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Masking the Drama:

A Space for Revolution

in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Courtezans*

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ABSTRACT

The construction of woman's representation follows some specific canons where man, for long, has decided what the woman can do and what she cannot, strengthening the "patriarchal binary thought" and imposing a dominant sexual politics. Nevertheless, the "Lady Cavaliers" in Aphra Behn's comedies *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Courtezans* enacted a fruitful rhetorical strategy in order to be equal to men.

Woman who is depicted through masculine discourse as the mute other becomes in Behn's plays the subject who dares to create a discourse of her own and she tries to create a new female identity on the stage. On the one hand, the author acted inside the patriarchal canons, she respected and recognized the king's authority and patriarchal rules but, on the other hand, she questioned the social order in the liminal space, on the stage and during Carnival, in which her female characters challenge their position, enact their revolution and create a supportive community of women.

This study offers the exploration of a world constantly reorganized and it investigates the problems of power and identity always deconstructed and re-created. Through a critical reading of some psychological and philosophical theories, this research has attempted to understand the Restoration period inspecting the use of language and masquerade in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Courtezans.*

And with Mrs. Behn we turn a very important corner on the road. We leave behind, shut up in their parks among their folios, those solitary great ladies who wrote without audience or criticism, for their own delight alone. We come to town and rub shoulders with ordinary people in the streets. Mrs. Behn was a middle-class woman with all the plebeian virtues of humour, vitality and courage; a woman forced by the death of her husband and some unfortunate adventures of her own to make her living by her wits. She had to work on equal terms with men. She made, by working very hard, enough to live […].
For now that Aphra Behn had done it, girls could go to their parents and say, You need not give me an allowance; I can make money by my pen. [1]

INTRODUCTION

The late seventeenth century was a pivotal period in women's social history and feminist awareness,[2] in which women's participation in social life contributed to break gender barriers, especially in the theatre.

The reopening of theatres in 1660 and woman's limited emancipation in it were encouraged by Charles II, as this authorization to Thomas Betterton demonstrates:

> Actresses are permitted. Because in the past "the women's parts have been Acted by men in the habits of women att which some have taken Offence," the King gives permission that "all womens partes to be Acted in either of the said two Companies for the time to come may be performed by women.[3]

[1] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* London: The Hogarth Press, 1959, pp. 94-95.
[2] Katherine M. Quinsey (ed.), *Broken Boundaries. Women & Feminism in Restoration Drama*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996, p. 1.
[3] Judith Milhous, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1605-1708,* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979, p. 6.

Introduction

When the theatres reopened all female parts were performed by women. This was to alter the world of English theatre and society because it created the opportunity to introduce new topics and new dramatic effects.[4] Nevertheless, Laurence Stone argued that

> She was a woman who moved uncertainly between two worlds: the one, in which she had been brought up and in which she was to live out her last decades, was based on female subordination to men, and marriage for interest not attraction; the other, which boiled of excitement, glamour, intrigues, love and feminine independence, literacy and responsibility. Her conflict between love and honour is characteristic of the plots of contemporary classic drama.[5]

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the most extravagant and autonomous ladies stopped being treated as commodities, or at least, they tried doing it. They *would no longer tolerate this authoritarian disposition of their hearts and bodies by their parents or "friends*."[6] As active figures, they rejected passive stereotypes of woman, claiming their equality, but they were inevitably depicted as vicious and degenerate. They did not want to be "the lady of the hearth," secluded in their homes, without any proper education and any cultural or professional aspirations. Quinsey adds

> Restoration drama focuses on the sexual basis of social structures – marriage, family, patrilineal succession – in a representation characterized by the unsettling and reexamination of assumptions.

[4] Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire. Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660-1720,* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006, p. 2.
[5] Laurence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 – 1800,* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979, p. 307.
[6] *Ibid.,* p. 308.

> These cracks in the patrilineal structure coexist with attempts to reaffirm that structure, sometimes through violent reassertion of male prerogatives, sometimes through subtle reformulations of economies of power.[7]

A changing awareness of female subjectivity characterized the social scenario. It promoted and encouraged the physical presence of women onstage as actresses, the increased and varied representation of women in the audience, and the entry of women into the public sphere as writers.[8]

The presence of women onstage provoked a profound effect on theatrical genderdisation, in which female subjectivity was restrained, contained, and constructed in various ways.[9] Not only did actresses cross the threshold of theatres, "embodying female roles in ways that male actors never could,"[10] but this also empowered women to write in a professional way and out of their closets, as they used to do, invading all-male arenas.

Radical innovation and sexual revolution were to come and women playwrights and actresses vigorously contributed to shape new theatrical agendas.[11] For the first time in English theatrical history, women were allowed to appear on the public stage, nevertheless the limited freedom given to women in late Stuart rule was difficult to

[7] K. M. Quinsey, *Broken Bounderies, Women & Feminism in Restoration Drama, op. cit.,* p. 2.
[8] *Ibidem.*
[9] *Ibidem.*
[10] George E. Haggerty, "Regendering the Restoration Stage: Women and Theater, 1660-1720," in Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroghs (eds), *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century,* New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2010, p. 29.
[11] Jacqueline Pearson, "Women Spectators, Playwrights, and Performers and the Restoration Stage," in B. Nelson and C. Burroughs (eds), *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, op. cit.*, p. 45.

conquer.[12] The public sphere and sexual behaviours were free enough, but that freedom was essentially a male privilege.

The extravagant ladies, or female Wits, who decided to escape the fixed path and to embark on a different and alternative one, were stigmatised with the epithet of "whore."[13] In this regard, Elin Diamond underlines how the theatre objectified women and how Restoration can be regarded as the best example of a season of strong contradictions. The actress was both admired (for her craft), and calumniated (for her sexual activity).[14] In the same way, the female playwright was objectified and "the author, like her texts, became a commodity."[15] The general opinion was that "the woman who shared the contents of her mind instead of reserving them for one man was literally, not metaphorically, trading in her *sexual* property."[16]

Women of the theatre faced shame in invading and violating an exclusive male field: the theatre, to obtain their fame. Popularity on stage as dramatists, or actresses, went together with public consensus but critical disdain, too. Their being active women was commonly regarded as synonym of depravity. Paula Backscheider has asserted that

> Women writers were forced into one of two classes: the new position of shameless, crass, fallen woman jostling with men and willing to live by her illicitly gained sexual knowledge, a place in

[12] Susan J. Owen, "Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's Drama, 1678-83," in Janet Todd (ed.), A*phra Behn Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 74.
[13] Jacqueline Pearson*, The Prostitute Muse, Image of Women and Women dramatists, 1642 – 1737*, New York, London, Toronto, Sidney, Tokyo: Harvester – Wheatsheaf, 1998, p. 10.
[14] George E. Haggerty, "Regendering the Restoration Stage: Women and Theater, 1660-1720," *op. cit.,* p. 34.
[15] Elin Diamond, "Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*," Janet Todd (ed.), *Aphra Behn (Casebooks),* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 33.
[16] Catherine Gallagher, "Who was that Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," in J. Todd (ed.) *Aphra Behn, op. cit.,* p. 17.

> stark contrast to the other, which was long-accepted practice of the aristocrat writing for herself and her circle and tastefully circulating manuscripts.
>
> […] the image of the prostitute and the prostituted pen are hardly less restricting than the constraints of elevated gentility that imposed deliberate silences and a constricted range of subjects.[17]

Aphra Behn was indeed accused of prostitution and of having exalted an indiscriminate sexual appetite. In 1691, Robert Gould, a misogynist critic, accused women writers of having broken "a silence prescribed by custom."[18] Stereotypes and prejudices at the expense of women writers were the rule. Women had constantly to fight against male virulent attacks.

In Doran's view, Aphra Behn was corrupted and corrupting, so that he argued:

> The most shameless woman who ever took pen in hand, to corrupt the public […] She might have been an honour to womanhood – she was its disgrace. She might have gained the glory by her labour – but she chose to reap infamy… To all other male writers of her day she served as a provocation and an apology. Intellectually, she was qualified to lead them through pure and bright ways; but she was mere harlot, who danced through uncleanness, and dare them to follow. Remonstrance was useless with this wanton hussy. [19]

[17] Paula Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England,* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. 81.
[18] Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 134.
[19] W. R. Owens and Lizbeth Goodman, *Approaching Literature. Shakespeare, Aphra Behn and the Canon,* New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 132.

Behn was the product of a turbulent age but she was able to take advantage from it. In her life, she faced many obstacles and she managed them. She was continuously attacked for being a writer and because of her libertinism and success. Needless to say, her reputation suffered because of her sex. Nevertheless, her writings achieved fame because she was a good writer and playwright. Aphra Behn can be compared to the woman warrior described by Simon Shepherd:

> She is a woman who, like the warrior, can insist on the sexual duel; she can insist on equal conditions of battle, whether physical or intellectual. To do this revalues the woman. But such equal battles are too often denied by the male world. Males assume a dominance that is physical, intellectual and sexual; they assume that they are the norm, that their value judgments are correct. It is rare that the male assumptions are put to the trial of strength.[20]

Because of her position of writer and playwright she was regarded as a "monster", as a whore. As Jane Spencer argued, "the most extreme male reaction was to deny women's ability to write"[21] and to accuse them to be unclean, untidy or simply whores.

Not only did Behn's male contemporaries condemn her because her "bawdy expressions could be taken as evidence of an unchaste and therefore unacceptable woman; […] and her life was used to condemn her writing as immoral,"[22]

[20] Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women. Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-century Drama,* Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981, p. 82.
[21] Jane Spencer, *Aphra Behn's After Life,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 6.
[22] Catherine Gallagher, "Who was that Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," in J. Todd (ed.) *Aphra Behn, op. cit.,* p. 24.

but especially because she professed to write because she needed money, she was "forced to write for Bread and not ashamed to owne it."[23]

Twentieth-century feminist movements probably contributed to influence the growing interest towards gender and women's issues and to revive women writers who had been neglected for centuries. As Virginia Woolf remarked, Aphra Behn signals an important watershed. She was an eclectic woman who dared to break gender boundaries centuries before the feminist uprising.

A first approach towards Aphra Behn was focused on biographical aspects. The revival of Aphra Behn was due to the interest shown by Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf. Their emphasis essentially rested on the importance of Aphra Behn as a symbol for feminism, she was depicted as a feminist *ante-litteram*. Vita Sackville-West wrote a short biography of Behn, entitled *Aphra Behn: The Incomparable Astrea.*[24] As Karyn Sproles has remarked, Vita Sackville West's biography reinvents Behn, disrupting facts. Sackville-West rejects "the traditional polarization of women into saints or whores, rewriting Behn's story in a different voice, a voice characterized by self-conscious multiplicity of subject, biographer, and history instead of unified authority."[25] In *A Room of One's Own*,[26] Virginia Woolf exalted Behn's greatness but like Sackville-West, her focus was on the fact that she was a professional woman writer, not for what she wrote.[27] Both Virginia

[23] Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist, From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 28.
[24] Vita Sackville-West, *Aphra Behn: The Incomparable Astrea*, New York: Vikings Press, 1928.
[25] Karin Z. Sproles, *Desiring Women; the Partnership of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville- West,* Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006, p. 112.
[26] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* London: The Hogarth Press, 1959.
[27] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own, op. cit.,* p. 96.

Woolf and Vita Sackville-West shared the interest in rehabilitating a woman writer who was for long neglected and they wanted to tell her story in a way that showed her to be both compelling and powerful.[28]

In the twentieth century, however, Behn's fame underwent a revival. Montague Summers, a scholar working on the English drama of the seventeenth century, published a six-volume collection of her work,[29] in order to rehabilitate her reputation. In 1948, George Woodcock wrote Behn's first full-length biography entitled *The Incomparable Aphra.*[30] Woodcock constructed Behn as an committed modern revolutionary, an advocate for a social and moral freedom that he finds radical in her day and ours. In Angeline Goreau's *Recostructing Aphra,* subtitled *A Social Biography of Aphra Behn,*[31] Behn symbolizes the lives of feminists in the 1980s. Janet Todd's *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*[32] follows. Todd gave great emphasis to Behn's early spying activities, and to the networks of Tory intrigue to which Behn was connected. Todd is committed to 'historicising' Behn, therefore she is concerned with the author's works' political aspects.

All these biographies had something in common: they told the story of a character named Aphra Behn that forgot the woman author. This approach affected especially Behn's drama. In all cases these biographers tried to find parallels between the life and the contents and themes of the plays and this approach does

[28] K. Z. Sproles, *Desiring Women; the Partnership of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville- West, op. cit.,* p. 112.
[29] Montegue Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn,* London: W. Heinemann; Stratford-on-Avon : A.H. Bullen, 1915.
[30] George Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra, London:* T. V. Boardman & Co Ltd;1948.
[31] Angeline Goreau, *Recostructing Aphra. A Social Biography of Aphra Behn,* New York: Dial, 1980.
[32] Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn,* London, New York, Sidney: Pandora, 2000.

not recognize Behn's dramatic wit and skills.[33] Nevertheless, this contributed to focus the attention on Astrea who is now regarded as a key English playwright and a major figure in Restoration theatre.

Aphra Behn's figure was remodelled in the twentieth century, when sexual standards relaxed and an interest in women writers developed. A new interest has developed around this elusive lady of the Restoration theatre re-discovering her drama.

Aphra Behn is finally being recognized as an important early writer in both women's history and the history of literature. The 1990s criticism of Behn's work was collected into two collections of essays, one edited by Heidi Hutner, *Re-reading Aphra Behn; History, Theory and Criticism,*[34] and the other by Janet Todd *Aphra Behn Studies*.[35] Broadly speaking, the first is more critical and theoretical, and includes the work of North American critics. In contrast, the essays in Todd's collection, mainly by British academics, tend to set works in their historical and theatrical context, emphasizing Behn's use of contemporary political rhetoric, or staging devices. They opened a new wave of interest in Behn's production.

In the twenty-first century the study of Restoration comedies has developed to publish many volumes. Some more collections have appeared. The most recent and complete is *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn,* edited by Janet Todd and Derek Hughes.[36] Janet Todd and Derek Hughes are probably the main contributors

[33] Kate Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies,* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003, p. 238.
[34] Heidi Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn, History, Theory, and Criticism,* Charlotteville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993.
[35] Janet Todd (ed.), *Aphra Behn* (New Casebooks), New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
[36] Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

who have underlined the importance of Astrea not only because she was one of the most prolific and interesting figures of the English Restoration. Their volume discusses and introduces her writings in all the fields Aphra Behn was engaged in and provides the critical tools with which to judge their aesthetic and historical importance. It includes a full bibliography,[37] a detailed chronology and a description of the known facts of her life. [38] It introduces Behn in connection to the Restoration era[39] with all its political intrigue.[40] It is actually a collection of articles which deal with different aspects of Behn's drama,[41] her comedies,[42] her tragicomedies,[43] her novels[444546] and short stories,[47] her translations,[48] and her political poetry.[49] It is an accurate guide to discover the writer who is inevitably the fruit of her time and society. It analyzes Behn's comedies from a

[37] Mary Ann O'Donnell "Aphra Behn: The Documentary Record," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.,* pp. 1-11.
[38] Mary Ann O'Donnell, "Chronology," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. xi-xxii.
[39] Susan Staves, "Behn, Women, and Society," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 12-28.
[40] Susan Owen, "Behn's Dramatic Response to Restoration Politics," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 68-97.
[41] Derek Hughes, "Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 29.45.
[42] Helen M. Burke, "The Cavalier Myth in *The Rover,*" in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 118-134.
[43] Janet Todd and Derek Hughes, "Tragedy and Tragicomedy," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 83-97.
[44] Ros Ballaster, " 'The Story of the Heart': *Love-Letters Between a Noble-Man and his Sister*," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 135-150.
[45] Joanna Lipking, " 'Others, Slaves, and Coloninists in Oroonoko," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 166-187.
[46] Laura J. Rosenthal, "*Oroonoko:* Reception, Ideology, and Narrative Strategy," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 151-165.
[47] Jacqueline Pearson, "The Short Fiction (excluding Oroonoko)," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 188-203.
[48] Line Cottegnies, "Aphra Behn's French Translations," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 221-234.
[49] Melinda S. Zook, "The Political poetry of Aphra Behn," in D. Hughes and J. Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn, op. cit.*, pp. 46-67.

political, feminist, and post-colonial perspectives, with a special regard to women, not only as playwrights but also managers, actresses and audience.

Aphra Behn opened up new paths for women, in their quest for an identity. As the many books published in Britain and in the United States over the last years demonstrate, they reveal the numerous facets of the writer, while stressing her ambiguity.

For the first time in the English literature, the interest of criticism is focused on Woman as Subject. There exists a before and after Aphra Behn. Until that moment, writing had been a male prerogative. Women used to write but their works were not intended to be traded.[50] Aphra Behn's generation subverted this rule and women started writing plays in order to be sold. Selling women's writing was shocking for seventeenth-century readers and audience but it was an important sign for the changing status of women's lives, so that Virginia Woolf would claim:

> All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds.[51]

Woman and her desire is told from a female point of view, from inside. The reaction of Behn's contemporaries was a dominant attitude of associating the publication of women's writing, especially theatrical works for theatre, with the exhibition of

[50] Catherine Gallagher, "Who was that Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," in J. Todd (ed.) *Aphra Behn, op. cit.,* p. 17.
[51] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own, op. cit.,* p. 98.

women's body without any veils.[52] Their writing was conceived as a good of trade. Selling women's writing was soon equated with trading a sexual property.[53] In other words, it was prostitution. Catherine Gallagher has described this phenomenon:

> The poetess like the prostitute is she who 'stands out', as the etymology of the word 'prostitute' implies, but it is also she who is masked. […] the prostitute is she who stands out by virtue of her mask. The dramatic masking of the prostitute and the stagey masking of the playwright's interest in money are exactly parallel cases of theatrical unmasking in which what is revealed is the parallel itself: the playwright is a whore.[54]

As I have already said, for the time writing was a scandalous sexual transgression, an abominable behaviour for a woman of quality, who had the only duty to hide her thoughts. Writing was regarded as an extension of sexual activity, as Gallagher has shown:

> Writing is certainly on a continuum here with sex, but instead of leading to the act in which woman's conquest is overturned, playwriting is supposed to extend women's erotic power beyond the moment of sexual encounter.[55]

Woman dared to share the secrets of her mind, worse, "If she was married, she was selling what did not belong to her, because in *mind and body* she should have given

[52] Catherine Gallagher, "Who was that Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," in J. Todd (ed.) *Aphra Behn, op. cit.,* p. 17.
[53] *Ibid.,* p. 16.
[54] *Ibidem.*
[55] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

herself to her husband."[56] A woman of quality, who decided to write, as an immediate consequence lost her 'virtue'.[57]

Behn was a poor woman. She was widowed at a young age and forced to find some means to support herself, this is probably why she complained about male privileges, gender bias and women writers' condition. She defended her idea in the *Epistole to the Reader* of *Sir Patient Fancy:*

> I Printed this Play with all the impatient haste one ought to do, who would be vindicated from the most unjust and silly aspersion, Woman could invent to cast on Woman; and which only my being a Woman has procured me; *That it was Baudy*, the least and most Excusable fault in the Men writers, to whose Plays they all crowd, as if they came to no other end than to hear what they condemn in this: *but from a Woman it was unnaturall*: […]. The play had no other Misfortune but that of coming out for a Womans: had it been owned by a Man, though the most Dull Unthinking Rascally Scribler in Town, it had been a most admirable Play. [58]

By displaying sexual difference the new generation of female playwrights subverted the female world and opposed the image of women provided by Marsden in her *Female Desire:*

> Female sexuality was the means by which power and property were handed down from generation to generation; women were the vessel not simply for the male seed but for the legitimate lines of

[56] *Ibid*., p. 16.
[57] W. Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature, op. cit.,* p. 134.
[58] Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy,* http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27273/27273-h/patient.html (9/10/2012)

> inheritance. Properly managed, their femininity ensured the orderly succession of property and power from father to son, reinforcing the patrilinear structures underlying early modern English Society.[59]

Control over female sexuality was an indispensable element to maintain the patriarchal power stable. The new born interest of female playwrights towards the female body and sexuality was a threat of this social stability.

Not only were women on the stage but they represented the audience. This provoked a cathartic function of pleasure. Actresses became the emblem of female sexuality. The effects on the audience aroused a cultural anxiety, which responded by attacking the women playwrights. It was difficult to affirm explicitly female identity as woman and as playwright and female desire. In *The Preface to The Lucky Chance,* Aphra Behn complains

> But 'tis in vain by dint of Reason or Comparison to convince the obstinate Criticks, whose Business is to find Fault, if not by a loose and gross Imagination to create them, for they must either find the Jest, or make it; and those of this sort fall to my share, they find Faults of another kind for the Men Writers. And this one thing I will venture to say, though against my Nature, because it has a Vanity in it: That had the Plays I have writ come forth under any Mans Name, and never known to have been mine; I appeal to all unbyast Judges of Sense, if they had not said that Person had made

[59] J. Marsden, *Fatal Desire, op. cit.,* p. 5.

> as many good Comedies, as any one Man that has writ in our Age;
>
> but a Devil on't the Woman damns the Poet. [60]

As Ros Ballaster argued, She was all too aware of the conventional polarization of the female in Restoration poetry.[61] She admitted to the difficulty of her challenge and the impossibility of destroying the dominant thought, but she inevitably caused a rift inside an immovable and balanced system, the patriarchal one, speaking like a man, acting inside men's schemes, and projecting woman in the male mirror; she recognized what Virginia Woolf would claim some centuries later:

> Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size […]. That serves to explain in part the necessity that women are to men. […][62]

She plays her role, assuming different positions, such as her masculine poetic gift and the labelled role of whore. This gave her access to the little but exciting world of women's literature. She constructed the image of the whore, becoming trader of herself. In doing this, she subverted the ideology of passive and commodified womanhood.[63] She placated men's anxieties about women writers using male instruments but she inflamed her worst judges because of their inversion.

Aphra Behn was too frank, too bawdy but, especially, she imagined "strong, independent women making their own choices, women who may be viragoes,

[60] Aphra Behn, *The Lucky Chance, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10039/pg10039.txt* (7/11/2013).
[61] Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 73.
[62] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own, op. cit.,* pp. 53-54.
[63] Heidi Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover,* Parts I and II," *op. cit.,* p. 103.

transvestites, or, most unconventionally, even Courtezans."[64] She offered herself in order to deconstruct the belief that man only is the holder of the woman's body and fate.

In selling her plays, Aphra was selling herself, thus she became the only agent and trader of her own commercialization.[65] In giving herself a value on the male market, Astrea becomes the real subject of herself. As Gallagher has pointed out, "the self sale is the proof of the self possession."[66]

By disturbing the established order she would create a new dimension, where woman is on the same level as man,[67] where she could become subject. As Braidotti claims,

> Sexual difference as a strategy of empowerment is the means of achieving possible margins of affirmation by subjects who are conscious of and accountable for the paradox of being both caught inside a symbolic code and deeply opposed to it.[68]

The de facto result of such subjectivity is that Aphra remains in the cage of the contradiction of the libertine ideology. It is in this context that she constructed her ideology, playing a part, recognizing, or rather claiming her androgyny. She was conscious of male supremacy, and she was able to both flatter and mock male pride. For that reason she claims:

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[64] J. Pearson, *The Prostitute Muse, op. cit.,* p. 168.
[65] E. Diamond, "Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*", in Janet Todd (ed.), Aphra Behn, *op. cit.,* p. 47.
[66] C. Gallagher, "Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," *op. cit.,* p. 17.
[67] J. Gallop, *Thinking through the Body*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 21.
[68] R. Braidotti, "Sexual Difference Theory", in http://www.scribd.com/doc/22966295/Sexual-Difference-Theory-Rosi-Braidotti-A-Companion-to-Feminist-Philosophy-Ed-Jaggar-and-Young.

> All I ask, is the Priviledge for my Masculine Part the Poet in me, (if any such you will allow me) to tread in those successful Paths my Predecessors have so long thriv'd in, to take those Measures that both the Ancient and Modern Writers have set me, and by which they have pleas'd the World so well: If I must not, because of my Sex, have this Freedom, but that you will usurp all to your selves; I lay down my Quill, and you shall hear no more of me, not so much as to make Comparisons, because I will be kinder to my Brothers of Pen, than they have been to a defenceless Woman; for I am not content to write for a Third Day only. I value Fame as much as I had been born a *Hero*; and if you rob me of that, I can retire from the ungreateful World and scorn its fickle Favours.[69]

Behn broke the rigid dichotomies of the patriarchal binary thought, and contravened the perpetuation of silence and powerlessness prescribed to women, demanding to be equal to men.

Behn used her wit and put on her masquerade claiming to possess a male poetic gift, the "masculine part of Poet." Behn capitalized on her being a woman, presenting herself as a divided subject, one of the female sex, the weaker part, the whore in her but with access to a 'masculine' power of poetry.[70] In doing this, Behn strategically avoided becoming the disdainful lady or the disdained whore of male polarization, she identified with the male role while modifying male view of woman.[71]

[69] J. Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist, op. cit.*, p. 43.
[70] Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms. Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 72
[71] Judith Kegan Gardner, "Aphra Behn: Sexuality and Self-Respect," *Women's Studies,* 7, 1980, p. 67.

Behn is a precocious woman, she was one of the first women who focus the attention on the history of sexuality and gender some centuries earlier, focusing on the important issue, the gender question and recognizing that:

> women and men are made, not born. They are created by those labels – labels that open some doors and close others. Labelling creates a fictitious being ("you are 'a woman'," "you are 'a man'"), but it is a harmful fiction for two reasons. The label denies the commonness that makes us all humans and perpetuates inequalities because the human carrying one label have more rights or privileges that those carrying the other label.[72]

Throughout her works and her life, Behn tried to change woman's condition, she took an active role in negotiating cultural ideology and system to gain power.[73] We cannot label her a 'Feminist', but she insisted by her writings and her example that woman had sexual desires that deserved as much respect as those of men.[74] She contributed to modify woman's self-perception, even if the results were not immediately evident.

My thesis will examine the phenomenon of women in the English Restoration theatre with a special concern on Aphra Behn, an exceptional figure whose works show elements of contiguity with the present day. My aim in this study is to show the importance of the construction of the female subjectivity in two of the most

[72] Peter R. Beckman and Francine D'Amico, *Women, Gender, and World Politics. Perspectives, Policies, and Prospects,* 1994, Westport, Connecticut, London: Bergin & Garvey, p. 7.
[73] Mary Burke, Jane Donawerth, Linda L. Dove, and Karen Nelson (eds), *Women, Writings and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain,* 2000, Syracuse, and York: Syracuse University Press, p. XVII.
[74] *Ibid.,* p. 143.

representative works of the Restoration, Aphra Behn's *The Rover, or the Banish'd Cavaliers* and *The Feign'd Courtezans.*

In the first chapter, I will examine the symbolical values of the theatre of the Restoration. From an fine-grained analysis I will argue that the theatre was a means of mass communication and the most powerful means of propaganda. Through signs, symbols and ceremonies which represented reality, that very reality was constructed, creating a *fog of symbols* whose interpretation was exclusively dictated by a hegemonic group. This shows how the theatre was strategically used by Behn, not only to promote Tory politics but especially to modify and re-interpret the representation of the "female".

In the second chapter, I will try to investigate the issue of Woman's representation. I will support the thesis according to which woman and her representation are the effect of a long constructed process which finds its origin in the Greek and the Judeo-Christian traditions. From an initial opposition, man vs. woman that, according to the dominant cultural construction is the primary source of stability of the world, I will delineate the role of women in the patriarchal society, where female subjectivity was denied.

In the third chapter, I will explore Aphra Behn's world, a world where being woman was still synonym of being an object. I will dissect the masculine thought in *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Courtezans.* For this, I will study the male strategies to protect their socially construed power. I will discuss the idea of woman as commodity in the male Restoration market and women's attempt to reject that ideological value.

In the fourth chapter, I will analyse a number of psychoanalytical and feminist theories in order to explain my contention according to which woman can re-invent herself through a strategical use of language.

In the fifth chapter, I will inspect Behn's strategy to create a female subjectivity by manipulating the male language and reappropriating it with new and unpredictable meanings.

In the sixth chapter, I will analyse the different theories about carnival and its importance in the formation of identity to finally analysing in the plays how Behn creates a fluctuating gender which cannot be controlled by the dominant thought. Cross-dressing and Masquerade will be the key to interpret sex relations based on power and they will give us the possibility to understand the female sexuality.

The unconscious represents nothing, but it produces.

It means nothing, but it works.[1]

The Power of Representation. The Political Use of the Theatre in the Seeventeenth Century.

The stage has always been a preferential place where all things, (vices and virtues), of our lives are shown. Drama is acted by people, for people and it deals with them, but according to Aristotle, the very soul of drama is action. *Drama is linked with the central desire of man to find form, pattern and purpose in his very existence*.[2] It is not by chance that in Greek the word *drama* simply means *action.*[3] Drama is the mimetic and the cathartic action in which it is possible to idealize human behaviours and to release man's passions and fears.[4] The first term, *mimesis,* derives from the word *mimos* (actor) and it probably refers to Aristotle's consideration that all things represented on the stage are regarded as imitations of reality.[5] According to the philosopher, drama is by definition a natural and artistic imitation and thus cannot be harmful. It amounts to a representation

[1] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act,* London and New York: Routledge, 1983, p. 6.
[2] E.K. Chambers, "Human Needs and the Drama", John Hodgson (ed.) *The Uses of Drama*, *Sources giving a Background to acting as a Social and educational Force,* London: Eyre Meuthen Ltd., 1972, p. 34.
[3] Ernest Klein, A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language, Amsterdam, London, New York: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1971. Action, n. – OF. (=F.), fr. L. *āctiōnem*, acc. of *āctiō,* ', action' fr. *āctus*, pp. of *agere*, 'to do, to act'. From Act: acte 'action, partly from fr. L. āctus, ' a doing, an action (fr. *āctus*, pp. Of *agere*, ' to set in motion, drive, to do, act), parly fr. *Āctum*, 'something done' (which is prop. Neut. Of *āctus* pp. Of *agere*).
[4] Martin Esslin, *The Anatomy of Drama,* London, Guildford and Worcester: Billing and Son Ltd., 1976, p. 14.
[5] Christopher S. Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies,* Cambridge*:* Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 67.

of the essence of things or, as Gadamer observes, it is an activity provided with an eminent cognitive function.[6] It is a copy of reality which can be affected by the artist's creative mood and idealization.[7] It contributes in comphrending the humankind. What Aristotle finds in mimesis is the possibility to discover a reality that is the object of knowledge.

Opposite to Plato's vision which pinpoints in theatre a means through which violent passions and fears are given off, Aristotle believes that tragedy exercises a purifying function and it releases spectator's soul from passions it puts on stage.

Aristotle suggests in his *Poetics* that "some say that dramas are so called, because their authors represent the characters as 'doing' them (*drôntes).*"[8] Drama describes and places on stage events and human behaviours. The philosopher argues that to act and so to imitate is an innate and instinctive need, an immanent peculiarity of the individual, as a single human being, as member of a community, and mankind, showed since the first organised forms of life. In this regard he claims:

> Thus from childhood it is instinctive in human beings to imitate, and man differs from the other animals as the most imitative of all and getting his first lessons by imitation, and by instinct also all human beings take pleasure in imitations. […] when they enjoy seeing images, therefore, it is because as they look at them they

[6] Georg Has Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (transl. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall), London: Sheed and Ward, 1975, p. 147.
[7] C. S. Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies, op. cit.,* p. 69.
[8] Aristotle, *Poetics* (trans. by James Hutton) New York and London: W. W. Norton &Company, 1982, ll.1448a 28-30.

> have the experience of learning and reasoning out what each thing represents, concluding, for example, that "this figure is so and so."[9]

It exists a nexus between pleasure and imitation and between pleasure and learning. Pleasure is not presented as something which disturbs and corrupts, it is something which leads to the realization of a completed action.

Catharsis is, instead, the effect produced by drama on the spectator, especially the direct effects of fear, pity, and terror. In its medical meaning, it can be associated with purgation of something harmful or in its religious understanding it refers to expiation or ritual cleansing. Drama purges of potentially dangerous emotions.[10]

> Thus, Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts, in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear [what we call] the *catharsis* of such emotions.[11]

In Greece, drama was a collective and ritual phenomenon, thus, supported by the Aristotelian assumptions, contemporary anthropologists have analysed and studied theatre and its connection with ritual.[12]

[9] *Ibid.,* 1448b par.4 ll.5-17.
[10] C. S. Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies, op. cit.,* p.72.
[11] Aristotle, *Poetics, op. cit.,* VI, 1449b.
[12] Ritual, adj. – L. rĭtualĭs, fr. . rĭtus, 'rite'. Rite, n. a ceremonial act. – ME., fr. L. – rĭtus, 'religious custom, usage, cerimony', cogn. With Gk.'number', do-rĭmu, 'I number, count, enumerate'. All those words are derivatives of I.E. base *rĭ-, 'to count, number', which is prob. An enlargement of base * ar-, 'to join, whence Goth. *arms*, OE *earm*, arm, etc., 'the upper limb'. Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Amsterdam, London, New York: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1971.

According to Emile Durkeim, ritual is at the basis of all primitive communities and it represents the typical expressive form of the human kind in its immature phase. The community recognizes the procedure thanks to its peculiarity: repetition.

In this regard the anthropologist Victor Turner adds that ritual is "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests."[13] Rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community.[14] Not only do symbols reveal crucial social and religious values; they are also transformative for human attitudes and behavior. The handling of symbols in ritual exposes their powers to act upon and change the persons involved in ritual performance. In sum, Turner's definition of ritual refers to ritual performances involving manipulation of symbols that refer to religious beliefs.

He has also analysed the connection between theatre and rituals, finding a common denominator in performance.

What emerged in his analysis is the interdependence between social drama and performance. Both are different modalities of acting. During the performance, something is generated. Performance deals with a story about a person or the community, and it helps in reading and interpreting life. It is through the projection of

[13] Victor Turner, "Symbols in African Ritual. In Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in the Study of Symbols and Meanings,"in Janet. L. Dolgin, David S. Kemnitzer and David M. Schneider (eds), New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 183.
[14] Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 2.

the story that the catharsis takes place. It helps the community to reflect about itself and to explore cultural symbols giving new meanings to them.

Social drama produces every types of performance, among them also the theatrical drama or generic artistic expressions which refer to the social as its product. In other words, to perform means to produce something. According to the anthropologists, people elaborate more and more their gestures, creating rituals and the first forms of spectacle. They spontaneously rationalize rituals, and spectacles into drama. As Daiches has argued:

> The ultimate origins of all drama are the concern of the anthropologist rather than of the literary historian. Drama and religious ritual seem to have been bound up with each other in the earlier stages of all civilizations; folk celebrations, ritual miming of such elemental themes as death and resurrection, seasonal festivals with appropriate symbolic actions – these lie in the background (sometimes far in the background) of all drama, though a sophisticated literary tradition may go far to obliterate their traces.[15]

It is an ideological rationalization, Robert Mayhew says, that is "a subclass of intellectual rationalization, involving one's own social and political beliefs and interests. It does not refer (as 'ideology' sometimes does) solely to the defence of the views of

[15] David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature,* vol. 2, London: Secker & Warburg, 1968, p. 208.

those in power. Rather, it refers to social and political beliefs, and the 'arguments' in defence of those beliefs that turn out to be (for whatever reason) mere rationalization."[16]

Victor Turner also introduced the idea of the inventor of social performance and enunciated the idea of "magic mirror", which open his interpretation of the relationship between performance and power. In his analysis he writes:

> The mirrors themselves are not mechanical, but consist of reflecting consciousnesses and the products of such consciousnesses, formed into vocabularies and rules, into metalinguistic grammars, by means of which new unprecedented performances may be generated. [17]

Performative genres are active modalities: they are mirrors in which drama and social transformations reflect and are reflected on. In their fragmentation, they inspect the multiple and different sides of reality. These magic mirrors do not represent a uni-directionally and dizzly reality, but they operate a creative hibridization deforming its proprieties. They form non-liminal spaces where legitimate socio-cultural forms are remodelled. Turner argues that

> Cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more opt or interesting ' designs for living'.

Hybridity between fiction and reality finds its climax in the English literature under the Tudor Dynasty, that remodels and is constantly remodelled by performances.

[16]Robert Mayhew, *The Female in Aristotle's Biology. Reason and Rationalization,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 3.
[17]Victor Turner, *Anthropology of Performance,* New York: PAJ Publications, 1986, p. 22.

Elizabeth I conferred great space to the theatre and public spectacles. She recognized it would be a substantial and powerful means of propaganda and communication if regulated under the Crown's power.[18] As Trussler argues, Elizabeth promoted and protected the theatre:

> It was during these days that the theatre became aware of its power and potentialities as it had seldom and sporadically been before – its 'official' forms often crossing the ill-defined boundary between pedagogy and propaganda, its 'unofficial' manifestations put at risk from wider recognition of their popular appeal.[19]

The queen recognized that those symbolic forms would help the monarchy to generate and perpetuate its power and the Tudor myth.[20] Elizabeth exploited Art and symbolic forms, considering them a mirror reflecting her authority. The "Virgin Queen" was able to manipulate her representation with theatrical bravura.[21] Her spectacularization had the aim to win popularity and her subjects' sympathy.

The Elizabethan theatre was a form of popular entertainment, it was addressed to a mixed public who lived a life neither prosperous nor peaceful, especially during the last nineteen years of Elizabeth's reign, a period of chronic economic hardship, religious and political turmoil, and, hanging over everything, the constant threat of military invasion.[22] Not only did the theatre contribute to mitigate the people's anxieties about

[18]Simon Trussler, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of British Theatre,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 51.
[19] *Ibid.,* p. 50.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 51.
[21] Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature,* 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 129.
[22] Gary B. Goldstein, "Did Queen Elizabeth Use the Theater for Propaganda", *The Oxfordian*, Volume VII, 2004, p. 164.

their time and survive under the stress of war and economic hardship, but it was involved in orchestrating the staged propaganda. The theatre was a powerful instrument of control, as Gurr mentions:

> It was the only major medium for social intercommunication, the only existing form of journalism, and the only occasion that existed for the gathering of large numbers of people other than for sermons and executions. […] The fictions of the stage were certainly not so marginal to the affairs of state, because imaginative thought had few other outlets, and none with the coerciveness of the minds of men in company.[23]

In 1581, the queen increased the Master of Revels' power. He was appointed to "call upon players and playmakers to appear before him and recite their pieces" and "to reform, authorize and put down as shall be thought meet or unmeet unto himself or his said deputy in that half."[24] It was a refined way to propagate the sovereign's policy, which only the queen knew and whose path she decided. The stage veiled the queen's plan on the one hand to subtly and insidiously undermine her enemies and, on the other hand to accrue her legitimacy through theatrical propaganda.

When Elizabeth died, the theatre was definitively regarded as a corrupted means for young minds, in that it stimulated erotic and licentious heterosexual and homosexual desires. No one could protect it anymore.[25] By the beginning of the

[23] Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (2nd ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 118.
[24] Edmund Kerchever Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage,* vol.2, Oxford: Clarendon, 1923, p. 288.
[25] A. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, *op. cit.,* p. 131.

seventeenth century, the Puritans were quiete a loud and forceful anti-theatrical lobby. Edmund Morgan states that the

> longest, most bitter, and most effective attacks on the theatre came from English Puritans, or at least from Englishmen living in the age of Puritanism.[26]

A different kind of censorship arouse in those years characterizing Puritan society. The condemnation and subsequently ban involved moral and religious beliefs in addition to political ones. Religion dominated the puritan society, the church was the new stage, the new pulpit where sermons acquired political as well as religious significance.

The Puritans understood deeply the endemic and dangerous power of the theatre, thus they forbade public performances. They feared the theatre, because they feared that people's identities and opinions were unstable, and they saw the theatre as revealing and producing this instability and a terrifying, monstrous transformation of the self; they saw the theatre as so powerful that people mimicked what they saw. Furthermore, the playwrights were conceived as the ones who took God's place, generating their own creatures, re-creating society and providing moral instructions. Specifically, the playwrights put on stage the diabolic bodies, the female ones, the sodomites and cross-dressed actors. This fear was part of a wider anxiety about the nature of identity.

Moreover, Puritans recognized in drama a political weapon used by kings and Governments: forbidding it was the only way they had to stop cavaliers' ideas to reach a

[26] S. Edmund Morgan, "Puritan Hostility to the Theater." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 110.5 (1966), p. 340.

larger consensus.[27] The only representations admitted were religious ones.[28] The Bible was the only authoritative "source of wisdom" that had to be assumed as the only law to follow on earth. Thus, people had to act in conformity with this. No exaggerations or extravagant behaviours were admitted, the theatres were closed, gambling houses and brothels shut down.[29] Puritans, by a simple syllogism, argued that the cause of the black Death was sin, the cause of sin were the actors, thus the actors were the responsible for the Black Death. It was a consequential decision that,

> On the 6th of September, 1642, the theaters were closed by ordinance, it being considered not seemly to indulge in any kind of diversions or amusements in such troublous times. In 1647 another and more imperative order was issued, in consequence of certain infractions of the previous one, threatening to imprison and punish as rogues all who broke its enactments.[30]

Puritans believed that the plays were often lewd and profane, that play-actors were mostly irresponsible, and immoral people, that taverns and disreputable houses were always found in the neighbourhood of the theatres, and that the theatre itself was a public danger in the way of spreading disease.[31] The church feared the effects on their flock of staged displays of sinful behaviour and of opportunities for illicit deeds offered

[27] Jeremy W. Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court. Politics, Drama, Sexuality,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995, p. 24.
[28] Ann Thompson, "Women/ Women and the Stage," in Helen Wilcox (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.108.
[29] http://www.theatredatabase.com/17th_century/closure_of_the_theaters_001.html (10/08/2013)
[30] *Ibidem.*
[31] Martha Fletcher Bellinger, *A Short History of the Theatre,* New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927, p. 207.

by mixed crowd of men and women.[32] This idea was already fully in circulation in the Elizabethan age but Elizabeth had protected the theatre by finding compromises.[33]

The accusation against the theatre and its consequent ban contributed to the oblivion of the golden age of public theatre which had contributed to the splendour of Elizabeth I's reign. These years of constraints and closure, associated with a strong economic crisis, contributed to the triumphal return of the King, who was greeted with acclamation of all people.[34]

The theatre was restored with the Monarchy. Charles, who admired his cousin, Louis XIV, and who was fascinated by French absolutism perfectly comprehended he had not the same power and consensus as his predecessors. Charles II recognized the potentiality of the theatre and of theatricality. Drama had always been an effective instrument in a process of educating or brainwashing, the process by which individuals internalize social roles.[35]

During his years abroad, he learnt how to persuade his subjects to accept his authority. He wanted his reign to be spectacular and to remove forever the image of his father's last memorable scene.[36] He cherished a secret desire: to fortify his power in order to make his reign an absolute monarchy. He realized that in order for the monarchy to be restored it had to be reinvented. For this reason,

> Charles made his entrance into London an unforgettable moment,
>
> one that, even in the eyes of a well-read man, dwarfed all but the

[32] G. B. Goldstein, "Did Queen Elizabeth Use the Theater for Propaganda", *op. cit.,* p. 161.
[33] John Harold Wilson, *The Court Wits of the Restoration,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948, p.
[34] Tim Harris, *Politics Under the Later Stuarts. Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715,* London and New York: Longman, 1993, p. 26.
[35] M. Esslin, *The Anatomy of Drama*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[36] J. W. Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court, op. cit.,* p. 24.

> portentous return of the captive Israelites to build the temple at Jerusalem. Charles had begun the effort to impress his subjects with his magnificence, confidence, popularity, and even absolute authority.[37]

As Judith Butler claimed in *Gender Trouble,* representation is fundamental because it extends visibility and legitimacy to the political subject.[38] Representation does not have to be suppressed, on the contrary power is involved in theatre making, producing and orienting ideas, beliefs and their representations.[39] In this regard, Michael Foucault explains that the political structure decides how the subject should be. Juridical power produces and rules the normative representations.[40] Repetition and ritualization of a set of actions manufactures reality, they are naturalized and normalized through time.[41] They create a strong relation between ideology and theatrical representation which is displayed through the rhetorical and ideological use of performance. Culture and politics are interconnected on stage. They legitimize each other.

The re-creation of the image of monarchy and its ancient authority started from the city of London, with its streets and public places, which became the chosen stage of Charles II himself and his court, it was used to secure the monarchy and establish the right interpretation of it.[42] Through the performative spectacularization and theatricalization of his actions, the king tried to re-construct a new self and a new nation.

[37]Paula Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. 8.
[38] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and Subversion of Identity,* New York and London: Routledge Classics, 1990, p. 2.
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[40] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1. The Will to Knowledge* (3rd ed.) (trans. Robert Hurley), London: Penguin Books, 1998, pp. 24-25.
[41]J. Butler, *Gender Trouble, op. cit.,* p. xv.
[42] P. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics, op. cit.,* p. 2.

He firmly believed in his divine right so he worked to project himself as a deified ruler.[43] Paula Backscheider describes his actions as follow:

> The establishment of power is but part of the message new monarchs need to deliver. Charles had to make a symbolic statement about Law, demonstrating if possible that it would be authoritatively and rightfully administered and would combine the divine attributes of justice and mercy with the wisdom of their king's "great original".[44]

Charles needed to inscribe his authority. Thus, his coronation was a perfect performance in which symbols and allusions were used in order to ritualize his power. Furthermore, In an extraordinary symbolic gesture, Charles had a stage built in Westminster Abbey for his coronation. Every mention of the setting for crowning used that word: "stage". [45]

At this point the king obtained the highest performance of his drama, in which he used the theatre to re-affirm his position in the Country.This strong ideological mechanism contributed to rebuild the idea of Monarchy as a stable and unified Body. Nevertheless, it required many efforts because of the insecurity of social life. Thus Charles, supported by the circle of the Wits, worked in the direction of inculcating the myth of his power through theatre, celebrations and spectacles, "a myth with which to appeal to a broad public consensus."[46] As Paula Backscheider has stressed, "most

[43] *Ibid., p.* 4.
[44] *Ibid.,* p. 11.
[45] *Ibid.,* p. 18.
[46] J. W. Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court, op. cit.*, p. 24.

ordinary people do not have a unified philosophy of life; therefore, signs, symbols, ceremonies, and myths construct reality for them."[47]

A further explanation of this conduct is, as Kenneth Burke argued, that human beings live in *a fog of symbols*[48] which are socially constructed. Symbols which circulated in the Restoration Society were representations produced by, in Gramsci's words, the "hegemonic we,"[49] the group of intellectuals close to the king. As Jeremy Webster argues, it is clear that

> A cultural group accepts its narrative form, and rejects others, because that form alone embodies the group's nearest image of itself as its most truthful and accessible scripture. The group defines and recreates itself in the repetition of its form, confirms its understanding of the nature of things in the ritual of retelling, and advances its causes against a host of enemies and aliens in the promulgation of its story.[50]

Undoubtedly, the theatrical discourse was the most representative of Restoration ideology. Writers contributed to stereotyping reality in order to shape a national identity. In this way what was particular became universal, and was perceived as the only right thought. In explaining this point, Althusser writes:

> It is not their conditions of existence, the real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to

[47] P. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics, op. cit.,* p. 22.
[48] *Ibidem*.
[49] Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 45.
[50] J. W. Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court, op. cit.,* pp. 20-21.

> them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world. It is this relation that contains the 'cause' which has to explain the imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world.[51]

Ideology is an imaginary relationship which does not correspond to reality. In this regard, Althusser claims that hegemony builds up an illusion which finds its basis in the allusion to reality.[52] Ideology is a constructed illusion perpetuated through normativity. As a result of this, people who do not belong to the hegemonic group are objects able to assimilate passively notions fixed by their masters. Subservient people lack subjectivity.

It is through the theatre or other public spectacles that a dominant thought was delineated. It was oriented and constructed. The Wits' group controlled and influenced the populace, leading it in a "*rivoluzione senza rivoluzione", "rivoluzione passiva*"(passive revolution),[53] a symbolic discourse, which fixes itself as hegemonic. They "intended to conserve the assent of the subaltern groups and to maintain control over them."[54] They acted in order to represent the power on stage and to manipulate the interpretation of reality.

Under Charles II individuals had to reorganize their encyclopedias or simply avoid to express any alternative to the standard prototypes. In recognizing themselves as members of the hegemonic ideology they become subjects. People lived in an imaginary

[51] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971, p. 164.
[52] *Ibid.,* p. 162.
[53] Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, vol. 3, Q*uaderno 19 (X) 1943-1935: Risorgimento italiano,* Einaudi Editore, 1975, p. 2011.
[54] *Ibidem.*

reality far from the real condition of existence. Althusser stated in this regard that reality was manufactured by a group of cynical men, the wits's circle, who took advantage of "their determination and exploitation of the 'people' on a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations."[55] They generated and produced a new context, where they projected the transformation of their world.[56] The idea of freedom which characterized the theatre in this ages was false, "it was politics which decided everything".[57]

The theatre came back to be the most powerful means of propaganda. It was through such reiterative practices that representation produced the effects that it names.[58] With regard to it, Deleuze and Guattari claim that

> The various forms of education or "normalization," imposed upon an individual consist in making him or her change point of objectification, always moving toward a higher, nobler one in closer conformity with the supposed ideal.[59]

Produced representation becomes the supposed and dominant ideal created through normalization, a process which Eco calls constitution of an encyclopedia.[60] The constitution of reality is thus strictly connected with it. It contributes to create a strong idea of the unification of the nation but also the subservience of the subject.

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[55] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *op. cit.,* 163.
[56] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act, op. cit.*, p. 67.
[57] L. Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon," in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, op. cit.,* p. 11.
[58] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble, op. cit.,* p. 29.
[59] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004, p. 143.
[60] Umberto Eco, "On Truth. A Fiction," in Umberto Eco, Marco Santambrogio, Patrizia Violi (eds), *Meaning and Mental Representations,* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 43. Furthermore, as Eco has stated, [the encyclopedias are ways in which [the] masters represent and organize what they know, what they think they know and what they would like to know.]

Theatre became the projection of this new ideology where

> the signifier is the sign in redundancy with the sign. All signs are signs of signs. The question is not yet what a given sign signifies but to which other signs it refers, or which signs add themselves to it to form a network without beginning or end that projects its shadow onto an amorphous atmospheric continuum.[61]

In rituals as in the theatre the community directly experienced its own identity and reaffirmed it. This made the theatre a powerful political resource.[62] In this regard, the subject recognizes through the theatre that the king addresses him or her and not somebody else.[63]

> The [Christian] ideology – Althusser explains - says something like: I address myself to you, a human individual called [Peter] (every individual is called by his name, in the passive sense, it is never he who provides his own name), in order to tell you that God exists and that you are answerable to Him.[64]

As human beings respond to symbols, language and rituals draw the outline of power. Furthermore, ruling bodies almost universally depend upon consent to their intellectual and moral leadership.[65] As Jeremy Webster has claimed

> Through the repeated performance of these gestures, acts, desires, the subject becomes convinced that the performance is essential to his or her identity rather than a role he or she has learned to play. These performances are supported and affirmed by a culture's various discourses,

[61] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia, op. cit.,* p. 124.
[62] M. Esslin, *The Anatomy of Drama, op. cit.,* p. 29.
[63] L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *op. cit.,* p. 174.
[64] *Ibid.,* p. 177.
[65] Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (eds), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, op. cit.,* p. 45.

> including those of the media, literature, the law, and political parties, for example.[66]

In other words, ideology recruits subjects by the operation of interpellation, the process whereby a social representation is accepted and absorbed by an individual as her/his own model. Thus, it becomes real in her/his mind.[67]

Working on the appearance of Reality, playwrights tended to build and to construct Reality itself. The intellectual leadership subjugates the individuals to power through the dynamics of consensus. Charles II understood this was the base upon which he could build the whole edifice of his kingdom. The sense of stability that consensus instils creates a sort of harmony, experienced as both social peace and peace of mind, and appreciated by people as "the way the world is."[68]

The new intellectual leadership is constituted by wits who establish new meanings and representations of the Restoration, creating the idea of a stable and splendid reign, and the king's image as a harbinger of well-being. The king identified as God was the

> Absolute Subject and he was specular. This mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning. Which means that all ideology is centered, that the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror-connection such that its subjects the subject to the Subject, while giving them in the Subject in which each subject can contemplate its own image (present and

[66] J. W. Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court, op. cit.,* p. 2.
[67] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender, Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction,* London: Macmillan, 1987, p. 12.
[68] P. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics, op. cit.,* p. 35.

> future) the guarantee that this really concerns them and Him, and that since everything takes place in the Family […], God will recognize his own in it.[69]

This acts upon the king's image because his authority is re-qualified and his power assumes a new stability. This propagandistic effort actualized what Barthes describes as the transformation of the sign:

> Meaning is always a phenomenon of culture, a product of culture; [...] this phenomenon of culture is constantly naturalized, reconverted into nature by speech, which makes us believe in a purely transitive situation of the object. We believe in a purely transitive situation of the object. We believe we are in a practical world of uses, of functions, of total domestication of the object, and in reality we are also, by objects, in a world of meanings, of reasons, of alibis: function gives birth to the sign, but the signs reconverted into the spectacle of a function.[70]

Charles realized that *all objects which belong to a society have a meaning;*[71] as a result of this, he accurately prepared his return to London on 29th May 1660, his birthday. He wanted to create a new image and representation of his monarchy. As Roy Strong describes, London was ready to receive its Champion:

> It opened with a dozen gilded coaches which jolted their way forwards, escorted by horsemen wearing silver doublets. Then came a thousand soldiers followed by the City sheriffs in Golden lace, and trumpeters in black velvet and cloth of gold. On it pressed, a seemingly never-ending cavalcade, numbering in all some

[69] L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *op. cit.,* p. 180.
[70] Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge,* New York: Hill and Wang, 1988, p. 190.
[71] *Ibid*., pp. 182-183.

> twenty thousand and culminating in the solitary figure of a man whose thirtieth birthday was, Charles II.[72]

The spectacular arrival of the king in the city of London, the King's coronation and the formal entry procession with sumptuously dressed courtiers, noblemen, and Cavaliers spread the general idea of splendor and decorum, richness and wealth.[73] The king was playing the game of the *semantization of the object and its signification.*[74] The memorable event produced, fabricated, consumed and normalized a representation of Reality, actualizing the semantization of its object: the king's power. Not only was this power masterminded by the Royal Court but it was reiterated and bolstered by English intellectuals' writings and plays which produced pro-Stuart propaganda.[75] Dryden wrote, in this regard,

> When our Great Monarch into exile went
> Wit and Religion suffered Banishment
> At length the Muses stand restored again
> To that great change which Nature did ordain.[76]

Intellectual groups had to structure, what in Eco's words is the "encyclopedia," ideas about what was speakable, representable or imaginable and what was not. The encyclopedia was the general meaning the hegemonic group attributed to symbols, the symbols were translated into internal representations, which were not constructed, from

[72] Roy Strong, *The Story of Britain*, Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1996, p. 178.
[73] *Ibidem.*
[74] R. Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge, op. cit.*, p. 182.
[75] Ronald Hutton, *The Restoration: A Political and Religious History of England and Wales, 1658-1667,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, p. 93.
[76] John Henry Dryden, *To the Lord Chancellor Hyde. Presented on New-Year's Day*, 1662.

the idea of Reality. The symbols were a manipulation, "a realist illusion,"[77] with no necessary correspondence to reality.[78] As Lakoff claims:

> All mental processes are [..] formal manipulations of arbitrary symbols without regard to the internal structure of the symbols or to their meaning. […] Arbitrary symbols can be made meaningful in one and only one way: by being associated with things in the world.[79]

In other words, the representation of reality provided on stage was built by the hegemonic group. The manufactured encyclopedia became everybody's knowledge. This knowledge was socially and politically constructed and continually re-negotiated. To quote Eco: *True in a possible world stands for "recorded in an encyclopedia"* and then, it exists a built encyclopedia for every possible circumstance or furnished world.[80] The theatre became the main means of propagation of a new truth. The reiteration of Truth in the Restoration plays contributed to establishing Charles's authority and the perception of a restored natural order. People recognized the existence of God in that man, *slim in built, with dark hair and saturnine features: the king*.[81]

In this regard, it is worth noting how the Restoration theatre created a perfect correspondence between words, images and a list of instructions, which told people how to interpret such expressions according to a series of contexts,[82] providing a list of possible meanings and interpretations for the plays and the events. Thus, people

[77] Gerard Graff, *Literature Against Itself. Literary Ideas in Modern Society,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 19.
[78] *Ibidem.*
[79] George Lakoff, "Cognitive Semantics", in Umberto Eco, Marco Santambrogio, Patrizia Violi (eds), *Meaning and Mental Representations, op. cit.*, p. 119.
[80] U. Eco, "On Truth. A Fiction *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[81] R. Strong, *The History of Britain*, *op. cit.,* p. 170.
[82] U. Eco, "On Truth. A Fiction", *op. cit.,* p. 43.

did not know the Truth. The hegemonic group preserved the *status quo*. They acted upon the subservient folk, who had an accommodating attitude. They accepted the Given Truth, like Eco's machine they affirm

> [My] Golden Rule is: take every sentence you receive as if it were uttered in order to be interpreted. If I find an uninterpretable sentence, my first duty is to doubt my own abilities. My orders are: never mistrust your interlocutor.[83]

The obfuscation this interpretation produces is evident when mistaken data are introduced in this system of symbols. The masters can provide anomalous sentences on purpose,[84] but like machines, people trust their masters. The king's authority is never mistrusted because he acts for the Country's sake. Starting from this assumption, the people accept and trust the given reality, even though this reality is the result of the data the masters have provided to the people in their encyclopedias as general knowledge.

Although Charles II was not acclaimed by everyone, he was able to widen his popularity, especially in the first decade of his Realm. It permitted him to reassert his hold over political power. In this regard, Timothy Murray states:

> Legitimation is but a phantasm of an interpretational authority sustained by little more than layers of fiction, desire, and exhibitionistic theatricality.[85]

In recognizing the king as the source of truth, the population endorses the king's power.

[83] *Ibid.,* p. 48.
[84] *Ibidem.*
[85] Timothy Murray, *Theatrical Legitimation. Allegories of Genius in Seventeenth-Century England and France*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 10.

In this connection, the theatre functioned as a kind of allegory for court politics.[86] Charles supported the Theatre, he granted his support to two newly formed theatrical companies, Sir William Davenant's The Drury Lane and Thomas Killigrew's Duke's Company.[87] The theatre was the perfect instrument to insinuate allegorical political messages into members of the audience, and into other writers. By participating in the theatrical events as spectators, people were involved and implicated in the ideological apparatus. Timothy Murray remarks that

> Legitimation is dependent on the allegorical re-positioning or re-generation of objects and Subjects through their narration. This happens through a process of allegorical transference, whether from an author's material shift of authority from stage to page, from a patron's self-aggrandizement through the agency of the poet, or from a spectator's re-presentation of the spectacle. To accrue the force of legitimation, these refigurations depend as well on their reading on narrative re-presentation, their being acknowledged as allegories of genius. [88]

Royalists probably disseminated social and political comments in their plays and helped to legitimize the power, hiding behind the curtain, behind covert and disguised strategies the values of the dominant System.

The theatre established trends imposing what was allowed to show and what was not. The real world was, thus, re-ordered, re-constructed as a theatrical scene. Because of the power of the speech act, according to which we can accomplish some action through

[86] Margaret Ferguson, "The Authorial Cyphers of Aphra Behn," in Steven N. Zwicker (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650 – 1740,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 238.
[87] S. Trussler, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of British Theatre, op. cit.,* p. 118.
[88] T. Murray, *Theatrical Legitimation, op. cit.*, p. 15.

language the king created Reality, by putting on stage his ideals and producing a series of performative acts. The king was the one appointed to speak the Truth, because of his hegemony. Even if speaking of a distorted or disguised truth, that truth became real. Grown up in the Libertine subculture, the king played on both his positions, the hegemonic one and the eccentric one, linked to youth subculture

> A hegemonic order prescribes, not the specific content of ideas, but the limits within which ideas and conflicts move and are resolved. Hegemony always rests on force and coercion, but "the normal exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent… without force predominating excessively over consent" (Gramsci 1971:80). Hegemony thus provides the base line and the base structures of legitimation for ruling class power.[89]

Gramsci used the term "hegemony" to refer to the moment when a ruling class is able, not only to coerce a subordinate class to conform to its interests, but to extend a "hegemony" or "total social authority" over subordinate classes. This involves the exercise of a special kind of power – the power to frame alternatives and contain opportunities, to win and shape consent, so that the granting of legitimacy to the dominant classes appears not only spontaneous but natural and normal.[90]

This agrees with Foucault's idea:

> Mais il ne faut pas oublier qu'il a existé à la même époque une technique pour constituer effectivement les individus comme éléments corrélatifs

[89]Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (ed.), *Resistance through Rituals. Youth subcultures in post-war Britain,* London: Routledge, 1996, p. 39.
[90] *Ibid.,* p. 38.

> d'un pouvoir et d'un savoir. L'individu, c'est sans doute l'atome fictive d'une représentation "idéologique" de la société; mais il est aussi une réalité fabriquée par cette technologie spécifique de pouvoir qu'on appelle la "discipline". […] En fait le pouvoir produit; il produit du réel; il produit des domaines d'objets et des rituels de vérité. L'individu et la connaissance qu'on peut en prendre relevant de cette production.[91]

The political representation shapes reality. It produces subjects along a differential axis of domination.

[91] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir. Naissance de la Prison.* Paris: nrf, Éditions Gallimard, 1975, pp. 195-196. But it should not forget that there existed at the same period a technique for constituting individuals as correlative elements of power and knowledge. The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom, of an "ideological" representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called "discipline" […]. In fact, power produces it produces reality it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.

Chapter II
The Woman in the Shadow

We are born male or female,
but not masculine or feminine.
Femininity is an artifice, an achievement,
a mode of enacting and reenacting
received gender norms
Which surface as so many styles of the flesh.[1]

The role of woman within the patriarchal society was summed up by John Milton in *Paradise Lost* as follows: "Hee for God only, Shee for God in him."[2] This patriarchal authority, which dominated the Puritan society, was the result of a complex development of the gender question through the centuries:

> Both gender hierarchy, with the man at the top, and the husband's patriarchal role as governor of his family and household — wife, children, wards, and servants — were assumed to have been instituted by God and nature. So ordered, the family was seen as the secure foundation of society and the patriarch's role as analogous to that of God in the universe and the king in the state.[3]

Women could only nurse and educate children or, administer medicines to their family. Nevertheless, it is in the Puritan age that the first instances of female agency were enacted inside the institution of the family where mutuality, spiritual compatibility and

[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 1979, New York: Vintage Book, p. 200 qt. in Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination. Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression,* New York and London: 1990, Routledge, p. 65.
[2] John Milton, *English Minor Poems: Paradise Lost, Samson Agonistes, Aeropagitica,* Chicago, London, Toronto, Geneva: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.: 1952, Book IV, ll. 299.
[3] http://www.norton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic_1/welcome.htm (12/09/2013)

substantial equality were established between the partners, showing a good example of democracy in it.[4]

A feeble hint of female equality, experienced in Puritan homes, increased during the Commonwealth and, although officially upper-class women had no political power in this period, they were beginning to make their voice heard in Parliament by presenting petitions regarding their lands and estates, and reclaiming their family rights.[5] As demonstrated by some women's activities, female autonomy expanded in social life. Women started contesting their exclusion from the public sphere, they started being engaged in political agitation, and eventually, some of them undertook dangerous partisan activities.[6]

The Interregnum marked a division between two eras. Nevertheless the transformation of woman's notion was a path already started in the past and not intended to turn back. Political events had only hastened the situation and had helped in some way. She was now politically involved and socially prompted to solve crucial questions for her family within the female domain. She contributed to modifying and outlining the boundaries of her representation which had been until then malleable and tractable in the social construction of her identity. The English Civil War and Interregnum modified women's fixed social roles. Both royalist and revolutionary women were ready to change their status and conditions. The turmoil enabled women to

[4] Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women. Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama,* Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981, p. 54.
[5] http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic_1/petition.htm . (12/12/2013).
[6] *Ibidem.*

be involved in new situations, providing them with new responsibilities and visibility,[7] as Kate Aughterson notes:

> During the Civil War some women gained greater freedom than hitherto: examples included learning to run businesses or estates in their husbands' absence at war; joining religious sects which practised equality between men and women (such as the Quakers); and acting as religious prophets. A more mobile population also meant more women moved away from their villages, and the control of family, to the greater freedom of London.[8]

During the Restoration, Charles II managed to reinforce the patriarchal authority, which was diminished by Charles I's assassination. It was probably during the Restoration that gender identity, sexuality, and women's oppression became an overwhelming concern.[9] These issues were central on the stage and in people's lives. To recast the patriarchal society and to downsize women's role became a high priority under Charles II's reign.

Woman's role and her position in society were redesigned again, and the relationship between men and women acquired a modified form: the father and/or the husband were the woman's and children's only master. Paternity was conceived as an extension of the law of property.[10] According to Simon Shepherd

> The woman was frequently excluded from interests and source of knowledge outside the family, and this eroded her traditional function within it. Lack of learning made her less suitable to educate children; men

[7] http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic_1/petition.htm (12/09/2013).
[8] Kate Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies,* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003, p. 234.
[9] Katherine M. Quinsey (ed.), *Broken Boundaries, Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama,* Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996, p. 1.
[10] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800,* London: Weidenfeld &Nicolson, 1979, p. 179.

> supplanted her in branches of the medical profession. The wife's role became that of emotional support, the heart for male head.[11]

In order to understand Restoration and Aphra Behn's plays, it is fundamental to inspect the phallocentric context upon which and through which all pivotal concepts were built up and supported.

The so-called masculine and feminine universal concepts are erected on imposed ideas and ideals of representation, and the social construction of female subordination inside and outside the stage is one of its outcomes. Questions about the place of women in social and familial structures, about male/female relations and, about the nature of women and men themselves arouse, creating a more unstable world.[12]

What emerged is that "the sets of effects," as examined by Foucault, were applied to produce the construction of gender, working on the body and acting through it, modelling behaviours, fixing social relations.[13] Femininity became *an artifice, an achievement, a mode of enacting and re-enacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh*.[14] Through this mechanism *we are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine.*[15] Woman's representation was constructed but most of all her body became the site where questions about gender role and identity could be enacted.

Two tendencies outlined women's role in the Restoration society. At the two opposite poles, the one connected with classical and Christian interpretations and the

[11] S. Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women, op. cit.,* p. 44.
[12] K. M. Quinsey (ed.), *Broken Boundaries, Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama, op. cit.,* p. 2.
[13] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction.* London: MacMillan, 1987, p. 3.
[14] S. Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination, op. cit.*, p. 65.
[15] *Ibidem*.

other linked to the libertine philosophy, these two views attained the same conclusion: woman is an object in men's hands. This misogynistic interpretation of woman belongs primarily to the classical tradition and then it was adopted by the Judeo-Christian tradition which (has) stressed woman's role as a passive being. She was designated to be placed in the backyard of her own life.[16]

On the one hand, to augment their power, men supported their arguments about the subjection of the female body with classical readings, especially Aristotle and Hesiod, and the consequent affirmation of male superiority and dominance with the oldest book: the Bible. They reiterated and shaped woman's image on the old adage, stressing female subjection and alienation, and attributing to her the worst guilt ever known: to have tempted man and, consequently, led him to death.[17]

Actually, this idea was inherited by the Christian tradition but it was a Greek heritage in Western society. Eve and Pandora shared the same fate. Female history and woman's consideration in Western society are exemplified by Hesiod's classical tale. As the Greek writer narrates, the woman is the one who was created after man by divine will. Her arrival on earth provoked the rise of evil among men. In Hesiod's myth, the female birth was introduced as a kind of punishment Zeus reserved to Prometheus and humankind. Zeus sent his "gift",[18] Pandora, a curse to mortals.[19] In *Theogony*, woman is the initiator of the

[16] Brenda Josephine Liddy, *Women's War Drama in England in the Seventeenth Century,* Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008, p. 53.
[17] Jean M. Higgins, "The Myth of Eve: The Temptress," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 44, 1976, pp. 639-647.
[18] Hesiod, *Theogony,* ll. 570-616 in *The Poems of Hesiod* (transl. R.M. Frazer), Bloomington and London: University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1983, pp. 65-67.
[19] The concept of the gift has been analyzed in modern philosophy by the feminist Hélène Cixous who explains her vision of the opposition of the one and the other. She recognizes the Real of the gift, the

> race of women, the feminine sex; from her come the baneful race and types of women. Women, a great plague, make their abodes with mortal men, being ill-suited to Poverty's curse but suited to Plenty.[20]

She is the beautiful evil to whom man cannot resist. The same picture is exposed in the *Bible*. Especially in the *Old Testament*, we can find women who tempt their husbands, or lovers who do evil, they are described as seducers, corrupters, women with no scruples.[21] The woman described by Hesiod shares many analogies with the biblical figure of Eve, mother of all Christians and origin of all evils. In Hesiod's description, woman is

> as an evil for men and conspirers in troublesome works. And in exchange for a good he gave a balancing evil.[22]

Christian narrations absorbed the classical tradition. The tale becomes fundamental to the theoretical and symbolical fixation of the feminine role in religious and secular western society.

During the Puritan age first and the Commonwealth afterwards, the reading of the holy texts and the exaggerated respect of them influenced by Greek tradition caused a harsher misogyny. The sermons gendered and exaggerated the biblical images of women starting from the *Genesis*:

> And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

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woman's realm, as opposed to the Realm of the Proper, where men dominate. She explains that in the Realm of the Proper, the gift is perceived as establishing an inequality – a difference – that is threatening in that it seems to open up an imbalance of power. Thus the act of giving becomes a subtle means of aggression, of exposing the other to the threat of ones's superiority.

[20] Hesiod, *Theogony,* ll. 590-593 in R.M. Frazer (transl.), *The Poems of Hesiod, op. cit.,* p. 66.

[21] Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremoer Longman III (eds), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery,* Downers Grove, Illinois, Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, Woman, Images of, 1998, pp. 958-959.

[22] Hesiod, *Theogony,* ll.601-602, in R.M. Frazer (transl.), *The Poems of Hesiod, op. cit.*, p. 66.

> [5] For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.
>
> [6] And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.[23]

This idea of guilty woman was assumed as a kind of dogma.[24] As a consequence of it, women were excluded from the social organization of the world and of their world.

Katharine Rogers, in her accurate analysis of women's subjection through the centuries, argues that woman was created reluctantly just to satisfy man's needs, because other creatures could not,[25] as it is written:

> And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. […]
>
> [20] […]but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.
>
> [21] And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;
>
> [22] And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.
>
> [23] And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.[26]

Most astonishing in the realm of sexuality and reproduction, woman is a piece of property to be passed, sold or given away from one man to another. This is even worse

[23] *Genesis,* 3: 4-6, *King James Bible "Authorized Version," Cambridge Edition, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/* (27/09/2013).
[24] *Timothy,* 2:12-14.
[25] Katharine Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature,* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966, p. 4.
[26] *Genesis*, 2: 18-23.

because woman is not created in God's divine image, but in man's imperfect one. Thus, woman is placed in a submissive position, she obeys man's desires, and she helps him in his tasks. There is no equal position, Eve exists only in relation to someone else, Adam, and thus she is his reflection. Eve is generated through Adam's body.

Other interpretations of this excerpt have remarked that woman was born from man and to him she is subjected. Man generates life and woman has not any generative power. Here conception is a masculine deed. Woman is deprived of her principal role. According to Rogers's interpretation, woman, the "help meet", is an accessory to man, so she lacks all rights.[27] This agrees with Irigaray's thought, who argues that *the law that orders our society is the exclusive valorization of men's needs/desires, of exchange among men.*[28]

This can be traced back to Aristotle's reception by Western society which perceived a sense of inequality between man and woman and the superiority of the former over the latter also in reproduction. According to the philosopher, the male represents the universal principle. In *On the Generation of Animals*, Aristotle explains this difference through his teleological approach, finding a natural and cosmological justification. He analyses the purpose of things, or the cause for their existence. He identifies four different types: final cause, formal cause, material cause, and efficient cause. The final cause is what a thing exists for, or its ultimate purpose. The formal cause is the definition of a thing's essence or existence, and Aristotle states that, in generation, the formal cause and the final cause are similar to each other and can be

[27] K. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate, op. cit.*, p. 4.
[28] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (transl. Catherine Porter), Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 171.

thought of as the goal of creating a new individual of the species. The material cause is the stuff a thing is made of, which in Aristotle's theory is the female menstrual blood. The efficient cause is the "mover" or what causes the thing's existence, and for reproduction Aristotle designates the male semen as the efficient cause. Thus, while the mother's body contains all the material necessary for creating her offspring, she requires the father's semen to start and guide the process.[29]

The philosopher argues that the male possesses the active faculty to generate the other while the female is the passive container to be filled. He adds:

> Male and female differ by definition in having different capabilities, and by appearance in certain parts. They differ by definition in that the male is that which can generate into another […], while the female is that which generates into itself and out of which the generated offspring is produced while present within the generator.[30]

Not only does the philosopher affirm masculine superiority in the field of reproduction, but as an extension he recognizes his social primacy: man is active by nature, he was created to rule over women. Female inferiority is biologically supported: she is the passive matter. The world is constructed as a binary system in which the male is the active, spontaneous, genital agent, easily aroused by 'objects' and fantasy, while the female is the passive being, it is thought in relation to male sexuality as basically expressive and responsive to the male.[31] This polarity male/female remains central to inspect the Western way of thinking.

[29] Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium,* I chap 8.
[30] Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium I*, Chap. 2, 716 a, ll.18-23.
[31] *Ibidem.*

The Aristotelian reception in the Judeo-Christian context is re-formulated in Saint Paul's teachings:

> Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.
>
> [12] But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.
>
> [13] For Adam was first formed, then Eve.
>
> [14] And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.[32]

Unmarried virgins and wives were to maintain silence in the public sphere and give unstinting obedience to father and husband, though widows had some scope for making their own decisions and managing their affairs. Children and servants were bound to the strictest obedience.[33]

Women, Eve's descendants, are the only responsible for the sin of lust, *porneia*, as Tertullian argues in the E*xordium of De Cultu Feminarum.* Women have inherited Eve's sin and shame. Her guilt caused human ruin and Christ's death. Tertullian adduces two fundamental reasons for woman's subordination, that is, Eve has exclusive responsibility for the fall "*tu es diaboli ianua, tu es arboris illius resignatrix, tu es diuinae legis prima desertrix, tu esquae eum suasisti, quem diabolus aggredi non ualit, tu imaginem Dei, hominem, tam facile elisisti*."[34] According to the Latin writer, the second reason lies in the prerogative of God's image in man. "*Tu imaginem Dei, hominem, tam facile elisisti…*"[35]

[32] 1 *Timothy,* 2: 11-14, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/ (14/09/2013).
[33] http://www.norton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic_1/welcome.htm (14/09/2013).
[34] Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum,* I,1-2.
[35] *Ibidem.*

Man was created first and without any mediations, while Eve was a secondary creature, derived from man, her mark is thus lack: Eve was not created after God's image, but she derives from Adam. Woman is only a man's reflection.[36] Negativity and female secondariness have remained paradigmatic in western consciousness and they are essential to the diffidence towards the female on which the symbolic Christian model is organized. Was had to be subdued, dominated, plowed or fertilized by means of male physical power, technology or sexual potency.[37]

Early theology reproduced and reiterated sexist assumptions. Subjection, transgression and alienation have been the marks which are constitutive of woman. Sexism became a normative model in human relations, strongly reinforced in all religious environments.

Woman "enact[s] the specular representation of her self as a lesser male."[38] This is connected with Jacques Lacan's idea of the mirror stage. He argued that

> Le stade du *miroir* est une drame dont la poussée interne se prècipite de l'insuffisance à l'anticipation – et qui pour le sujet, prise a leurre de l'identification spatiale, machine les fantasmes qui se succèdent d'une image morcelée du corps à une forme qui nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, - et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante, qui va marquer de sa structure rigide tout son développement mental. [39]

[36] *Corinthi* 1, 11 8-9.
[37] Eileen O' Neill, "(Re)presentations of Eros: Exploring Female Sexual Agency" in Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo (eds) *Gender/Body/Knowledge, op. cit.,* p. 32.
[38] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics, A Feminist Literary Theory,* London: Routledge, 1985, p. 135.
[39] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits,* Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 97, trans. Bruce Fink, *Écrits* New York and London: Norton & Company, 2005, p. 78. The mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation – and for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial

The ordinary social construction reduces women to alienation or dependence. She represents the pivot around and on which man erects his specular constructs but, using Moi's words, she is "the point on which male erections subside as well."[40]

On the other hand, an extreme reaction to this strict religious view of the world and relationships, identified with the libertine philosophy, dominated the English Restoration.[41] Libertinism gave voice to the young English aristocracy who spent its exile abroad and was influenced by French ideals and manners. It embodied an alternative culture in which the young Cavaliers were cynical and Epicurean. They remodelled social priorities, rejecting all previous ideals, which essentially exalted the metaphysical, private, and spiritual dimensions, demolishing and refusing the sanctity of marriage, family and the body.[42] Immorality, amorality, and frivolity represented the values of this new reaction.[43] As Chernaik has underlined:

> Libertinism is a young man's philosophy, a rebellion of the sons against the fathers. The conventional, middle –aged virtues – discretion, prudence, responsibility, the patient accumulation of wisdom or the worldly goods – are rejected out of hand as suitable only to those whose senses have been dulled by age or natural incapacity.[44]

Nevertheless, Kate Aughterson remarks that the Restoration was influenced by the idea that

identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I call an "orthopedic" form of its totality – and to finally donned armour of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structures.

[40] Toril Moi, *What is a Woman?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 136.

[41] David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature,* London: Secker & Warburg, 1960, Vol. III, p. 537.

[42] Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 25.

[43] George Macaulay Trevelyan, *Illustrated English Social History,* Vol. II, London: Pelican Books, 1964, p. 221.

[44] W. Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature, op. cit.,* p. 25.

> the Civil War brought about a crisis of a particular model of masculinity: the courtly Cavalier, whose sexual prowess matched the unassailed political power, had literally been defeated. Despite the revival of the Cavalier rake in Charles II himself, his rakishness was […] equally followed and reviled.[45]

Hence, they discredited femininity and built their philosophy on the exaltation of the self and male desire. The English Civil War had destroyed their securities, so they tried to re-build their world in a different philosophical climate. Their Hedonistic credo was woman, wine and song; their only goal was the gratification of their own senses.[46] Furthermore, inspired by Hobbes's philosophy, they believed that all humans were mere matter and passion, and that both men and women were just mechanical bodies.[47]

The Libertine philosophy essentially stressed Hobbes's idea that humans consist solely of physical appetite (for food, sex, sleep), "the motivating forces of man in society,"[48] their natural condition was to seek satisfaction in a purely selfish manner, using brute power to achieve it.[49] Everything, woman included, was consumed in order to satisfy their needs. According to their philosophy, woman is an object, a passive body, desiring the male in order to be complete.

Male libertine attitudes refused to admit the challenge of female sexuality; they confused the physical and the spiritual, and make an object of the female body.[50] Susan Staves has pointed out that

[45] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn, The Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 234.
[46] John Harold Wilson, *The Court Wits of Restoration, An Introduction,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948, p. 18.
[47] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn, The Comedies, op. cit*, p. 235.
[48] W. Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature, op. cit*., p. 38.
[49] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn, The Comedies, op. cit.*, p. 235.
[50] S. Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women, op. cit.,* p. 82.

> Philosophically, libertinism made the senses a primary source of knowledge and stressed the reality of material world over what it saw as the illusionary character of ideals. Royalist English libertinism […] celebrated the authority of nature over that of what debunked as religious superstition and argued for the value of physical pleasure in present time.[51]

According to the libertine philosophy, desire is the only driving force, a ceaseless pursuit of what cannot be fully achieved. Love is just another name which refers to sexual desire and it constantly requires to be satisfied.

Libertines evoke the power of fathers, sons, male partners, chiefs, masters. Male supremacy amounts to female oppression. The reiteration of the male position in Society created the idea of male perfection and dynamism. This implies that any imperfection that is caused in the world must be caused by woman because one cannot acquire an imperfection from perfection, which was perceived as male.

These patriarchal developments were deliberately encouraged by the social system and the monarchy. This contributed to promote and sustain a strongly organized system, where women remained excluded, or worse, where aristocratic and middle class families managed women's bodies as a mere transaction object.

Majorat and patriarchy tended to accrue power in men's hands, especially in the oldest ones, so that in the families, in towns, in the county and even at court, a perpetual

[51] Susan Staves, "Behn, Women, and Society," in Derek Hughes, Janet Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 20.

fight was enacted to gain people's approval and to control the levers of power. [52] This condition was persevered in the following centuries as depicted by Irigaray:

> All the system of exchange that organizes patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued, and rewarded in this societies are men's business. The production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he "pays" the father or the brother, not the mother…), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another.[53]

Ideology has always been an extremely important site of the construction of gender. It is the division of men and women caused by the social requirements of heterosexuality which institutionalizes male sexual dominance and female sexual submission.[54] Patriarchy was the way to organize society. It provides conceptual models for organizing power relations in spheres that have nothing to do with the family, for example, politics and business.

This produced and still produce an exasperating female oppression and alienation. Woman has to be the Object, not a speaking subject.

Property and power were pre-eminent and interrelated in the Restoration, they were the fundamental parameters to structure representations. Irigaray says something quite effective about woman's alienation. She asserts that she is the absent object and her sex is the impossibility of a grammatically denoted substance, and she adds:

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[52] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800,* New York: Harper & Row, 1977, p. 154.
[53] L. Irigaray, *This Sex which is Not One, op. cit.,* p. 171.
[54] Thomas Laqueur, *Maxing Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud,* Cambridge: Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1990, pp. 12-13.

> Men make commerce *of* them, but they do not enter in exchange *with* them. […] the exchange of women as goods accompanies and stimulates exchange of other wealth among groups of men. The economy - in both the narrow and the broad sense – that is in place in our societies thus requires that women lend themselves in consumption, and to exchange in which they do not participate, and that men be exempt from being used and circulated like commodities.[55]

The body is itself a construction, as are the myriad "bodies" that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender.[56]

Man who was created in God's image represents perfection and dynamism in this society, establishing what Hélène Cixous calls "patriarchal binary thought,"[57] a cultural mechanism of gender construction. This mechanism conceives society within a constant binary opposition, such as Activity/Passivity; Sun/Moon; Culture/Nature; Father/Mother; Day/Night; Head/Emotions; Intelligibility/Sensitive; Logos/Pathos.[58] In this scheme, the feminine pole is always regarded as the negative one, a "powerless instance."[59] Woman became the unrepresentable and the unspeakable. As Judith Butler emphasizes,

> Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable.* […] Women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity. Within a language

[55] L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Nnot One, op. cit.,* p. 172.
[56] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York and London: Routledge Classics, 2010, p. 12.
[57] T. Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics, op. cit.,* p. 104.
[58] Hélène Cixous, Annett Kuhn, "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs*, Vol.7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), p. 44.
[59] T. Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics, op. cit.,* p. 116.

> that rests on univocal signification, the female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and undesignatable. [60]

Woman is made invisible even though, masculinity, according to Derrida, is strengthened by sapping the other's energy, annihilating or simply reducing the other, woman, to substance. Masculinity can be achieved only in this direct opposition to femininity. It is through this endless process of referring to the other, the absent signifier, that meaning is produced.[61]

This phallogocentric ideology can be explained even in semiotic terms. The problem of woman and her representation raise the question of the correspondence between signifier and signified which has contributed to creating a system of signs and a domain of signification which has no referent in the real world. Woman becomes the object described by Peirce

> A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representation.[62]

Thus, the idea of representation is a form of control over women. Society produces, provides, and articulates a role, a position and even consistency to the woman that she

[60] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble, op. cit.,* p. 13.
[61] T. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics, op. cit.,* p. 106.
[62] Charles Sanders Peirce, "A Syllabus of Certain Topics of Logic," in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 2 (1893-1913),* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 272-3.

has to maintain. Representation is always a process of signification, of semiosis, of meaning making, but, like the sign, representations (which in fact are signs) can be taken as referring to something else, something 'real', outside signification, something which was not made but is. This is how a process of construction, of making meaning, comes to be interpreted as reference, referring to something that already exists, It is how representations come to be taken for realities.[63]

> […]l'*image,* d'abord diffuse et brisée, est régressivement assimilée au réel, pour être progressivement désassimilée du réel, c'est-à-dire restaurée dans sa réalité propre. Action qui témoigne l'efficience de cette réalité.[64]

The woman is not conceived as a thinking and independent agent, she is an object excluded from the construction of subjectivity, conceived as a male privilege. She only *serve[s] as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men*.[65] She becomes the place, the sign of their relations. Her natural body disappears into its representative functions. Her body is taken and subjected to obligations, prohibitions and censures.[66] The woman becomes an object lacking skills and peculiarities. Her body is already colonized by the hegemony of male desire[67] and it is completely in line with patriarchal thought as Dallery claims:

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[63] Terry Threadgold, Anne Cranny-Francis (eds), *Feminine, Masculine and Representation,* Sydney, London, Boston, Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1990, p. 2.

[64] J. Lacan, *Écrits, op. cit.,* p. 85. […] the *image,* which is at first diffuse and broken, is progressively assimilated with reality, in order to be progressively dissimilated from reality, that is, restored to its proper reality. This action attests to the efficacy of this reality.

[65] L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One, op. cit.,* 172.

[66] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir. Naissance de la Prison.* Paris: nrf Éditions Gallimard, 1976, p. 149.

[67] Arleen B. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (the Body): *Écriture féminine*," in A. M. Jagger and S.R. Bordo (eds), *Gender/Body/Knowledge, op. cit.,* p. 55.

> The preconditions for the production of western knowledge, its standard of objectivity, rationality, and universality, require the exclusion of the feminine, the bodily, the unconscious. Indeed, the logical ordering of reality into hierarchies, dualisms, and binary systems presupposes a prior gender dichotomy of man/woman. Not only has women's voices or experience been excluded from its subject matter of western knowledge, but even when the discourse is "about" women, or women are the speaking subjects, (it) they still speak according to phallocratic codes. [68]

The patriarchal system, which structures society, does not give any chance to women. Woman is body only, or simply an object. Eve's story in the Bible justifies her subjection and it provides a proof of her natural depravity and inability to control her impulses,[69] a reason to control her, or at least, that is man's alibi to his construction of Woman.

> While a condemnation of sex does not necessarily entail misogyny, there is an obvious connection between them: abhorrence of sex leads to abhorrence of the sexual object, while guilt feelings about desire are conveniently projected as female lust and seductiveness.[70]

Carolean society persisted in conceiving women only as wives or mistresses: the two available options remained Mary the Perfect mother and Eve the temptress. In both cases the female saint and the dark lady are excluded from the active social life. In the

[68] *Ibid.,* p. 53.
[69] K. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate, op. cit.,* p. 4.
[70] *Ibid.,* p.8.

libertine masculinist ideology, "A woman was a 'cunt' and any man who was foolish enough to respect her for any qualities was missing the point."[71]

Woman's body becomes (or better, is constructed as) a docile body, *objet et cible de pouvoir […] qu'on manipule, qu'on façonne, qu'on dresse, qui obéit, qui répond, qui devient habile (ou dont les forces se multiplient).*[72] She challenges power that is a role game in which, e*st docile un corps qui peut être soumis, qui peut être utilisé, qui peut être transformé et perfectionné*.[73] It is in this game of relations that the English word Woman finds its place. It comes from wo-man, that is wife-man,[74] as if she would be a man's attribute. She has no story, no identity, she inhabits a sub-plot, her male relatives' story, she is just an appendix or simply a "docile body". Women's stories are not written because history belongs to men and, history books only deal with masters and generals.[75]

Vern L. Bullogh, in his *Subordinate Sex,* underlines that in this male-oriented history, the only pages interested in female figures are the scandalous and passionate ones. The ones which reiterate Eve's inheritance. The woman and her body are the diabolic place, the worst incarnation of evil.

The monastic medieval culture, obsessed by carnal sins transformed the original sin, which was essentially a sin of intellectual pride into sexual temptation, providing a

[71] Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra. A Social Biography of Aphra Behn,* New York: The Dial Press, 1980, p. 170.
[72] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir, op. cit.,* p. 138. […] the body [is] object and target of power. [It] is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful (and increases its forces).
[73] *Ibidem.* A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.
[74] Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language,* Amsterdam, London, New York: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1971, woman, n. –ME. *Wimman, wumman, woman,* fr. OE. *Wīfman, wimman,* lit. 'woman-man, wife-man' compounded of *wīf,* 'woman, wife', and *man,* 'human being, man'. (In OE. Man was used for both sexes);cp. Du. *Vrouwmens, 'wife', lit 'woman-man).*
[75] Vern L. Bullogh, *The Subordinate Sex, A History of Attitudes toward Women*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973, p. 3.

theological support to this misogynistic tradition,[76] and even though the theological context was completely different,

> Most of the leaders of mainstream Protestant thought from Martin Luther to John Calvin regarded the physical superiority of the male as a sign from God of man's superiority in the household. They looked upon the husband-father as the ultimate authority within the home, the breadwinner, the pastor and priest to the family. It was only by submission to her husband that a woman could atone for Eve's transgression.[77]

In this world of representations, western society imagines a dichotomic world and establishes the superiority of one term over the other: mind over body, culture over nature, self over other, reason over passions. Common sense has classified the latter features of this binary attaching women to materiality as negative (-).[78] Moreover, pleasure, especially in its erotic sense (conceived as passion), is symbolized by the woman's body. In distinguishing two poles, man, or "the intellectual, the cleric", epitomizes the life of mind which, in Lakoff and Johnson, are representative of the good, the high and the spiritual,[79] opposite to woman, who epitomizes the life of the body.

English society was based on the reiteration of the endless and eternal dichotomy masculine/feminine and established both concepts as the values upon which everything else is constructed.

[76] *Ibid.,* p.119.
[77] E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Church,* Allen and Unwin, 1931, vol. 1, p. 546.
[78] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, M*etaphors We Live By,* Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2003, p. 15-17.
[79] *Ibidem.*

> The dominant ideology of Jacobean [and Carolean] England is profoundly hierarchical. It affirms the legitimacy of a patriarchal society in which power emanates from God the Father down through king and lord, to every man whose domain is woman, beast and nature. Such a hierarchy involves a highly conceptualised system of subordinations supported by the providential hand of God himself. Crucially, within this universe, hierarchal *man* held a central, if precarious place.[80]

This opposition contributed to solidify gender characteristics and categorizations, determining the body as proper to woman as a being subordinated to man.

Teresa De Lauretis observes that the idea of gender is far from being connected with a single individual, it represents a relation, and a social relation. It depends on a symbolic system or a system of meanings that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies.[81]

The regimes of power controls body and its space. Through the theatre, Charles tried to control his people's "docile bodies." The power of patriarchy was made possible because its docile bodies recognized and accepted the authority as legitimate. Foucault has inspected this:

> Le pouvoir vient d'en bas, c'est-à- dire qu'il n'y a pas, au principe des relations de pouvoir, et comme matrice générale, une opposition binaire et globale entre les dominateurs et les dominés, cette dualité se répercutant de haut en bas, et sur des groups de plus en plus restraints jusque dans les profondeurs du corps social. […] Ceux-ci forment

[80] *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*, p. 9.
[81] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, London, Macmillan, 1987, p. 5.

> alors une ligne de force générale qui traverse les affrontements locaux, et les relie; bien sûr, en retour, ils précèdent sur eux à la redistributions, à des alignements, à des homogénéisations, à des aménagements de série, à des mises en convergence. Les grandes dominations sont les effets hégémoniques que soutient continûment l'intensité de tous ces affrontements.[82]

When we are born, society provides us with a social role, a fixed position which cannot be modified, but with pain and problems. Who is able to get out this system becomes an outsider, who tries in vain to conquer her/his own subjectivity, her/his own agency. Beauvoir affirms that this "patriarchal ideology [which] presents woman as immanence, man as transcendence"[83] is a social construction which can and must be changed. In other words, gender is the field in which the fight for power takes place. The fight for power is a hidden process. The representation of woman as a subservient object is a form of control over her body, which is built on a network of practices, institutions, and technologies that produce a system of domination, as Foucault explained:

> Se forme alors une politique des coercitions qui sont un travail sur le corps, une manipulation calculée de ses éléments, de ses gestes, de ses comportements. […]Une "anatomie politique", qui est aussi bien une "mécanique du pouvoir" […] elle définit comment on peut avoir prise sur le corps des autres, non pas simplement pour qu'ils fassent ce

[82] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité, Vol 1, La volonté de Savoir,* nrf Édition Gallimard, 1976, p. 124. Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. […] These then form a general line of force that traverses the local oppositions and links them together; to be sure, they also bring about redistributions, realignments, homogenizations, serial arrangements, and convergences of the force relations. Major dominations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations.

[83] T. Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics, op. cit.,* p. 92.

> qu'on désire, mais pour qu'ils opèrent comme on veut, avec les techniques, selon la rapidité et l'efficacité qu'on détermine. La discipline fabrique ainsi des corps soumis et exercés, des corps "dociles". […][84]

This mechanism shapes and proliferates rather than repress. Accepting the primacy of gender hierarchy and promoting gender normativity, patriarchal power confirms and increases the sexual subordination of women. This produces a single effect: the importance of appearing in accordance to gender norms which is perceived, especially by subordinated people, as the way the world is. Woman acts following those schemes established by patriarchal society so that

> Every time a woman goes for a walk, her mind and her body are invaded by a social definition of her femininity that threatens to disconnect her from her own experience.[85]

Theatre becomes a disciplinary institution, everybody was placed in the "right place" and was directed by a dominion/submission rule. This is the experience of domination Aphra Behn lived. She lived in a society in which

> Patriarchy attacks desire, the unconscious longing that animates all human action, by reducing it to sex and then defining sex in the politicized terms of gender. Paradoxically, however, sexuality thus organized by gender, becomes reciprocally desire's sculpture, while

[84] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir,* pp.139-140. What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior. […]. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies.

[85] Muriel Diemen, "Power, Sexuality and Intimacy", in A. M. Jaggar and S.R. Bordo (eds), *Gender/Body/Knowledge, op. cit.,* p. 37.

> gender simultaneously organizes part of desire into the self. Not only sexuality, but all manifestations of desire are thereby informed by gender; thus, the roots of desire, itself the source of personal experience, are steeped in hierarchy.[86]

Woman is, thus, described as the absent, the alienated but in any case, Derrida argues men need to recognize women's subjectivity in order to exist. This is crucial in the understanding of Aphra Behn's misogynistic world. In this connection, Simone de Bouvoir perceived woman's absence as the only way man has to differentiate his male identity. The absence, the negation, the annihilation of the Other becomes the substantial foundation for the affirmation of the self. Virginia Woolf ironically summed up this assumption as follows

> The looking-glass visions of supreme importance because it charges the vitality; it stimulates the nervous system. Take it away and man may die, like the drug fiend deprived of his cocaine. [87]

The issue of gender representation is based on a constant reference to the other in an oppositional relationship as explained by Teresa de Lauretis

> the term *gender is a representation;* and not only a representation in the sense in which every word, every sign, refers to (represents) its referent, be that an object, a thing, or an animate being. The term *gender* is actually, the representation of a relation, that of belonging to a class, a group, a category. Gender is the representation of a relation, or, [...] gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities, which are previously constituted as a class, and that relation is one of belonging;

[86] *Ibid.,* p. 38.
[87] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* London: The Hogarth Press, 1959, p. 55.

> thus, gender assigns to one entity, say an individual, a position within a class, and therefore also a position vis-à-vis other preconstituted classes.[88]

Woman, the incessantly neglected reference, is affirmed thanks to the constant attempt to be suppressed. By denying her existence, Man affirms his presence. Man's aim is to annihilate woman's body and to reduce it to object in order to determine his superiority over her and her body. In her position in the phallocentric society, and especially during the Restoration, woman had no chance to speak, she was just an object.

> [...] we can resist, but we can never quite escape the phallocratic libidinal economy of discursive and representational practices within which our sexual identities, our subjectivities, have been and go on being constructed.

Just one chance is left: to use the phallogocentric language and turn the male world and its fixed categories upside down. Language becomes woman's revolution.

In this regard, Derrida asserted that the recognition of the self is strictly connected to that of the Other, but his approach shows that this dualism is imbalanced. The two terms are always hierarchically ranked. One pole (presence, good, truth, man) is privileged at the expense of the second (absence, evil, lie, woman). The essence does not lie in one of the two poles but between, in the large space, it is in between, in the "indicible opposites". Inside or outside? Before or after? The answer is neither the one nor the other but in the space between the one and the other. The answer is the bar that divides the opposition, the line-spacing, the indicible, the difference, which is the condition for the opposition of presence and absence.[89] *Différance* is also the hinge

[88] T. De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender, op. cit.,* p. 4.
[89] http://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/ (1/07/2014)

between speech and writing, and between inner meaning and outer representation. In this context, the body exists only in relation to others. Man cannot exist without his counterpart, the woman to which he is always in contrast and/or in relation. Woman represents his double, the only element to which he can compare himself. She is his negative or mirror-image. Because all signifiers viewed as present in Western thought will necessarily contain traces of other (absent) signifiers, the signifier can be neither wholly present nor wholly absent.

Aphra Behn worked inside this phallocratic ideology moving in that and slightly modifying people's minds without changing their world. She modified just few things in order to change everything. She recognized that *phallocratic codes become the only ones by which women describe and are described with.*[90] Her ability resides in transforming female roles in new ways in order to subvert the stable male dominant society in which her female characters moved. She finds her way to repossess her body which had been confiscated from her.

She enacted two strategies to achieve her goal: Revolution in language and transgression in manners. On the one hand, her female characters are admitted into the symbolic and adopt the phallocentric language, in so doing language becomes woman's weapon for her revolution from within. On the other hand, her female characters invert negative stereotypes attached to them: passivity and alienation.

[90] A. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (the) Body: *Écriture Féminine*," *op. cit.,* p. 14.

Virtue is but an infirmity in a woman,
a disease that renders even the handsome ungrateful;
Whilst the ill-favored, for want of solicitations and address,
only fancy themselves so.
I have lain with a woman of quality who
has all the while been railing at whores. [1]

MASCULINE DOMINATION IN BEHN'S WORKS

In the Restoration, comedies reflected the patriarchal discourse on femininity, and Aphra Behn did not exempt herself from depicting this misogynistic background common to all other male dramatists' plays. Exhibited even on the scene, what emerges is that

> The fundamental model of the human being remained unchanged: one, singular, solitary and historically masculine, that of the adult Western male, rational, competent. Diversity was therefore still conceived of and lived hierarchically, with the many always subordinate to the one. Others were nothing but copies of the idea of man, a potentially perfect idea which all the more or less imperfect copies had to try to equal.[2]

Nevertheless, drama was strategically and self-consciously used by women during these years as a means of re-negotiating their places within the microcosm of the family,[3] and in the society. Behn's works deal with the dynamics enacted by women to reach their

[1] Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, Act IV, Scene II, ll. 180-187.
[2] Luce Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two,* London: The Athlone Press, 2000, p. 122.
[3] Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination. Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression,* New York and London: Routledge, 1990, p. 65.

goal (freedom and autonomy), exposing relationships based on power. Her world inspects the established dominant position of men.

In this context, society organization establishes that men are intended to be dominant and women to be subordinate, therefore inequality perpetuates itself.[4] This ideology also contributed to exalt *'masculine' characteristics* [as] *prized, and 'feminine' characteristics* [as] *less valued* [so that] *the existing power distribution is sustained*.[5] Man is the master who acts on the female body through coercions, commands, obligations, as Don Pedro demonstrates in the opening scene of *The Rover*: "I have a Command from my Father here to tell you, you ought not to despise him, a man of so vast a Fortune."[6] Here, Don Pedro epitomizes patriarchal power, the power that, as Foucault argues, is constantly wielded upon *docile bodies*.[7] He dictates total obedience to his sisters. He represents a world where women have to remain silent about their desires and where the father and the brother decide about suitable husbands for their daughters and sisters.

The world in which Aphra Behn lives, and her heroines act, is a male-oriented and patriarchal one. A world where male characters always prevail and female characters are always perceived as powerless puppets in men's hands. In both *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Courtezans*, the two couples of sisters share the same destiny: Hellena and Marcella have to marry the men appointed by their relatives, Florinda and Cornelia will be secluded in a convent. The woman's body is clearly managed as an attribute or a property of men, as demonstrated by Pedro in his sister's attempt to rebel and change

[4] Peter R. Beckman and Francine D'Amico, *Women, Gender, and World Politics. Perspectives, Policies, and Prospects,* Westport, Connecticut, London: Bergin & Garvey, 1994, p. 7.
[5] *Ibidem.*
[6] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, scene I, ll. 67-69.
[7] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir, Naissance de la Prison,* Paris: nrf Éditions Gallimard, 1976, p. 138.

her male relatives' decisions. In Hellena's effort to dissuade her brother, Pedro remains unmovable and emotionless, and with a resolute attitude he asks her sister twice "have u done yet?"[8] in order to precede his final sentences about Florinda's future Pedro: For all your Character of Don *Vincentio*, she is as like to marry him as she was before."[9] And eventually about Hellena's prospects Pedro declares: "Do not fear the blessing of that choice. You shall be a nun.[10] In the relationship with the other sex, as shown, man exercises stolidly his power upon women.

This policy of coercions, Foucault says, manipulates elements, gestures, and behaviours.[11] This is a "political anatomy," or a "technology of gender," which defines how one may have a hold over others' bodies. It is the product of various social technologies, such as institutionalized discourses, social relations as well as practices of daily life.[12] This "technology of gender" produces subjected docile bodies, those who do not try to subvert the male dominant position but behave in obedience to the imposed standards. A clear example of it is in *The Rover*, act I, Scene II, when Hellena felt herself obliged to respect her relatives' will, demonstrating female pliability to the fixed norms, so that when Willmore wants to give her love she replies:

> Hellena: Why, I could be inclined that way, but for a foolish vow I am
> going to make to die a maid.[13]

Behn underlines how women usually accept and are subjected to the power of institutions which regulate the individual through discursive strategies.[14] In T*he Feign'd*

[8] A. Behn, *The Rover, op. cit.,* Act II, Scene I, ll. 117, 123.
[9] *Ibid*, l. 128.
[10] *Ibid.,* Act II, Scene I, ll. 148.
[11] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir, op. cit.,* p. 149.
[12] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, London: Macmillan, 1987, pp. 2-3.
[13] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act. I, Scene ii, ll.194-195.

Courtezans, Cornelia questions her social status and what she would lose in opposing men's decisions:

> Cornelia: Nay, then I am in earnest, -- hold, mistaken stranger – I am of noble Birth; and Shou'd I in one hapless loving Minute destroy the Honour of my house, ruin my Youth and Beauty, and all that virtuous Education my hoping parents gave me?[15]

Nevertheless, Behn insists on equality between the two sexes and she fights against a constructed common opinion according to which man was free to rove from an adventure to another only in the name of desire, as all male characters do in both plays. She opposes this power which is commonly accepted and does not find any opposition. Hellena is the modern heroine, She is the one who more than others manifests her dissent and projects Florinda's inexorable miserable future, realized with the accurate repetition of hatred actions:

> Hellena: And this man you must kiss, nay you must kiss none but him too—and nuzle through his beard to find his lips—and this you must submit to for threescore Years, and all for a Jointure.[16]

Women were only allowed to live their own private lives in the shadows of their domestic worlds. Behn fights and resists this world. She shows how that discourse is perpetuated and constructed to women's detriment. The writer is conscious that it is a world for and by men, and woman is conceived as the male's imperfect copy. But she

[14] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1. The Will to Knowledge* (3rd ed.) (trans. Robert Hurley), London: Penguin Books, 1998, p. 25.
[15] Aphra Behn, *The Feign'd Courtezans,* Act. IV, Scene II , ll. 118-121.
[16] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, Scene I, ll. 125-128.

tries to perform new strategies to project a new more autonomous and freer vision of woman in this world.

Nevertheless, this remains a relationship of superiority vs inferiority. Men act as the king does towards his people. In this regard, Irigaray argues:

> The body of a commodity thus becomes, for another such commodity, a mirror of its value. Contingent upon a bodily *supplement*, a supplement *opposed* to use value, a supplement representing the commodity's *super-natural* quality (an imprint that is purely social in nature), a supplement completely different from the body itself, and from its properties, a supplement that nevertheless exists only on condition that one commodity agrees to relate itself to another considered as equivalent: "for instance, one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him."[17]

While Pedro is obsessed by his role of surrogate father, interrogating the others, accusing her sister of falsity,[18] perfidy and deception[19] as well as debauchery,[20] Hellena neutralises his authority. She ridicules and discredits male decisions. She describes Don Vincetio as a dehumanized man, a monster, referring to him as follows: "The Giant stretches it self, yawns and sighs a Belch or two as loud as a Musket."[21] the image of the old monster moving slowly, inexorable as his age and condition is depicted in the following passage; he "throws himself into Bed, and expects you in his foul Sheets." Hellena objectifies Vincentio, rendering both man and woman equals in this

[17] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (transl. Catherine Porter), Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 179.
[18] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act V, Scene i, l. 459.
[19] *Ibid.,* Act V, Scene I, l. 501.
[20] *Ibid.,* Act V, Scene I, ll. 519-520.
[21] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, Scene i, ll. 118-123.

objectification. But according to patriarchal concept, woman's objectification is the fundamental act because the representation of the male subject needs it in order to exist and in order to be performed. Florinda is the victim of the system ready to be sacrificed. The sarcasm finds its end in the final question: "And are not these fine Blessings to a young Lady?" [22]

As a reply, Pedro discredits his sister, downsizing her position, reducing her to a simple label, "girl," (ll.97). He refuses to recognise his sister as equal so he uses a patronising tone and manner opposed to Hellena's self-confidence and natural equality that force the audience to reflect on the female condition.[23]

What emerges is that the relationship between man and woman is essentially based on the domination of one sex over the other. Women are constantly reduced to be nothing else but man's Other in phallocratic ideology.[24] Woman is the object of man's pleasure and Behn's heroines know this, so that Cornelia comments: "Good Lord, what a damnable wicked thing is a Virgin."[25] In Behn's epoch, not only did the dominant perspective create an aristocratic masculine identity through the repetition of libertine gestures, acts and attitudes, but it also tried to wreck the "other" identity. This agrees with Foucault's opinion:

> La disparité éclate dès qu'il s'agit de définir les techniques de cette correction individualisante. Là où se fait la différence, c'est dans la procédure d'accès à l'individu, la manière dont le pouvoir punitive se donne prise sur lui, les instruments qu'il met en œuvre pour assurer

[22] *Ibid.,* Act I, Scene i, ll.121-122.
[23] Kate Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies,* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003, pp. 35-36.
[24] Jane Gallop, *Thinking through the Body*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 113.
[25] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtezans,* Act II, Scene i, l. 34.

> cette transformation; c'est dans la technologie de la peine, non pas dans son fondement théorique; dans le rapport qu'elle établit au corps et à l' âme, et non pas dans la manière dont elle s'insère à l'intérieur du système du droit. [26]

This leads to the general opinion that Women must follow Men's instructions and agrees with Dollimore's opinion according to which "[i]dentity is clearly constituted by the structures of power, of position, of allegiance, and service; any disturbance within or of identity could be dangerous to that order as to the individual subject."[27] Woman learns how to behave through bodily discourses and gender policy, or as Hellena does, in rare circumstances they challenge the disparity. Toril Moi explains that female subjectivity is a complex process:

> 'Femininity' is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone De Beuvoir puts it. Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural.* Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labeled both *unfeminine and unnatural.*[28]

Not only does gender policy organize the distribution of labour but it also normalizes attitudes and behaviours through fixed scripts universally accepted and observed. Teresa

[26] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir, op. cit.,* p. 130. The disparity emerges clearly enough when one defines the technique of this individualizing correction. The difference is to be found in the process of access to the individual, the way in which the punishing power gets control over him, the instruments that it uses in order to achieve this transformation; it is in the technology of the penalty, not in its theoretical foundation; in the relation that it establishes with the body and with the soul, and not in the way that it is inserted within the legal system.

[27] Jonathan Dollimore, "Subjectivity, Sexuality and Transgression: The Jacobean Connection," *Renaissance Drama 17,* 1986, p. 54.

[28] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics, Feminist Literary Theory,* London: Routledge, 1985, p. 65.

de Lauretis, with her definition of technology of gender subverts the way in which we think both gender and sex to do it she explains that

> The cultural conceptions of male and female as two complementary yet mutually exclusive categories into which all human beings are placed constitute within each culture a gender system, a symbolic system or system of meanings, that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies.[29]

Female sexuality is constantly thought of in terms of its *relation to* male sexuality, as basically expressive and responsive to the male.[30] The female body is the fundamental object upon which man erects his power and constantly practises his dominion over her, actualising the idea demonstrated by some feminist scholars that the sexual is political. Male historical dominion exercised upon women developed a sense of alienation in the latter. Woman represents the eternal other, the excluded element. Woman is the "periphery marginalized by the centre.[31]

As Margarete Rubik comments, "the 'other' is always indispensable for the formation of the 'self'," but it becomes a problematic factor because "the female is cast as the 'other' of the dominant male, with all the concomitant attribution of 'undesirable' characteristics suppressed by the male centre."[32] Men do not recognize any subjectivity and will to women, whose stories have already an unchangeable written end. Men deny

[29] T. De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender, op. cit.,* p. 5.
[30] *Ibid.,* p. 14.
[31] Margarete Rubik, "Estranging the Familiar, Familiarizing the strange: Self and Other in *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter,"* in Mary Ann O' Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq, Guyonne Leduc, *Aphra Behn (1640-1689). Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity,* Paris, Montréal, Budapest, Torino: L'Harmattan, 2000, p. 33.
[32] *Ibidem.*

the existence of women as subjects; they reject the idea of woman as thinking agent; an active and clever subject who deconstructs the fixed male conception of subjectivity.

Specifically, women's body becomes object of symbolic exchange. They occupy a limited domain where the representation of women is subjected to male parameters. In this regard, Teresa De Lauretis has argued:

> Gender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the *conceptual* and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes.[33]

Aphra Behn herself recognised this attitude and denounced it in many prefaces to her works, especially in *Sir Patient Fancy*. In this organised and over-controlled system, woman is but a docile body, a property, a potential resource of ambition and power in a world where the brothers, Pedro or Julio, and uncle Morosini represent the oppressive patriarchal system, where power and profit are its bedrocks. In other words, this power controls and contains the body of difference. Talking about her nieces as a curse, an object of misfortune, Morosini will say:

> Well, well, sure my Ancestors committed some horrid crime against Nature, that she sent this pest of Woman-kind into our family, -- two Nieces for my sake; -- by Heaven, a Proportion sufficient to undo six Generations.[34]

Later Julio expresses all his anger against the female race. His misogyny reflects male stereotypes attributed to women:

[33] T. De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender, op. cit.,* p. 5.
[34] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtizans*, Act III, Scene I, ll. 17-19.

> A curse upon the Sex! Why must Man's honour depend upon their Frailty.[35]

Men protect their socially construed power, but woman could represent an unpredictable threat that could diminish their power and authority. In order to maintain a stable control over society and over the "others", they act misogyny, depreciating female value, as Belvile shows:

> Belvile: they are whores, though they'll neither entertain you with drinking, swearing or bawdry; are whores in all those gay clothes and right jewels; are whores with those great houses richly furnished with velvet beds, store of plate, handsome attendance, and fine coaches; are whores, and errant ones.[36]

Besides, Galliard in *The Feign'd Courtizans* underestimates woman, comparing her to material element of nature, a tool to accomplish elementary physical functions:

> Lawful Enjoyment! Prithee what's lawful Enjoyment, but to enjoy 'em according to the generous indulgent Law of Nature; enjoy 'em as we do Meat, Drink, Air, and Light, and all the rest of her common Blessings?[37]

According to Luce Irigaray man projects his fantasy over women, connected with her submissive position and her state of dependency. She explains this male attitude when she affirms:

> Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of men's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such pleasure is

[35] *Ibid*, Act III, Scene I, ll. 37-38.
[36] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act II, scene I, ll. 82-87.
[37] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtizans, Act I, scene i, ll. 43-47.*

> above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take" her as his "object" when she seeks his own pleasure. Thus, she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants. [38]

Women of quality, such as Hellena and Florinda, as well as Marcella and Cornelia, can be sold and exchanged in the women's market, without any rights to dissent.

Laura Lucrezia complains about her status in this way: "A Wife! A Wife my Silvio, That unconcern'd domestick Necessary, who rarely brings a Heart, or takes it soon away."[39] This male market constantly controls, organizes and denies women's bodies.[40] In all cases, women, both the Virgin and the Whore, are commodified and they acquire a trade value as a prize that men easily conquer. They are circulating goods ready to be exchanged for lands, money, titles,[41] or pleasure. She is a beautiful thing to collect, or to buy. Aphra Behn underlines that prostitution is just one form of commodification men force upon women, forced marriages are another kind.[42] According to Luce Irigaray

> [Woman] is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist: She is simply

[38] L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One, op. cit.,* p. 25.
[39] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtizans*, Act II, Scene ii, ll. 126-127.
[40] Pilar Zozaya, "Representing Women in Restoration England: A Reassessment of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*," in Zenon Luis Martinez, Jorge Figueroa Dorrego (eds), *Re-Shaping the Genres: Restoration Women Writers,* Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt ,New York, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003, p. 109.
[41] Robert Markley, "Be Imprudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud: The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," in Canfield Douglas J. and Payne Deborah C. (eds), *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre*, Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1995, p. 117.
[42] Paulette Scott, "There's difference in Sexes"; Masculine Sexuality and Female Desire in *Feign'd Courtizans*," in *Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity, op. cit.,* p. 170.

> envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange. In this sense, her natural body disappears into its representative function.[43]
>
> Woman has developed a sense of subjugation and alienation regulated by the binary roles attributed to her: Madonna vs whore, child-woman vs bitch.[44]

Behn shows the way in which women are used as a currency that is circulated amongst men. This currency is given a value that derives from the woman's possession of "honour" (the dowry) or her lack of it (the prostitute's fees). The social order, which breeds misogyny, maintains and protects male power. Galliard measures woman's value in affirming: "I tell thee 'tis a Whore, a fine desirable Expensive Whore;"[45] the motif is reiterated throughout the play and the semantic field which represents the *fil rouge* in male conversations remains the economic one:

> *Galliard:* Do, salute her in good Company for an honest Woman—do, and spoil her Markets:— 'twill be a pretty civil spiteful Compliment, and no doubt well taken;—come, I'll convince ye, Sir. [*Goes and pulls* Philippa. —Harkye, thou kind Help meet for Man—thou gentle Child of Night—what is the Price of a Night or two of Pleasure with yonder Lady—*Euphemia*, I mean, that Roman Curtezan—
>
> *Fil*. Oh, Heavens! a Curtezan!
>
> *Phil*. Sure you're a great Stranger in *Rome*, that cannot tell her Price.

[43] L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, *op. cit.,* p. 186.
[44] *Ibid.,* p. 109.
[45] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtizans*, Act III, Scene I, ll. 17-19.

Gal. I am so; name it, prithee, here's a young *English* Purchaser— Come forward, Man, and cheapen for your self— [*Pulls him*.

Phil. Oh, spare your pains, she wants no Customers.— [*Flings away*.

Fil. No, no, it cannot, must not be *Marcella*;
She has too much Divinity about her,
Not to defend her from all Imputation,
Scandal wou'd die to hear her Name pronounc'd.

Phil. Believe me, Madam, he knows you not; I over-heard all he said to that Cavalier, and find he's much in love.

Mar. Not know me, and in love! punish him, Heaven, for his Falshood: but I'll contribute to deceive him on, and ruin him with Perjury.

Fil. I am not yet convinc'd, I'll try her farther. [*Goes to her bowing*.]—But, Madam, is that heavenly Beauty purchasable? I'll pay a Heart, rich with such Wounds and Flames—[46]

As Pilar Cuder Domìnguez has remarked about *The Rover,* "Willmore's attempt to purchase Florinda is significant, as it reinforces the mercenary-erotic praxis of the play in which money not only purchases (and maintains) the image of the female but supports the male image of self-worth."[47] Robert Markley adds that

[46] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtezans*, Act II, Scene ii, ll.185-202.
[47] Pilar Cudez Dominguez, "Pretty Contradictions" the Virgin Prostitutes of Aphra Behn's *The Feign'd Courtesans*," Huelva: *Sederi VIII*, 1997, p.118.

> The women [are] the means to transmit property from one generation to the next – by positing an idealized feminine desire as, in Lacanian terms, the conflation of the penis and the phallus, that is, of physical desire and symbolic empowerment[…].[48]

Everything is the product of a transaction. But in the relationship between man and woman, the latter is always the loser. Women are subjected to the coercion described by Foucault, and they inevitably become *no more than a projection of masculine desire.*[49] As Francis Barker has reasoned, "the woman is an objectified body at which speech is aimed […] but whose being is, so to speak, a sub-discursive, dumb, reduced, corporeal matter."[50] Man always describes and places woman inside strict social patterns. She inescapably becomes a token of exchange, a beautiful thing, or metonymically a part of her body (her sex for the whole) to be passed from one man to another. On the contrary, Whitford argues, "[m]en's bodies have never stood simply for sex, rather they have represented a wide spectrum of emotion and experience."[51]

The absolute lack of freedom in choosing their future and the impossibility to be free characterizes the opening of *The Rover*. Women of quality are now aware of their submissive condition and this awareness proves an important starting point. They complain at the very beginning of the play:

> Florinda: with indignation; and how near soever my father thinks I am to marrying that hated object, I shall let him see I understand

[48]R. Markley, "Be Imprudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud: The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," *op. cit.*, p. 118.
[49] Virginia Blain, "Cross-dressing in fiction: literary history and the cultural construction of sexuality," in Threadgold Terry, Cranny-Francis Anne (eds), *Feminine, Masculine and Representation,* Sydney, London, Boston, Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1990, p. 147.
[50] Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body,* London & New York: Metheun, 1984, p. 84.
[51]Margaret Whitford, "Irigaray's Body Symbolic" *Hypatia, A Journal of Feminist Philosophy.* Vol. 6, no.3, (Fall 1991), p. 97.

> better what's due to my beauty, birth, and fortune, and more to my soul, than to obey those unjust commands.[52]

This is also the main concern in *The Feign'd Courtizans:*

> Cornelia: What go home to Viterbo, ask the old Gentleman pardon, and be receiv'd to Grace again, you to the Embraces of the amiable Octavio, and I to St. Teresa's, whistle through a Grate like a bird in the Cage—for I shall have little heart to sing.[53]

Behn focuses her audience's attention on the gender question and she attempts to provide her female characters with a different status, from being a passive object of male desire into an active desiring subject.[54] Becoming Subject, the agent can act freely from the sovereign subject (man).

A striking sentence opens *The Feign'd Courtezans*, a kind of declaration of women's freedom. Focusing the attention on female subjectivity, Laura Lucretia declares:

> *Laura Lucretia*: I do not fear, my *Silvio*, but I wou'd have this new Habitation which I have design'd for Love, known to none but him to whom I've destin'd my Heart:—ah, wou'd he knew the Conquest he has made, [*Aside*.] Nor went I this Evening to Church with any other Devotion, but that which warms my heart for my young *English Cavalier*, whom I hop'd to have seen there; and I must find some way to let him know my Passion, which is too high for Souls like mine to hide.[55]

[52] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, scene i. ll.23-27.
[53] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtezans,* Act I, scene ii, ll.81-84.
[54] P. Zozaya, "Representing Women in Restoration England: A Reassessment of Aphra Behn's *The Rover," op. cit.,* p. 108.
[55] A. Behn,*The Feign'd Courtezans*, Act I, Scene I, ll. 4-8.

Laura Lucretia shows confidence in herself, her body and her desires.

As Irigaray argues:

> Women are better able to commit themselves to a relationship between two, to the relationship to the other. Their subjectivity allows them to open up again the horizon of the one, the similar, and even of the many, in order to present themselves an other subject, and to impose a two which is not a 'second.'[56]

Recognizing man as an other thus represents not only an ethical task appropriate to women, but also an indispensable step towards the acquisition of their autonomy.[57]

Aphra Behn depicts two different worlds which are apparently irreconcilable: the masculine and patriarchal one which is already known and establishes the rules; the other is the female, the desired one, in which woman is subject of herself. The plays put the gender questions onstage and the effect is a clash between two worlds, one representable the other unrepresentable. The writer understands this and subverts women's current position by using the same language and the logic of specularization, which is clearly connected to the idea of the mirror. This logic, Irigaray explains, acts as a speculum, a typical instrument used in gynecology to inspect the *cavities of the female body.*[58] It is a male instrument for further penetration of the woman, meant to enter and enlighten the woman's vagina. This concave mirror is also a focal point, a lens to shed light on secrets of caves and to pierce the mystery of the woman's sex.[59] The viewpoint is not only a mirror: it tries to show how a woman constructs a world of her own,

[56] Luce Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two,* London: The Athlone Press, 2000, p. 140.
[57] *Ibidem.*
[58] Luce Irigaray, Mary Greene (eds), *Luce Irigaray Teaching,* London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008, p. 56.
[59] *Ibid.,* p. 58.

thereby partly revealing her *journey into interiority – towards an internalized becoming.*[60] This mechanism which reflects female identity outside herself is able to make woman aware of her identity and to know herself.

Even though Behn's female characters eventually remain inside the patriarchal system, she achieved her goal not only by ridiculing that world and its stability but also by creating a space for herself. By introducing different groups of people she can mark the minority's point of view, introducing issues about gender and differences. Her critical tools involved the audience by provoking critical suspicion towards the conventionally leading views and behaviours. The heroines, who act in a male dominated society based on the libertine and Epicurean philosophy, subvert and re-create the discourse of sexuality and posit themselves in a different position in society and in their own fantasies. As Hellen Burke argues, Behn tries to reconfigure the binary system:

> so as to engineer the collapse of the male hero and to invent an alternate more elevated role for women. In her carnivalesque inversion of the cavalier myth, […] it is the women – virgin and whore alike – who are the agent of correction and restoration.[61]

In addition to this, Catherine Gallagher declares that Behn contrasted "the ways in which men exercise economic control over women, whether wives, daughters, servants or prostitutes."[62] Behn describes a female underworld in a patriarchal arena. As sexualised objects of their society, their realms of power and development were bedrooms and

[60] *Ibidem.*
[61] H. M. Burke, "The Cavalier myth in *The Rover*," *op. cit.,* p. 122.
[62] *Ibid.,* p. 168.

brothels. Women lived in the spheres of sexual and marital arrangements, deriving their personal power from liaisons with men.

Silence, which represented women of quality's value, is now challenged. The traditional role attributed to them is subverted. They start speaking, using the masculine language and showing their ability to decide for themselves. Her language is now perceived as a female threat which destabilizes the patriarchal system.

In *The Rover* as well as in *The Feign'd Courtizans,* Behn attributes to woman a new centrality and shows a new sensibility where women

> reject the roles assigned them by their fathers and both express their determination to disobey these paternal commands and follow their own desires. Behn also begins her assault on traditional distinctions within and across gender lines [in this first scene] by giving these young women the bawdy, witty lines that were reserved for the Courtizans or for the male cavalier characters in Killigrew's play.[63]

Aphra Behn satisfies the audience's expectations, dividing her heroines into two groups, the women of quality on the one hand, and viragoes, courtezans and whores on the other, but they share the same destiny. We get the female perspective which is highly critical towards the male dominance.

By contrasting young, intelligent and likeable young women with older, rapacious men, Behn utilizes a conventional comic device (the young vs the old), and then genders it.[64] In the attempt to transgress and to rebel against a world they do not like women acquire a new status, being equal to man by rejecting a submissive position. Behn's women try to oppose their destiny, as Hellena declares:

[63] *Ibidem.*
[64] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn. Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 11.

> Shall I so? You may chance to be mistaken in my way of devotion. A nun! Yes, I am like to make a fine nun! I have an excellent humor for a grate! No, I'll have a saint of my own to pray to shortly, if I like any that dares venture on me.[65]

Behn's women are not speechless and powerless individuals but they are often active, cross-dressed women and courtesans.[66] They create a space of possibilities and they face the masculine world with irony

> Hellena: 'Tis but getting my consent, and the business is soon done. Let but old gaffer Hymen and his priest say amen to't, and I dare lay my mother's daughter by as proper a fellow as your father's son, without fear or blushing.[67]

Women are not "objects of men's ambitions and desires, but rather independent characters and active desiring participators in the development of the events of the play."[68] Woman challenges the male convictions, affirming herself as Subject. She affirms her difference, obliging man to recognize her agency. Woman acts as master of her self: female characters act as male characters do. Behn legitimates feminine desire and offers the prospect of a reciprocal desire. On the one hand, the Restoration theatre participated in the phallic economy that commodified women so that it was a mistress

[65] A. Behn, *The Rover, op. cit.,* Act I, Scene I, ll. 149-155.
[66] Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostitute Muse, Images of Women & Women Dramatists 1642-1737,* Harvester – Wheatsteaf, 1988, p. 163.
[67] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act V, Scene unique, ll. 451-454.
[68] Khaoula Chahed Lakhoua, "Power of the Powerless in Aphra Behn's *The Rover,*" in Mary Ann O'Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq & Guyonne Leduc, *Aphra Behn (1640-1689): Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity,* Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000, p. 177.

market in which men went to look, to covet and to buy,[69] on the other hand Robert Markley argued that:

> Behn seeks to create reciprocal relationships of desire between her male and female characters within Royalist economies of class and privilege, she must idealize this desire as something other than a product of […] patrilineal ideology. [70]

Behn challenges traditional ideas about women through irony, thus criticizing male behaviour and male codes. Behn's women prove that they can be free and "individualist."[71]

It is through the body of the "other" woman that Behn articulates her resistance to late-seventeenth-century denials of feminine desire. She exalts the different body, considering it a free subject far from being repressed by male control. In deconstructing the phallic Restoration economy that commodified women as objects of desire, Behn underlines two tendencies: on the one hand, Hellena's rejection of patriarchal decisions:

> Hellena: 'tis true, I never was a lover yet, but I begin to have a shrewd guess what 'tis to be so, and fancy it very pretty to sigh, and sing and blush, and wish and when I do, look pale and tremble just as you did when my brother brought home the fine English colonel to see you.[72]

On the other hand, the refusal of acting as the canon imposed on Angellica and Laura Lucrezia act in mimetic representation. The balcony scene in *The Rover* is highly

[69] Elin Diamond, "Gestus and Signature in *The Rover,"* in Janet Todd (ed.), *Aphra Behn*, (New Casebooks), New York: St Martin's Press, 1999, p. 45.
[70] R. Markley, "Be Imprudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud: The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," *op. cit.,* p. 118.
[71] K. C. Lakhoua, "Power of the Powerless in Aphra Behn's *The Rover,*" *op. cit.,* p.179.
[72] A. Behn, *The Rover, op. cit.,* Act I, Scene I, ll. 9-14.

significant. "Angelica emerges in the Flesh and offers herself for free to Willmore. By eliminating her value- form, Angelica attempts to return her body to a state of nature, to take herself out of circulation."[73]

[73] E. Diamond, "Gestus and Signature in *The Rover," op. cit.,* p. 46.

Could language injure us, if we were not, in some sense, linguistic beings? Beings which require language in order to be? Is our vulnerability to language a consequence of our being constituted within its terms? If we are formed in language, then that formative power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were by its prior power.[1]

"No violence: Speak!"

This effective slogan which resumes the focus of many feminist campaigns moves on from simple revolt, aiming at the affirmation of woman's subjectivity against every kind of violence. It finds its original source in the negation of her being a woman.

In a renovated attempt to re-gain her self, the woman is invited to speak and speak aloud. This is a new revolution, especially because in the collective imagination women are dumb. Apparently, and practically women are not able to speak except for chatting.[2] This does not purport that woman has no language but every day she faces a powerful man who refuses to listen to her and denies her subjectivity. As the American feminist Robin Morgan claims, the very semantic of language reflects woman's condition: "she has no names but she bears her father's one until she changes it for her husband's one."[3] This is probably because the masculine symbolic system denies women's subjectivity and shuts women up, so women are considered unable to speak.

[1] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*, New York and London: Routledge, 1997, p. 1.
[2] Jane Gallop. *Thinking through the Body,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 71.
[3] Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far, The Personal Chronicle of A Feminist,* New York: Vintage Books, 1977, p. 106.

As Kristeva argued, language is inseparable from the beings[4] that use it. Speaking is strictly connected to the problem of affirming subjectivity. I have demonstrated in the previous chapters that woman is a representation of a constructed ideology. Furthermore, ideology, for feminists, refers to the patriarchal system of representation of gender and, more specifically, to the myths and images that construct femininity.[5] As Rosi Braidotti has claimed, "Subjectivity is conceptualized […] as a process (*assujettissment*) which encompasses simultaneously the material ("reality") and the symbolic ("language") instances which structure it."[6]

The analysis conducted until then had demonstrated that woman's life and her representation is an artificial construction within phallocentric schemes, the speakable world.

Language as well as the speaking subject are the product of an endless process. And, as denounced by Dale Spender in her *Man Made Language,*

> Men who have created the world, invented categories, constructed sexism and its justification and developed a language trap which is in their interest. Male […] have produced language, thought and reality. Historically it has been the structures, the categories and the meanings which have been invented by males […] and they have been validated by reference to other males. In this process women have played little or no part.[7]

[4] Kristeva calls them *parlêtres* which is the fusion of two French words: *parler= to speak* and *êtres = beings.*
[5] Rosi Braidotti, "Sexual Difference Theory," A. Jaggar, I.M. Young (eds), *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 298.
[6] *Ibidem.*
[7] Dale Spender, *Man Made Language,* London: Routledge, 1980, pp. 142-143.

This supports Jacques Lacan's theory according to which language and the symbolic order are only masculine. In a strong relationship between signifier and signified, woman can only be explained through her signified, the phallus:

> Le signifiant a fonction active dans la détermination des effets où le signifiable apparaît comme subissant sa marque, en devenant par cette passion le signifié.
>
> Cette passion du signifiant dès lors devient une dimension nouvelle de la condition humaine en tant que ce n'est pas seulement l'homme qui parle, mais dans l'homme et par l'homme ça parle, que sa nature devient tissée par des effets où se retrouvent la structure du langage dont il devient matière, et que par là résonne en lui, au-delà de ce qu'a pu concevoir la psychologie des idées, la relation de la parole.[8]

According to Lacan and Lacanians, woman herself is constructed through and into language, where *le phallus est le signifiant* (the universal signifier) *privilégié de cette marque où la part du logos se conjoint à l'avènement du désir.*[9] In his attempt to decipher the way in which the human subject is constructed, Lacan explains that

[8] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits,* Paris: Aux Éditions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 688-689. The signifier plays an active role in determining the effects by which the signifiable appears to succumb to its mark, becoming, through that passion, the signified.
This passion of the signifier thus becomes a new dimension of the human condition in that it is not only man who speaks, but in man and through man that it [ça] speaks; that his nature becomes woven by effects in which the structure of language of which he becomes the material can be refound; and in that the relation of speech thus resonates in him, beyond anything that could have been conceived of by the psychology of ideas. transl. Bruce Fink, *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English,* New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.

[9] *Ibid*., p. 690. The privileged signifier of the mark where the share of the logos is wedded to the advent of desire.

> Le sujet, à proprement parler, se constitue par un discours où la seule présence du psychanalyste apporte, avant tout intervention, la dimension du dialogue.
>
> Quelque irresponsabilité, voire quelque incohérence que les conventions de la règle viennent à poser au principe de ce discours, il est clair que ce ne sont là qu'artifices d'hydraulicien […] aux fins d'assurer le franchissement de certains barrages, et que le cours doit s'en poursuivre selon les lois d'une gravitation qui lui est propre et qui s'appelle la vérité. C'est là en effet le nom de ce mouvement idéal que le discours introduit dans la réalité.[10]

Phallocentric discourse exists only because language becomes a "passive conduit for mental processes and pregiven realities."[11] This is a specific cultural product of social and historical conditions.[12] Juliet Mitchell, in her *Feminine Sexuality*, explained that, according to Lacan

> The human animal is born into language and it is within the terms of language that the human subject is constructed. Language does not arise from within the individual, it is always out there in the world outside, lying in wait for the neonate. Language always 'belongs' to another person. The human subject is created from a general law that comes to it from outside

[10] J. Lacan, *Écrits, op. cit.,* p. 216.
The subject, strictly speaking, is constituted through a discourse to which the mere presence of the psychoanalyst, prior to any intervention he may make, brings the dimension of dialogue. Whatever irresponsibility, not to say incoherence, the conventions of the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis impose on the principle of this discourse, it is clear that they are merely a hydraulic engineer's artifices […] intended to ensure the crossing of certain dams, and that the course must proceed according to the laws of a kind of gravitation, that is peculiar to it, which is called truth. For 'truth' is the name of the ideal movement that this discourse introduces into reality.

[11] Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis (eds), *Feminine Masculine and Representation,* Sidney, London, Boston, Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1990, p. 19.

[12] *Ibidem*.

> itself and through the speech of other people, through this speech in its turn must relate to the general law. [13]

Thus, the individual becomes subject in and through language.

For Lacan, men and women are only in language. But, within the phallic definition, the woman is mute, she is not a subject, she is constituted as "not all." The feminine is figured as an absence within the real as well as the imaginary and symbolic orders. Thus, women are excluded from the symbolic order.

The representation of woman in male literature is construed in terms of distorting stereotypes and this has contributed to generating women's oppression and alienation from her self.[14] Man negates her entry into it determining her absence. The oppression of woman is double, material oppression and oppression in representation.[15] The only possibility to enter into the symbolic is as male. (It is in this attempt that Aphra Behn professes to have a masculine part). But this provokes a partial knowledge of herself, in fact, as Kaja Silverman clarifies:

> Like the male subject, the female subject emerges only within discourse; she knows herself from the place of language, and once inside the symbolic order she has no more access to her biological real than does her masculine counterpart. […] whereas the male subject has privileges conferred upon him by his relationship to discourse, the female subject is defines as insufficient through hers.[16]

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[13] Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (transl. Jacqueline Rose), *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne,* New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985, p. 4.
[14] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics, A Feminist Literary Theory,* New York & London: Routledge, p. 22.
[15] Sue- Ellen Case, "From Split Subject to Split Britches," in Enoch Brater (ed.), *Feminine Focus, The New Women Playwrights,* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 129.
[16] Kaja Silverman, "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice," in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, Linda Williams, *Re-Vision. Essays in Feminist Film Criticism,* Los Angeles: University Publications of America, Inc., 1984, p.131.

Woman knows herself only from a male point of view. But as Mary Beard argues, "The woman who is known only through a man is known wrong."[17]

Reality, like language, is a male prerogative so woman can represent herself only as a male copy. This recalls Lacan's idea of the mirror stage:

> L'*image* d'abord diffuse et brisée, est régressivement assimilée au réel, pour être progressivement désassimilée du réel, c'est-à-dire restaurée dans sa réalité propre. Action qui témoigne de l'efficience de cette réalité.[18]

Woman, according to Lacan and Lacanians, is conceived as a supplement, an imperfect copy on which the male mirror reflects. In it, the woman appears as a deformed and distorted image of his reflection. She loses her autonomy, she is only a copy. In order to affirm herself woman has to become a man.

Western tradition has promoted a universal and neutral subject. This idea of neutrality was a stratagem to exclude and subordinate women by determining their physical and symbolical annihilation. According to this logic, man is the rational animal, and language belongs to him only. Woman is, instead, irrational and passional. This system does not contemplate the female subject. The essence is neutral, universal and male, it denies multiplicity, alterity and difference. Woman in this system is represented as the "less", a reduction. In this respect she is the incompleteness of the universal essence. In it, woman is never the subject of her language, her language does

[17] Mary Beard, *Woman as a Force in History*, New York: MacMillan, 1946, p. 209.
[18] J. Lacan, *Écrits*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
This image, which is at first diffuse and broken, is progressively assimilated with reality, in order to be progressively dissimilated from reality, that is restored to its proper reality. This action attests to the efficacy of this reality. p. 69.

not belong to her, but she uses the language of the other. She is represented in an other's language. In this respect Kaja Silverman concludes:

> The female subject […] is excluded from positions of discursive authority both inside and outside the diegesis; she is confined not only to safe places within the story (to positions, that is, which come within the eventual range of male vision or audition), but to safe place of the story.[19]

Women's representation is by silence, absence, lack, and she experiences herself only fragmentarily. The specular logic of patriarchy imposes on women to choose between two attitudes, on the one hand, remaining silent and thus being incomprehensible to the male master discourse or, on the other hand, woman can "enact the specular representation of her self as a lesser male."[20]

In the former case, muteness is a form of rejection woman enacts against that world which refuses, rejects, and neglects her; as Bordo claims:

> At the same time, of course, muteness is the condition of the silent, uncomplaining woman – an ideal of patriarchal culture. Protesting the stifling of the female voice through one's own voicelessness, that is, employing the language of femininity to protest the conditions of the female world, will always involve ambiguities of this sort.[21]

In the second case, women are given the same words men are: masculine words. In it, Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between

[19] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror. The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 132.
[20] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics, op. cit.,* p. 135.
[21] Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault" in Allison M. Jaggar and Susan S. Bordo (eds), *Gender/Body/Knowledge. Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing,* New Brunswich and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989, p. 21.

two men.[22] Thus, woman is not able to express herself using her language. She is trapped in a patriarchal world that represses her desires and silences her. She is represented as the one who has lost her identity, or maybe the one who has never had an identity.

Men build their codes, their rules, and their image of woman based on logic, clarity, and consistency. She is constructed as a text and she is censored by their dominant discourse, as demonstrated by Bordo's studies:

> Women today continue to be taught traditionally "feminine" virtues, to the degree that the professional arena has opened up to them, they must also learned to embody the "masculine" language of that arena – self control, determination, cool, emotional discipline, modesty and so on.

As a matter of fact, language is not neutral, it inscribes and symbolizes the structure of sexual difference. It is already shaped, hierarchized and oriented. Language is the place in which personal symbolic investements, subjectivity and representations are shaped. On them, each individual builds up the representation of her/himself and of her/his experience. It is a circular relationship which produces their images based on social codes.

This divergence between Woman as the object of male representation and her real condition, De Lauretis argues, is not only a discrepancy but it is a situation reiterated and sustained by a logical contradiction in our culture. Thus woman's construction depends irremediably on it. What is impossible to destroy is the idea of woman as described object, she is never a speaking subject.

[22]L. Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* (transl. Catherine Porter), Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 31-32.

In connection with this, Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* remarked that men relegate women to nurseries or kitchens, downsizing their value, she opposed the idea according to which a woman has no possibilities to be admitted in the literary environments. In her critique of the male world she argued the hypothesis:

> For if [woman] begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgment, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is? [23]

Therefore, when woman is mirrored in the Freudian-Lacan mirror there is only lack, "le manque" and deficiency. Her image is not complete. In this structure, we can say that:

> This image is a fiction because it conceals, or freezes, the infant's lack of motor of co-ordination and the fragmentation of its drives. But it is salutary for the child, since it gives it the first sense of a coherent identity in which it can recognize itself. For Lacan, however, this is already fantasy – the very image which places the child divides its identity into two.[24]

Silverman notes that not only do men alienate women but

> Male subject is even unable to tolerate the image of loss he has projected onto woman, and is obliged to cover it over with a fetish. However, whatever he insists upon sexual difference through phobic avoidance or attempts to conceal that difference with a fetish, he fortifies himself less against the female subject's castration than

[23] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own, op. cit.,* p. 54.
[24] J. Mitchell and J. Rose, *Feminine Sexuality, op. cit.,* p. 30.

> against his own. The "normal" male subject is constructed through the denial of his lack; he is at all points motivated by a "not wishing to be". In short, what he disavows is his insufficiency, and the mechanism of that disavowal in projection.[25]

In this context, women can only appear as tokens of exchange within this masculine economy. She *has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters*.[26] Because of this attitude, mimetic representation is the only way in which woman can reach her own identity.[27] She mimes man, she simulates him, because she is the *Dark Continent*, the negative. Teresa de Lauretis has tried to spell out this side of femininity which is "the side of the materinal, or the unconscious," close to nature and the body. [28] What De Lauretis argues is that woman's position "within the phallic model of desire and signification" is never representable, she is never "subject of desire or of signification," "or better, that in phallic order of patriarchal culture and in its theory, woman in unrepresentable except as representation."[29]

Language can only operate by designating the woman as an object, or to use Lacan's words, ~~The~~ Woman, *which in her symbolization turns on the object as absence*.[30] Within this phallic definition, the woman is constituted as "not all", as the excluded and negated. The Lacanian subject position is gendered marked as male.[31] In this view, femininity serves to reflect masculine desire. She is a metaphor of man. Man

[25] K. Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror. The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, *op. cit.,* p. 20.
[26]Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One, op. cit.,* p. 23.
[27]T. Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics, op. cit.,* p. 135.
[28] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction,* London: MacMillan, 1997, pp. 19-20.
[29] *Ibidem.*
[30] J. Mitchell and J. Rose, *Feminine Sexuality, op. cit.,* p. 31.
[31] S. E. Case, "From Split Subject to Split Britches," *op. cit.,* p. 127.

has the privilege of meaning, or literal identity: femininity, as signifier cannot signify itself; it is but a metaphor, a figurative substitute.[32]

Metaphor, mirror or projection of the male desire, woman is always the object of his discourse, a discourse which has built and transmitted the female image as the negative in relation to man. Nevertheless, as Julia Kristeva argued in *La révolution du langage poétique:*

> La négativité est le liquéfiant, le dissolvent, qui ne détruit pas, mais relance de nouvelles organisations, et en ce sens affirme: temps logique du passage (Übergang), elle est l'enchaîné au sens choréographique du terme, «la liaison nécessaire et la genèse immanente des différences. [33]

Responding to Lacan's dilemma, the Bulgarian scholar defines this condition of exclusion as *abjection* in which the woman is "ni sujet ni objet"[34] She describes *abjection* as follows:

> Il y a, dans l'abjection, une de ces violentes et obscures révoltes de l'être contre ce qui le menace et qui lui paraît venir d'un dehors ou d'un dedans exorbitant, jeté à côté du possible, du tolérable, du pensable. C'est là, tout près mais inassimilable. Ça sollicite, inquiète, fascine le désir que pourtant ne se laisse pas séduire. Apeuré, il se

[32] Shoshana Felman, "Rereading Femininity," *Yale French Studies,* 62 (1981), p. 25.
[33] Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique,* Paris: Collection Tel Quel, Aux Éditions du Seuil, 1970, p. 102.
[34] Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur. Essai sur l'Abjection*, Paris: Collection «Tel Quel», Aux Éditions du Seuil, 1980, p. 9. There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned.

> détourne. Écœuré, il rejette. Un absolu le protégé de l'opprobre, il en est fier, il y tient. Mais en même temps, quand même, cet élan, ce spasme, ce saut, est attiré vers un ailleurs aussi tentant que condamné.[35]

Woman, eventually, is not a simple object men can manipulate or oppress, but in order to obtain the hegemony, man suppresses and demonizes woman as the other, the abject. Women are categorized as the human representative of abjection: the improper, transgression, unclean, sin, evil in Western Christianity. Nonetheless Kristeva theorized a locus of subversion of the paternal law. This place is the *semiotic chora.* Thinking about the subject-in-process, both physically and linguistically, Kristeva explained language as a meaningful combination of the semiotic, identified as the maternal substratum of any speaking being (non-verbal aspect), and the symbolic, which represents the verbal form. It is in the semiotic, according to the scholar, that bodily energy becomes language. The semiotic precedes language and it resides in a space she calls *chora,* a term borrowed from Plato.[36]

According to Kristeva, the *chora* belongs to each person in particular before s-he clearly develops the borders of her own personal identity.[37] The *chora* is capable of generating, not just receiving, energy. It produces the energy which helps producing signifying processes, and it is the process by which significance is constituted.[38] The *chora* is strictly connected to the mother's body because at the beginning the child is immersed

[35] *Ibidem.*
[36] The chora is the space which "Exists always and cannot be destroyed. It provides a fixed site for all things that come to be. It is itself apprehended by a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception, and it is hardly even an object of conviction. We look at it as in a dream when we say that everything that exists must of necessity be somewhere, in some place and occupying some space.
[37] J. Kristeva, *La Révolution du Langage Poétique,* New York : Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 19.
[38] *Ibid*., p. 26.

in the semiotic chora. It is a pre-linguistic place where language is in process. This place in a female one, in it, the semiotic acts as a feminine locus subverting the paternal law. She argues that:

> The chora is not yet a position that represent something for someone (i.e. it is not a sign); nor is it a position that represents someone for another position (i.e., it is not yet a signifier either); it is, however, generated in order to attain to this signifying position.[39]

As opposed to Lacan's vision, Kristeva is convinced that the symbolic and the semiotic cannot be taken into account separately, since language, without the symbolic would be non-coherent and without the semiotic would be meaningless. In this regard, Kristeva introduces the thetic phase, a unitary phase in which the subject takes form. In this phase, s-he realizes that what s-he produces is meaningful, the child starts to distinguish herself/himself (the subject) from others. It is in this moment that the mirror stage is fragmented and the child is spit out, rejected and excluded and the *chora* suppressed. The *chora* is always operating in the shadow of the Symbolic and sometimes finds its way out of its situation of repression, and hence causes disruption within discourse. What is relevant in Kristeva's theory is that the symbolic and the semiotic are always interconnected. The maternal *semiotic chora* is not a naturalized phallocentric concept that links motherhood solely to nature, but it is a multi-layered notion that could distort and distrupt discourse from within. The *chora* carries the connotation of subversiveness within itself; this disruption of meaning becomes manifest in poetry and maternity.

[39] J. Kristeva, *La Révolution du Langage Poétique*, *op. cit.,* p. 94.

Through the use of the semiotic chora as maternal Kristeva tries to deconstruct the phallogocentric reductive representation of "women-as-phallic-mothers". In Kristeva's view, the maternal body has a specific and immediate access to alterity, and she also potrays a very specific kind of subjectivity.[40] The maternal and pregnant body seems to bring back the disruptive semiotic, since it disturbs "the symbolic inscription of the body as "mine" and separate from others."[41]

The maternal body is connected to the idea of alterity, the other, as the child inside the mother's body breaks down the binary distinction between subject and Other. The mother is not the radical other but instead she carries the Other in herself. Kristeva represents the maternal body as a third term, as a place in-between, connecting culture and nature. Kristeva argues that:

> De l'objet, l'abject n'est qu'une qualité – celle de s'opposer à *je.* Mais si l'objet, en s'opposant, m'équilibre dans la trame fragile du désir de sens qui, en fait, m'homologue indéfiniment, infinement à lui, au contraire, l'*abject,* objet chu, est radicalement exclu et me tire vers là où le sens s'effondre.[42]

Abjection is characterized by that which is cast out, rejected and expelled from the social order. In her analysis, Kristeva diagnoses the dynamics of oppression. She describes abjection as an operation of the psyche through which subjective and group

[40] Eva Ziarek, "At the Limit of Discourse: Alterity, Heterogeneity and the Maternal Body in Kristeva's Thought." *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy,* 7 (1992): p. 99.
[41] *Ibidem.*
[42] *J. Kristeva, Pouvoirs de l'Horreur, op. cit.,* pp. 9-10. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.

identity are constituted by excluding anything that threats one's own borders.[43] As Kristeva explains the other is a permanent reference to whom the subject is attracted to:

> Je n'éprouve de l'abjection que si un Autre s'est planté en lieu et place de ce qui sera "moi". Non pas un autre auquel je m'identifie ni que j'incorpore, mais un Autre qui me précède et me possède, et par cette possession me fait être. Possession antérieure à mon avènement: être-là du symbolique qu'un père pourrait ou non incarner. Inhérence de la signifiance au corps humain.[44]

As a result of this, in the phallogocentric system woman continues to be posit in a subservient place, she represents a threat. By man as subject finds the abject both repellant and seductive and thus his or her borders of self are, paradoxically continuously threatened and maintained.[45] This threat constitutes an indispensable factor for masculine affirmation. In fact, "l'abject peut apparaître […] comme la sublimation la plus *fragile* (d'un point de vue synchronique), la plus *archaïque* (d'un point de vue diachronique) d'un «objet» encore inséparable des pulsions. L'abject est ce pseudo-objet qui se constitue *avant,* mais qui n'apparaît que *dans* les brèches du refoulement secondaire.[46] Woman/ abject is "le manque" in man's life, which provokes ceaseless desire. "Le désir est le désir de l'Autre."[47] The writer argues:

[43] David Fisher, "Kristeva's Chora and the Subject of Postmodern Ethics", in David Crownfield (ed.), *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva,* New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 98.
[44] J. Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur, op. cit.,* p. 18. I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be "me." Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be. A possession previous to my advent: a being-there of the symbolic that a father might or might not embody. Significance is indeed inherent in the human body.
[45] Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva,* New York and London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 49-50.
[46] *Ibid.,* p. 20. The abject might then appear as the most fragile (from a synchronic point of view), the most archaic (from a diachronic one) sublimation of an "object" still inseparable from drives. The abject is that pseudo-object that is made up before but appears only within the gaps of secondary repression.
[47] J. Kristeva, *La Révolution du Langage poétique*, *op. cit.,* p. 120.

> Le désir sera l'assujettissement toujours déjà accompli du sujet au manqué: il ne fera que démontrer le devenir signifiant, jamais le procès hétérogène qui le met en cause. […] Le sujet du désir précisément, qui vit aux dépens de ses pulsions, à la recherche jamais atteinte d'un objet manquant: sa praxis ne s'origine que de cette quête du manque, de la mort e du langage et comme telle, elle s'apparente à la praxis du «souci» phénoménologique. [48]

In this regard, Derrida's deconstruction seems to me very interesting in that it critiques binarism and dualism in Western Society. Derrida analyses woman's "position" in *Éperons* and he fixes three assumptions, in which he clarifies:

> La femme est condamnée, abaissée, méprisée comme figure ou puissance de mensonge. La catégorie de l'accusation est alors produite au nom de la vérité, de la métaphysique dogmatique, de l'homme crédule qui avance la vérité et le phallus comme ses attributs propres.[49]

He does not seek to modify the binary pairs but he tries to erase the boundaries between the opposition.

His second assumption declares that

> La femme est condamnée, méprisée comme figure ou puissance de vérité, come être philosophique et chrétien, soit qu'elle s'identifie à la vérité, soit que, à distance de la vérité, elle en joie encore comme d'un fétiche à son avantage, sans y croire, mais en demeurant, par ruse et

[48] *Ibid.,* p. 121.
[49] Jacques Derrida, *Éperons. Les Style de Nietzsche,* Paris : Champs Flammarrion, 1987, p 78. Woman is condemned, debased, scorned as figure or power of lying. The category of accusation is then made in the name of truth, of the dogmatic philosophy of the credulous male who advances truth and the phallus as his own attribute. The text – phallogocentric – written from this reactive and negative instance, are quite numerous.

> naïveté (la ruse est toujours contaminée de la naïveté), dans le système et dans l'économie de la vérité, dans l'espace phallogocentrique.[50]

According to Derrida the only language available is the logocentric, phallogocentric, binary language. It opens an ineliminable gap, the *différance, the* conceptual space woman could use in order to suggest an alternative or something different or/and to deconstruct masculine symbolic.

In order to get her position, woman has to do some steps, starting from being silent and then using phallocentric language. This agrees with Elaine Showalter's opinion according to which

> There is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority discovery, a turning inward freed from some of dependency of opposition, a search for identity.[51]

Linguistic and behavioural imitation becomes the means of a bloodless female emancipation. It acts in the depths of female identity, avoiding fights, but modifying the world around.

Kristeva declares that

> La conscience de soi commence à s'articuler lorsqu'elle perd l'objet – l'autre – par rapport auquel elle se pose et qui est "la substance simple

[50] *Ibidem*. Woman is condemned, debased, scorned as figure or power of truth, as a philosophical or Christian being, either identified with the truth or, at a distance still enjoying it and using it as a fetish for her advantage without believing in it, dwelling by ruse and naïveté […] within the system and economy of truth, within the phallogocentric space.

[51] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, London: Virago, 1979, p. 13.

> et indépendante", fondement de la certitude sensible. Elle le nie pour revenir à soi, et ne le perd que comme substance simple pour réaliser sa propre unité avec elle-même. […] le désir est donc la négation de l'objet dans son altérité comme "vie indépendante"; il est donc l'introduction de cet objet, ainsi amputé, dans le sujet connaissant; il est l'assomption de l'altérité, la suppression de son hétérogénéité à l'intérieur de la certitude et de la conscience; il est la résolution des différences, "l'universelle résolution", "la fluidité des différences"[52]

Women: denied, castrated do not own their own language, they speak the male language in which they are strangers to their own. Woman's submission is as physical as well as linguistic and social. Nevertheless, in his third assumption about women's "position", Derrida claims that, eventually:

> La femme est reconnue, au-delà de cette double négation, affirmée comme puissance affirmative, dissimulatrice, artiste, dionysiaque. Elle n'est pas affirmée par l'homme mais s'affirme elle-même, en elle-et dans l'homme.[53]

The other's negation and annihilation is a primary bedrock for the affirmation of the male self. Denying the other, reducing it to an object/abject is necessary to be able to dominate it, becoming what the anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and the philosopher Michael Foucault have called the *direct locus of social control*.[54] The French feminist Luce Irigaray identifies a real revolutionary act in the female recognition of words.

[52] J. Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique, op. cit.,* p. 122.
[53] J. Derrida, *Éperons, op. cit.,* p 79. Woman is recognized, beyond this double negation, and affirmed as affirmative power, dissimulating, artist, Dionysian. She is not affirmed by man but herself affirms herself, in herself and in man.
[54] S. Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault", *op. cit.,* p. 13.

Having words and starting speaking is striking in the male order which is based on her silence and absence. Like Derrida, Irigaray maintains that the logos is phallogocentric and she stresses that only by challenging it the woman can rescue to decentre established meanings. What she convincingly affirms is that the goal for feminism is not to displace phallogocentrism or replace one dominant discourse with another.

Irigaray rejects Lacan's theory which identifies woman as lack, rather she focuses on a model that recognizes femininity as alterity. She suggests sociality among women and a language of their own to get outside the binary system.

In speaking, the woman is. In speaking, she performs herself.

Irigaray's starting point resides in the consideration that man and woman do not generate language or structures in the same way, thus they cannot understand each other, unless they are aware of their difference.

Language is the locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, where all the signs of sexual opposition are exaggerated, where woman has never her turn to speak. Masculine language becomes the only possibility of change, the space, postulated by Derrida, that can serve as a springboard for subversive rebirth.

Censorship is not merely restrictive and privative, that is, active in depriving subjects of the freedom to express themselves in certain ways, but also formative of subjects and the legitimate boundaries of speech.[55] The American feminist Judith Butler argues that censorship precedes the text and is, in some sense, responsible for its production.[56] What I am arguing here is that the woman is mute because the society makes her alienated, because social construction makes her as a text which

[55] J. Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative, op. cit.,* p. 132.
[56] *Ibid*., p. 128.

> must be produced through a process of selection that rules out certain possibilities, and realizes others. […] The process of selection appears to presuppose a decision, one made by the author of the text. And yet, the author does not create the rules according to which that selection is made; those rules that govern intelligibility of speech are decided prior to any individual decision.[57]

Woman becomes the silent sex, "by dint of not being heard."[58] Her voice, is 'not at all'. Her being is a not one. Butler continues:

> […] to become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be eligible as the speech the subject.[59] Here the question is not whether certain kinds of speech uttered by a subject are censored, but how a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate for subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not.[60]

In philosophical terms, the problem of woman and her representation raises the initial question of the correspondence between signifier and signified.

> To move outside of the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability in one's speech is to consummate one's status as a subject speech.[61]

[57] *Ibid.,* pp. 128-129.
[58] J. Gallop, *Thinking through the Body,* p.71.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 133.
[60] *Ibidem.*
[61] J. Butler, *Excitable Speech, op. cit.,* p.133.

But women continue to be treated as 'Cyphers', they are subordinated and imprisoned in men's texts:

> Men deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen.[62]

The French scholar Hélène Cixous, who declares herself to be opposed to feminism, identified sexual difference in the scraps of language, in the white space. She identifies the disconnected point in woman's life and underlines the necessity of reconciling her body and her mind, and she can do it only in writing. In so doing, she exposes her inner thoughts and makes her condition real:

> By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger or display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause of location and inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.[63]

Héléne Cixous describes woman's subservient condition:

> They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's body that talks, and man doesn't heard the body[64]

But she fights the idea that women have no choice other than to be decapitated.

Freud imagined and created the "Dark Continent" as Hélène Cixous denounced, a continent in which woman has "internalized [the] horror of the dark."[65] But woman may

[62] Susan Gilbert and Susan Guber, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979, p. 13.
[63] H. Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa", *op. cit.,* p. 350.
[64] Hélène Cixous, Annett Kuhn, "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs*, Vol.7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), p. 49.

find a way to regain her body and her voice, so long confiscated in what Hèlène Cixous calls the *écriture féminine,* a space in which woman regains not only her position in the society but specially her body.

The revolution wished for women from the beginning of this chapter is the attempt to subvert the patriarchal system based on symbolic domination. Revolution entails expressing her own identity and speak, speak a female voice, a female body. Through her voice woman becomes "potentially subversive".

Irigaray's feminism tries to deconstruct this phallocentric organization which posits woman's sexuality as a mirror or a complement to male sexual identity. This discourse constructs the genuine multiple otherness of woman's libidinal economy – her eroticism – which has been symbolically repressed in language and denied by patriarchal culture.[66] The shift, from specularizing objectification to female subjecthood, is identified with the speculum, which is, in Irigaray's eyes, a means of interpreting the symbolic order.

Materiality, symbolized by the woman's body, is not perceived and conceived as passive but dynamic, even convulsive:

> Our body forms are considered expressions of an interior, not inscriptions of a flat surface. By constructing a soul or psyche for itself, "the civilized body" forms libidinal flows, sensations, experiences, and intensities into needs, wants, and commodified desires that can gain a calculable gratification. The body becomes a text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into.[67]

[65] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa," p. 349.
[66] A. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing the Body," *op. cit.,* p. 54.
[67] E. Grosz, "Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason", *op. cit.,* p. 198.

According to Irigaray, when woman acknowledges the specificity of her language, she recognizes the specificity of her eroticism. Julia Kristeva explains desire as a specificity of her *jouissance*.[68] It is "a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure; it is sexual, spiritual, physical and conceptual, at the same time."[69]

According to Lacan, *jouissance* is essentially phallic but he admits, however, it exists a feminine *jouissance* and this is only a supplementary *jouissance*, which is beyond the phallus, a *jouissance* of the Other. This feminine *jouissance* is ineffable, for both women and men may experience it but know nothing about it.[70] By disclosing her own *jouissance,* woman frees her own thoughts; she deconstructs the social order. Her eroticism does not follow male parameters. It is not lack but plenitude. It is not need but pleasure.

Writing the body celebrates women as sexual subjects not objects of male desire. It undermines the phallic organization of sexuality by retrieving a presymbolic level of speech where feminine *jouissance* is disclosed. Writing the body celebrates woman's autonomous eroticism, separates from a model of male desire based on need, representation, and lack. This *jouissance* precedes the self/other dualism; it expresses the community of self and other.[71]

Irigaray argues that there is a language capable of representing the female body, not as the separate parts of the whole but as the two inseparable lips of the vulva, opposing Lacan's linguistic theory that urges to renounce the body in favour of the signifier.

[68] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (transl. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, Leon Roudiez), New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 154.
[69] A. B. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (The) Body: Écriture Féminine," *op. cit.,* pp. 56-57.
[70] J. Lacan, *Écrits, op. cit.,* p. 145.
[71] A. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (the) Body: Écriture Féminine," *op. cit.,* p. 58.

Irigaray's metaphor of the two lips represents female subversion and a rejection of Lacan's image of the black hole,[72] an ironic alternative to Lacan's phallus. In her opinion, the two lips exist only in the symbolic Realm and disturb the monopoly of the phallus.[73] Female morphology is a privileged site of production of resistance to the phallocratic code.

> In opposition to the logic of "phallic" discourse – characterized by linearity, self-possession, the affirmation of mastery, authority, and above all of unity – feminine discourse must struggle to speak otherwise.[74]

Thus the female body parts become synecdochally the body in its totality.

> The mucous indicates a body that is not easily incorporated into the male imaginary. It is not a part-object like the penis or breast, it cannot be separated from the body, and so cannot be easily grasped by the male imaginary which is perhaps "exclusively dependent on organs?" […] It is neither simply solid nor is it fluid. It is not stable in a fixed form; it expands, but not in a shape; its form cannot readily be visualized. [75]

The mucous represents the amalgam of an inverted symbolic world. It is a non-phallic key to interpreting the imaginary body where castration is not contemplated. It suggests a new economy, where women are free from *men's self-affection and self-protection*.[76]

[72] M. Whitford, "Irigaray's Body Symbolic," *op. cit.,* p. 100.
[73] *Ibidem.*
[74] S. R. Suleiman (ed.), "Rewriting the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism," *op. cit.,* p. 13.
[75] M. Whitford, "Irigaray's Body Symbolic," *op. cit.,* p. 103.
[76] *Ibid.,* p. 104.

It is at the same time the most sensible, the most transcendental, the most corporeal part of the body. It represents the most unspeakable part of it.[77]

> In the absence of valid representations of female sexuality, [the] womb merges with woman's sex/sexual organs as a whole. There are no words to talk about it, except filthy, mutilating words.[78]

Speaking the body is creating the body, destroying the idea of a mirror image. Phallomorphism is deconstructed thanks to woman's speech. In speaking, woman acquires her real position. Writing the body is also a performative utterance; the feminine libidinal economy inscribes itself into language. [79]

Her ability to speak is represented by the mucous.

> The mucous[…] is invisible in the flat mirror; it is not immediately accessible to sight; it indicates that which is not entirely "owned" by men; it cannot be detached, split off from the body; it does not slot easily into the available dichotomies. Its function, and its potential strength, lies in this elusiveness and ungraspability which might orient us towards a different way of symbolizing the sexuate body.[80]

Woman possesses a *cosmic libido* which is not focused on the pair head/genitals,:

> Woman's sexuality is not one, but two, or even plural, the multiplicity of sexualized zones spread across the body: she is

[77] *Ibidem*.
[78] M. Whitford, "Irigaray's Body Symbolic," *op. cit.,* p. 102.
[79] A. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing the Body," *op. cit.,* p. 59.
[80] M. Whitford, "Irigaray's Body Symbolic," *op. cit.,* p. 106.

> neither one nor two she cannot strictly speaking be determined as one person or two. She renders any definition inadequate.[81]

Speaking is the female jouissance. *Sex and speech are contiguous; the lips of the vulva and the lips of the mouth are each figures of and for each other*. [82]

Woman possesses different zones of pleasure. Her pleasure is multiple and based on different senses. Irigaray's production of an apparently essentializing notion of female sexuality functions strategically as a displacement of Lacan's phallomorphism.[83] Irigaray is convinced that women can deconstruct the strong male system which has repressed women's desires. Quoting Freud, Irigaray writes:

> […] by continuing to be the "object" pole in the sexual act, the woman will provide man with an outlet for his "primary masochism", dangerous not only for the "psychical", but also for the "organic", threatening to "life". Now, Freud states that this primary or "erogenous" masochism will be reserved to woman, and that both her "constitution" and "social conventions" will forbid her any sadistic way to work out these masochistic death drives. She can only "turn them round" or "turn them inward."[84]

Aphra Behn is aware of woman's linguistic trap but she faced her limits adopting the phallogocentric language and giving it new and unpredictable meanings. She selected and manipulated dramatic features in order to give her audience new images of female empowerment.

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[81] A. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (the) Body: Ecriture Féminine," *op. cit.,* p. 55.
[82] B. Freeman, *Re-writing Patriarchal Texts: The Symposium, Manuscript.*
[83] M. Whitford, "Irigaray's Body Symbolic," *op. cit.,* p. 100.
[84] *Ibid.,* p. 104.

Chapter V
Portrait of A Lady Cavalier

I'm resolved to provide myself this Carnival,
if there be e'er a handsome proper fellow of my humor above ground,
though I ask first.[1]

For centuries women have been forced to live according to the wishes, expectations and standards of men, so that they have completely forgotten what they want. They have been treated as "the other" of men.

As commented by Irigaray and Derrida, patriarchal thought establishes the criteria for positive values which essentially are connected to the Phallus and the Logos. They are the pivots on which the Western patriarchal system is raised and stabilized. What is connected to the Phallus or the Logos counts as good, true or beautiful. Following this interpretation, "anything that is not shaped on the pattern of the Phallus is defined as chaotic, fragmented, negative or non–existent."[2] The Phallus represents the totality, anything else is chaos.[3]

Language and meaning are governed by the rules of the father and hence woman is excluded from the symbolic. Their way of thinking is artificially constructed and follows external rules, as Rosemarie Tong writes,

> Because women cannot totally internalize the "law of the father," this law must be imposed on them from the outside. Women are given the same words men are given: masculine words. These words cannot express what women feel, however; masculine words can

[1] Aphra Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, scene i, ll. 35-38.
[2] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics. A Feminist Literary Theory,* London: Routledge, p. 67.
[3] *Ibidem.*

> express only what men think women feel. Lacking feminine words, women must either babble outside the Symbolic order or remain silent within it.[4]

Aphra Behn decides to adopt the male dominant language but giving it new meanings, provoking audience and her contemporaries. Aphra Behn realized that women could not speak in the patriarchal world, a place in which the hegemonic language suppressed the *heteroglossia* of multiple everyday speech types, but she managed to find a place for them, in her plays she privileges women's speech.[5] In explaining this, Paula Backscheider argues that:

> Behn had to work within the same kinds of forms and conventions that gave aspiring male authors access to publication and production. Thus, she had useful models of successful work and effective conventions. However, she […] had to struggle to invent appropriate language and forms to express profoundly different experiences and a pronounced sense of dissimilarity.[6]

Behn puts on stage her "challenges to constructions of sexuality and desire,"[7] her heroines long to find an identity of their own that is outside the patriarchal construction.

[4] Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought. A More Comprehensive Introduction* (3rd ed.), University of North Caroline, Charlotte: Westview Press, 2009, p. 154.
[5] Dagny Boebel, "In the Carnival World of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's *The Rover*," in Katherine M. Quinsey (ed.), *Broken Boundaries. Women & Feminism in Restoration Drama,* Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996, p. 56.
[6] Paula Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics, Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England,* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. 83.
[7] Robert Markley, "Be impudent, be saucy, forward, bold, touzing and leud' : the Politics of Masculine sexuality and feminine desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," in Douglas Canfield, Deborah C. Payne (eds), *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre,* Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1995, pp. 115-116.

With the other seventeenth-century professional women writers, she inevitably and probably unconsciously contributed to modifying women's representation and, step by step they redrew woman and her position in society. These women writers were immediately involved in the hegemonic process. They shared the theatre and its canons were largely accepted. They learned to reject authoritative discourse and adopted only those parts of the other's perspective which best fitted their values and experiences. This is what Bakhtin called a mature subject, that is, a subject who possesses an active, independent and responsible discourse. They were able to renegotiate elements of the patriarchal ideology. This was a new era in which women were seeking to reduce man's power to define women's nature, needs, aspirations, and acceptable conditions of existence.[8]

Aphra Behn wrote the typical sex comedies which were essentially stories of masculine dominance and sexual success.[9] Jane Spencer argues that this mode was clearly created by men and pandering to their fantasies, this implied very little space of monoeuvre for female issues.[10] But women learnt to live within the character traits and roles given to them by men. Man places woman as feature of his fantasy, or constitutes fantasy through the woman.[11] Furthermore, as Jacqueline Pearson has underlined, in women's plays women are more active and in power than men,[12] they speak more than

[8] P. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics, op. cit.,* p. 83.
[9] Jane Spencer, "Deceit, Dissembling, all that's Woman: Comic Plot and Female Action in the *Feigned Courtesans,"* in Heidi Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism,* Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993, p. 89.
[10] *Ibidem.*
[11] Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (trasl. Jacqueline Rose), *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne,* New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985, p. 47.
[12] Dolors Altaba-Artal, *Aphra Behn's English Feminism. Wit and Satire,* Selinsgrove and London: Susquehanna University Press and London: Associated University Presses, 1999, p. 36.

the "dominant sex", in an attempt to capsize the assumption according to which "Men think that women can only experience pleasure in recognizing men as masters."[13]

In the Catholic Mediterranean countries, Italy and Spain, the settings of Behn's plays,

> Men are expected to be actively in power while women had to be passively powerless. Men ruled the world and were in charge of the family's finances, wealth, and property, which included women. […] At the epoch, women took care of the home. If a girl was lucky enough to have a protective father, her highest aspiration was to get a good husband.[14]

In Behn's works, instead, we observe a characterization of a complex female world in which women react in their own way. The writer provides a range of female characters, all of them singular and unique. She deployed on the stage different models of femininity, redefining the idea of woman/women.

For the first time in the English literary history, Behn's writings introduce a new perspective that allows the reader to know female desire by a direct or sometimes contrasting point of view, the female characters' point of view. In this new dimension women become powerful subjects. Woman affirms her diversity, obliging man to recognize her agency. She is not passive or subservient. She starts to speak, modifying, when possible, her own destiny. Behn and her heroines are aware of the linguistic and social oppression that confines them into a life they do not want. Woman can choose to stay trapped in her body by a language that does not fit her and does not allow her to

[13] Michel Foucault, "An Interview: Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity," Toronto: Juin 1982, *The Advocate,* no 400, pp. 26-30.
[14] D. Altaba-Artal, *Aphra Behn's English Feminism*, *op. cit*., p. 35.

express her inner thoughts and desires or she can take advantages of her body and use it as a way to communicate.

The masculine poetic alter ego she creates for herself is another trick to overcome these female limits. She was Astrea, muse of a lost golden age who could combine "Female Sweetness and a Mainly Grace."[15]

The only viable solution is using the only language audible which is the masculine one: full of metaphors, double meanings, allusions, sexual references. In other words, she manipulates conventional dramatic forms to realize an unpredictable and unique feminist vision of the world.[16] Behn undermines male position and violently invades the male territory facing the constant epistemological violence that forces her to silence. She realizes the difficulty to attack explicitly and strike the core of the matter, thus she adopts an unusual strategy: the use of phallocentric language. But it is created by men and it represents males as subjects and females as objects. It follows, then, that because of language, or the symbolic order, is phallocentric, women are not represented within it and cannot effectively use it to define themselves. In this regard, Hélène Cixous acutely remarks that

> Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away – that's how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak – even just open her mouth – in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall always upon the

[15] Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Aphra Behn: Sexuality and Self-Respect," *Women's Studies* 7 (1980), p. 67.
[16] Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse. Images of Women & Women Dramatists 1642 – 1737*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1988, p. 168.

> deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine. [17]

She embarks on this titanic challenge because she probably understood that

> New meanings always have to speak in the language of the old, both inside and outside them, it is difficult enterprise and one whose ramifications and implications can be extremely hard to understand.[18]

Through male speech, woman tries to challenge her society, breaking the silence. She decides to be master of her own life and destiny, as men do. Not only does Behn place women in a new and different position but her heroines are freer to say what they want. Moreover, they avoid the censorship reserved to the female voice because they share the same language.

Behn's women start speaking about their wishes and desires, "they prove they are capable of being logical, consistent, disinterested, they prove they are able to be the new powerful subjects of their own discourse."[19] They are aware of their sexuality as demonstrated by the young Cornelia:

> *Cornelia:* Why; if all these if's and or's come to pass, we have no more to do than to advance in this same glorious Profession, of which now we only seem to be—in which, to give it its due, there are a thousand Satisfactions to be found, more than in a dull virtuous Life: Oh, the world of Dark-Lanthorn-Men we should have! the Serenades, the

[17] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Robyn R Warhol & Diane Price Herndl (eds), *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (rev. ed.), London, Macmillan, 1997, p. 351.
[18] Terry Threadgold, Anne Cranny-Francis (eds), *Feminine, Masculine and Representation,* Sydney, London, Boston, Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1990, p. 24.
[19] P. Backsheider, *Spectacular Politics, op. cit.,* p. 72.

> Songs, the Sighs, the Vows, the Presents, the Quarrels, and all for a Look or a Smile.[20]

Rather than proposing her own language, the female one, which is deficient and inaudible by the male ear, Behn offers woman a means to articulate the inner, silent she. Any form of criticism against it would have diminished the entire phallocentric system from within. The phallocentric language that proposes the female in a perpetual human state of lack is now challenged.

Behn's witty heroines object to their male-ordered destiny. They can redraw the politics of pleasure, releasing their many selves. By disclosing the self, the actual and the signifier woman transforms both language and social constraints. She activates an opposition against the patriarchal dominance claiming women's right to act, "evading an oppressive destiny of arranged marriage and enforced celibacy, plotting to take control of their lives, civilizing rakes and winning marriage choice and freedom sexual of manoeuvre."[21] Behn reflects on the ideological changes of her time trying to deconstruct social structures and introduce women, the lady cavaliers, who fight for their right to choose. Hellena epitomizes this freedom and awareness, as exemplified in the following passages:

> Hellena: Faith, brother, my business is the same with all living creatures of my age: to love and to be beloved—and here's the man.[22]

And again:

> Hellena: I have considered the matter, brother, and find the three hundred thousand crowns my uncle left me, and you can keep from me,

[20] Aphra Behn, *The Feign'd Courtezans*, Act II, Scene I, ll. 65-72.
[21] Susan J. Owen, "Behn's Dramatic Response to Restoration Politics," in Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 70.
[22] A. Behn, *The Rover*, Act V, ll. 513-515.

> will be better laid out in love than in religion, and turn as good an account.[23]

The basis of Behn's unorthodox representation of femininity lies in her belief that a different femininity is possible. Instead of depicting the kind of woman who is both object of male desire and subject to male authority, Behn presents self-assertive heroines who are subjects of desire and who are in control of themselves and even of men.[24] Hellena, the Virgin heiress, probably the most audacious of Behn's characters, opens *The Rover* in an attempt to subvert this world, to transgress class and gender boundaries. She is depicted as a self-aware, active, attractive, witty woman. Her language is explicit and determined, she uses language self-consciously and her effort to construct herself as equal to the men she meets is astonishing. She declares

> I'm resolved to provide myself this Carnival, if there be e'er a handsome proper fellow of my humor above ground,
> though I ask first.[25]

The Feign'd Courtezans immediately presents one of the main female characters who professes her freedom of love and female independence:

> Laura Lucretia I do not fear, my *Silvio*, but I wou'd have this new Habitation which I have design'd for Love, known to none but him to whom I've destin'd my Heart:—ah, wou'd he knew the Conquest he has made, [*Aside*.] Nor went I this Evening to Church with any other Devotion, but that which warms my heart for my young

[23] *Ibid.,* Act V, ll. 537-540.
[24] Jorge Figueroa Dorrego, "Viragoes and "Soft Men: Androgyny in Aphra Behn's Fiction," in Mary Ann O'Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq, Guyonne Leduc (eds), *Aphra Behn (1640 – 1689). Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity,* Paris, Montréal, Budapest, Torino: L'Harmattan, 2000, p. 27.
[25] Aphra Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, Scene i, ll. 35-38.

> *English* Cavalier, whom I hop'd to have seen there; and I must find some way to let him know my Passion, which is too high for Souls like mine to hide.[26]

Language, which is the most powerful representational medium available for humans,[27] becomes a sexual extension and through it women can maintain their sexual control over men. Hellena entices Willmore with her metaphorical use of language, where appetite, for both characters, stands for sexual relationship:

> Hellena: I'm afraid, my small Acquaintance, you have been staying that swinging stomach you boasted of this morning; I remember then my little Collation would have gone down with you, without the Sauce of a handsom Face — Is your Stomach so quesy now?
>
> Willmore. Faith long fasting, Child, spoils a Man's Appetite — yet if you durst treat, I could so lay about me still.
>
> Hellena. And would you fall to, before a Priest says Grace.[28]

In this regard, Laura Finke remarks that linguistic manipulation is the weapon through which woman can achieve her conquest of men.[29] Moreover, verbal teasing provokes male fantasy.

[26] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtezans*, Act I, Scene i, ll. 4-8.
[27] Deborah Cameron, Don Kulik, *Language and Sexuality,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 12.
[28] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act III, scene I, ll. 161-167.
[29] Laura Finke, "Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary theory," in Heidi Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism,* Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993, p. 28.

Hence, Hellena is able to maintain her virginity and to conquer/stimulate Willmore's desire until marriage. Man is sexually stimulated by female speech, more stimulated by a phallocentric language uttered by women as the scene exemplifies:

> Hellena. Why — I could be inclin'd that way — but for a foolish Vow I am going to make — to die a Maid.
>
> Willmore. Then thou art damn'd without Redemption; and as I am a good Christian, I ought in charity to divert so wicked a Design — therefore prithee, dear Creature, let me know quickly when and where I shall begin to set a helping hand to so good a Work.
>
> Hellena. If you should prevail with my tender Heart (as I begin to fear you will, for you have horrible loving Eyes) there will be difficulty in't that you'll hardly undergo for my sake.
>
> Willmore. Faith, Child, I have been bred in Dangers, and wear a Sword that has been employ'd in a worse Cause, than for a handsom kind Woman — Name the Danger — let it be any thing but a long Siege, and I'll undertake it.
>
> Hellena. Can you storm?
>
> Willmore. Oh, most furiously.
>
> Hellena. What think you of a Nunnery-wall? for he that wins me, must gain that first.
>
> Willmore. A Nun! Oh how I love thee for't! there's no Sinner like a young Saint — Nay, now there's no denying me: the old Law had no Curse (to a Woman) like dying a Maid; witness Jephtha's Daughter.
>
> Hellena. A very good Text this, if well handled; and I perceive, Father Captain, you would impose no severe Penance on her who was inclin'd to console her self before she took Orders.
>
> Willmore. If she be young and handsom.
>
> Hellena. Ay, there's it — but if she be not —
>
> Willmore. By this Hand, Child, I have an implicit Faith, and dare venture on thee with all Faults — besides, 'tis more meritorious to leave the World when thou hast tasted and prov'd the Pleasure on't; then 'twill be a Virtue in thee, which now will be pure Ignorance.

> Hellena. I perceive, good Father Captain, you design only to make me fit for Heaven — but if on the contrary you should quite divert me from it, and bring me back to the World again, I should have a new Man to seek I find; and what a grief that will be — for when I begin, I fancy I shall love like any thing: I never try'd yet.
>
> Willmore. Egad, and that's kind — Prithee, dear Creature, give me Credit for a Heart, for faith, I'm a very honest Fellow — Oh, I long to come first to the Banquet of Love; and such a swinging Appetite I bring — Oh, I'm impatient. Thy Lodging, Sweetheart, thy Lodging, or I'm a dead man.
>
> Hellena. Why must we be either guilty of Fornication or Murder, if we converse With you Men? — And is there no difference between leave to love me, and leave to lie with me?
>
> Willmore. Faith, Child, they were made to go together.[30]

Not only does Hellena use a language full of metaphors and ambiguity where Faith and Religion are readapted for Sex and Sexuality, but she also appropriates both the language and actions of the masculine world. As Robert Markley underlines, Behn's heroines are desiring subjects. They are able to attain what they desire. Moreover, he remarks that she puts on stage specific forms of resistance against that male or phallocentric discursive practices which have historically shaped and demarcated woman's body for herself. Through this discourse, Behn modifies the female body consideration.[31] Her female characters are aware of their status as objects but their usurp male language to negotiate their desires. From the beginning Hellena's tongue is not silenced, and she wishes for "some mad companion or other that will spoil my devotion." [32]

[30] Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, Act I, Scene ii, ll. 154-200.
[31] Arleen Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (the) Body: Écriture Féminine," in Allison Jagger and Susan Bordo (eds), *Gender/Body/knowledge. Feminist Reconstruction of Being and Knowing,* New Brunswich and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989, p. 59.
[32] A. Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, Scene I, ll. 37-38.

The effort to give voice to women's thoughts and to represent them in a non-conventional way is what Freud defines heroism: challenging the male world, annihilating the father's projects and beliefs.[33]

> Woman is the embodiment of phallocentrism's essentialisms, the tissues of their complicitous interlacings. Woman is the manifestation, the "reality" that "references" essentialism's constitutive violations. And her body is indeed essentialism's superlative because it matters too much, because it bears the habit of too many meanings, too many contradictions, too many questions that defy resolution and that stay alive in the paradoxical spacing of their peculiar assemblage.[34]

In mastering male language she confounds, disorients traditional expectations, and *the conventional fetishization of woman as the object of the male gaze*,[35] so she penetrates the Infinite and she enjoys it, woman

> can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours, daring to make these vertiginous crossings of the other(s) ephemeral and passionate sojourns in him, her, them, whom she inhabits long enough to love them at the point closest to their drives; and then further, impregnated through and through with this brief, identificatory embraces, she goes and passes into infinity. She alone dares and wishes to know from within, where she, the outcast, has never ceased to hear

[33] Vicky Kirby, "Corporeal Habits: Addressing Essentialism Differently," *Hypatia, A Journal of Feminist Philosophy,* vol.6, no.3 (Fall 1991), p. 16.
[34] *Ibidem.*
[35] Allison Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson- Wright, Gweno Williams, *Women and Dramatic Production 1550-1700,* Essex: Longman, 2000, p. 3.

> the resonance of fore-language. She lets the other language speak – the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death.[36]

The female body is subjected to ideological schemes, they answer to mastery and ownership" in a "homosocial discourse or male exchange."[37] But opposing traditional perception of the absent woman, the one who does not speak, Chernaik remarks that Behn disrupts such expectations, appropriating the stage, for her own uses[38] in order to assert female agency. Her voice speaks veiled feminist issues, a new attempt to create a space for women by women, getting back her language so long confiscated. Some centuries later Hélène Cixous would write

> If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to discontaining it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. And you'll see with what ease she will spring forth from that "within" – the "within" where once she so drowsily crouched – to overflow at the lips she will cover the foam.[39]

The phallogocentric language which usually kills female subjectivity, in Behn's plays generates, recreates, gives new forms to women's body. It redefines women's position and their language. In her foray into the creation of equality in Restoration London, the

[36] H. Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *op. cit.,* pp. 357-58.
[37] Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property,* London and New York: 1987, pp. 131, 154.
[38] Warren Charnaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp.173-174.
[39] H. Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" *op. cit*., p. 556.

phallogocentric language uttered by a woman's voice roars. That is woman's power and her weapon.

Behn deploys on the stage women who speak equally to men, feel equally to them, break social schemes, create their own subjectivity, manage their bodies and their emotions. Opposing stereotypes created for them by those men they imitate,

> This community of women alters the myth of submissive, subservient women; they see dangers clearly, know their risks, and consciously act together to obtain their aim. A woman alone in the world of men cannot survive their unwise attacks. On the other hand, a community of women, as small as this one, is able to shift the development of the events to their advantage.[40]

Aphra Behn organizes her plays by polarizing the female world where she depicts the ones who observe tradition and worry about their honour and reputation and the ones who fight for their independence and freedom. They are both passive and active, submissive or reactive, they are women of extraordinary power and powerlessness. It is a world in which the female figure is central and the male loses his historical position. Hellena is the most radical characters with an outspoken and frank view of love. Florinda, instead, appears to conform to a more conventional model of femininity: modest and restrained ('Fie, Hellena). Nevertheless, they form the two coins of the same medal. Both creates a new female identity in two different ways that resist male power and escape social obligations. They rebel against the confinement of the moral system and defy the social codes. Hellena and Florinda, like Cornelia and Marcella, refuse to submit to their male relatives' will and in so doing they choose for themselves.

[40] D. Altaba-Artal, *Aphra Behn's English Feminism, Wit and Satire*, p. 58.

In Behn's plays, discourses establish a power relation. Female characters, often imagined and perceived as powerless, are here independent. They actively participate in the development of the plot and they lead the plays.[41] They are resilient and resistant to the patriarchal patterns. The heroines decide to change their lives, they oppose patrilineal decisions. They wish to satisfy their desires. She fights against a hostile world which denies her the freedom to speak. *She is the one whose mind will not let itself be penetrated by the phallic probing of masculine thought.*[42]

> Shall I so? You may chance to be mistaken in my way of devotion. A nun! Yes, I am like to make a fine nun! I have an excellent humor for a grate! No, I'll have a saint of my own to Pray to shortly, if I like any that dares venture on me.[43]

Hellena's language carries the boldness of transgression. She mingles religious and carnal discourse, and displace the one/Other, soul/body, and male/female hierarchy. The noun *saint* acquires a new meaning throughout the play, it stands for lover, prayer for seduction. Hellena continues playing on this ambiguity, ridiculing both institutions, masculine and ecclesiastical one. The female becomes the sexually active counterpart.

Moreover, in both *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Courtezans,* Behn attempts to transform woman from being the passive object of male desire into an active desiring subject.[44] In becoming Subject, the agent can act freely from the sovereign subject (man). Behn constructs the image of the sexualized whore who tries to subvert the ideology of

[41] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn. The Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 10.
[42] T. Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics, op. cit.,* p. 58.
[43] A. Behn, *The Rover*, Act I, scene I, ll. 149-154.
[44] Pilar Zozaya, "Representing Women in Restoration England: A Reassessment of Aphra Behn's *The Rover,"* in Luis-Martinez Zenon & Jorge Figueroa-Dorrego (eds), *Reshaping the Genres: Restoration Women Writers*, Bern, Berlin, New York, Oxford: Peter Land, p. 108.

passive, self-controlled, and commodified womanhood.[45] What she depicts is a complex and contradictory world where people, women or men pursue the same goal: the satisfaction of desire. Her heroines, the desiring objects adopt forms of resistance in order to disarticulate male power and to achieve sexual desire.[46] Women are not "objects of men's ambitions and desires, but rather independent characters and active desiring participators in the development of the events of the play."[47]

Behn challenges traditional ideas about women through irony criticizing male behaviour and male codes. Behn's women prove that they can be free and "individualist."[48] In contrasting the specular structure that has construed the schemes of female representations in men's minds, the author proves that women can feel the same pleasure (in itself) as men do.

Women free their body from the constrictions of language which, as Julia Kristeva declares, "many women experience as something secondary, cold, foreign to their lives. To their passion. To their suffering. To their desire. As if language were a foreign body."[49] They possess now a language by which they can describe and reinscribe their body as a text. In describing/writing themselves they exist.

> Behn gives her heroines strong, witty and direct voices. Her dialogues range from 'the moral respectable and the flauntingly

[45] H. Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover,* Parts I and II," in Heidi Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn*, *op. cit.,* p. 103.
[46] R. Markley, "Be Imprudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud: The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," *op. cit.,* p. 116.
[47] Khaoula Chahed Lakhoua, "Power of the Powerless in Aphra Behn's *The Rover,*" in Mary Ann O'Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq & Guyonne Leduc, *Aphra Behn (1640-1689): Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity,* Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000, p. 177.
[48] K. C. Lakhoua, "Power of the powerless in Aphra Behn's *The Rover,*" *op. cit.,* p.179.
[49] Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (eds), "Julia Kristeva,"A Question of Subjectivity - an Interview. *Women's Review* Number 12". Modern Literary Theory, 131-137. Ed.. London: Edward Arnold, 1996.

> immodest' and there are 'risqué allusions to subjects like female sexual desire, homosexuality, and impotence.[50]

As we can see in Behn's works, both men and women turn their persuasive "powers" (charms) to the manipulation of others. Hite argues that women could take control of their own stimulation, which equals to have power over their bodies, changing their sexual habits, subverting man's beliefs that women cannot obtain sexual satisfaction and power without the man.[51] Her privileging of natural desire over socially conceived and socially contested rights recasts notions of masculine and feminine sexuality by allowing us to perceive the working of desire from the vantage point of her female characters; Behn simultaneously deconstructs and idealizes the discourse of sexual and romantic love, reconstructing them in opposition to the mercenary economies of financial self-interest and the exploitation of women. This process of defamiliarizing the discourse of desire inscribes in Behn's plays a counter-ideology that seems, to those of us who are products of psychosexual construction of selfhood, counterintuitive.[52]

A new model of liberated woman is given. This offers woman a new relation with her body. "Her hidden parts would speak sensibly to her, and she would know their secrets, so that she (that is, her rational self) might control them and her destiny, rather than being overpowered by a passionate loss of self."[53]

An important difference has to be stressed. Woman's language is a powerful strategic impulse. She applies her power over others and her power is based on a given

[50] D.Altaba-Artal, Aphra Behn's English Feminism. Wit and Satire , SUP, London, 1999, p.82.
[51] J. Gallop, *Thinking through the Body, op. cit*., p. 74.
[52] R. Markley, "Be Imprudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud: The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," *op. cit.,* pp.116-117.
[53] J. Gallop, *Thinking through the Body, op. cit.,* p. 74.

intersubjective dynamic.[54] Language produces bawdy fantasies that end in an endless surge of power and pleasure. It turns over the hierarchy. I agree with Teresa De Lauretis who argues that it exists "both a male form [of sexuality] and a female form, although in the patriarchal or male-centered frame of mind, the female for is a projection of the male's, it's complementary opposite, its extrapolation – Adam's rib, so to speak. So that, even when it is located *in* the woman body, sexuality is perceived as an attribute or a property of the male."[55]

By shaking the established order Behn may try to recreate a new dimension, where woman is on the same level as man,[56] where she can become subject. Behn's women are not speechless and powerless but they are often active viragoes, transvestites and courtezans.[57] Behn mingles women of quality and whores who share and adopt similar goals in the pursuit of their passion.

> Hellena: 'Tis but getting my consent, and the business is soon done . Let but old gaffer Hymen and his priest say amen to't, and I dare lay my mother's daughter by as proper a fellow as tour father's son, without fear or blushing.[58]

Women refused their alienation. Men deny the existence of women as subjects; they rejected the idea of women as thinking agency; an active and clever subject who deconstructs the fixed male conception of Subjectivity. Through their strong personalities, Behn suggests at early British women's potential to feel and act

[54] *Ibid.,* pp. 74-75.
[55] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction,* London, Macmillan, 1987, p. 14
[56] J. Gallop, *Thinking through the Body*, *op. cit.,* p. 21.
[57] Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostitute Muse, Images of Women & Women Dramatists 1642-1737,* Harvester – Wheatsteaf, 1988, p. 163.
[58] A. Behn, *The Rover, op. cit.,* Act V, Scene unique, ll. 451-454.

confidently on sexual feelings, thus "[demasculinizing] desire" and "[subverting] the construction of woman as a self-policing and passive commodity."[59]

What emerges in Behn's plays is that both men and women are governed by desire, the most compelling desire is for power. Dominant power, transgression and rebellion walk together. Rebellion is another face of power, as I have largely argued, it is an instrument through which power is reproduced and extended.[60] Power of love and power to choose become female power which brings and stimulate them to modify masculine ordinary practices over women.

This consideration contributed to encouraging resistance towards social codes, limits and oppressions. They also redesign rules of game, challenging social roles and getting their agency. Behn dramatizes resistance to patriarchy.[61] It was probably the only way women could reach to attain a very little space of freedom. In so doing they tried to modify the sexual identity that society and religion had constructed for them. As Judith Butler argues in *Excitable Speech*, marginalized cultural groups use the same language structure as the dominant groups but the former enacts a process of reappropriation and transformation of language, this means that by using the same language they turn reality upside down. Domination and power relations are central in the plays. They are strictly connected to discourse. It establishes people's position in the system of power.

Discourse serves as the vehicle of producing subjects. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, individuals are created through the discourses of certain power systems. In creating a powerful female subject; Behn has in mind a mirror projection

[59] H. Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover,* Parts I and II," *op. cit.,* p. 104.
[60] K. C. Lakhoua, "Power of the Powerless in Aphra Behn's *The Rover," op. cit.,* p. 179.
[61] Susan J. Owen, "Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's Drama, 1678-83," in Janet Todd (ed.), A*phra Behn Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 70.

based on the imitational behaviour of the male character. Woman represents his mutual double, the only element to which he can compare himself. She is "his negative or mirror-image."[62] In this regard, Behn creates Willmore's female alter ego in Angellica Bianca She acts as master of her self: she acts as Willmore does. She chooses as he does. Behn legitimates feminine desire and offers the prospect of a reciprocal desire. As Robert Markley has argued:

> Behn seeks to create reciprocal relationships of desire between her male and female characters within Royalist economies of class and privilege, she must idealize this desire as something other than a product of […] patrilineal ideology. [63]

Conflictual relationships between the sexes always involve domination and subordination, or in other words a power relation.

Although women are always labelled in relation to men as virgins, whores, sisters, daughters, widows in a submissive position, in Behn's works they are not so obedient as the tradition requires. She exposed the social pressures of her time and she tried to overcome them, by using a patriarchal background and the satirical and witty techniques typical of Restoration drama.

Men prevail, they are in numerical supremacy. The environment reflects social conditions, where men celebrate their power and oppose all female attempts to change it.

Nevertheless, the strong male system is challenged. In the plays through the use of mockery and irony, female power eventually fractures and deteriorates the male one.

[62] K. C. Lakhoua, "Power of the powerless in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*" *op. cit.,* p. 133.
[63] R. Markley, "Be Imprudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud: The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," *op. cit.,* p. 118.

Lucetta, for instance, in *The Rover,* in the subplot tricks male superiority and vilifies man sexuality in the subterfuge to consume sex. Behn, then, seeks to reverse codes of authority by allowing women to gain control of the symbols of male power.[64]

Behn created a series of transgressive women characters and provocative plot lines,[65] in order to change the hegemony. Behn realized that whoever controls representation controls identity, history and morality.[66] In her narrow space of manoeuvre, woman fights an inevitable struggle against man and his conventions, using new means: masculine language and masculine imitative behaviour. Her women fight to satisfy their desire and oppose themselves to fixed canons. In order to be equal to men, and thus to master their subjectivity and to affirm their identity, these women act by imitation, sometimes, not only linguistically but also by cross-dressing.

It is worth noting that woman turns over the construction of discourse created by man, which has constantly annihilated her specific energy. She learns how to invent herself in appropriating a plallocentric language for herself in order to describe her world inside and outside her. Women reject all male stereotypes, moreover, they refuse to be men's servants, so that not only do they become subjects, but they tell a different story, a story in which they are the main characters and they occupy a different position. Behn's characters discover the power of language. A language which

> does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible. When id is ambiguously uttered – the wonder of being several – she doesn't defend herself against these unknown

[64] Jacqueline Pearson, *Gender and Narrative in the Fiction of Aphra Behn*, *The Review of English Studies, New Series*, Vol. 42, No 165 (Febr., 1991), p. 44.
[65] P. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics, op. cit.,*p. 85.
[66] *Ibid.,* p. 83.

> women whom she's surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from its gift of alterability.[67]

But they still live a fracture in themselves. They are subjects split into two. They are fragmented. They are bound to male will, but now they are also aspiring and desiring subjects, they understand the power of language, and realize that

> Language or any semiotic system is not a set of forms with meanings attached. It is a set of complex, evolved, evolving and open semiotic systems where meanings are realised in and constructed through a complex material media, in contradictory and overlapping institutional sites, by sexuality, socially and historically positioned speaking subjects, who are subjected to and constructed in and through signifying networks of power and desire.[68]

Male characters fear female sexuality as a threat to their power. Reluctant to give up their socially constructed power, they appear to be at a loss and so express their misogyny. Behn uses the most conventional form, the theatre, which is seen as a stable controller of meaning, in order not to alarm man's stability and power. In the meantime she inserts irony and sarcasm in order to mock the authority.

Misogynist comments are ironically presented as an outsider point of view. The Asides produces a comic effect but they introduce, in Behn's works, the very contradictions of her time.[69] Everyone produces autonomous meanings, giving an endless possibility to read the world. Conventions make the audience comfortable, but

[67] H. Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *op. cit.,* p. 358.
[68] Terry Threadgold, Anne Cranny-Francis (eds), *Feminine, Masculine and Representation,* Sydney, London, Boston, Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1990, p. 14
[69] Kate Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies,* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003, p. 45.

they are deconstructed by the within to attain the writer's purposes. Audience watches the stage form a new perspective and this provokes sympathy towards the ladies and a kind of support towards their social conditions.

In my analysis, I have argued that Behn seems to be able to subvert the entire patriarchal society, showing a variety of active and witty ladies. Behn projects on the scene a variety of voices, showing not a single reality but rather a reality for each character. She shows a dialogism, in Bakhtinian terms, in which a multiplicity of voices and perspectives are possible. Actually, the patriarchal convention of men are respected at the end. But what I want to underline is that the writer realized that whoever controls representation controls identity, history and morality.[70] As remarked by Jacqueline Pearson

> These contradictions are highly revealing of the contradictions faced by women in the late seventeenth century, and perhaps particularly of the female writer and narrators themselves, powerful within the confines of fiction, powerless outside.

In the heroic fantasy world of the main plot the lady cavalier can insist on her own power. In the more realistic world of the subplots women seem dependent on men, exploited by them, and incapable of living without them. Behn manipulates these images to allow her narrators to explore, and criticize the conditions which they and their female creator share.

[70] P. Backsheider, *Spectacular Politics, op. cit.,* p. 83.

Chapter VI
Masking the Drama: A Space for Revolution

Although the logic of anatomy might suggest otherwise,

skirts are the traditional garb of women

and pants the traditional garb of men

harem bloomers and kilts,

the exceptions that prove the rule

Boston Globe Magazine, August 28, 1988

The mark of gender, according to grammarians,

concerns substantives.

They talk about it in terms of function.

If they question its meaning, they may joke about it,

calling gender a "fictive sex".

Monique Wittig, The Mark of Gender

What a strange power there is in clothing

I.B. Singer, Yentl the Yeshiva Boy

The use of theatre is in Behn mediated by Carnival which provides her with an excellent instrument to unmask taboos linked to women in general, and to her female characters who perform on the stage in particular. Carnival renders woman's chance to perform her revolution possible, putting on stage a different ego. Through Carnival, the mask is able to formulate woman's identity with all its nuances, which in different circumstances would be marginalized and labelled as scandalous.

The word Carnival probably derives from medieval Latin *carne levare*, or *carnelevarium*, which means to take away or remove fat or meat, indicating the time

period of gustatory excess before Lenten deprivation.[1] Thus, Carnival would be the last occasion on which meat was eaten before Easter.[2] Carnival is still a popular festival, celebrated in Catholic countries, particularly in Italy and Spain, in the period immediately before Lent and it is closed by Ash Wednesday. Carnival and Lent represent two opposite moments in Christian people's lives. The excess and frivolity of Carnival are suddenly and inevitably replaced by the sobriety and moderation of Lent.

The origin of this feast in Europe is uncertain but it was already known by the Greeks in 1,100 B.C.[3] It is probably the oldest of all Western pagan festivals still celebrated today. It is bound up with the classical festivals of ancient Rome and Greece: *Bacchanalia*, *Lupercalia*, and *Saturnalia*. These festivals were all connected to licentiousness, drunkenness, and orgies.[4] The sense of guilt which characterizes the Judeo-Christian tradition is diminished during Carnival.

This season of entertainments, joy and pleasure is symbolically conceived as disruptive and subversive of the authority, as threatening the hierarchical scale. It forgets the boundaries between people and between things. The anthropologist David Gilmore explains that

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[1] Etymology, *Carnival:* (kā·ˈivăl). 1549. [a.It. *carnevale,* conn. W. med. L. *carnelevarium,* etc., originating in a L. * *carnem levare* 'the putting away of flesh (as food)". The connection with L. *vale,* as if "farewell to flesh" , is due to pop. Etym.] 1. The week (*orig.* the day) before Lent, devoted in Italy and other Roman Catholic countries to revelry and riotous amusement, Shrove-tide; the festivity of this season. 2. *Fig.* Any season or course of feasting or riotous revelry 1589. Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Amsterdam, London, New York: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1971.

[2] Carnivalization/Carnivalesque in J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* (fourth Edition*),* London: Penguin Books, pp. 111-112.

[3]Monica Rector, "The code and message of Carnival: escolas-de-samba" in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.) *Carnival!*, Berlin, New York Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers,1984, p. 39.

[4] The *bacchanalia* celebrated Bacchus or Dionysius, god of wine and debauchery. *Lupercalia* were festivals honouring the god Pan or the faun, and eventually the Roman Saturnalia, characterized by the presence of the King of Saturnalia, a satyr-like figure that became king for a day during the festival and then was symbolically killed off. (Rector 1984: 39).

> Carnival is a temporal parenthesis in which people oppose the moral and sexual license of holidays to the moderation and oppressiveness of everyday life. Carnival, is above all, inversion of the world as it is a turning upside down of things, a revolution in system and order. It is therefore a time for liberation, surrealism, intoxication, hysteria, impulsiveness, defilement, debauchery – a capitulation before the resurgent id, or what Enst Kris calls "a holiday from the superego."[5]

Because of its nature, Carnival involves and interrogates gender relations and the problem of sexual difference. Not only is it a representation in real life but it becomes a lens to inspect humans in particular conditions. Among all human actions and rituals, Carnival is, probably, the one which best explains human conduct and social relations in anarchic contexts; it unveils secrets about sex, gender and status. Carnival is seen as a ritual, consisting of a series of performances or routinized events strung together over time. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, ceremonies and rituals constitute the basis upon which human beings structure society.

As Mikhail Bakhtin argued, Carnival is governed by few rules, that is, the absence of any rules. "During carnival Time," he claims, "life is subjected only to its laws, that is the laws of its own freedom."[6] Subversive impulses, controlled in everyday life, are eventually released,[7] provoking a sense of liberation and freedom.

Nevertheless, some anthropologists have underlined the fundamental role Carnival plays in the organization of society and in the maintenance of the *status quo*. Carnival is undeniably a contradictory festival, a two-faced Janus. His first side

[5]David D. Gilmore*, Carnival and Culture. Sex, Symbol and Status in Spain,* New Have and London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 10.
[6] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (transl. Hélène Iswolsky), Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 7.
[7] D. Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture, op. cit.,* p. 3.

represents the subversion of all rules, which threats the hierarchical order of society, but on the other side, it constitutes a "letting off steam," a thermostatic device[8] which controls societal tensions among the lower classes in order eventually to get and reaffirm the *status quo* and social order.[9] As Gilmore explains:

> Carnival provides the masses with "crazy" (that is, ludic and subversive) but also preternaturally sane mechanism by which they can experience and negotiate conflicts and contradictions that trouble them deeply and that demand some sort of psychological release. [10]

Rituals of rebellion, such as Carnival, questions the distribution of power, and not the structure of the system itself.[11] Paradoxically, "What people celebrate in carnival is the social system itself, a kind of secular deity in need of constant propitiation."[12] The end of Carnival constitutes the restoration of the hierarchical order. It acts as a purification ceremony in which

> Ritualism provides a safe outlet for the expression of potential conflict, as well as restrictive frame in which the potential anomie or entropy is under control.[13]

Order vs disorder, respectability vs licence, which in normal conditions would create instability, during Carnival harmoniously stick together. This peculiarity activates a new outlook completely opposed to the phenomenon itself. It, in fact, reaffirms the cohesion of society and its values instead of destabilizing it. In the end, social binarism remains

[8] Max Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa,* London: Cohen & West Ltd., 1963, p. 112.
[9] D. Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture, op. cit.,* p. 11.
[10] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[11] M. Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*, *op. cit.,* p. 112.
[12] Meyer Fortes and E. Evans Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, London: Oxford University Press, 1940, pp. 17-18.
[13] Eva Hunt, "Ceremonies of Confrontation and Submission: e Symbolic Dimension of Indian-Mexican Political Interaction," in Sally Falk Moore, Barbara G. Mayerhoff (eds), *Secular Ritual,* Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp. B. V., 1977, p. 144.

unchanged. The clash between the two opposites re-establishes the harmony of everyday life, creating social cohesion and solidarity among people. Everybody returns to his/her place when Carnival ends. In this regard, Bakhtin, analyzing the medieval European Carnival argues that

> The temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchal rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times.[14]

According to the Russian scholar, during Carnival, people show a parody of the world itself, a "world inside out."[15] In his opinion, Carnival creates a situation in which diverse voices are heard and interact, breaking down conventions and enabling dialogues. People are involved in truly human relations which are not subjected to any impositions. Even the self transgresses through masking. In any cases, according to this theory, carnival provides a positive alternative vision of reality, encouraging the return of the repressed creative energies. Everything is ever-changing, playful and undefined. Hierarchies are overturned through inversions, debasements, and profanations, performed by normally silenced voices. In other words, carnival, according to Bakhtin, creates the chance for a new perspective and a new order of things. In this view, carnival is the space for an alternative world, characterized by freedom, equality and abundance. This freedom, exalted during the feast, is, according to Umberto Eco, just illusory:

[14] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, op. cit.,* p. 10.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 11.

> Carnival can exist only as an *authorized* transgression (which in fact represents a blatant case of *contradictio in adjecto* or of happy *double binding – […]).* If the ancient, religious carnival was limited in time, the modern mass-carnival is limited in space: it is reserved for certain places, certain streets, or framed by the television screen. In this sense, comedy and carnival are not instances of real transgressions: on the contrary, they represent paramount examples of law reinforcement. They remind us of the existence of the rule.[16]

Carnival has also been explained in terms of class struggle by Marxists: it is a symbolic form of revolution against the dominant classes and their domination. The inversion, typical of Carnival, which cannot be controlled or ruled, creates new and unpredictable relations and hierarchy. In other words, carnival is the contrary image of society, where lower-class people project their class struggle sublimation. Status inversion and proletarian rebellion are seen as the very essence of the carnivalesque.[17] In its temporary manifestation, the folk is soon re-absorbed in the re-established ruling order, a return of the repressive order and the acceptance of it.[18] Umberto Eco argues that

> Carnival can subvert the normal order while at the same time reinforcing normalcy. Carnival can create a moral unity through symbolic means among classes and sexes. This unity can extend to the whole society or to conflictive subsets – be they social classes, the oppressed, or women – within the society. Rituals of rebellion, like carnival, can therefore paradoxically enhance the existing social

[16] Umberto Eco, "The Frames of Comic Freedom," in T. A. Sebeok (ed.), *Carnival!, op. cit.,* p. 6.
[17] Abner Cohen, *Masquerade Politics. Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements,* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993, p. 153.
[18] M. Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa, op. cit.,* p. 127.

> order; or contrariwise, they can subvert the existing order by promoting horizontal solidarity among oppressed groups.[19]

Carnival was largely used by English playwrights in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Behn, like others, enacted a fruitful strategy, taking advantage from the current situation. On the one hand, she acted inside the patriarchal canons, she respected and recognized the king's authority and patriarchal rules, but on the other hand, she questioned the social order, in a temporary parenthesis (on the stage and during Carnival), in which her transvestite women challenge their position, enact their revolution and create a supportive community of women. In a particular way, transvestism, among other carnival rituals, functions as

> a ritual neutralization of semiotically significant opposites, in this case the opposition male/female. The basic tenet of structural anthropology […] is that there is a constant striving for equilibrium between binary polar oppositions in ritual and myth. The balance may be achieved by mediation between them. [20]

These rituals free people from the pressure of everyday responsibilities. Every action is deprived of political consequences and moral implications. They experience their revolution by invading class and gender boundaries. Moreover, it acts as manipulative of the cultural symbols of resistance. Carnival represents the only possibility of revolt and inversion of the oppressed world in which a revolutionary but utopian model of the world is created. It is seen as a sublimation of class as well as gender struggle.

[19] D. Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture, op. cit.,* pp. 35-36.
[20] V. V. Ivanov, "The Semiotic Theory of Carnival as the Inversion of Bipolar Opposites," in T. A. Sebeok (ed.), *Carnival!, op. cit.,* p. 14.

Nevertheless, although Carnival is seen by anthropologists as a force for political change, even for revolutionary upheaval, the end of carnivalesque exuberance determines the restoration of order. Society is re-compounded under the pressure of laws. Tomasi di Lampedusa, the Sicilian author of *The Leopard*, in this regard, argued that it is fundamental to make lower-class people believe they are part of a big change when nothing actually is modified.

According to Victor Turner, carnivalesque symbols stand outside syntactic rules and they are not subordinate or rigidly imprisoned in it. Symbols investigate and clarify some societal structures. In his opinion, this feast is a *rite of passage,* in which the individual crosses boundaries in order to be part of the community. In order to change status or social position, individuals are required by society to undergo liminal rites, or rites of transition, in which they leave one category and cross the threshold into another. This phase is called *margin* or *limen*, in which individuals live an ambiguous condition, where they are no more what they were but they do not know what they will be. This marginality is a ritual in itself in which individual experiments "new ways of acting and new combinations of symbols."[21] In the transition phase, the individual is conferred immunity from unlawful acts; it provides an alibi and an excuse. In the end, the individual is transformed and eventually reintegrated into the society, but in a new position.

This rite is involved in the construction of personal identity. Like an adolescent in the *rite of passage,* the individual in Carnival frees her/himself from her/his anxieties through transgression admitted in the liminal space. In this phase, inevitably the self enters into a relation to the other. Nevertheless, the experience of

[21]Victor Turner, "Variation on a Theme of Liminarity," in S. F. Moore, B.G. Myerhoff, *Secular Ritual, op. cit.,* p. 40.

otherness is governed by the impulse to return to the already constituted, traditional patterns of social organization. Turner explains that originally people are placed in an ambiguous social place, the place of the Other, which Van Gennep defines "Betwixt and between."[22] The other is the marginalized one. This social organization establishes an opposition between the marginalized individual, whom Turner calls liminal, and the community. The period in which the individual stays outside the community, before the passage, is the liminal period. Liminal identity is a fundamental step people go through in order to join their community.[23]

In Carnival, the energies of freedom are released and this acts as a mediation, because it suppresses differences in that temporary moment, so that it functions as an element for collective harmony, promoting social cohesion.[24] The liminal individuals create the *communitas*, which is different from "the community", it is a place where all people are equal. This structure works as an anti-structure because it lacks rules.[25] In Turner's view, as opposed to Bakhtin's, dissidence, hostility, even rebelliousness are anticipated and respected in and through the festival, but eventually the social structure remains unchanged and the feast promotes conformism. Turner points out:

> In human history, I see a continuous tension between structure and communitas, at all levels of scale and complexity. Structure, or all that which holds people apart, defines their differences and constrains their actions, is one pole in a charged field, for which the opposite pole is communitas, or anti-

[22] Arnold Van Gannep, *The Rite of Passage(*transl. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960.
[23] Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in the *Rite of Passage*," Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion, 1964, p. 6.
[24] Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater, Plebeian Culture and The Structure of Authority in Renaissance England,* New York and London: Methuen, 1985, p. 33.
[25] M. D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater, op. cit.,* p. 38.

> structure... Communitas does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms, though this is necessarily a transient condition if society is to continue to operate in an orderly fashion.[26]

This reflection has led scholars to connect liminal phenomena to social drama. It introduces the idea of performance as a fundamental tool to penetrate liminoid phenomena, which are fruitful areas for rewriting cultural codes. Turner argues:

> A social drama first manifests itself the breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule, law, morality or custom or etiquette in some public arena. This breach may be deliberately, even calculatedly, contrived by a person or party disposed to demonstrate or challenge entrenched authority, […]. In order to limit the contagious spread of the breach certain adjustive and redressive mechanisms, informal and formal are brought into operation… The mechanisms may range from personal advice and informal advice and informal arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and to resolve certain kinds of crisis, to the performance of public ritual.[27]

Carnival and theatre are according to Turner liminoid phenomena. They reveal subcutaneous strata of social structure. They let opposite elements of society emerge, showing the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in depth. Social drama modifies links between opposite groups, genders, ethnicities, social categories and classes, roles and positions, projecting them into conflicts. These conflictual relationships question and doubt the legitimate social-cultural order by introducing critical revision and

[26] Victor Turner, "Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society," *op. cit.,* p. 274.
[27] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play.* New York: PAJ Publications, 1982, p. 70.

providing an openness to experimentation. At the very end of the phase of transition the individual has a new existence, s-he becomes another. The liminal space is the no-one zone where gender questions arise. Because of its interstitial position, Carnival can modify prefixed structures. Its liminality helps Behn to find her place for her female revolution, a narrow space of manoeuvre where "the other" can act.

Theatre becomes the fruitful field able to introduce revolutionary and alternative issues which would not take root in a different field. This leads to the consideration that encounter/clash between opposites is essential in every kind of relationship, in the self/other relationship as well as in Behn's patriarchal world. Behn's dramatic works are liminoid and they put on stage liminal characters, suggesting alternative possible behaviours in opposition to the legitimate view. Woman, who is depicted through masculine discourse as the mute other, becomes in Behn's plays the subject who dares to create a discourse of her own and she tries to create a new female identity on the stage. In Behn's works, Carnival does not re-establish the social order but it creates a new world. The individual undergoes an ontological transformation.

The binarism described in the previous chapters remains as a constitutive feature of society and of each of its representations. The law of the father recalls the load-bearing axis, *the Structure.* It is only in a liminal network that the denied female identity can find its space. Not only does female identity represent the liminal space but it also exists only outside the law of the father, outside its structure and rules. This identity can only exist in a limited space which is intended to end: the theatre and the carnival.

Fixed genders and identities represent *the structure*, while masquerade and fictive sexes are the *counter-structure* that act in liminal spaces. The passage from the

former to the latter requires to get outside fixed schemes and to modify old identities in order to create new ones. The scholar Efrat Tseëlon sums up the importance of masquerade as follows:

> Masquerade unsettles and disrupts the fantasy of coherent, unitary, stable, mutually exclusive divisions. It replaces clarity with ambiguity, certainty with reflexivity, and phantasmatic constructions of containment and closure with constructions that in reality are more messy, diverse, impure and imperfect. The masquerade, in short, provides a paradigmatic challenge not only to the dualistic differences between essence and appearance. It also challenges the whole discourse of difference that emerged with modernity.[28]

Masquerade can hide the multiplicity of our identities or, on the other hand, the mask, real or metaphoric, could be perceived "as covering, on certain occasions, and even deceiving by pretending to be the real self."[29]

Masquerade questions new discourses about difference and its connection with the "Other" identity. Masquerade is not about portraying something false, but rather it is a way to understand the intricacies of identity. Efrat Tseëlon explains masquerade in terms of presentation of our ideal selves in relation to others. She explains that

> The other is that which cannot be classified, the residue of a normative taxonomy. Its existence poses both a constant threat and a necessary corollary to the classification system itself. Thus, the nation-state became a source of identity that was intertwined with exclusion. By setting boundaries around the self one is also defined the non-self

[28] E. Tseëlon (ed.), *Masquerade and Identities. Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Marginality,* London and New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 3.
[29] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

> (insiders/outsiders, established/strangers). It is the Other (or the stranger) and not the enemy who is the real problem for the nation-state. The enemy is clearly marked and external to the system, whereas the Other is the enemy within.[30]

Efrat Tseëlon explains that the mask conveys multiple metaphoric possibilities. It becomes a potent cultural symbol which stands for "a site of excess, ecstasy, intrigues and moral danger harbouring erotic, riotous and mysterious associations." The mask separates the original face from the masked one, hiding the essence of a person and producing an indefinable identity. The masquerader becomes a character. Moreover, Castle analysed masqueraders psychological implications, arguing that

> From basically simple violations of the sartorial code – the conventional symbolic connections between identity and the trapping of identity – masqueraders developed scenes of vertiginous existential recombinations. New bodies were superimposed over old; anarchic, theatrical selves displaced supposedly essential ones; masks, personae, obscure persons […].One became the other in an act of ecstatic impersonation. The true self remained elusive and inaccessible – illegible – within its fantastical encasements.[31]

Carnival underlines the *in fieri* condition of human beings as well as social and political development of gender. Nothing is permanent, but everything can be changed into something else.[32] In analysing identity, Bristol argues that

[30] Efrat Tseëlon (ed.), *Masquerade and Identities, op. cit.,* pp. 5-6.
[31] Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth Century English Culture and Fiction,* Stanford University Press, 1986, p. 4
[32] M. D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre*, *op. cit.,* p. 70.

> Just as in a stage play, identity is both guise and disguise, a social integument rather than a 'true native form', but it is absolutely necessary to display respect for that integument and to protect not to notice. [33]

Masquerade is the instrument to subvert and deconstruct the social order, creating hybridizations. One of the most salient features of Carnival is sexual inversion. The Other, the masqueraded character, the woman, real or fictive, becomes a source of ambiguity, hence of threat.[34]

Cross-dressing, Marjorie Garber argues, is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just as a category crisis of male and female, but as the crisis of category itself.[35] The mark of gender is put into question through masquerade and cross-dressing. The body is a construction,[36] and Carnival constitutes myriad bodies and the field of experimentations.

Cross-dressing is virtually universal but traditionally men especially have celebrated carnival with rituals of female impersonation. This is probably due to its strict regulation. As we can read in sixteenth and seventeenth-century reports, women wearing male clothing were scandalous, because they subverted the fixed order.[37] Masculinity arrogated to itself the right to judge and define the proper characteristics of femininity. During the early modern period many laws were promulgated to regulate dress codes, in order to maintain social control over cities and in order to avoid the possible threat of being cheated.[38] Women were expected to maintain their proper place:

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[33] *Ibidem.*
[34] E. Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities, op. cit.,* pp. 5-6.
[35] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests, Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 17.
[36] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble, op. cit.,* p. 12.
[37] M. Garber, *Vested Interests, op. cit.,* p. 26.
[38] *Ibid.,* p. 21.

> our apparell was given us as a signe distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex, & therfore one to weare the Apparel of another sex is to partecipate with the same, and to adulterate the veritie of his owne kinde.[39]

The dress code had the social function to mark out class and gender visible and legible.[40]

However, ideas about sexual identity and gender roles were both highly unstable and hotly contested in early modern England, "theatrical play with such figures as the cross-dressed heroine could evoke enormous anxiety and might be understood through the model of subversion and containment."[41] The nature of identity, the truth of identity, the stability of identity categories and the relationship between the supposed identity and its outward manifestations (or essence and appearance) are blurred.[42]

Linda Woodbridge argues that the subversive potentialities of disguise were confined to the theatre, contained there by a massive extra-theatrical discourse comprising sermons, conduct manuals, moral treatises, pamphlets, and the like promulgating conventional understandings of the role and the status of women.[43] Masks, cross-dressing and transvestism were a threat to the social order. Any person's social station, social role, gender and other indicators of identity in the world had to be *readable,* without ambiguity or uncertainty.[44] The upper class feared masked people, especially the ones "dressing above their station." People wearing different clothes could "put on" new social roles, and new identities, occupying a different social status.

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[39]Phillip Stubbs, Anatomy of Abuses in England in Shakespeare's youth, http://archive.org/stream/phillipstubbessa00stubuoft/phillipstubbessa00stubuoft_djvu.txt (16/08/2014).
[40] M. Garber *Vested Interests, op. cit.,* p. 26.
[41] Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage. Boy Heroines and Female Pages,* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996, p. 6.
[42] E. Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities, op. cit.,* p. 3.
[43] M. Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage, op. cit.,* p. 4.
[44] M. Garber *Vested Interests, op. cit.,* p. 26.

The attempt to regulate carnival was essentially due to the anxiety for the dissolution of boundaries[45] and to the monstrous proliferations of differences and identities.[46] Prohibitions were fixed during eighteenth-century masquerade parties in an attempt to maintain pretensions of exclusivity by limiting access of members of the lower order to the entertainments.[47] Not only in the theatre but also in the streets, the fantasy and fear of transvestism had its visible counterpart. Visible, but not always legible: the "confusion" of degrees and genders was increasingly blurred.[48]

In order to protect and safeguard identities, the anti-theatricalists openly criticized the most offensive behaviours enacted: acting on the stage and cross-dressing.[49] The matter was that they could not stop the change which questioned power in social relations. Therefore, the mask was a relevant tool offering access to power and secret knowledge.[50] The appearance of actresses on the stage innovated the Restoration theatre and it transformed the theatre itself. Women's bodies, previously performed by young boy actors who were vehicle for homosexual desire, were then replaced by young women who eroticized their own body. What is remarkable is that although the introduction of women on the stage, cross-dressing remains a theatrical strategy. "This is probably due to the fantasy linked to the pleasure of the masquerade, a fantasy of two bodies simultaneously and thrillingly present, self and other together, the two-in-one."[51]

[45] *Ibid.,* p. 25.
[46] M. D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater, op. cit.,* pp. 63-64.
[47] T. Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization, op. cit.,* pp. 92-93.
[48] *Ibidem.*
[49] M. Garber, *Vested Interests, op. cit.,* p. 62.
[50] E. Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities, op. cit.,* p. 33.
[51] T. Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: the Carnivalesque in Eighteenth Century English Culture and Fiction, op. cit.,* pp. 4-5.

As Marjorie Garber has noted, "the substitution of female actresses for boy actors is not a naturalizing move that returns theatre to its desired condition of mimesis, replacing false boy with real woman. It is, instead, a double substitution – a re-recognition of artifice – something tacitly acknowledged by Restoration critics."[52] This new identity acquired through the artifice of masquerade is conceived as "an act of rebellion" against the "repressive patriarchal law,"[53] explains Heidi Hutner, about the first scenes of *The Rover*. This mechanism of substitution is the very essence of theatre where role playing, improvisation, costume and disguise empower transvestites.[54]

Furthermore, cross-dressing and masquerade have a cultural function, Gubar remarks, that is to underline displacement, substitution or slippage: from class to gender, from gender to race or religion. To some extent, the transvestite becomes the new object of desire. Conversely, masquerade becomes a means to access male power. The mechanism of substitution and cross-dressing, which was in vogue in English comedies, arises, in Behn's as in other Restoration works, the problem of identity because it allows cross-dressers and masqueraders to acquire a new one. The idea of womanliness as masquerade becomes a potential danger. Masquerade is seen, according to Joan Riviere, as "a defence, a defence in this system of male identities and consequent identifications."[55] As Eco remarks, Carnival is revolution (or Revolution is Carnival), where nothing is placed in the right place: kings are decapitated (that is lowered, made inferior), and the crowd is crowned.[56] In analysing masquerade, we

[52] *Ibid.,* p. 126.
[53] Heidi Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn, History, Theory, and Criticism,* Charlotteville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993, p. 107.
[54] M. Garber, *Vested Interests, op. cit.,* p. 29.
[55] S. Heath, "Joan Riviere and The Masquerade," *op. cit.*, p. 46.
[56] U. Eco, "The Frames of Comic Freedom," in T. A. Sebeok (ed.), *Carnival!, op. cit.,* p. 3.

notice that the mask is something more than a second skin. It has a deeper collocation, it becomes something people are not able to remove.

It is worth noting that reducing cross-dressing only to homosexuality is reducing its field of action. The cross-dresser plays a crucial role as that which is mistaken, misread, and overlooked – or looked *through.*[57] Following these insights, analysis of cross-gendered scenes in both *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtezans* could help to reach new conclusions about psychological and cultural aspects of Aphra Behn's works. Gilbert and Gubar describe the transvestite as in effect a figure for woman: Gubar finds that "cross-dressing [is] … a dream of prophecy and power for women. […] Gilbert is intrigued by the idea of the 'third sex.'"[58]

According to Joan Riviere, womanliness is not completely genuine and masquerade is not completely an artifice.[59] She adds that there is no difference between "genuine womanliness" and masquerade. It was woman's means to avoid men's anxiety and "as a primary mode of sexual enjoyment."[60] The psychoanalyst argues that woman enacts womanliness as a strategy to protect herself. Woman reduces herself in order not to fear man whose love gives her back her self-esteem.[61] In this regard, Joan Riviere affirms that

> Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen goods.[62]

[57] M. Garber *Vested Interests, op. cit.,* p. 87.
[58] *Ibid.,* p. 9.
[59] Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade" in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplin, *Formations of Fantasy,* London and New York: Routledge, 1986, p. 38.
[60] *Ibidem.*
[61] S.Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," *op. cit.,* p. 49.
[62] Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade," *op. cit.,* p. 38.

In her opinion we cannot divide the masculine and the feminine, because all of us possess both parts. Society fears this aspect of human beings which threatens masculine stability. Therefore, it makes it necessary to regulate genders by norms which make possible to fix genders clearly into an established matrix. Judith Butler remarks that society maintains identity binarism stable. Nevertheless, it is destabilized by some individuals who "fail to conform to the gendered norms."[63] These subjects are labelled as incoherent, because they stay outside the gender system, creating what society calls "gender disorder." In this group of non-conformists it is included woman, the "other" who "can never 'be' so it needs to appear like a man."[64] In normal conditions, disorder remains a pent-up threat, emerging only in Carnival or masquerade parties, where it is monitored and regulated in fixed time and space.

The uncontrolled mask becomes the site of resistance or the other way round, it becomes a site of power. The apparent social stability is lost during masquerade. It encourages female resistance against social fixed roles and subverts women's positions. In masquerade both women of quality and whores are disguised, deleting social differences in order to reach the same goal. What happens is a collective mediation of self and other, where the other is engaged in an act of impersonation or in different forms of self-presentation: the experience of doubleness, the alienation of inner from outer.[65] In it the Other (embodied by non-fixed categories) posits oneself in a resistive position and its difference becomes a threat,[66] because it is the tool for deconstructing

[63] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble, op. cit.,* p. 23.
[64] *Ibid.,* p. 25.
[65] E. Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities, op. cit.,* p. 29.
[66] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

those categories of identity,[67] made up and structured by and through patriarchy and the Church.

The "mark of gender" is the expression of the constructed patriarchal system. In it, Butler argues, that

> The feminine is never a mark of subject; the feminine could not be "an attribute" of a gender. Rather, the feminine is the signification of lack, signified by the Symbolic, a set of differentiating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference.[68]

Escaping the mark of gender equals to liberate women from male domination. According to Butler, it exists an auto-productive mechanism which produces gender hierarchy. In this system, masquerade and language can create a sort of blackout, an ontological crisis of both sexuality and language. Masquerade is therefore connected with the desire of power which leads women to resist social prohibitions. According to Lacan, women yearn for being and having the sign of power, that is, the Phallus, the universal signifier, the supreme signifier of an impossible identity. But Butler argues that

> The masculine subject only *appears* to originate meanings and thereby to signify. His seemingly self-grounded autonomy attempts to conceal the repression which is both its ground and the perpetual possibility of its own ungrounded. But that process of meaning–constitution requires that woman reflect that masculine power and everywhere reassure the power of the reality of its illusory autonomy.[69]

[67] *Ibid.,*, p. 2.
[68] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble, op. cit.*, p. 38.
[69] *Ibid*., pp. 60-61.

The mark of gender is the mark of oppression, nevertheless, "the Phallus requires this Other to confirm and, hence, be the Phallus in its "extended" sense.[70] The mark of gender is not the part of masquerade thus, in it, sexual difference is neutralized, confirming that gender is a fluctuating category. This aspect of cross-dressing challenges the Western way of thinking, "putting into question the categories of 'female' and 'male', whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural."[71]

The ideological implications of this concept are clear. The power of love which is directly connected with et power to make decisions becomes the force used by female characters with the specific purpose of deconstructing societal customs. Women re-establish the game rules, topsy-turvy social roles, and decide what they want to be. Marjorie Garber analysed this phenomenon as follows:

> Cross-dressing can be "fun" or "functional" so long as it occupies a liminal space and a temporary time period; after this carnivalization, however […] the cross-dresser is expected to resume life as he or she was, having presumably, recognized the touch of "femininity" or "masculinity" in her or his otherwise "male" or "female" self.[72]

Although it is limited in time and space, cross-dressing is the space of desire,[73] the space for freedom. This idea implies other psychological problems linked to the issue of the third term in Lacan's view. For the cross-dresser equals Lacan's third term, neither "having, nor "being" the phallus, but "seeming or appearing": the intervention of "to seem" that replaces "to have" in order to protect it on the one side and mask its lack on

[70] *Ibid*., p. 60.
[71] M. Garber, *Vested Interests, op. cit.,* p. 10.
[72] *Ibid.,* p. 70.
[73] *Ibid.,* p. 75.

the other.[74] According to Lacan, men and women occupy a different position in the Symbolic order; "having" the phallus is the position of men while "being" the phallus is paradoxically the position of women.[75] As analyzed by Judith Butler, woman

> becomes the basis of a radical dependency. This dependency, although denied, is also *pursued* by the masculine subject, for the woman as reassuring sign is the displaced maternal body, the vain but persistent promise of recovery of preindividuated *jouissance*. [76]

Man needs the relation to the other in order to elaborate his autonomy and self-elaboration. Moreover, Butler observes that

> Women are said to "be" the Phallus in the sense that they *maintain the power to reflect* or represent the "reality" of the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject, a power which, if withdrawn, would break up the foundational illusions of the masculine subject position. In order to "be" the Phallus, the reflector and garantor of an apparent masculine subject position, women must become, must "be" (in the sense of "posture as if it were") precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the essential function of men. Hence, "being" the Phallus is always a "being for" a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through the recognition of that "being for".[77]

Butler is strongly convinced that the body is not a "being" but only a changeable surface, whose permeability is politically regulated. Butler adds and concludes arguing that

[74] *Ibid.,* p.121.
[75] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble, op. cit.,* p. 60.
[76] *Ibidem.*
[77] *Ibid*., pp. 61- 62.

> If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity.

What is fundamental in Butler's theory is that gender is not a fixed category and subject and identity are constructed through action and language. A special position is acquired by the "third" term which is in between, it does not follow gender norms, on the contrary, it deconstructs the comfortable and controllable binary system.[78] It is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility.[79]

The stage was a privileged site of transgression,[80] where the transvestite could be both a signifier and that which signifies the undecidability of signification. The transvestite as object of desire – is, indeed the embodied construction of mimetic desire.[81] What Heath remarks is that in masquerade no one has the phallus, but being the phallus is a game, masquerade becomes a signifier of "the lack-in-being" that determines the subject's relation to the signifier.[82]

Theatricality in public life is complicated and requires a complicated response, demanding the critical negation of every allegorical signification in favour of a detached, comphrensive strategy of interpretation. The transgressive metaphors of popular festive form are therefore used to interpret and deconstruct actual events and identities.

[78] M. Garber, *Vested Interests, op. cit.,* p. 12.
[79] *Ibid.,* p. 11.
[80] *Ibid.,* p. 34.
[81] *Ibid.,* p. 37.
[82] S. Heath, "Joan Riviere and Masquerade," *op. cit.,* p. 55.

The issue of Cross-dressing and disguise in a carnivalesque atmosphere represent two of the fundamental pillars of the Restoration theatre and its society in Behn's plays. As Pilar Zozaya has argued "Carnival and the Carnivalesque have a great importance in the play both as background for the comedy and because of the concomitant elements implied by the spirit of this festive occasion."[83]

As I said in the previous chapters, women needed to enact different strategies in order to solve conflicts projected on women's figures from the outside and which placed them in the backyard of their own lives.[84] Warren Chernaik has remarked that in Behn's plays, "female characters are able to gain an unaccustomed momentary freedom of action by a change of costume."[85] This was a dramatic convention in vogue during Restoration time and it was used by playwrights as means to both subvert and support the *status quo*. In Behn's plays, this led to question about identity and social conventions[86] and this also contributed to explore a greater freedom.[87]

In order to emancipate her heroines from their condition, Aphra Behn adopted masquerade and phallogocentric language which are inevitably connected. The two strategies marked the way in which some female playwrights challenged male dominion and the patriarchal binary thought. Aphra Behn deconstructed accepted sign-signified connections, demonstrating how the patriarchal hierarchy was constructed as arbitrary

[83] Pilar Zozaya, "Representing Women in Restoration England: A Re-assessment of Aphra Behn's *The Rover,*" in Zenón Luis Martínez, Jorge, Figueroa Dorrego (eds), *Re-Shaping the Genres: Restoration Women Writers,* Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt/M., New York, Oxford, p. 114.
[84] Hélène Cixous, Annette Kuhn, "Castration or Decapitation?", *Signs,* Vol.7, No 1, Autumn 1981, p. 49.
[85] Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 193.
[86] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies,* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003, p. 14.
[87] *Ibid*., p. 235.

fantasy.[88] By disguising as men or whores, her female characters acquired the status of subjects of themselves. Only through these revolutionary techniques was she able to rift the masculine immovable world.

Cross-dressing and disguise particularly gave her heroines the possibility to subvert, even for a brief time, their existence, performing new identities, or simply a behaviour which was not subjected to male coercions. Women, for a while, do not live anymore inside the canons imposed on them which forced them to perceive their body as seen by another, by the anonymous patriarchal Other.[89] Rather than being the objects of exchange, they realized the way in which they could be the subject that makes transactions.[90]

Not only are masquerade and disguise linked to a physical experience of freedom, but they become a state of mind, in which everything is possible, inversions of normal identities and irreverent activities[91] are accepted. By dressing contrary to the usual garb, the mask was able to connect people "with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself.[92] The mask obliterated all distinctions of rank,[93] showing both the Marxist idea of class-struggle and the alternative gender possibilities.

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[88] Katherine M. Quinsey, *Broken Boundaries. Women & Feminism in Restoration Drama,* Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996, p. 5.
[89] Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination. Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression,* New York and London: Routledge, 1990, p. 72.
[90] Sue-Ellen Case, "From Split Subject to Split Britches", in Enoch Brater (ed.), *Feminine Focus, The New Women Playwrights,* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 127.
[91] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 167.
[92] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, op. cit.,* pp. 39-40.
[93] J. L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance,* Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 114.

As Kristeva points out, "carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest."[94] Carnival is "no laws world," a world which is not subjected to the patriarchal authority, it is a liminal space in which not only did women behave and act as they desired but also men perceived it as a lustful and promiscuous time in which they could pursue whores and they could mix and cross social boundaries.[95] In this regard, Willmore, who epitomizes the libertine ethos of the Wit Court, explains carnival as "a kind of legal authorized fornication,"[96] and he shows the contradictions of libertinism. On the one hand, he manifests the misogyny of his time but on the other hand, he opens up to new elements of equality. In this context, women take advantage from Carnival and they share with men the same attitude, transcending the boundaries of femininity.

Aphra Behn elected foreign countries as settings of her plays probably because Carnival has had a long tradition and a strong connotation in Catholic countries or probably Italy and Spain were more suitable to distance her criticism against the English patriarchal system and to scrutinize her world from a female point of view. As Lussier argues, Carnival in these countries is probably associated with the eruption of *jouissance* "prior to the advent of Lent, the period when the Church as primary social institution erected in the Father's name reasserts its authority over accepted behaviour."[97]

It is worth noting that settings act as liminal spaces, where not only do women experience new identities (but only because they reject male limitations and escape male

[94] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Art and Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 36.
[95] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 171.
[96] A. Behn, *The Rover*, Act I, scene ii, ll. 135-137.
[97] Mark S. Lussier, " 'Marrying that Hatred Object': The Carnival of Desire in Behn's *The Rover*" in James R. Bink, *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England,* Kinksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1993, p. 233.

control) but this also involves experimentations for the English Cavaliers. This idea of freedom, as a mixture of impunity and power, in a liminal space is summed up by Willmore as follows:

> I'm glad to meet you again in a warm climate, where the kind sun its godlike power still over the wine and woman. Love and mirth are my business in Naples, and if I mistake not the place, here's an excellent for chapman of my humor.[98]

Carnival is the time in which anonymity engages people in relationships otherwise denied because of class and gender, this is the time for experimenting with new roles.

Behn's comedies put on stage a social condition in which Charles II led his noblemen by example with a hedonistic lifestyle of parties, sex, and extravagant spending.[99] The social and sexual freedom was not a woman's prerogative but it was relegated to men only. Women craved higher degrees of autonomy and sexual expression, as demonstrated by Behn's female characters.[100] This strive for independence finds in Carnival women's solution. In this connection, Kristeva argues that carnival acts as the space in which "language escapes linearity (laws), to live as drama in three dimensions… where prohibition and transgression dream and body) coexist."[101]

Behn's women experience Eros and its language. Eros which is a procreative, constructive and productive instinct innate to all human beings finds its place in Woman's language. It becomes the phantasmatic place which frees energies. What is relevant is that woman has anything to loose so that entering the masculine world she can resignify it.

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[98] Aphra Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, Scene II, ll. 71-75.
[99] Trevor Griffiths and Simon Trussler (eds), *The Rover*, *Restoration Comedy,* London: New Hern Books, 2005, p. 164.
[100] *Ibidem.*
[101] J. Kristeva, *Desire in Language, op. cit.,* pp. 78-79.

Nonetheless, although women experience a sort of freedom during Carnival, the audience immediately faces the disparity between the two sexes. Women's freedom is connected to the disobedient act of women, no concessions are allowed them.

Both plays open with women in action, transvested as a courtesan or a gipsy then as a boy, catching the opportunity "for freedom of speech and act" usually denied them.[102] In *The Rover* Hellena is the initiator of the transgressive act. She immediately focuses on the double aspect of masking which she recognizes as an illicit behaviour. On the one hand, she recognizes that Carnival allows her the licence "to be as mad as the rest, and rake all innocent freedom[103] and the ability to assume any identities.[104] Hellena is aware of the possibility of acquiring a new identity for herself and a manner of being and of free action. She feels herself as equal to the rest of the world, as she remarks in the following passage:

> Callis: What go in masquerade? 'Twill be a fine farewell
> To the world, I take it. Pray what would you do there?
> Hellena: That which all the world does, as I am told: be
> as mad as the rest and take all innocent freedoms. Sister,
> You'll go too, will you not? Come, prithee be not sad.
> We'll outwit twenty brothers if you'll be ruled by me.
> Come, put off this dull humor with your clothes, and
> Assume one as gay as fantastic as the dress my
> cousin Valeria and I have provided, and let's ramble.[105]

[102] Jane Spencer, "Deceit, Dissembling, all that's Woman," in Heidi Hunter (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism,* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991, p. 95.
[103] Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, Act I, scene I, ll. 182-183.
[104] *Ibid*, ll. 185-186.
[105] *Ibid.,* ll. 179-187.

Despite don Pedro's order, "Take her hence and lock her up all this Carnival,"[106] they escape, disguised as gypsies.

These topics are echoed in the *The Feign'd Coutezans*, where Carnival is not explicitly invoked but the use of masks and disguises is equally conspicuous. In the play, Cornelia suggests the disguise:

> What, Curtezan! Why, 'tis a noble Title, and has more Votaries than Religion; there's no Merchandise like ours, that of Love, my Sister: - can you be frigthted with the Vizor, which you your self put on? [107]

Both plays show resolute heroines who wish to adventure in the public arena. In this regard, it is worth noting the use Aphra Behn did of the performative verb "resolve" in both plays:

> Hellena: I'm resolved to provide myself this Carnival, if there be e'er a handsome proper fellow of my humor above ground, though I ask first. [108]

Not only do Cornelia and Hellena share the same destiny but they also share the desire for adventures, the search of amusements, the practical sense and an extreme wit and sense of humor:

> CORNELIA: Spoke like my Sister! a little impertinent Honour, we may chance to lose, 'tis true; but our down-right Honesty I perceive you are resolv'd we shall maintain through all the dangers of Love and Gallantry; though to say truth, I find enough to do, to defend my Heart against some of those Members that nightly serenade us,

[106] *Ibid.,* I. i. l. 143.
[107] Aphra Behn, *The Feign'd Courtezans,* Act II, scene i, ll. 328- 329.
[108] Aphra Behn, *The Rover,* act I, scene I, ll. 36-38.

> and daily show themselves before our Window, gay as young Bridegrooms, and as full of Expectation.[109]

Hellena and Cornelia adopt the unpredictable, fluid, transgressive and dehierarchizing language of carnival, and they try to diminish the masculine authority as is clear from the earliest words. They plan the way to escape male control, by disguising, assuming another identity, exotic and marginal, joining carnival in order to reach what they desire,[110] as Marcella declares:

> MARCELLA: 'twas the only Disguise that cou'd secure us from the search of my Uncle and Octavio. Our Brother Julio is by this too arriv'd, and I know they'll all be diligent,--and some Honour I was content to sacrifice to my eternal Repose.[111]

This also confirms Bakhtin's idea of the mask as "related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries[…] [and] based on a particular interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles.[112] Thus, the mask represents a form of resistance to the repression of feminine desire. Masked, they strongly believe they will rule themselves, and they have the key to interpret the phallocentric configurations of social reality and to establish a space from which to resist it.[113] The assumption of a new and different identity, as Hellena suggests, will bring the woman to embark on a rebellious enterprise against those aspects of patriarchal law that she experiences as repressive.[114] In so doing, not only did Behn

[109] A. Behn, *The Fegn'd Courtezans,* Act II, scene i. ll. 57-61.
[110] Elin Diamond, "Gestus and Signature in *The Rover," English Literary History,* 56.3, 1989, p. 526.
[111] A. Behn, *The Fegn'd Courtezans,* Act II, scene I, ll. 53-55.
[112] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, op. cit.,* p. 40.
[113] M. S. Lussier, " 'Marrying that Hatred Object': The Carnival of Desire in Behn's *The Rover,*" *op. cit.,* p. 233.
[114] Heidi Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover,* Parts I and II," in H. Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism, op. cit.,* pp. 106-107.

entertain but she also provoked a new consideration of the expectations and limitations placed on Restoration women.

The ladies dressed as courtesans or gipsies suggested a topsy-turvy world[115] where people can reinvent themselves and be socially renewed. [116] Hellena suggests that Carnival might liberate her sexuality, so this becomes the time and space for inversion, disguise, adventure and sexual discovery (even discovery of herself). [117] This is the perfect space in which to choose a different partner from the one appointed by her relatives and to express her sexuality more freely.[118] As Bristol states:

> In contrast to the spectacles of authority, Carnival also eliminates the social boundary or proscenium that separates performer from onlooker. Its participatory masqueraders permit people to "put on" new social roles, to borrow the clothing and identity of someone else, and to adopt the language and manners of a different social status. The festive liberty of physical involvement […] transforms the "truth already established" by official ideology. The chaotic disarray produced by this arrangement does more than express a subversive and unauthorized sentiment: its pragmatically threatening and potential mutinous.[119]

In Behn's comedies, women disguise themselves across class and gender lines. They learn a new language in order to script new gender roles.[120]

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[115] Brenda Josephine Liddy, *Women's War Drama in England in the Seventeenth Century,* Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008, p. 100.
[116] *Ibidem.*
[117] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 165.
[118] B. J. Liddy, *Women's War Drama in England in the Seventeenth Century, op. cit.,* p. 108.
[119] M. D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre, op. cit.,* p. 165.
[120] E. Diamond, "Gestus and Signature in *The Rover*", *op. cit.*, p. 527.

The use of disguise always becomes a double-edged weapon for the women who don it, because they are always forced to face misogynist attacks against women, misunderstandings connected to the whore figure and a continuous risk to be raped. In breaking free from coercions the only alternative possibility is the acquisition of the status of whore, entering an underworld of deceit and treachery. The Cavaliers continue to see women as objects to gratify their lust and they expect to be able to use them with impunity. As Lussier observes, "the Englismen, with the exception of Belvile (and Fillamour) take a consuming approach to sexual and marital relations that can be defined by the gratification of lust."[121]

Behn's heroines are aware that their choices in life are limited and they monitor men's reactions because women frightened men, nevertheless they are eager to obtain what they want so they run the risk. An example of it is Hellena who wishes to express her sexuality rather that doing "everlasting penance in a Monastery" (1.1.28). She encourages her sister not to think of herself as an "object of sexual desire rather than to be a self-directed sexual being"[122] Behn does not describe her female characters as passive objects of male desire but rather they are active desiring subjects who reject social coercions and promote new exciting encounters, liberating themselves from norms of etiquette and decency imposed on them.[123] Dolores Artal-Artlaba depicts Behn's female characters as follows:

> With their intelligence, wit, resourcefulness, and commitment, this small community of women has the importance of being the first to break the mold of the communities of men that "however

[121] M. S. Lussier, " 'Marrying that Hatred Object': The Carnival of Desire in Behn's *The Rover,*" *op. cit.,* p. 234.
[122] B. J. Liddy, *Women's War Drama in England in the Seventeenth Century, op. cit.,* p.108.
[123] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, op. cit.,* p. 10.

> overweening or debased they may become…usually possess indisputable magnitude and significance"[…]. This community of women alters the myth of submissive, subservient women; they see dangers clearly, know their risks, and consciously act together to obtain their aim. A woman alone in the world of men cannot survive their unwise attacks. On the other hand, a community of women, as small as this one, is able to shift the development of the events to their advantage."[124]

Women subvert all male stereotypes creating a community which recognizes to have the same goal. Women of quality and whores mix in the comedies and they help each other when they can.

This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who come into contact with each other.[125]

Men and women use a different language about Carnival. Helena talks of madness and rambling while Willmore uses strongly sexual connotations. So that when he talks about love he refers to sex. Dagny Boebel remarks that this strong connection with carnality in general and with feminine sexuality in particular is illustrated in *The Rover* by two parades, the first composed of female masqueraders and the second of men. In *The Rover*, roses and horns, who stand for female genitals, represent the symbolical connotation of the displacement of the phallic discourse by a body language that dissolves the hierarchical male/female binary and privileges feminine *jouissance*.[126]

[124] D. Altaba-Artal, *Aphra Behn's English Feminism, Wit and Satire,* p. 58.
[125] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, op. cit.,* p. 10.
[126] Dagny Boebel, "In the Carnival World of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's World", in K. M. Quinsey, *Broken Boundaries, op. cit.,* p. 58.

In act I scene II the meeting between Hellena and Willmore is characterized by a strong use of bucolic metaphors referring to sex. Kate Aughterson has remarked on Willmore's ability to pick up the women's euphemism "Roses for every month" and to extend the metaphor into further explicit references to the sexual organs

> Willmore: […] I'll be baked with thee between a pair of sheets, and that's thy proper still; so I might but strew such roses over me and under me. Fair one would you would give me leave to gather at your bush this idle month; I would go near to make somebody smell of it all the year after.[127]

Boebel suggests that in the beginning Willomore is enthusiastically supportive of women's sexual freedom, as he says: "Kind and obliging to inform us, pray where do these roses grow? I would fain plant some of them in a bed of mine" and he reaffirms his opinion in claiming: "is this the fruit that grows in this warm country? […]This is a gardener of Adam's own breeding."[128] In Willmore's words we can read the exaltation and celebration of bodies and bodily functions typical of the carnivalesque[129] Behn makes us aware that language is gendered and Carnival provides men with the freedom to think and talk in this way but this is always at the cost of women's autonomy and of any ability they may have to think or act in the same way.

This freedom of Carnival enables the woman to join and mix freely with the Cavaliers. In so doing, women, Carlson points out, "are allowed entrance into a previously unavailable world of desire and agency."[130] In this world of desire and

[127] Aphra Behn, *The Rover,* Act I, Scene II, ll. 87-91.
[128] D. Boebel, "In the Carnival World of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's World," *op. cit.,* p. 58.
[129] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 172.
[130] Susan Carlson, "Cannibalizing and Carnivalizing: Reviving Aphra Behn's *The Rover*," Theatre Journal 47.4, 1995, p. 533.

agency, the sisters struggle to overturn the prevailing cultural norms of passive woman and active man. Female agency is embodied by Hellena and Cornelia who can flirt and make sexual overtures to a man they do not know because of their disguises. Nonetheless, Hellena remarks the dangerous position occupied by women in the game of love that she explains with a gambling metaphor: "I know thou'rt too good natur'd to leave us any design: thou wou't venture a Cast, tho thou comest off a loser, especially such a Gamester" (3.1.44-46). As can be seen, Behn gives her heroines strong, witty and direct voices.

Carnival masks and disguises allow her characters to roam and love freely, reflecting the libertinism of the period. The apparent stability of identity is lost in Carnival. "Allowing security, masquerades foster a resistance of the dominant social codes imposed on women of 'good quality', creating confusion by destabilizing the identity that patriarchy has framed for women. In fact, love's power becomes a force the female characters use to deconstruct the usual practice of the Cavaliers."[131]

Behn's heroines also redefine the rules of the game. It is Florinda, dressed like a gypsy, who gives Belvile an appointment in the garden. Again the sexual metaphor is reiterated in the garden image and, the image of a woman who takes the action reversed the stereotypical powerlessness of women since in these relations women command and men obey.[132] As Lakhoua remarks, Behn rejects male social codifications and she adds that

> Behn, through Carnival, offers us a new world where disguise is used to confuse and disorient and to allow different social groups to intermix in a world where women are no longer restrained by

[131] Khaoula Chahed Lakhoua, "Power of the powerless in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*," pp.180-181.
[132] *Ibid.,* p.181.

> social codes or excluded from the men's world. Thus, despite men's domination, female characters assert their power and their freedom, and they control the situation in the play. Behn argues for woman's need to choose and exercise her sense of self.[133]

In Behn's plays, cross-dressing is the female key to asset equality. Through masquerade and cross-dressing, Hellena professes her equal status and desire:

> O' my conscience, that will be our destiny, because we are both of one humor: I am as inconstant as you, for I have considered, captain, that a handsome woman has a great deal to do whilst her face is good. For then is our harvest-time to gather friends, and should I in these days of my youth catch a fit of foolish constancy, I were undone: tis loitering by daylight in our great journey. Therefore, I declare I allow but one year for love , one year for indifference, one yers for hate; and then go hang yourself, for I profess myself the gay, the kind, and the inconstant. The devil's in't if this won't please you.

Masks and disguises increase resistance and become the tool to subvert women's role, but mostly, transvestism and cross-dressing suspend gender difference and raise questions about it. In this regard, Marjorie Garber, analyzing Shakespeare's Rosalind has underlined that "cross-dressing allows [Shakespeare's character] to live out a freer, more assertive and independent role than she could otherwise. In male garb, [the protagonist] automatically becomes the dominant figure[…] It is she who deals with the outside world who can meet and converse with men, speak and act assertively, even authoritatively[…]in short, she can be a person."[134]

[133] *Ibidem.*
[134] Marylin French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience,* New York: Ballantine Books, 1981, p. 108.

For the female characters, the mask may not be removable, femininity is itself a role. Women use visual appearance for their purpose: to test and engage men. Cross-dressing is understood as "a symbolic incursion into territory that crosses gender boundaries."[135] In the *Feign'd Courtezans,* Laura Lucretia exalts the potentialities offered by the change of clothing in conquering her lover,[136] Galliard; Laura says:

> This habit, besides many opportunities 'twill give me, of getting into his acquaintance, secures me too from being known by any of my Relations in *Rome.*[137]

The change of garb raises important questions about what it is to be a woman. Transvestism is a powerful destabilizer of order, Lisa Jardine argues, that increases anxiety and tension,[138] because it represents the lack of male control over women and the deterioration of both female and male identity in society. Aphra Behn shows that gender is mutable and unstable, anticipating what Judith Butler would argue about gender, that is, that "gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific set of relations."[139]

In men's clothes, women acquire the power to manipulate men and events. The plays carry out a politicized act that utilizes cross-dressers not only to entertain but also to subvert political ideas, rising radical and legitimate questions about femininity and identity. Women's appropriation of male clothing acquires a significant social connotation and implication to gain personal success. Behn re-creates the woman's language which carries tensions and constrictions and she lets them get free from the

[135] Vern Bullogh & Bonnie Bullogh, *Cross-dressing, Sex, and Gender,* Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 1993, p. viii.
[136] B. J. Liddy, *Women's War Drama in England in the Seventeenth Century, op. cit.,* p. 124.
[137] A. Behn, *The Feign'd Courtezans, op. cit.,* Act 2, scene I, ll. 152.154.
[138] Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare,* New York: Colombia University Press, 1989, pp. 141, 142,150.
[139] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble, op. cit.,* p. 10.

language of subordination that had remarked and guaranteed the male hierarchical system. In so doing, women project and satisfy their desires and modify the commodity status established by patriarchal law.[140]

In feminist psychoanalytic terms, the masquerade of female sexuality subverts the "Law of the Father," that stands "behind" any representations. [141] The garb is represented in these works as in others as the extension of gender, underlining one more time that gender is culturally constructed.

Not only women but men too dissemble their identity and misunderstandings are inevitable. Don Antonio and Don Pedro disguising themselves, for instance, are not able to recognize each other as close companions, but they perceive each other as strangers and formidable rivals to each other, creating confusion of identity. But for women, cross-dressing is a slightly different matter. A woman in masculine attire connotes conflictive cultural meanings. This is connected with Riviere's theory according to which masquerade is a dissimulation, a veil that hides the truth, [142] a mask that covers the "true nature" of woman. As men cannot read the true signs of women, especially when in disguise, it can be said that the patriarchal construction of females along the binary virgin/whore should be retrought and, then, superseded. [143]

In this resignified world, misunderstandings become women's weapon. During Carnival the relationship between signified and signifier is broken so that the phallic discourse upon women is suspended. Female characters are not the reference for the universal signifier: the Phallus. Men are not able to associate them anymore. This provokes men's fear for woman's false appearance. They have no guarantees of the true essence of

[140] P. Zozaya, "Representing Women in Restoration England: A Re-assessment of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*," *op. cit.,* p. 115.
[141] E. Diamond, "Gestus and Signature," *op. cit.,* p. 40.
[142] *Ibid.,* p. 41.
[143] Wiseman 51.

woman. Behn used Carnival as a literary linguistic mode,[144] where the dialogues open the possibility to be interpreted in many ways because they have more than one meaning.[145]

In *The Rover* as well as in *The Feign'd Courtezans,* masked ladies impose their own meaning on the play, "a fluently externalized game of identities whose insights are swift and poignant.[146] They reach the possibility of performing activities supposedly reserved for men,[147] experiencing the difference. Not only do the lady cavaliers invade an exclusively male territory but they also master the male tools: his body (through cross-dressing) and his language. In their various disguises, the woman can enter forbidden areas of action. The disguises offer the benefit of acquiring information: Hellena discovers Willmore's courtship to Angellica and, by cross-dressing, she reminds him of their relationship, Angellica wants to seek revenge upon Willmore by her own hand, so she dresses as a man and attempts to kill him. And then, Laura Lucretia, dressed as man, can enter the fight on Galliard's side and is rewarded by his embrace as he thanks her: "This Bravery, Sir, was wondrous (2.336).

The lady cavaliers can flirt without being the object of the patriarchal marriage market and they can assert their will, act and speak freely abandoning for a while roles imposed on them. Moreover, weapons, guns and swords, which are used as status symbols of masculinity and as tools to achieve economic and social gains, are in *The Rover* as well as in *The Feign'd Courtezans* mastered by women. This possession

[144] K Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 177.b
[145] D. Boebel, "In the Carnival World of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's World," *op. cit.,* p. 57.
[146] Edmund Burke, Restoration Comedy: crises of Desire and identity, Houndmills, Basingstoke, London. MacMillan, 1988, p. 131
[147] Pilar Zozaya, "Representing Women in Restoration England: A Reassessment of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*," *op. cit.,* p. 115.

acts as an attempt to usurp phallic control over female sexual desire and body.[148] The audience perceives the weapon as a temporary assertion of a woman's power against a man. As explained by Aughterson: "It represents both an expression of phallic power appropriated by woman, and a visual reminder of the very limits of that power."[149]

By masking as men, women demonstrate how ladies may take ownership of rights associated only with male Cavaliers, romance, justice, and sexuality. They use their masquerade to play an equality game. Without that disguise, woman is only a commodity who has taken herself out of the marriage economy. The commanding position of women in plays that utilized transvestism produced multiple and varying meanings. Trough the adoption by women of what society has identified as male clothing - male signifiers of power and authority - a sexual transgression occurs, positioning the woman in a different place which has the potential psychologically to arouse the spectators, as well as reflects shifting gender roles in society. In cross-dressing, women really wish they were men, because they want the power that men have.

[148] H. Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Part I and II,"*op. cit.,* p. 108.
[149] K. Aughterson, *Aphra Behn, The Comedies, op. cit.,* p. 82.

CONCLUSION

Aphra Behn's body which is buried in the backyard of Westminster Abbey is the metaphor of her life and works, still neglected. Thanks to Virginia Woolf and the feminist movements today Aphra Behn is included among the laureate writers. She inspected female issues concerning freedom and equality starting the arduous way that today we call sexual revolution.

In the seventeenth century Aphra Behn opened a space for alternative forms of subjectivity, remaining loyal to her king and to the dramatic conventions. By using dramatic tools in vogue in the Restoration theatre she was able to critique within the patriarchal system which denied women any possibilities to "breathe" and act freely and equally. Her physical invasion of the male territory, the theatre, provoked among her contemporaries a strong disapproval which led them to label the female writer. "whore," the one "*who dared to write for bread."*

Impudent like her female characters, Behn showed wit, intelligence and theatrical bravura, standing out in the theatrical market of her time as one of the most prolific writers of the Restoration Theatre. This position allowed her to inspire the female world and to introduce subtle variations that emphasized the female voice and female determination.

This work has critically looked at Aphra Behn's comedies *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Courtezans*, through contemporary philosophical, anthropological and political views. Her plays demonstrate how the binary and patriarchal structures can be deconstructed by using their own tools. Managing the instruments typical of the theatre, Behn subverted woman's position, and helped breaking gender barriers in the theatre.

Behn constructed a variety of female characters to focus the debate on female sexuality and the relationship between sexuality and freedom. By using the phallogocentric language she delineated new and unpredictable meanings and new equalities. The phallogocentric language is used to describe the world from the "other" point of view, the female one. Behn's female characters take possession of the language that does not belong to them in order to deconstruct it and re-create endless "other" meanings.

Behn's comedies reflect, respond and raise questions about women's concerns and the possibility of a female agency. The question of identity remained a fixed point in her works. We grow up acquiring information and knowledge, storing them on the binarism of reality: up and down, good and bad, man and woman, female and male. Identity is in Behn's works assumed as a role. As a result, I have inspected these roles and I have appreciated the remarkable results Behn achieved.

Disguise was used in her plays to inspect society. Gender itself was displayed as a liberating expression of how all identity can be moulded and manipulated at will. Through the use of masquerade and cross dressing, which represent two of the fundamental pillars of the Restoration theatre, Aphra Behn was able to perform the question of the fluidity of gender and to expose the illusion of representation, preparing the ground for subverting the binary patriarchal system and introducing a different vision of woman/women. Woman, object of the patriarchal system which does not permit any female subjectivity, subverts everything in becoming subject. Women control the space as well as the action.

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