

The dissapointment by behn's



Introduction The Disappointment, written in the late 17th century by the first professional woman Aphra Behn, undermines the 17th century discourse on sexuality. The writer took the topic of the conventional idea of male heroism as opposed to female surrender employing the mock-heroic technique. The mock heroic element was used to heighten the shock value of the anti-climax where the writer has made a deliberate role reversal of the characters. The aim was to bring home the irony of the situation and also convey the writer's opinion of female power. The writer had approached the 17th century contemporary literary as well as socio-political aspects that were predominant in the restoration world of art and literature. Behn's treatment of the 17th century discourse of sexuality and morality In the poem Behn took up the topic of the battle of the sexes that was one of the most prevalent topics in restoration literature. Her poem began with the typical act of the male pursuing the female in the game of love. She apparently glorified masculine strength over feminine coyness as the power that initiated the act of love. By describing Lysander as one who made sexual advances to a lady because he was " By an impatient passion swayed" (l. 1), Behn not only pointed out the vain male ego but the crudity of the situation. As a contrast to Lysander's rakish character Behn created Cloris as the conventional figure of ' virgin innocence' who was apparently trying to ward off his charms. But her resistance to Lysander's approaches as she " Permits his force, yet gently strove" (ll. 14) indicated Cloris' indulgence. Even her cries of honour could not seem to hide her willingness to surrender when she said: My dearer honour even to you I cannot, must not give -- retire, Or take this life, whose chiefest part I gave you with the conquest of my heart (III. 27-30) Behn had tried to bring out the irony of the

situation where it becomes the obligation of the woman to refuse the lover in the name of honour. But Behn deviated from the tradition by shifting her focus from Lysander's virility to Cloris' desire. She went on to portray Cloris succumbing to her passion and as against the conventional notion capable of being aroused as " Each touch her new desire alarms" (IV. 35). In making Cloris surrender Behn conveyed her standpoint, as against the 17th century concepts of women and morality, that a woman has no bigger control over her libido than a man. She not only asserted the physicality of women but went ahead to establish its superiority over masculine power. Once again she pointed at the irony when in spite of the woman's complete surrender the man failed to perform. Her poem ends with the final blow on the sexual potency of men along with conveying the message that it is the woman who is in control of the act of love: But more the shepherdess's charms, Whose soft bewitching influence Had damned him to the hell of impotence. (XIV. 138-140) The mock-heroic technique Behn had chosen the mock heroic tradition in keeping with the 17th century poetic convention as it was one of the most popular poetic forms employed to generate humour as well as used for satirical purposes. From the beginning of the poem there has been the deliberate building up of pressure. She set the stage in the opening scene by choosing twilight as the time of the day and the pastoral background as the venue. She had combined the pastoral romance with the satirical edge of the mock heroic style that also attributed her work with uniqueness. On one hand her lyricism and on the other the contrasting imagery heightened the poetic effect. She drew a parallel between Cloris and " The spoils and trophies of the enemy" (IV. 40) to deepen the satire and point the triviality of the issue. Her comparison of the entire seduction episode to that of a

religious ritual underlined the deliberate exaggeration. Behn had elevated the levels of expectation only to make the fall worse and the mock heroic treatment of the entire theme of passion and masculine impotence delivered the desired blow. Conclusion In conclusion it could be said that Behn had taken up the 17th century discourse on sexuality and undermined it through her satirical poem. She had stayed within the traditional concepts of femininity and heroism yet questioned their true basis. The readiness of the woman and the powerlessness of the man in the act of love seemed to be Behn's answer to the prudery of the restoration society. Work Cited Behn, Aphra. The Disappointment. Poetry Archive. 2002. Retrieved on 24th July 2011 from [http://www. poetry-archive. com/b/the_disappointment. html](http://www.poetry-archive.com/b/the_disappointment.html)