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The Political Voice of Aphra Behn

Politický hlas Aphry Behnové

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Kristýna Hoblová

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Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Klíčová slova

Aphra Behnová, ženská literatura, politika v literatuře, Restaurační období, propaganda Toryů, roajalismus, beletrie sedmnáctého století

Key words

Aphra Behn, women's literature, politics in literature, Restoration period, Tory propaganda, royalism, seventeenth-century fiction

Abstrakt

Tato literárně-historická práce analyzuje vztah mezi prózou Aphry Behnové a rozvíjející se politickou scénou Restauračního období se zřetelem k využití obvyklých prostředků politického vyjadřování příznivců Whigů i Toryů i k tomu, jak její feministické názory ovlivnily prostředky politického projevu v jejím díle. Práce je založena na předpokladu, že v době Restaurace byly veřejná a soukromá sféra stále těsně propojeny a téměř každé literární dílo bez ohledu na žánr vyjadřovalo jistý politický názor.

Práce je uvedena kapitolou, jež rozebírá historické pozadí a literární kontext doby vlády Karla II. a Jakuba II. Součástí je i stručný přehled hlavních prostředků používaných ve všech žánrech psaného politického projevu. Součástí tohoto přehledu je především analogie státu a domácnosti ve formálních pojednáních, Kavalírská kultura Restaurační komedie charakterizovaná libertinstvím, fungování alegorie v romancích, Toryovský feminismus rozvitý v díle Margaret Cavendishové a stručný rozbor prostředků použitých v díle Johna Drydena, autora, který byl Behnové nejblíže svým politickým i náboženským přesvědčením.

Třetí kapitola využívá tento kontext ke shrnutí přístupu Aphry Behnové k politice v celku jejího díla, přičemž na jejích ódách se ukazuje neměnná loajalita vůči Karlovi II. a jeho bratru Jakubovi, zatímco na příkladu her *The Rover* a *The Roundheads* je zkoumána feministická kritika Stuartovské libertinské kultury a patriarchální ideologie v protikladu k podpoře jejich svatého práva na trůn během Vylučovací krize.

Závěrečná část práce se skládá ze samotných rozborů jednotlivých prozaických textů Aphry Behnové se zaměřením na narativní postupy využité k propagaci Toryovské ideologie a kritice jejích odpůrců, mezi nimiž jsou na příklad alegorie, roman a cléf, biblická typologie, vzory z klasické literatury, karikatura a oslava vznešené královské postavy. U *Love-Letters* a *The Dumb Virgin* se rozbor soustředí na jejich pojetí moci obsažené v kontrole reprezentace, analogii mezi sexuálním a politickým a historickou alegorii. *Oroonoko* je využit k prozkoumání specifické verze Toryovské ideologie prosazované Aphrou Behnovou, která se zakládá na konceptu cti, věrnosti a vznešenosti vrozené tělu krále. *The Fair Jilt* nabízí ukázku toho, jak Behnová transformuje karikaturu žádostivé sexuální jakobitské ženy se zaměřením na veřejnou povahu aristokratické etiky. *The History of the Nun* a jí příbuzné příběhy dvojí loajality jsou rozebírány pro jejich nakládání s alegorickým potenciálem romance a *Memoirs of the Court of the King of Bantam* jsou typickou ukázkou oblíbeného karikování opozice. Každý rozbor se zaměřuje

na jiné rysy politického projevu Behnové tak, aby práce zahrnula celou šíři jejích rétorických postupů. Důraz je kladen především na využití zavedených prostředků politického projevu a jejich přeměnu skrze feministické myšlení, neboť Behnová nepodrobuje své hrdinky politické teorii a využívá schopnost romance pro vrstvení alegorie i smyslu k vytvoření celistvých postav neomezených přítomnou politickou myšlenkou.

Abstract

This work of literary history analyses the relationship between the fiction of Aphra Behn and the developing partisan politics of the Restoration period, focusing on Behn's use of set tropes of political rhetoric of both Whig and Tory supporters and on the influence of her feminist views on her political writing. It rests on the assumption that in the Restoration period the public and private spheres were still closely interlinked and thus almost any kind of literature engaged in politics, ranging from formal treatises to drama and amatory fiction.

The thesis opens with a chapter setting up the historical background and the literary context of the reign of Charles II and James II, which offers a brief overview of the main rhetorical strategies of all kinds of political writing – the household analogy of formal treatises, the Cavalier libertine culture of the Restoration comedy, the relationship between romance and allegory, Tory feminism developed by Margaret Cavendish and methods of political rhetoric employed by John Dryden, the author closest to Behn in political and religious adherence.

The third chapter uses this context to sum up Behn's approach to politics in the whole of her work, employing some of her pindarics to prove her invincible loyalty to Charles II and James II and the examples of *The Rover* and *The Roundheads* to explore Behn's feminist critique of the Stuart libertine culture and patriarchal ideology in contrast with her support of their divine right to the throne during the Exclusion Crisis.

The last part of the thesis consists of the analyses of individual prose works by Aphra Behn with a focus on the narrative strategies employed to promote the Tory ideology and criticize their opponents, such as allegory, roman a clef, typological writing, classical examples, caricature and celebration of the noble royal figure. In *Love-Letters* and *The Dumb Virgin* the analysis concentrates on their discussion of the power inherent in the control of representation, sexual-political analogy and historical allegory. *Oroonoko* is used to explore Behn's version of Tory ideology based on the concepts of honour, loyalty

and royalty inherent the King's body. *The Fair Jilt* offers an example of Behn's transformation of the caricature of ambitious sexual Jacobite female with stress on the public nature of aristocratic ethics. *The History of the Nun* and relative stories of double loyalty are studied for their work with the allegorical potential of romance and in *Memoirs of the Court of the King of Bantam* Behn employs the popular caricaturing approach to Stuarts' opponents. Each analysis tries to focus on a different feature of Behn's political writing, so that the thesis would encompass the whole scope of her rhetorical strategies. The main stress is put on Behn's use of set tropes of political writing and their subverting through the feminist thought, as Behn does not allow her heroines to be subjected to political theory and uses the potential of romance for multiple layering of meaning and allegory to build complex characters not limited by the political idea present.

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1 Introduction

Most often, Aphra Behn is remembered as the first female professional writer, one of the mothers of female writing, the first one to "make her living by her wits. […] All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn,"[1] as Virginia Woolf wrote in her *A Room of One's Own.* She was the first in the coming long line of feminist critics who rediscovered the work of Aphra Behn and struggled to find her lost place in the history of English literature.

Aphra Behn was always a rather controversial figure, who gained an aura of immorality after her death, mainly because what she wrote was fully in accordance with the sexually open atmosphere of the Stuart court after the restoration of Charles II to the throne. Indeed, her works must have seemed scandalous in comparison with later eighteenth-century novels asserting female chastity and virtue as primary values. After the revival of interest in her, started by the publishing of her collected works by Montague Summers at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was mainly her life full of rumour about love affairs, her spying mission, life in a colony and her independent living that attracted attention rather than her actual writing (hence the numerous biographies by G. Woodcock, W. J. Cameron, M. Duffy, J. Todd, A. Goreau and others). Apart from her fascinating life full of questions, there were two main movements in Behn criticism in the second half of the twentieth century. Her position among early female writers and the sexuality of her works led to extensive discussion of gender issues and feminism (M. Duffy, J. Todd, A. Goreau, J. Pearson) and her most famous fictional work, *Oroonoko*, provoked many debates about the issues of slavery and abolitionism (J. Lipking, C. Gallagher).

Yet, the last two decades also opened a new approach to Behn's writing. As Judy A. Hayden says, "the Restoration theatre was as political as the politics of the court of Charles II were theatrical."[2] This holds true for Behn's drama too, as she was a life-long supporter of the Stuart dynasty and thus her plays offer a very interesting insight into the

[1] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Project Gutenberg Australia, 2002) unpaginated, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200791.txt> 8 Apr 2013.

[2] Judy A. Hayden, *Of Love and War: The Political Voice in the Early Plays of Aphra Behn* (Amsterdam, NLD: Editions Rodopi, 2010) 1, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10435995&ppg=166> 20 Feb. 2013.

political discourse of the turbulent Restoration period, which saw the glorious return of Charles II, the Exclusion Crisis intended to change the line of succession, innumerable conspiracy theories and plots and ended in the Glorious Revolution that marked the breaking point in both religious and political history of England. It is the era which brought forth the rise of political parties, huge increase in the role of the public and the print in politics and which also decided the direction of England's future development. However, though drama played a major role in the Restoration literature, poetry and fiction do not lag behind in their political addresses.

Aphra Behn's writing career generally proceeded from drama in the 1670s and early 1680s to fiction and poetry in the latter half of the 1680s. Despite the political outspokenness of her drama, the prose was long perceived as a kind of amatory fiction, female pornography, stories about women intended for women. Nevertheless, such approach is very limiting to the importance of Behn's work. In almost all prose works by Behn that have been critically approached lately, some kind of political agenda has been discerned, ranging from allegory to less obvious influence in the choice of tropes, plots and types of characters.

This thesis will therefore examine a major part of Behn's fiction from the perspective of its engagement with the contemporary partisan politics and analyse the various tropes and methods of political rhetoric in her fiction with regard to the set practices of partisan discourse of the period. In order to fulfil this aim, the analyses of individual Behn's texts will be necessarily preceded by a general overview of the key political movements and events of the Restoration period, a summary of the tropes, motives and rhetorical strategies employed in various genres of Restoration literature and an overview of politics in other genres of Behn's work. As the chief aim of the thesis is the literary historical analysis of Behn's fiction, the historical and contextual chapters are only focused on the topics relevant to her writing for the reasons of conciseness and clarity. The number of Behn's prose works exceeds the space of this thesis and therefore the analyses focus on the five major texts, which comprise all the important strategies of Behn's political writing, though in some cases a comparison with some of her minor works also proved pertinent.

2 English literature and politics 1660-1689

2.1 England 1660 – 1689

In order to interpret Behn's writing from the perspective of her political rhetoric it is necessary to bear in mind political events that stirred the society during her writing career, which roughly corresponds to the so called Restoration period of 1660-1688. This chapter therefore offers a brief summary of the course of events in the period and of the political and cultural development in England. The purpose of this thesis does not require a thorough historical study, rather a general summary of the main problems, which will predominantly follow the detailed studies of the Stuart era written by Martin Kovář who provides us with a very thorough analysis of both political and religious relationships among all major historical figures of the period. For a more generalizing overview of the main movements during the later part of Behn's life, John Miller's *The Glorious Revolution* also proved very helpful.

In 1660 Charles II returned to the throne from his Interregnum exile and established a court which was later mainly remembered for its libertine culture. After the Puritan period of the Commonwealth the nation enjoyed the reopened theatres, actresses appeared on stage for the first time and the court was famed, as well as criticized, for its loose morals. In the first half of his reign the King was surrounded by an elite circle of libertines, the so called Court Wits, a group of artists, politicians and other major social figures, e.g. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester; George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham and John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave.[1] Their extraordinary behaviour, characterised by a certain tint of public performance in their sexual exploits, caused much animated debate in the society and was much criticized by the Puritan opposition. The men involved gradually lost their influence and by the end of the Exclusion Crisis in 1681 the libertine circle was no longer in existence. Yet their life style and approach to culture stand at the centre of what is being remembered about the Restoration till today.

During the first decade of Charles II's reign the domestic political scene was relatively peaceful, as both the Parliament and the King were careful not to disrupt the

[1] Jeremy W. Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court: Politics, Drama, Sexuality* (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 21. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10135505&ppg=21> 13 Jan 2013.

recently obtained stability. The threat of the past Civil War cast a shadow over the whole Restoration period and, indeed, the relative peace of its beginnings did not last long, as the relationship between the King and the Parliament gradually worsened. The Parliament feared Charles's tendency to absolutism and also suspected his friendly relationship with Louis XIV of France, an absolutist Catholic king who caused anxiety in all Protestant countries of Europe. Therefore the Parliament tried to keep the King under control through the shortage of money and followed a strict policy of religious intolerance to any religion except for the re-established Church of England. Despite Charles's efforts for tolerance, the Parliament gradually passed what would become known as the *Clarendon Code* – a series of penal laws aimed against all nonconformist religions. The shortage of royal financial resources was one of the reasons for Charles's constant negotiations with France which culminated in the secret *Treaty of Dover*, in which Charles allied with France against the Dutch and promised to convert to Catholicism at some time in the future in exchange for military support in case of domestic trouble and a pension of 140 000 pounds. In 1672, before starting the Third Anglo-Dutch War, Charles II issued the *Declaration of Indulgence*, in which he promoted religious tolerance. However, he was forced to withdraw the declaration when the war did not go well and he needed the support of the Parliament. In the end he had to agree with the *Test Act*, which forbade any nonconformists to hold state offices. Thus the situation was very strained and "the marriage of James, Duke of York, to the Roman Catholic Mary of Modena in 1673 simply added fuel to an already raging fire."[2] The future development was then mainly determined by Charles not having a legitimate son who would succeed him. The idea of Catholic James on the throne seemed unacceptable to an important part of the politicians and the nation.

The climax of the religious and political suspense came with the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis at the end of the 1670s. In August 1678 Christopher Kirkby, Titus Oates and Israel Tonge revealed a supposed conspiracy against the person of Charles II and the kingdom. Oates claimed that the Catholics intended to murder Charles, support an invasion of the French army and massacre the Protestants. The investigation did not attract much attention until Oates indicated Edward Coleman, the secretary of the Duke of York, as the chief conspirator and when his house was searched ciphered letters to French Catholics

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[2] Judy A. Hayden, *Of Love and War: The Political Voice in the Early Plays of Aphra Behn* (Amsterdam, NLD: Editions Rodopi, 2010) 159, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10435995&ppg=166> 20 Feb. 2013.

were found. In October the dead body of Edmund Berry Godfrey was found. He was the judge to whom Oates testified and his death caused a spread of panic around London. The atmosphere of general anti-Catholic hysteria also affected the Parliament who led the investigation of the Popish Plot. When they proposed the impeachment Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby, Charles's Lord Treasurer and chief political agent, the King decided to dissolve the Cavalier Parliament after 18 years.

All this provoked a kind of election excitement intensified by a huge campaign where the supporters of the Crown, the Court Party, stood against the Country Party. The first one, future Tories, were mainly connected to land-owners and the High Church, while the latter one, future Whigs, stood closer to Low Church, dissenters and London mercantile classes. It is this turbulent period that can be called the beginning of English party politics, though the parties were not institutionalized and politicians often changed adherence as it suited their own interests. The Whigs (led by Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury) won majority in the House of Commons and in 1679 they passed the *Exclusion Bill* which excluded the Duke of York from succession. A part of the Commons suggested Charles's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, as a possible heir to the throne. Charles II insisted on James's right to succession, dissolved the Parliament once again and to calm the atmosphere sent both the Duke of York and the Duke of Monmouth out of the country.

The whole situation got complicated in the autumn 1679 by the revelation of the so called Meal-Tub Plot. Thomas Dangerfield at first accused the Whigs of a plan to murder the Duke of York; the fabricated documents to the plot were then discovered in the "meal-tub" of a midwife and Catholic sympathizer, Elizabeth Cellier. However, when charged with a deception, Dangerfield changed his testimony and claimed that the plot was prepared by Catholics who wanted to discredit the Whigs.

By 1681 the crisis gradually calmed down; during the whole period the Whigs had tried to pass the *Exclusion Bill* three times, but it never passed in the House of Lords and in the end left Charles II with ascendancy that allowed him to dissolve the Parliament for several years. His position strengthened later, when in 1683 the knowledge about the so called Rye House Plot came to light. This was a conspiracy of the City radicals who intended to murder the King and the Duke of York in support of Monmouth's claim to the throne, which provoked a wave of anti-Whig moods. The rest of Charles's reign was

therefore marked by peace not experienced before. The power of Whigs was weakened by previous scandals and the King had the support of the Tories.

In 1685 Charles II died and on 6 February his brother James II was proclaimed King, which meant a paradoxical and explosive situation of a Catholic king governing a country that built its identity primarily on its Protestant religion and civil freedoms. Nevertheless, the accession passed with surprising ease. As expected, James's chief aim was at promoting his religion and improving the situation of Catholics, who were excluded from the state offices and the Parliament and were not allowed to have common Communions. Unfortunately, both Tories and Whigs and both Anglicans and Dissenters agreed in detesting Catholicism and even those who could allow for certain religious tolerance would be firm in the question of admitting Catholics to state offices. James had to be very careful, too, not to lose the support of the Tories, on whom his position depended.

However, the Tory Parliament elected after his accession declined any of his attempts to repeal the penal laws concerned and thus he attempted a different strategy and turned to the Dissenters. As they were another religiously oppressed social group, he hoped for their support in the question of religious tolerance. In 1687 he issued a *Declaration of Indulgence*, in which he used his dispensing right to dispense the whole nation from complying with the penal laws. This was a very dubious action, as the only institution allowed to suspend statuses was the Parliament. Later on he dissolved the Parliament and started a campaign which was supposed to help him to create a Dissenter Parliament. He expected them to suspend the penal laws, which would allow him to create a Catholic Parliament later and issue law promoting Catholicism. While attempting to promote the Dissenters, he also punished Anglican clergymen who preached against the Papists. In opposition, the Anglicans called for unity of the Protestants, allowing the Dissenters more toleration, to which the Dissenters were much more inclined than into trusting James's designs. So by the summer 1688, "James had alienated the Anglicans without winning over the Dissenters."[3]

Meanwhile the opposition negotiated a possible support with William III Orange, the husband of James's Protestant daughter Mary. In April 1688, he conditioned his possible invasion by an invitation from the English. This invitation, signed by only seven men, came, dated 30 June. William's decision for the invasion was also propped by the

[3] John Miller, *The Glorious Revolution* (London: Longman, 1997) 9.

birth of James's son on 10 June, which threatened the nation with a line of Catholic rulers. The opposition seized the opportunity and spread a rumour about a fraud, in which a strange baby was claimed to be smuggled into the queen's chamber in a warming-pan.

Thus, on the 5 November William's fleet landed at Torbay. James did not have much support among his subjects and in the end decided to send his wife and son to France a he himself unsuccessfully attempted to flee on 10 December. He was brought back to London by a group of fishermen, but the Dutch army marched to London and on 18 December he was escorted from London by a Dutch guard, by which his lifelong exile started and the so called Glorious Revolution took its place in history.

After long and complicated discussions in the Parliament Mary and William were jointly offered the Crown on 13 February 1689 and the line of succession was established as if James II were dead and had no son.

2.2 Politics in the Restoration literature

For understanding the importance of Behn's political voice and its singularity, it is necessary to put it into context of Restoration political writing in general. This chapter therefore offers a brief overview of main rhetorical strategies asserting political ideology across various genres and the political spectrum of the period.

As Mark Knights mentions, in the period of 1679 to 1716 general elections were held in average every two and a half year, the electorate considerably widened and politically engaged persons divided into the evolving new political parties. "These factors combined to produce a partisan political culture that was truly national and in which the public became a routine, participating, part of the political process."[4] With the increasing role of public in political life of the country, various means of print and propaganda also gained in importance. This was not a new invention but a long-scale development that started earlier in the century and accelerated especially during the mid-century crisis, when "the vacuum of authority resulting from the undermining of traditional authorities such as the crown and church […] was thus partly filled by the public." [5]

The public debate in press appeared not only in non-fictional genres like political treatises, numerous pamphlets of all kinds, memoirs or letters, but also had a great

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[4] Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2006) 20, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10271504&ppg=20> 11 May 2013.

[5] Knights, 22.

influence in drama, poetry and fiction. The idea of fiction writing devoted to the private domestic scene was not to appear till the next century's sentimental novels. The private and the public were closely interwoven; belles-lettres was used for political protestations as much as all other genres.

In approaching the Restoration literature from the perspective of its engagement with partisan politics, the question of terminology may be very intriguing, as it is the earliest stage of the development of political parties and nothing can be clearly defined yet. The political scene was formed by a complex net of political, religious and personal interests that appear in various combinations. While usually the Tories are associated with the High Church, country landowners and traditionalism, and the Whigs are perceived as closer to the Dissenters, middle classes and the City of London, this division varies greatly in the relationship to the King and Catholicism. During the reign of Charles II he had the support of the Tories, while the Whigs stood mostly in opposition, especially in the question of his heir. However, with the accession of James II this neat division falls apart and the political body across the parties divides into the Royalist group of James's supporters, who therefore have to be more tolerant to Catholic religion, and the opponents of a Catholic king on the English throne. As mentioned above, the end of James's reign showed much alienation from both Whigs and Tories. For the reasons of lucidity though, this thesis will follow the most usual distinction of Tories as the Stuarts' supporters and Whigs as the opposition.

Since their beginning both these parties developed distinctive imagery that accompanied their propaganda, identified texts of similar political adherence and promoted their ideology through asserting authority of the text while at the same time subverting the imagery of the other party to undermine the opposing discourse. Formal political treatises of the late seventeenth century relied thoroughly on an analogy of the state and the domestic household, established already by Aristotle. Generally, in the Restoration period there were two main conceptions of this analogy - the Stuart patriarchal divine-right theory and the Whig social-contract theory. They derived their validity from two different interpretations of Genesis and two theories of domestic household. In the patriarchal version of Genesis "God granted dominion of the Earth to Adam and to all kings directly descended from him," while in the social-contract theory "God granted dominion of the Earth to Adam and Eve jointly, in a powersharing arrangement that justified the accession of William and Mary as joint sovereigns and, more generally, the interruption of the

Catholic line of Stuarts."[6] The most typical of the patriarchal treatises was Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha: a Defence of the Natural Power of Kings Against the Unnatural Liberty of the People* published at the height of the Exclusion Crisis, in 1680. He builds his argument on the household hierarchy, where the father/king is understood to have naturally absolute power over other members of the household/citizens. As a direct response to Filmer, James Tyrrell published his *Patriarcha non Monarcha* in the next year. He opposes Filmer's view by precedents from the European history, in which ruling families were overthrown by others. Tyrrell was later followed by other thinkers who established the basis of the social-contract theory, like John Locke.

The Tory discourse thus featured the patriarchal image of the king as the father of his nation and stressed the divine nature of his power, which could not be denied by his subjects, in the same way as a wife and children cannot deny the right of the father of the family to govern their lives. As Judy Hayden stresses, in accordance with this patriarchal household analogy Royalist political rhetoric and literature also featured the image in which the King is "the husband and the head of the body politic, and thus the masculine authority, Parliament is both the wife and body of the body politic and is represented deferentially as feminine."[7] Thus much celebratory poetry on the occasion of Charles's accession to the throne, including John Dryden's panegyrics, featured a complex image of the coronation as a wedding through which England is "preserv'd from ruin"[8] in becoming the bride provided with jewels from "Both Indies, rivals in your bed".[9] Dryden also reinforces the father-king analogy through biblical history: "When empire first from families did spring / Then every father govern'd as a king."[10] This marital metaphor seems to be closely interlinked with the use of incest as an analogy for the decline of the nation state as seen both in Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus: A Tragedy* and Behn's *The Dumb Virgin*.

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[6] Rachel Carnell, *Realism, Partisan Politics, and the Rise of the British Novel* (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 19, < http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10150383&ppg=23> 13 Feb. 2013.

[7] Judy A. Hayden, *Of Love and War : The Political Voice in the Early Plays of Aphra Behn* (Amsterdam, NLD: Editions Rodopi, 2010) 193, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10435995&ppg=13> 20 Feb. 2013.

[8] John Dryden, "To His Sacred Majesty. A Panegyric on his Coronation," *The Poetical Works of John Dryden, Volume 1* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1850) 27, Google Books, <http://books.google.cz/books?id=RZIOAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs#v=onepage&q&f=false> 10 March 2013.

[9] Dryden, "To His Sacred Majesty," 30.

[10] Dryden, "To His Sacred Majesty," 29.

Apart from treatises, much political discussion also took place in the so called Restoration comedy, a genre popular especially before the Exclusion Crisis after the reopening of London theatres. It fully merged with the relaxed atmosphere of the period and the comedy often featured libertine characters reflecting the contemporary Court Wits that surrounded Charles II or the exiled Cavaliers of the Interregnum period. With the sharpening of the political situation dramatists also employed a more piercing satire of the radicals.

Susan J. Owen analyses the themes and tropes associated with the political reading of Restoration drama and shows that while Tory plays promoted unconditional loyalty connected with quietism as an absolute value, Whigs saw loyalty as a state that allows helping the kingdom through advising and criticizing the monarch. Whigs also put much more stress on patriotism and trade interests thus creating a frequent target for Tory satires. Contrary to Whigs, Tories use "a nexus of negative values: faction, ingratitude, banishment, and exclusion,"[11] which is reflected in the difficulty of asserting one interpretation on Behn's texts; while it is always clear what is being condemned, critical opinions greatly differ in terms of what is being promoted instead. Much of these values were asserted through the omnipresent analogy of sexual and partisan politics. In tragedies, sexual perversion like lust and rape, were associated with rebellion by Tories and with tyranny and popery by Whig playwrights. Sexuality in literature links to the real-life politics in the same way as the private performativity of the Court libertines and cavaliers is a part of certain political expression. At least the libertines provoked reactions that significantly differed in the Puritan, as opposed to the Royalist, surroundings.

The political-sexual analogy also opened space for the political self to be coded as both male and female. In 1680, at the peak of the Exclusion crisis, Elkanah Settle produced an anti-Catholic dramatic tragedy *The Female Prelate: Being The History of the Life and Death of Pope Joan*, where he deploys images of corrupt Catholic priests and a threatening figure of female sexuality and ambition. Such monstrous depiction of the highly eroticized Jacobite woman was common in Protestant England, where, as Alison Shell notes, "the scarlet woman sitting upon the seven-headed beast in the Book of Revelation was synonymous with the Catholic Church, whose idolatry of images and of the Host during

[11] Susan J. Owen, "The Dramatic Language of Politics," *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1996) 8, Oxford Scholarship Online, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com> 7 Mar. 2013.

the Mass was seen as spiritual whoredom."[12] This threatening monstrous figure of a Popish woman characterized by exceeding sexuality, ambition and activity is one of the core political images examined and refuted in Behn's fiction, which often offers thorough studies of the characters of such "bad women".

The competition between two opposing political discourses and struggle to ridicule the opponents, a battle on the pages of works of art, naturally creates space for the flourishing of satire, the best example of which in the Restoration period is "Absalom and Achitophel" by John Dryden, published in 1681. The poem is aimed at turning the public opinion against the Whig leader Shaftesbury who supported Monmouth in his rebellion. For the following discussion of Aphra Behn's work it might be useful to look at the narrative strategies employed in Dryden's political writing. His poem is built on the typological correspondence between contemporary events and the biblical story of Absalom's rebellion against his father, King David, which interpreted the Whig campaign as a rebellion against the King rather than a movement protecting the country against a Catholic heir to the throne. In its praise of the King the poem has to cope with the widespread criticism of his sexual misconduct, which is therefore accounted for by placing the story in "pious times, ere priestcraft did begin, / Before polygamy was made a sin;"[13] an apology used by many Royalist supporters including Behn.

While the King is thus figured as King David, his rebellious son Absalom stands for the Duke of Monmouth and his wicked councillor Achitophel provides a figure for Shaftesbury. The translation of a current political debate into the typological narrative proves to be an important tool in interpreting the issues concerned. While reality may be always a matter of discussion, according to Paul Hammond, "a typological narrative carries with it little or no liberty of interpretation, for the private voice of the reader cannot speak against the quasi-divine voice of the typology."[14] Through allowing only one interpretation of the text the author controls the interpretation of events as well, which is one of the reasons for the wide usage of classical examples and biblical typology in political

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[12] Alison Shell, "Popish Plots: *The Feign'd Courtizans* in context," *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 39.

[13] John Dryden, "Absalom and Achitophel," *The Poetical Works of John Dryden, Volume 1* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1850) 124, Google Books, <http://books.google.cz/books?id=RZIOAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs#v=onepage&q&f=false> 10 March 2013.

[14] Paul Hammond, *John Dryden: a Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991) 97-98.

discourse of the time. Examples were a means to impose a certain interpretation on contemporary events and also a tool for asserting authority of the text.

"Absalom and Achitophel" does not follow the real events as much as it would be usual in romans a clef; the plot is rather based on speeches which lay bare the characters of the persons. Paul Hammond also notes that much stress in the characterization is put on the physical properties of the Whigs. "In paying so much attention to the unruly and grotesque bodies of the Whig leaders, Dryden is implicitly contrasting them with the sacred person of the King."[15] Indeed, much of the Tory imagery is based on the divine power that enters the King's body on his accession to the throne. In accordance with Tory fears of Whig revolutionary tendencies, Dryden also uses his poem to travesty the Whig political philosophy through the association with the rule of "Crowd" that holds power over the King and thus threatens not only the established order but also private property and rights: "who can be secure of private right, / If sovereign sway may be dissolv'd by might?"[16] Dryden's poem thus offers a complex net of Tory rhetorical strategies focused on the critique of Whig ideology sharpened in personal satire on real-life politicians, asserting the divine right of the King based in his body and supporting the authority if the text by biblical typology.

Similar narrative methods were also used in the prose of the seventeenth century, which is usually critically rather overlooked, as the novel was still to come and romance seemed to be past its prime, usually dismissed by contemporary critics as a mere remnant genre and imitation of fashionable French fiction. However, Amelia Zurcher has published an intriguing study of this neglected period of romance and uncovered the specific role of romance of the time in examining the nature of self-interest in political agency in contrast with the more traditionally construed virtue, which led to strong inclination towards social or political allegory and roman a clef, also known as a "scandal chronicle" or "secret history." Although Behn's fictions do not fit entirely into the group of romances Zurcher studies, they are especially similar in their allegorical potential in the meaning of "the establishing of a literal realm (i.e., the fiction itself, the images and plot that the poet makes) that is primarily in relation to something else, rather than a world unto itself."[17]

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[15] Hammond, 101.

[16] Dryden, "Absalom and Achitophel," 158.

[17] Amelia A. Zurcher, *Seventeenth-Century English Romance*, (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 43. < http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10194087&ppg=43> 15 March 2013.

Zurcher divides allegory in romance into two branches - the allegory of intellectual concepts and of historical facts and events, embodied since the mid-seventeenth century in theological allegories like *The Pilgrim's Progress* or in the romans a clef respectively. Most romances of the period then should be understood as "fiction located on a continuum between the conceptual and the historical, negotiating between and trying to carve out its own understanding of poesy's relation to these two poles."[18] In the fiction of the Restoration period this allegorical potential merged with partisan imagery and tropes associated with the individual ideological stances, which is crucial to the understanding of Aphra Behn, whose fiction explores the relationship between the conceptual allegory of Royalist ideas, the independent existence and internal logic of a narrative plot and intertextuality.

The fiction by Aphra Behn falls in with a time of transition in narrative writing, the shift from romance to novel. While it maintains many features of romance, including the allegorical potential mentioned by Zurcher and idealization of characters, there is much effort in claiming the authenticity of the narrative reality, e.g. through the narrator's identification with the author as an eye-witness. However, to a certain degree non-realistic description of the characters in the stories can be interpreted as a part of the political agency of the texts. In *Realism, Partisan Politics, and the Rise of the British Novel,* Rachel Carnell analysed the role political agenda has played in the development of the novel as a genre and in pushing some writers, such as Aphra Behn, out of the future literary canon. She stresses the importance of intertextuality in early British novels, including their relationship to non-fictional genres of political treatises and pamphlets. From these she derives a conception of realism differing from our understanding of it nowadays. It is based on the generalizing and caricaturing tendencies of political writing of the time:

> Formal political treatises in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Britain frequently constructed a political self in general terms, making such an individual seem "human" and "universal" by omitting particularizing detail. Meanwhile, during the same era, polemical occasional pamphlets routinely defined their partisans as ordinary or "normal," hence "real" or "universally human," in contrast to the caricatures of their excessively "zealous" partisan opponents.[19]

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[18] Zurcher, 43.

[19] Carnell, 11.

It is of importance therefore, not to dismiss early novels, like those of Aphra Behn, for their incapability of realistic depiction, but rather read this in the context of caricaturing and hyperbolic tendencies in depicting of the opponents and glorifying or generalizing approach to their heroes.

All the before-mentioned movements and tendencies of political rhetoric are explored in Aphra Behn's work, yet one question remains unanswered and will probably never receive a definitive answer. There is a remarkable paradox in that most seventeenth-century female writers are associated with the Tory cause and thus with the Stuart patriarchal ideology. As Catherine Gallagher puts it, "[i]t is an odd but indisputable fact that the seventeenth-century women whom we think of as forerunners and founders of feminism were, almost without exception, Tories."[20] She approaches this paradox through the work of Margaret Cavendish and links her feminism and Toryism through the ideology of "the absolute self," which defends "singularity itself" through the analogy with absolute monarchy. "The monarch becomes a figure for the self-enclosed, autonomous nature of any person."[21] The female self is represented here as a fully evolved microcosm in no way relative to any other, which through its exclusion from politics becomes thoroughly independent, a monarch "over the empire of the mind."[22] Through a kind of solipsistic philosophy thus Cavendish laid the foundations of future feminist thought, which retained the idea of female sovereign self, but removed the isolation in which Cavendish viewed the female self. Though Cavendish's work is of an earlier date than Behn's writing, it is useful to see how the image of the absolute female self gets complicated with the appearance of anti-Stuart caricatures of the Pope Joan type, which show the female self in a distorted threatening perspective. Therefore future strong female characters, like those of Aphra Behn, have to negotiate their position among these two extreme opposites, Whig caricatures of monstrous female Jacobites contrasted by strong women asserting their self in feminist Tory writing.

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[20] Catherine Gallagher, "Embracing the Absolute: Margaret Cavendish and the Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England," *Early Women Writers: 1600-1720*, ed. Anita Pacheco (London: Longman, 1998) 133.

[21] Gallagher, 136.

[22] Gallagher, 137.

3 Politics in the work of Aphra Behn

But England has a nobler task for you,
Not to tame Beasts but the brute Whigs subdue.[1]

Aphra Behn could be called a Restoration author par excellence. Her work covers the period from the height of Charles's reign (her first staged drama, *The Forced Marriage*, was recorded in 1670) through the highly political time of Exclusion Crisis till the Glorious Revolution. Her life ended with the Restoration; she died shortly after the revolution in 1689. Although there is not much evidence about her life apart from her writing, it has been sufficiently proven that she was a life-long supporter of the Stuarts' divine right. Before she started writing she even served briefly as a spy in the Netherlands.

She began her career in the most typical genre of her time, the comedy, and became the second most prolific writer of the Restoration period after John Dryden, with whom she shared her political adherence. Although Behn's early plays are usually understood as less politically concerned than those of the Exclusion Crisis, Judy Hayden has focused on their political interpretation and claims that "the political voice in dramatic texts is not absent in the first decade of the Restoration; it is simply more focused after 1678. It is louder and certainly more extreme – but it is not new."[2] In general, most of Behn's drama explores the Stuart Cavalier culture and the position of women in it. While she explicitly states her support of the Stuart house in her prologues and epilogues, her dramatic plots transform the Royalist rhetorical strategies from her feminine viewpoint, thus often undermining the Cavalier ethos and Filmerian household analogy, which offered only complete subjugation to women as wives or mistresses. Hero Chalmers stresses that Behn's drama often

> questions the notion that libertine sexual conduct provides an equally satisfactory means of expressing Tory loyalties for men and women alike. This is frequently triggered by a highly developed consciousness of women's economic predicaments

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[1] Quoted in Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650-1689* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2004) 157, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10263660&ppg=170> 20 Feb. 2013.

[2] Judy A. Hayden, *Of Love and War: The Political Voice in the Early Plays of Aphra Behn* (Amsterdam, NLD: Editions Rodopi, 2010) 4, < http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10435995&ppg=13> 20 Feb. 2013.

and of the often vexed interface between economic exigencies and political affiliations.[3]

Women's lack of independence strengthened by their economic limitations not only offers a perspective that criticizes the Cavalier ethos of Tory drama, but exposing the economic conditioning of women's actions also opens the topic of newly arising mercantilism, which pervades political ideals across party boundaries. This critical approach to the ethos of the mercantile class of society, politically mostly associated with Whigs, also penetrates her later fiction.

Behn's drama, as well as the criticism of her work, thus generally tends to two directions, epitomized by her plays *The Rover; or, The Banish't Cavaliers* (1677) and *The Roundheads; or, The Good Old Cause* (1681). The first one, though not denying the supremacy of Tory ideology over its opponents, stages a critique of the cavalier ethos from the feminine point of view, while the other offers itself fully into the service of partisan needs. This seeming inconsistency has been explained mainly on the basis of the time of their production. *The Rover* was staged in the time of relative political peace and allows Behn to make a survey in the possibilities and drawbacks of Tory ideology, while *The Roundheads* is a work of political crisis and necessary defence.

Helen M. Burke has analysed *The Rover* in terms of its treatment of the Stuart Cavalier myth through the comparison with its source, *Thomaso; or, The Wanderer* by Thomas Killigrew. In her reading *The Rover* is interpreted as a parody of the original Royalist source and its patriarchal celebration of the Cavaliers, which would correspond to the general trend of the late 1670s drama to use the figure of a rakish cavalier with intense scrutiny and often cynical approach. While Behn keeps up with the loyalist Cavalier myth in so far that both the two main Cavalier characters, Willmore (the "Rover") and Belvile, victoriously gain the hands of two noble and rich sisters at the end of the play, the feminist scepticism about the libertine culture complicated the Royalist image through "a less than flattering view of her triumphant cavalier hero"[4] and "in her carnivalesque inversion of the cavalier myth […] it is the woman – virgin and whore alike – who are the agents of

[3] Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650-1689* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2004) 152, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10263660&ppg=152> 20 Feb. 2013.

[4] Helen M. Burke, "The Cavalier Myth in *The Rover*," *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 121.

correction and restoration."[5] The centrality of female figures is supported by multiplying the number of female heroines in comparison with *Thomaso*, by allowing them more space for expressing their views and by giving them much eloquence in exchanges with the cavaliers. The chief target of Behn's critique of cavaliering is the title character, Willmore. He behaves in a most excessive manner, seducing any female who gets near to him without consideration of who actually the person is and, though possessing the gift of charming eloquence and wit, he is described as a "filthy Beast"[6] by the romantic heroine Florinda and a "senseless swine"[7] by her lover Belvile. The ambiguous depiction of the Cavalier culminates then in the debate between Willmore and three of his companions about who should be the first in an intended gang rape. Thus Behn's play puts her Cavalier hero on a scale between the "filthy Beast" and the glorified hero without ascertaining his precise position. The disruption of traditional dramatic ethics also shows itself through the blurring of the moral line between a virgin and a whore mentioned in Burke's quotation; in *The Rover* the courtesan Angellica, rival to Hellena in seducing Willmore, acts as a typical romantic heroine.

In contrast, *The Roundheads; or, The Good Old Cause*, staged at the peak of Exclusion Crisis, employs a much more traditional Royalist discourse and allows even for a grotesque depiction of the female political acts in the scene depicting Interregnum Puritan "Council of Ladies". While the Puritans are shown here as licentious, greedy and craving for power, the Royalists, Loveless and Freeman, represent the typical witty charming Cavaliers conquering the heart of any woman: "I never heard of any one o't' other Party ever gain'd a Heart; and indeed, Madam, 'tis just Revenge, our Husbands make Slaves of them, and they kill all their Wives."[8] The only targets of satire are among the Puritans and the play foregrounds the noble character of Tories and loyalty as the primary value. Yet, the ideal of loyalty is still grounded in the female character of Lady Desbro who is married to a Puritan leader but in love with Freeman. He urges her to unfaithfulness to her husband seemingly excused by his wrong political adherence. Nevertheless, Lady

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[5] Burke, 122.

[6] Behn, "The Rover," *The Rover and Other Plays,* ed. Jane Spencer (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1995) 44.

[7] Behn, "The Rover," 46.

[8] Behn, *The Roundheads* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 21, Google Books, <http://books.google.cz/books?id=qf63Xhpw26gC&dq=behn+the+roundheads&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s> 10 February 2013.

Desbro stresses the ideal of loyalty as the basis of her Royalist identity and thus unfaithfulness even to an unloved husband would contradict her Royalist stance: "No, I'm true to my Allegiance still, true to my King and Honour. Suspect my Loyalty when I lose my Virtue."[9] Although *The Roundheads* raise the traditional Tory discourse at the expense of most female characters, yet it offers what would later in her fiction become the basic promoted Tory ideology – culture based on the notion of political loyalty fully anchored in personal honour.

All of Behn's prose can be dated to the period after 1683, when she was shortly imprisoned for insulting the Duke of Monmouth on stage and also the conditions for staging plays worsened. In drama Behn only wrote one tragedy, *Abdelazer, or The Moor's Revenge*, and 5 plays that could be classified as tragicomedies (*The Forced Marriage: or, The Jealous Bridegroom*; *The Amorous Prince*; *The Young King, or The Mist*ake; and *The Widdow Ranter*), all other plays were comedies. In contrast, seven of her fourteen known fictions have tragic plots. This allows for many possible interpretations, one of them being the background for their creation. While she wrote most of her drama in the period of Stuart optimism during Charles II's reign, her fiction was mostly written during the last two years of her life, which means shortly before and after the Glorious Revolution. Also, Rachel Carnell explains Behn's preference of the form of fiction for the tragic stories as a way to avoid the strict conventions in Restoration stage tragedies.[10]

With the change of political climate after the Exclusion Crisis, which could be summarized as the end of the libertine era, Behn abandons the figure of the rogue and Cavalier omnipresent in her previous comedies. In accordance with general trends in literature of the time, sexual excess becomes more associated with political disruption and thus while her Tory characters are usually depicted as ideals of love and honour, their Whig counterparts often prove to be false, licentious and promiscuous in analogy with their political instability. Nevertheless, Behn does not give up the critical analysis of the Tory discourse in her fiction. As Rachel Carnell stresses,

> Behn frequently refutes domestic hierarchy in her prose fiction, especially in her prose tragedies, and challenges the partisan stereotypes of Tory virtue. In so doing,

[9] Behn, *The Roundheads*, 120.

[10] Rachel Carnell, *Realism, Partisan Politics, and the Rise of the British Novel* (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 47. < http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10150383&ppg=23> 13 Feb. 2013

> she reconfigures the domestic analogies of high political theory, both Tory and Whig; she also frequently refutes the partisan caricatures of Tory selfhood. [11]

Aphra Behn's prose work is thus very intriguing in asserting her own version of Tory ideology based on the ideals of honour and loyalty. It is this assertion of a new Tory "reality" that Carnell sees as the reason for Behn's experiments with various narrative techniques associated with formal realism like the "first-person 'eye-witness' narrator sometimes opting for a quasi-journalistic attempt at objectivity."[12] Similarly, Behn also often abandons the caricaturing approach to partisan characters letting them develop into complex literary characters.

Apart from drama and fiction Aphra Behn also wrote much poetry throughout her life, both of love and politics. Melinda Zook finds in Behn's poetry a similar change of focus as in the transition from drama to fiction. While her earlier political poetry focused on the Cavalier image, after 1685, the year of James II's accession to the throne, Behn "dedicated her political poetry to the cause of monarchy. James II himself epitomized her ideal masculine hero."[13] This shift is also present in several poems of hers focused on the Duke of Monmouth. The first one, called "Song", shows Monmouth as young Jemmy, beautiful shepherd, "the gayest swain" who could "conquer any princely maid."[14] Apparently young Monmouth represented to Aphra Behn the ideal Cavalier figure, young, witty and handsome courtier. This view would be much altered by the later revelation of the Rye House Plot and the image of Monmouth conveyed by *Love-letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* would be much less flattering. After the death of Charles II in 1685 Behn published "A Pindaric on the Death of Our Late Sovereign: With an Ancient Prophecy on His Present Majesty," where she uses the biblical analogy of Charles as Moses who "had lead the murm'ring crowd, / Beneath the peaceful rule of his almighty wand;" Charles's heir James is then depicted as "the good Joshua […], / by Heaven and nature pointed out to lead the way." [15] Thus the poem, in the same way as Dryden, employs

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[11] Carnell, 46.

[12] Carnell, 46.

[13] Melinda S. Zook, "The Political Poetry," *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 48.

[14] Aphra Behn, "Song," *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 217-218.

[15] Aphra Behn, "On the Death of Our Late Sovereign," *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 253.

biblical typology for asserting its message. It is mainly concerned with the death scene, putting stress on the loving relationship between the Stuart brothers and on Charles's leaving the destiny of his nation in the hands of his brother, the only legitimate heir to his throne. The death scene is immediately followed by hailing the new king, glorifying his previous success in arms, his "patience, suffering, and […] banishment" in exile and stressing that only he was "preserved, and fit for sacred government."[16] The anxiety about having a Catholic king is dismissed as "needless fears" and James II is conveyed in an image of a gleaming sun whose "convincing rays" would his "foes o'ercome."[17]

Aphra Behn's poetic career is then concluded in an exemplary way after the accession of William and Mary by "A Pindaric Poem to the Reverend Doctor Burnet, On the Honour He Did Me of Enquiring After Me and My Muse." Behn was asked to write in favour of the new joint monarchs and the new regime, yet she very gracefully declines:

> My Muse that would endeavour fain to glide
> With the fair prosperous gale, and the full driving tide
> But loyalty commands with pious force,
> The stops me in the thriving course.[18]

The poet cannot share the joyous celebrations of the new monarchs as she is bound by her loyalty to James II and is then described as a lonely person left "unpitied far behind / On the forsaken barren shore."[19] Indeed, it did not take long before she died and so her literary work was ended together with the era of the Stuart prime which she had celebrated since her first writing attempts.

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[16] Behn, "On the Death of Our Late Sovereign," 255.

[17] Behn, "On the Death of Our Late Sovereign," 256.

[18] Aphra Behn, "To the Reverend Doctor Burnet," *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 267.

[19] Aphra Behn, "To the Reverend Doctor Burnet," 267.

4 Analyses of individual works

4.1 Love-Letters and *The Dumb Virgin:* Plotting, Language and Incest

Treason, rebellion and murder,
are far from the paths that lead to glory,
which are as distant as hell from heaven.[1]

Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister was the first published fiction of Aphra Behn, which appeared in three parts from 1684 to 1687. It is an epistolary roman a clef based on the events of the Rye House Plot, the Monmouth rebellion and the love affair of Lord Grey of Warke with his sister-in-law, Lady Henrietta Berkeley. Lord Grey was implicated in Monmouth's rebellion and was "outlawed for high treason, in conspiring the death of the late king."[2] However, unlike the Duke he was not executed in the end. According to Paul Salzman, in turning from drama to a roman a clef Behn was "clearly influenced by the vogue for fashionable French forms of prose fiction, and by the associated fascination with fiction as a means for representing current scandals."[3] In a thin guise of a chronique scandaleuse set during the Huguenot rising in France, Behn criticizes the Whig conspiracy which intended to overthrow Charles II and make the king of his illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, represented by Cesario in the novel. Thus the novel addresses the same political conspiracy as *Absalom and Achitophel*. The chief difference between the two texts lies in Dryden's focus on Shaftesbury and Behn's condemnation of conspiracy as such through the sexual-political analogy inherent in the relationship between Philander and Sylvia (Lord Grey and Lady Berkeley). Patrick Parrinder has noted Behn's insistence on the genre of the novel; she introduces the description of the defeat of Huguenots at the end of the text (parallel to Monmouth's defeat at Sedgemoor in 1685) with the claim that "it is not the business of this little history to treat

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[1] Aphra Behn, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (London: Virago, 1987) 35. All future page references in this chapter will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

[2] Thomas Jones Howell, William Cobbett, David Jardine, a *Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783: 1680-88* (T. C. Hansard for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816) 1091. Google Books. 30 March 2013.

3 Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 2006) 216.

of war, but altogether love; leaving those rougher relations to the chronicles and historiographers of those times." (447) According to Parrinder, "'little history' here refers to the scandalous and fashionable genre of petites histoires, such as the 'little French novels' that Behn's characters use to while away the odd brief interlude between episodes of sexual dalliance."[4] How much and in how many ways this "little history" comments on the great history of the Restoration period we will see in the closer examination of the text.

As in most texts stemming from romance, the political message of this text works through multiple layers of meaning. The main line of the plot is based on historical allegory and corresponds to the events of the Monmouth rebellion and Lord Grey's escape to Netherlands with his lover, which has been deciphered in many critical studies already.[5] The relationship between the fictional characters and their real counterparts is then recognizable through the net of their relations (Cesario's being the rebellious son of the king points straight to the Duke of Monmouth, similarly Philander's love-affair to Lord Grey) but also through some distinctive features of their characters, such as Monmouth's belief in astrology and superstitions[6] mirrored in Cesario's appeal to black magic: "he calls up the very devils from hell to his aid, and there is no man famed for necromancy, to whom he does not apply himself." (416) There is a striking difference in the characterization of Monmouth in Dryden's and Behn's texts, which can be partly accounted for by the date of publication. *Absalom and Achitophel* was published in 1681, when a fraction of Whigs wanted Monmouth on the throne, yet he was still under the protection of Charles II and no author attempted a too harsh critique of him. Therefore Dryden puts the whole blame on Achitophel / Shaftesbury, while Absalom is "so beautiful, so brave,"[7] possesses "kingly virtues" and "'[t]is juster to lament him than accuse."[8] On the contrary, Behn wrote the third part of her novel much later, when Charles II was dead, and

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[4] Patrick Parrinder, *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from Its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2006) 63. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10177943&ppg=63> 20 March 2013.

[5] See Paul Salzman, Patrick Parrinder.

[6] Susan Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2006) 355. http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/docDetail.action?docID=10271502.

[7] John Dryden, "Absalom and Achitophel," *The Poetical Works of John Dryden, Volume 1* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1850) 124, Google Books, <http://books.google.cz/books?id=RZIOAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs#v=onepage&q&f=false> 10 March 2013.

[8] Dryden, "Absalom and Achitophel," 144.

she used the events of Monmouth's rebellion against James II as the background, which meant that there was no reason for compromising in Monmouth's representation. He is described as a ridiculous character with his appeal to black magic, total dependence on his mistress, cowardice and lack of strength of will.

Apart from personal satire and historical allegory, *Love-Letters* also engage in an intertextual discussion with rhetorical strategies of other politically outspoken texts. In *Conspiracy and Virtue* Susan Wiseman has taken *Love-Letters* out of its usual context of amatory fiction and compared the text with female nonfictional works written in opposition to the current government, like memoirs and collections of letters by Anne Halkett and Rachel Russell. In these texts she analysed "some of the literary practices which attempted to justify political conspiracy by grounding it in personal virtue and— in Halkett's text more importantly— seek to use political loyalty to underwrite sexual misconduct."[9] The writing in opposition, seen as conspiracy by the official authorities, lacked the institutional support of the other party and therefore had to rely on using personal virtue as a guarantee of political virtue. This then allows a new perspective on the sexual-political parallel in Behn's texts. It is not only a kind of amatory fiction; it is a response to the authentication techniques of autobiographical writing which strived to sustain conspiracy through asserting personal virtue of the protagonists. Through exposing these techniques in fictional letters of one of the conspirators and allowing the reader to discern the disruption between words, pretensions to virtue and actual conduct in fiction, it attacks the whole possibility of putting a true account of events into a text. As a fiction using the authentication tools of nonfiction, it reiterates fictionality of all writing.

If the texts of opposition assert their political virtue through the personal one, it follows naturally that the main strategy of their adversaries would be the similar analogy between sexual and political treason. This analogy is especially strong in *Love-Letters*, where in the first part the still virgin Sylvia, thus still a symbol of innocence and purity, complains that in Philander's mind she is "huddled up confusedly with your graver business of State, and almost lost in the ambitious crowd." (32) Repeatedly it is asserted that a person who is not loyal to the king cannot be faithful in love, and is not to be trusted: "what generous maid would not suspect his vows to a mistress, who breaks 'em with his prince and master!" (16)

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[9] Wiseman, 320.

Through sexuality Behn also follows Dryden in asserting the authority of her texts by the use of classical examples, which she employs to invert the Whig image of the Stuarts as tyrants. Twice in the novel Philander compares himself to a Roman emperor, both times in connection with his desired lover. Firstly, when he seduces Sylvia he discards his political interest in a letter to her and compares himself to Nero in the burning Rome:

> No, were the nation sinking, the great senate of the world confounded, our glorious designs betrayed and ruined, and the vast city all in flames; like Nero, unconcerned, I would sing my everlasting song of love to Sylvia; which no time or fortune shall untune. (12)

With Nero he chose an analogy to the emperor with the reputation of the worst tyrant in the history of Rome. Secondly, when he abandons Sylvia and describes his first encounter with Calista he uses the classical myth of Lucretia: "Just such I fancied famed Lucretia was, when Tarquin first beheld her; nor was the royal ravisher more inflamed than I, or readier for the encounter." (169) Comparing himself to Tarquin, he identifies with the last tyrant of Rome, whose rape of Lucretia brought about the overthrow of the King and establishing the republic. The tale of Lucretia offers itself usually as the best classical example for the republican discourse. Behn overturns this association by using it in connection with the Whig rebellion, thus making the rebel look like the tyrant. This association is confirmed, when Sylvia asks Philander about the reasons of his disloyalty: "what has the King, our good, our gracious monarch, done to *Philander*? […] Who has he oppress'd? Where play'd the tyrant or the ravisher?" (34) In *Love-Letters* it is not the monarch who could be called a ravisher, it is one of the leading figures of the rebellion, who ruins "a yet unspotted maid, fit to produce a race of glorious heroes." (18)

In a similar way, Behn also uses another feature of the anti-Stuart sexual writing to point back to their opponents. Charles II was often criticized for his promiscuous life seen as a sign of effeminacy. Susan J. Owen notes that "'effeminacy' in the Restoration sense of enslavement to women and sexual desire was seen as one of Charles's major faults, the other side of the coin from his failure to be 'man' enough to square up to Louis XIV militarily."[10] Yet, in *Love-Letters* the promiscuous life and effeminacy is associated with

[10] Susan J. Owen, "Reading the Politics of Restoration Drama," *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1996) 8. Oxford Scholarship Online.
<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com> 7 March 2013.

the opposition, Philander being shown as a kind of "sexual predator"[11] and Cesario in the third part of the novel appears as completely subjugated by his mistress Hermione, who is not even beautiful.

However, it is not only sexual misconduct and classical examples Behn employs for the assertion of her political opinions in this text. She uses the fictional space opened by the insight into the private correspondence of conspirators in order to declass their very cause. As has been mentioned, in the first part Sylvia still is an innocent virgin and as such she pronounces ideas most likely to agree with the author's. It would be expected that the Huguenot rising in France would be grounded in religious reasons, yet in *Love-Letters* such a noble cause is missing. When Sylvia asks Philander about his involvement with the League, she only offers reasons that would be connected with dishonour – vain glory, addition of titles or putting weak Cesario on the throne in order to have a king under control. The League is shown as an empty bubble without any ideological foundation; actually, Philander's face is more attractive than the cause of the League itself: "I have heard a witty man of your party swear, your face gain'd more to the League and association than the cause." (19) Yet, Philander's answer intensifies the unjustness of the League; he admits that Cesario does not have a right to the throne, the League attempting to overthrow the king is "a party so opposite to all laws of nature, religion, humanity, and common gratitude" (40) and he only supports it for his own profit in disturbing the kingdom. It is not the cause of Cesario, but the possibility of getting upwards on the political scene that drives his actions: "What man of tolerable pride and ambition can be unconcerned, and not put himself into a posture of catching, when a diadem shall be thrown among the crowd?" (40-41)

Although his reasoning is not answered as such, interestingly, Behn moves the discussion back to the sexual level, when Sylvia after yielding to him very soon after this political discussion, writes a letter to reproach him for his breaking of the promise not to violate her chastity:

> What then, Philander, must you take the advantage? Must you be perjured because I was tempting? It is true, I let you in by stealth by night; whose silent darkness favoured your treachery; but oh, Philander, were not your vows as binding by a glimmering taper, as if the sun with all his awful light had been a looker on? (64)

[11] Wiseman, 314.

In the light of the preceding rhetorical question of Philander's this reproach gives the answer to what an honest man should do instead of "catching the diadem". He is bound to serve his king by a divine oath and should therefore adhere to his loyalty instead of leaving the principles of honour at the first sight of a possible profit.

In contrast to this profane conspirator Sylvia elevates the figure of the king to a Christ-like character of the "royal forgiving sufferer" (34) in accordance with the Tory image of executed Charles I and exiled Charles II as martyrs. The King is distinguished from other characters by his unrealistic idealization, which puts emphasis on his divine right to rule and inborn qualities which highly surpass other citizens. His whole life was "one continued miracle; all good, all gracious, calm and merciful: and this good, this god-like King, is mark'd out for slaughter, […] on whose awful face 'tis impossible to look without the reverence wherewith one would behold a god!" (34)

Despite the critical approach to Philander's treacherous promiscuity in abandoning Sylvia in the middle of a foreign country, *Love-Letters* do not promote female virtue in the sense of Puritan ethics. On the contrary, as Patrick Parrinder has noted, in the character of Octavio's relative Sebastian it offers a revelation of the hypocrisy behind Puritan calling for chastity. Sebastian, one of the leading politicians in the Netherlands, reproaches Octavio for his immorality with Sylvia calling it "flat adultery," (286) but as soon as he sees her he would commit any crime to possess her body. According to Parrinder, his "main function in the novel is to show the corruption and imposture of official justice, which appears irrevocably tarnished beside the personal honour of the aristocratic cavalier ready at all times to stake his life on his sword."[12] The only figure approaching the ideal of an aristocratic cavalier, at this point in Behn's development already devoid of the libertine ethics, would be Octavio whose love to Sylvia seems invincible and who retires to a monastery after her treason.

In *Love-Letters* Behn does not assert any complex ideological stance. While she discredits anti-Stuart movements through exposing the world of conspiracy and ridiculing Puritan assertions of virtue, the only positive values she offers instead is the power represented by the victimized King's body and ethics based purely on personal honour embodied in noble Octavio. At the same time she transfigures the rhetoric associated with anti-Stuart propagandists to either focus it back on them or undermine its value through exposing possible other motives behind their ideology.

[12] Parrinder, 64.

The questions of incest, sexual misconduct and "struggle to control representation"[13] treated in *Love-Letters* were reopened in Behn's later story *The Dumb Virgin*, which was not published during her life. In this text Aphra Behn created her own version of the classical Oedipus tragedy, a variation of the story of much popularity in the seventeenth century. According to Rachel Carnell,

> although seen by post-Freudian society in terms of individual psychological development, the tragedy of Oedipus is in fact concerned with the decline of a nation state, a decline linked to incest within the ruling family. Sophocles' original tragedy emphasizes an implicit, if somewhat blurred, connection between order in the family and order in the state.[14]

It follows from the parallel between the family and the state that Oedipus story would be popular as a means of political rhetoric of the Restoration period, when much debate appeared about the role of the monarch, decline in the royal families and patriarchal law. In 1678 the Oedipus story was also adapted in *Oedipus: A Tragedy* by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee in a version reinforcing the Stuart patriarchal domestic analogy.[15] In Behn's adaptation the lost son who comes back to his birthplace falls in love with his two sisters and seduces the one who is beautiful, but dumb. In the final duel scene he kills his father and is himself mortally wounded. When the truth comes to light, Maria, the seduced dumb sister, miraculously exclaims "Incest!" and stabs herself too. Similarly to *Love-Letters, The Dumb Virgin* examines the power of discourse and the power inherent in the control of representation of political events.

It is no coincidence that Behn chose the name of Dangerfield for her tragic hero. Though it is only a "counterfeit"[16] that he assumes on his return to Venice, it had a strong political resonance in the 1680s. Thomas Dangerfield was the "notorious false witness"[17] at the centre of the well-publicized Meal-Tub Plot. As Hero Chalmers points out, above all

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[13] Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650-1689* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2004) 182, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10263660&ppg=195> 20 Feb. 2013.

[14] Rachel Carnell, *Realism, Partisan Politics, and the Rise of the British Novel* (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 51, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10150383&ppg=62> 13 Feb. 2013.

[15] Carnell, 51.

[16] Aphra Behn, "The Dumb Virgin," *The Works of Aphra Behn: Volume V*, ed. Montague Summers (Project Gutenberg eBook: 2003), unpaginated. Kindle file.

[17] Chalmers, 182.

the Meal-Tub Plot was an affair of competing representations of what happened. Dangerfield first fabricated a story about a Presbyterian plot in favour of Monmouth, but once he was charged with a deception, he changed his testimony and accused his Catholic companions of paying him to lie in order to disguise the real threat coming from the Catholics. Importantly, he thus "prospered along the way by winning credibility for his fictionalized accounts of political events."[18]

The story acknowledges the power inherent in the control over language by presenting two sisters, of whom Maria is beautiful, but dumb, and Belvideera ugly, yet she "delivered her Sentiments with that easiness and grace of Speech, that it charm'd all her Hearers."[19] They both fall in love with Dangerfield and he also wants them both, which sets off a chain of events that lead to the tragic end. Maria with her beauty shows the typical passive female figure, as she cannot control the events due to the lack of ability to speak. While the narrator asserts at the beginning that "the Language of her Eyes sufficiently paid the Loss of her Tongue,"[20] later she acknowledges the importance of speech in rivalry with her sister: "A Rival, who had the Precedency of Age, as the Advantage in Wit, and Intreague, which want of Speech render'd her uncapable of."[21] Thus *The Dumb Virgin* stresses the importance of the control of representation in intrigues of both amatory and political character. Dangerfield, similarly to his real-life counterpart, decides to use this control and seduces Maria because she cannot speak about it. Yet, as Chalmers notes, the story undermines "the historical Dangerfield's recognition of the potency of controlling representation" by the narrative twist that exposes his acts through Maria's newly gained ability of speech. In Chalmers's interpretation this exposure "challenges the story's initial suggestion that male sexual domination will inevitably follow from an assured masculine control over language and representation."[22]

It is evident from this that Behn does not allow her story to yield to the same patriarchal discourse as Dryden's tragedy employs. Not only does Maria overcome Dangerfield's control of language, but also her intelligent sister survives the whole tragedy and continues living in retirement. As Carnell claims,

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[18] Chalmers, 182.

[19] Aphra Behn, "The Dumb Virgin," *The Works of Aphra Behn: Volume V*, ed. Montague Summers (Project Gutenberg eBook: 2003), unpaginated. Kindle file.

[20] Behn, "The Dumb Virgin," unpaginated.

[21] Behn, "The Dumb Virgin," unpaginated.

[22] Chalmers, 183.

> concluding the story with this brief explanation of what happens to the forgotten daughter, Behn challenges the focus of political debate in which the model for the civic individual is a husband or father whose virtuous actions in the political sphere lead to the all-too-real tragedy of violation in the household.[23]

In Behn's adaptation of the Oedipus story, the complexity of the plot takes precedence over the political household analogy and moves reader's attention to the female heroines and their lives which are not subjugated to any political theory.

Both *Love-Letters* and *The Dumb Virgin* thus seem to be centred on the discussion over fictionality, political debate and the power contained in the control of representation, while using incest as a powerful analogy for the political rhetoric. The importance of language is a very strong motive that reappears in much of Behn's fiction, often as the basic plot device. For example in the "Unfortunate Bride," a blind heroine is handicapped mainly through her inability to write letters until she regains sight and learns to write. Moreover, the whole tragic plot of this story is based on the black villainous woman called Moorea who steals letters from the main hero and his lover and so causes a fatal misunderstanding. Thus the power of language, writing and print penetrates the whole of Behn's prose work and often the success of the characters depends on their ability to control the representation of events, as well as their misfortunes come from a collapse in communication.

4.2 *Oroonoko: a* Tory Hero Doomed to Lose

All hail great Prince, whom ev'ry miracle
Preserved for universal rule;[24]

Of Behn's fiction, *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* is probably the most famous text and definitely the one which has received most critical attention. This stems mainly from its fame as one of the first anti-slavery stories in early modern England, but also from its setting in Surinam, which evoked a long critical discussion over the autobiographical basis of the romance. This biographical discussion has now come to a consensus, found evidence that Aphra Behn truly was in Surinam and distinguished those features of the novel that are based on reality. The question of anti-slavery seems much more complicated and

[23] Carnell, 57.

24 Aphra Behn, "On the Death of our Late Sovereign," *Oroonoko and Other Writings,* ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 255.

a definitive answer will probably never be found, as the narrative signals on this topic are quite ambiguous.

Most recent critical studies, however, prefer the approach to the romance through analysing the tropes of partisan and religious politics of the text, which follows also from the explosive moment in British history when Oroonoko was probably written and definitely published. Although Behn visited Surinam when she was very young, before even starting to write, she used this experience in fiction much later; *Oroonoko* was first published in 1688. According to Rachel Carnell, Behn probably started writing the book shortly after the announcement of Mary's pregnancy and it was published shortly after the birth of James Edward Stuart in June 1688.[25] The threat of having a Catholic heir to the throne caused great disturbance on the political scene of England and the citizens loyal to the Crown felt that the Stuart dynasty was under great danger. At this critical moment Aphra Behn wrote her romance and, considering her previous work that was always highly politically engaged, it would be very surprising if *Oroonoko* was not commenting on the present situation. Hero Chalmers has noted that the connection between the expectation of an heir and *Oroonoko* was reinforced by the fact that Behn's poem congratulating James on the birth is followed by an advertisement of the near publication of *Oroonoko*.[26] It is therefore tempting to read the romance as a kind of roman a clef, where Oroonoko represents James II under the threat of revolution. Such a reading can be supported by several features that link the fictional prince with the real king, for example royal blood, the expected birth of an heir that puts events into going and religion that differs from that of the colonists.

Although the connection between Oroonoko and James is relevant and obvious, *Oroonoko* is probably not a roman a clef where the characters would point straight to concrete individuals. Unlike *Love-Letters,* the relationship between reality and fiction comes closer to the present-day understanding of an allegory. Rather than one-to-one correspondence of real people and the characters in the story, the relationship is based on a set type of Royalist imagery. Nevertheless, even the Royalist imagery seems to be subverted in many places, as is usual in Behn's fiction, which never follows

[25] Rachel Carnell, *Realism, Partisan Politics, and the Rise of the British Novel* (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 57, < http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10150383&ppg=23> 13 Feb. 2013.

[26] Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650-1689* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2004) 187, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10263660&ppg=170> 20 Feb. 2013.

straightforward methods of propaganda, but rather stems from the set tropes and develops an independent narrative. In this, *Oroonoko* seems to be an exemplary case of Behn's tactics in political writing. It includes typical imagery of Royalist works – stress on honour, loyalty, martyrdom and distrust of religious fanaticism and Whiggish focus on money – but at the same time disrupts the household analogy.

The main tool of the story's Royalist dedication is definitely the main character of the royal slave, Oroonoko, himself. He is an interesting alteration of the royal person in *Love-Letters* whose royalty is an inherent quality that cannot be mistaken or denied. As for his looks, he is described as visibly differing from his black subjects. The colour of his skin differs, being darker and like "perfect ebony, or polished jet,"[27] and his features are strikingly European: "His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. His mouth, the finest shaped that could be seen, far from those great turned lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes." (12) Oroonoko's looks reinforce his royal status; his darker skin colour distinguishes him from other common slaves, while his aristocratic Roman features make the black man less alien to the European public. Royalty is thus inherent to his body that is distinguishable from others and is visibly noble even for people who do not know about his birth: "The royal youth appeared in spite of the slave, and people could not help treating him after a different manner, without designing it." (39)

It is, however, not only the body that confirms Oroonoko's inborn royalty. The narrator describes his spirit as much nobler than that of many European colonists and although it is partly owing to his European education, it surpasses the general standard of characters in the romance so much that mere education cannot account for it:

> 'twas amazing to imagine where it was he learned so much humanity; or, to give his accomplishments a juster name, where 'twas he got that real greatness of soul, those refined notions of true honour, that absolute generosity, and that softness, that was capable of the highest passions of love and gallantry. (10-11)

The overall characteristic of Oroonoko is indebted to the slowly disappearing romance and epic tradition. As Goreau put it, Oroonoko "is the perfect Arthurian knight (dragon-killer) in the guise of a black slave"[28] compared to great monarchs of the classical

[27] Aphra Behn, "Oroonoko," *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 12. All future page references in this chapter will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

[28] Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 62.

history, Caesar and Alexander Great. His royalty is inherent in his body through the royal blood, though proper education gives the necessary final polish to his perfection.

This royalty, unfortunately, is not allowed to succeed in the world of the 17th century; the gradual decline of power of the Stuart monarchs is projected in the tragic outcome of the romance. In the tragic end of Oroonoko's life, Rachel Carnell discerns "a significant variation on the theme of martyred Tory innocence."[29] Martyrdom of the noble characters of a king or loyal courtiers was a common feature of Tory writing referring to the execution of Charles I. This analogy between Oroonoko and Charles I is established right at the beginning of the text, when the narrator introduces the noble character of Oroonoko, in a specific mention of the execution of the Stuart king: "he had heard of the late Civil Wars in England and the deplorable death of our great monarch, and would discourse of it with all the sense, and abhorrence of the injustice imaginable" (11). Thus Oroonoko not only represents an ideal royal person, but also shows his conviction that the position of the monarch cannot be violated by the citizens; it is given to him by nature and God through his body. Therefore his execution at the end of the text had to take the form of complete disintegration of his body by cutting it up.

While in *Love-Letters* the question of religion was fairly marginalized, *Oroonoko* puts much stress on this key issue of James's reign, though not in the way of defending Catholicism. Rather, it criticizes any kind of religious fanaticism and the value of religion is diminished in favour of other values, such as loyalty, love and, most of all, honour.

The dedication of *Oroonoko* has been used as one of the proofs of Behn's Catholicism. It is dedicated to Lord Maitland who was a Catholic supporter of the Stuart dynasty:

> Where shall we find a man so young, like Saint Augustine, in the midst of all his youth and gaiety, teaching the world divine precepts, true notions of faith, and excellent morality, and, at the same time, be also a perfect pattern of all that accomplish a great man? (4)

To everyone who knew what religion Lord Maitland professed, the "true notions of faith" must have implied the Catholic teaching and thus by this dedication Behn showed herself at least as a Catholic sympathizer or tolerant viewer, which stance must have been inevitably adopted by all supporters of James's divine right.

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[29] Carnell, 13.

The text of the romance itself does not put forward the contrast between Protestantism and Catholicism; rather than that, it offers a critique of religious hypocrisy as such. It is based on the contrast of morally developed heathens and Christians who break their words throughout the novel. Religion thus does not guarantee virtue or morality in its adherents. Behn seems to promote a system of appreciation of human virtue based not on religion but on a different set of values, which is in harmony with her Royalist stance, as such revaluation of the human conduct would make the Catholic king acceptable to his Protestant nation. Thus the Frenchman who was the source of Oroonoko's education is described as a learned man with flawless character who lost his position in the European society only due to his religious conviction: "This Frenchman was banished out of his own country for some heretical notions he held, and though he was a man of very little religion, he had admirable morals, and a brave soul." (32) Interestingly, this example of a person of excellent worth though banished for his religion is probably Huguenot, thus a Protestant persecuted in Catholic France. This analogy between persecuted Catholics of England and Protestants of France reinforces Behn's view that religion should not be the main source for judging the worth of a person. Hero Chalmers interpreted this in the tolerationist perspective as a warning against religious fanaticism both on the side of Protestant Whigs and on the side of the Catholic king, as well as a celebration of promoting tolerance:

> The fact that Oroonoko murders his own family may be read as a veiled warning that James II could destroy the future of the Stuarts if he does not moderate his pro-Catholic stance. These sentiments echo those of Behn's associate and fellow Catholic sympathizer, John Dryden, whose recent allegorical poem, The Hind and the Panther (1687), warned James against too hasty or extreme a drive for Catholic emancipation and celebrated the Declaration for Liberty of Conscience (Declaration of Indulgence) issued on 4 April 1687.[30]

Instead of religion, the code of conduct in *Oroonoko* is based on the notion of honour. Honour is the criterion by which the noble hero measures the value of others and which the narrator uses to praise Oroonoko "whose honour was such, as he never had violated a word in his life himself, much less a solemn asseveration" (35-36). According to Anita Pacheco, honour

> signifies both the internal mechanism through which the aristocrat overcomes ordinary fears and desires in order to fulfill his public role and the esteem and

[30] Chalmers, 190.

> power which reward that capacity. Honor is thus a measure of the excellence of individual members of a superior class. Traditionally, it was manifested preeminently on the battlefield, where its contempt of danger and death was considered capable of generating exceptional feats of valor. [31]

In this view, honour becomes a tool for controlling human behaviour in the same way as religion does and it explains why Oroonoko as the ideal royal character must not only be noble and honest, but also a great warrior. Honour in this sense is both a kind of personal ideology and public performance, which needs to be confirmed through great deeds and fame. The public element of the ethics based on honour is much explored in the Restoration literature and often leads to exposing figures whose honour is limited to empty performance without any inherent ethical code, as we will see in *The Fair Jilt*. Nevertheless, in *Oroonoko* the concept of honour itself is glorified and put as the core centre of Tory ethics, while pretence to honour on the side of some Christian colonists is exposed.

In the heathen culture of both Coramantien and Surinam the word of a man of honour is inviolable, while the Christians break their promises several times like the captain of the slave ship who captured Oroonoko by a betrayal and then led a discussion with him on the value of a word by a man whose conduct is supposedly governed by religion and a man who values his honour most (35-36), of which the man of honour comes out best in the narrative - not only from the discussion, but mainly from the fact that the captain betrays Oroonoko again at the end of the passage, while Oroonoko always keeps his word. During the whole narrative the narrator and all Oroonoko's educators try to persuade him of the worth of Christianity, but when the tragic end of his story is near he sums his experience with Christians in a completely negative way: "there was no faith in the white men or the gods they adored, who instructed 'em in principles so false that honest men could not live amongst 'em; though no people professed so much, none performed so little." (62) As a result, *Oroonoko* promotes ethical system, in which honour made up the inviolable core of man's value worth fighting for, not religion. Anita Pacheco suggests that the upper classes developed their morality system revolving around honour in distinction to the commercial classes more tied to Puritanism. Thus by promoting morality based on the concept of honour "Oroonoko participates in this conservative, 'closing

[31] Anita Pacheco, "Royalism and Honour in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 34.3 (summer 1994): 497. JSTOR. 15 June 2012.

ranks' mentality, foregrounding the traditional and defining upper-class value at a time when Stuart absolutism was once again under threat."[32]

However, Pacheco distinguished honour not only as the centre of the ideological level of the novel, she also pointed out that honour is the key concept around which the narrative plot is structured. It consists of two parts which both "place Oroonoko in situations that threaten his honor."[33] In the first half his wife was taken from him and in the second he was put in disgrace by slavery. As honour seems to be the ultimate drive of all Oroonoko's action, thus the plot is inevitably based on putting him into situations that violate it.

Thus separately the individual concepts of royalism, honour and religion in the narrative constitute a clear image of a Tory piece of writing supporting the rights of the Stuart dynasty. However, as the plot entangles the concepts problematize each other. The main problem of the Coramantien part is that though an ideal royal person, Oroonoko in fact is not the monarch. The king is his extremely old grandfather, who violates Oroonoko's honour when he takes Oroonoko's wife into his harem before the marriage can be consummated. Oroonoko thus stands in an extremely delicate situation where he either has to violate his concept of honour by leaving Imoinda to the king or violate the patriarchal rule by claiming his right. Behn makes her character face a choice between the Filmerian concept of royalism based on the inviolable patriarchal rule and Behn's own version of royalism based on honour, loyalty and personal merit of the monarch, which does not use the household analogy.

Catherine Gallagher puts Oroonoko and his grandfather in opposition, where Oroonoko represents "not just a king, but kingship" and his grandfather is "a specimen of a mere African king," which can be proved in that the grandfather can easily dress himself as one of his subjects, while Oroonoko's royalty always shines through every disguise.[34] She thus stresses the symbolical potential of the character of Oroonoko, who represents the ideal of royalty in the complex of honour, ideal personality, distinguished body and royal blood. His grandfather bears the title of the king, but lacks all of these features that are inherent to the true royalty. In the narrative this, together with Oroonoko's conviction that

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[32] Pacheco, 501.

[33] Pacheco, 497.

[34] Catherine Gallagher, "*Oroonoko's* Blackness," *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 238.

the king's deed was against the law, enables Oroonoko to violate his grandfather's rule and visit his wife in the harem at night: "But it was objected to him that his case was not the same, for Imoinda being his lawful wife by solemn contract, 'twas he was the injured man and might, if he so pleased, take Imoinda back, the breach of the law being on his grandfather's side." (17) This conduct, according to Pacheco, stands "in contrast to Stuart nonresistance theory, which held that the monarch as the ultimate legislative authority in the state was not liable to legal limitation" [35] and therefore in *Oroonoko* the concept of honour as the ultimate measure of conduct violates the patriarchal rule of the monarch. Oroonoko is aware of the contradiction and for that reason he tries to steal his right at night without confronting the king openly, though the attempt is unsuccessful.

The other half of the narrative, then, puts Oroonoko in a similar position and counters his honour with adversaries in the form of the colonists and slave owners in Surinam. The description of Surinam and its native inhabitants reminds the reader of the Paradise: "these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin." (8) The natives of Surinam are at first conveyed as people in the natural state of innocence, not tainted by civilization and religious hypocrisy: "Religion would here but destroy that tranquillity they possess by ignorance, and laws would but teach 'em to know offences, of which now they have no notion." (8) This natural state includes honour as the basis of their conception of the world; they value courage and are not even able to understand the idea of breaking one's promise:

> They once made mourning and fasting for the death of the English governor, who had given his hand to come on such a day to 'em, and neither came, nor sent; believing, when once a man's word was passed, nothing but death could or should prevent his keeping it. (8)

It would be tempting to pose the natives' honour in the state of Adam and Eve in the Paradise into straight contrast with the colonists, most of whom are willing to lie all the time despite their religious professions. However, Behn does not offer such simple ways of reading. This opposition is deeply undermined on both sides. The heathen ethical code is based on exaggerated bravery, which is ridiculed in the text in the absurd image of warriors deforming their own bodies to prove their lack of fear. In this context then Oroonoko's extraordinary proofs of courage like catching an electric eel make close the seemingly ideal concept of Oroonoko's honour and the absurd notion of it among the natives of

[35] Pacheco, 501.

Surinam, especially when Oroonoko's final proof of bravery is his stoic attitude during his execution, in which he was also cut into pieces. Though honour in this heathen interpretation guarantees truth in communication and honesty, much space is open for its criticism in terms of the relationship to the body.

On the other hand, the colonists are also represented in a very complex way. From the point of view of political adherence there is a very intriguing net of relations between real characters, their narrative counterparts and the overall allegorical level of the text. It has been proved that Behn based most of her characters among the English in the story on real people, but, very strikingly, she changed some of the basic facts of their lives or political opinions. The plantation owners of the story are divided into two groups; that is those who oppose Oroonoko and those who admire and support him as the narrator does. Hero Chalmers has noted that among Oroonoko's allies there is Trefry, linked by Behn to the Royalist stance, but also Colonel Martin, in reality suggesting "George Marten, the real-life brother of the regicide, Henry Marten."[36] Against these the chief enemies to Oroonoko's cause were the captain who enslaved him and the deputy-governor Byam "who was the most fawning fair-tongued fellow in the world, and one that pretended the most friendship to Caesar, was now the only violent man against him, and though he had nothing, and so need fear nothing, yet talked and looked bigger than any man."(60) This villain is the head of the council, which "consisted of such notorious villains as Newgate never transported, and, possibly, originally were such who understood neither the laws of God or man, and had no sort of principles to make 'em worthy the name of men." (65-66) In real life, however, Byam was, according to Joanna Lipking, "a staunch Royalist official with Surinam estates and also a well-born wife,"[37] though Behn shows him as a greedy villain with no estates. The stress on the lack of property of the deputy-governor separates him and his caricatured council from the rich plantation-owners and thus enforces similar division as was established between the Tory party whose adherents were traditionally among the old families of landholders and the Whigs supported mainly by the rising mercantile classes. The council in *Oroonoko* shows the danger of administrative power in the hands of greedy people who take the law into their hands and ensure their position through violence. It is countered by the inborn ability to rule of the people of noble birth

[36] Chalmers, 190.

[37] Joanna Lipking, "'Others', Slaves, and Colonists in *Oroonoko,*" *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 182.

represented by Colonel Martin's denial to use remains of Oroonoko's body to frighten the slaves, as he "could govern his Negroes without terrifying and grieving them with frightful spectacles of a mangled king." (73)

From what has been said it is obvious that *Oroonoko* does not lend itself to any straightforward conclusions. It offers material for allegorical interpretations as an allegory of the destiny of Charles I or a warning, or prophecy, of the danger to James II. Behn bases her narrative on a set of typical Tory imagery and values, but transforms it significantly in order to produce a piece of Tory writing based not on the household analogy, but rather stemming from the concepts of loyalty, royalty and honour. Yet the text also shows that each of these ideals can be problematized when it clashes with the others or when it appears in a distorted version. Royalty in Behn's view is not a function of the title, but rather of the idealized King's person and his public body. This concept of royalism is celebrated by the narrator, but the tragic outcome of the plot shows such classical concept of knightly morality in decline, not able to compete with the rising culture of mercantile capitalism. That allows for Rosenthal's reading of the romance as an elegy for the ending of a historical era,[38] or at least as a strong warning against the possibility of a tragic outcome of the political situation of 1688.

4.3 *The Fair Jilt:* Cherchez la Femme

Deceive the foolish world – deceive it on,
And veil your passions in your pride;[39]

Similarly to *Oroonoko*, *The Fair Jilt* was published in 1688 and it is also based on Behn's experience from youth, namely on her period of spying in Antwerp. It also makes claims to the "truth" of the story; Behn promotes the story as "reality, and matter of fact."[40] Indeed, it is based on Prince Tarquino, who was recorded at that time as being at Antwerp,

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[38] Laura J. Rosenthal, "*Oroonoko*: Reception, Ideology, and Narrative Strategy," *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 161.

[39] Aphra Behn, "On Desire," *Oroonoko and Other Writings,* ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 259.

[40] Aphra Behn, "The Fair Jilt," *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 74. All future page references in this chapter will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

and in *The London Gazette* of 1666 there is a mention of his abortive execution.[41] Behn uses the generally known story of this man, but quite typically transforms the material from reality into an independent narrative by using Tarquino's fictional wife Miranda as the main character of the story and as the leading force behind all the action.

It is a very intriguing narrative in terms of its transfiguration of reader's expectation of set tropes, genres and types of characters and it denies any simple one-way interpretations. In *Oroonoko* we have seen a kind of elegy on the disappearing culture of Stuart Cavaliers and a praise of honour facing the threat of the modern European commercial spirit. The same conflict is represented in *The Fair Jilt* in a new refreshing way that neither allows for reading as a romance, nor lends itself fully to a parody of one. According to Pearson, "the tale moves provocatively between heroic romance and a kind of epic satire, through alternative overstatement and undercutting, on romance and heroism, where sex and shopping challenge the romantic absolutes of love and honour." [42] Such interpretation shows the basic principle of almost all Behn's fiction – a certain ambiguity and playfulness in its crossing the boundaries of the Tory political writing, traditional romance and satire. The story uses real events, the concepts of honour and loyalty, it transforms the Whig image of a devilish Papist woman and it does not offer a definitive end that would commit the narrative to any primary concept of contemporary writing.

The romance opens with a dedication that connects it again to the stance of loyalty to the Stuarts. It is dedicated to Henry Neville Payne, who was a Catholic playwright and after the Glorious Revolution became an active Jacobite.[43] Most of all, Behn praises his invincible loyalty:

> a spirit as illustrious, a heart as fearless, a wit and eloquence as excellent as Rome itself could produce. Its senate scarce boasted of a better statesman, nor Augustus of a more faithful subject; as your imprisonment and sufferings, through all the course of our late national distractions have sufficiently manifested." (75)

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[41] Paul Salzman, "Notes," *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 272-273.

[42] Jacqueline Pearson, "The Short Fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 197.

[43] Salzman, 272.

The text dedicated to Payne then is a story of an aristocrat who suffers for his invincible loyalty, however questionable the object of the loyalty is. Prince Tarquin has all the features an aristocrat at the Stuart court should have – beauty, art of spectacle, honour, loyalty and a loose relationship to religion. Despite his title being questioned by some, he is naturally provided with the qualities of an aristocrat; he is "extremely handsome, […] easy in conversation and very entertaining, liberal and good natured, brave and inoffensive." (97) These natural qualities are supplemented with his ability for performance; he arrives into the town "gloriously attended" (97) and keeps up the splendid image of himself even when his fortune is disappearing: "for even to the last he kept up his grandeur, to the amazement of all people, and indeed, he was so passionately beloved by them that those he had dismissed served him voluntarily and would not be persuaded to abandon him while he lived." (114) He seems to be the perfect aristocrat, naturally beloved by people, accomplished in terms of body and spirit and very brave. The only flaw this character shows is his invincible love for Miranda, which however does not stop the town from admiring and loving him.

In the text he is connected to Charles II by visiting his exiled court and being approved by the king. In Tarquin then Behn presented again a monarch, whose title may be questioned by his opponents, but whose inborn royalty is undeniable and recognized by most of the citizens. He is not ideal; he devoted his loyalty to a wrong object, but that is not a reason for his damnation, as his being saved by the crowd after his execution shows. In a similar way, the Stuarts have one fatal flaw of Catholicism, but for Aphra Behn that is not a reason sufficient for rebellion. In Tarquin's love without questions Behn transforms the image of an effeminate monarch under the rule of sex often associated with Charles II into a concept closer to the quietism of unshakable loyalty of the Stuart ideology.

Unlike *Oroonoko*, *The Fair Jilt* does not feature the royal hero as the main character; as the title suggests, the story is centred on beautiful Miranda who is one of Behn's most intriguing characters. She is introduced as the most beautiful lady, very much accomplished, with pleasant behaviour and she "had a great deal of wit, read much, and retained all that served her purpose." (79) Yet later she becomes the source of repellent events, which show her as a devilish being. However, unlike other Behn's texts, she escapes all punishment and only "they say" (119) that she regrets her deeds at the end of the book, from which the reader is at a loss whether to judge her or feel compassion. In fact, Miranda is a tool for fascinating intertextual play with characters of the Pope Joan

type. Miranda shares many features with this kind of partisan caricatures used by Whig authors; she is lustful, misuses sexuality for governing men and she is capable of any crime to satisfy her wishes. Yet at the same time she has many features associated usually with the caricature of a Whig – greediness, hypocrisy, commercialism. Putting Miranda into interaction with figures of Tory virtue like Prince Henrick and Prince Tarquin makes her Whig qualities more prominent and thus translates the image of a lustful devilish woman from one partisan discourse, anti-Catholic, into the opposite one. The association with partisan caricatures is also strengthened by the hyperbolic language Behn uses with both Miranda and Tarquin. At the same time the understanding approach of the narrator and Miranda's reported penitence at the end open a way to discard the original partisan caricatures completely and approach Miranda as a complex individual character.

Miranda is a person who can take advantage of the men in the story because she does not follow the same "game rules". Both Prince Henrick and Prince Tarquin are "men of quality" which to Behn means that they are of noble birth and they are properly educated in the court ethics based on the code of honour. Though one is religious and the other is not overtly so, they both share honour as the basis of their conduct, just as Oroonoko. Miranda, however, though richly born too, does not share their ethics, she is quite their opposite. She does not share their ability for loyalty and is "extremely inconstant." (80) Also she is not capable of apprehending the idea of true devotion and thinks Prince Henrick's religion is only "a little hypocritical devotion, […] religious pride and vanity." (93) Moreover, she misuses the code of honour shared by the two aristocrats to achieve her own goals.

Her revenge on Prince Henrick through the pretended rape is aimed at ruining his honour in public: "I will ruin thee, and make no scruple of revenging the pains I suffer, by that which shall take away your life and honour." (93) As for Prince Tarquin, she uses his constant love since the beginning of their relationship to get access to his money and title and then makes him commit a murder to protect her property. Though Miranda comes from a rich family, she is not a "woman of quality," however desperately she wants to become one. In men she always looked only for this one thing: "above all, she admired quality; quality alone had the power to attack her entirely, yet not to one man." (80) Unfortunately for her, Miranda only sees the outside features of quality. She dotes on mighty sounding titles:

> She no sooner heard of him, which was as soon as he arrived, but she fell in love with his very name. Jesu! – a young king of Rome! Oh, 'twas so novel that she doted on the title, and had not cared whether the rest had been man or monkey almost, she was resolved to be the Lucretia that this young Tarquin should ravish. (98)

She also understands the public image of aristocracy, the need for performance, as we can see in the splendid image of riches she creates around herself when she is punished by standing at the pillory. However, although she can create an outward image of aristocracy around herself she cannot convince the public. Although the people of the town know Prince Tarquin was the attempted murderer, they are willing to forgive him for his noble reasons of love and loyalty, yet they cannot forgive Miranda in whom they cannot discern any ethical code. What Miranda does not understand is that aristocracy, or quality in Behn's terminology, is not only the spectacle and property, but also that there is some kind inborn grace and ethical code of honour, which she does not and cannot share. In this division Behn again stresses that royalty or aristocracy is not a state that could be obtained through commercial success, it is in the blood. In fact, when the spectacle is thrown away and the aristocrat tries to disguise himself as a common man, it is impossible. As Oroonoko could not hide his royalty, Prince Henrick cannot pretend to be an ordinary monk: "Besides the beauty of his face and shape, he had an air altogether great; in spite of his professed poverty, it betrayed the man of quality, and that thought weighed greatly with Miranda." (81)

Yet, the impossibility of hiding his quality makes Henrick helpless under Miranda's gaze, through which she achieves a gender reversal that would make her especially associated with Pope Joan: "She gazed upon him, while he bowed before her, and waited for her charity, till she perceived the lovely friar to blush and cast his eyes to the ground." (81) In this way the prince is put into the position of a blushing maid, which culminates in the scene of the pretended rape, of which Miranda is the agent. (94)

The same principle of gender reversal is interestingly used in the re-appearing motive of Lucretia, which we have seen in *Love-Letters* already. The tale of Lucretia is an example often reappearing in English literature and interpreted in many different ways; as Susan Wiseman noted, "Lucretia's suicide holds a place as one of the most oppositely interpreted of classical self-murders."[44] *The Fair Jilt* is one of the stories that create these

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[44] Susan Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2006) 53, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/docDetail.action?docID=10271502> 20 Jan. 2013.

oppositions. Traditionally, Lucretia is an example used for the promotion of republicanism, as a story of the overthrow of a tyrant. As such it was used by the contemporary Exclusionist or Whig propaganda, as Rachel Carnell has shown on the case of *Female Excellency, or the Ladies Glory*, a book published in the same year as *The Fair Jilt*, which

> showcases heroines of antiquity and the Old Testament who demonstrate the courage to challenge political tyrants. The chapter about Lucretia in Female Excellency includes a specific diatribe against tyranny that leaves no doubts as to the author's view of the House of Stuart.[45]

It is not only this one book, which would use the tale of Lucretia against the Stuart monarchy; apparently it was widely known and accepted. Before the battle of Worcester, Marchmont Nedham called Charles Stuart "a young Tarquin" in the newspaper Mercurius Politicus supporting the republic.[46] Behn is therefore reworking a tale generally known as an example of anti-royalism into a story supporting the Stuarts. That is achieved by the gender reversal. As has been quoted above, when Miranda hears about Tarquin's title and wealth, she exclaims that "she was resolved to be the Lucretia that this young Tarquin should ravish." (98) Thus all the guilt for a potential rape comes to the woman, especially with view to her past experience with Prince Henrick which showed her actually capable of staging a rape. Tarquin in *The Fair Jilt* has no other intention than to honourably marry his Lucretia who is not married and thus no reason for the overthrow of the country arises.

An interesting twist of the political discourse appears when this gender and role reversal is applied to the universally spread household analogy of the king as a husband and his country or the Parliament as his wife. Behn questioned the authority of the husband by submitting him to the will of his wife and at the same time supported it by making Prince Tarquin morally superior to her. The image that arises then is that of a too good husband/monarch willing to sacrifice his principles for the love to his bad wife who only tries to get commercial success without respect to any ethical code. According to Carnell,

> Behn's Prince Tarquin— at this juncture, a figure for James II— becomes a figure for her new vision of masculine Tory selfhood. Behn's Tarquin is not morally perfect, as Behn acknowledges in the preface: his devotion to Miranda provokes

[45] Carnell, 71.

[46] Wiseman, 57.

him to engage in criminal acts. He offers a new model of Tory heroism, one that allows a hero to give a sinning woman a second chance."[47]

It also shows the only way out of the present political crisis acceptable to the supporters of James II: repentance of the sinning revolutionaries and graceful forgiveness on the side of the king.

4.4 *The History of the Nun:* England, Beware!

Long may she scourge this mad rebellious Age,
And stem the torrent of Fanatick rage,
That once had almost overwhelm'd the Stage. [48]

Among Behn's fiction there are two allegorical stories of vow-breaking nuns, which is a very powerful motive for warning against the breaking of the oath of allegiance, and these are *The History of the Nun* and *The Nun, or the Perjured Beauty*.

The History of the Nun was published not long after *Oroonoko*; it was licensed in October 1688, two weeks before William of Orange landed at Brixham.[49] It is a story that on the allegorical level most directly comments on the strained situation of that year without submitting the originality and independence of the text. It was dedicated to the Duchess of Mazarine who was "renowned for her independent spirit" and was Charles II's mistress.[50] In one person thus both Behn's ideals are fulfilled, the support to the Stuarts and femininity devoid of the limitations of standard marriage.[51]

Unlike the other major fiction works by Behn, the narrator of this story does not pretend to be an eye-witness and does not interfere in the events as she did in *Oroonoko*. In the dedication a mention of the truth of the story is made, yet with less insistence than in

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[47] Carnell, 70.

[48] Quoted in Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650-1689* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2004) 157, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10263660&ppg=170> 20 Feb. 2013.

[49] Rachel Carnell, *Realism, Partisan Politics, and the Rise of the British Novel* (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 57, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10150383&ppg=68> 13 Feb. 2013.

[50] Paul Salzman, "Notes," *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 276.

[51] The family situation of Duchess of Mazarine was very peculiar. She was courted by Charles II before his return from exile, but she married Armand-Charles de la Porte. She later separated from him for his extreme jealousy and mental instability, and lived at various courts across Europe, finally becoming the mistress of Charles II. She was therefore perceived as an unusually independent woman, which led to dedications by several female writers like Behn and Mary Astell.

the other works. This might be helping to transfer readers' attention from the literal meaning of the plot to another, allegorical interpretation.

In both nun stories Behn employs again a variation on the theme of a monstrous Jacobite woman, following a similar experiment in *The Fair Jilt.* While in *The Nun* Ardelia's inconstancy is the reason for several unnecessary deaths and the story does not attempt to apologize her, *The History of the Nun* transforms the common character of a guilty woman completely and the idea of an inherent evil in the monstrous Jacobite is wholly undermined through the insight into the heroine's thoughts and a high degree of understanding in the narrator's approach to her. In fact, the reader is not aware of the evil that the deeds of this woman would cause until the very end of the narrative with only little suspicion during the course of the story. The main heroine, Isabella de Vallary, is introduced at the beginning as a beautiful girl growing up in a monastery, who is an example of excellence among the nuns: "When they would express a very holy woman indeed, they would say she was a very Isabella."[52] Unfortunately she falls in love with Bernardo Henault, elopes and marries him. When he goes to the army to gain back his honour, he is captured and Isabella marries Villenoys while convinced that she is a widow. It ends fatally when Henault comes back home, Isabella is in despair as an adulteress and solves the problem by murdering both her husbands, for which she ends up at the stake.

The story is framed by a strong insistence on the importance of vows and the criminality of vow-breaking. The full title of the book is *The History of the Nun; or the Fair Vow-Breaker*, it is opened with an introduction by the narrator concerned with vows and it is closed by Isabella at the stake who "made a speech of half an hour long, so eloquent, so admirable a warning to the vow-breakers, that it was as amazing to hear her, as it was to behold her." (190) The narrator opens the story by insistence on a punishment that always follows breaking of an oath: "Of all the sins incident to human nature, there is none of which Heaven has took so particular, visible, and frequent notice and revenge as on that of violated vows, which never go unpunished." (139) There are, however, more kinds of vows, of which the most sacred is the vow of a nun or a monk:

> But as there are degrees of vows, so there are degrees of punishments for vows. There are solemn matrimonial vows […], but there is another vow, called a sacred

[52] Aphra Behn, "The History of the Nun," *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 148. All future page references in this chapter will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

vow, made to God only, and by which we oblige ourselves eternally to God only, and by which we oblige ourselves eternally to serve Him with all chastity and devotion. […] of all broken vows, these are those that receive the most severe and notorious revenges of God. (140)

In the lives of Behn's English readers there were no monasteries, but there was a different kind of divine oath, the oath of allegiance which the courtiers had to swear and which all the royal subjects would know and feel that it is valid for everybody under the King's rule. With the impendent Glorious Revolution many English citizens would feel a strong dilemma between the fear of the Catholic heir to the throne and the awareness of a divine bond between the king and his subjects which William's coming would break. Clearly, Behn's stress on vow-breaking would be easily read in connection with the general ethical anxiety in the society similar to that of the Exclusion Crisis.

It is therefore not surprising that in her Exclusion crisis drama, *The Roundheads*, Behn already opened the topic of breaking vows in relation to the Solemn League and Covenant.[53] Here Lady Desbro' refuses to break a vow, because that is what a Royalist does not do. In *The History of the Nun,* in a historical moment even more strained than during the Exclusion Crisis, Behn shows a heroine who is not able to keep the demands of an oath imposed on her in the past, not having such discipline as Lady Desbro does, and the results are tragic.

With regard to the generally accepted Royalist conviction of Aphra Behn, her stance in this case should be clear and the frame of *The History of the Nun* reflects it. It could be summarized in the simple idea of a horrible punishment following breaking of the divine vow, be it the celibacy of nuns or allegiance to the king. After Isabella's elopement from the nunnery, she with her husband assume the name Beroone, which sounds very near to "be ruined," and such they indeed are as their farm meets all kinds of catastrophes while their neighbours flourish. Clearly, this is a punishment for the first break of a vow. The tragic result of Isabella's second breaking of a vow, this time the matrimonial one, has been already described.

It follows from what has been said, that the story offers itself to an allegorical interpretation. Rachel Carnell deciphered it through the historical approach. She reads the first and worst break in the story, Isabella's elopement, as a representation of the worst

[53] Chalmers, 174.

break of the oath of allegiance in English history, the execution of Charles I and then the outcome follows with inevitable logic:

> From a Tory viewpoint, this original act of disloyalty provides the logic for a second act of disloyalty— in an overthrow of James II, that might well result in his death or the death of his infant son. By asking for pardons from aunt and father respectively, Isabella and Henault might represent the many political officeholders under the Protectorate who deftly negotiated for Charles II's pardon when they saw Richard Cromwell's hold on power fading. In allowing Isabella and Henault to gradually return to favor, Behn seems to acknowledge the political necessity of changing loyalty, even though her heroine ends the novel with a final speech against vow-breaking as she approaches the scaffold.[54]

Reading *The History of the Nun* as a historical allegory seems to be perfectly plausible, especially with the support of the resemblance between the names of William and Villenoys. Yet the idea of Behn's acknowledging the necessity of changing loyalty might be problematic in view of the tragic outcome of the story. Amelia Zurcher's concept of romance as "allegorical fiction located on a continuum between the conceptual and the historical"[55] allows us to use multiple layers of interpretation that do not always fit together entirely. The overall concept of the text is the fatal punishment for breaking the divine vow. At the same time, the historical allegory level needs Isabella and Henault to experience a period of favour to represent the short time of peace during the early Restoration period. This, nevertheless, does not contradict the tragic outcome of the overall concept.

Even in this highly topical political allegory Behn does not abandon the fundamentals of her own discourse and works through the subversion of the set tropes and practices of political propaganda. In Isabella she gets close to, but does not entirely merge with, the Whig character of a monstrous Catholic woman and the Tory caricatures of disloyal Whigs, but through the understanding approach of the narrator and insight into Isabella's thoughts Behn creates a fully developed character independent of the issues of propaganda. In the dedication Behn asks the reader to feel with the heroine: "if my fair, unfortunate vow-breaker do not deserve the honour of Your Grace's protection, at least she will be found worthy of your pity." (139) Then in the introductory part of the story an

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[54] Carnell, 66.

[55] Amelia A. Zurcher, *Seventeenth-Century English Romance* (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 43, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10194087&ppg=43> 15 March 2013.

appeal is made to parents not to force their children into any vows, both the matrimonial and the monastic, before they are old enough to choose for themselves. In Carnell's view, this questioning of the ability of fathers to make the right choice for their children criticizes also the Tory analogy of patriarchal household as such.

During the whole course of the narrative, there is a strong sense of fatalism both in the narrator's approach and in Isabella's own understanding of what she is doing. When Isabella, still a nun, falls in love, she tries all kinds of religious practices to get rid of the unwanted emotion. When these fail she assumes a fatalistic stance and yields fully to the emotion:

> at last, she was forced to permit that to conquer her she could not conquer, and submitted to her fate as a thing destined her by Heaven itself, and, after all this opposition, she fancied it was resisting even divine providence to struggle any longer with her heart, and this being her real belief, she the more patiently gave way to all the thoughts that pleased her. (166)

When the threat of what could follow after breaking her sacred vow comes to her mind, she throws the responsibility on Heaven: "since all her devout endeavours could not defend her from the cause, Heaven ought to excuse the effect." (166) Ltaer, when the fatal outcomes appear, she again puts blame on her destiny: "O, what fate, what destiny is mine? Under what cursed planet was I born, that Heaven itself could not divert my ruin?" (187) There is an unavoidable cause-and-effect logic, named as destiny in Behn's vocabulary, in *The History of the Nun* and the individual is entrapped in the plot and responsible for his own actions even though the original cause might not be his or hers. This rejects any kinds of excuses made for the change of the monarch on the throne; there is a threat present in the story of fatal consequences after the violation of the oath of allegiance irrespective of the reasons.

Both *The History of the Nun* and *The Nun* thus feature female characters not able to keep their promises. Ardelia in *The Nun* is of naturally inconstant character, her change of lover proves to be disastrous for both her lovers and later she fails even in keeping her divine vow. In contrast, Isabella's character is much more complex and complicates the straightforward damnation of her vow-breaking, though the outcome is brought forward with the inner logic of unavoidable destiny. Breaking of the divine oath is punished regardless of the motives behind, in the same way as there is no valid motive for overthrowing the King in the Stuart ideology. Similar case is hidden behind the tragic story

of *Agnes de Castro*, in which Agnes is put into the position of double loyalty – to her lady whom she admires and serves and to the prince whom she desperately loves. There is no possible solution of such situation other than Agnes's violent death though all the three characters are virtuous and struggle to retain their honour.

At the threshold of the Glorious Revolution thus Behn published stories not aimed at criticizing the opposition so much, rather warning against the tragic outcome of what was going on at the political scene of the days. In the fatal course of events in each of the three stories there is a sense of unavoidable destiny that must have been shared by many supporters of James II at the time when his position was on the edge of destruction. Among the three texts *The History of the Nun* shows deepest attempt at characterization of the main heroine. Therefore, *The History of the Nun* seems to be one of Behn's most topical works, with a most clearly presented allegorical level of interpretation warning against breaking the oath of allegiance to the monarch which the whole nation did in the revolution, while at the same time it does not give way to any standard caricatures of political propaganda and features a fully developed heroine with rich inner life.

4.5 Memoirs of the Court of the King of Bantam

Though we are the knaves, we know who's the fool.[56]

This story was not published during Behn's life and its exceptionality in the whole of her fiction led to some doubts about its authorship. Nevertheless, it is still generally accepted as one of Behn's works and even though it is not very similar to her other fictions, Aphra Behn proved to be experimenting in so various ways that it is quite acceptable that she should try her hand at farcical fiction especially with view to her broad comical outcome in drama.

What is so exceptional about this text is its farcical nature that does not appear in any other Behn's story in such degree, especially as they are mostly tragedies in fiction. It is a story about Mr Wou'dbe King who takes the title of a King of Bantam made up for one evening party too seriously and whose meanness and love of pomp is used by other characters to trick him out of some of his money.

In its "knowing and sophisticated tones of a Restoration raconteur, full of cynical asides and wry humour,"[57] *Memoirs* are very close to the highly political Restoration

[56] Aphra Behn, "The Cabal at Nickey Nackeys," *Oroonoko and Other Writings,* ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 236.

comedy. It also follows the habit of political pamphlets in using rather non-realistic characters to prove a point through caricature and grotesque aimed at the opposite side. It is one of the few stories where Behn fully develops this technique of depicting; in her other writing the complexity of her characters surpasses their caricaturing potential. In *Memoirs* Behn employs caricature in the person of Mr. King and it seems very probable that he is a tool for a personal satire. So far, the critics have proposed two possible readings. Sara Heller Mendelson suggests reading it as a satire on John Sheffield, the third Earl of Mulgrave, who "courted James's daughter Anne and was exiled from court in disgrace in 1682. He is satirized in Behn's poem 'Ovid to Julia' and was certainly made fun of for pretensions (via the courtship of Anne) to great things, one of his nicknames being King John (Greer)."[58] On the contrary, Pearson suggests that Mr King satirizes Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 2nd Earl of Shaftesbury, "whose enemies believed he coveted the elective monarchy of Poland: the internal evidence allows the events of the novel to be dated to 1683, the year of Shaftesbury's death, [which] makes this particularly plausible."[59] Both these versions seem to be possible and no definitive proof can be made.

Whoever he represents, Mr Wou'dbe King is a disagreeable person, strongly suggesting someone of the Whig party. As every caricature, his characterisation is based only on a few exaggerated qualities. These are his immense wealth, pride, belief that his name entitles him to become a king and his lust, which all are used by his witty opponent Sir Philip Friendly, who, on the contrary, is generous about money and friendly to everyone besides Mr King.

Similarly to *Oroonoko* and *The Fair Jilt,* this story is highly concerned with commercial culture and the power of money, as shown already in the opening sentence: "This money, certainly, is a most dev'lish thing!"[60] The leading feature of Mr Wou'dbe King is his belief in the unlimited power of his money. As his denomination as "Mr" in opposition to Sir Philip shows, he is not a member of an aristocratic family and gained his

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[57] Paul Salzman, "Introduction," *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998), xiv.

[58] Paul Salzman, "Notes," *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 274.

[59] Jacqueline Pearson, "The Short Fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 190.

[60] Behn, "Memoirs of the Court of the King of Bantam," *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 1998) 120. . All future page references in this chapter will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

admittance to the higher circles of society through his property, unlike the rest of the characters who all seem to be from noble families, though they are by lack of fortune not rich enough to accomplish their wished for marriages. They need to get Mr King's money in order to make their love possible and thus, according to Pearson, in the world of Behn's narrative "economic consumption is the only thing that makes possible or sustainable amatory consumption."[61] Thus at the same time the story establishes the importance of property in the current society and caricatures people who value it more than anything else. In Mr Wou'dbe King's view, money opens the way to anything he could wish, though he wouldn't have any other right to it. His conviction that he deserves to be a king despite not having any title by birth makes him act like one:

> This glorious prophecy had so great an influence on all his thoughts and actions that he distributed and disbursed his wealth, sometimes so largely, that one would ha' thought he had undoubtedly been king of some part of the Indies, to see a present made today of a diamond ting worth two or three hundred pound to Madam Flippant, tomorrow a large chest of the finest china to my Lady Fleecewel […] (121)

Quite typically his trying to act as a king is represented in terms of giving away his money in the form of expensive presents; there is no other feature of royalty in him. This quotation also shows a different perspective to his adoration of money. He is sure that money makes him irresistible and can buy him love of any woman: "He promised himself the victory over any lady whom he attempted, by the force of his damned money." (121) Therefore, the simple principles of Behn's Cavalier culture are above his understanding. First, that to be a king a man needs to be born one. Proper birth does not only mean inheritance of property and title, but also specific physical and psychical qualities. Mr King only sees the outward performance and material side of being an aristocrat. Second, Mr King cannot see that the love of a gentlewoman is not won by money but by various kinds of personal qualities. Therefore he only succeeds in seducing Lucy, who is not a woman of high moral standards being a former mistress of Sir Philip, by literally "throwing the naked guineas into her lap." (135-136)

In the same way as Miranda in *The Fair Jilt*, Mr King mistakes the spectacle of higher classes for the whole ethics, which makes him ridiculous in the eyes of truly noble

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[61] Pearson, 195.

men. In the words of his love rival, Valentine Goodland, he is a "pageant" and "Property King," fit only to be the king of Bantam. (126)

The scene from the next day in which Mr King boasts about his empty title at the court shows that it is full of similarly vain people and full of gossip:

> Madam Tattlemore, I think, was the first he spoke to in court, and whom first he surprised with the happy news of his advancement to the title of King of Bantam. […] 'Twas not in her power, because not in her nature, to stay long enough to take a civil leave of the company, but away she flew, big with the empty title of a fantastic king, proclaiming it to every one of her acquaintance as she passed through every room, till she came to the presence chamber, where she only whispered it, but her whispers made above half the honourable company quit the presence of the King of Great Britain to go make their court to His Majesty of Bantam. (131)

Behn uses the court scene to stress the difference between the real king Charles II of royal birth and his fake counterpart. While Mr King is a vain person with no real friends, Charles "is a wonderful good-natured and a well-bred gentleman." (131) *The Memoirs* thus in a light-hearted manner make the same point as all Behn's stories analysed so far – it points out superficiality of mercantile concerns with property and celebrates the graceful charm of high-born people.

5 Conclusion

The analysis of Behn's political rhetoric shows the limitations imposed upon her texts when read devoid of their historical background and context as simple amatory stories or scandal novels imitating their French counterparts. Quite contrary, Aphra Behn matches John Dryden both in the scope of her literary work and in its relevance for the study of the Restoration literature, while at the same time she promotes an original feminine perspective on the writing and politics of her time.

In her early drama she attempted a deep critique of the libertine ethos of the Cavalier culture stressing the limitations imposed on women both by the libertine ethics and by their economic restrictions. However, as a stark Royalist she never denied the Tory discourse completely and in times of need she turned to the more traditional strategies of Tory rhetoric, as she did in her plays of the Exclusion Crisis. In her fiction, which all comes from 1683 and later, she, in accordance with the general trend of the Restoration, abandoned the figure of a Cavalier and sexual promiscuity became rather associated with negative values and decay. Sexual misconduct, in the form of incest or excessive promiscuity, was used as an analogy for political misconduct, treason, plotting and disloyalty.

All of Behn's fiction proves to be highly engaged in contemporary political issues; it reflects all the main affairs like the Rye House or Meal-Tub Plots and with the gradual increase of political instability her writing engages with the general ethical anxiety in warning against possible tragic outcomes of a revolution, hence the tragic plots based on inevitable destiny. She makes use of all the techniques of political rhetoric of the Restoration period experimenting with the caricature, both historical and conceptual allegories and the typological interpretation of contemporary events through classical or biblical examples. Often she employs rhetorical strategies of the opposition to aim them back to their creators as in the case of the tale of Lucretia used for accusing the rebels of tyrannical inclinations or in associating the figure of a monstrous woman with the Whig mercantile interests in *The Fair Jilt*.

In the prose works Aphra Behn does not promote feminist issues as much as in some of her comedies, yet she does not allow for their complete abandonment. Her fiction, though asserting the Stuarts' divine right, often disrupts the official patriarchal ideology

and Filmerian household analogy. Her narratives insist on the independence of the household reality not subjugated to any political theory, which is made possible through the development of the romance's potential for multiple layers of meaning. It allows the texts to retain a certain specific kind of Tory discourse while at the same time they elaborate the complexity of the narrative reality and characters. Both Behn's Tory and feminist views are mirrored in the fictions' study of the power of discourse and the control of representation, which explores the limitations imposed on women by their lack of public voice and also the functioning of the many political conspiracies that appeared during the Restoration period and were mostly based on fabricated fictional plots.

Instead of the patriarchal household analogy, Behn promotes a version of Tory ideology based on the principle of personal honour, loyalty and divine right of the King. The divine right is based in the King's body and supported by the idealization of the royal person epitomized in the ideal of Oroonoko and Prince Tarquin. The texts rather diminish the role of religion in their ethical structure and instead build a system of ethics centred on the concept of aristocratic honour. Moreover, many of the texts criticize the Whig middle-class ethos, ridiculing their monetary interests and laying bare their attempts at gaining the higher-class status through public performance and material wealth without accommodating the concept of personal, private honour.

In none of her major works does Behn allow the political agenda to overcome the complexity of her characters, which opens space for a thorough exploration of the female self. Behn's texts negotiate the position of her female characters on the scale between the "absolute self" of Margaret Cavendish and the partisan caricature of the Pope Joan type. Even the characters that undergo the deepest political critique, like Miranda in *The Fair Jilt* or Isabella in *The History of the Nun*, are not subjected to caricaturing simplification or patriarchal suppression. The allegorical layering of Behn's narratives allows for the development of complex female individualities not subjugated to any political theory, though the allegorical interpretation of the story is not disrupted.

However, there is still much to be done in the study of Behn's fiction, which the scope of this thesis did not allow for. The rest of the minor fictions by Behn deserve their own analyses, while the works analysed here still afford much material for examining. This thesis offered a very brief overview of the chief tropes and strategies used by Aphra Behn and it attempted to place them in relation to the period of their production, yet it still leaves much to be explored in the individual texts.

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