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FOR SEX OR MARRIAGE: THE COMMODIFICATION OF WOMEN IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* AND APHRA BEHN'S *THE ROVER*

by

Linsey D. Allnatt, BA

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APPROVED BY

____
Gretchen Mieszkowski, Ph.D., Chair

____
David Day, PhD., Committee Member

____
Craig White, Ph.D., Committee Member

RECEIVED BY THE COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES:

____
Howard Eisner, Ph.D., Associate Dean

____
Bruce Palmer, Ph.D., Dean

Dedication

To my husband, Robert, whose support and patience helped me through the long hours and many semesters of work, and to Ethan, who kept me entertained.

ABSTRACT

FOR SEX OR MARRIAGE: THE COMMODIFICATION OF WOMEN IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* AND APHRA BEHN'S *THE ROVER*

Linsey D. Allnatt
University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2008

Thesis Chair: Gretchen Mieszkowski, Ph.D.

William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Aphra Behn's *The Rover* emphasize the effect on women of being treated as commodities. When the plays were written, marriage was the most common means by which women were commodified, while prostitutes and courtesans were more obviously "for sale." The similarities between these two categories of women are remarkable both in real life and in literature, but considering the social value of a woman's chastity and the attitudes toward female sexuality at this time, the likenesses are not surprising. Behn analyzes the commodification of women to a greater extent than Shakespeare. He has always attracted attention because of his strong women, but Behn knew firsthand both the freedom and potential perils that a woman alone in the world faced. Her experience with these concerns was probably the primary reason for this difference in focus.

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INTRODUCTION:
THE NOTION OF THE COMMODIFIED WOMAN

William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Aphra Behn's *The Rover* are two plays that very skillfully reveal problems with how women have been treated in literature. They are also significant in that they emphasize the extent to which women were commodified and how those women were affected because they were treated as commodities. Though Shakespeare and Behn wrote hundreds of years ago, from 1590-1613 and 1670-1696 respectively, the notion of the commodification of women is still quite relevant, especially with society's current interest in sexual politics and power relationships within the family.

In literature, it is not uncommon to see women treated as commodities, or objects, to be used or bartered by the men in their lives. In countless written works over thousands of years, women have been portrayed as little more than tradable objects at least, and decorative ornaments at best. Then again, this is, more or less, the way they were treated in reality. Through marriage, a woman could be a considerable asset to a man; a courtesan too could be very important, though it was generally she who made a profit from him. Women often had to face the difficult reality of such a life. When placed in this position, they were often left to their own devices in order to do as they wished, but were most of the time trapped nonetheless.

In the west, marriage today tends to be thought of as an institution that, ideally, is based on love between the couple involved. Historically, however, this has not always been the case. In Elizabethan England, women were often matched with men by their parents in hope that a marriage between the couple would be advantageous to both families concerned: "the convention among the gentry and aristocracy was for marriages to be arranged by families with a view to securing advantages or alliances" (Sokol &

Sokol 30), and “at the highest social levels, marriage was important for not only financial but also dynastic and, sometimes, political reasons, and it was in these ranks that family influence in matchmaking was most powerful” (Ingram 118). If a family could be more secure in its social standing or profitable in financial dealings, it was little hardship for them to use their daughter to obtain this status. However, “the degree of involvement of families in the selection of a marriage partner ranged between the benign acceptance and blessing of a child’s own choice, and the forcible coercion to accept a parent’s choice of spouse” (Sokol & Sokol 56). Unless her parents approved the choice she made, a woman had virtually no say in arranging her own marriage, and she was expected to marry a suitor chosen by her father. Apparently, the latter was all too often the case. While a daughter was sometimes allowed to choose a husband because she wanted to be married, there was no guarantee that her choice would be sanctioned by her parents.

In most of these cases, a dowry was attached to a daughter to make her more desirable to a more desirable suitor. A girl worth more money would be part of a better deal than another girl who brought less of a monetary bonus. This practice became the norm amongst the wealthy. “The dowry system among propertied classes had been in place since the sixteenth century, but at the end of the seventeenth there were thirteen women to every ten men, and cash portions had to grow to attract worthy suitors” (Diamond 524). At this point in history, then, women were worth even less since their value had to be buttressed by even more money. This dowry, once given, was the property of the man, not the couple. Even in the instance that a woman’s husband should die, “a woman with a £100 dowry could expect to receive £10 to £20 a year during widowhood, which meant that she would have to outlive her husband by five or ten years just to recoup her original investment” (Stretton 51). The dowry, which played such a key role in marital bargaining, was not intended to be returned to the wife at the husband’s

death. What money she was allotted at that time was predetermined and not reflective of the wife's service to her husband. This too is indicative of how a woman's worth was perceived by society.

In addition to her monetary dowry, a woman's virginity was considered an asset. "Since virginity is essential where marriage is primarily a property transaction, virginity itself becomes a class symbol" (Dusinberre 52); virginity added to the overall worth of a man's bride and was a testament to his social status. Thus, the one thing that a woman should be able to claim as her own was irrevocably taken away from her through an arranged marriage. "Under the system of arranged marriage a woman has to reject the world's assessment of her property worth, if she is to keep any human dignity" (Dusinberre 124). However, "whilst her sexual reputation – virginity until marriage and unwavering sexual fidelity to her husband thereafter – was a key component, it was not the only one. A married woman should not only be sexually faithful, but she should also maintain a demeanor fitting for a wife: submissiveness, deference, loyalty and silence unless spoken to" (Hinds 36).

This lack of control, the fact that they were pawns in the game of marriage, objectified women and transformed them into pieces of property, so much so that "early modern England's patrilineal property regime is often cited as a particularly egregious example of women's status as objects, rather than subjects, of property" (Korda 38). When women were betrothed to men by their fathers, they were, in essence, traded away. To betroth is literally to give in marriage, and one cannot give something that he does not own; hence, the father must consider himself in possession of his daughter, and she an object to be owned, in order to betroth her to another individual. Immediately after the wedding, the woman, as a piece of property, moved from her father's possession to her husband's. When such a transaction occurred, the female concerned went from being the

responsibility of her father to being under the care of her husband; “in a patriarchal society where a young woman depended on her father and, once married, had to obey her husband, for she was ‘under the rod’ or ‘under the power of her husband,’ women were powerless and often exchanged for money” (Lakhoua 177).

In Renaissance England women were generally defined in relation to their marital status; that is, “they were maids (understood as women who were preparing to marry), wives (women who had made it to the married state), or widows (women who had been married but whose husbands had died). The only other category was for whores (women assumed to be forever outside the marriage state)” (Howard, “Feminist Criticism” 413). If a woman was unmarried, she would have been fair game for any male in want of a wife. Wives were situated in a rather secure position because they were under the protection of their husbands. Widows were not always so fortunate, though they did receive some compensation as a result of their having been married.

A woman gained the most respect and most freedom as a wife. Husband and wife “shared a single legal personality and that personality was the husband’s” (Stretton 42), and the courtesy a wealthy man was shown was usually extended to his wife. This may have seemed, at least to the man, like a good deal for a woman, but probably did not to her. After all, all she had to do was give up her identity and all of her worldly possessions. “On marriage a woman’s personal property (her money, belongings and personal effects, including the clothes she stood in) became her husband’s outright, along with any gifts she received or monies she earned during marriage” (Stretton 42). The only thing that a woman could claim as her own was, in essence, her husband, and even then, she had little say over him.

It is true that, “by offering women certain rights and withholding others, and by linking legal status to married status, laws helped to define female identity” (Stretton 44),

but the identity she was then given was not her own. A woman ceased to be herself the moment the marriage vows were taken. A wife was often given leeway in the organizing and managing of the familial estate. “Early modern domestic ideology, in positioning the housewife as a nonproprietary manager or keeper of material property, clearly worked to buttress a political economy based on patrilineal property relations and the gendered division of labor that lent it support” (Korda 47). But even if the wife did have increased autonomy on a domestic level, it was so because her husband allowed her such freedom.

Even as a wife, women continued to be commodified because they produced offspring that would in turn award their husbands with more property. “Women through marriage had evident exchange value; that is, the virgin became a commodity not only for her use-value as a breeder of the legal heir but for her portion, which, through exchange, generated capital” (Diamond 524). Anything she created or any work she performed within the household also contributed to her husband’s assets.

Women who were not fortunate enough to be married were in a subclass of society who, “in early modern England were expected to live as household dependents (i.e., with family or kin, or as servants in other men’s households) and, of course, to remain chaste until marriage.” If a woman ever harbored a desire to live independently, she “risked being classified as ‘masterless women’ or prostitutes” (Korda 177), even if she did not practice the art of prostitution. With no male to protect her, and many to compromise her, she was assumed unchaste and guilty without proof. Sadly enough, these assumptions were often validated because “those singlewomen not living as household dependents who could not find work as servants had few legitimate employment options; they often had to get by on unlicensed, ad hoc forms of economic activity, or were forced into prostitution or onto poor-rates” (Korda 177). Women, then, had two options: marry and become the object of one man, or remain unwed and become

the object of many men. All in all, "marriage only offered a woman a better life than whoredom … if her husband treated her as a partner instead of a possession" (Dusinberre 126). At least as a wife she would remain reputable.

Since there were certain laws that dictated the way women could behave and the amount of power they had over themselves, there was little women could do to alter their roles as objects. "The issue arises repeatedly in plays and verse of the period: not only are marriages loveless, but once married, women lose both independent identity and control of their fortunes" (Diamond 525).

As was the case in the Elizabethan era, the marriages of Behn's time were very seldom unions of love; they were seen straightforwardly as a means to an economic end. There are many ways in which the women in the seventeenth century were as restricted as their predecessors. As Gallagher notes, at the time when Aphra Behn lived and wrote, women were considered inferior, objects of beauty that were primarily used as means of financial gain through marriage, or mere sex objects if outside of a legal union. Marriage was a very serious matter that was treated more like a business arrangement than the end result of a love affair as is common today. Clearly, quite often, there was no love to speak of between the parties involved in the marital negotiations. In fact, "because the husband's right of property was in the whole of the wife, the prior alienation of any part of her had to be seen as a violation of either actual or potential marital property" (Gallagher 29). If a man did not take proper care of his wife, it was as if he was neglecting an asset that was valuable to his estate, or not taking proper care of a child. "Women in the seventeenth century still had no independent legal status; first their fathers and then their husbands had legal responsibility for their actions, and their persons were these men's legal property" (Hinds 38). It is apparent, however, that women were growing increasingly unhappy with their limited existence:

> Whilst ideas about subordination and dependence, underpinned by reference to the divinely ordained natural order, constructed women as passive and compliant, the arguments made in women's petitions (and indeed, by the very existence of women's petitions), and the evidence of court records, construct a very different version of women, in opposition to these prescriptions. (Hinds 42)

Such petitions are evidence that women were not always as submissive as they have been portrayed, yet they do serve to show how repressed such women were:

> The picture constructed by these discourses of women's lot is a gloomy one: it is one of constraint, repression, powerlessness, docility, and restriction, where women, it would seem, are positioned either as submissive inferiors of their husbands and fathers, as passive victims of laws and prescriptions, or as disorderly creatures … in the thrall of their carnal natures, and beyond the bounds of social respectability. (Hinds 38)

Part of the reason that men were allowed control over their wives was that they were not self-controlled enough to see to themselves. They needed their husbands to relieve them of such a difficult task.

CHAPTER 1:
MARRIAGE AS A MEANS OF COMMODIFICATION

While Shakespeare could not have been ignorant of the treatment of women in his society, many of the female characters he created transcend such concerns. As a result, the plays he wrote were "theatrical transformations of the social tensions that gave them some of their subject matter and their appeal to a divided audience, not examples of Elizabethan social history" (Novy 6). In developing such compelling women to play in his work, he enabled others to see that women could indeed be strong, independent thinkers, in or outside of marriage.

> Often the richest historically inflected readings of *Measure for Measure* study complex interrelationships that link the action of the play with social and political practices distinctive to its time—whether on the grand scale of the court or in the textured cultural record that has survived from the everyday social, political, and religious life of early-seventeenth-century England. (Wheeler, "Introduction" 3)

Measure for Measure shows how various stages of a woman's life could have affected the woman she ultimately became. The women figures in the play each embody the characteristics and speech of a specific type of female that would have been familiar to anyone living at this time; "each of these women represents a different kind of antitype to the figure of the housewife: the nun (Isabella); the unwed mother (Juliet and Kate Keep-Down); the prostitute (Kate Keep-Down); the economically dependent singlewoman (Mariana); the economically independent bawd and widow (Mistress Overdone)" (Korda 180). Isabella does everything she can to maintain her chastity and surrenders herself to God to avoid getting married; Juliet and Kate Keep-Down give in to the men they love and begin the play in difficult situations because they are not legally wed; Mariana is independent, but only because she has been betrayed by Angelo, whom

she would have married; and Mistress Overdone, though also independent, is forever doomed to remain a whore because she is not considered marriageable. "Mistress Elbow, as one might well not recall, is the only legal wife in the play" (DiGangi 179). Marriage would be the one thing that would give any of these women a way out of their less than desirable predicaments.

It is only through marriage at the end of the play that they are made worthy of living in relative comfort and safety:

> In *Measure for Measure*, marriage represents a reciprocal exchange of value or 'worth' between husband and wife ... From this perspective, the play's narrative works effectively to ensure that property never remains in the hands of its placeless singlewoman; Isabella's dowry is mentioned only at the moment she is poised to marry an earthly, rather than a spiritual, bridegroom. (Korda 188)

Mariana is the only woman in the play to possess any property, aside from Isabella and her little-mentioned dowry, and she is not allowed to keep it to herself as she is soon reattached to Angelo. "Isabella's propertylessness allows her to retreat from a corrupt 'Viennese marriage market' that objectifies women as 'commodities to be sold or traded to the highest bidder' into the pastoral 'green world' of the cloistered garden" (Korda 164), but this does not last for long as she is commanded to re-enter the world that she attempted to retreat from. Kate Keep-Down does hold on to her freedom for a while, but only until the Duke determines she should marry Lucio. Juliet must marry the father of her child. As is the case in all of Shakespeare's comedies, the plot of the play is "motivated by the imperative to get maids to the altar, that is, to position them to make the successful transition to wives" (Howard, *Feminist Criticism* 414). As was the case for many Elizabethan women, the women of *Measure for Measure* are identified in relation to the men in their lives.

“In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare again raises the question of woman’s personal autonomy—her right to control her own body” (Dash 251). The one piece of a woman’s property that she should not have to relinquish upon marriage is control of her body. But from Isabella’s first appearance in the play, her right to control her body is undermined. Angelo’s offer to have her sleep with him in return for saving her brother’s life does imply that her body is worth a great deal: the value of a human life; the fact that he expects her to jump at the chance, however, does indicate how little *he* values her chastity and implies that she is not capable of controlling her body to begin with. Her brother’s implication that she should indeed give up herself and her own self-worth for him also indicates that he, not Isabella, should be given control of her body. The one thing Isabella chooses to do, to give her body to God, is not allowed to happen because of what others, particularly men, think she should do with it instead. The chastity, which she would have given to God, is twisted to objectify her in the eyes of her society. Unjustly, her status as a woman determines whether or not she should be able to have control over her body.

Mariana’s astounding devotion to Angelo, in spite of his ill-treatment of her, shows how much she values love, but how little she values herself. Where Isabella believes herself to be worth more than a bargaining tool to be used by the men in the play, Mariana is all too quick to make herself into a bargaining instrument for Angelo’s life. She loves Angelo in spite of the fact that he only wants her for her money, as is apparent in her emotional appeal for his life at the end of the play. “I crave no other, nor no better man” (5.1.432), she tells the Duke in her plea to him. Mariana does seem aware that she probably should not love Angelo, but she cannot help it; her belief in romantic love supersedes her knowledge of Angelo’s betrayal. In a sense, “Mariana’s acceptance of Angelo, who had discarded her for want of a dowry and condemned Claudio for letting

love anticipate finance, measures her worth against his" (Dusinberre 124). If this is the case, she must not be worth very much. This sort of situation, as illustrated by Mariana, serves as a sharp contrast to what women actually wanted. Or perhaps women would have wanted the love Mariana claims, but not at such a price as to give herself to a man so undeserving. Yet Mariana is doing exactly what the men of her time would have wanted her to do; she is nothing without a husband, so that should be her goal in life, to get a husband no matter what the cost to herself.

Shakespeare manages to tidy everything up for the women in terms of marriage, with the exception of Isabella because she never accepts or refuses the Duke's proposal of marriage. It is in this issue alone, the final few lines of the play, that we are given a glimpse of what women could be. Shakespeare could have had Isabella accept the Duke's offer, but then she would be like every other woman in the play: an object of worth only when married to a man. Isabella's only viable options are to agree to marry the Duke or enter the nunnery. In marrying the Duke, she would have been doing almost exactly what she would have been doing had she agreed to Angelo's proposition; she would be giving herself to a man, without the noble motivation of saving her brother. In the nunnery, she is committed to God rather than a man, but here too she holds no power as a woman. Shakespeare could have had her definitively choose the latter, but perhaps this would not have been an acceptable, or believable, choice in the eyes of his Protestant audience. Instead, he leaves her response open to interpretation, allowing his audience and modern readers alike to decide what kind of woman Isabella is.

In *The Rover*, Florinda is a woman who is intended by her father to marry a man with different interests and background from hers, and who is considerably older; these qualities and the fact that she is not in love with him, are several of the reasons that Florinda does not wish to be married to him. She is a "well-born young woman who is

subjected to an arranged marriage, which leads her to complain of being 'enslaved' by her domineering brother" (Copeland, "Staging Gender" 18). Don Pedro, her brother, claims that he has only her best interests in mind, which perhaps he does, but he refuses to listen to her speak her own mind on the matter; he may take her situation into consideration, but he does not take her feelings into account. Instead, Don Pedro instructs her to consider the fortune of her intended and not his appearance or disposition, to which she replies, "let him consider my youth, beauty and fortune, which ought not to be thrown away on his age and jointure" (1.1.75-76). "He may perhaps increase her bags, but not her family" (1.1.87). It does seem in many ways that the primary concern of her family is the marital connection to Vincentio and not much more. Either way, Florinda's wishes or opinions on the matter concern them very little. Don Pedro does give her an alternative choice in his friend Antonio, but, again, her true happiness is not significant. It is clear in the way her brother speaks to her that he at least wants her to be happy, but "Pedro's love for his sister does not extend to granting her the freedom to choose her own husband" (Pacheco 210). Needless to say, "Florinda's pride in her self-worth clearly chafes at the exploitation involved in forced marriage" (Pacheco 325); therefore, she uses every resource at her disposal to free herself of that dreaded obligation.

Florinda is eventually able to overcome her nuptial dilemma and be married to someone she loves, but she has to reach that point on her own. Ironically, "the properties which sustain Florinda's status as an autonomous subject free to choose her own marriage partner are largely those for which her father and brother cherish her: it is her beauty, rank and fortune that make her such a prized asset on the marriage market" (Pacheco 325). Florinda is wealthy, beautiful, and intelligent, and it is with these qualities that she manipulates her situation and eventually avoids the event that she so dreads. At the same time, however, Florinda is still "degraded to the level of an object, a

commodity, however precious, in a coercive structure of exchange" (Pacheco 325), because she still becomes Belvile's property in the end, even if her position under Belvile is much more appealing than her other option ever was.

Hellena is not initially intended to become a member of the marriage market. Instead, "her family expects her to live in a convent, but Hellena usurps the authority of her brother (who stands in as patriarch for her absent father), and decides for herself what to do with her life" (Bobker 35). Hellena wants to be given the chance to experience something more than what her family has in mind; she "rejects not only her brother's decision to place her in a nunnery, but also the cultural narrative of portion, jointure, and legal dependency in which she is written not as subject but as object of exchange" (Diamond 527). It is rather ironic, however, that Hellena chooses to become part of the same system that would make a commodity out of her sister.

Hellena wishes to marry out of love, and is in no way forced to wed, but her future husband, Willmore, does take her financial value into consideration. The future of the young lovers remains uncertain until Willmore is enlightened as to the dowry that would come to the man who married Hellena; it is only when Angellica "reveals the crucial information that Hellena has a portion of 300,000 crowns" (Staves 65) that his decision to marry Hellena is confirmed. Were he to have made such a choice without money being a factor, Hellena might have escaped being a commodity altogether because a union of love consists of two people of supposedly equal importance instead of a one-sided relationship.

The words used in discussing the potential marriage between Hellena and Willmore further depict Hellena as a commodity. The first thing Hellena speaks of after Willmore voices his intention to marry her is the large sum of money she has to offer a husband: "Why, I have considered the matter, brother, and find, the three hundred

thousand crowns my uncle left me, and you cannot keep from me, will be better laid out in love than in religion, and turn to as good an account" (5.1.521-25); the money her uncle provided for her would be best invested, or "laid out," in her happiness in marriage rather than in her unhappiness in the convent. That Hellena is the one speaking, however, shows that she is aware of how important money is to their union. She does not seem to mind that money is such an important factor because it will get her what she wants. She knows what she is getting from Willmore out of the deal and she does not sell herself short, as some women in her position would have.

CHAPTER 2:

SHAKESPEARE'S PROSTITUTES AND BEHN'S COURTESANS

Prostitutes have appeared in many forms in many different texts over the years. "Prostitutes and courtesans occasionally appear as minor characters, sometimes greedy and heartless, as in Shadwell's *The Woman Captain*, sometimes neutral, like Madam Rampant in *She Would if She Could*, just occasionally the whore with the heart of gold, like Sedley's *Bellamira*" (Pearson 93). Shakespeare's prostitutes in *Measure for Measure* are neither malicious nor overly generous in their dealings; instead, they provide humor and an obvious contrast to the chastity of the key female figure in the play, Isabella. Behn's courtesans likewise illustrate what the lives of Hellena and Florinda could have been like had they not been born into privilege.

Shakespeare does not use the word prostitute in *Measure for Measure*; rather, he labels Mistress Overdone a "bawd" or woman in charge of a brothel. However, the full nature of her profession is quite evident from the way she and her women are referred to and the lewd jokes made at their expense. The OED defines the word prostitute as "a person, typically a woman, who engages in sexual activity for payment" ("Prostitute"); whereas a courtesan, a word Behn does explicitly use to identify such women, was "a prostitute especially one associating with wealthy or upper-class clients" ("Courtesan"). The two words mean virtually the same thing, the only difference being the societal status of the customer and, perhaps, the seller. This distinction is quite easily seen in the women in the two plays. Shakespeare's prostitutes are lower-class women who sell themselves to anyone who can pay their fee, while Behn's courtesans are beautiful women of a higher class who charge a great deal more for their services.

There are several prostitutes in *Measure for Measure*. Part of the play, in fact, takes place in a brothel. Shakespeare's Mistress Overdone is the most memorable of these

women. Mistress Overdone does not, as we see her, seem displeased with her profession. She is constantly forced to endure jokes made at her expense, but she also dishes out a few of her own. In *Measure for Measure*, "life and comedy are synonymous with commerce among the brothels of Vienna. Shakespeare presents the physical reality, and mutual acceptance, of those who make their money through sex: Mistress Overdone, Pompey, Froth, and Elbow" (Edmonson 280). To some extent, Mistress Overdone is set up to be a contrast to other women in the play, though she is never at their social level. She does represent what could happen to women like Isabella or Juliet should they not conform to the desire of the men in their world, but her character is not developed well enough to evoke the same feeling we have for the other women in the play.

The prostitutes in *Measure for Measure* do not reveal their attitudes toward sex anywhere in the play. It is possible that Shakespeare gave them such limited depth on purpose as a way of showing the limited significance of prostitutes in society. They served a purpose, yes, but did not matter enough as people to have valid thoughts on important societal issues. Mistress Overdone is extremely blasé in her attitude toward prostitution in that she jokes about, and tolerates jokes about, her profession. The scene in the brothel is one of the most comical in the play. Women were not supposed to have as cavalier an attitude toward sex as men did, the only exception being the whores in both Shakespeare and Behn's plays.

Conversely, in *The Rover*, the extremely beautiful, very talented and infamous courtesan Angellica Bianca emerges as one of the most fascinating characters in the play, and is the focus of many of the play's most significant issues. Angellica is an essential character needed to help the audience "understand the real purport of a female author's and an actress's theatrical significance, together with a woman's commodification, and a courtesan's value in the exchange economy of Restoration London" (Zozaya 118). Where

Florinda wishes to be released from her engagement to marry for love, any move Angellica makes is to line her pockets and stroke her ego, at least until she falls in love with Willmore. The Angellica we see at the beginning of the play is "a woman torn between immense pride and an equally formidable psychic burden of disempowerment—an inner division that disassociates her sexuality from her sense of self-worth" (Pacheco 340). Angellica does not think of herself as being below other women, even though she sells her body for money; she is a courtesan, but she does not consider that what she chooses to do with her body renders her any less valuable than a woman of virtue. She values herself – literally. This attitude is indicative of Behn's own belief that women should be free to make their own decisions. Angellica is her own boss and does not have to answer to anyone, which is something that Florinda and Hellena cannot claim. While Behn might not have advocated prostitution, the freedom attained by a prostitute, or courtesan, was very appealing.

Angellica openly admits that only gold, or a high price paid for her, will be able to win her charms. She even "hides behind a curtain and plays music, sings songs to rich potential customers – at this point Angellica is highly conscious of and in control of her own self-promotion" (Bobker 33). Since she quite literally makes herself into an object to be bought, it is no wonder that men treat her as an object. However, while she does sell herself to the highest bidder, she never accepts an offer that she does not want to take. The extent of Angellica's self-objectification only adds to the notion that prostitutes are objectified because of the nature of their trade.

Though Angellica has more control over herself than the other women in the play, with the exception of the other whores, she "laments being imprisoned in an underworld sexual economy, out of which she cannot escape because she has no currency, no reputation for chastity" (Canfield 149). Where she possesses the freedom the other

women lack, freedom is all that she has. She will likely never marry or be valued as anything but a courtesan. Throughout the play, the virgins concern themselves with who and how they will marry, but Angellica has to discover who she is and what she wants. It is in the wooing/bargaining scene with Willmore that it becomes clear that she wants to "step out of the exchange economy symbolized by the paintings" (Diamond 533); her "gift of herself marks her intention to step out of the exchange economy of the prostitute market" (Zozaya 119). This is, however, the one thing about her life that she cannot control. She cannot remove herself from the situation she has created for herself. Yet, "by eliminating her value-form, Angellica attempts to return her body to a state of nature, to take herself out of circulation" (Diamond 533). After seeing what the virgins are able to attain, and realizing how little she has, she seems to want to reevaluate her situation. If anything, Angellica's implied desire to leave her position makes her a more complicated character than she at first appeared. While it is highly unlikely that she would ever be able to be a reputable woman, wealthy or not, she does not leave the reader with the impression that she wished to remain a courtesan. In fact, there is no definitive answer as to what will become of Angellica. She is faced with a choice of what to do with herself, but her decision is never revealed. Angellica "cannot simply be typed as a whore: at the conclusion she remains, as she is throughout, separated from the play's 'bad' prostitute, the duplicitous Lucetta; nor is she shown returning to her trade. No other place is provided for her, however: she is not only isolated, but left in limbo" (Copeland, "Once a Whore" 26).

Essentially, Angellica sees herself as a savvy businesswoman. "An important difference between Behn's author-whore and writer-wit identities is illustrated by Angellica and Hellena's contrasting relationships to economic and sexual power. Angellica distinguishes between sex for money and sex for pleasure. When she sleeps

with men for money, Angellica's gain is purely economic, she does not enjoy the sex" (Bobker 36). Angellica is able to distance herself from her sexual relations in a way that Hellena, or Florinda, never does. Angellica represents a woman who possesses the freedom that Florinda and Hellena so desperately want. Unlike the virgins, Angellica does not place a romantic value on sex, perhaps because she no longer has the virtue that the other women still possess. If women like Florinda and Hellena were able to view sex in a similar manner it would serve them well when pressured into marriage without romantic feelings; they would not expect the emotions that would come with a union of love, and would be able to distance themselves from the sex they would inevitably have in a loveless marriage. When sex is disconnected from emotion, the act itself becomes a commodity to be given or taken by the women involved, bought or stolen by the men with whom they are involved.

In *The Rover*, the whore is also the only exception to this rule because it is the whore "who parceled her sexuality out piecemeal at a very high rate of exchange while withholding her identity, her self, which is what Angellica Bianca does until she gives herself to Willmore" (Finke 27). Angellica's view of sex remains consistent in all of her interactions, aside from those with Willmore. When she meets Willmore, he cannot afford her favors, so he instead offers her love in exchange for sex, putting a slight twist on the idea of sexual economics through the implication that both love and money can buy a woman. Somewhat surprisingly, given what we see from her previous words and actions within the play, Angellica Bianca enters into an agreement with him that she will indeed give herself to him, and he to her, out of affection. That she even considers altering her usual terms in order to allow Willmore access implies that she may not be as content with her position as she would have others think.

Angellica may have been hurt by Willmore's desertion, but she seems far from devastated when their relationship does not develop beyond the physical, though she does threaten to shoot him. Rather than being heartbroken, she seems insulted that her power through beauty and sex did not keep him at her whim:

> In vain I have consulted all my charms
>
> In vain this beauty prized, in vain believed
>
> My eyes could kindle any lasting fires;
>
> I had forgot my name, my infamy,
>
> And the reproach that honor lays on those
>
> That dare pretend a sober passion here.
>
> ....
>
> Then since I am not fit to be beloved,
>
> I am resolved to think on a revenge
>
> On him that soothed me thus to my undoing. (4.2.400-11)

These are not words of grief but of frustration. Angellica's thoughts turn almost immediately to revenge. Aside from this instance with Willmore, there are no indications that she feels anything for the men she meets. As a rule, Angellica conducts her intimate affairs as one would a business enterprise, and even refers to her industry as a business. She markets herself to fetch the highest price possible. The painting she hangs outside her dwelling is the equivalent of a modern-day billboard; it is an ad, with Angellica Bianca as the object for sale. Willmore too, in his dealings with Angellica, says to Moretta, her manager, "here, good forewoman of the shop, serve me, and I'll be gone" (2.2.29-30). In this instance, Angellica's bedchamber is transformed into a store where she is the good on display, the good she has advertised. This notion is seen again when Willmore takes possession of her portrait. Angellica Bianca is once more an object for Willmore to

literally take off of the shelf and purchase; "Willmore removes Angellica's portrait the way a theater manager might lift a piece of the set—because without buying her, he already owns her" (Diamond 532). While he does not actually have possession of the women, he owns the next best thing, a stylized version of her. Willmore possesses Angellica in virtually every way he can; he first robs her of her likeness, then she gives him her body. "In effect she is doubly commodified—first because she puts her body into exchange, and second because this body is equated with, indeed interchangeable with, the art object" (Diamond 534).

Throughout the play, the profession of courtesan is tied to business-like references and metaphors. Despite the implication of these references, however, Angellica seems to get her personal reward not from monetary gain, but from the boost her ego receives by being the object of desire to as many men as possible. Angellica even claims of men that "their wonder feeds my vanity, and he that wishes but to buy gives me more pride, than he that gives my price can make my pleasure" (2.1.121-23). If it is enough for her that she be desired instead of paid, then she is selling herself for pride. When she agrees to sleep with Willmore without her fee, she sets aside her desire for fame and profit to be with him. Perhaps the fact that she did make exceptions to her usual method of business in order to be with him added to the hurt and anger she felt toward him when he ended their affair.

It is rather telling that none of the men seems to look down on Angellica for the career she has chosen to embrace. Only Blunt even bothers to pose the question, "when did you ever hear of an honest woman that took a man's money?" (1.2.43-44), and even then, no one appears concerned with the answer, or is even aware that the question was posed. They simply continue to appreciate the fact that such women are available for their entertainment. It is almost as if viewing the available courtesans and discussing the

prices they charge are just an enjoyable pastime for the noblemen in the play. Most of these men have other women they are hoping to marry, yet they are free to cavort with the courtesans on the side for fun.

Don Pedro is willing to pay a great sum of money for an opportunity to be with Angellica, and he not once downplays his yearning for her, but he concedes that this is something that he has done numerous times before with different women. Don Pedro treats her as an object because she presents herself as an object, as seen in the way she displays her visual advertisement on the wall of a building. Don Pedro tells his man to "fetch me a thousand Crowns, I have never wisht to buy this Beauty at an easier rate" (2.1.109-10) because he wants to buy time with her. Again, men like Don Pedro do not seem to acknowledge that women are more substantial than a piece of property to be bought or used, that they are more than the commodities they are treated as; then again, this is what they would have seen go on in their society for a very long time.

The difference in the prostitutes and courtesans in Shakespeare and Behn's plays is remarkable, and not because of the difference in social status. Shakespeare's prostitutes in *Measure for Measure* are one-dimensional, serving only to provide humor and contrast to the more important female characters in the play; Isabella, Mariana and Juliet are all more significant to the plot of the play than Mistress Overdone. In *The Rover*, on the other hand, Angellica is arguably the most essential female character, in spite of her position as courtesan; the autonomy Angellica possesses is of at least equal importance to the struggles of the oppressed virgins.

The dissimilar ways in which these similar characters are treated could be indicative of the author's view of prostitutes or, more likely, the different points the authors were trying to make. Shakespeare shows how different women were treated in his society, while Behn uses depictions of such women to emphasize the problem of

commodification in hers; Shakespeare uses prostitutes to advance his plot, while Behn is clearly fascinated by prostitution as an alternative to marriage.

CHAPTER 3:

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MARRIED WOMEN AND PROSTITUTES

In many ways, women who were to be married faced many of the same problems as prostitutes. Married women and prostitutes were often both treated as commodities by men, to be bought and used as they saw fit. A married woman was restrained by her title as such, but the freedom had by prostitutes gave way to other problems. Married women and prostitutes were first and foremost *women*; thus, they were at a disadvantage from the start, to be controlled and manipulated by men.

While men played the role of negotiator when it came to buying a wife, the prostitute dealt with her own transactions. Likewise, where prostitution strives to establish a sexual affiliation between strangers, marriage does the same for a husband and wife. "In the renaissance world, women were to be mothers, daughters, or widows, virgins or prostitutes, defined by their sexual status in relation to men" (Lakhoua 177); their sexual status, like everything else, was defined by their position in relation to the man closest to them. A successful prostitute would be considered so if she were able to charge a man more money for her goods or had larger quantities of men interested in her, just as a woman would be more valuable if she had a substantial dowry tied to her.

Both Shakespeare and Behn seem to have been very much aware of the consequences that an unwed woman would have to face if careless with her choice of sexual activities. Potential wives and prostitutes each had to ensure that they avoided anything that would hinder their advancement along their designated paths. If a woman did not protect her virginity or was not discreet with her sexual exploits, her power or status in the marriage marketplace could easily be adversely affected. In the same sense, a woman's career as a prostitute could also be compromised by bad decisions made about her sexuality, especially if those indiscretions involved the conception of a child. Since

there were no guarantees that an illegitimate child would be recognized by the father, children from unwed mothers, infamous prostitutes included, would have been the sole responsibility of the mother, thus adding to her financial burden. In both situations, the decision to have sex must be carefully weighed against what might come from such a submission. The act of sex physically symbolizes the trade that was made of the objectified woman; the act of being intimate with a man is proof of her objectification. A woman's "consistent morality is that sexual submission for the sake of money, family, or status –in or out of marriage– is base prostitution" (Gardiner 73). When a woman submits to unwanted sex in a marriage bargain, she is giving away her identity as a woman as surely as if she were performing the act of a prostitute. Given this notion of what each position means, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that, in many circumstances, prostitution even allows a woman to be stronger than she would otherwise be able to be; at least women usually had a choice whether or not to become prostitutes. "Prostitution, a kind of commonwealth, readily becomes, therefore, an image of the body politic because women and men are associated in both prostitution and marriage with sexual access and property to be contractually exchanged" (Szilagyi 449).

While Shakespeare made his prostitutes recognizably different from his married women and eligible maids, it is not difficult to infer commonalities between them, especially given the language that is used to discuss them. It is not surprising that there is a comment made about the diseases "purchased" under Mistress Overdone's roof (1.ii.44-45) since she opens herself up to being bought, but it is not as expected that Isabella and Juliet be commodified in such a way. Claudio speaks of the "true contract" that binds himself to the mother of his child. When Angelo is instructing the Provost on how to handle Juliet near her time of labor, he says simply "dispose of her to some more fitter place" (2.2.20-21). He speaks of her as though she were indeed an object to be disposed

of rather than a human being. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare depicts “a Vienna in which lust is rampant and in which even fiancées and wives are referred to in the same terms as whores” (Riefer 162). Juliet is connected to the prostitutes when she is referred to as a fornicatress, even though she was contracted to be married to Claudio (2.2.25). Prostitutes fornicate, but in Angelo’s eyes, so do virtuous young maids who sleep with men who are more or less their husbands. Angelo, the most contemptible character in the play, does not see a difference between women like Mistress Overdone and Juliet, perhaps because they are women. Instances such as this, especially when thought of in conjunction with the other ways in which he speaks of women, imply that he sees all women to be at the same level, and a very low one at that.

In being commodified, Isabella is very closely tied to the prostitutes in the play. Where prostitutes willingly sell themselves to men, Isabella unwillingly becomes an object of desire to both Angelo and the Duke. Though Angelo gives her very compelling motivation for relinquishing control of her body, in making the proposition at all he reduces her worth to commodity status; the mere suggestion of the exchange sets Isabella up as a commodity. According to Angelo, if Isabella does not consent to his request, her identity as a woman will be in jeopardy. He tells her to “Be that you are / That is, a woman; if you be more, you’re none” (2.4.135-36). In other words, “to be woman is to be frail, to be subject to and by the sexual desires of men” (Baines 295); to be woman is to be a commodity, an object to be used by men. Angelo equates “the nonconforming woman with nothingness—that is, if a woman won’t have sex with a man she has no identity” (Slights & Holmes 282). If she has no identity as an object, she has no identity period. This is the same way such a man would view a prostitute. In this instance, the sex she will not give him becomes as much a tangible asset as she does.

In a rather different manner, the Duke too believes that Isabella can be bought. He does seem to respect her in ways that Angelo obviously does not, but it is clear from the way he presents the offer that he expects her to agree to his proposal because of who he is. Instead of wanting her body for sex, however, the Duke wants her for her integrity. If he can have Isabella, he can have all that she represents; if he gains possession of her, it shows him worthy of her. In this sense, she would be no less of a commodity as the Duke's wife than she would be as Angelo's mistress. The only difference would be that she would obtain a legitimacy that a relationship with Angelo would not have provided. Though the Duke did not care about any financial benefit Isabella might provide, he was very interested in her integrity; if he could have Isabella, he could have everything she stood for.

In *The Rover*, Behn uses her own wit and a keen understanding of the women of her time to emphasize the idea that the roles of wife and courtesan are indeed very closely related. In all actuality, there is really very little structural or economic difference between marriage and prostitution, especially at the time *The Rover* was written – one sells a woman for the profit of her family, and the other allows the woman to sell herself in order to make her own profit. In her work, Behn "equated forced marriage directly with prostitution, an exactly similar economic arrangement where sex is bought for money" (Pearson 161); throughout the play, she reminds the reader that the status of a woman is related to the exclusivity of the terms upon which she can be purchased (Staves 65). Perhaps it was because Behn made such little distinction between the two categories of women herself that she minimized the difference between the status of the virgin and the whore, a wife or a prostitute, in her play. Angellica and Hellena, Lucetta and Florinda provide complementary illustrations of the prostitute and a woman of quality.

One of the main ways in which Angellica and Hellena are similar is that they both advertise themselves, even though the ways they go about doing it are quite different. Angellica blatantly hangs a portrait of herself where everyone will be able to see what she looks like so that men will be aware of her beauty and be tempted to bid on her 'wares'. Hellena very plainly tells Florinda of her views on the subject of love and sex, and how she feels about interacting with men, but, unlike Angellica, she does so in the privacy of her rooms where only the reader, or audience watching the show, can hear; while "Angellica advertises herself publicly; Hellena's self-advertisement, within the play's fictive world, takes place in the privacy of her home" (Copeland, "Once a Whore" 22). They both want to be desired by men and hope to be the object of their affections, but the manner in which they make their feelings known is very different. In addition to demonstrating the difference in their personalities and their freedom to express their feelings, the way each woman speaks is also indicative of their social status, but "like the prostitute, Hellena is acutely aware of her economic situation and sees herself as a marketable object" (Bobker 36). Even though she emphasizes her appealing qualities in hope of attracting a husband for herself by doing so, a woman like Hellena would never be expected to be as blatantly obvious about her desires as Angellica is because of who she is, a woman of quality.

It would be easy for Angellica to hate her profession, but she makes the best of her situation instead, such as it is. Hellena too does everything short of becoming a prostitute to be happy. "Yet there is a crucial distinction between Hellena and the people who are literally for sale: Hellena is not offering her sexuality explicitly for literal male purchase and consumption" (Nash 84); she only sells the idea of herself in order to make a marriage match. "As a prostitute, Angellica relies on the circulation of masculinist discourses of sex and power, but she is generally the object not the subject of these

discourses. By contrast, Hellena, a young aristocrat, constructs herself through, and plays with, a wide variety of discourses" (Bobker 35). Hellena does seem to wish that she could give in to the role of carefree gypsy completely, but she does not end up doing so until the price is right. Still, Hellena's position is rather ambiguous because of this connection to Angellica. "Angellica Bianca would seem to be a supplement to the intrigue plot — a supplement since one need not intrigue to visit a whore. Yet before the virgins are rewarded with the husbands they desire, they will transverse the whore's marketplace" (Diamond 519). The respectable virgins mingle in the world of the prostitute but are still able to be married because of their stature as respectable women.

In the character of Florinda, Behn presents one woman of several women "who exist as major commodities on marriage markets and ... address the use and exchange of values attributed to women by the controlling social matrix, an ordering based on marriage marketeering and erotic speculation" (Lussier 380). She serves a purpose: to be married off for the benefit of her family. In doing so, Florinda becomes as much an object as her courtesan counterparts. "If Angellica Bianca makes a spectacle of herself through balcony curtains and paintings, Florinda's 'undress' and her proximity to the painted scenes signify a similar reduction to commodity status" (Diamond 534). In *The Rover*, "it is Florinda's rebellion against the commodification of forced marriage that destabilizes her position within patriarchy, while Angellica Bianca's self- construction as Petrarchan mistress charts the attempt of a woman excluded from the marital marketplace to turn her beauty into an alternative form of power" (Pacheco 323). Even though the two women have different goals in attracting men, both exchange their power for something else; Florinda loses the power she exerts to marry Belvile, while Angellica exchanges the power she has gained through being a notorious prostitute for a chance to be with Willmore. Angellica has no place in the marital marketplace; thus, instead of selling

herself into marriage, she gives herself to Willmore in exchange for his affections. Florinda cannot afford to just "give" herself to anyone.

In a similar sense, Florinda and Lucetta are also connected. The jeweled miniature that Florinda passes to Belvile serves as her public advertisement that she is available and desires to be pursued by him; Belvile in turn passes the picture amongst his friends in order to advertise her appeal to them. Lucetta, on the other hand, openly flaunts herself in front of the men she hopes to trap in her web, and this serves to make her desires known. To some degree, they both advertise themselves publicly, like Angellica Bianca, but again, they do so in different ways. Like Hellena, Florinda manages to keep a physical distance from the man she is in love with, and like Angellica, Lucetta gets as close as she can to the man she is after, as is the custom of her profession. While Florinda does put herself up for purchase, as does her courtesan counterpart, she advertises herself in the sense that she expresses her desire to be sold into marriage. Though Florinda and Hellena act as though they would prefer freedom, they know that it will not ever fit into their lives; rather, it is a fantasy they are able to create and enjoy for a short time. Either way, Behn was right: whether in marriage or outside of it, sex for status or money is prostitution, on some level or another.

CHAPTER 4:
FEMALE SEXUALITY AS IT RELATES TO COMMODIFICATION

A woman was expected to remain chaste before marriage unless she was a prostitute. At the time of a woman's marriage, it would have been unthinkable for her to have had any prior sexual experience. A woman's virginity, as discussed above, was one of her most marketable assets when trying to find a husband; "chastity is thus the form of power that subjugation assumes" (Baines 285). In a sense, a woman's chastity was what made her eligible to form a legitimate alliance with a man. Without it, she was not worthy of privilege. Therefore, insisting a woman remain chaste became "not only a means of restoring social health, but also the means of reviving or buttressing patriarchal authority" (Baines 285). It would be more difficult, if not impossible, for a woman to be used though marriage if her chastity was not intact. Therefore, "chastity becomes for woman a form of power; through it the woman legitimizes the power of the man and preserves the patriarchal social structure" (Baines 286). There was no place for sexuality in the lives of respectable women. Especially "when, in the exchange economy, a woman was either destined to become a wife or nun, the exertion of her theoretical right to sexual freedom translated her into a whore at once" (Zozaya 116). There was no gray area; "virgin" and "whore" were the only recognized labels that women could wear.

In *Measure for Measure*, Isabella is the perfect virgin. She knows what it means to be unmarried in Vienna and she acknowledges that her most viable escape is to the nunnery. She could have tried to become a wife, but that too would mean succumbing to a man. The fact that she chooses neither of these options indicates that she wanted to retain control of herself; "the chastity that the nunnery protects is thus a form of freedom, the only form of autonomy left for women in a world where sexuality means submission to men and degradation in that submission" (Baines 287). By choosing to join the

convent, Isabella pledges an obedience she would have had to give a husband, but as a servant of God, she would still be her own person rather than an extension of her husband. The desire behind her initial decision to join the nunnery is still evident at the end of the play in her lack of response to the Duke's proposal.

When Isabella ventures outside of the convent, she is faced with the very situation that she hoped to avoid in the nunnery. No time at all passes before she is propositioned by Angelo, who uses her love for her brother as a tool to obtain what he wants. She rejects him as anyone of her devotion would, but "to reject Angelo is to reject the woman's role – as defined by men" (Walder 237); by not having sex with Angelo she is going against what a woman is expected to do, submit to man. However, in successfully rejecting Angelo, Isabella successfully defends her chastity and her right to keep control of herself, although fictionally, she does submit to him in the bed trick. Her reluctance to accept the Duke's proposal of marriage is also reflective of her desire to remain free. Her encounter with Angelo has made her even more eager to flee from the corrupt city and the threat it poses to her still-intact chastity. By marrying the Duke, Isabella would gain a security she would not have obtained by prostituting herself to Angelo, but she would still be giving control of herself to another; "what the Duke has to offer in this exchange is his authority, his power; what Isabel has to offer is her autonomy, forfeited as she gives her body in marriage" (Baines 298). The institution of marriage has been traditionally constructed in favor of the husband. Because "marriage institutionalizes the authority of the husband over the wife, the Duke, in fact, has everything to gain and nothing to lose through Isabella's acceptance" (Baines 298). It is Isabella who has everything to lose – because she is a woman.

Entering the convent is Isabella's only other viable option. Granted, this would not be an escape from patriarchy since the Catholic Church itself is entirely patriarchal,

but her immediate power structure would be female. She would lose considerably less of herself than she would under other circumstances.

Juliet had already fallen from her virgin state by the time she makes her appearance onstage. From the outset, she represents, in the eyes of Viennese society, everything that Isabella is not—chaste, law-abiding, morally sound—and she is subsequently punished. Even though she was already "fast" Claudio's wife (1.2.144), she is condemned for premarital sex. In another city at the same time she would not have been in violation of the law, and even in Vienna Juliet likely would not have been prosecuted under the Duke's authority. Again, it is Angelo's strict enforcement of the law that prompts him to do the wrong thing in regards to a woman, this time to Juliet. For Juliet a proper marriage does not hinge on her chastity because she is already more or less married when she has sex. Sex does, however, put both herself and Claudio in a very precarious position.

On the other hand, sex with Angelo, by way of a bed trick that the Duke orchestrates, is what allows Mariana to reclaim her position next to Angelo. By arranging this act of deception, the Duke puts Angelo in the same situation Claudio was in at the beginning of the play: he had sex with a woman who was not his wife. He could no more deny his guilt than he could admit that he was corrupt. Mariana is the only female in *Measure for Measure* who benefits from the act of sex, and that is likely because it was the means through which the "villain" of the play was punished.

Sex, or the idea of what sex means, is everywhere in *Measure for Measure*. Each female figure in the play represents a different type of woman that could be found in Vienna at this time: the would-be nun, the pregnant girlfriend, the jilted fiancée, the widow, the whore. Likewise, the issues that such women would have had to face are dealt with by their corresponding characters: "the alternatives to Isabella's strict renunciation

of her sexuality are the shame and harassment of Juliet, the sorrow of Mariana, the tavern jokes at the expense of Mistress Elbow, the exploitation of Kate Keepdown, and the overuse of Mistress Overdone" (Baines 287). Sex plays a key role for each and every female in the play, so much so that every woman is defined in terms of her sexual relations to men (Carlson 13). Isabella renounces sex and is then asked to use it on her brother's behalf, Juliet has sex and is jailed, Mariana uses sex by means of the bed trick to tie herself to Angelo, and Mistress Overdone sells sex for profit. Sex is not, however, seen in a positive light. "Because it measures the perceived cost of a woman's autonomy in marital and reproductive affairs, *Measure for Measure* foregrounds female sexual desire only to deny the desirability of seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake" (DiGangi 179). The only positive outcome of having sex in the play is in the bed trick, and that was not so much sex for pleasure as it was a means to an end. "Sex in Vienna is either punished or belittled" (Riefer 162) until the end of the play when the majority of the women are, as a man would see it, *rewarded* by being married. Then again, that in itself is belittling because their problems resulting from sex are so easily solved through those same marriages. "The word 'healthy' could hardly be associated with female sexuality in such an environment, no matter how positively a woman saw herself" (Riefer 162).

Conversely, in her works, Behn almost always focuses on women and how society treats them, as well as the sexual aspects of their character, be it through their sexual appeal as wives or as paid lovers. Restoration dramas, such as *The Rover,* "offer plots that explicitly position a woman's chastity as an object of exchange" (Sebek 52). In Behn's plays, the women seem even more aware of their purpose, just as they are more defiant in their response to it. The plays "expose the contradictions entailed in the effort to position women as gifts, commodities, or currency, when the resolution of plots relies on women used in these ways, or on women who refuse to be used in these ways, raising

questions about what constitutes women's values" (Sebek 52). Where other plays of this time represented women as little more than sexual diversions for men (Pacheco 203), all of Behn's women are more significant than this, and, unlike other authors, Behn never makes sexuality seem dirty, even when she is depicting a whore. Sex in her plays is always subtly erotic, exciting and desirable, but never vulgar. While many of the key characters in her plays are respectable, honorable women, several others are courtesans or other less than reputable figures. In *The Rover,* the courtesans play as big a role in the progress of the story as the virgins do. These characters are just as essential to the plot of the story; to Behn, both types of character, with their different views on or motives for sex and personal freedom, are considered equal, regardless of their social or moral elevations. Ultimately, the whore does have to make a living, and young women do need to search for a way to better their lives other than through the typical route to a loveless marriage.

Female sexuality plays an integral part in all of this in many different ways. In fact, Behn's "single dominant theme in plays, novels, and poetry is human sexuality" (Gardiner 68). Through marriage, prostitution, and even rape, a sexual act and an intimate relationship between a man and a woman plays a large part in the connection. A woman's sexuality had to be handled with care. Behn focuses on the importance of indiscretion by having many of her plays show "love as a woman's only profession, and her ability to keep cool is then as serious a matter as her enslavement to a desire that may leave her pregnant and adrift" (Gardiner 74). With the exception of becoming a nun, women from families with money did not take positions outside the home; in this sense, love, marriage without love, or love through a sexual act was one of the only professions in which a woman could engage.

In Restoration England, as in the Elizabethan England Shakespeare knew, women were primarily considered mere sexual commodities (Zozaya 116). This explains the play's treatment of Florinda. Her sexuality is of little importance as a figure in the marital arrangements her father makes for her, which is as it should be, according to social custom. What Florinda wants does not come into play until she becomes aware that there is a chance for her to successfully thwart her father's plans. In the liberating world of disguise she allows her sister to pull her into, she is for the first time able to do as she pleases instead of what she is told. Her attraction to Belvile is able to come to fruition; thus, her sexuality is rewarded rather condemned. Behn succeeds in glorifying sexuality rather than making it something a woman should find shameful.

In the beginning, Florinda was hesitant to satisfy any curiosity she harbored about the opposite sex. Hellena, however, "insists in the first scene of the play that she is in all ways fit for love and determined to make best use of her mind and body" (Sullivan 341), despite the fact that she is soon to be sent to the nunnery. Like Florinda, the costumes she dons enable her to act in ways that would never have been acceptable, given her social position. In using disguise, Hellena is able to get closer to Willmore than she otherwise would have been able to do. Willmore is able to offer her the freedom she so desperately wants to experience. Perhaps this serves to exaggerate the attraction she initially feels for him. "Just as he [Willmore] is characterized by the sexually free will, so she [Hellena] is symbolic of the imprisonment that attends the sexually confined will" (Sullivan 335).

"Hellena's pursuit of Willmore is based on a complex relationship between economics and desire" (Bobker 36); she wants him but is aware of her worth as a woman. She makes herself an object that she hopes he will desire and marries him without reservation, but she is careful to not let him have control of her as a woman usually would. Hellena "achieves her conquest of Willmore through linguistic manipulation by

refusing to give herself completely and wholly to him" (Finke 28). Hellena is aware that Willmore has eyes for other women because she sees how he behaves with Angellica and hears how he speaks when he believes her to be a boy. She is willing to marry him in spite of this, but she realizes that she should do so before he moves on to someone else, so she uses her verbal prowess to secure the deal. Willmore tries multiple times to convince her that "marriage is as certain a bane to love, as lending money is to friendship" (5.1.450-51), and that she should sleep with him rather than hope for marriage, but Hellena does not fall for his lines the way Angellica does. Instead she parries his propositions with witty retorts until he tells her "I adore your humor and will marry thee" (5.1.471). She realizes that if she gives in to him, as many other women have done, she will not win him in the end.

"Willmore, for all his superficial attractiveness, is not the main character of the play, nor even Hellena, but rather the dialectical working out of their opposed situations, vis-à-vis the sexual will, into some sort of a compromise" (Sullivan 343). Willmore knows what his limitations are and lets Hellena have more control than another man might have; "he has no center; his will leads him everywhere, and being everywhere he is nowhere ... To be complete he needs the stabilizing influence of Hellena, who on the other hand requires the sexual liberation symbolized in him" (Sullivan 343). Willmore needs her inheritance, but he needs her for herself as well, though he may not fully realize this.

In many ways, Angelica is like Willmore, the key difference being that her will expresses itself as politically as sexually (Sullivan 344). Angellica is strong in ways that Willmore is not, and she too has achieved the freedom that Hellena desires, but Angellica is unable to embrace her own sexuality the way Hellena can by the end of the play. For Angellica, sex is business and she has little chance for real fulfillment because of her

position as a courtesan. Hellena gets Willmore in the end because of what she represents, which is precisely the reason Angellica can never have him. Angellica puts her ego first and compromises her sexuality by selling it, and it is because of this that she cannot be a part of a reputable marriage, especially one where the would-be groom is after a bride of quality with money. But even if she wanted to, she cannot be a prostitute forever. There will be a point where she will be unable to find a buyer for her aging goods, especially at a rate that would provide her the comfort to which she is accustomed. Angellica seems to have, by the end of the play, realized this about herself and does not seem to want to continue in this manner, though she will never be able to undo the damage she has already done to her social worth. However, when she "disrupts the exchange economy that defines her, she ceases to have a social identity. As her society does not contemplate the possibility of modifying her status, she ceases to be, unless she reinscribes herself in the established economy of the prostitute market" (Zozaya 119).

CHAPTER 5:
RAPE AS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF FEMALE OBJECTIFICATION

When a woman is raped, she is objectified in the most physical, most damaging way. Instead of transforming women into objects to be married off to wealthy men, raping them takes away what identity they would otherwise retain. In *The Rover*, Florinda is put into a position, on more than one occasion, that she never would have had to face, had she not been mistaken for a whore. It is openly admitted that a woman the men judged to be of certain value was subject to their advances, even if they were unsolicited. The first time she is accosted she is merely waiting for her lover in her own garden. She does not necessarily *act* inappropriately for her social position, but she is not where a woman of her stature is supposed to be, especially alone and after dark. She risks herself this way in hopes of ensuring Belvile's affection, but "in seeking to secure the husband of her choice, Florinda abandons the signs of her status as a 'lady of quality' and so looks to the drunken Willmore like an 'errant harlot'" (Pacheco 206). When Willmore stumbles upon Florinda alone in her garden, he assumes she is a whore, even though he has little reason to think her thus.

The second time Florinda is almost raped, the comments made by her would-be rapists show that they are intending to violate her because they think she is a prostitute. Being still in costume as a courtesan from her previous outing with Hellena, Florinda does not appear to be the woman of quality that she is. The carnivalesque setting and Florinda's subsequent alteration of her clothing to fit the setting successfully blur the lines between lady and whore "not keeping the external signs that signified her as a virgin resulted in her misrepresentation as a loose woman" (Zozaya 116). Even though she claims to be an innocent, the men do not believe her. Had they known who she was, they would have desisted in their assault of her. It is clear through their words that, to them at

least, “women of quality” commanded different treatment than a common whore. After Frederick, Blunt’s friend and fellow would-be rapist, sees Belvile’s ring, he begins to doubt their plan and talks about being “trussed up for a rape upon a maid of quality, when we only believe we ruffle a harlot” (4.5.122-123). The only reason Florinda was not taken advantage of then was that she was accidentally identified as a respectable woman. Had she not been so lucky to be discovered when she was, or had she indeed been a whore, as she was originally believed to be, she would have had a different fate.

Courtesans or prostitutes were fair game in the eyes of these men. When Willmore hears of the “wench” Blunt has in his chambers, he too makes a similar statement: “Nay then, we must enter and partake, no resistance” (5.1.28-29). The men in *The Rover* clearly consider it acceptable to take advantage of a prostitute for that single reason: she is a whore to begin with so there is no harm in taking what it is she sells without making a payment. It is only because she is recognized as the possession of Belvile that Florinda is not sexually abused. Ironically, in this play it is never the prostitute who encounters such a problem.

By including such scenes in *The Rover*, Behn was emphasizing the true extent to which women were commodified. As seen in these scenes, the men of her time thought of women as objects first and human beings second. If men can treat any woman the way they plan to treat Florinda, it says very little about men in general. It is this idea that Behn was stressing.

CHAPTER 6:
BEHN'S AUTHOR-WHORE PERSONA

Aphra Behn is best known for being the first English female playwright. The majority of her work focuses on feminine issues, such as women's place in society. Behn often complained about women's lot through attacks on the sexual double standard and her mocking reversals of sexual roles. In her plays, she grants women the freedom they did not necessarily have in real life. By dressing as a man, a gypsy, or a courtesan, as her female characters in *The Rover* do, they can move freely in society and do not have to conform to social conventions. It is because of this ungoverned mobility that they end up happily attached instead of forced into loveless marriages.

After 1667, Aphra Behn lived as an independent woman, so she knew both the freedom and potential perils that a woman alone in the world faced; "educated but constantly in need of money, with court connections but no supporting family, Aphra Behn wrote plays when female authorship was a violation of the 'women's sphere'" (Diamond 520). She rejected her allotted position to do as she wished and was able to address women's issues in her position as an author. "Aphra Behn concentrated on exposing the exploitation of women in the exchange economy, adding vividly to contemporary discourse on the oppressions of marriage" (Diamond 525), but it was only by being independent that she was able to do so. In her work, Behn primarily focuses on the plight of well-bred girls who are to be sold into marriage; the "most common of Behn's images of female oppression is … the forced marriage, the center of her social criticism" (Pearson 160). Since such women had an "obligation" to their families to form a bond with a worthy man, it was expected that they would live up to their end of the agreement. The position of wife was the only occupation a woman was suitable to fill. She could become a prostitute and sell her love in a different manner, but good,

honorable women did not do so. This did not leave women with very many options. As a result, "one of the most recurrent themes in Restoration female authors' writing is the commodification of women in the male controlled marriage market and the foreseeable outcome of those 'forced marriages: the wife's alienation" (Zozaya 109). These issues were not only crucial to women authors like Behn but to all women.

In her article "Aphra Behn: Sexuality and Self-Respect," critic Judith Gardener explains what Behn did in her writing:

> Some of her critics chide that love in Behn's work is only sex. It is a criticism that we may interpret to her advantage. She was not a woman to be fooled by myths of eternal and perfect love. Nor, like some male libertines, does she reduce sexuality to a bestial or mechanical coupling. Instead, she consistently sees sexual passion—which involves generous giving of oneself to others—as the root of all social impulse. (77)

This is indeed what Behn seemed to endeavor to do when she put forth her plays to be seen and read by the public. However, "that Behn might sexualize the fact of her commodification should hardly shock us, given the character of Restoration court culture and its powerful royal mistresses, as well as London's celebrity actress-whores and bawds" (Conway 88). The public was used to certain women expressing their sexuality, but virgins destined to be wed, especially by means of an arranged marriage, did not fall into this category. "Behn has her female characters engage in sexual conquests and keep their lovers' desire alive by linking sexuality and wit. The analogy between the sexually available woman ('the newfangled whore') and the woman playwright (who has 'mastered' language) is crucial to her appropriation of the libertine pose" (Finke 27). In her plays, she allows her women to use their sexuality to explore their options in life rather to exist as an object to be possessed by someone else. Even though her female

protagonists tend to ultimately end up in a union with a man through marriage, they do all that they can to be as happy as possible. “Behn’s plays show us again and again how the ideology of passive and commodified womanhood and the dialectical construction of woman as both virgin and whore constitutes the repression of feminine desire” (Hutner 104), and many of the women in her plays were shown as commodities because that is the way they were really treated. Through marriage and sex, a woman could be a considerable asset to a man and vice versa, but the compromise was often on the side of the woman. In *The Rover*, Behn “rebukes the patriarchal concept of women and ‘others’ as property” (Hutner 102) by having the women in the play go against this idea – they refuse to compromise.

However, “Behn on the whole does not go for easy targets, and her work does not idealize female characters and present males as monsters. Society’s systems of power can prove inequitable to some men as well as to all women, but the institutionalized oppression of women is the centre of her critique of society” (Pearson 150). She acknowledges that women and men are both imperfect, and she depicts both realistically. It is society that is flawed. Men and women of the era were simply following the rules of their society.

“Behn’s success as a commercial playwright was unprecedented; it challenged the male hegemony over public performance and over writing for publication more radically than the work of any other woman” (Staves 61). Needless to say, Behn endured much criticism because of her willingness to examine quite publicly the roles of women. Aphra Behn was “a female subject – and, therefore, subjected to cultural discourse on sexuality and gender” (Zozaya 100). She was criticized more because she was a woman who was criticizing society than for the actual criticism she provided. Some satirists even claimed “an equivalence between a woman who made herself public by having a play produced or

published and a woman who was available to the public as a prostitute" (Staves 61). In other words, a female writer was no better than a prostitute. Behn did open herself up to public scrutiny because of the public nature of her chosen profession, "for British women writers, venturing into print has *always* meant granting one's public the right to make one's private life a public commodity. In seventeenth-century England, new marketing strategies quickly transformed an existing interest in the women writer's personal character into an obsession" (McDowell 227), but there is no reason that this should equate her with a whore. For some reason, "the woman who lived a public life in the seventeenth century, whether as a publishing writer, a playwright, or an actress, was sexually suspect, as available for hire as any prostitute because she was not the exclusive *private* property of a man" (Finke 25). If this assessment was indeed a commonly held belief, it only serves to emphasize the extent to which women were seen as objects to be owned, and thus controlled.

Various critics have commented that Behn was probably doing more than depicting problems that arose and were faced by women of her era. Such critics have stressed the connections between character and dramatist and need Angellica Bianca as an authorial mouthpiece, or a theatrical self-portrait of Aphra Behn. From this interpretation, Behn places herself in her play and expresses her own views through the freedom of the stage. "The author-whore persona also makes a female authorship per se a dark comedy that explores the bond between the liberty the stage offered women and their confinement behind both literal and metaphorical vizard masks" (Gallagher 24). Perhaps Behn felt that, since she was seen as a prostitute/whore because of her profession, she might as well put herself into her play in the form of such a notable, and plot-significant, courtesan. Like the women in her plays, Behn dons a "mask" in order to do what she feels necessary.

It is precisely what makes Aphra Behn so attractive to twentieth-century feminists that made her so unacceptable to seventeenth-century feminists. Most women writers of her period sought to refute accusations of the immorality of the woman writer by living sexually blameless lives and avoiding explicitly sexual themes. For Aphra Behn, the central feminist issue was women's rights to sexual freedom equal to that of men, and she insisted by her writings and her examples that women had sexual desires that deserved as much respect as those of men. (Pearson 143)

CONCLUSION

As has been discussed at length, the focus of both of these plays is the commodification of women. But to what purpose? Shakespeare builds up his play with various instances of women's commodification, but he never goes into why these women matter or why any action they take is significant. Women such as the ones he depicts in *Measure for Measure* are women who would have existed in his society and he does little more than show them to his audience. Behn, on the other hand, goes well beyond simply putting her women on the stage to be observed. Instead, she has them act for themselves, and do what they might have wanted to do, in spite of their commodified state; Behn's women very actively pursue some degree of sexual satisfaction for themselves.

The fact that the two plays were written in different yet contiguous time periods is likely one reason for the dissimilar depth of plot. The society of Behn's era was more relaxed in their views of sex than during Shakespeare's lifetime. As a result, Behn was able to write about what real woman might have thought or how they would have behaved. Behn's career as the first female English playwright also undoubtedly influenced the actions she wrote for her characters. As mentioned previously, Behn did want to use her writing to shed light on the plight of the commodified woman. Since she was familiar with what women often had to deal with in terms of an arranged marriage or what might happen to a woman were she not a wife, she was able to convincingly convey those ideas to her audience.

However, the most compelling reason for the apparent differences in *Measure for Measure and The Rover* is that the authors were of opposite sexes. Having not been a woman, Shakespeare would not have had the scope of knowledge about feminine thoughts and desires that Behn would have known; it would have been substantially

easier for Behn to compose a more insightful work regarding the commodification of women, and the subject might well have been a more meaningful one for her.

Shakespeare frequently depicted the women in his plays as strong, confident individuals, a powerful contrast to the stereotypical roles the females of his time period would have played. He repeatedly raised questions about the nature of women, about men's attitudes toward them, and about the stereotypes society imposed on them. But in *Measure for Measure*, even though these ideas are raised they are not fully developed, hence the many marriages at the end of the play. "*Measure for Measure* is, among many other things, a play about love, power, and justice; about sexuality, authority, and freedom" (Wheeler, "Introduction" 1), but the women in the play never attain them. There is little doubt that Shakespeare did view women as more important than they were typically treated, and that he was attempting to show how ugly the situation could be for women, but was Shakespeare not able to realize what women really wanted because he was a man? The answer to this question is arguably yes. Especially when compared to Behn's play dealing with similar women.

Is, then, the reason Behn depicts sexually motivated women because she is a woman? Again, the answer could be yes. Behn is typically written of as rather sexually liberated herself, not just because of her author-whore status. Behn not only knew of the desires of women, she shared those same desires. In *The Rover*, prostitution, marriage, rape and the relationship of women to men through sex are all important issues that are explored but are never really resolved. This could be because there were so many endings possible for the various situations she presents.

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