

The Prostitute as a Heroine

in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*

EMA JELÍNKOVÁ

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY, OLOMOUC, CZECH REPUBLIC

Aphra Behn

- 1640–1689
- playwright, fiction writer, poet
- the first English woman to earn her living by writing

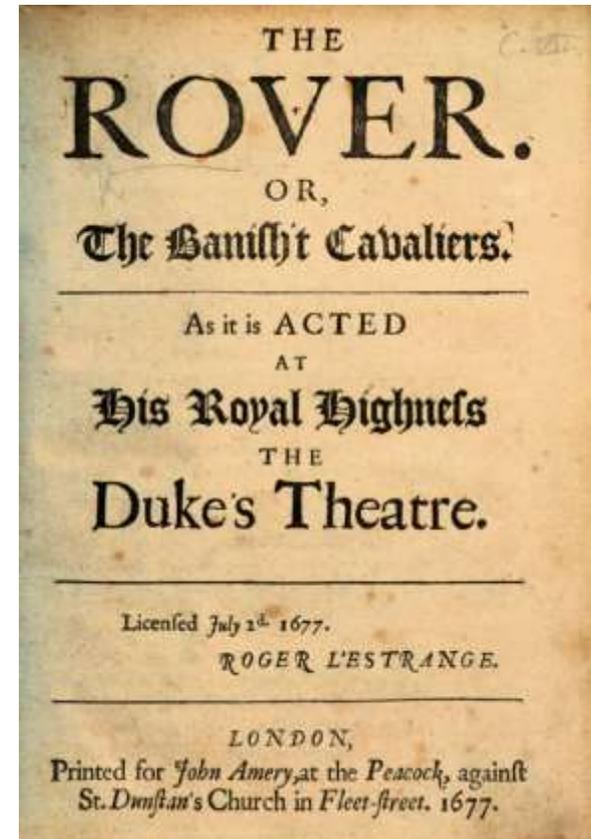
Image: *Aphra Behn*, oil on canvas by Sir Peter Lely, c. 1670



The Rover

- *The Rover; or, The Banish't Cavaliers*
- produced and published in two parts in 1677 and 1681

Image: title page of *The Rover*, 1677



Eva Simmons points out that Walter Scott once related in a personal anecdote that his aunt returned some of Aphra Behn's novels which he had sent her at her own request, saying that she now felt ashamed to read a book which, 60 years before, she had read aloud in the best circles in London.

Text...

On the marriage of convenience

Hellena:

„If these be her daily divertissements, what are those of the night? To lie in a wide moth-eaten bedchamber, with furniture in fashion of the reign of King Sancho the First, the bed, that which his forefathers lived and died in.....instead of a valet to uncase his feeble carcass, he desires you to do that office: signs of favour, I assure you...that honour being past the giant stretches itself and sighs a belch or two, loud as a musket, throws himself into bed, and expects you in his foul sheets, and ere you get yourself undressed, calls you with a snore or two: and are not these fine blessings to a young lady?“

Willmore, the Rover

The carnival in Naples is presented as time when dreams can come true and all is possible (perhaps even finding a man, evading the fate in the form of a nunnery), of quality... Willmore, the eponymous rover, one of cavaliers banished from Cromwellian England, finds himself in a love triangle.

One lady, Helena, dressed as a gypsy and hiding her face, charms him by her intelligence, wit and rather cynical sense of humor befitting his own, yet, in her absence, Willmore (as someone **who wills** more) responds to another, no other but a famous courtesan, Angellica, a reputed beauty, a prize far beyond the means of an impoverished exile and therefore all the more tempting.)

Being the first to talk to her in a sincere manner, he wins her heart – and more...

Angellica in love

Is all my mighty expectation vanished?

No, I will not hear the talk: thou has a charm

In every word that draws my heart away,

And all the thousand trophies I designed,

Thou has undone. Why art thou soft?

Thy looks are bravely rough, and meant for war.

Couldst thou not storm on still?

I then perhaps had been free as thou.