

"The Disappointment" and "The Disabled Debauchee"

Restoration Sex, Self-Fashioning, and Satire

LAURELS FOR MONKEYS

John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester

Challenging social convention through mockery and the levelling power of the flesh



LIBERTINISM

LIBERTINE: "one manumitted from slavery" (Roman period, OED)

LIBERTINE: "free thinkers" who did not acknowledge religious or moral laws

- "free-thinking" = pejorative association with sexual promiscuity, dissolution, "social dis-ease"

ROCHESTER'S LIBERTINE SOCIAL SATIRE

- Exposes hypocrisies of social gentility;
- Levels social hierarchies through emphasis on the body's desires and appetites:
 - Crude language "shocks" the refined reader by stripping away social "masks" and asserting that even fine ladies and gentlemen "fuck";
- Plays on the tension between the necessity for and consequences of **both** social regulation and the excesses of freedom.

STRIPPING AWAY PRETENSE

I'd be a dog, a monkey, or a bear;
Or anything but that vain animal
Who is so proud of being rational.
The senses are too gross, and he'll contrive
A sixth to contradict the other five:

("A Satire against Reason and Mankind," 5-9)

For wits are treated just like common whores,
First they're enjoyed and then kicked out of doors.

(37-8)

The Disabled Debauchee

What: What social masks does Rochester seek to strip away in the poem?

Consider:

- The libertine's self-presentation (45-48);
- The episode with the "link-boy" (37-40).

So What: How does the satirical tone of this presentation relate to the tension between social control and the consequences of uncontrolled freedom?

**FEMALE
PROTEUS**

Aphra Behn

Challenging the boundaries of gender through wit, appropriation, Protean self-fashioning



PUBLISHED WOMAN

PUBLISHED: to have one's works printed and sold on the open market.

PUBLISHED: to be displayed as a prostitute in public (either in written bans or literally on a penitential wagon); a shaming punishment for those who violate sexual or gender norms.

**BEHN'S HERMAPHRODITIC
SELF-FASHIONING**

In pity to our sex sure thou wert sent,
That we might love, and yet be innocent:
For sure no crime with thee we can commit;
Or if we should — thy form excuses it.
For who, that gathers fairest flowers believes
A snake lies hid beneath the fragrant leaves.
("To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagined More than Woman")

- Manipulation of gender norms in order to open spaces for active feminine (androgynous or bisexual) desire.

FAINT PLEADING

What: How does Behn deploy the conventions of feminine decorum?

Consider:

- Cloris's "resistance" (13-25);
- Her blushes (115-17);
- Her Daphne-like flight (121-30).

So What: What is the relationship between this invocation of social decorum and Behn's treatment of feminine sexuality?

THE MOCK HEROIC

HEROIC

- Elevated tone and diction;
- IDEALIZED characters ("bigger than life") who
- Represent CULTURAL IDEALS;
- Nationalism, state-building, elevation of the "people" through
- Emphasis on conflict on a grand scale (good vs. Evil)

MOCK HEROIC

- "HIGH BURLESQUE";
- Elevated tone and diction that is
- INAPPROPRIATELY linked to
- LOW or TRIVIAL or PRIVATE subject-matter for the purposes of
- DEFLATING grand pretense and
- EXPOSING hypocrisies

HEROIC DEBAUCHERY?

What: In what ways does "The Disabled Debauchee" demonstrate the concept of the "mock heroic?"

So What: What is the relationship between mock heroic and the concept of social "unmasking?"

EPIC DISAPPOINTMENT

What: How does "The Disappointment" exemplify the mock heroic?

So What: What is the relationship between this deployment of the mock heroic and Behn's destabilization of gender norms?
