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Royalism and Feminism: 
Aphra Behn’s Dilemma in the Two Parts of The Rover

Wataru Fukushi

Aphra Behn began her literary career in 1670 with a tragicomedy called The Forc’d Marriage. The title is symbolic enough to show her principal matter of concern; for, in her dramas, Behn constantly presented female characters who try to marry the man of their choice, escaping from the partner decided by their parents. It is noteworthy that Behn often portrays sympathetically such female characters in difficulties, characters like Erminia in The Forc’d Marriage, Cloris in The Amorous Prince, and Florinda in The Rover. The forced marriage is presented as a matter of vital importance which drives the plot in The Rover. The nuptials of the virtuous heroine Florinda and her constant lover Belvile constitute a characteristic case in which a woman makes a satisfactory choice of her own. Viewed from Florinda’s side, the marriage at the denouement is significant because it produces a happy ending. Certainly one of the primal concerns in Behn’s dramas, fully worked-out in The Rover, is to describe women who freely choose their way of life: in other words, to present feminism—pity for, vindication of, and sympathy for women in trouble.¹

Representing libertinism was another main theme for Behn. She described various libertines in her works, always giving them two ambivalent features: they are attractive, but tyrannical. For example, in her second play, The Amorous Prince, published in 1671, Behn created the rakish Frederick, loved by the chaste Cloris. He is attractive, at least for Cloris, but so licentious as to attempt the seduction of women merely to satisfy his desires. His wildness is so marked that he even has it in mind to rape another maid. Frederick’s tyrannical violence is, however, finally neutralized so that a happy ending for the woman is emphasized—his charm, not his wildness, being underlined.

The characteristics of the libertine Willmore in The Rover are not very different from those of Frederick: he is also attractive and wild. Yet, one significant difference is that his rakish manner is never
reformed. This makes the marriage of Willmore and Hellena complicated. It is not merely described as the satisfactory result of a woman’s free choice, although Hellena does wish it, but also as an acceptable union for the libertine. Since it happens without Willmore’s reformation, he might well threaten his wife’s future happiness after the marriage. Hellena must want Willmore to be faithful in their matrimony for her reputation, but it is not at all certain that he will be constant to her—because Willmore is not simply an attractive character but preserves both charm and wildness.

The two couples juxtaposed at the end of *The Rover* suggest that two incompatible modes coexist in the play: one is the consummation of true love, or the fulfilling of a woman’s free choice, represented in the marriage of Belvile and Florinda, and the other is the survival of libertinism in that of Willmore and Hellena. These two modes are fundamentally drawn out in separate directions so that their coexistence generates a tension emerging from several conflicts between Willmore and the others.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the causes of that tension. A first and necessary step will be to compare *The Rover* with *The Second Part of The Rover*; for these two plays share a similar tension though it is revealed in different ways. Secondly, it will be important to consider not only the representation of female characters, as many critics have done, but also the difficulty of representing rakes, a difficulty with which Behn will have struggled. Examining only a misogynistic aspect to libertinism might lead us to miss another side: its association with the royalists. As Susan Owen has shown, there were certain discourses which related party politics with sexual politics around the period of the Exclusion Crisis. Considering that Behn was a resolute supporter of the royalist cause throughout her life, Owen’s suggestion should not be neglected. We should therefore historicize the rakish manners represented in *The Rover* and *The Second Part of The Rover* in interpreting them: while libertinism was regarded as an abominable form of behavior for some women, it was related to an image of the royalist. Feminism and libertinism are fundamentally at odds; but Behn needed to reconcile them somehow in order not to undermine her royalism.

I

First, we need to take a short view of the historical and political context around the time *The Rover* was written and its significance for
Behn. It is well known that the revelation of the Popish Plot in the autumn of 1678 provoked a “four-year roller-coaster of political crisis” known as the Exclusion Crisis. The political confrontation between the King and parliament which involved the royalists and the opposition was so furious that it was widely feared civil war would break out again. It cannot be overstated that the revelation of the Popish Plot was a crucial turning point in the party politics of the period; however, this political confrontation did not suddenly explode in 1678. There had been continuous struggles between the two sides since the Restoration. As is recorded in many satirical poems, the antagonism was apparent even from the early 1670s; in addition, the association of libertinism and the royalists was also evident from an early phase of the confrontation. It might be confirmed through the staging of *The Libertine* by Thomas Shadwell in 1675. Shadwell, who was an advocate of the Earl of Shaftesbury and the parliamentarians during the Crisis, bitterly satirized the rakish style in a play where libertines are described as demonic villains and finally sent to Hell. According to Janet Todd, contemporary audiences certainly saw the play as direct criticism of the royalists. Therefore, it must have been difficult for Behn (who stood by the King and his supporters) to represent a rake as an abominable rogue after the staging of *The Libertine*. She would not have wanted to be regarded as an anti-royalist in describing a libertine as a villain or by making him reform and repent his behavior.

Willmore in *The Rover* is generally depicted as an attractive royalist hero. He is a wandering mercenary soldier who travels with the “Prince” and is hired by the Spanish navy: that is, he is a typical cavalier of the Interregnum period in which this drama is set. A number of royalists aristocrats—such as Thomas Killigrew, author of *Thomaso,* the source for the two parts of *The Rover*—were exiled from England with Charles and earned their living as mercenary soldiers during the Commonwealth. Considering that people tended to draw a parallel between the Interregnum and the 1670s, Willmore may be thought a royalist not of the 1640s but of the Restoration. His gay and courageous humour would be received as charms characteristic of the current royalist by the audience of that time.

Willmore’s merry character is presented as soon as he makes his first appearance on the stage: “my business ashore was only to enjoy myself a little this Carnival” (1.2.63–4). With a sexual implication that he will “enjoy” the loose and festive space of the “Carnival”, he
declares he has an inclination to mirth. Willmore’s gallantry is described sufficiently in the scene where he quarrels with his company on the question of whether he should enter Angellica’s lodgings or not. Frederick’s speech shows well the common uneasiness about the bawdy house: “death Man, she’ll Murder thee [Willmore]” (2.1.258). It was often the case with prostitutes that they hired bullies in order to defend themselves; therefore, they were considered to bear equivocal features—sexual allurement and potential violence which might deprive the customer of his life. What is tested at the gate of Angellica’s house is masculinity in two senses: conquering women and confronting violence. Willmore asserts his when he replies: “Oh! fear me not, shall I not venture where a Beauty calls? a lovely Charming Beauty! for fear of danger!” (2.1.259–60)

Willmore’s sexual attractiveness is most fully shown during the scene in which he seduces Angellica. His conquest of Angellica should satisfy vicariously the male audience’s desire:

ANGELLICA. The low esteem you have of me, perhaps
May bring my heart again:
For I have pride, that yet surmounts my Love.
WILLMORE. Throw off this Pride, this Enemy to Bliss,
And shew the Pow’r of Love: ’tis with those Arms
I can be only vanquisht, made a Slave.
ANGELLICA. Is all my mighty expectation vanisht?
—No, I will not hear thee talk—thou hast a Charm
In every word that draws my heart away.
And all the Thousand Trophies I design’d
Thou hast undone— [. . . ].                                  (2.1.391–401)

It is notable that Willmore has enough insight to perceive that her pride is the last obstacle to his courtship. As Angellica has stated that “No Matter, I’m not displeas’d with their [male characters’] rallying; their wonder feeds my vanity, and he that wishes but to buy, gives me more Pride, than he that gives my Price, can make my pleasure” (2.1.115–7), pride is essential for her individuality as a whore; however, torn between pride and love, she is now in a dilemma. It represents the triumph of libertinism that Willmore succeeds in undermining Angellica’s fundamental quality and leading her into bed. His success is based on a misogyny which assumes male predominance over the female and regards a woman as merely an object for the fulfilling of a man’s desire—that is to say, as an exchangeable commodity. Willmore’s conquest of Angellica is the moment when a
libertine possesses a woman as an object (and what is more, for free). Angellica is commodified not only as a character—as the portraits hung on her abode signify—but also as a physical object, the actress’s body on stage being an alluring object for male spectators. This is, therefore, a gratifying performance vicariously satisfying the male audience’s desire. The male audience can gaze at Angellica who is about to submit to Willmore with whom they can identify, fulfilling their visual pleasure. At this point, Willmore, the royalist libertine, is at the high point of his attractiveness.

However, Willmore’s heroic charm decreases from this moment on. We soon discover Willmore’s success in not only conquering Angellica but also receiving some money from her in the scene where he boasts his accomplishment to his company (3.1.87–118). Being in rapture about his triumph over Angellica, Willmore reveals his frivolity: “pox of Poverty it makes a Man a slave, makes Wit and Honour sneak . . .” (3.1.112–3). This attitude, though jokily sneering at poverty, makes a satirical contrast with his courting rhetoric which criticized Angellica for her mercenary vice: “Yes, I am poor — but I’m a Gentleman, / And one that Scornes this baseness which you practice” (2.1.320–1). It reveals that his heroic speech condemning Angellica was no more than a strategy. In addition, when Willmore curses poverty, his speech, curiously enough, shows a resemblance the foppish Blunt’s lines: “I thank my Stars, I had more Grace than to forfeit my Estate by Cavaliering” (1.2.46–7). Blunt’s preference of “Estate” to “Cavaliering”—to play and to be a cavalier—well testifies that he is a typical country squire. His foppish character is mocked in several scenes, sometimes by Willmore and Bel vile; nevertheless, Willmore’s desire for wealth do reveal a similarity with Blunt after the former’s conquest of Angellica.

Hellena takes the initiative against Willmore in the battle of love between them, so that he appears to be beaten in marrying her; however, their nuptials are not described as a simple victory for Hellena. Marriage seems the most detestable thing for a libertine like Willmore, for, officially, it required husband and wife to be constant to each other in order to maintain their reputations. Seen from this viewpoint, the marriage of Willmore and Hellena does seem a defeat for Willmore; however, we should not overlook Willmore’s shifty statement: “Well, I see we are both upon our Guards, and I see there’s no way to conquer good Nature but by yielding,—here—give me thy hand—one kiss and I am thine;—” (5.1.435–7). The equivocality of their marriage is well
revealed in this paradoxical speech: Willmore accepts a “yielding” to Hellena because it is the only way to “conquer” her. In part, marriage is a triumph for Hellena because she can manage to contain Willmore within the system of matrimony; on the other hand, it is, in part, a desirable result for Willmore because he can possess both Hellena’s body and fortune: “Ha! my Gipsie worth Two Hundred Thousand Crowns!—oh how I long to be with her—pox, I knew she was of Quality” (4.1.271–2). For Willmore, marriage with Hellena suggests not a termination of his rakish career, but a chance to gain the property which will solve his financial predicament. Moreover, when Willmore tells Hellena his name is “Robert the Constant” (5.1.456), his claim of constancy only sounds jokey. He has never been faithful, as he deceived Angellica, and his curious titling himself as “the Constant” conversely convinces us that he will never be so after the wedding. The marriage of Hellena and Willmore does not simply mean Hel- lena’s victory because she cannot reform his rakishness and Willmore profits financially by it.

Libertinism is not necessarily presented as a very attractive mode; however, the nuptials of Willmore and Hellena do not completely subvert it. More significantly there are always viewpoints which relativize Willmore’s libertinism, and these generate the tension within the play. One of those viewpoints is conspicuous in the scene where Blunt is ‘discovered’:

Oh Lord!
I am got out at last, and (which is a Miracle) without a Clue—and now to Damning and Cursing!—but if that wou’d ease me, where shall I begin? with my Fortune, my self, or the Quean that couzen’d me—what a Dog was I to believe in Woman? oh Coxcomb!—Ignorant conceited Coxcomb! [. . . ] but as I was in my right Wits, to be thus cheated, confirms it I am a dull believing English Country Fop— [. . . ] .

(3.2.87–99)

This scene simultaneously suggests two different effects. One is derived from the fact that Blunt’s soliloquy is presented in a discovery scene, which is intended to increase the visual effect.¹³ Playwrights of the period use this type of scene to present some shocking sight—of terrible torture, of an assignation in a grove, or of a voluptuous bed chamber—in order to hold the audience’s attention. In this case its use is parodic to make fun of Blunt, because the discovery of his miserable figure is rather more laughable than shocking. His appearance on stage in dirty underwear makes a great contrast with the usual use of the dis-
covery scene in which an actress is presented in an erotic, loose dress. In fact, Blunt’s miserable appearance and speech functions to emphasize the difference between him and the royalist aristocrats. However, we need to note that he is described as a member of Willmore’s company throughout the play. While he has characteristics which differ from those of the royalists, he continues to be “one of us” (1.2.66) for the royalists: this leads us to the second effect of this scene. That is, the audience’s mockery of Blunt can be turned on to Willmore because of their resemblance. Blunt’s identification with a “Dog” in this scene reminds us that Willmore also described himself as a “Melancholy Dog” (3.1.133). Moreover, they have in common so vile a humour as to call Florinda a whore and to attempt to rape her—Willmore regards that as just a “pure Accident” (3.2.142) to conquer a beauty, while Blunt, who is abused by the prostitute Lucetta, considers that a chance to “be reveng’d on one Whore for the sins of another” (4.1.614–5). On the one hand, the difference between Blunt and Willmore is certainly discovered and mocked; on the other, their similarity is also suggested so that we may wonder how far that difference does function to denigrate Blunt alone. What is discovered and mocked is, explicitly, Blunt’s ridiculousness; however, it can also be, implicitly, Willmore’s frivolous character.

The next point is made through Belvile, the other royalist aristocrat. He is put into a similar situation to that of Willmore—his estate confiscated and in exile—and is always friendly to him, but there is one clear difference between them concerning the sexual norm. Belvile never accepts Willmore’s rakish manners, and condemns them when his beloved Florinda is exposed to their threat. Belvile’s fury against Willmore who has proposed to rape Florinda reveals not only his faithful love but also the fact that Willmore’s libertinism is challenged by another mode of love. While Willmore regards Florinda as an “Errant Harlot” (3.2.216), an exchangeable commodity, Belvile distinguishes her from other women and feels “Reverence” (3.2.219) for her. His constant love leads to the consummation of Florinda’s own choice. The happy ending in the marriage between Belvile and Florinda suggests both that libertinism is not the only style valued in this play and that the mode of true love relativizes Willmore’s manners.

In the scene where Angellica threatens him with a pistol, Willmore’s rakishness is highlighted and relativized:

ANGELlica. Yes, Traitor,
Does not thy guilty blood run shivering through thy Veins?
Hast thou no horrour at this sight, that tells thee,
Thou hast not long to boast thy shameful Conquest?
WILLMORE. Faith, no Child, my blood keeps its old Ebbs and
Flows still, and that usual heat too, that cou’d oblige thee with
a kindness, had I but opportunity. (5.1.202–8)

It is notable that Willmore will not reform his rakish manner even in this emergency. However, it is more significant to realize that his libertinism is literally threatened. Angellica’s claim is based on her love for Willmore—just like Florinda’s for Belvile. While Willmore regarded her as only an exchangeable commodity, Angellica looked on him as a true lover: “But I have given him my Eternal rest, / My whole repose, my future joys, my Heart! / My Virgin heart Moretta; Oh ’tis gone!” (4.1.232–4) Thus, she has good reason to condemn Willmore’s “shameful Conquest”, for her “Virgin heart” was outraged by the faithless libertine. Like Florinda who regards forced marriages for fortune as “ill Customes” (1.1.60), Angellica reveals her need for true love when she argues that marriage for fortune is “the same Mercenary Crime” (2.1.357) as prostitution. Angellica leaves the stage with her virgin heart neglected; however, she produces the critical moment when libertinism is drastically relativized. Although her violent conduct in holding a pistol to his head ruins her chance of success, the mode of true love will not fade out but be incarnate in the Florinda and Belvile pairing. Angellica’s pistol threatening and relativizing Willmore’s rakishness reveals the place where the tension arises—between the woman’s desire and the desire of the libertine.

II

The Second Part of The Rover is said to have been performed some time before 18 January 1681, when Parliament was dissolved. Around that time, the opposition had so much the upper hand that the Exclusion of James was believed to be inevitable. Behn, in such a situation, dedicated this play to the Duke of York. This was a highly political act, declaring her support for the royal brothers; in addition, the play itself contains many more political references than its previous part. It would seem that the rakish style and royalism would be stressed at the expense of feminism; however, it is not the fulfillment of the rake’s desire but the achievement of a woman’s free choice that is foregrounded. The tension, which was generated in the juxtaposition of the
two incompatible modes in *The Rover*, is presented in a different manner in the Willmore and La Nuche pairing. Behn describes libertinism as a central concept under the necessity of supporting the royalist in hard times, but she can not entirely dismiss her other primal concern, feminism.

*The Second Part* presents libertinism in a strengthened way, dispelling some elements which relativized the rake Willmore in the previous part. The first point is the disappearance of the faithful couple. That Belvile and Florinda are “left [. . .] in health at St. Germans” (1.1.81) is symbolic, for the mode of constant love embodied by the two lovers does not develop at all in this part. Ariadne, who is forced to marry Beaumond, differs from Florinda (who faithfully pursued her sole lover) but is much nearer to Hellena: “I hate your dull temperate Lover, ’tis such a husbandly quality! like *Beaumond*’s addresses to me, whom neither joy nor anger puts in motion” (2.1.393–5). She regards her fiancé, Beaumond, as the “formal Matrimonial Fop” (2.1.416) and in vain pursues Willmore. Similarly, Beaumond does not share the constant humour with Belvile: “ [. . .] a Husband that will deal thee some Love is better than one who can give thee none” (2.1.449–50). While he makes thus an unfaithful and plausible excuse for Ariadne, he chases, also in vain, the “charming Beauty, fair *La Nuche*” (2.1.413). They eventually marry, but that does not challenge libertinism as the constancy of Belvile and Florinda had done. Secondly, another fetter for the rakish mode vanishes: Willmore’s wife, Hellena. When Willmore reports Hellena’s death in a sea storm—it is an irony because she asked him “Can you storm?” (*The Rover*, 1.2.161) in order to know if he loves her or not—on their way to Madrid, it is noted in the stage direction that he should tell it “*With a Sham sadness*” (1.1.124). As Beaumond remarks, “Marriage has not tam’d you” (1.1.122); Willmore is not reformed, or rather, his rakishness and misogyny are much more conspicuous than in the previous part.

Libertinism moves to the center when Willmore becomes literally the central character trying to control both the main plot of his love affair with La Nuche and the sub plot of mocking the foppish characters, Blunt and Fetherfool. Willmore disguises himself as a mountebank and performs a mock-fortune-telling in order to attract La Nuche: “I must confess you’re ruin’d if you yield, and yet not all your Pride, not all your Vows, your Wit, your Resolution or your Cunning, can hinder him from Conquering absolutely . . .” (3.1.210–2). Unfortunately for him, La Nuche replies “No,—I will controul my Stars and
Inclinations” (3.1.214). On the contrary, it sounds ironically at last when he is captured by La Nuche in spite of his intention to court Ariadne. Yet he does try to establish an order so that the dramatic world will fit his desires. Willmore also voluntarily involves himself in the mocking plot: “I must have my share of this jest, and for divers and sundry reasons thereunto belonging, must be this very Mountibank expected” (1.1.230–2). While Willmore was not involved in the mocking of Blunt in The Rover, he states that “the Rogues [Blunt and Fetherfool] must be couzen’d” (1.1.116). He manages the sub plot as a mountebank in order to satisfy his desire for “mirth” (1.1.116).

Since Willmore takes part in the sub plot, it is apparent that the structuring of conflict between royalism and the opposition stresses the former. In addition to Willmore’s voluntary participation in the mocking of Blunt and Fetherfool, his motive for it is also worth noting: “these two politick Asses must be couzen’d” (1.1.242–3). Though the word “politick” is used here to mean ‘prudent’ (of course an irony), it should not be missed that it connotes that other meaning, ‘political’. Willmore’s antagonistic attitude toward Blunt and Fetherfool contains an aspect of political rivalry, which is also confirmed in the speech and action of the other side:

BLUNT. The Devil’s in’t if this will not redeem my reputation with the Captain, and give him to understand that all the wit does not lye in the Family of the Willmore’s, but that this noodle of mine can be fruitful too upon occasion.

FETHERFOOL. Ay, and Lord how we’ll domineer, Ned, hah—over Willmore and the rest of the Renegado Officers, when we have married these Lady Monsters, hah, Ned! (1.1.218–24)

It is significant that both Blunt and Fetherfool are willing to challenge Willmore, for it provides a vivid contrast with Blunt in the previous part. While, despite their differences in humour, he was a docile friend of Willmore throughout The Rover, here Blunt contrives to outwit Willmore by marrying the “Lady Monsters”. As the word “Renegado” signifies, their position is based on a different faith or, more practically, a different political side from Willmore and the other royalists. In addition, the fact that their intriguing to marry the “Lady Monsters” is kept from the company of royalists confirms that they bear the mark of the Whigs: to “doat in secret” (2.1.57) was related to Whiggish hypocrisy.15 The mocking of Blunt and Fetherfool—managed by the royalist Willmore—is, therefore, equivalent to satirizing the Whigs.
The most extraordinary figures in this play, the “Lady Monsters”, also function in emphasizing the triumph of the royalist. They are, in the first place, the very representation of the Other—they are rich, Jewish, come from Mexico, and are deformed—and to some extent subvert the supposed male dominance over the dramatic world. The monsters can partly defy the male desire to treat them as commodities: they outwit and overwhelm Blunt and Fetherfool who merely think of them as the source of fortune both in their speech and their physical peculiarity—especially the “Heroical and Masculine” (3.1.76) body of the Giant. However, the similar desire of the other side, the royalists Shift and Hunt, to gain the fortune of the monsters does not suffer from their resistance: “The Gyant [. . .] is in love with me [Shift], the Dwarf with Ensign Hunt, and as we may manage matters it may prove lucky” (1.1.191–2). Luckily, the two royalists are able to “manage matters” and to marry the monsters. Although they consider marriage as only a means of gaining property, just like Blunt and Fetherfool, their mercenary desire is not focalized.

Libertinism and royalism are accentuated because the play lacks factors opposing them and viewpoints to reveal their defects. It seems that the theme of the woman’s choice is disregarded in this play; however, one critical point emerges when Willmore the libertine at last fails to complete his final aim—to conquer the woman he desires:

LA NUCHE. And you it seems mistook me for this Lady [Ariadne]; [. . .] now I am yours, and o’re the habitable World will follow you, and live and starve by turns as fortune pleases.

WILLMORE. Nay, by this light, Child, I knew when once thou’dst try’d me, thou’dst ne’r part with me—give me thy hand, no poverty shall part us. [. . .] now here’s a bargain made without the formal foppery of Marriage. (5.1.501–9)

The fact that Willmore “mistook” his partner when he led her to bed is meaningful. Unlike the Willmore in The Rover, he can not satisfy his desire in this play; on the contrary, it is La Nuche who attains her aim as she declares “[. . .] I will not lose the glory on’t” (5.1.494). Although Willmore is trying to control the dramatic world and is on the whole successful, he fails to triumph in this critical point for a gallant. In other words, it is not the desire of the libertine but the attainment of woman’s will that is eventually brought into focus. La Nuche’s triumph over Willmore is crucial in that it fractures the libertine-centered order in the play, and, more importantly, that it generates a tension between the two irreconcilables: the libertine’s desire and the woman’s
free will.

Yet, it is also important to draw attention to the plot that makes La Nuche’s victory ambiguous. Though Willmore accepts her, he avoids “the formal foppery of Marriage” which will fetter him, at least outwardly, in the legal sanction of constancy—which he had suffered in The Rover. As he states “You [Beaumont and Ariadne] have a hanker- ing after Marriage still, but I am for Love and Gallantry” (5.1.610–1), the evasion of marriage enables Willmore to vow to maintain his libertinism. In addition, considering that Willmore disguises himself as a mountebank and accomplishes the mocking of Blunt and Fetherfool soon after he is defeated by La Nuche, there is a drive in the plot structure that tries to reaffirm the libertine-centered (therefore royalist-centered) dramatic world—which was constructed by putting Willmore in the central position, but which was qualified by La Nuche. This play shows the woman’s triumph over a libertine, but—because of this very triumph—there are several contrivances to obscure it.

III

Finally, let us look at The Roundheads or, The Good Old Cause which was produced in December 1681 when the fury of the Popish Plot was coming to a favorable conclusion for the royalists. This play is a highly political one among Behn’s dramas and is apparently filled with devices to fortify royalism. It seems that the female characters are debased for the purpose of stressing the nobility of the male royalists; however, Behn’s feminism is not completely sidelined though it is mostly concealed and revealed only in oblique points.

In the first place, The Roundheads contains some characteristics of the Tory propaganda:

Is there such god-like Vertue in your Sex?
Or rather, in your Party.
Curse on the Lies and Cheats of Conventicles,
That taught me first to think Heroicks Divels,
Blood-thirsty, lewd, tyrannick Savage Monsters.
—But I believe ’em Angels all, if all like Loveless.
What heavenly thing then must the Master be,
Whose Servants are Divine? (5.1.379–86)

The allusion to “the Master”, or the King, as a divine thing is the key point in Lady Lambert’s speech. It confirms the hierarchical structuring which puts the royalist at the top—the master should be a “heav-
enly thing”—by providing a foundation to heighten royalism from the side of the opposition, the wife of the parliamentarians’ leader.

It appears that a vain woman changes her mind when enlightened by the nobility of a royalist; however, a similar tension seen in the two parts of *The Rover* is implied here. The love sworn by the protagonist which moves Lady Lambert seems to be a constant one; yet the name of the protagonist is, oddly, ‘Loveless’, a typical libertine. Though Loveless does not seem to be love-less or a misogynist, his courting of Lady Lambert is shamelessly adulterous and his name casts a rakish tone over his character. Similarly, Lady Lambert could be a ‘lamb’ to be devoured by the rake pretending to be a constant lover.17 While the woman’s choice and male desire appear compatible here, it is implied in their names that there still exists a similar tension between royalism and feminism in this overtly political play.

It must have been a hard task for Behn to represent a rake in the two parts of *The Rover*. Libertinism and feminism are essentially incompatible; however, Behn could not make Willmore reform his behavior as she did Frederick in *The Amorous Prince*, because to represent a libertine’s reformation had come to imply an anti-royalist predilection by the time *The Rover* was written. It is, therefore, the result of a negotiation under the pressure of an urgent political crisis between Behn’s feminism and royalism—which was closely associated with the rakish style—that generates the tension shown in the two parts of *The Rover*. As can also be seen in Behn’s highly political drama, *The Roundheads*, her dilemma in presenting feminism and libertinism is thus at the heart of Aphra Behn’s dramaturgy.

**Notes**

1 I do not intend to suggest that Aphra Behn shares the modern concept of ‘feminism’, or that there was a ‘feminism’ in the seventeenth century. However, we can find compassionate lines in Behn’s works, which can be called feminism in the most fundamental sense.

2 Elin Diamond, for instance, has argued the close relationship between a libertine’s action and the principle of the patriarchal rule. See Diamond, “*Gestus* and Signature in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*,” *ELH* 56 (1989): 519–41.


5 Owen, Crisis, 1.


10 See Owen, Crisis, 35–6.


15 Satirizing the Whigs as lecherous was a typical royalist device for criticizing their inconstant hypocritical character; the Whigs often attacked the libertinism prevalent at court as a source for the social decay in public morals. For the Whigs’ attack, see Harris, London Crowds, 80. For exemplary royalistic satire of the hypocritical Whigs, see POAS, 2, 103–6.


17 In John Tatham’s The Rump, the source of The Roundheads, the names of some characters taken from real lords of the Rump Parliament were slightly altered in the first edition: for example, Lambert as Bertlam. Behn’s application of the second edition—Lambert as Lambert—has, it seems to me, some meaning other than the fact that she simply no longer needed to worry about the danger of representing the real parliamentarians.