

# Sexual relationships in 'the rover'



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Critics have argued that many of the sexual relationships presented by Behn demonstrate personal gratification and financial gain lacking the existence of love; nevertheless it is important to consider that this restoration comedy is set in a carnival allowing sexual freedom to be provided, thereby both women and men receive equality and an extended freedom which would have been prohibited. The carnival is a metaphor for the restoration in the bawdiness and sexuality of the play we see a reaction to the years of Puritanism. The setting allows Behn to create disorder, removing laws and rules temporarily, in addition to the suspension of ranks. Due to this, it becomes trivial to perform a sexual act to gain money or obtain pleasure almost viewing the idea to be legitimate and acceptable.

Nevertheless, many of the sexual relationships witnessed, embody love and affection; Behn builds contrasting relationships creating her climax as some of the characters act as a foil to one another. The audience encounter sexual relationships exploited in order to receive income. This is demonstrated by the use of sex for a financial gain rather than expressing emotions of love. Our prime indication of this is Angelica, who maintains sexual relationships in order to gain profits; her mentality concerning love is of 'inconstancy's the sin of mankind, therefore I am reserved that nothing but gold shall charm my heart', and it is this very idea which causes Willmore to 'condemn' her mind, clearly from this statement we acknowledge Angelica's views on love, she seeks to gain money and by doing so perhaps receiving status; as a result, the carnival is the time for her work exposing her beauty to lure the men who 'regard her' and thereby receiving her income. Consequently, we learn who seeks to gain Angelica's pleasure must pay a large sum of money,

however, Angelica almost gives into Willmore, allowing him to 'lay' with her, regardless of his circumstances being 'unprovided with money', perhaps implying she views Willmore as an exception, perhaps a sexual relationship which may be connected with love.

'His words go through me to the very soul', in this case, it appears that Angelica seems to be affected by Willmore, possibly even desiring him as she later claims: 'I never loved before, though oft a mistress. Shall my first vows be slighted' showing a change in her perception of relationships, viewing sexual relationships to be more than a financial gain, which could be seen as a result of Willmore's flattery language and charming attitude he adopts and uses to win her. Evidently, we cannot assume all sexual relationships presented portray financial gain or the satisfaction of one's sexual desires, this is apparent as Behn shows some connection with love, although in this analysis to a limited extent as Willmore only desires the satisfaction of his sexual requirements. On the contrary, Lucetta deludes Blunt's mind taking advantage of his ignorance and naivety, convincing him she is a person of 'quality' whereas in fact she is quite the opposite.

Consequently, Frederick's prediction was rightly placed, blunt was 'cheated of all' and 'turned out naked at midnight', thereby throughout this scene we are exposed to a relationship held only for a financial gain excluding any sense of affection or passion as Blunt finally recognises the reality of Lucetta and cries 'Dogs! Rouges! Pimps! Help! Help!' Moreover, Behn enlightens us of potential relationships likely to be maintained, such as that between Florinda and Don Vincentio, by marrying this man, an act her father declares she must do, will result in her gaining status and wealth although she holds

no feelings for him. Furthermore, Pedro wishes Florinda to marry Antonio as a result of his love for her, however Florinda asserts that she does not reciprocate such emotions towards Antonio, thereby implying that the feelings are one sided. Nonetheless, Antonio's love towards Florinda can be questioned as he sets to engage in a sexual relationship with Angelica, regardless of his marriage and commitment to Florinda, ' Name not those distant joys, there's not one thought of her will check my passion here', this statement by Antonio reveals the challenged extent of his love towards Florinda, as a result, his disloyalty portrayed imply that such a relationship has little connection with love, perhaps a criticism of arranged marriages. An alternative approach can be viewed through the relationship possessed between Florinda and Belvile. Although many obstacles face them, restricting their right to be together, they still fight for one another and for their love.

This is demonstrated by Belvile's determination to be faithful remaining with Florinda, although he is challenged by Frederick: ' I dare swear I know a hundred as kind young and handsome as this Florinda and dogs eat me if they are not as troublesome to me i'th'morning as they were welcome over night'. However, although Belvile is exposed to such temptation he resists the inducement emphasising his loyalty towards Florinda, possibly acting as a foil to Antonio's response to temptation. Similarly, Florinda behaves in a comparable way towards Belvile, protesting her love for him against her brother and father by refusing to marry Don Vincentio or Antonio. This analysis opposes the comment of the title illustrating complete love and devotion maintained by two individuals in deep harmony with one another

regardless of the conflict their relationship arises and the challenges they face in order to be together.

Behn presents a character who although we are enlightened 'shall be a nun' behaves as a 'wild cat' as she strives to 'love and be beloved', which drives her to oppose her brother's demands by attending and participating in the carnival regardless of the consequences. One interpretation of Hellena's attitude is that she seeks the personal fulfilment of a sexual relationship. Her keenness and eagerness to experience the pleasure is portrayed through her relationship with Willmore. However we cannot assume that this relationship is based primarily on the maintenance of sexual desire, Hellena holds affection even lust towards Willmore, this is apparent by her claim: 'not every he that likes me shall have me, but he that I like', indicating that she has fallen for Willmore.

Willmore on the other hand seeks all women around him 'as soon as lie with thee, as kiss thee', illustrating Willmore's determination to achieve a source of satisfaction for his desires. This is further demonstrated as he traps Hellena by his gentlemanly behaviour and charms, and soon moves to the next prey, Angelica, who is also a victim of his lies and deceits as he double crosses both characters by cheating on them in order to gain a male's sexual pleasure, in turn living up to the term 'my dear rover'. In a moment of desperation and anxiety, Willmore results in attacking Florinda in attempt to satisfy his sexual needs. From this approach, we can conclude that some of the characters introduced in the play, as demonstrated by Willmore, conduct their sexual relationships in order to obtain their private pleasures excluding love or the potential of a faithful relationship. Although the majority of sexual

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relationships presented by Behn are maintained as a result of a financial gain and personal gratification, they still demonstrate some connection with love, which is evident by Angelica's agreement to sleep with Willmore regardless of his financial situation. An alternative explanation is that the financial gain or the pay is 'but of thy love' meaning the money is simply a symbol of love in a sexual relationship.

Another interpretation implies love derives from a relationship accidentally without provoking deep emotional feelings during the initial stages of that relationship, for example although Willmore admires Hellena, his only intentions were to gain personal satisfaction this is evident from his keenness to sleep with Angelica at the same time fulfilling his cavalier figure. However, later on in the play, Willmore reveals his love for Hellena asserting a love connection in their sexual relationship. Thus, Behn attempts to communicate her possible beliefs concerning sexual relationships through the characters and their interactions with their sexual partners. The play suggests that a possible interpretation of Behn's opinion is whether the characters connection derives as a result of a financial gain or in attempt to silence their sexual needs, a love bond will penetrate through, although not in all cases as symbolised by Blunt and Lucetta. Furthermore, it is understood that society can not control sexual relationships, as proven by Hellena's rebelling nature and her thirst to gain experience and pleasure.

In addition, Behn was very much an opponent of arranged or forced marriages, which is witnessed in this play as she pursues this theme by the presentation of a forced sexual relationship between Florinda and Antonia or

Don Vincentio, which explicitly demonstrates the inexistence of love, a marriage primarily based on status.