



APHRA BEHN

THE ROVER
AND OTHER PLAYS

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS



APHRA BEHN

The Rover
The Feigned Courtesans
The Lucky Chance
The Emperor of the Moon



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INTRODUCTION

Behn's Life and Career

Aphra Behn's colourful and mysterious life has swallowed up attention at the expense of her writing. Her biographers have traced their disparate ways through contemporary records, remarks from her acquaintances, apparently autobiographical remarks within her fiction, and three versions of a memoir published soon after her death.¹ She was born in Kent, and her first surname is generally believed to have been Johnson, but her family origins are still disputed. Perhaps she was Eaffry, the child of Bartholomew Johnson and Elizabeth Denham christened in 1640—the daughter of a barber and a wetnurse, who transcended her class origins to become an educated writer; perhaps she was of more genteel origin, an Aphra whose mother, an illegitimate daughter of Lady Mary Sidney Wroth, provided her with an appropriately scandalous relationship to a feminine literary tradition; or perhaps she was someone else again.² In her youth she travelled to Surinam, later claiming that her father was appointed the colony's lieutenant-general. She returned to England in 1664, and at some point became known as Mrs Behn. Her husband, who according to the memoirs was a merchant of Dutch extraction, has never been definitively traced; he is usually conveniently supposed to have died in the plague of 1665. Perhaps he was the seaman Johan Behn, whom she could possibly have met on the return journey from Surinam; and perhaps her life without him indicates separation rather than his death.³ It is even possible that she made him up. A widow's status

¹ The first memoir appeared with her posthumously published *Younger Brother* in 1696; a fuller version, by 'A Gentlewoman of her Acquaintance' in her *Histories and Novels* later the same year; and an expanded account by 'One of the Fair Sex' in the third edition of *All the Histories and Novels* in 1698.

² The case for Behn as the daughter of Bartholomew Johnson and Elizabeth Denham is presented in Maurcen Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977). The alternative theory, which would connect Behn with Lady Mary Wroth and the Countess of Pembroke, is put forward by Sharon Valiant. See Mary Ann O'Donnell, 'Tory Wit and Unconventional Woman: Aphra Behn', in K. M. Wilson and F. J. Warnke (eds.), *Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 342.

³ See Jane Jones, 'New Light on the Background and Early Life of Aphra Behn', *Notes and Queries*, NS 37: 3 (Sept. 1990), 288–93.

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gave the best chance of an independent life for a woman, and might have been especially useful for one who, like Behn, accepted a commission to visit the Netherlands as a spy for Charles II. Her brief was to obtain information from William Scott, whom she had known in Surinam. He provided her with a warning of the Dutch fleet's invasion of the Thames, but her superiors took no notice, and refused to pay her expenses. She returned to London in debt at the end of 1666, and at one point was threatened with debtors' prison, though we do not know if she was actually imprisoned. From 1667 to 1670 there is very little record of her life, and then in 1670 she suddenly appears as the author of *The Forc'd Marriage*, produced by the Duke's Company at Lincoln's Inn Fields.

At this time there were two theatre companies in London, licensed by Charles II after the Restoration, and presenting a mixture of revived plays from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and new plays by court wits like Wycherley and Etherege and professional writers like Dryden and Shadwell. Actresses, for the first time, were regularly performing in London's public theatres, and women were beginning to appear as playwrights, too: plays by Katherine Philips and Frances Boothby were performed in the 1660s. How Behn found her way into this theatrical world we do not know. One possibility is that she became the mistress of someone connected with the theatre, but there is no positive evidence. It may be that she had some contact with the pre-Restoration theatre when spending time in Lord Willoughby's house, next to the house where Davenant put on operas in the late 1650s.⁴ Another suggestion is that she was introduced to the theatre through Sir Thomas Killigrew. Killigrew was the proprietor of one of the theatre companies, the King's Company, to which she gave feathers from Surinam used in a production of *The Indian Queen*. She certainly knew Killigrew, who had recommended her as a spy to Lord Arlington. She may have worked as a hack adapter of old plays for a while;⁵ at any rate, her first play showed a knowledge of stagecraft indicative of some sort of theatrical experience.

Killigrew's King's Company did not bring out Behn's play, though; the rival company, the Duke's Company, did. Possibly the fact that a woman—Lady Davenant, taking over from her deceased husband—

⁴ See Henry A. Hargreaves, 'The Life and Plays of Mrs. Aphra Behn', Diss. (Duke University, 1960), 70.

⁵ See O'Donnell, 'Tory Wit', 344.

was at this time running the Duke's Company was an encouraging factor. Anyway, Behn was a success with the Duke's Company, and continued to write for it, and for its successor the United Company, during her long stage career. She tailored her roles to suit its leading actors and actresses, and exploited the resources of its successive theatres.

Behn produced at least eighteen plays (others are of doubtful attribution). Her early efforts, *The Forced Marriage* and *The Amorous Prince*, were in tragicomedy; in *Abdelazar* (1676) she wrote a tragedy of revenge. Mostly, though, she wrote comedies, and it was as a writer of comedy that she demanded recognition. *The Dutch Lover* failed in 1673, but *The Rover*, first performed in the spring of 1677, made her reputation. It seems to have been first presented as a man's work: the prologue calls the author 'he' and the earliest quartos were anonymous. But by the third issue of the first edition Behn's name was on the title-page, and it is as the author of *The Rover* that she has been best known ever since. Other comedies followed, including *Sir Patient Fancy* in 1678 and *The Rover, Part II* in 1681.

When *The Feigned Courtesans* was performed in 1679, its prologue complained that the fuss over the Popish Plot was keeping audiences away from the plots presented on stage; and during the next few years politics dominated Behn's stage career, as the country was dominated by conflict over the succession to Charles II. Once it had become known that his brother and heir James, Duke of York, was Catholic, political opposition focused on the Whig attempt to debar James from succession and find a Protestant king. The king's role was at stake as well as his religion, with the choice to be made between Stuart absolutism and a crown brought under Parliamentary control. Behn's plays are strongly anti-Whig and anti-Puritan. *The Roundheads* (1681) suggests that the Whigs of the 1680s threaten a return to the Commonwealth of the 1640s, and *The City Heiress* (1682) has a satirical portrait of the Whig statesman Shaftesbury. These allegiances are not surprising in plays written for a theatre whose patron was the Duke of York himself, but Behn's commitment to Toryism and the Stuart monarchy was genuine and lifelong. Like other Tories she satirized the commercialism of Whigs and the hypocrisy of prudish Puritans; and like some other women of her time she considered a royalist court, with its tradition of educated ladies, its atmosphere of sexual openness, and the political power it afforded the wives and mistresses of nobility and royalty, a more

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hospitable place than a mercantile city where women were part of the merchandise.⁶

Behn, supporter of the Catholic James, may have been Catholic herself, either by upbringing or conversion. Some of her dedications are to prominent Catholic noblemen, and some plays express sympathy with Catholicism. She made no public profession of her religion, though, and some of her work suggests rather a sceptical and anti-religious viewpoint. Like her lover John Hoyle, she was an admirer of Lucretius, who argued against the existence of an afterlife. She wrote that reason was a better guide than faith, and she liked to imagine a Golden Age before religion and law had controlled a natural and joyous human sexuality. Her dislike of Puritan reformers centred on her belief in their sexual hypocrisy and repression; and when she did write religious verse it was to gloss the Lord's Prayer with the claim that her own trespasses were of the kind a loving God must forgive, for they were sins of love.

If Behn's imagination delighted in the thought of a world before kingly authority, in Restoration reality she opposed any rebellion against the Stuarts. In 1682 she wrote an epilogue for the play *Romulus and Hersilia*, attacking the Duke of Monmouth, the king's illegitimate son and focus of the hopes for a Protestant succession, for rebelling against his father. This piece of loyalty went too far for Charles's taste, and Behn was arrested. It has been suggested that this episode contributed to her silence as a playwright over the next few years, but probably the strongest factor was general lack of opportunity in the theatres. The King's Company collapsed in 1682 and the Duke's Company took it over to become the United Company. Fewer new plays were put on in the following years, and Behn was forced into other areas. She continued to write poetry, publishing a collection in 1684; she translated poetry, scientific writing, and fiction from French, and she began to write her own innovative fiction. *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister* appeared from 1684 to 1687, and a number of shorter novels, including her most famous, *Oroonoko*, based on her Surinam experiences, appeared shortly before her death.

Behn returned to the stage later in the 1680s, and *The Lucky Chance* (1686) is one of her best comedies, with an underlying bitterness not characteristic of her earlier work. It was followed in 1687 by *The*

⁶ The attractiveness of royalism and absolutism to Tory feminists in the 17th cent. is argued in Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England', *Genders*, 1: 1 (1988), 24-39.

Emperor of the Moon, a dazzling farce combining the techniques of *commedia dell'arte* with the spectacular displays found in the new operas.

By this time Behn was ill, and her last years were ones of poverty, sickness, and political defeat. She lived to see James II deposed and William of Orange on the English throne; and she pointedly addressed her poem of welcome not to him but to his wife Mary, James's daughter. She died in 1689 and was buried in Westminster Abbey—the traditional burial of a poet, and one that would have gratified a writer who, as the years passed, aspired to unite professional writing with the pursuit of literary immortality. 'I am not content to write for a third day only', she wrote in *The Lucky Chance*, 'I value fame as much as if I had been born a hero.'

Restoration Theatres and Behn's Stagecraft

The theatre where Behn made most of her claims to third days' profits and heroic fame was the Dorset Garden theatre, built for the Duke's Company and in operation by the end of 1671. Of the four plays in this volume, three were first produced at Dorset Garden. *The Lucky Chance*, written when the United Company had the use of the former King's Company venue as well as its own, was first put on at Drury Lane. Both theatres had the long platform stage, reaching out into the pit and close to boxes and galleries, that fostered the Restoration intimacy between players and audience; and they also had the scenic area behind the proscenium arch, increasingly used in the later Restoration period for spectacular scenery and other effects. A notable feature of the stage was the proscenium doors (two each side, with balconies above) used for exits and entrances. Less is known about the layout of Dorset Gardens than of Drury Lane, and there is a flourishing controversy over its exact dimensions and function, some seeing it as a theatre with an exceptionally long scenic area, specializing in operatic spectacle, others considering it a general theatre not very different in design and use from Drury Lane.⁷ Whatever the truth of this, Behn was working for a company that was concerned to find out about the latest in scenic design and to incorporate

⁷ For opposing views on the theatre's function, and summaries of the debate over its dimensions, see John R. Spring, 'The Dorset Garden Theatre: Playhouse or Opera House?', *Theatre Notebook*, 34 (1980) 60–9, and Robert D. Hume, 'The Nature of the Dorset Garden Theatre', *Theatre Notebook*, 36 (1982), 99–109.

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spectacular effects into its dramas. She was a great asset to the Duke's Company, developing into a theatrical innovator who used the whole stage area, with forestage scenes increasingly interspersed with acting in the scenic area behind the arch. Her characters weave in and out of the scenery, move around between scenic area and forestage, and carry on more than one action simultaneously, using different areas of the stage. Sometimes they operate in a fictional darkness, when the audience can see them and they can't see each other.⁸

One of Behn's hallmarks is the frequent use of the 'discovery' scene, when one set of scenery, painted on shutters, is drawn back to reveal actors in place behind. The successive revelation of a number of scenes, painted in perspective, was itself a visual novelty that delighted Restoration audiences; and Behn incorporated such visual effects into dramatic action, revealing the foolish Blunt, gulled by the jilting wench Lucetta, crawling out of a sewer (in *The Rover*), or (in *The Lucky Chance*) Lady Fulbank, 'supposed in bed', stoically waiting for the unattractive husband who will turn out to be her desirable young lover. Exactly how these effects were achieved is another subject of debate for theatre historians, who disagree on how many shutter positions would be available behind the proscenium arch to carry the different sets of scenery.⁹ For the purposes of commentary I have assumed two shutter positions behind the proscenium arch, with more than one set of grooves at each shutter position for carrying the scenes. This gives two discovery spaces, allowing for two successive discoveries: one when a scene at the first position is drawn back to reveal a scene at the second shutter, another when this second shutter is drawn back to reveal a scene on a backcloth.¹⁰

All the plays here show Behn's dexterity with stagecraft. *The Rover* makes clever use of trapdoors and discoveries, and gives Angellica a balcony for her territory; *The Feigned Courtesans* makes complicated comic use of the proscenium doors; *The Lucky Chance* has a complicated sequence of discovery scenes; and *The Emperor of the Moon* is a triumphant spectacle, with its successive discoveries of

⁸ For my discussion of Behn's stagecraft I am indebted to the very full account in Dawn Lewcock, 'Aphra Behn on the Restoration Stage', Ph.D. thesis (Cambridgeshire College of Art and Technology, 1987).

⁹ For a discussion of theories about the number of shutters and shutter positions see Jocelyn Powell, *Restoration Theatre Production* (London: RKP, 1984), 56.

¹⁰ Another discovery space, further forward, could be created by using a drop curtain (perhaps the proscenium curtain, perhaps a curtain just behind the proscenium arch) in front of the first pair of shutters. Behn uses this in *The Emperor of the Moon*, 2.3.

Parnassus and a temple, its large flying machine and smaller swooping chariots, its actors pretending to be a tapestry, its twenty-foot telescope, and its talking head.

The Rover

The Rover, the earliest of the plays here, is based on Sir Thomas Killigrew's two-part, ten-act drama *Thomaso, or the Wanderer*, written during the Interregnum and centring on the amorous adventures of a cavalier in exile. Behn reacted angrily to charges of plagiarism, and certainly she was only following common practice in drawing on a source in earlier drama; but she does take far more from *Thomaso* than she acknowledges in her defensive postscript, and many of her lines are close echoes of Killigrew's. Her reshaping of his work, though, makes *The Rover* very much her own play. It is not just that *The Rover*, with its tight organization, swift pace, and clever use of the stage provides the theatrical flair lacking in *Thomaso*, a play of interesting but long-drawn-out ideas. Behn's manipulation of the characters and situations set up by Killigrew shows her engaging in a thoughtful dialogue with the earlier play, revising its notion of heroic male and female roles, and in the process producing distinctive versions of such stock Restoration characters as the rakish hero, the abandoned mistress, and the witty heroine.

Killigrew's *Thomaso* is a recognizable precursor of the Restoration rake hero, very much in charge of events as he wanders at his ease in a world full of whores. He has affairs with Angellica Bianca and Saretta in the course of the action, while Paulina remembers him fondly as her first lover. Yet *Thomaso* decisively reforms, pledging to leave his wandering life for marriage to the rich and virginal Serulina, whom he saves from the threat of rape by the fool Edwardo. Behn makes her Willmore far less dignified, giving *Thomaso*'s heroic exploits in the siege of Pamplona and his romantic devotion to a chaste lady to Belville, while transferring some of the fool's actions, like the drunken attempt on the lady's chastity, to Willmore. Her rake-hero is more of a bemused bungler than a clever plotter. Compared to heroes like Wycherley's Horner and Etherege's Dorimant, he is both more indulgently and less admiringly treated. From Killigrew's Angellica Bianca Behn takes the idea of treating a courtesan and cast-off mistress (often a figure of fun in Restoration comedy) with sympathy and a sense of the seriousness of her position. Killigrew's Angellica sharply rebukes *Thomaso* with her attack on the

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double standard. But she is presented as a victim and her attitude to Thomaso is humble to the point of self-abnegation. At the end Paulina reports that Angellica is leaving the country, leaving behind her plea for forgiveness for having tried to prevent the marriage to Serulina. Behn's Angellica, much stronger, threatens Willmore with a pistol in a scene where he is left looking foolish.

However, Hellena is the character Behn changes most. In a way she is a completely new character: a witty heroine, rather like a warmer version of Etherege's Harriet, who substitutes for the paler Serulina as the hero's match. Behn makes her outspoken and demanding, transferring to her some smutty lines Killigrew had given to a male character, and giving her gipsy and boy disguises that allow her more scope for action than Killigrew's heroine. The name is taken from Killigrew: in *Thomaso*, Helena is 'an old decayed blind, out of Fashion whore', who begs the mountebank to make her young, beautiful, and lovable again.¹¹ Tricked by the mountebank's wife, she takes the wrong restorative bath and her body is transformed to that of the rogue Scarramucha. The last we hear of her she is reported to be horrified to find herself with beard and breeches. Behn performs another act of transformation to create her Hellena, who is given youth and beauty and, for a while, the breeches, too—and unlike Killigrew's Helena, she is able to use them to her advantage.

The empowerment of the main female characters and the gentle fun poked at the rake's dignity distinguish Behn's version of the carnival world of comedy. It is masculine authority which is turned upside down in the Neapolitan carnival. Lucetta tricks Blunt and tips him in the sewer; Florinda, Hellena, and Valeria slip away from Don Pedro's care and pursue the men they desire. While Angellica Bianca, advertising herself through her pictures, presents herself to male characters and audience alike as an object of desire, the male characters too are objectified by Behn's theatrical vision, and they are given less control over their representations. Behn's frequent use of discoveries has been taken as evidence that, more than other Restoration playwrights, she presents female bodies as fetish objects to the male spectator;¹² but in *The Rover* it is not only women who are discovered. Not the courtesan, but a courtesan's gull, Blunt, is

¹¹ Thomas Killigrew, *Thomaso, or, The Wanderer: A Comedy* (London: Printed by J.M. for Henry Herringman, 1663), Part I, Act 4, scene 2, p. 363.

¹² Elin Diamond, 'Cestus and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*', *ELH* 56 (1989), 535.

revealed to the audience semi-naked and helpless. He is an object only of scorn and laughter; Belvile, who is discovered—heroic and vulnerable—at the beginning of the fourth act, is presented as an object of desire. Close enough to contemporary portrayals of the rake-hero to be popular with men in the audiences and with leading actors, *The Rover* nevertheless manages to subject masculine figures to a female gaze.

The gaze is sometimes an angry one. Carnival comedy is sometimes threatened by a resurgence of male power misused, as when Blunt threatens to rape and beat Florinda, or by a vision of female helplessness, as when Angellica realizes she loves Willmore and can never keep him. The comic ending, with its incorporation of male and female characters into prevailing patriarchal structures, is ruffled by these disturbances. Behn constructed a delicate balance between Hellena and Angellica, between the lighter and darker sides of women's attempts to win a game where men have stacked the cards. The defeat of Angellica perhaps left her unsatisfied. In the second part of *The Rover* she killed Hellena off and re-ran the contest between rich virgin and lovelorn courtesan for Willmore's love. This time she gave the hero to the courtesan, La Nuche, gesturing towards a utopian future of unwedded bliss. For the contemporary audience this reversal was a repetition with variation, for William Smith and Elizabeth Barry, who had played Willmore and Hellena in 1677, played Willmore and La Nuche in 1681.

The Feigned Courtesans

The Feigned Courtesans, or a Night's Intrigue was performed and printed in 1679, two years after *The Rover*. The play, or a version of it, may possibly be the one performed in 1677 as *A Midnight's Intrigue*, but the earlier play is lost.¹³ *The Feigned Courtesans* is not based on any identified source, though the general framework of swift and complicated intrigue is familiar enough in Spanish-influenced comedy of the time. Like *The Rover* it employs cross-dressing and other disguises to gain freedom of action for the heroines. Cornelia, Marcella, and Laura Lucretia all pretend to be boys and to be courtesans. Play is made with the different standards of honour applied to men and women, as Marcella and Cornelia violate the masculine honour of truth to be true to the feminine honour of

¹³ See William Van Lennep *et al.*, *The London Stage*, pt. 1, 1660–1700 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), 249.

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chastity, tricking their would-be customers into paying for services never rendered. Mistaken identities and mistaken doors lead to confusion on confusion. Female identity is slippery: the courtesan Silvanetta doesn't exist at all, but two women pretend to be her and several men are convinced they are about to make love to her. The play celebrates what attacks on the theatre condemned, the deceitfulness of women and of acting.

Women who disguise and deceive are usurping the role of the comic trickster servant, a parallel made explicit in this play by the heroines' dependence on their own male servant, Petro, to do their dirty work for them. He is the most versatile at disguise, and the women only pull off their trick of being virginal courtesans by virtue of his splendid inventiveness in tricking money from the play's two gulls, the comic squire Sir Signal Buffoon and his Puritan tutor Tickletext. Women and servants share the subordination that carnival comedy momentarily overturns, and they share, too, a fluidity of identity that makes them dominate the comic action, and that places in perspective the single-minded devotion to honour exhibited by men like Fillamour and Octavio.

Though less overtly political than Behn's anti-Whig satires of the early 1680s, *The Feigned Courtesans* made its author's Catholic sympathies abundantly clear at a time when anti-Catholic feeling in London was approaching hysterical levels. Set in Rome, near the famous Vatican church of St Peter's, the play marries its English heroes to Italian Catholic women, and has the sympathetic Fillamour defend the beauty of Roman art against the iconoclastic fervour of a ridiculous Puritan divine. Tickletext's hypocrisy is revealed with comic gusto as he avoids criticism of his whoring by declaring his intention to convert all the courtesans of Rome. His ranting equation of Popish idolatry with prostitution is typical of the Protestant attitude to the 'Whore of Babylon', comically invoked in the prologue. Cleverly putting the enemy's labels to use, Behn defends Catholicism, and, implicitly, the courtesan—or rather the freedom of action that the courtesan is made to represent here.

The Lucky Chance

While the intrigue form and foreign setting of *The Feigned Courtesans* allows for a wish-fulfilling emphasis on female agency, *The Lucky Chance*, set in contemporary London, contains a more sombre analysis of women's relation to courtship and marriage. Again this is a play

without a major source, though some plot elements are taken from earlier plays—Lady Fulbank's having Gayman led to her house by 'devils' from Shirley's *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635), and her sending him anonymous donations of money from Dryden's *The Wild Gallant* (1663).¹⁴ Low-life scenes, like the one in Alsatia with the debt-ridden Gayman parleying with his landlady, and contemporary references to plots, riots, and the City authorities' clash with royal prerogative, establish a much more realistic setting for the old comic plot of the younger generation outwitting the old. The enemy to be outwitted is embodied in the City merchants Sir Feeble Fainwould and Sir Cautious Fulbank, who have used their commercial power to buy brides. There is a new seriousness about the examination of unhappy marriage bonds, anticipating the themes taken up by Vanbrugh and Southerne in the 1690s.

Both main plots turn on dodging unwanted marriages. Belmour and Leticia do so without challenging the institution itself: their story, involving their own verbal contract of marriage, violated by Leticia because she has been tricked into believing Belmour dead, and the non-consummation of the subsequent marriage to Sir Feeble, gives the young lovers' wishes the sanction of law. Gayman and Julia are not so lucky. Julia's marriage to Sir Cautious, apparently entered into in a conscious decision to take his full bank rather than pleasure with Gayman, cannot be so easily set aside, and she takes her own virtue and self-control too seriously for cuckolding to provide a simple solution. The interlocking actions of the play concern Gayman's attempts to consummate his love for Julia and Leticia's attempts to avoid consummating her marriage to Sir Feeble. While Belmour and Leticia bring off their project with comic tricks, Gayman and Lady Fulbank find their successes turning sour. Lady Fulbank, taking her husband's money to bribe her lover to a bedroom encounter that he supposes to be with an ugly old hag, and Gayman, dicing with Sir Cautious to win a night with Julia, enter into the world of commercial values that has separated them in the first place. Possibly in the first encounter, planned by Julia, and certainly by the second, orchestrated by Gayman, they become lovers; but the comic bed-trick is not allowed to resolve matters completely. Lady Fulbank is furious at having been made an object of exchange between husband and lover. Divorce and remarriage are not an option. Julia is left with the uneasy

¹⁴ See the discussion in Eva Simmons, '“Virtue Intire”: Aphra Behn's Contribution, in her Comedies, to the Marriage Debates of the Seventeenth Century', Ph.D. thesis (London, 1990), 364.

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solution of being bequeathed to Gayman if Sir Cautious dies, and in the meantime an adulterous affair may or may not continue.

The Emperor of the Moon

The Emperor of the Moon blends *commedia dell'arte*, farce, and spectacle to produce a dazzling entertainment. Behn would have had the chance to see Italian troupes in London in the 1670s,¹⁵ but her main source, *Arlequin, empereur dans la lune*, was played by Italian artists in Paris in 1684. It seems to me likely that Behn visited Paris and saw this work performed, though I have no documentary evidence; or perhaps she had details of it from a friend. Summers suggests she read an edition published in 1684, but the extant printed sources date from the 1690s.¹⁶ Only the French scenes by Nolant de Fatouville, developed for the sake of the Parisian audience, were published. The players improvised a good deal and it is likely that many of the *commedia's* effects have gone unrecorded. Behn takes her characters and many of the *lazzi* (comic turns) from *Arlequin empereur*, but incorporates them into a tightly structured plot most uncharacteristic of *commedia dell'arte*.

Behn's plot involves the usual pairs of young lovers, who employ the zanies Scaramouch and Harlequin to trick Doctor Baliardo into sanctioning the weddings of his daughter and niece in the belief that their suitors are the emperor of the moon and the prince of Thunderland. For the doctor's delusions, Behn draws on a wide range of current intellectual trends. The new science of astronomy, alluded to by the huge telescope, is obviously a main theme, and Behn, like Fatouville, uses recent books of fantastic voyages for the idea of an inhabited moon-world which can communicate with the earth. The new ideas opened up by astronomy fascinated Behn, who translated Fontanelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* as *A Discovery of New*

¹⁵ Italian troupes visited London in 1673 and 1678–9. See K. Richards and L. Richards, *The Commedia dell'Arte: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 265–6.

¹⁶ See the introduction to *The Emperor of the Moon* in Hughes and Scouten, *Ten English Farces*, 40–1. Scenes from *Arlequin empereur* appear in Evariste Gheradi, *Le Théâtre italien* (Paris, 1695). Further editions, some containing more complete versions of the play, appeared in 1698, 1721, and 1741. *Arlequin empereur* may have been published earlier than this: an undated edition published at Troyes is mentioned, without any copies being located, in Henry Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, pt. IV, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), 615.

Worlds in 1688, together with an 'Essay on Translated Prose' containing her own remarks on Copernican theory. What we think of as early scientific discovery was not then clearly separated from studies now dismissed as magical, and the doctor's interests range promiscuously through astronomy, astrology, medicine, alchemy, cosmography, and the strange spiritualism of the Rosicrucian brotherhood. Behn unites these themes through a controlling metaphor of vision and blindness. The play teems with visual tricks, from the nymph placed in the glass of the telescope, and the cart that turns into a calash, to the tapestry made of real people, each effect contributing to the point that all the doctor's 'scopes' don't allow him to see what is going on around him. His misogyny, which leads to the Rosicrucian renunciation of mortal women and the attempted seclusion of Elaria and Bellemante, is lightly touched on, but is clearly a factor in his comic blindness. The doctor both watches a series of spectacular effects, and is made into a comic spectacle himself. His cure is effected through a deliberate and sustained illusion engineered by Charmante and Cínthio, which is then shattered, leaving him to come to terms with the truth.

The 'farce' put on by the young lovers for Doctor Baliardo is, of course, put on for the audience too. Curtains and shutters are used to create a complex succession of discovery scenes: three successive discoveries in the second act and two in the triumphant final scene, ending in a perspective leading right back to the wall of the theatre, showing a temple and featuring the voice of the 'emperor' speaking through a trumpet. A large flying machine for the zodiac and the moon-chariot, and the smaller chariots that zoom across the stage, add to the spectacle. If the foolish doctor is deceived by appearances, those same illusions are what delight the audience. In her use of stage illusion here Behn is at the very forefront of Restoration stage development, vying with the new operas; and she uses her stagecraft with a characteristic clever playfulness. From the joking use of the speaking head in the prologue, to the revelation that the knights of the sun are only Harlequin and Scaramouch, Behn teases her audience to see through the deceptions she sets up. The result is a play that, in the best Quixotic tradition, enchants even as it mocks the victims of enchantment.

Performances of Behn's Plays

Behn's comedies were very popular with her contemporaries, and for much of the eighteenth century. Seventeenth-century stage records are very incomplete, but it is known that *The Rover* was revived at