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# Aphra Behn on the Contemporary Stage: Behn's Feminist Legacy and Woman-Directed Revivals of *The Rover*

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Aphra Behn on the Contemporary American Stage:  
Behn's Feminist Legacy and Woman-Directed Revivals of *The Rover*

by

Nicole Elizabeth Stodard

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English  
with a Concentration in Literature  
Department of English  
School of Humanities and College of Arts and Sciences  
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## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to the memory of my sister, Ginger Stodard (1960-2008), who sparked my interest in theatre. I have faint but fond childhood memories of seeing her perform in productions at Catawba College in North Carolina. She was the proverbial life of the party, the perpetual ham; I had stage fright, which was, perhaps, why my path to theatre practice consisted for so long of the study of drama as literature—to this day, I curse curtain speeches. While I was finishing coursework at the University of South Florida, Ginger was undergoing treatment nearby at H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Institute. Her death in 2008 prompted me to take a leave of absence and reassess my personal and professional aims. A stint in 2009 as a drama teacher for Treasure Coast Hospice cemented my belief in the theatre's ability to provide meaningful and transformative experiences and my need to nurture the dormant artist within me. In 2010, I relocated to Fort Lauderdale, founded a professional, non-profit theatre company, and launched a career for myself as a director and designer.

This study would not be possible were it not for the unwaivering compassion, encouragement, and patience of my mentor, Dr. Laura Runge. I will forever be indebted to her both for the emotional support that she provided me when I was coming to terms with my sister's imminent death and for the exemplary role model she has always been to me as an indefatigable scholar, eloquent author, historically-grounded feminist, mother and professional. I must also thank my father, Morris, for coaching me as a writer from a young age; my brother, Randy, and my mother, Elizabeth, for insisting that I finish this project and for seeing me through one of the two most challenging experiences of my life; my mother-in-law, Colette Zeiders, and my spouse,

Jake Zeiders, for expressing ongoing support of my journey, whether or not it included a terminal degree; my dear friends and company members at Thinking Cap Theatre, who cheered me on along the way; and my children Violet, Merritt, and Genevieve for their love and resilience when I had to spend hours that added up to weeks and months away from them in the culmination of this study.

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## Abstract

This study theorizes the origins and history of the professional female playwright and director from the Restoration period to the present day through the stage history of Behn's most popular play, *The Rover*. Part one is comprised of two chapters: the first in this section argues the importance of appreciating Behn's proto-directorial function in the Restoration theatre and her significance to the history of feminism and women in professional theatre; the second chapter in this section examines the implications of casting practices and venue changes to eighteenth-century revivals of Behn's canon with a particular eye towards what a contemporary director can glean from 18th century revivals. Part II draws on archival research and personal interviews with directors, actors, and dramaturges to examine the historical significance of two particular twentieth-century, woman-directed revivals of *The Rover*: the 1989 revival at the Goodman directed by Kyle Donnelly and the 1994 revival at the Guthrie directed by Joanne Akalaitis. This study argues the synergistic impact at the time of woman-directed revivals of the most popular play by the first professional female playwright to the emergence of the professional woman director in America in the 1980s and 1990s. Part III consists of three chapters that examine woman-directed revivals of *The Rover* against the backdrop of theatre practice and sexual politics in the 2000s: one chapter analyzes cross-gender revivals of *The Rover* by Queen's Company in Brooklyn, NY (2001) and *Woman's Will* in San Francisco (2003); the next chapter examines a 2011 site-specific, panoramic production of *The Rover* at the World Financial Center directed by Karin Coonrod for New York Classical Theatre; the final chapter in this section analyzes a 2013 gender parodic production that I directed for Thinking Cap Theatre in Fort

Lauderdale. This study argues for the importance of contemporary archiving and revival activism to historicizing the concept of the glass curtain and the gender parity movement in professional theatre and to improving the rate of employment of female directors and playwrights.



## Chapter One:

### Introduction

Had the plays I have writ come forth under any Mans Name, and never known to have been mine; I appeal to all unbyast Judges of Sense, if they be not said that Person had made as many good Comedies, so any one Man that has writ in our Age; but a Devil o't *the Woman dams the Poet . . . All I ask, is the privilege for my masculine part the poet in me . . .* If I must not, because of my sex, have this *freedom*, but that you will usurp all to yourselves, I lay down my quill . . . for I am not content to write for a third day only.

~Aphra Behn, Preface to *The Lucky Chance*, 1686

I take great pleasure, in the name of women writers for the stage, in thanking Bronson Howard and members of the American Dramatists Club for *the 'privilege' of breaking bread with them* this evening . . . tonight I have reached the zenith of my ambition—I have been present at one of those mysterious Dramatists Club dinners.

~Martha Morton, 1907<sup>1</sup>

Without historic precedent, without role models, mentors, consistent statistical data . . . women are constantly re-introducing themselves to the field. *As perpetual newcomers, they are constantly elbowing for their place at the table* and defending themselves against charges of inferiority. And they are caught in a paradox; they do not want to be counted as 'women artists' but simply as 'artists,' yet when gender is not counted, it continues to count against them. What is not perceived cannot be challenged or altered.

~Susan Jonas and Suzanne Bennett, 2002<sup>2</sup>

### Aphra Behn and the Origins of Feminism and the Glass Curtain in Professional Theatre

Although centuries separate the above remarks by Behn, Morton, and Jonas and Bennett, these women all underscore one critical point: sexism is a historical and recurring problem in

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Gipson, Rosemary. "Martha Morton: America's First Professional Woman Playwright." *Theatre Survey*. (November 1982): 213-221.

<sup>2</sup> Jonas, Susan and Suzanne Bennett. "Report on the Status of Women: A Limited Engagement?" *Women Count NYSCA Report*. January 2002.

*professional* theatre. “Professional” is the operative word in the previous statement and throughout this study. Non-professional women playwrights of “closet drama” predated Behn by centuries. The sub-genre has its own fascinating history dating back to the 10th century German nun, Hrosvitha (c.935-c.1001), whom scholars identify as the first woman playwright.<sup>3</sup> Intended for private reading or performance as a social activity among peers (other women) or family members, closet plays by definition relegated the creative offerings of early modern women dramatists to the hobby-work of amateurs.<sup>4</sup> Behn’s distinction as *the first professional* female playwright is significant because it marks the historic moment when women’s dramatic writing not only went public but also produced a profit.<sup>5</sup> In the preface to *The Lucky Chance*, written towards the end of her two-decade playwriting career and just three years prior to her death, Behn felt compelled to address, once again, the double standard that she had constantly encountered as a woman writer, particularly in the genre of comedy.<sup>6</sup> She avows that her plays,

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<sup>3</sup> For an historical overview of women playwrights, see Croft, Susan. *She Also Wrote Plays: An International Guide to Women Playwrights from the 10th to the 21st Century*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001. In *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (1995), Elaine Aston notes “the importance of reclaiming Hrotsvitha lies in the way in which discovering the ‘past’ is a means to changing the future . . . Without primary role models, such as Hrotsvitha, it may not be possible to establish a tradition of women’s dramatic writing as a ‘norm’ rather than an ‘alternative’ or deviant off-shoot of the ‘canon’” (See Lizbeth Goodman, ed. *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, 1998, 38-39).

<sup>4</sup> Anne Finch (1661-1720), and to a lesser extent Katherine Phillips, consciously crafted identities as non-professional dramatists (1632-1664). Straznicky argues that Finch ultimately achieved “a public amateur career” (720).

<sup>5</sup> See Marta Straznicky’s article “Restoration Women Playwrights and the Limits of Professionalism” (1997) for an interesting discussion of the surprising emergence, during the same period that the professional female playwright appeared, of a variety of closet drama that fostered an anti-performance female author, most notably in Anne Finch: “the efforts of a single closet dramatist to avoid the stigma of performance indicate the extent to which the cultural sign of ‘female playwright’ in the Restoration was becoming restricted to the professional domain” (703).

<sup>6</sup> In “Epistle to the Reader” from *The Dutch Lover* and the postscript to *The Rover*, Behn also addresses her struggles as a woman writer. Many scholars have concurred with Jacqueline

if reviewed under the conditions of a blind submission process, would rival any man's, and she "asks" directly for the "privilege" to write unfettered by gender bias. In referencing her dissatisfaction with the practice of paying playwrights a portion of the third night's earnings, provided a show lasted more than a night or two, Behn also invokes the Restoration precursor to the modern feminist mantra of equal pay for equal work.<sup>7</sup> Seventeenth-century England witnessed the historic emergence and intersection of feminism as a discourse and women as theatre professionals. Treatises on women's rights were appearing and circulating in manuscript.<sup>8</sup> Actresses and women playwrights were officially entering the theatre industry. As Gilli Bush-Bailey notes, the playhouse was the site of an emerging female discourse that was part of a wider discussion:

Women now had unprecedented access to new representations and ideas and their presence on the stage and in the auditorium constitutes a radical form of social interaction. As female playwrights, players, and audience members they

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Pearson that Behn "writes as a feminist in prefaces, prologues, and epilogue, attacking, though with decreasing optimism, prejudice and the sexual double standard" (149). See also Jane Milling's chapter "Working in the Theater: Women Playwrights, 1660-1750" in Nelson and Burroughs (2010) wherein she discusses Restoration and early eighteenth-century women playwright's awareness of the commercial nature of their work and the practices of the theatre industry. Milling, however, stipulates that women playwrights of this period do not yet make up a unique tradition or identify themselves as a group.

<sup>7</sup> Established in 1963 under President John F. Kennedy, the Equal Pay Act made it illegal in the U.S. to pay men and women working in the same place different salaries for similar work.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Ross provides an insightful discussion of the role that the liberal humanist education of women in sixteenth century Italy and England played in "the emergence of 'woman as intellect'" and the establishment of "the debate on women" as a genre of literature. By the seventeenth century, "the rise of educated women in society . . . made feminism a prominent theme in European intellectual history—a preliminary step to the advent of feminism as a prominent theme in Western social history" (15-16). Ross also notes that seventeenth-century British women intellectuals "surpassed all previous models of feminist argument," for they "introduced the powerful term 'rights' into the lexicon of the querelles de femmes" (299). See Ross, Sarah Gwyneth. *The Birth of Feminism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009.

participated in an essentially public debate on the position of women in Restoration society (Bush-Bailey 36).<sup>9</sup>

Active in this debate, Behn was a vocal proponent of gender and sexual equality in her profession and in everyday life. In her plays, she critiqued the institution of marriage and the culture of rape. In the prefaces and postscripts to her published plays, she explicitly addressed the obstacles that she faced as a woman artist. Behn's experience foreshadowed the seemingly endless problem of gender inequality in the theatre profession. Long after she appeared to have shattered the Restoration "glass curtain," sexism continued to exert pressures and limitations on her career and those of her successors.<sup>10</sup>

Martha Morton (1865-1925), who holds the designation as America's first professional female playwright, is a name even less familiar than Behn's to contemporary audiences, but her accomplishments were substantial and also warrant discussion here. A prolific playwright, Morton earned over a million dollars from the thirty-five plays that she wrote between 1888-

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<sup>9</sup> Bush-Bailey acknowledges that "It is not possible, however tempting it may be, to claim that the stability of the patriarchy was seriously threatened by the advent of such a strong female presence but the accusations of indecency and immodesty hurled at theatre women suggest that their work, at the very least, touched the nerves of the patriarchal hegemony" (37).

<sup>10</sup> Women in the theatre profession adapted the expression "glass ceiling" to "glass curtain" to address the inequities unique to their own field. Emily Glassberg Sands entitled her AB Thesis at Princeton "Opening the Curtain on Playwright Gender: An Integrated Economic Analysis of Discrimination in American Theatre" (2009). See also Silverbush, Rhona. "Shattering the Glass Curtain (Power Tools Optional)." *Broadway Direct*. 7 July 2015.

<https://broadwaydirect.com/shattering-the-glass-curtain/>. The "glass ceiling" metaphor arose in the early 1990s to express the sexual double standard in corporate America. In 1991 a group known as the Glass Ceiling Commission was formed. Part of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, "the Glass Ceiling" Commission was a 21-member Presidential commission that investigated the barriers that kept qualified women and people of color from achieving the highest management levels. The Commission drew public attention to "glass ceiling" barriers and recommended ways to reduce or eliminate them. See Redwood, Rene. "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Good for Business, Good for America." *NCJW Journal*. 18:2 (31 Oct. 1995).

<https://search.proquest.com/openview/720eed4717a4012eb80aeb984880623c/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=27059>.

1915. Unusual for the period, Morton oversaw the staging of her own plays—she was just twenty-one years old when she made her Broadway directing debut (Gipson 216). In this regard, she firmly established the identity of the woman playwright-director, a role that Behn had arguably already occupied in a nascent capacity during the Restoration. In spite of Morton’s achievements, sexism still afflicted her professional journey, as indicated by the above excerpt from a speech that she gave at the American Dramatists Club’s annual banquet in 1907. Invoking the word “privilege,” just as Behn did in the preface to *The Lucky Chance*, Morton emphasizes the historic significance of her attendance; for the first fifteen years of its existence, the American Dramatists Club had prohibited women’s membership or involvement.<sup>11</sup> This restriction motivated Morton in January 1907 to establish her own organization, The Society of Dramatic Authors; its inaugural member-base consisted of 30 women and one man, playwright Charles Klein (1867-1915). Later that same month, Morton’s success and moxie finally earned her an unprecedented invitation to dine among the men of the American Dramatists Club. Morton expanded the model and furthered the cause of the professional woman theatre artist that Behn had inaugurated in England in the 1670s: “As a pioneering force in the American theatre, Morton led the way for women to participate in the fullest sense, not only as actresses, but as playwrights, producers, directors, and bona fide members of professional organizations” (221).

Writing in the twenty-first century, Jonas and Bennett engage the gender equity issue in terms that resonate with Behn and Morton and illuminate the Groundhog’s Day quality that has historically characterized the experience of women in professional theatre. Evoking the spirit of an interminable physical contest, Jonas and Bennett liken women theatre artists’ professional

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<sup>11</sup> Playwright Bronson Howard (1842-1908) founded the gender-exclusive American Dramatists Club in 1891.

struggle to “continually elbowing for their place at the table” where their superiors, read men, are always already seated.<sup>12</sup> Beyond this apt metaphor, they stress three key criteria for combatting sexism in contemporary theatre: 1) historical precedent; 2) role models; 3) statistical data. Over the past forty years, countless studies have demonstrated that sexist programming and hiring practices permeate contemporary American theatre.<sup>13</sup> While we must continue to document quantitatively and assess qualitatively how gender figures on- and off-stage in the profession, in the face of an abundance of disappointing evidence, it is also important to have an understanding of women’s theatre history and to identify women who can offer hope, strength, and guidance. Aphra Behn relates to both of these points. Since Behn’s reincorporation into the dramatic canon and performance repertoire began in the late 1970s, Behn has impressed and inspired modern scholars, writers, and theatre practitioners, who have viewed her life and works as relevant antecedents to the struggles of women in their own time. For instance, Rosamond Gilder glowingly casts her as not just the first professional female playwright, but also “the first modern” (174).<sup>14</sup> As another example, Sue Ellen Case celebrates Behn as a “pioneer” who

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<sup>12</sup> Jonas and Bennett’s imagery resonates with Behn’s imagined removal from her historic seat in the 1738 essay “The Apotheosis of Milton” in *Gentleman’s Magazine*. Jane Spencer explains: “The occasion is Milton’s acceptance into the company of bards; . . . Behn appears, only to be ejected . . . She is told firmly by no less an authority than Chaucer ‘that none of her Sex has any Right to a Seat’ with the great poets” (*Aphra Behn’s Afterlife* 85).

<sup>13</sup> Writing recently on Canadian theatre, Michelle MacArthur notes: “The current post-feminist climate challenges both researchers and artists; it is difficult to mobilize the theatre community and engage the public when pervasive attitudes suggest that feminism has done its work and is no longer necessary. A post-feminist culture needs to be convinced that inequities exist, and it is therefore important for arts organizations, theatre companies, and scholars to continue the arduous task of collecting data and monitoring trends.”

<sup>14</sup> Gilder, Rosamond. *Enter the Actress: The First Women in the Theatre*. London: George G. Harrap, 1931.

“created a model of resistance for the woman playwright” (38).<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, Behn has ascended to the status of contemporary feminist icon and professional female role model.<sup>16</sup> Of course, this proclivity has had its detractors.<sup>17</sup>

### **Aphra Behn: Feminist Myth or Icon and Role Model?**

Writing in 1996, Simon Shepherd argues that a “strain” of North Atlantic feminism has bred something contagious and bad: “the Aphra myth,” the ahistorical, self-advantageous view of Behn as an androgynous, democratic-minded professional. In Shepherd’s estimation, this line of thinking has tainted the stage revival of Behn’s most popular play, *The Rover*.<sup>18</sup> Shepherd insistently puts Behn and her feminist proclaimers in, what he believes, are their proper places as myth and myth-makers respectively. In his interpretation, Behn is not Gilder’s forward-minded ‘first modern,’ but a “backward-looking monarchist” (175).<sup>19</sup> To challenge the idea of Behn as a contemporary feminist icon or role model—essentially the positive connotation of ‘myth’—

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<sup>15</sup> Case, herself, is a pioneer of feminist theatre history and practice. Her landmark polemical assessment of the impact of feminism on theatre practice, *Feminism and Theatre* (1988), has since enjoyed four re-printings. Fifty years prior to Case, Gilder viewed Behn’s “pioneer spirit” as an explanation for “why her plays could be passed as ‘writ by a man’” (177).

<sup>16</sup> An icon is someone regarded as a representative symbol of a movement that is worthy of admiration, and a role model is someone who sets an example of how a role should be carried out, a person regarded as worthy of imitation.

<sup>17</sup> See Hughes, Derek. “Race, Gender, and Scholarly Practice: Aphra Behn’s *Oronooko*.” *Essays in Criticism*. 52:1 (2002): 1-22. Hughes objects to the modern tendency to use current political interests to interpret Behn’s work. See also Hobby, Elaine. “No stolen object, but her own.” *Women’s Writing*. 6(1999): 113-127.; Marsden, Jean I. “Feminism and the Future of Eighteenth-Century Literary Studies” (2002).; Shepherd, Simon. “Bawdy Manners and the English National Character.” *English Drama: A Cultural History*. 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Shepherd points to Frances Kavenik’s 1991 argument in “Aphra Behn: The Playwright as ‘Breeches Part’ (in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660-1820*. Eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski. Athens: Ohio UP, 1991.) that Behn depicts Willmore as “fun-loving” in order to suggest the androgyny of men and women in the play.

<sup>19</sup> In an effort to demonstrate Behn’s contradictoriness and privilege (as opposed to complexity) Sheperd continues: “The image of Behn the first woman writer draws together sexual independence, monarchist views, and an upper class position” (176).



Shepherd conjures up his own glib Aphra myth that draws on the word's negative meaning as a widespread erroneous belief that exaggerates and idealizes the truth. Writing in 1999, Nancy Copeland translates Shepherd's argument into feminist terms; she asserts that "the liberal bourgeois feminist of the 'Aphra myth'" is an "important factor in the late-twentieth century success of *The Rover* . . . it owes its place in the contemporary theatre to an adaptability to current taste and concerns equal to that of Behn's persona." While Copeland more accurately characterizes the impulses underlying Behn's revival, the desire to use the past as a vehicle to understand the present, her identification of Behn with liberal feminism, nonetheless, evokes an essentialist and elitist view of Behn that is arguably at odds with her modest family lineage, noted financial struggles, and egalitarian authorial voice. Moreover, Copeland's use of the word "persona," although less derogatory than Shepherd's use of "myth," still does not allow the contemporary feminist appropriation of Behn to enjoy the more positive and productive potential that comes with conceiving of her as an icon and role model.<sup>20</sup>

In a 2002 article entitled "Feminism and the Future of Eighteenth-Century Literary Studies," Jean I. Marsden considers the legacy of the late-twentieth-century recovery of past women writers in order to determine the positive and negative results of this scholarly enterprise and to suggest possibilities for future inquiry. Marsden identifies several concerns: 1) the tendency to ignore historical context; 2) the projection of personal, present day ideologies onto these past writers; 3) the woman-only framework of study. To avoid ahistoricizing, Marsden

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<sup>20</sup> In *Aphra Behn's Afterlife*, Jane Spencer examines Behn's reputation within the context of "discussions of her within her lifetime; the growth of Behn biography in the years following her death; and the reception of Behn's verse. What unites these different parts of her story is the growth of a myth about Behn, which drew on received notions of the relationship between a female writer and her work, and set the tone for the reception of later women writers. The myth is that Behn's writing reflects a life pre-eminently concerned with sexual love" (20).



stresses the importance of foregrounding contextual differences between writer and scholar in order to avoid the “risky tendency to lump women together monolithically” (661). Marsden also expresses concern about a trend among feminist literary scholars of proclaiming past women writers as “foremothers of feminism . . . more specifically, of late-twentieth-century feminism” (658-659). Marsden’s frustration with her own inability to pinpoint the reason for this “understandable” but problematic trend is palpable:

I found myself questioning the direction of feminist studies and asking whether this tendency to read ourselves into the figures we studied was inescapable . . . Such a pattern suggests danger not just for eighteenth-century scholars but for feminist studies in general (659).

By way of solution, Marsden calls for “continual scrutiny of our work and ourselves” and proposes that scholars not only seek similarities or resonances between past women writers and themselves, but also differences (662). Marsden concludes her article by asserting that “we are never truly ‘beyond’ recovery” (662).<sup>21</sup> If this is the case, and I believe it is, then scholars should not discount or abandon altogether the potential benefits of gender-focused investigations of early modern women writers that can allow the past to illuminate the successes and shortcomings of women in the present and vice-versa.

The objections of Shepherd and concerns of Marsden point to a fissure that exists between literary academia and theatre practice. The theatre industry (and the world at large) has not caught up with scholarship; therefore, many feminist-resistant or post-feminist theories do not serve the theatre profession, where gender inequity remains a prevalent issue. While one camp of scholars has called for a move away from the potentially reductive pitfalls of biographical criticism and the overemphasizing of the importance of ‘firsts,’ for many scholars,

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<sup>21</sup> Marsden’s argument also brings to mind Hughes’ warning that cheerful antiquarianism in itself is not enough to justify scholarship; it must have a useful objective.

artists, readers, and audience members, Behn's historic achievements remain impressive, noteworthy, and relevant, and she herself remains a feminist icon and role model.<sup>22</sup> In "My Life with Aphra Behn" (2012), Maureen Duffy, who wrote the Behn biography *The Passionate Sheperdess* (1977), reflects on how Behn inspired her personally and why the playwright remains an inspiration to women writers in the twenty-first century. Behn is "a role model for female successors . . . even now, [because] the place of women dramatists in the theatre remains precarious" (242). Duffy recalls that

The discovery of Behn and her work encouraged [her] in many ways under the banner of 'If she could do it I can'. . . I tried to emulate her writerly courage and her sheer productivity . . . She was also an excellent role model in dealing with criticism (242-43).<sup>23</sup>

Anticipating her critics, Duffy assesses the current state of each literary genre in a U.K. context and cautions against overzealous celebration of the recent strides made by creative women:

The mere fact of a woman laureate and the success in the UK at least, although not on Broadway . . . of Lucy Prebble's play *Enron* (2009), might lead us to suppose that Behn's function as a role model has been superseded, as might the presence of several women on the Man Booker shortlist, the UK's most prestigious fiction prize . . . Only among poets is there anything approaching gender equality . . . In her refusal to accept a lesser plane for women writers, as evidenced by her preface to the published text of *The Dutch Lover* (1673) she remains painfully relevant (245).<sup>24</sup>

Duffy's argument also holds true in an American context. Established in 1917, the coveted Pulitzer for Drama has been awarded to a woman playwright only 16 times (18%) in the past

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<sup>22</sup> Susan Bassnett states that "the need to move away from the 'exceptional woman' theory has always been important for feminist scholarship . . . the figure who, despite her gender manages somehow to succeed in a male world is patronizing and unhelpful" (Bassnett 87, *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*. Ed. Lizbeth Goodman).

<sup>23</sup> Duffy, Maureen. "My Life with Aphra Behn." *Women's Writing*. 19:2 (May 2012), 238-247. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2011.646871>

<sup>24</sup> Behn, Aphra. *The Dutch Lover*. EEBO. Obtained online September 20, 2017.

century.<sup>25</sup> The Tony, the theatre excellence award created in 1947 and named in honor of actress/director Antoinette Perry, did not recognize a woman director with a nomination until 1982.<sup>26</sup> It was not until Garry Hynes's win for *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* in 1998 that a woman finally won a Tony for direction of a play. While Rebecca Taichman won the award for direction in 2017 for Paula Vogel's *Indecent*, women directors remain rare as nominees and rarer as winners at this event.

### **The Gender Parity Movement in Contemporary American Theatre**

The gender parity movement in American theatre began in the late 1970s when feminist artists started calling attention to sexist stage representations of women and sexist hiring practices. In 1976, the group Action for Women in Theatre published a study on the hiring practices of U.S. theatres from 1969 to 1975 revealing that women represented only 7% of playwrights and directors working in regional and off-Broadway theatres.<sup>27</sup> Statistics remained bleak in the 1980s and 1990s. At a conference in 2000, Susan Jonas proposed the idea for the "50/50 in 2020 initiative," a ten-year plan, co-sponsored by the League of Professional Theatre Women (LPTW), Women's Project, and New Perspectives Theatre, to achieve parity for women in professional theatre. The initiative's culmination in the year that marks the centennial of the certification of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, the amendment that gave American

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<sup>25</sup> The Pulitzer Prize for Drama has been awarded 87 times in the past 100 years since the award was established. Fourteen different years, there was no award for drama: 1917, 1919, 1942, 1944, 1947, 1963, 1964, 1966, 1968, 1972, 1974, 1986, 1997 or 2006. Of the 16 times that a woman playwright earned the distinction, one occasion was Ketti Frings' adaptation of a Tom Wolfe novel and another was the co-authored *Diary of Anne Frank*. Thus, a female solo-authored play received the distinction fourteen times.

<sup>26</sup> Geraldine Fitzgerald received a nomination in 1982 for her direction of *Mass Appeal*.

<sup>27</sup> "Action for Women in Theatre: A Study of Employment Discrimination Against Women Playwrights and Directors in Non-Profit Theatre (1969-1975)." Action for Women in Theatre (1976). See also Bader, Jenny Lyn. "A Brief History of the Gender Parity Movement in Theatre." *Women in Theatre Journal Online*.

women the right to vote, is no accident.<sup>28</sup> Jonas' campaign gained momentum with "Report on the Status of Women: A Limited Engagement?" (2000), a study she co-authored with Suzanne Bennett. Their study found that women represented only 23% of playwrights and directors hired by 1900 regional and off-Broadway theatres.

Since 2000, the volume of outrage over the gender gap in the theatre profession has increased to a new level. Industry leaders have assembled to compose action plans that can be carried out online and on the ground around the country on a grass-roots level. Search #GenderParity on Twitter or Facebook and discover a labyrinthine conversation on the subject spearheaded by industry leaders, including the staff of *American Theatre*, Theatre Communications Group (TCG),<sup>29</sup> the League of Professional Theatre Women (LPTW), and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC).<sup>30</sup> Surveying the landscape a decade later, the LPTW published "Women Count: Women Hired Off-Broadway 2010-2015," a five-year study that assesses progress towards equitable hiring in 13 positions in 455 Off- and OffOff-Broadway theatres. "Women Count" found that women playwrights comprised a low of 28% in 2011-2012 and a high of 36% in 2012-2013. "Old plays" by women, which here means published before 2005, represented a low of 0% in 2014-2015 and a high of 22% in 2010-2011 (Steketee and Binus). For the five-year period, women directors had a rate of representation of

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<sup>28</sup> <http://theatrewomen.org/programs/5050-in-2020-parity-for-women-theatre-artists/>  
The 19th Amendment was officially certified on August 26, 1920.

<sup>29</sup> TCG's mission is "to strengthen, nurture, and promote the professional not-for-profit American theatre." <http://www.tcg.org/AboutUs.aspx>

<sup>30</sup> See Evans, Suzy. "Hashtag Gender Parity." *American Theatre*. (October 2014): 118-122;  
<http://sdcweb.org/diversity-inclusion/>; <http://thekilroys.org>.

33% (Steketee and Binus 4).<sup>31</sup> By broader comparison, “The Count,” a 2015 study conducted by *The Dramatist* and the Lilly Awards,<sup>32</sup> examined the programming of 153 regional theatres around the country and determined that women authored only 22% of plays produced between the 2011-2012 and the 2013-2014 seasons (Jordan and Stump).<sup>33</sup> Just this year, Karen McConarty and Heidi Rose published a qualitative analysis that builds on the quantitative findings of “The Count.” They interviewed 18 artistic directors (11 women, 7 men) from the four major U.S. regions and from a diverse range of theatre organizations in order to gain insight into the play selection processes that are producing the harrowing 22% statistic. Their study revealed that organizational values such as artistic merit, artistic directors’ vision, and profitability, all of which shape season planning, reflect both conscious and unconscious gender biases.<sup>34</sup> While conditions have improved in the past decade, positive change has been inconsistent, and the percentage of women employed in professional theatre still falls considerably below any definition of an equitable standard. The need for both outspokenness and action remains critical.

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<sup>31</sup> Steketee, M.W. and Binus, J. “Women Count: Women Hired Off-Broadway 2010-2015.” New York, NY: League of Professional Theatre Women. Retrieved from <http://theatrewomen.org/women-count-2015/>

Women directors represented a low of 22% in 2011-2012 and a surprising high of 40% in 2014-2015.

<sup>32</sup> The Lilly Awards Foundation originated in 2010 to honor the work of women in American theatre. The organization’s founders include Julia Jordan, Marsha Norman, and Theresa Rebeck. The Award is named after American playwright, Lillian Hellman (1905-1984).

<sup>33</sup> Jordan, J. and Stump, R. “The Count.” *The Dramatist*. 18(2): 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.dramatistsguild.com/media/PDFs/TheCount.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> McConarty and Rose suggest ways to counter the continuing trend of gender inequity in season planning: 1) Theatres should reprioritize season programming criteria and make playwright gender a key factor at the beginning of the process instead of at the end or not at all; 2) Theatres should select seasons from a more diverse pools of scripts; 3) Theatres should include a more diverse array of artists’ perspective in the season planning process.

## Back to the Future: Aphra Behn and Contemporary Theatre

As an icon, role model and canonical playwright, Aphra Behn has had a remarkable presence in contemporary theatre and culture for nearly four decades. Theatres in Australia, Canada, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S. have produced her plays. Admirers have adopted her name as a Twitter handle. She is the subject of playwright Liz Duffy Adams's widely-produced history play, *Or*; the sixty productions it has enjoyed in the U.S. and Canada further attest to the interest that Behn holds with modern artists and audiences.<sup>35</sup> The occasion of staging a play by Behn calls attention to vital feminist issues because of the themes that she explores and because her distinguished occupational status reminds us of the history of women in professional theatre. Reviving a play by the first professional female playwright invites artists and critics to consider the theatrical past and to take stock of the present state of the profession. As Aoife Monk notes,

Theatre's ability to evoke the past in ways that signify to the present, explains its attraction for feminist practitioners and critics. Re-presenting the past has been key to a feminist engagement with the future (Monk 88).<sup>36</sup>

To this end, this project in its broadest sense is an investigation of Aphra Behn, feminism, and the implications of gender on- and off-stage in contemporary theatre. As a feminist theatre scholar and a professional director, I am invested in these subjects as they intersect and inform each other. I identify myself here at the outset of this study as a feminist in order to align myself with Charlotte Canning, and Gerda Lerner before her, because we share the belief that the

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<sup>35</sup> Production count provided by Liz Duffy Adams in an email interview on June 23, 2017. *Or*, premiered Off-Broadway at Women's Theatre Project on October 29, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Monk acknowledges that the feminist theatrical engagement with past is not without its problems or complexities: "For example, what if the past is represented on stage without offering the possibility of change in the future? Can this be classed as feminist theatre? On the other hand, even if a production does challenge gendered histories, can this work be considered feminist when it's not intended as such?" (89). See Monk, Aoife. "Predicting the Past: Histories and Futures in the Work of Women Directors." Aston, Elaine and Geraldine Harris, eds. *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory*. England: Palgrave, 2006.

writing of feminist history and the staging of feminist theatre are performative acts and thereby represent ways of actively engaging in furthering the cause of feminism.<sup>37</sup> What follows is a feminist historiographical investigation that theorizes and analyzes the role of the female director from Behn's time to the present through the American stage history of *The Rover*. This study focuses on productions helmed by women out of a feminist interest in highlighting the work of women directors as a means of politically advocating for more equitable employment of this under-hired group. Moreover, historically, the work of women directors has not received the same extent of coverage as the work of men directors; this is due to the male heteronormative historiography of stage direction, the fact that men have dominated the main stages and directing anthologies, and the tendency of women directors to work on second stages or outside of mainstream theatre and, thus, off the radars of reviewers and historians.

Part I of this study focuses on pre-twentieth-century productions. The first chapter in this section considers *The Rover*'s premiere from a director's perspective and posits Behn as a proto-director who anticipated the modern playwright-director exemplified by Martha Morton, Maria Irene Fornes, Amy Mann, Mary Zimmerman, and others. The next chapter in this section draws on the work of Jane Spencer and Nancy Copeland to examine the significance of casting, editing, and venue to early modern revivals of *The Rover*. Part II examines twentieth-century, woman-

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<sup>37</sup> Lerner made this declaration in 1979 in *The Majority Finds Its Past Placing Women in History* (xv) and returned to it again in 1994 in *Why History Matters*. In Canning's words, this was "the claim of the active participant in a politicized community . . . by saying it, she accomplished it . . . It is feminists' commitment to fusing lived experience and scholarship that has opened possibilities for change and critique and made room for the understanding of feminist history as performance . . . Understanding history as performance will continue to enable feminists to reveal its performative, that is the iterations and reiterations that make it appear natural and stable, in order to use that understanding to effect ongoing transformation and change. Understanding history as performance will also continue to serve feminism as an active political movement" ("I am a feminist scholar": The Performative of Feminist History," 230).

helmed revivals of *The Rover* at U.S. resident powerhouses. Chapter four restores Kyle Donnelly's critically overlooked 1989 staging at Chicago's Goodman Theatre to its rightful place in Behn's contemporary production history. Donnelly's revival marked *The Rover's* first, major American production helmed by a professional woman director. It was also a rare instance of a woman directing on the Goodman's main stage; from 1977 to 1989, women directed only 7% of the Goodman's programming. Chapter five provides a reexamination of Joanne Akalaitis's 1994 staging at Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater. While this production was also notable for utilizing a woman director, given that women directed only 19% of Guthrie productions during the 1990s, it also represented the first feminist, experimental revival of Behn's most popular play. Part III analyzes four twenty-first century, Off-Broadway and regional productions of *The Rover*. The first chapter in this section offers a comparative analysis of two all-female, cross-gender stagings: Rebecca Patterson's 2001 Queen's Company production and Erin Merritt's 2003 *Woman's Will* production. The next chapter examines Karin Coonrod's 2011 pro-woman, site-specific revival for New York Classical Theatre. The final chapter explores my own punk-inspired, gender parodic staging of *The Rover* in 2014 for Thinking Cap Theatre in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

### **Research Materials**

While the materials available for analysis vary by production, the personal interview is a constant in this study. In "Constructing Experience: Theorizing a Feminist Theatre History" (1993), Charlotte Canning argues that "women's experience" is "a crucial category for a feminist theatre history. The term experience describes the process of constructing an identity in context" (530). The women directors I interviewed represent a range of perspectives on feminism, stage direction, Behn, and *The Rover* that speak collectively to the complex appeal and unique



challenges and opportunities associated with staging Behn's work in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Of the five women directors that I interviewed, four identify as feminists, and one prefers the term humanist. Accordingly, their interests in imbuing Behn's play with contemporary feminist resonance ranged from negligible to subtle to overt; of course, lack of an intentionally feminist staging approach does not preclude one from interpreting a production as feminist in significance. Artistic intention aside, each of the revivals examined in this study illumines to varying extents the gender and sexual politics of its moment of production. As Aoife Monk notes, whether or not a production produces a feminist effect depends not only on the director but also on the "institutional location" (89). Monk identifies three categories of women directors that are useful: "the woman director in the institution, the woman director in the avant-garde, and the woman director in feminist practice" (89-90). These categories are not mutually exclusive. Joanne Akalaitis, for example, has affiliations with all three. Throughout my study, I consider the characteristics of the producing organization and the material conditions of the performance space to each production's concept, scale, and overall meaning.

For the Goodman and Guthrie productions, I had close to ideal research conditions. I obtained interviews with directors Kyle Donnelly and Joanne Akalaitis; Donnelly's Hellena, actress Lisa Zane; and Akalaitis's dramaturg, Kathleen Dimmick. I viewed recordings of both productions, and both theatres generously provided me with copies of programs, performance scripts, costume Bibles, and in the case of the Goodman, production photos. Sadly, photos of Akalaitis's Guthrie revival cannot be located.<sup>38</sup> Chapter six on cross-gender productions demonstrates the research challenges of documenting the work of smaller, non-profit theatre

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<sup>38</sup> A few black-and-white production photos can be found in Susan Carlson's article "Cannibalizing and Carnivalizing *The Rover*."

companies. In spite of the fact that the Queen's Company and Woman's Will productions occurred in the twenty-first century, photographic documentation of them was minimal and promptbooks and video recordings were not archived. Therefore, my analysis of these revivals centers on insights gleaned from interviews with Queen's Company's founding Artistic Director, Rebecca Patterson, and co-founders DeeAnn Weir-Morency, who played Willmore, and Virginia Baeta, who played Blunt. With the exception of not having access to a recorded performance, the chapter seven on New York Classical Theatre's production, like the Goodman and Guthrie chapters, posed a wealth of research materials. In addition to securing interviews with director Karin Coonrod, actress April Sweeney, who played Hellena, and New York Classical Theatre's Artistic Director Stephen Burdman, I had at my disposal a first and a final cut of the performance text, press materials, reviews, and extensive photo-documentation, thanks to the kindness and thorough archiving of Burdman and his organization. The last chapter of this section analyzes the production that I directed for Fort Lauderdale's Thinking Cap Theatre in 2013. I reflect on my textual edits and directing and design choices, along with reviews, in order to theorize the implications of my staging through the lens of feminist comic theory.

A study on woman-directed revivals of Behn's most popular play provides a compelling opportunity to explore how women directors have interpreted *The Rover* and shaped Behn's contemporary legacy and to consider how Behn has served the careers of the American women directors who have revived her work. The relevance of *The Rover* to contemporary feminism remains a point of ambivalence, possibility, and debate. This study will examine the methods and ideologies that guided the production of meaning in these revivals in order to identify patterns and departures in how American women directors interpreted the gender and sexual politics of the play in performance. As this study will demonstrate, determining whether *The*

*Rover* is a feminist text in performance hinges on the aesthetic and interpretation of the director and the politics of the specific moment of production. Regardless of the gender of the person directing the revival, staging the *The Rover* will always serve as an occasion for comparing and contrasting historical and contemporary ideas on gender roles, sex, violence, and genre as well as for spotlighting Behn's significance to the history of women in professional theatre. However, when directed by a woman, the play serves as a vehicle for illuminating the persistent underrepresentation of not only women playwrights but also women directors in contemporary theatre. By raising awareness on these subjects, the revival of Behn's plays takes on a heightened function as a form of feminist theatre activism, serving as a means to champion the cause for gender equality in the industry.

### **Existing Scholarship on Behn's Contemporary Production History**

With the exception of a 2016 article by S. S. Gammanpila on recent London productions of Behn's plays, scholarship on Behn's contemporary production history has rested for three decades on the efforts of Mary Ann O'Donnell, Jessica Munns, Susan Carlson, Cheryl Black, and Nancy Copeland.<sup>39</sup> Between them, they have focused on three revivals: Royal Shakespeare Company's 1986/7 productions directed by John Barton; the Guthrie's 1994 production directed by Joanne Akalaitis; and the 1994 BBC/Open University production directed by Jules Wright.<sup>40</sup> To my knowledge, my study represents the first book-length analysis of Behn's contemporary production history. In *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography*, first published in 1986 and

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<sup>39</sup> Jessica Munns (1988) and Nancy Copeland (1990) analyze Barton's 1986-1987 RSC stagings. Susan Carlson (1995) and Cheryl Black (2009) offer analyses of Akalaitis' 1994 Guthrie staging. Copeland has also written about Jules Wright's 1994 revival (1999), and she is the only scholar to my knowledge who has offered a broader interpretation of Behn's contemporary production history (2010).

<sup>40</sup> Wright directed a production of *The Lucky Chance* in 1984 for the Woman's Playhouse Trust. Her production of *The Rover* ran October-November 1994, after Akalaitis's Guthrie revival.

reprinted in a revised edition in 2004, O'Donnell provides invaluable bibliographic coverage of Behn's entire oeuvre. But most pertinently, O'Donnell was the first scholar to document the contemporary stage life of Behn's plays. Appendix IX of the 2004 edition contains an extensive, though not comprehensive, list of 34 late-twentieth century *Rover* revivals between 1979 and 2001; even as it stands, O'Donnell's inventory is an essential starting point for anyone interested in analyzing Behn's contemporary production history. Her list is comprised of 11 academic revivals and 23 professional productions, along with citations for accompanying reviews. Only nine of the 23 professional productions employed women directors; by contrast, eight of the 11 university productions engaged women directors. These numbers represent a common research trend that reveals women working pro bono or for little pay on the fringes of regional theatres or in educational settings, while men have dominated the paid, professional directing arena.

Only Nancy Copeland has taken the groundwork laid in O'Donnell's bibliography to the next level of offering broader interpretive analysis of Behn's contemporary production history that moves beyond the most-discussed productions by Barton, Akalaitis, and Wright.<sup>41</sup> Copeland divides the modern production history of Behn's plays into two stages: the high-profile, attention-garnering productions of *The Rover* in the decade between 1984 and 1994 and the post-1994 "diversification" period when *The Feigned Curtizans*, *The Emperor of the Moon*, and *Sir Patient Fancy* began to receive some stagings. She identifies several trends in contemporary productions: 1) a focus on female characters (anachronistic feminism); 2) casting appeal, namely the youth of Behn's protagonists makes her plays of interest to schools and young companies; 3) an appreciation of her plays' farcical and "diverting" potential; 4) the

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<sup>41</sup> See Copeland, Nancy. "Aphra Behn in the Contemporary Theater." *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*. Eds. Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs. NY: MLA, 2010.

opportunity to explore serious issues alongside comic ones; 5) the potential for adaptation, such as the use of cross-gender casting or present day analogies to facilitate accessibility for a contemporary audience. Borrowing Alan C. Dessen's term "rescripting," a "less overt process" that often entails shortening the text, clarifying plots, and incorporating contemporary soundscape, Copeland asserts that "the process of staging any play from the past in a new context is a form of adaptation," and, therefore, "the production history of Behn's plays is a study of how they have been adapted in performance to convey meaning in new cultural contexts" (72).<sup>42</sup>

### **Aphra Behn on the American Stage: *The Rover*'s 1979 U.S. Premiere and 1980s Revivals**

I stood and read *The Rover* for the first time in the back corner of a bookstore. A tingling sensation spread through my body and it did not stop till I had reached the ending couplet . . . You look around to make sure no one has been watching you standing in a corner chuckling and snorting with glee. You lower the book, title cover pressed tightly against your body, and assuming a controlled air (as much, that is, as knocking-knees will allow), you head for the cashier. You pay in a casual manner so as to convince the clerk who is inevitably in the employ of Joseph Papp as a literary spy, that this is just another one of those forays into frustration and disappointment . . . You have struck the gold that is attached to the rainbow of possibilities. Your life has a new adventure and you have found a possible means of sharing with a great many people the excitement that you felt upon discovering that which had languished in unfair obscurity.<sup>43</sup>

Director Michael Diamond's elation upon unearthing *The Rover* in a bookstore in the late 1970s is both an endearing anecdote and an insightful testament to the exciting prospect of rediscovery that characterized this period for scholars and artists. His reference to Papp (1921-

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<sup>42</sup> In this same essay, Copeland also briefly discusses two other recent productions that have not otherwise been treated by scholars: Rebecca Patterson's 2001 *Woman's Will* production, which is treated in the present study, and Josh Costello's 2005 Chance Theatre Repertory Company adaptation. Recent editions of *The Rover* also document the play's frequent, contemporary revival (see Methuen Drama, 2006; New Mermaids, 2014; and Oxford Student Editions, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Director's Note from *The Rover Program*. Folger Theatre Group. pg20.

1991), the legendary, founding artistic director of New York Shakespeare Festival/The Public, represents a good-spirited spin on a very real tradition of programming competition among theatre directors. It was under Diamond's direction that *The Rover* enjoyed its American debut in February of 1979 at the University of Illinois' Circle Theater in Chicago.<sup>44</sup> In spite of its academic setting, this staging was semi-professional; the cast included Equity actors in the major roles of Willmore, Hellena, Angellica, and Blunt, and students in the remaining supporting roles.<sup>45</sup> In spite of poor reviews from local press and low attendance, Robert D. Hume hailed the production as a triumph and praised Diamond for treating the play as "a workable vehicle, not as a fragile museum piece" (412). Hume also attributed the production's effectiveness to Diamond's "heavily cut" script, asserting that "comprehension is needed, not reverence" (413). Hume's observations have rung true in the play's many subsequent revivals. Directors have continued to grapple with how to prune and play Behn's text in order to make it shorter, more accessible, relevant, or entertaining for a modern audience.

American productions dominated the first decade of Behn's contemporary revival.<sup>46</sup> *The Rover*, in particular, enjoyed thirteen productions, ten of which took place in the U.S. Of these

<sup>44</sup> Circle Theater is not to be mistaken with Circle Theatre with an 're' ending, which was founded in Chicago in 1985 and is still in operation. Diamond's Chicago revival of *The Rover* ran February-March 1979. His revival at Folger's Theatre in D.C. ran from December 15, 1981-February 21, 1981-1982.

<sup>45</sup> Equity or AEA refers to Actors' Equity Association, the professional union for actors and stage managers.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Ann O'Donnell's Appendix on contemporary revivals begins with the 1979 Circle Theatre production at the University of Illinois; however, while doing archival research in the Special Collections of the New York Public Library's Theatre and Film Division, I recently discovered news clippings that reference a 1978 production of *The Rover* in Colchester, England; this production, not Diamond's 1979 Chicago production, ostensibly ended the two hundred year stage respite of Behn's dramatic canon. Staged by The Mercury company under the direction of David Buxton, this English production was "the first unbawdlerised version since the 1750s," according to reviewer Liz Mullen. See her review in *The Stage & Television Society*. 7

ten American revivals, six were professional, and four were academic.<sup>47</sup> The production after Diamond's Chicago revival marked *The Rover*'s New York premiere. Presented in the fall of 1979 by the Off-Off-Broadway Meat and Potatoes Company at a 99-seat venue under the direction of Neal Weaver, this revival garnered at least four, mostly mixed reviews.<sup>48</sup> More than one critic complained that the space was too small for a play with so much action and that actors repeatedly clashed with the set. Reviewer Marilyn Stasio faults Weaver's direction for "far too much attention to fussy and costly design and failure to attend to what really matters—a unified acting style, performed with a sense of the period and its idiom." Stasio's opinion contrasts with

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September 1978, p23. See also John Peter's review in London's *Sunday Times*. 5 September 1978, 38.; and the brief review by Cushman, R. *London Observer*. 10 September 1978, p33. The title of this review is not included with the clipping.

<sup>47</sup> O'Donnell's Appendix lists nine productions from 1979-1989; I count John Barton's productions at the Swan (1986) and the Mermaid (1987) as two separate stagings because of changes to casting and blocking. Seven of these were American revivals: four were professional, and three were academic. The additional productions I discovered increase the total count of revivals from 1979-1989 to thirteen. The increase is from two U.K. productions to three and from seven U.S. productions to ten (six professional and four academic). The additional productions not identified in O'Donnell's Appendix are as follows: A Meat and Potatoes Company production directed by Neal Weaver ran from September 13 - October 7, 1979 at a theatre on 58 W. 39th Street. The running time was 3 1/2 hours, which suggests that Weaver made few or no cuts; A Women's Project at New York Theatre Ensemble production, adapted and directed by Leslie (Hoban) Blake ran April 15, - May 9, 1982 at a downtown theatre on 62 East Fourth Street. Faculty member Elizabeth Swain directed a student production at Minor Latham Playhouse, Barnard College, the alma mater of Behn biographer Angeline Goreau (*Reconstructing Aphra*, 1980), from November 8 - 19, 1989.

<sup>48</sup> In operation from 1976-1987, the Meat and Potatoes Company was a non-profit OffOff-Broadway company that specialized in classical revivals. From 1984 until it folded in 1987, the company worked out of the Alvina Krause Theatre on 306 W. 38th Street in New York City. Its *Rover* revival ran from September 13, 1979-October 7, 1979 at a theatre on 58 West 39th Street. It had a running time of 3 1/2 hours. The core cast was as follows: Barbara Knowles (Florinda), Barbara Leto (Hellena), Richard Bourg (Don Pedro), Toni Brown (Callis and Moretta), Cynthia Bock (Valeria), Paul DeBoy (Belvile), Spike Steingasser (Frederick), Charles Sweigart (Blunt), Geof Prysirr (Willmore), Sara Eldgridge (Angellica Bianca), Lou Spirito (Don Anotonio). For reviews see Stasio, Marilyn. *N.Y. Post*. (Sept. 15, 1979) p29.; Wilson, Donald. "Roving News." (Sept. 20, 1979) p53.; Feingold, Michael. *Village Voice*. (24 September 1979): 92; Bello, Elizabeth. *Show Business*. (27 September 1979): p20.



Hume's in his review of Diamond's Chicago production, wherein he praises the latter director's less precious approach. Michael Feingold's *Village Voice* review, while more praiseworthy of Behn than the production, is interesting for its back-handed call for more professional productions of non-Shakespearean classics:

If the traditional inevitably falls into the hands of amateurs and novices, they are hardly to blame; the professionals who have abdicated their responsibility should think twice. One would like to know exactly what it is they profess. Opportunists, insects, beggars, and whores: It may be they avoid these plays because the images involved strike too close to home.

Drawing a link between professional theatre and debauchery, Feingold implies that the themes of Behn's plays resonate, perhaps, too much with late 1970s culture; this was the era of Studio 54 and the AIDS epidemic.

### **The First Female-Directed Productions of Behn's Canon**

While Behn's contemporary stage revival began under male direction, it was only a short time before her plays met with female directors. In 1982, Leslie (Hoban) Blake (b.1939) became the first professional woman director to stage *The Rover*, marking the beginning of a vital and dynamic history of woman-directed revivals of Behn's canon. Blake adapted and helmed an OffOff-Broadway production presented by A Women's Project at New York Theater Ensemble, a historic downtown theatre on 62 East Fourth Street.<sup>49</sup> In the early 1970s, Francis Ford Coppola had filmed parts of *The Godfather II* (1974) at this venue; today the Rod Rogers Dance Company occupies the building. Formerly an Equity actress, Blake described her production of *The Rover*

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<sup>49</sup> This production ran April 15-May 9, 1982. It was "A Women's Project" production, for which Blake served as artistic director. The company only existed one year, producing three productions during the 1982-1983 season, because of the producing director's death from AIDS.



as her real breakthrough as a director.<sup>50</sup> She had seen both Weaver's 1979 *Meat and Potatoes* revival and Diamond's 1981 *Folger* revival, and she recalls not agreeing with their treatment of the female roles. Her production was staged loosely as a seventeenth-century, period-honoring revival [Figure 1]. It played on the venue's main proscenium stage (with no forestage), not in the black box basement space. Of particular interest was her decision to combine the roles of Biskey and Sebastian and cross-gender cast the hybrid character as Bianca.<sup>51</sup> Australian-born director and avowed feminist, Jules Wright (1948-2015) followed Blake, becoming the second professional woman director to stage one of Behn's plays with her 1984 production of *The Lucky Chance* for the Woman's Playhouse Trust in London. The very next year at Princeton University, Carol Elliott MacVey, having learned of Wright's revival, directed the third ever woman-helmed revival of one of Behn's plays.<sup>52</sup> MacVey's production contained an all student cast, whose youth she found fitting for the play's "comic shenanigans" and depiction of "women who prevailed" (393-394).<sup>53</sup> It played on a three-quarter round stage with close proximity to audience and was scenically minimalist with just an upstage center balcony and oversized pillows as set pieces, which served well the extreme physical demands of the play. As one example of their use, MacVey describes a playful pillow fight between Hellena and Florinda at the start of the play:

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<sup>50</sup> Blake remains active in the profession to this day as the co-host of "Two on the Aisle," a theatre review talk show on the New York Public Access channel.

<sup>51</sup> Phone interview with the author, October 10, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> The Princeton production ran for two weekends from November 7 - 17, 1985. In an interview for a local paper, *Town Topics*, MacVey acknowledged learning about Behn because of Wright's staging of *The Lucky Chance* the previous year (Oct 30, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> See interview with MacVey that follows *The Rover* in Barnet, Sylvan; Berman, Morton; Burto, William; and Ren Dray, eds. *Types of Drama: Plays and Contexts*. 7th ed. Longman: New York, 1997.

the pillows were piled center stage and we heard raucous screaming offstage. Then, Florinda ran in, wildly pursued by Hellena, who eventually tackled her sister, threw her onto the pile of pillows, straddled her and pinned her down . . . From the outset, Hellena is someone to reckon with, not only verbally, but physically (545).<sup>54</sup>

MacVey made sizeable cuts to Behn's original—"of speeches, of scenes, whole pages" (544).

Also noteworthy was MacVey's incorporation of a commedia style dumbshow dubbed "Marriage-a-la-mode," which followed each of the play's carnival movements and unfolded in four episodes that dramatized the types of arranged marriages that a seventeenth century woman might experience in her lifetime: first, a young woman forced to marry an old man; next, a woman with a brood of children forced to marry an old wealthy man with his own brood of children; then, a middle-aged woman with even more children forced to marry an older but wealthier man with children in equal abundance; and finally, a young man forced to wed a wealthy, widowed woman. This idea of incorporating original, devised transitions that further explicated the world of the play for the audience would be taken up by later directors, such as Rebecca Patterson of Queen's Company. MacVey flavored the carnival world into which Willmore makes his first entrance with sexual hyperbole and innuendo by having him enter from beneath the skirt of a grotesque giantess, a hoop-skirted woman on stilts, who screamed aloud, out of surprise or pleasure, when he exited her. In the words of MacVey, the giantess then "picked him up, smothered him in her oversized balloon breasts and hurled him to the ground, much to everyone's delight" (544) [Figure 2]. This striking visual places Willmore in an emasculated light and depicts him as a spent object physically dominated by the opposite sex, a point of contrast to later revivals, such as Joanne Akalaitis's, which graphically depicted men's

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<sup>54</sup> MacVey, Carol Elliott. "Directing *The Rover*." *Types of Drama: Plays and Contexts*. New York: Longman, 544-545.

domination of women. One final point worth noting about MacVey's production involves the ending. The unresolved tension at the end of the play interested MacVey and prompted her to illustrate this complexity in her final stage picture, which featured Angellica alone at her balcony observing the newlyweds' joyous exit. This is the only production that I have encountered that incorporated Angellica Bianca into the play's ending in performance.

### **British Influence on American Revivals: Barton's *Rover* at the Swan and Mermaid**

The most influential twentieth-century revival was John Barton's adaptation for Royal Shakespeare Company, the famed London institution founded in 1960 by Sir Peter Hall. This revival helped to solidify the canonical status of Aphra Behn and placed the writer and her most popular play more prominently on the radars of contemporary theatremakers. Selected as one of the plays for the RSC's inaugural 1986-1987 season at The Swan, a 426-seat theatre located in Stratford-upon-Avon, *The Rover* was the theatre's biggest box office success in its first three years in existence.<sup>55</sup> It ran from July thru August 1986 and was so successful that the RSC remounted it in November 1987 at its larger London venue, the Mermaid Theatre, which seated 600.<sup>56</sup> Mary Ann O'Donnell's appendix on contemporary productions lists thirty-four entries pertaining to Barton's revivals, making them possibly the most written about stagings of *The Rover* to this day.<sup>57</sup>

In spite of its financial success and largely warm reception among reviewers, the RSC's *Rover* proved highly contentious among scholars because of edits and additions made by Barton,

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<sup>55</sup> The RSC's main theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, which shares a lobby and bar with the Swan, seats 1,018.

<sup>56</sup> Established in 1959, the Mermaid Theatre officially closed its doors in 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Only one of these entries was an academic article: Nancy Copeland's 1990 essay "Re-Producing *The Rover*: John Barton's *Rover* at the Swan" in *Essays in Theatre*. Not listed in O'Donnell's inventory of writing on Barton's production is Jessica Munns' 1988 essay, "Barton and Behn's *The Rover*: Or, The Text Transposed."

who drew as heavily from his own imagination and Killigrew's *Thomaso* as he did from Behn's play. Barton omitted 550 lines; added 350 lines; relocated the setting to a slave occupied colony in the Spanish West Indies; employed cross-racial casting; incorporated an extensive slavery theme; and altered and expanded the role of Lucetta. He incensed scholar Jessica Munns, who found his direction intrusive and his rewriting "dishonest and offensive" (17). To map out her objections, Munns engages in a comparative text-based study that examines the version of Barton's adaptation that was printed and included in the RSC program alongside Behn's and Killigrew's texts. According to Munns's close analysis, "Barton's interventions range from minor cuts and redistributions of lines to major transpositions of scenes, large insertions, substantial development of minor characters" (12). She takes particular issue with the implications that Barton's textual omissions and additions have for female characters in the play. Munns finds the director generally guilty of imposing himself upon Behn's play:

From a company notorious for male directorial domination an overtly feminist production may represent a happy new departure. However, when the production involves considerable interventions into a female text by a male director, a certain skepticism is in order (Munns 11).<sup>58</sup>

Using Marvin Carlson's reception theory, Nancy Copeland analyzes the documents associated with Barton's staging "in order to discover how Behn's play was re-produced by that institution [the RSC] for a late-twentieth-century audience" (45). In her analysis, she names the RSC program as a glaring indicator of the production's flaws. Copeland takes issue with the ahistorical contextualizing strategy used by Simon Trussler in constructing the RSC program. In his push to suggest Behn's relevance, Trussler depicts her as "a sexually liberated proto-feminist, whose works are problem plays that reflect her personal experience . . . relevance trumps over

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<sup>58</sup> Munns, Jessica. "Barton and Behn's *The Rover*; or The Text Transpos'd." *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*. 3.2(1988): 11-22.

historicism” (48). In other words, Trussler positions the play as a reflection of Behn’s autobiography: “the emphasis on the ‘feminist’ credentials of Behn and her play is essential to its project, but it is highly problematic” (56). Barton “diminished or obscured” Behn’s feminism by virtue of emphasizing violence and farce and downplaying Willmore’s heroism (54). Ultimately, Copeland determines that the production caved to economic necessity and audience expectation, creating a revival that epitomized the challenges and conflicts that characterize the RSC’s “paradoxical” mission to produce classical theatre that possesses historical authority and contemporary relevance.

While Copeland’s essay on Barton’s production echoes some of Munns’ criticisms, it also illuminates critical complexities about the print and performance history of the RSC productions that bear not only on how one might retrospectively view Barton’s handling of *The Rover* but also on how some directors (and their dramaturgs) have since approached Behn’s play. Copeland’s article makes an important textual clarification about Barton’s staging that went unnoted in Munns’ article. In essence, there are two different print versions of Barton’s production: the version of Barton’s adaptation as it existed midway through the rehearsal process that was printed and included in the program for audience and the performance script that represents the play as it was actually performed at the Swan. In the program version, the first two scenes of the play were reversed; in other words, the play begins with the cavaliers on the brink of sexual adventure, not with the sisters discussing the restrictions of marriage. However, this is not the scene order that the RSC production at the Swan (or at the Mermaid) followed in performance. Yet, this printed version of Barton’s adaptation would go on to be a major reference point for productions in the 1980s and 1990s, about which more will be said later. Indeed, this program version of the text was what fueled, in part, Jessica Munns’ scorn for

Barton's adaptation. It also troubled director and Princeton professor, Carol Elliot MacVey, who lamented the prospect of inverting the order of the first two scenes, arguing instead for the special significance of Behn's first, female-centric scene:

What Behn gives us in the original version is unusual and ought to be fiercely protected—a play that opens with women's energies generating the machinations of the plot and creating a landscape into which men will enter . . . Even though much of Hall's script reflects Behn's original . . . He has sabotaged and violated and subverted all the primal female energy with which Behn obviously intended the play to begin (544).<sup>59</sup>

To be clear, while Barton's decision later in the rehearsal process to return to Behn's opening order resolved one scholarly objection, his production as staged still contained plenty of other alterations for scholars to bemoan.

A study on the role of women directors in the contemporary revival of *The Rover* would be remiss not to address briefly in conjunction with discussion of Barton's adaptation of Behn's play the RSC's longstanding history of "male directorial domination" (Munns 11). In the 1960s, when the RSC was establishing itself as an expert on staging Shakespeare, no women directors were hired. As Elizabeth Schafer notes,

Women directors have been particularly scarce on the often maligned mainstage at Stratford; a total of six women have directed there [as of 2000], something which seems ironic given that the space was designed by a woman, Elizabeth Scott (231).<sup>60</sup>

The first woman to direct for the RSC was Buzz Goodbody (1946-1975), a self-proclaimed feminist and socialist who joined the company as John Barton's personal assistant in 1967. In

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<sup>59</sup> MacVey refers here to Barton's RSC colleague, British theatre giant, Sir Peter Hall (1930-2017), who founded the RSC in 1960.

<sup>60</sup> The first women to direct at Stratford prior to the RSC's founding and residence there were Irene Hentschel and Dorothy Green respectively. Hentschel directed *Twelfth Night* in 1939, and Green directed *The Winter's Tale* in 1943. These performances took place at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, the precursor to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

three years' time, Goodbody was permitted to assistant direct and then direct, but her creative domain was initially limited to staging Shakespeare for RSC's Theatreground, an RSC educational initiative. Goodbody's official main stage directing debut was a June 1973 production of *As You Like It*, which audiences enjoyed and critics questioned for its overtones of contemporary gender politics. In 1974 Goodbody was named Artistic Director of The Other Place. Dubbed her "brainchild" and housed in an actual tin shed in Stratford, The Other Place was a rehearsal and studio theatre space for the RSC's more experimental theatre projects.<sup>61</sup> There Goodbody embarked on the challenge of directing productions of *King Lear* (1974), which toured to New York, and *Hamlet* (1975), which opened April 8, 1975 and received glowing reviews. Tragically, Goodbody committed suicide four days later on April 12, 1975, just one month before her 29th birthday. Based upon interview accounts with Goodbody and her colleagues, stress related to the pressures of succeeding professionally as a director took a toll on the rising but troubled artist. In a 1970 interview, Goodbody spoke frankly about experiencing sexism in her early tenure at the RSC (Schafer 238). It was eight years after Goodbody's death before a woman directed again for the RSC. Sheila Hancock had a one-off engagement with a staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1983; on more than one occasion after the project ended, Hancock referred to the directors at the RSC as the "academic, white, male mafia" (Schafer 239). Deborah Warner, on the other hand, who received critical acclaim for her main stage production of *Titus Andronicus* (1987), has never registered complaints about her experiences working at the RSC, but for decades, Warner was a unique exception at the institution. In the twenty-first century, women directors have had a greater presence. In fact, the

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<sup>61</sup> Still in existence, The Other Place has undergone several evolutions and now exists as a brick-and-mortar building with a 200-seat black box theatre.

RSC hired Loveday Ingram to direct its 2016 revival of *The Rover* in conjunction with the thirtieth anniversary celebration of *The Swan*.

### **Behn after Barton**

Marion Wynn-Davies emphasizes the impact of Barton's production on the contemporary stage history of Behn's plays: "Behn, at least with this particular play, became seen not merely as performable, but as a reliable addition to the repertoire, with a number of more authentic productions . . . following in fairly rapid succession" (161).<sup>62</sup> Wynn-Davies' use of the words "more authentic," ostensibly meaning productions based solely upon Behn's text, reinforces just how inauthentic and problematic the scholarly community found Barton's adaptation to be. How much truer to Behn's original the revivals were that immediately followed Barton's is debatable. The first production prompted by Barton's 1986 revival at The Mermaid was an American revival, the July 1987, Williamstown Theatre Festival production directed by John Rubinstein. Located in Williamstown, MA, on the Williams College campus, Williamstown Theatre Festival was established in 1955 and conceived of as a summer theatre festival with a resident company. Following Barton's precedent, Rubinstein set the play in the Spanish West Indies. Drawing on reviews, particularly one by Frank Rich in the *New York Times*, Munns and Copeland both perceive the Williamstown revival as a recycled version of Barton's RSC revival. While the Williamstown Festival program does not credit its performance text to Barton and a note towards the bottom of the program's title page expresses gratitude to dramaturg Kevin Kelley for "his help and guidance with the text and the actors," Leslie Hoban Blake, who knew Williamstown Artistic Director Nikos Psacharopoulos, confirms that

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<sup>62</sup> "Editing Early Modern Women's Dramatic Writing for Performance" in *Editing Early Modern Women*, ed. Ross and Salman, 2016.



Psacharopoulos secured the script from the RSC.<sup>63</sup> Another East Coast production of *The Rover* followed the next year, perhaps prompted by Rubinstein's; in July 1988, the now defunct Phoenix Theater Company in Dobbs Ferry, NY, mounted a revival directed by Stefan Rudnicki.<sup>64</sup> In 1989, *The Rover* received its first major professional revival under a woman's direction, which is where part two of this study begins.<sup>65</sup> This production at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago marked the end of a decade of predominantly male-directed revivals.

### **Engendering A Profession: The Modern Director & Feminist Historiography**

Today gender bias continues not only to impede the careers of women playwrights but also of women directors. Given the comparative youth of directing as a categorically distinct role in theatre, the plight of the professional woman director is a more recent subject of investigation. The choice of the word "engendering" to frame this section operates on two levels: First, it points to the changes in theatre practice over time that originated the idea of the director as the unifier of the many elements of theatrical production. Second, it is a conscious nod to the patriarchal power structures that defined the role in male, heteronormative terms. Throughout the twentieth century, the prevailing 'history' of the modern director was a narrative of great white men with godlike authority. "The precursors to the modern director of Western theatre have been almost exclusively men, for historically women were relegated to positions as

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<sup>63</sup> Program provided by Williamstown Theatre Festival archivist, June 2017. Other productions do credit Barton; for example, the Goodman production attributes its performance script to him, not to director Kyle Donnelly, though she noted in an interview with me that she drew from Barton and Behn to further adapt the script for the Goodman revival. According to Blake, she offered Nikos Psacharopoulos her adaptation, but Psacharopoulos had already paid for use of one of Barton's versions.

<sup>64</sup> See *New York Times* review by Alvin Klein, Aug. 14, 1988.

<sup>65</sup> Also in 1989, MFA student Julia Fisher directed the play as part of her thesis project at the University of MN.

performers or playwrights,” note Fliotsos and Vierow (5).<sup>66</sup> If women directors appeared in early directing anthologies, they were present in a token capacity.<sup>67</sup> A brief understanding of this history will provide a useful context for appreciating Behn’s proto-directorial role during the Restoration, which is the subject of chapter two of this study, and for historicizing the challenges faced in the past four decades by the professional women directors whose contemporary revivals of *The Rover* comprise parts two and three of this study.

As late as 1870, playbills still did not provide attribution to a “director” or identify a single person as responsible for overseeing the staging of a play (Kliewer 514). Moreover, as late as the 1920s, critics failed to mention directors in their reviews (Canning 51).<sup>68</sup> In addition, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers (SDC), the directors’ union founded in 1959, still did not list an official job description for a director (Kliewer 533). All of these points underscore the recentness of professional stage direction. Most historians track the origins of the modern director to the work of Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914) in late-nineteenth century Germany. Meiningen was noted for “the unification of all the production elements—costume, scenery, properties, and lifelike acting—to

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<sup>66</sup> Fliotsos, Anne and Wendy Vierow, eds. *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> First published in 1963, *Directors on Directing*, co-edited by Helen Krich Chinoy and Toby Cole, was regarded for decades as a textual authority on the profession and has undergone numerous reprints. An anthology comprised of a lengthy introduction by Chinoy on the emergence of the director and followed by excerpts from the writings of 41 individual directors—only two of whom are female, Joan Littlewood and Margaret Webster, *Directors on Directing* paints a familiar, patriarchal portrait of the origins of the director. Starting in the 1980’s, directing texts began to include discussion of female directors, but male directors still appeared in greater numbers. For example, Arthur Bartow’s *The Director’s Voice* (1988) contains 21 director interviews, and only three of the interviewees are women (Joanne Akalaitis, Martha Clarke, and Zelda Fichandler).

<sup>68</sup> Canning, Charlotte. “Directing History: Women, Performance, and Scholarship.” *Theatre Research International*. 30(March 2005): 49-59.

form a whole, coherent picture on stage” (Kliwer 5).<sup>69</sup> He, along with the French director Andre Antoine (1858-1943), French playwright-director Emile Zola (1840-1902), Russian theatre artist Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), Swiss designer-director Adolphe Appia (1862-1928), and actor-director Gordon Craig (1872-1966), adopted a naturalistic approach to stage direction that emphasized realistic acting and design.

Stanley Kaufman, on the other hand, argues that the director existed in earlier incarnations in ancient times and that the role merely re-emerged as a separate identity with its own name in the modern era. Kaufman dates the director’s emergence earlier, to the 1770s, and attributes the timing to the philosophical and aesthetic impact of Romanticism (4).<sup>70</sup> He asserts that the movement’s championing of a personalized view of art dovetailed with the idea of a single individual overseeing the artistic unity of theatre production. Unlike its historical antecedents, the modern director could elect to be a director *only*, instead of also a playwright or actor or manager. While the responsibilities of the director continued to evolve in the first half of the twentieth century, invisible direction prevailed as a principle and goal. The director served as the direct facilitator, not the interpreter, of the author’s intentions.

### **The Mid-Twentieth Century Ascendancy of the Director**

By the middle of the twentieth century, a new model of stage director appeared that rivaled the playwright in importance. The interpretive director was an author in his or her own right.<sup>71</sup> This variety of director moved the theatre “away from the realism it was mired in forty

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<sup>69</sup> Kliwer, Warren. “Directors and Direction” in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre. Volume 2: 1870-1945*. Don B. Wilmet and Christopher Bigsby, eds. New York: Cambridge UP, 1999.

<sup>70</sup> Kauffmann, Stanley. “The Director Reborn.” *PAJ*. 73 (2003): 1-6.

<sup>71</sup> Kliwer credits Orson Welles with elevating the director to the status of an “omnipotent, ultimate artist” and the craft to an art form in its own right (531). For an interesting analysis of

years ago and in the direction of . . . an intense theatricality” (Leiter 487).<sup>72</sup> One particularly distinct type of interpretative director that emerged in the 1960s was the “auteur.”<sup>73</sup> A concept borrowed from French cinema, the term auteur implied a highly visual, zeitgeist approach to stage direction.<sup>74</sup> Since mid-century, many other classifications of directing have evolved, including the actor’s director, the physical director, the textual director, and the feminist director. The role of the director will continue to reinvent itself “as long as playwrights hand us unsolvable staging problems, teachers devise new methods of actor training, theatre technology develops irresistible new techniques, and theatre economics devise new ways to do old tasks” (Kliewer 533).

Since the 1980s, feminist theatre historiographers have rewritten the history of theatre direction to expose the gender (and racial and sexual) biases inherent to the prevailing discourse and to illuminate women’s place within the profession. Charlotte Canning has demonstrated that women were participating in the profession alongside men in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries; the traditional narratives that have defined theatre history simply overlooked women’s contributions to stage direction.<sup>75</sup> During the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries,

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the director as author see: Sidiropoulou, Avra. *Authoring Performance: The Director in Contemporary Theatre*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

<sup>72</sup> Leiter, Samuel L. “Directors and Direction” in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre. Volume 2: 1870-1945*. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby, eds. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000.

<sup>73</sup> Examples of auteur directors include Joanne Akalaitis, Peter Brook, Julian Beck and Judith Malina (The Living Theatre), Joseph Chaikin (The Open Theatre), Maria Irene Fornes, Elizabeth LeCompte, Richard Schechner (The Performance Group), Robert Wilson (the Bird Hoffman Center and now, the Watermill Center), Richard Foreman (Ontological-Hysteric Theatre), Charles Ludlam (Ridiculous Theatrical Company).

<sup>74</sup> The opera of Wagner is often cited as an early influence on modern auteur direction.

<sup>75</sup> See Canning, Charlotte. “Directing History: Women, Performance, and Scholarship.” *Theatre Research International*. 30(March 2005): 49-59.; “Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography.” *Theatre Survey*. 45(Nov 2004): 227-233.; “I am a feminist scholar”: The Performative of Feminist History.” *Theatre Research International*. 26(2001): 223-32.;

more women were directing during this pivotal period of growth and exploration, though their contributions are largely invisible in the annals of history, for many of their efforts were not on the commercial stage but in private homes, educational institutions, little theatres, and other amateur ventures across the United States (Fliotics and Vierow 8).

Following the lead of Rosamond Gilder's 1931 study, Fliotics and Vierow identify German theatre practitioner, Carolina Neuber (1697-1760), working in the early to mid-eighteenth century, and French theatre practitioner, Marguerite Brunet (1679-1739), also known as La Montansier, working in the mid-eighteenth century, as female pioneers of directing.<sup>76</sup> A more comprehensive history of female stage direction had accumulated by the 2000s. *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century* by Anne Fliotics and Wendy Vierow (2008) represents a major milestone in scholarship on women directors in America. The work highlights the achievements of fifty professional women directors in the U.S in the past century. In spite of the feminist revisioning of history and the many accomplishments of women directors, their plight for work and recognition still persists. In what follows, I argue Behn's significance to the history of female stage direction, examine her relationship to the professional women directors who have revived her plays in America, and propose Behn's ongoing value as a feminist icon and role model to the contemporary gender parity movement.

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"Constructing Experience: Theorizing a Feminist Theatre History." *Theatre Journal*. 45(1993): 529-540.

<sup>76</sup> Gilder dubs La Montansier as 'the first business manager and directress of the European theatre' (6).

**Part I:**

***The Rover's* Premiere and Pre-Twentieth Century Productions**

## Chapter Two:

### Playwright as Proto-Director:

#### Behn's Dual Role in Restoration Theatre & *The Rover's* Premiere

Who did the work of a director in the seventeenth century? Who decided on casting, ran rehearsals, coached actors on their roles, arranged the composition of performers onstage, and conferred with designers? In reflecting on classical Greek drama, Stanley Kauffman asserts: “We still gasp at the speed with which the theatre produced some of its greatest dramatists, but we have gasped insufficiently at the fact that those earliest plays were directed by their authors.”<sup>77</sup> This was not just the case in ancient Greece but also in Renaissance and Restoration England, where playwrights, in addition to actors and managers, routinely served in a directorial capacity. Playwright-manager William Davenant (1606-1668) resumed this classical and Shakespearean practice in 1660 when King Charles II reopened the theatres and granted Davenant one of the two royal patents in the London theatre duopoly (Innes and Shevtsova 18).<sup>78</sup> Davenant's interest in staging new plays, both his own and others', along with his steady engagement with scenic design were “to some degree anticipating the role of a contemporary director” (19). George Villiers' 1671 play *The Rehearsal*, a full-length Restoration analogue to our contemporary *Saturday Night Live*, mocks poet laureate John Dryden in its lead character Bayes. While Villiers takes specific jabs at the elevated emotion and elaborate spectacle of

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<sup>77</sup> Kauffmann, Stanley. “The Director Reborn.” *PAJ*. 73(2003): 1-6.

<sup>78</sup> Innes, Christopher and Shevtsova, Maria. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*. London: Cambridge UP, 2013.

heroic drama, particularly Dryden's most successful example of this, *The Conquest of Granada* (1670), Villiers provides stinging commentary and insight on Restoration theatre practice in general, including the playwright's involvement in the staging process. In act one, the players' anticipation of Bayes' arrival suggests the directorial nature of the playwright's involvement: "[T]he author will be here presently and he'll tell us all" (Harris 8).<sup>79</sup> Behn, along with Dryden, was among the numerous playwrights critiqued in Villiers's play. Behn had written two tragicomedies by this time: *The Forced Marriage* (1671) and *The Amorous Prince* (1671), both of which Villiers references. Janet Todd identifies *The Rehearsal* as "the first known criticism of Behn's work" and suggests that her inclusion was a case of bad press being better than no press (3).<sup>80</sup>

Casting practices, in particular, provide compelling evidence of the Restoration playwright's proto-directorial function. Peter Holland asserts,

Nearly all of the major dramatists seem to have taken care over the casting of their plays. To a large extent this was a result of the mechanics of Restoration play production. There was no director to intervene between the actor and the playwright (Holland 73).<sup>81</sup>

Robert Hume echoes Holland's point: "playwrights were routinely consulted about casting . . . it can tell us a great deal about the original production concept and how the play probably came across in performance" (Hume 20). Holland also notes that the theatre-manager, "especially when the manager was the actor," often assisted the playwright with running rehearsals (Holland 74). In the case of *The Rover*, Thomas Betterton, then the Duke's Company's co-manager along

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<sup>79</sup> Villiers, George. *The Rehearsal*, in Harris, Brice. *Restoration Plays*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953.

<sup>80</sup> Todd, Janet. *The Critical Fortunes of Aphra Behn*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998.

<sup>81</sup> Holland, Peter. *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979.



with actor Henry Harris, performed the second male lead of *Belvile*, which means that he and Behn could conceivably have co-directed the play's first production.<sup>82</sup> Behn, along with Thomas Otway and John Dryden, was among the playwrights that Betterton recruited to write for the Duke's Company in the 1670s; thus, he was an advocate of her ongoing involvement (Milhous).

Scholars have written at length about Behn's many different creative roles, from poet, playwright, and novelist to critic and translator, but the idea of Behn as director of her own plays has received only passing mention. Behn's biographer Janet Todd and scholars Rosamond Gilder, Edward A. Langhans, P.A. Skantze, and Gilli Bush-Bailey all allude to the idea that Behn functioned in a directorial capacity, making casting decisions, participating in rehearsals, and guiding performance style. Gilder was the first modern scholar to note Behn's "intimate knowledge of the theatre of her day" and to conjecture that "she must have been at home behind the scenes and influential in casting and production" (183). The fact that Behn's plays contain a wealth of skillful stage directions supports this line of thinking. In *Restoration Promptbooks* (1981), Langhans adds that Behn's plays also often contain "very specific instructions on scene changes" (56).<sup>83</sup> Reviewing the promptbook from *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), he identifies additional notes that could have been made by Behn, the prompter or the property man (56). In *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (2000), Todd registers a cautious confidence about Behn's involvement in the staging of *The Forc'd Marriage* (1670), her first play with the Duke's Company. While it was common for Restoration playwrights to run rehearsals, "how far this

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<sup>82</sup> William Davenant died on April 7, 1668. Actor Henry Harris testified that he and Thomas Betterton were named as co-managers of the Duke's Company in the wake of Davenant's death. Lady Mary Davenant also played a key role in running the company. In 1677, their son Charles became head of the company. See Judith Milhous's entry on Betterton in *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>83</sup> Langhans, Edward A. *Restoration Promptbooks*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1981.

would be true of Behn as a novice and a woman is difficult to gauge, but she must have played some part.” Todd posits that Behn “tailored the [leading] parts” of *The Forc’d Marriage* “to Mary and Thomas Betterton’s skills” (142). Bush-Bailey also points to John Downes’ description of young Thomas Otway’s failed portrayal of the old king in Behn’s *The Forc’d Marriage* as evidence of Behn’s responsibility for casting. John Downes notes that “Mrs Bhen [sic] gave him the King in the Play, for a Probation Part” (Quoted in Holland 72). As evidence of Behn’s role in casting *The Dutch Lover* (1686), Peter Holland points to her preface to the published play:

My Dutch Lover spoke but little of what I intended for him, but supply’d it with a deal of idle stuff, which I was wholly unacquainted with, till I had heard it first from him; so that Jack-pudding ever us’d to do: which though I knew him before, I gave him yet the part, because I knew him so acceptable to the most o’th’ lighter Periwigs about the Town. (Quoted in Holland 72).

Holland interprets Behn’s casting decision as an undiscerning use of the responsibility bestowed upon her. However, always with her eye on fame and fortune, Behn’s choice of Edward Angel was a shrewd, business-minded decision, for she knew that he was popular with the London audience and that outweighed her concern over the likelihood of him literally and figuratively not following her directions and ad-libbing her script.<sup>84</sup> The Restoration marked the birth of celebrity culture, and to this day, the star quality of performers has figured in casting decisions in every medium (stage, television, film), at every level (local, regional, national, international). Of course, Angel’s improvising of lines also had practical implications for other performers; as Holland notes, “Each part was a roll of paper containing his lines and minimal cues so that the actor had little idea of the rest of the play and any ad-libbing was particularly likely to throw the

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Angel (d. 1673), along with James Nokes and Cave Underhill, was one of the leading Restoration comedians.

other actors out” (65).<sup>85</sup> With regard to *The Rover*, Todd suggests that Behn may have served as “coach” to Elizabeth Barry, guiding her towards “precisely the gestures she wanted for her heroine” (213).<sup>86</sup> Todd also posits that audiences might have viewed *The Rover* as “a high theatrical moment: the first starring of the most celebrated Restoration actress in a play by the foremost female playwright” (219).

Within the context of her larger study on “the fault lines” opened up by “the conjunction of print, aurality, orality, and performance” in the seventeenth century, P. J. Skantze points to passages in Behn’s dramatic prefaces and stage directions that illustrate her managerial negotiation of movement and stillness, whether in the form of absent/still author guiding the reader of a printed text or in the form of present/moving playwright guiding actors in rehearsal or greeting patrons in the theatre (112). Through her examination, Skantze evokes an image of an artist who was not merely a playwright consulted on casting, but someone actively involved in the process, a proto-director:

The sound of Behn’s voice at rehearsal as she read the text of her newest play, the presence of the woman writer giving an interpretation of the work for the actors would influence the makers, women and men, of the play she had written (112).

In this way, Behn’s dual role in the theatre anticipated contemporary playwright-directors such as Martha Morton (1865-1925), Maria Irene Fornes (b.1930), Emily Mann (b.1952), or Mary

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<sup>85</sup> This was the only Behn play in which Edward Angel appeared. Hume groups him with James Nokes and Cave Underhill, as “one of the leading comedians of the early Restoration” (196) See Hume’s Appendix on Behn’s principal performers in *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*. London: Palgrave, 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Todd’s suggestion derives from the recollections of the actor John Bowman cited in Jacques Georges de Chauffepie’s *Nouveau dictionnaire historique et critique*, vol. I, (Amsterdam, 1750-56). See Todd, Janet. *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1996.

Zimmerman (b.1960).<sup>87</sup> Also of relevance, Skantze interprets *The Rover*'s 2.1 stage directions, in which two braves set up Angellica Bianca's trinity of portraits, as the work of a director: "Insisting on the audience's understanding of a scene created by a directorial eye, Behn has two 'braves,' stage hands, arrange the set while the characters on stage and by extension the audience watch the making of an orchestrated spectacle" (115).<sup>88</sup> Skantze's comment implies the metatheatrical nature of this moment; a woman has staged a scenic transition in which men, under the direction of ostensibly two women—Behn and by extension Angellica Bianca—enact the cultural display, worship, commodification, and purchase of female beauty.

In *Treading the Bawds*, her 2006 monograph on actresses and female playwrights of the Restoration, Bush-Bailey echoes Gilder in arguing that "the intimate knowledge of theatre practice that even Behn's early plays show suggests that she must have experienced the *process* of production as well as the moment of performance" (38). The detailed stage directions in Behn's plays demonstrate her keen understanding of stage production.<sup>89</sup> Bush-Bailey argues that successful women writers, such as Behn, were neither lone star, renegade artists nor artists reliant on the aid of male theatre professionals to propel their careers; instead, Bush-Bailey

<sup>87</sup> We might also add George Bernard Shaw and Samuel Beckett to Behn's list of successors; their plays are dense with stage directions. For an interesting discussion of Beckett's dual role as playwright and director of his plays via stage directions, see Avra Sidiropoulou's chapter "Beckett's Turbulence" in *Authoring Performance: The Director in Contemporary Theatre* (2011).

<sup>88</sup> Skantze asserts that "Behn's elaborate scene of adoration at the shrine of the tripled whore should have provoked the audience's visual associations with religious imagery" (115). While this is a compelling assessment, it is also worth noting that directors of contemporary revivals often display a single visual representation of Angellica Bianca; this was most certainly the case in many of the productions examined in this study, including revivals by the Goodman, the Guthrie, New York Classical Theatre, and Thinking Cap Theatre.

<sup>89</sup> In *Restoration Promptbooks*, Edward Langhans notes Behn's "detailed stage directions and very specific instructions on scene changes" (56). See Langhans, Edward. *Restoration Promptbooks*. Chicago: Southern Illinois UP, 1981.

argues that women artists synergistically supported one another. On these grounds, Bush-Bailey examines the original female casts of Behn's plays in order to make a compelling case for Behn's involvement not just in writing but also in staging her plays among a network of women. Bush-Bailey takes her lead from Rosamond Gilder. In her groundbreaking study, *Enter The Actress* (1931), Gilder suggested that Lady Davenant's influence rivaled that of company member and co-manager Thomas Betterton. In 1670 when Behn began writing for the company, Lady Davenant had recently taken a more active role in running the company after her husband William's death in 1668. Bush-Bailey suggests that Lady Davenant, as a stand-in company manager, may have assisted Behn in casting decisions (44).

### **Behn and the First Recorded Production of *The Rover***

On Saturday, March 24, 1677, the Duke's Company, with whom Behn worked exclusively from 1670 until its merger with the King's Company in 1682, mounted the first recorded production of *The Rover*. While the exact number of performances remains uncertain, this production likely ran for less than two weeks (Hume and Milhous 5).<sup>90</sup> According to Janet Todd, the play was "excitedly received." Judith Milhous's research on the Duke's Company's increased dividends for the month of March, during which time *The Rover* may have been the only new play at the Duke's, supports Todd's claim.<sup>91</sup> *The Rover* solidified Behn's status as a leading Restoration playwright and went on to become her most widely produced and most

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<sup>90</sup> According to Hume and Milhous, "hardly any new play lasted two weeks until into the eighteenth century." "Playwrights' Remuneration in Eighteenth-Century London." *Harvard Library Bulletin*. 10:2 (1999): pp3-90.

<sup>91</sup> Milhous, Judith. "The Duke's Company's Profits, 1675-1677." *Theatre Notebook*. 32(1978): 76-88 quoted in Todd, Janet. *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, p220. *The Rover* is the only play staged at Dorset Garden listed under March of 1677 in *The London Stage*, part vol., pp255-56.

anthologized play.<sup>92</sup> At the time of the play's first staging, Behn was 36 years old and already the author of at least six plays.<sup>93</sup> *The Rover* was the sixth of twelve plays that Behn wrote during her twelve-year collaboration with the Duke's Company.<sup>94</sup> Over the course of her prolific, commercially successful, two-decade career, Behn earned her place as the second most produced playwright of the Restoration. Her high level of accomplishment and steady employment with the Duke's Company (and after that, with the United Company) reinforces the argument for her proto-directorial involvement in the staging of her plays.

### ***The Rover's First Venue: Dorset Garden***

*The Rover* played at Dorset Garden, the Duke's Company's lush, custom-built theatre, which officially opened its doors on November 9, 1671.<sup>95</sup> While Christopher Wren, an acclaimed architect of the period, designed the venue, Thomas Betterton was also instrumental in its planning.<sup>96</sup> As a prominent indicator of the close connection between politics and theatre during the Restoration, the facade of Dorset Garden boasted the arms of its patron, James, Duke

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<sup>92</sup> Van Lennep. William, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur H. Scouten, eds. *The London Stage, 1660-1800, Part 1: 1660-1700*. Southern Illinois UP, 1965, p256. Whether or not the play premiered on this actual date remains plausible but unconfirmed.

<sup>93</sup> In *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, Janet Todd suggests that Behn may have written and staged more than 6 plays by age 36.

<sup>94</sup> In actuality, she may have written 13 plays during this period if you also include *Like Father, Like Son*, of which only the prologue remains; the complete list, then, would be as follows: *The Forc'd Marriage* (1671), *The Amorous Prince* (1671), *The Dutch Lover* (1673), *Abdelazer* (1677), *The Town-Fopp* (1677), *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), *The Feign'd Curtizans* (1679), *The Second Part of The Rover* (1681), *The False Count* (1682), *The Roundheads* (1682), *Like Father, Like Son* (1682), *The City Heiress* (1682).

<sup>95</sup> Though not precisely documented, according to Milhous there is evidence that Betterton made several trips to Paris to gather information on the use of machinery in French theatre practice. In spite of its impressive innovations, Dorset Garden was not universally embraced because of what some perceived as poor acoustics. The theatre closed permanently in 1709. See Milhous's entry on Betterton in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>96</sup> Wren was not only noted for theatre design but also for rebuilding some 52 churches in London after the Great Fire of 1666.

of York, the Catholic brother of King Charles II. A typical afternoon at the Restoration theatre consisted of a three-hour program; given its length, *The Rover* probably filled most of this span of time. Depending on the running time of the central play, additional entertainment, such as music, dance, or afterpieces might be incorporated; for example, a song by composer Simon Pack accompanied the first documented presentation of *The Rover* (Van Lennep cxlii).<sup>97</sup>

Candlelight lit the stage *and* audience. To this point, P. A. Skantze stresses that

we cannot be reminded enough that in the seventeenth-century theatre practice an audience was not roped off from the stage by darkness or the fiction of realism but invited to participate in lively exchange with the players, playwright, and settings (113).<sup>98</sup>

As many as eight chandeliers with ten to twelve candles each lit the Restoration stage; additional footlights placed along the perimeter of the forestage provided a form of front light (Mullin 74).<sup>99</sup>

Dorset Garden was London's first theatre designed for staging grand spectacles.<sup>100</sup> It featured elaborate, then-state-of-the-art stage machinery, including changeable scenery, trapdoors, and devices for raising and lowering people and objects that made it ideal for staging operas, heroic tragedies, and plays that explicitly called for the new machinery, such as Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687). *The Rover*'s stage directions indicate that Behn made use of the stage's trapdoor for Blunt's emergence "out of a common shore" in 3.4. Based on the considerable number of plays written for the Duke's Company with stage directions that

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<sup>97</sup> Van Lennep. William, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur H. Scouten, eds. *The London Stage, 1660-1800, Part I: 1660-1700*. Southern Illinois UP, 1965.

<sup>98</sup> Skantze, P. A. *Stillness in Motion in the Seventeenth Century Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Mullin, Donald. "Lighting on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage: A Reconsideration." *Theatre Notebook*. 34:2 (1980): 73-85.

<sup>100</sup> Dorset Garden cost 9,000 pounds to build. It remained in operation until 1709 when it was demolished.



reference traps, Edward A. Langhans asserts that Dorset Garden was “more fully trapped than any other Restoration theatre” and speculates that the stage contained as many as six traps (77-78).<sup>101</sup> Given the fact that Restoration theatres had the apparatus necessary to fly performers, it is fun to speculate on if or how Behn might have utilized that staging option for *The Rover*.

Might William Smith as Willmore have made his first appearance by descending heroically from a suspended rope as Jack Wetherall did in the Folger Theater (1981) and Goodman Theatre (1989) productions and as Jeremy Irons did in the Royal Shakespeare Company productions (1986/1987)?<sup>102</sup>

Physical details regarding the interior of Dorset Garden remain a subject of conjecture and debate.<sup>103</sup> Scholars believe that the building, and accordingly the performance area, were particularly narrow; in its entirety, Dorset Garden measured approximately 60 feet wide by 140 feet long. As Robert D. Hume notes, certain knowledge of the interior of the theatre “rests largely on the five Dolle engravings for *The Empress of Morocco* showing different settings on

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<sup>101</sup> Langhans, Edward A. “A Conjectural Reconstruction of the Dorset Garden Theatre.” *Theatre Survey*. 13:2 (November 1972): 74-93.

<sup>102</sup> See chapter three in this study on the 1989 Goodman Theatre production for more on this point.

<sup>103</sup> Hume asserts that Langhans’s study, although not without problems, is the soundest investigation of the material conditions of Dorset Garden. In two separate rebuttals, Hume objects to John Spring’s argument. Pictures of the inside of the theatre in Langhans’s 1965 article are particularly useful from a teaching and staging standpoint. See Langhans, Edward A. “A Conjectural Reconstruction of the Dorset Garden Theatre.” *Theatre Survey*. 13:2 (November 1972): 74-93.; Also by Langhans, “The Dorset Garden Theatre in Pictures.” *Theatre Survey*. 6:2 (November 1965): 134-146.; Spring, John R. “Platforms and Picture Frames: A Conjectural Reconstruction of The Duke of York’s Theatre, Dorset Garden, 1669-1709. *Theatre Notebook*.; Hume, Robert D. “Dorset Garden Theatre: A Review of Facts and Problems.” *Theatre Notebook*. 33:1 (1979): 4-17. Also by Hume: “The Nature of the Dorset Garden Theatre.” *Theatre Notebook*. 36:3 (1982): 99-109.



the stage, plus a tantalizing hint of the proscenium front” (4).<sup>104</sup> Hume and Milhous estimate the venue's total audience capacity at 820 (4).<sup>105</sup> In keeping with the layout of other late-seventeenth-century London theatres, Dorset Garden's stage featured a deep upstage scenic area separated by a proscenium arch from a downstage playing area known as an apron stage, where acting could take place in close proximity to the audience.<sup>106</sup> Scholars have questioned the exact dimensions of the total playing area.<sup>107</sup> Hume estimates that the width of the proscenium opening measured between 24 to 30 feet and that the forestage's depth accordingly measured as little as 14.5 feet or as much as 21 feet (105).<sup>108</sup>

<sup>104</sup> *The Empress of Morocco* (1673) was Elkanah Settle's celebrated heroic tragedy. See Hume, Robert D. "Dorset Garden Theatre: A Review of Facts and Problems." *Theatre Notebook*. 33:1 (1979).

<sup>105</sup> Milhous and Hume estimate that Drury Lane accommodated the same number of audience. Edward A. Langhans, on the other hand, initially speculated that Dorset Garden could accommodate 1,192; see pp91-92 of his 1972 essay "A Conjectural Reconstruction of the Dorset Garden Theatre."

<sup>106</sup> Owens, W. R. and Lizbeth Goodman, eds. *Shakespeare, Aphra Behn, and the Canon*, London: Routledge, 1996. p138.

<sup>107</sup> *The London Stage*, volume 1, xl. Also, refer again to John R. Spring, 'The Dorset Garden Theatre: Playhouse or Opera House?' *Theatre Notebook*, 34 (1980): 60-69; and Robert D. Hume, "The Nature of the Dorset Garden Theatre," *Theatre Notebook*, 36 (1982): 99-109.

<sup>108</sup> Hume, Robert D. "The Nature of the Dorset Garden Theatre." *Theatre Notebook*. 36:3 (1982): 99-109. In *Restoration Promptbooks* (1981), Langhans suggests a similar forestage measurement for most Restoration playhouses: "sometimes more than 15' deep, flanked by proscenium doors, at least one if not two on each side of the stage . . . The width of the forestage varied from theatre to theatre, being perhaps as little as 15' to 20' in the smaller playhouses but not much wider than 30' to 35' in the larger ones. The floor was raked, rising gradually from the front edge toward the back, aiding the perspective effect of the scenery and giving us the upstage-downstage terms we still use today" (xvii). Interestingly, Langhans also notes that "Restoration promptbooks make little or no mention of costumes, stage movement, or line interpretation" (xxiii); he speculates on the implications of this suggesting actors may have been left to their own devices once on stage on the grounds that "Under the twentieth-century influence of the Stanislavski system perhaps we assume incorrectly that players three hundred years ago went to great pains to develop a character and that precise blocking of stage movement was worked out for all the characters in a series of rehearsals lasting over a period of weeks . . . Restoration companies . . . might perform fifteen or more different plays within a month" (xxiv). He adds: "The notion of historical authenticity in costuming and of specially designed costumes

## Asides in Restoration Theatre

Performers typically delivered asides on the apron stage. A common device in Restoration comedy, the aside is a form of direct address that communicates the private thoughts of the character and works best when performer and audience are in closer proximity to one another; accordingly, J.L. Styan notes: “With the small size of the auditorium . . . and the overall illumination, it is not surprising that the dominant and basic speech convention in the comedies was the ubiquitous, the indispensable, aside” (204). Indeed, the device was so popular that “sometimes the stage explodes in metatheatrical outbreaks of double asides and runs of asides” (204-205). The prevalence of asides contributes to the rhythm of a Restoration comedy in performance, infusing it with a recurring stop/insert/resume tempo. Behn’s first play *The Forced Marriage* (1670) contained only fourteen asides, but her use of the device soon increased. As additional points of reference, *The Dutch Lover* (1673) has 79, *The Town-Fop* (1676) has 38, and *The Feign’d Courtesans* (1679) has 61 explicit asides and 78 implied asides for a potential total of 139.<sup>109</sup> *The Rover* contains approximately fifty explicit asides and another forty that are implied but not marked as such in the 1677 facsimile edition of the play.<sup>110</sup> Of

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for each play surely would have struck Restoration players as unnecessarily extravagant. Stock scenery, stock costumes, stock plays, stock characters, and stock characterizations were a part of theatre for twenty-five hundred years; only in the last one hundred have we tried to alter that tradition” (xxv).

<sup>109</sup> Editor Jane Spencer identifies Behn’s asides with parentheses and implied asides with brackets.

<sup>110</sup> I have cross-checked this count between Jane Spencer’s 2008 Oxford World Classics edition, Summers’ 1967 reprinted edition, and the 1677 facsimile edition on *EEBO*. Spencer’s edition indicates 51 original asides and infers an additional 38 for a total of 89. Summers indicates 58 total asides. *The Rover Part II* (1681) contains 41 original asides.

significance, *Thomaso*, the source text by Killigrew, contains only five explicit asides.<sup>111</sup> While several scholars have noted the similarities and differences between Behn's and Killigrew's texts, no one, to my knowledge, has remarked on Behn's amplification of the aside throughout her play; this device figures heavily in the mock-heroic tone of Behn's play by contrast to the heroic tone of Killigrew's.

In *The Rover*, Hellena is the first character to speak in aside. In 1.1 Don Pedro enters his sisters' bedroom to test Florinda's virtue and determine when she last had a visit from her elderly suitor, Don Vincentio, a man she is loath to marry. Hellena comes to Florinda's defense, and in doing so, delivers her first witty, one-liner to the audience, a sarcastic retort that makes clear her intent to act on her own will:

PEDRO . . . Go, up to your devotion: you are not designed for the conversation of lovers.

HELLENA (aside) Nor saints, yet awhile, I hope.—Is't enough you make a nun of me, but you must cast my sister away too, exposing her to a worse confinement than a religious life? (1.1.88-92)

Hellena's aside immediately alerts the audience to her rebellious humor and sets a precedent for how the comedy operates—on two levels, theatrically and meta-theatrically.<sup>112</sup> In the Restoration, theatre design and dramatic text served one another. The large number of asides in *The Rover* and their distribution among characters also provides a sense of performers' general

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<sup>111</sup> In Part I, Angellica, Sancho, and Edwardo (the correlate character to Blunt) each have one. In Part II, Serulina and Thomas each have one.

<sup>112</sup> Hellena's second aside in the scene makes her intention even more explicit: "(Aside) No, I'll have a saint of my own to pray to shortly, if I like any that dares venture on me" (1.1.143-144). Callis and Florinda each have an aside in 1.1. Callis's aside divulges her interest in partaking in carnival; Florinda's anticipates her conscription in arranged marriage because Antonio, the alternative to Don Vincentio, is young, attractive, and wealthy, so she can't dismiss him on account of age or appearance. In his 1986 RSC revival, John Barton cut both of these asides, and accordingly, so did Joanne Akalaitis in the 1994 Guthrie revival.

blocking, on the forestage near the audience, and underscores the comic and non-illusionistic style of the play. Willmore utters the most explicit asides, more than 20, while Hellena has ten. Interestingly, Florinda and Belvile tie one another with fourteen. Behn increased Angellica's asides from one in Killigrew's source text to six in *The Rover*. As theatre practice has evolved and revival venues have varied, undoubtedly so has the manner in which directors have staged asides. The handling of asides has significant implications for the style and tone of *The Rover* in performance. The productions mounted at the Goodman Theatre (1989), a proscenium configuration, and the Guthrie Theater (1994), a proscenium with a three-quarter thrust, offer contrasting examples of how venue configuration impacts the effectiveness of asides.<sup>113</sup>

### **Restoration Casting and Performance Practices**

Restoration casting differed from mainstream twentieth-century casting practice. Because realism has dominated Western theatre since the late nineteenth-century, audiences have become accustomed to a method of casting that forges an essentialist connection between performer and role. Since the 1960s, theatre artists such as Richard Schechner have challenged this practice by calling for age-, gender-, and race- blind casting. Arguably, this contemporary call for change is not that far removed from Restoration casting practices. Holland explains:

Age was unimportant because the style of acting was not one in which the identification with the part was total; the actor never stopped being an actor. Hence as an extension of the audience's recognition of the actor as individual, the actor kept his own parts. It adds up to the basis for the Restoration theory of casting, the strong link between the actor and his parts, the concept of the correct and accurate performance (Holland 60).

Holland makes two important points. First, in Restoration theatre, the notion of "a continuity of performance," of there being "a single right way of performing" a role, was the prevailing theory

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<sup>113</sup> For further analysis of the treatment of asides in these productions, see chapters four and five of this study.

of acting. This meant that “all succeeding performers work[ed] in the shadow of the previous actor” (Holland 66-67). Second, Holland stresses the importance of the tradition of “the continuity of possession”:

When, on an actor’s death or retirement, the parts were redistributed, the process involved the physical handing over of the manuscript parts. . . . The ownership of one’s parts was a moral right in the theatre. When Anne Marsall returned to the theatre in 1667 as Mrs. Quin, after a two-year absence, she found her old parts redistributed (65).

Marshall complained to the Lord Chamberlain and her parts were returned to her. Given Behn’s longstanding relationship with the Duke’s Company and the fact that playwrights were routinely involved in casting and rehearsal decisions, having a sense of the cast of *The Rover*’s first recorded production provides an understanding of how Behn as proto-director envisioned her play in performance.

### **Behn’s Original Cast: The Actresses**

The original cast of *The Rover* featured some of the most distinguished of England’s first generation of professional actresses. Elizabeth Barry and Mary Betterton performed the roles of the Spanish sisters, Hellena and Florinda. The other original female cast members included Duke’s Company newcomer, Anne Marshall Quin<sup>114</sup> (courtesan Angellica Bianca), Elinor Leigh (Angellica’s woman, Moretta), Margaret Hughes (the sisters’ cousin, Valeria), Mrs. Norris (their

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<sup>114</sup> Some accounts identify Anne Quin as the first actress to appear on the Restoration stage in 1660 in the role of Desdemona and suggest that she later relinquished the role to Margaret Hughes (See, for example, Hughes, Henry Wysham. *The First English Actresses*, New York, 1930). However, John Callow’s entry on Hughes in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* states that John Downes, prompter for the Duke’s Company, listed Hughes as the first recorded actress to play Desdemona in 1663. See Callow, John. ‘Hughes, Margaret (d. 1719),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. London: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/14085>, accessed 4 July 2017]

governess, Callis), and Mrs. Gillow (the wench, Lucetta).<sup>115</sup> A perusal of the Duke's Company's roster for the previous season of 1675-1676 reveals that all of the actresses in the cast were continuing company members with the exception of Anne Marshall Quin, who had previously worked with the King's Company. This is significant because it suggests a history of familiarity and collaboration among Behn and the actresses that would aid and inspire Behn in crafting roles and shaping the actresses into a cohesive ensemble in performance.<sup>116</sup>

### **Elizabeth Barry and Mary Betterton as Hellena and Florinda**

Born in 1658, Elizabeth Barry was just two years old when the London theatres reopened and Mary Betterton began her career as an actress. A twenty-year age difference separated the two women. Born c. 1637, Mary Betterton's Florinda was, in essence, a forty-year-old virgin. From a twenty-first century vantage point, this actress pairing may seem odd, but it illustrates Restoration casting practices, which favored skill over age-appropriateness. Nonetheless, one is tempted to interpret the striking disparity in age and appearance as underscoring Hellena's youthful rebelliousness and Florinda's more mature cautiousness. *The Rover* marked Barry and Betterton's second time appearing together in a Behn play. The first time was earlier that same year; in Behn's only tragedy, *Abdelazer*, Barry played Leonora (a girl) and Betterton, Florella (a wife), roles more closely aligned to the actresses' actual ages and offstage identities.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> I've used the spellings of cast members' names as they appear in *The London Stage* (vol.1, p248); therein some of the actresses are listed with 'Mrs.' in lieu of a first name, which was then common practice and not necessarily an indication, as it is today, of a woman's married status. When I have been able to obtain first names, I have included them.

<sup>116</sup> Bush-Bailey stresses the significance of viewing the women working in the professional Restoration theatre as a tightly-knit network of women collaborators. She also posits the relationship between actresses and playwrights as one of two-directional influence (10).

<sup>117</sup> See chart in Bush-Bailey (pp40-41) that identifies the women in the Duke's Company who performed in Behn's plays from 1670-1682. According to Bush-Bailey, the purpose of her chart is "to draw attention to the first moment at which women dramatists and actresses had the

Elizabeth Barry began working with the Duke's Company during the 1673-1674 season. Between then and 1682, she appears on the cast list for eight of Behn's plays.<sup>118</sup> Hellena was the first of six breeches roles that Barry acted between 1677 and 1680.<sup>119</sup> By 1677, Barry had already achieved some degree of fame, which Hume attributes to her esteemed portrayal of Mrs. Loveit in Etherege's *Man of Mode* in 1676. Others credit her early success to the Earl of Rochester, who allegedly took her to the country and made her rehearse the role of Hellena "at least thirty times, twelve in costume," an exercise that was arguably as much for his own titillation at seeing her in breeches as it was an acting strategy.<sup>120</sup> Bush-Bailey provides another compelling explanation for Barry's initial success that positions Behn in a directorial relationship to Barry:

it is possible to suggest that Barry's success in *Abdelazer*, performed in 1676, followed by another in Behn's *Rover* . . . was as much to do with the playwright's direction and encouragement to the young actress as any contribution Rochester may have made (Bush-Bailey 46).

Furthering this line of thinking, Bush-Bailey notes the significance of the cast members supporting Barry—Mary Betterton joined by Anne Quinn and Elinor Leigh: "we might conclude that the pragmatic Behn deliberately surrounded her talented but relatively inexperienced leading actress with the most experienced actresses available" (46). Jacqueline Pearson adds that Barry, as a newcomer, "had no known connection with [William] Smith, and so the relationship

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opportunity to represent women on the public stage and the way in which that opportunity was fully exploited, not least by the female playwright" (44).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>119</sup> See Howe (178) for more on the other five breeches roles Barry performed. Howe suggests that Hellena may have been Barry's second role ever.

<sup>120</sup> Backscheider, Paula R. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 125.

between Hellena and Willmore must have seemed more edgy and uncertain (Pearson 52).<sup>121</sup>

Certainly, the pairing of Barry and Smith represented a casting contrast to the known quantity in the Bettertons as Florinda and Belvile.

According to contemporary accounts by Colley Cibber, Barry possessed acting talent and stage presence, but was not a stage beauty. She had dark hair, a striking rather than beautiful face, a sharply aquiline nose, was short, increasingly full-figured with age, and had a physical abnormality of the mouth.<sup>122</sup> Behn's casting of Barry as Hellena points to the importance of casting an actress who exudes personality and wit. Looks aside, Barry was, nonetheless, an actress of tremendous talent and would go on to be dubbed "the Famous Mrs. Barry"<sup>123</sup> and viewed as one of the finest tragic actresses of the Restoration period. By the 1680s, Barry was a box office draw for the Duke's Company, and many playwrights in addition to Behn crafted roles for her. As further evidence of her popularity, Barry was the first performer of either sex to receive individual benefits prior to 1695 when the United Company divided.<sup>124</sup> A benefit meant that the entire profits of a performance went to the person or party named. The practice of the benefit was still evolving between 1660 and 1700. Early in the period, the recipients of benefits

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<sup>121</sup> Pearson, Jacqueline. "Spectators, Playwrights, and Performers" in Nelson, Bonnie and Catherine Burroughs, eds. *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*. MLA: New York, 2010.

<sup>122</sup> Cibber, Colley. *Lives of the Late Famous Actors and Actresses* (1747), cited in Backscheider, p126.

<sup>123</sup> John Downes, a contemporary of Barry, claimed her performances in *The Orphan*, *Venice Preserved*, and *Fatal Marriage* in particular earned her this title.

<sup>124</sup> *The London Stage, 1660-1700*, lxxx. The practice of paying benefits did not become customary until the season of 1694-1695. According to Colley Cibber in *Apology*, Barry's first individual benefit occurred during the reign of James II (1685-1688). See Van Lennep. William, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur H. Scouten, eds. *The London Stage, 1660-1800, Part 1: 1660-1700*. Southern Illinois UP, 1965.



included the actresses of a company collectively (the profit divided among them); dramatists;<sup>125</sup> charitable causes;<sup>126</sup> and later in the period, individual performers.<sup>127</sup> The bestowing of benefits to individual actresses ended the practice of an annual benefit for actresses as a group.

Mary Betterton was one of the two original actresses signed to the Duke's Company in 1660 when Charles II issued a royal mandate that allowed women to perform women's roles on the public stage.<sup>128</sup> Prior to 1660 young boys and men had performed all roles. Over time Mary Betterton built quite a remarkable theatre resume.<sup>129</sup> Most commonly credited for training aspiring actresses, she also had an extensive acting career, playing sixty different roles, of which she originated 25, between 1661 and 1694 (Gilder 157-159).<sup>130</sup> She performed in both comedies and tragedies, but was most esteemed for her performance of serious roles, most notably Lady Macbeth. Mary was revered for her sterling reputation and managed to avoid being the subject of sexual lampoons, which was largely a result of her lasting marriage to fellow company member Thomas Betterton.<sup>131</sup> Because she typically played virtuous women and was most often

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<sup>125</sup> For dramatists, the benefit was their main source of revenue and typically occurred on the third performance, though sometimes they received additional benefits on the sixth (a double benefit) or ninth performance (a triple benefit).

<sup>126</sup> Benefits were sometimes offered during times of 'theatrical stress,' for example, to raise funds following the closure of theatres due to the plague, and also occasionally to help families in distress.

<sup>127</sup> See Van Lennep. William, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur H. Scouten, eds. *The London Stage, 1660-1700*, lxxxii.

<sup>128</sup> The other original actress of the Duke's Company was Mrs. Jennings; both she and Mary Betterton appeared in Behn's first play, *The Forc'd Marriage* in 1670 (Gilli Bush-Bailey 33).

<sup>129</sup> Her career opportunities increased when her husband became co-manager of the Duke's Company following the death of William Davenant. Mary and Thomas lived on site at Dorset Garden and functioned as building superintendents; they informally adopted actresses Anne Bracegirdle and Elizabeth Watson, who lived at the theatre with them.

<sup>130</sup> Gilder, Rosamond. *Enter the Actress*. London: George G. Harrap, 1931. Pp157-159.

<sup>131</sup> They were married on Christmas Eve in 1662; Mary was 25. She and Thomas were married nearly 48 years. See Judith Milhous, 'Betterton [Saunderson], Mary (c.1637-1712)', *Oxford*

the second lead, her casting as Florinda, the less rebellious, of the two sisters, was fitting. Bush-Bailey points out that Rosamond Gilder “is among the earliest, possibly even the first, theatre historian to suggest a more radical creative influence between Mary Betterton and . . . Aphra Behn” (35).<sup>132</sup> Behn’s casting of the Bettertons as Belvile and Florinda “gives a comforting predictability to their trajectory in the play, all the more necessary to maintain comic equilibrium in a play where Florinda is constantly in danger of rape” (Pearson 51).<sup>133</sup> This point is particularly relevant to the 5.1 attempted gang rape of Florinda, for which Belvile/Thomas Betterton is/was present. Belvile’s asides in this moment are critical, for they not only offer comic relief but also assure the audience that the enlightened and upstanding Belvile/Thomas Betterton will prevent Blunt and the others from assaulting Florinda/his real life wife.<sup>134</sup> In the next century, Florinda’s character was sometimes cut, eliminating the rape scenes altogether. In revivals since the twentieth century, hundreds of years removed from Behn and the Bettertons,

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*Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/24708>, accessed 4 July 2017]

<sup>132</sup> Gilder devotes an entire chapter to Mary Betterton.

<sup>133</sup> Pearson, Jacqueline. “Spectators, Playwrights, and Performers” in Nelson, Bonnie and Catherine Burroughs, eds. *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*. MLA: New York, 2010. In this chapter, Pearson modifies her position in her 1988 monograph *The Prostituted Muse*. She concedes that Behn and Margaret Cavendish are not the radicals she wanted them to be. She identifies three new scholarship trends: “the gendered consumption of theatrical texts and performances, ‘intertheatrical’ study applied to relations between women dramatists and women performers, and constructions of masculinity in plays of the era (46).

<sup>134</sup> Husband/wife acting duos also appeared in revivals of the play. In 1714, Robert Wilks and Jane Rogers first appeared at Drury Lane as Willmore and Hellena; the pair had begun playing stage couples in the 1690s and eventually became real life partners. On seven occasions in the 1730s at Goodman’s Field, Henry Giffard acted the role of Willmore and his wife, Anna Marcella (Nancy) Lyddal, portrayed Angellica. The Giffards also reprised these roles in a performance at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in 1737. Also, in John Barton’s 1986 Swan revival, Jeremy Irons played Willmore opposite his wife, Sinead Cusak, as Angellica.

directorial approaches to the rape scenes have varied greatly, sometimes deviating from what was likely a more assuredly comic approach when the play debuted under Behn's guidance.

### **Anne Marshall Quin as Angellica Bianca**

When Anne Marshall Quin portrayed Angellica Bianca, she had been performing intermittently for sixteen years.<sup>135</sup> One of the first professional English actresses, Quin debuted on the London stage on March 26, 1661 with the rival King's Company where she worked until 1668. She typically played lead roles. J. Milling asserts Quin's flexibility as a performer of both comedic and tragic roles; however, according to Elizabeth Howe, she specialized in tragedy (Milling; Howe 24). Quin's company affiliation fluctuated, and Quin moved back and forth between the King's and the Duke's companies, perhaps out of financial necessity.<sup>136</sup> Records also show stretches of time in which she had no theatre affiliation at all. As a case in point, her portrayal of Angellica Bianca with the Duke's Company marked her return to the stage after a nine-year absence.

In contrast to Barry, Quin was a noted beauty with an attractive figure as evidenced by extant engravings and a record of an extraordinary miniature of her. This made her an ideal choice to portray the illustrious Angellica, whose beauty is enshrined within the world of the play via a triplet of portraits. Quin left the Duke's Company after the 1679-1680 season to perform again with the King's Company during the 1680-1681 season. There are no records of

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<sup>135</sup> Her last name was sometimes mistakenly recorded as 'Guin,' which has resulted in Ann Marshal Quin being confused with Nell Gwyn, who had already retired from the stage by 1677. Birth and death dates for Anne Marshall Quin are unconfirmed. Very little is known about her and her sister Rebecca, both of whom were actresses. See Milling, J. 'Quin [Marshall], Anne (*fl.* 1660–1682)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* London: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/67768>, accessed 4 July 2017]

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

Quin performing after 1682 when the Duke's Company and the King's Company merged to form the United Company; this means that Quin was one of the few original cast members of *The Rover* not to participate in a revival production.

### **Supporting Actresses: Leigh, Norris, Hughes, and Gillow<sup>137</sup>**

Elinor Leigh joined the Duke's Company in the 1670-1671 season and enjoyed a long alliance with Elizabeth Barry and Thomas Betterton, with whom she continued to work as part of the United Company in the 1680s and as a member of Betterton's Actors Company until 1707.<sup>138</sup> Very little is known about Leigh's life beyond her marriage in the early 1670s to fellow actor and Duke's Company member, Anthony Leigh; couples abounded in the theatre industry then as they do today. Leigh's portrayal of Moretta is her first documented role in a Behn play; however, she may also have appeared in three earlier Behn plays: Cloris in *The Amorous Prince*, 1671; Cleonte in *The Dutch Lover*, 1673; and Crostill in *The Debauchee*, 1677 (Bush-Bailey 41-43). If this were the case, Leigh's casting history in Behn's plays would consist of two 'girl' roles, a widow, and a maid for two young sisters. Thus, her roles matured as she herself did,

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<sup>137</sup> Little to nothing is known about Mrs. Gillow (Lucetta). Based upon company rosters in *The London Stage*, the 1677-1678 season when she appeared in *The Rover* was her last season with the Duke's Company.

<sup>138</sup> Milhous names her in addition to Bracegirld and Barry as one of the actresses who accompanied Betterton in forming his 'rebel' company separate from the United Company, which fell under the management of Sir Thomas Skipwith and Christopher Rich when the youngest of William Davenant's sons, Alexander Davenant, defaulted on the loans Skipwith and Rich had secretly provided him in order to buy the shares of his older brother Charles Davenant. Discussed in Judith Milhous, 'Betterton, Thomas (bap. 1635, d. 1710).' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, London: Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, Sept 4, 2010 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/2311>, accessed 6 July 2017] Some details about Elinor Leigh can be gleaned from Deborah Payne Fisk's entry on Anthony Leigh: Deborah Payne Fisk, 'Leigh, Anthony (d. 1692)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/16374>, accessed 14 July 2017]

which is perhaps another example of Behn creating roles to suit the actresses at her disposal.<sup>139</sup>

Sarah Norris, who was one of the original eight actresses in the Duke's Company, appears on the cast lists of six plays by Behn. Her portrayal of Callis is also her first documented performance in a Behn play; however, Bush-Bailey suggests that she, too, may have performed in as many as three earlier works by Behn.<sup>140</sup> Her casting as Callis is characteristic of the roles she commonly played: maid or bawd. Margaret Hughes (Valeria), like Anne Marshall Quin (Angellica Bianca), was an original company member of Killigrew's King's Company.<sup>141</sup> An actress and court mistress, Hughes was "a mighty pretty woman," in Samuel Pepys' estimation. From late 1669 until 1676, Hughes left the theatre to live with Prince Rupert, a cousin of Charles II. When she returned to performing, she joined the Duke's Company. She left the stage permanently after the 1676-1677 season to care for her daughter, Ruperta, and the Prince, whose health was failing.

### The Actors

The original cast of *The Rover* featured many notable Restoration actors. William Smith (Willmore), Thomas Betterton (Belvile), Cave Underhill (Blunt), and John Crosby (Frederick) performed the roles of the British expatriates. Matthew Medbourne<sup>142</sup> (Don Pedro) and Thomas Jevon<sup>143</sup> (Don Antonio) performed the roles of the Spanish elite, and John Richards (Stephano),

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<sup>139</sup> Bush-Bailey suggests it is even likelier that Leigh performed in more Behn plays after *The Rover* and offers Mrs. Dashit in *The Revenge* (1680); Cromwell in *The Roundheads* (1681/2); and Mrs. Closet in *The City Heiress* (1682) as additional, plausible roles (Bush-Bailey 41-43).

<sup>140</sup> Bush-Bailey, 40-41.

<sup>141</sup> Hughes died in 1719. While her birthdate is not documented, she easily lived into at least her 60's.

<sup>142</sup> See Cheryl Wanko's entry on Hughes.

<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/18492>

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Jevon is among the performers that Ross identifies as a master of low comic roles, a likely indication that he played Don Antonio in a satiric manner that riffed on stereotypes of Spanish masculinity. See John C. Ross, 'Jevon, Thomas (1651/2-1688).' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. London: Oxford UP, 2004.

Thomas Percival (Philippo), and John Lee (Sancho) played the lower class locals. Medbourne typically played supporting roles. Jevon excelled in low comic roles, singing, and dancing.<sup>144</sup> In contemporary revivals of *The Rover*, critics often praise the actors who portray Don Antonio for their comic portrayal of Spanish stereotypes. By 1677, Smith, Betterton, Underhill, and Medburne had been performing together for fifteen years. Thus, they shared a solid rapport with one another and with London audiences. Smith, Betterton, and Underhill were all in their early forties in 1677.

### **William Smith as Willmore**

Leading Restoration actor and theatre manager William Smith (b.1635-40?-1695)<sup>145</sup> joined the Duke's Company in 1661.<sup>146</sup> During his 34-year career, he performed at least 80 different roles.<sup>147</sup> A record from November 1666 indicates that Smith was acquitted for an altercation that resulted in another man's death; this appears to have been the only blot on the esteemed actor's record. According to Milhous, "[Smith's] great talent was for dashing heroes in comedy, some of them noble and strictly honourable, others sex-mad scamps."<sup>148</sup> Less

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[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/14807>, accessed 9 Oct 2017] Also see Milling, Jane. "For Without Vanity, I'm Better Known": Restoration Actors and Metatheatre on the London Stage. *Theatre Survey*. 52:1 (May 2011). <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/core/journals/theatre-survey>. Milling includes Jevon in "the role call of leading fools or clowns."

<sup>144</sup> Thomas Jevon later played Harlequin in Behn's *Emperor of the Moon*.

<sup>145</sup> Judith Milhous guesstimates that he was possibly born in the mid- to late 1630s.

Judith Milhous, 'Smith, William (d. 1695)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, London: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2010

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/25925>, accessed 6 July 2017]

<sup>146</sup> Smith's first recorded performance was Antonio in a September 1662 production of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*.

<sup>147</sup> Given the incompleteness of records from the period, Milhous suggests that the number of roles Smith performed was probably a larger number.

<sup>148</sup> Milhous, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Had Thomas Betterton's co-manager and fellow actor Henry Harris not become so preoccupied by his political interests starting in 1677, Harris might have been a casting consideration over Smith for the role of Willmore. However,

frequently, Smith performed major roles in heroic tragedies. Smith's most pertinent role prior to Willmore was Sir Fopling Flutter in Etherege's *Man of Mode* (1676); for Milhous this casting choice "implies a less effeminate character than some later interpretations of that glamorous if ridiculous fop."<sup>149</sup> In 1681, Smith joined Thomas Betterton as co-manager of the Duke's Company.<sup>150</sup> Behn was still living, and Smith likely reprised the role of Willmore in *The Rover*'s four revivals in the 1680s, given that he played the title role in two productions in 1681 of *The Rover, Part 2*. Smith retired in 1688, so the *Rover* revivals in the 1690s required a new leading man.<sup>151</sup>

### **Thomas Betterton as Belvile**

A towering individual in London theatre, Thomas Betterton (bap. 1635-d.1710) remains the most revered Restoration actor and one of the highest paid theatre professionals of the era. Scholars have positioned him in a celebrated acting lineage that began with Richard Burbage in the sixteenth century and continued with David Garrick in the eighteenth century. Betterton's first record of involvement with the London stage was in 1660 at John Rhodes' Cockpit Theatre in Drury Lane.<sup>152</sup> In November of that year, Betterton and nine other actors that worked for

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over the course of the next four years, Harris "gradually transferred his roles and eventually his managerial duties to Smith" (Milhous).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> When William Davenant died in 1668, Betterton and actor Henry Harris took on management of the Duke's Company. In 1681 when Harris phased out of that role, Smith succeeded him.

<sup>151</sup> Smith only retired temporarily; when Betterton launched his own company with Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle in April 1695, Smith returned as a sharer and principal actor. Sadly, however, Smith died suddenly in December of that year.

<sup>152</sup> As its names, suggests, the Cockpit was originally a site for cockfighting when it was built in 1609; Christopher Beeston converted it to a playhouse in 1616. Scant evidence suggests that Rhodes secretly took over operating the Cockpit as early as 1644; at the time, the London theatre was closed by royal mandate until 1660. Confirmed evidence indicates that Rhodes obtained a license to stage plays and began leasing the Cockpit to this end effective February 1660. After the Restoration theatre duopoly led by Davenant and Killigrew was formed, Rhodes briefly



Rhodes formally joined the new Duke's Company led by William Davenant. Records indicate that Betterton performed at least 180 roles during his lengthy career. According to Milhous, since there is not adequate documentation for an additional 128 Restoration and late eighteenth-century plays, the total number of roles Betterton performed likely exceeded 200.<sup>153</sup> Throughout his career, Betterton was noted for his ability to excel in a range of styles, performing consistently in leading roles in both tragedy and comedy, but also choosing at times to take on smaller character roles, such as Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night* and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. Milhous notes that Betterton did not do farce. This point is apt with regard to his casting as Belvile in *The Rover*; farcical acting was the domain of his counterpart William Smith as Willmore. A sober, serious, and studious man, according to Samuel Pepys, Betterton had an offstage reputation that melded with his casting as the honorable captain Belvile (See Milhous; Pepys, 22 Oct 1662).<sup>154</sup> In contemporary revivals, however, the character distinctions between Willmore, Belvile, and Frederick are sometimes dissolved to suggest a shared, sexist male mentality.<sup>155</sup>

### **Cave Underhill as Blunt**

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maintained a traveling company that operated out of the abandoned Cockpit and Red Bull theatres. This ended by 1662.

<sup>153</sup> Judith Milhous, 'Betterton, Thomas (bap. 1635, d. 1710)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2010

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/2311>, accessed 6 July 2017]

<sup>154</sup> Betterton helped develop new plays by Aphra Behn, Thomas Otway, and John Dryden. "Only in the 1690s, thirty years after he began acting, does he begin to alter the type of new role he takes on, and therefore exchanges his parts in some earlier plays" (Holland 65-66).

<sup>155</sup> This was the case to differing extents in both the Goodman (1989) and the Guthrie (1994) productions. Matching or complementary costumes also contribute to this choice of direction.



Cave Underhill (b.1634-1713)<sup>156</sup> enjoyed an acting career that spanned more than fifty years. He began acting at age 26 in 1660 when he (like Betterton) joined John Rhodes' acting company. When the duopoly companies merged to form the United Company, Underhill remained a member, and when the company folded, he joined Betterton, Barry, and Bracegirdle in The Actors' Company. A celebrated comedic actor, Underhill was frequently cast in what biographer John H. Astington classifies as "eccentric and stupid characters."<sup>157</sup> In addition to Blunt in *The Rover*, he originated many roles including Congreve's Sir Simon Sampson in *Love for Love* (1695) and Sir Willful Witwould in *The Way of the World* (1700). Audiences revered him for his performance of Shakespearian comic roles, including the role of the gravedigger in *Hamlet*, which he reprised throughout his entire career; Trincalo in Dryden's adaptation of *The Tempest*, which earned him that character's namesake as a nickname; Feste in *Twelfth Night*; and Gregory in *Romeo and Juliet*. Underhill appeared in two other Behn plays in addition to *The Rover*: *The Emperor of the Moon* (Doctor Barliardo) and *The Widow Ranter* (Timorous Cornet). Playwright Richard Steele praised Underhill's "understated and natural" style of acting (Astington). Cibber's account of Underhill suggests that the actor had a distinct and interesting look that lent itself to comedy (Astington). Underhill had a reputation for drunkenness and struggled financially. During the same year that *The Rover* premiered, Underhill found himself arrested and imprisoned due to financial debts; depending on the timing of this, it may or may not have contributed to audience delight or sympathy for his portrayal of the duped and bereft Blunt.

<sup>156</sup> Underhill was married at least four times and had six children.

<sup>157</sup> Astington, John H. 'Underhill, Cave (1634–1713).' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, London: Oxford University Press, 2004  
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/27996>, accessed 5 July 2017]

## **The Significance of *The Rover*'s First Production to Revival Directors**

With early modern playwrights, such as Aphra Behn, the contemporary director has no copyright, estate, or royalty issues with which to contend. Therefore, creativity is legally unrestrained. Production costs are another matter that can help keep a director's imagination in check, if necessary. Mounting a large cast, professional revival of a Restoration play can range from thousands to millions of dollars. Depending on company budget and staff-size, a contemporary theatre director may or may not have the resources to hire a dramaturg or personally to obtain access to adequate research channels to unearth information about the original production history of an early modern play. While generic Internet searches on Shakespeare's plays might yield useful details on historical production values, the same is not yet true of Behn's plays, which still require deeper academic digging. Moreover, depending on a director's staging approach, particularly if she intends to adapt or update a canonical play, she may not deem it necessary to investigate deeply original casting, stagecraft, or venue. However, with regard to *The Rover*, valuable staging insights can be gleaned by considering these elements because of the proto-directorial function of the Restoration playwright and Behn's history of collaboration with the Duke's Company. Understanding the combined significance of the intimacy of the Restoration playhouse, the (meta)theatricality of asides, and the resulting potential for steady, direct engagement with the audience were vital to my own direction of the play. These factors provide a keen sense of how to gauge Behn's style and tone in a play that invites us to see the tragedy in comic moments (ie. Lucetta's duping of Blunt) and the comedy in tragic moments (the three attempted rapes of Florinda). They also speak to why *The Rover* arguably translates better in an intimate black box space than in a larger venue, particularly one that lacks a forestage thereby inhibiting audience/performer proximity.

### Chapter Three:

#### *The Rover Revived, 1678-1760:*

##### **The Divergent Directions of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Productions**

*The Rover* was revived as many as six times in the seventeenth-century, and Behn was still living for all four revivals in the 1680s. As the century wore on, the play's popularity declined; however, its currency increased over the course of the early eighteenth century, reaching a crescendo in the 1720s; during that decade alone, the play enjoyed a total of fifty revivals at two venues, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields. After that its popularity sharply declined: there were only eleven productions in the 1730s; ten in the 1740s; thirteen in the 1750s; and three in 1760.<sup>158</sup>

##### **Seventeenth-Century Revivals at Whitehall's Hall Theatre<sup>159</sup>**

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<sup>158</sup> For additional analysis of casting and editing trends in eighteenth-century *Rover* revivals see Jane Spencer's chapter "*The Rover* and the Eighteenth Century" in Todd, Janet, ed. *Aphra Behn Studies* (1996) and Nancy Copeland's chapter in "*The Rover* and the Repertoire" in *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre* (2004) Bearing in mind that *The Rover* followed a similar trajectory to the *Man of Mode* and other Restoration comedies, Jane Spencer offers some explanation for the play's popularity in the early eighteenth century and its decline later in the period. Spencer examines the original 1677 *Rover* text, a c.1740 promptbook, a 1757 edition, and Kemble's 1790 adaptation of *Love in Many Masks*, noting how they reflect objectionable elements in Behn's play and shifts in treatment of Willmore, Hellena, Angellica Bianca, and Blunt.

<sup>159</sup> The theatre was also referred to as "the theatre in the Great Hall" or "The Theatre in Whitehall." The two revivals not held at court were as follows: There was a possible staging by the United Company on February 22, 1685, although it is not clear if this was part one or part two of the play and if this occurred at Drury Lane or Dorset Garden. The United Company worked out of both venues, Dorset Garden (formerly the Duke's Company's home) and Drury

Four of the seventeenth-century stagings took place at Whitehall Court's Hall Theatre.<sup>160</sup>

The creation of Hall Theatre in 1665 was "by far the most important event in the history of the Court theatre" asserts Eleanore Boswell (22). A dedicated court theatre, it was superior to its precursor, the Royal Cockpit. Built by John Webb, the Hall Theatre was located in the palace's Great Hall and remained in use until 1698 when a palace fire destroyed it. Prior to 1665, the Great Hall was a versatile space, and while performances of various sorts occurred there, no permanent stage existed until its christening as Hall Theatre.<sup>161</sup> As one would expect, the stage at Hall Theatre was smaller than at Dorset Garden, which measured 60' wide x 140' deep. By comparison, the Hall Theatre stage measured approximately 40' wide by 32' deep with a 5' elevation; it did not contain an apron downstage of the proscenium, which spanned 24' (Boswell 34).<sup>162</sup> Given the detailed extant account of the King's dais where he sat in state during

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Lane (formerly the King's Company's home). There was a performance at Lincoln's Inn Fields during the 1696-1697 season. Exact details about this revival do not exist; while casting is not known, it is possible that Elizabeth Barry and Thomas Betterton were in the cast. *The London Stage* states only that it was "possibly revived" during the 1696-97 season; however, Mary O'Donnell's *Annotated Bibliography* includes the title page of the 1697 printed edition (Q2) of the play, which very clearly points to a recent production: "As it was acted by | His Majesty's Servants, | at the | Theatre in Little-Lincolns-Inn-Fields." Lincoln's Inn Field had become the designated venue of Thomas Betterton's company in 1695; his company would next move into John Vanbrugh's Queens' Theatre at the Haymarket in 1705.

<sup>160</sup>From 1660 to 1664, court performances occurred at the Royal Cockpit at Whitehall. This changed in the spring of 1664 with the construction of the superior Hall Theatre. In the next century, royalty would continue to request *The Rover*'s revival, but these performances took place at public theatres, not at Court (Boswell 220): for example, public performances on December 21, 1714, and April 17, 1724, were performed "at the Royal Highness' command" at Drury Lane.

<sup>161</sup> According to Boswell, the Great Hall's use as a performance space under Charles II effectively began in the winter of 1662-1663 (25). Boswell speculates that the King may have seen greater potential in this larger space than at the smaller Cockpit "with its formal Paladian proscenium," which limited staging options (27).

<sup>162</sup> Boswell notes that "Webb's Hall Theatre is essentially the Great Hall arranged from *Florimene* by Inigo Jones. (It is, of course, superfluous to comment on Jones' indebtedness to Continental models . . . ) . . . Webb's theatrical design so far as we know it, is taken directly from

performances, he was “quite as much a part of the show as the people on stage” (Boswell 42).<sup>163</sup>

In the Restoration, the close connection between royal patronage and the theatre profession meant that dramatists aspired to having their plays performed at court; Behn was likely elated to have four of her plays staged there.<sup>164</sup> James, Duke of York, the brother and successor of King Charles II, regularly attended the public theatres, and *The Rover* was the vehicle through which Behn notably earned his admiration.

### Revivals at Hall Theatre in the 1680s

*The Rover*’s first documented court revival occurred on Wednesday, February 11, 1680.<sup>165</sup> Presented by the Duke’s Company, this staging was part of a series of dramatic performances held exclusively for King Charles II.<sup>166</sup> The cast of this revival is unconfirmed, but it probably contained several of the original cast members.<sup>167</sup> Behn’s sequel *The Rover Part II* played twice the next year in 1681, and in it Smith and Blunt reprised their respective roles

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the masque stage, with the result that the Hall Theatre may be said to be Inigo Jones limited by the physical conditions of an already existed building” (65). Like the Palais-Royal in France, the ceiling of the Hall Theatre was covered in blue cloth “to cut off the great height of the roof” (64). The stage itself was covered in green baize lined with canvas that was removed between performances to preserve the baize. In 1672 a floor trap entrance was added, so Blunt’s emergence from the sewer was stageable.

<sup>163</sup> See p140 of Boswell for a useful drawing of the Hall Theatre that shows the stage and the King’s dais opposite one another and nearly equal in size. Also of note, Charles Killigrew, the son of Thomas Killigrew, who wrote *Thomaso*, the source text upon which *The Rover* is based, was then Master of Revels.

<sup>164</sup> Her other plays performed at Court were *Sir Patient Fancy*, *The Feign’d Curtizans* and *The Emperor of the Moon*. Among Restoration playwrights, Dryden led with ten plays acted at Court; Orrery, Crowne, and Lee matched Behn with four plays each; Otway and Etherege had three plays staged at Court. For more on this see Boswell p107.

<sup>165</sup> This was Behn’s second play staged at Court. *Sir Patient Fancy* had played there in January 1677 a few months prior to *The Rover*’s premiere.

<sup>166</sup> *The London Stage* registers surprise at the performance of any plays at Court at this time in light of “recent disorders at the Duke’s Theatre” in connection with the Popish Plot; on Monday, January 26, 1680, a group of men entered the pit at Dorset Garden and delivered disparaging speeches and threw lit candles. See Van Lennep. *The London Stage*, vol. 1, 284.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

and Barry played La Noche, the courtesan.<sup>168</sup> In light of this confirmed casting, Smith, Blunt, and Barry, a favorite at Court, all probably performed in the 1680 court production of *The Rover*.<sup>169</sup> The original cast members definitely not involved in the first revival were Matthew Medburne (Don Pedro), who had died at Newgate Prison in March 1680; Anne Marshall Quin (Angellica Bianca), who had moved back to the King's Company;<sup>170</sup> Margaret Hughes (Valeria), who had retired after the 1676-1677 season; and Mrs. Gillow (Lucetta), who is not listed on the company roster for the 1679-1680 season.<sup>171</sup> Comedies outweighed other genres in popularity at Court.<sup>172</sup> The King's selection of *The Rover* with its distinctly recognizable, libertine hero suggests that Smith portrayed Willmore in a flattering manner; how could Smith not have reflected back a charming image of the original in the King who sat before him?<sup>173</sup> The United Company may also have presented the play at Whitehall on Thursday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1685, and Wednesday, January 19, 1687.<sup>174</sup> Given that all three of these revivals would have occurred prior to William Smith's temporary retirement in 1688, it is probable that he continued in the title role. Given Behn's close affiliation with the United Company up until her death, she may

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<sup>168</sup> It played in January and April 1681.

<sup>169</sup> Boswell notes that Barry was a favorite at Court (104-105).

<sup>170</sup> Quin appears to have retired from the stage completely by 1682.

<sup>171</sup> Matthew Medbourne's career was "marred . . . by legal and political difficulties" (Wanko). He appeared on stage for the last time in November 1678. A Catholic and friend of Titus Oates, he was embroiled in the Popish Plot. He spent the last year of his life in jail where he died March 19, 1680. See Wanko, Cheryl. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/18492>

<sup>172</sup> Boswell notes that the detailed records for the 1680-1681 season at Hall Theatre are missing, so any changes or additions to the space during that time are not known (49). For a breakdown of plays by genre at Court see Boswell p108.

<sup>173</sup> Charles II, along with John Wilmot, the Duke of Rochester, and John Hoyle, Behn's bisexual lover, are among the historical figures that scholars have identified as real life inspirations for the role of Willmore.

<sup>174</sup> In 1682 the King's Company and the Duke's Company merged.

have been involved in a proto-directorial capacity with the mounting of these revivals, just as she had been involved in the casting and staging of the original production.

### Post-Humous Revivals

A Hall Theatre revival of particular pomp and circumstance occurred on Tuesday, November 4, 1690. King William requested that *The Rover* be performed for his birthday.<sup>175</sup> Behn had died eighteen months prior on April 16, 1689, just five days after the coronation of William and Mary. The King's wish that Behn's comedy be the centerpiece of the evening's festivities speaks to both the play's lasting entertainment value and Behn's enduring popularity at Court. New equipment was ordered specifically for this staging.<sup>176</sup> William Mountfort, a twenty-five year old actor and playwright portrayed Willmore. Previously a member of the Duke's Company, which he joined at approximately age fourteen during the 1677-1678 season (the season after *The Rover*'s premiere), Mountfort quite literally grew up and trained among Behn and her original cast and was likely the first actor after William Smith to portray Willmore. Mountfort had proven his talents in the years leading up to this revival with his acclaimed portrayal of the title character in John Crowne's *Sir Courtly Nice* (1685). Colley Cibber deemed Mountfort's portrayal of Willmore "excellent" and full of "charms and merit," even if Cibber also found it "reproach[ful] of Behn to create such unsavory characters."<sup>177</sup> According to Cibber, the Queen shared this opinion of Mountfort's Willmore: "King William's Queen Mary was

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<sup>175</sup> Van Lennep. William, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur H. Scouten, eds. *The London Stage, 1660-1800, Part 1: 1660-1700*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965, p385. A concert and a Pindarick ode written by Matthew Prior just for the occasion also accompanied the play.

<sup>176</sup> Van Lennep. William, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur H. Scouten, eds. *The London Stage, 1660-1800, Part 1: 1660-1700*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965, 391.

<sup>177</sup> *Apology*, I, 128, cited in *The London Stage*, vol. 1., p391.



pleas'd to make in favor of Mountfort, notwithstanding her disapprobation of the play.”<sup>178</sup> The Queen’s comment underscores the significance of casting a favorable actor whose skill and magnetism can offset the character’s deplorable qualities.<sup>179</sup> Cibber’s description of Mountfort’s approach to comedy resembles what audiences today would classify as the ‘straight man’: he would not laugh at his own jokes “unless the point of his raillery upon another called for it.”<sup>180</sup> Unfortunately, for the promising actor, this production marked his sole encounter with the title role because of his young and untimely death in 1692.<sup>181</sup> Upon Mountfort’s death, most of his roles transferred to George Powell (1668?-1714), who definitely acted the part of Willmore in a summer 1710 revival at George Penkethman’s Greenwich Theatre.<sup>182</sup>

By the 1690s, the raunchy and more radical spirit associated with the reign of Charles II had dissipated, and moralizing anti-theatricalists such as Jeremy Collier had begun criticizing the

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p391.

<sup>179</sup> In Joanne Akalitis’s 1994 Guthrie revival, for example, the actor who played Willmore was shorter or equal in size to the performers who played Belville, Frederick, Hellena, and Angellica, and he lacked the physical appeal and bravado that is arguably necessary to keep his character in balance.

<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Avery, Emmett L., ed. *The London Stage 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment Compiled from Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period*. Part 1. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960. pg cxxvi.

<sup>181</sup> b.1664-d.1692. Married to actress, Susanna Percival and admired by actress Anne Bracegirdle, Mountfort was ambushed and stabbed by one of Bracegirdle’s jealous admirers on December 9, 1692—he was trying to keep two men, Captain Hill and Lord Mohun from abducting Bracegirdle (A.S. Borgman, *The Life and Death of William Mountfort* quoted in Holland p153). Mountfort died the next day of a chest wound. Deborah Payne Fisk cites Colley Cibber’s account of the impact of Mountfort’s death on fellow company member Anthony Leigh—who claimed that the news make Leigh sick with a fever that resulted in his death days later on December 21 or 22, 1692; this speaks to the tight bonds originally formed among members of the Duke’s Company.

<sup>182</sup> Penkethmen’s theatre opened in 1709 and was a summer theatre destination. Cast lists are not available for the other two revivals in the 1690s or for several revivals in the first decade of the next century, so Powell may have portrayed Willmore prior to 1710 in one of the Actors Company revivals at Lincoln’s Inn Fields.



plays of Behn and her contemporaries and calling for more sanitized drama. A new body of more polite plays soon answered Collier's plea. This shift in sentiment may account for why *The London Stage* documents only two revivals in the 1690's. Another likely reason for less revivals during this decade was the growing tumult within the United Company, which dissolved in the fall of 1694 because of an actors' rebellion headed by Thomas Betterton along with Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle. In addition, in December of that year, Queen Mary died, and the theatres closed until April of the next year.

### **Eighteenth-Century Revivals: *The Rover* in Repertory**

When the theatres reopened in 1695, another evolution in London theatre management had occurred, and two new companies emerged: The Actors Company helmed by Betterton, Barry, and Bracegirdle operated out of Lincoln's Inn Fields; The Patent Company led by businessmen Christopher Rich, a lawyer, and Thomas Skipwith, a member of Parliament, staged plays at Dorset Garden and Drury Lane, though predominantly at the latter.<sup>183</sup> As Van Lennep notes in *The London Stage*, the new duopoly was no less flawed than the previous one:

with the re-establishment of two companies, each reflecting a different theory of management, some of the old problems reappeared. Arbitrary decisions by the Rich-Skipwith regime caused an occasional player to desire a transfer to the sharing group under Betterton . . . On the other hand, his company discovered that some members did not relish rule by their equals" (Van Lennep lx).<sup>184</sup>

The major theatres in eighteenth-century London operated under a repertory system. A company's season offerings consisted of a selection of existing plays staged in an alternating sequence. Premieres of new works were typically staged between December and February. The

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<sup>183</sup> Both companies saw fit to include *The Rover* in their programming. William Penkethmen, who would eventually open his own venue, Greenwich Theatre, was part of the Rich-Skipwith company.

<sup>184</sup> Van Lennep. William, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur H. Scouten, eds. *The London Stage, 1660-1800, Part 1: 1660-1700*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965.

repertory system put intense demands on actors and actresses. They had to be versatile in different genres, memorize lines quickly, and retain the lines of many characters in different plays at the same time because programming changed frequently and time for re-rehearsal was, therefore, limited.

With Behn deceased and the theatre landscape significantly altered, *The Rover* entered a new phase of revival after 1700. This was also true for Behn's contemporaries, most of whom had died by the turn of the century.<sup>185</sup> In the playwright-director's absence, the leading actor or actor-manager, ran rehearsals. For example, when Robert Wilks joined Christopher Rich's company in 1702, he took over George Powell's position of running rehearsals. Powell saw Wilks as competition for roles and left Rich's company to work with the Actors Company at Lincoln's Inn Fields. With regard to revival casting, Robert D. Hume notes,

Casts represent an enormously powerful tool for the analysis . . . of evolving presentations of a play, decade by decade . . . the casting history of revivals is virtually a book in which is written the production concept and impact of the play. Much may be learned from comparisons (20-21).<sup>186</sup>

Nearly twenty different actresses portrayed Hellena between the time of the play's premiere and its last eighteenth-century revival in 1760. By comparison, during the same time, a dozen actresses played Angellica Bianca, and a dozen actors portrayed Willmore.<sup>187</sup> Mrs. Porter portrayed the courtesan at least forty times at Drury Lane between 1715-1731. From 1725-1734, Mrs. Horton portrayed the courtesan at least twenty times, first at Drury Lane and later at Covent

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<sup>185</sup> Dryden died in 1600; George Villiers in 1687; Otway in 1685; Rochester in 1680.

<sup>186</sup> Hume, Robert. "Theatre History, 1660-1800: Aims, Materials, Methodology." *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses*, eds. Michael Cordner and Peter Holland. Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2010.

<sup>187</sup> The actors who played Willmore included: William Smith (5), William Mountfort (1), John Verbruggen (number not known), Powell (number not known), Wilks (60+), Lacy Ryan (24 at LIF; 19 at CG), Giffard (8), Burney (1), Bridgwater (1), W. Mills (4), A. Hallam (2), Smith (16).

Garden. Later in the century, Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Hamilton occupied the role of Angellica, mostly at Covent Garden; Horton reprised the role approximately twenty times from 1731-1748, and Hamilton approximately fifteen times from 1757-1760. Wilks dominated the title role, performing it at least sixty times. Lacy Ryan was a close second, performing Willmore more than forty times. Similarly, thirteen actors, many of whom were the most celebrated comic actors of their day, played Blunt. Interestingly, Belvile and Florinda respectively represent the roles with the least and most variation in revival casting. From Thomas Betterton in 1677 to Ridout in 1760, only ten actors are known to have played Belvile, which might suggest a desire on the part of eighteenth-century actors to maintain ownership of that nobler role. By contrast, as many as two dozen different actresses portrayed Florinda between Mary Betterton's origination of the part and Mrs. Elmry's final reprisal in 1760. Casting history suggests that Willmore, Angellica, Belvile, and Blunt were roles that performers clung to for decades once cast, which implies great flexibility with regard to the age of the performer and a carryover of Restoration casting practice. Not until Mrs. Vincent took on the role of Hellena at Covent Garden did an actress steadily reprise that role the way that Wilks or Lacy did Willmore; Vincent played the novice more than twenty times from 1738-1760.<sup>188</sup>

### ***The Rover at Drury Lane, 1703-1735***

Over the course of the century, *The Rover* enjoyed 79 revivals at Drury Lane—more than at any other venue.<sup>189</sup> At least five actresses who portrayed Hellena at this venue chose *The*

<sup>188</sup> See J.W. Fisher's article on eighteenth-century casting practices: "Aging Actresses in the Eighteenth Century." *Journal of Aging and Identity*. 4:2 (June 1999): 57-77.

<sup>189</sup> In the 18th century, there were 37 revivals at Covent Garden, 27 at Lincoln's Inn Field, 7 at Queen's Theatre, 7 at Goodman's Field, and 1 at Greenwich Theatre.

*Rover* for their annual benefit performance.<sup>190</sup> On three occasions, *The Rover* played there on Valentine's Day, which suggests a lighter, more comic staging approach.<sup>191</sup> In the first decade of the century, Behn's farce *Emperor of the Moon* was also a staple in the theatre's repertoire; a staging of this play commenced Drury Lane's 1702-1703 season in September and reappeared in April.<sup>192</sup> That same season at Drury Lane also marked the first eighteenth-century revival of *The Rover* and the passing of Behn's work into the hands of a new company and a new generation of actors.

In a revival on Thursday, February 18, 1703, Robert Wilks (c.1665-1732) and Susanna Percival Verbruggen (b.1666-d.1703) performed the lead roles of Willmore and Helena.<sup>193</sup> The great new star of the era, the Irish-born Wilks was in his late thirties when he first portrayed Willmore; he acted the role regularly over the next twenty-five years, the final time as a mature man in his sixties. Wilks modeled his acting style after William Mountfort, who had died seven years earlier (Holland 90). According to Peter Holland, Wilks worked diligently to effect the same sympathetic manner as Mountfort had possessed, tried to avoid base characters in

<sup>190</sup> Oldfield (1711), Rogers (1716), Mountfort (1718), Booth (1720), and Bullock (1723) all chose *The Rover* for a benefit performance. Only once was the play chosen for the benefit of an actress portraying Angellica Bianca: Porter (1729).

<sup>191</sup> It played on Valentine's Day in 1709, 1717, and 1724. John Rich's father, Christopher, co-managed Drury Lane until the time of his death in November 1714. At the time of Christopher Rich's death, he and Skipworth revived *The Rover* at Drury Lane more than twenty times. John took up his father's role, which included keeping this play in the theater's repertoire.

<sup>192</sup> Penkethmen played Harlequin; the rest of the cast is not listed. This may have been the beginning of Penkethmen's association with Behn's work. He would later stage *The Rover* for his benefit at Greenwich Theatre in 1710.

<sup>193</sup> Interestingly, a note in *The London Stage*, vol. 2, part 1, indicates that *The Rover* was last staged at Drury Lane ten years prior, ostensibly in 1693, but as outlined earlier in this study, there is no documented performance of *The Rover* at Drury Lane in the 1690's, only the 1690 Court performance and the 1696/7 performance at Lincoln's Inn Fields. (*The London Stage*, vol. 2, part 1, pg32.). It is possible the reference is to a 1685 revival for which the venue was either Dorset Garden or Drury Lane, but this remains unconfirmed.

tragedies,<sup>194</sup> and preferred to play gentlemen in comedies (90-91). The influence of Mountfort on Wilks was likely intensified by the fact that Susanna Verbruggen, who played Hellena, was Mountfort's widow.<sup>195</sup> In January 1694, Susanna married another actor, John Verbruggen (b.1670?-d.1708), who was a member of Betterton's company.

Susanna Percival Verbruggen was exposed to theatre from a young age because of her father, Thomas Percival (d. 1693?), who was a member of the Duke's and United Companies and played Phillipino in the *Rover's* first production.<sup>196</sup> Between her first recorded performance with the King's Company in the summer of 1681 and September 1703 when she died in childbirth, Susanna performed at least sixty roles, most of which were comic stock characters, including the coquette, the stale virgin, the hoyden, the minx, the bawd, and the comic grotesque (Heddon). Acclaimed for her comedic skills and for her work in breeches roles, Susanna was well suited for the role of Hellena. Like her first husband William Mountfort, Susanna Verbruggen died at the height of her professional success; both had just one encounter with Behn's play. In spite of Verbruggen's pregnancy and sudden death in September 1703, the show went on, and Christopher Rich recast the role of Hellena for the remaining performances that year.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> In terms of tragic roles, Wilks excelled as Antony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

<sup>195</sup> They married in June 1686 and had four children together. The two enjoyed great stage synergy and frequently appeared together as the 'gay couple.' See Deirdre E. Heddon, 'Verbruggen, Susanna (bap. 1666, d. 1703)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/28199>, accessed 10 July 2017]

<sup>196</sup> Derek Hughes notes that Thomas Percival was "convicted of clipping coins in 1693, and apparently died on his way to Portsmouth for transportation" (199); See the appendix to *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*.

<sup>197</sup> No cast lists are available for the next several Drury Lane revivals of *The Rover* (or *Emperor of the Moon*). Revivals at Drury Lane during the 1703-1704 season without cast lists include the following: October 15 and November 9, 1703; January 12, October 21, and December 5, 1704. For the October 21st and December 5th performances at Drury Lane, Etscourt played Blunt; no other cast members are listed in *London Stage*.

Skipwith and Christopher Rich died in 1710 and 1714 respectively, and Rich's son John took over management of Drury Lane.<sup>198</sup> Like his father before him, John Rich ensured that *The Rover* remained in the theatre's repertoire. On Friday, April 16, 1714 at Drury Lane a revival took place with Wilks as Willmore and Jane Rogers as Hellena for the benefit of Mrs. Rogers.<sup>199</sup> While this was their first time appearing together in *The Rover*, they had begun playing lovers onstage in the late 1690s and eventually became authentic ones offstage. Just as the Bettertons' portrayal of Belvile and Florinda must have tempered the tragedy of the threats to Florinda's virtue, so must the offstage romance of Wilks and Rogers have warmed audiences to Willmore and Hellena's game of verbal tennis. According to Wilks' *Memoirs*, the couple was so popular with audiences that Rich "was obliged to let Mrs. Rogers always act the heroine in every play where Mr. Wilks was the hero" (quoted in Holland 91). According to Holland, the couple was "uniformly associated with the airy, happy parts" and represented "one of the strongest casting patterns in the period" (91).

### **The Actors Company and *The Rover* at Old Lincoln's Inn Fields (LIF), 1704-1737**

When the theatres reopened in 1695 after the death of Queen Mary, the Actor's Company worked out of Lincoln's Inn Fields. A revival of *The Rover* may have taken place there during the 1696-1697 season. Anne Bracegirdle (1663-1748) and Elizabeth Barry (1658-1713) were at the height of their careers then and may have played Hellena and Angellica Bianca

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*Emperor of the Moon*—October 18, November 25th, December 27, and December 31, 1703; February 7, July 26, August 11, December 20, 1704; January 1, April 13, November 12, 1705, January 15 and 28, 1707. A performance also took place at Dorset Garden on November 16, 1706.

<sup>198</sup> Also of note, Thomas Betterton died in 1710, the same year as Skipwith.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p320. "At the desire of several ladies of quality"

respectively.<sup>200</sup> The first confirmed production at Lincoln's Inn Fields in the eighteenth century was on February 9, 1704. While no cast list exists, Elizabeth Barry probably portrayed Angellica Bianca; this was certainly the case by the time of the revival in October 1706. Continuing company member Cave Underhill probably acted Blunt. However, it is less likely that Betterton, then nearing 70, appeared in the role of Belvile; records indicate that he had started to relinquish some of his past roles by the turn of the century during the fallout of the United Company.

### ***The Rover at Queen's Theatre at the Haymarket, 1705-1710***

In 1705 the Actors Company moved to Queen's Theatre at the Haymarket, owned by John Vanbrugh with William Congreve as a joint lessee. Inspired by classical and Palladian theatre architecture, Queen's Theatre was an opulent, baroque amphitheatre with a 20' radius (Barlow 517).<sup>201</sup> Like the Hall Theatre, its seats were covered in green baize. The spherical architectural theme shaped every feature including the theatre's curved forestage (518). The proscenium width of Queen's Theatre measured 26'; it was just slightly wider than the proscenium width of Hall Theatre, which measured 24'.<sup>202</sup> While Queen's Theatre contained standard technical equipment, such as floor traps and a flying system, the consensus at the time was that its structure was impractical for staging plays. Eventually, it became a dedicated opera venue.<sup>203</sup> *The Rover* played at Queen's Theatre seven times between 1705 and 1710. While confirmed cast lists for the three respective stagings in 1705, 1706, and 1707 do not exist, the

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<sup>200</sup> In *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, Hughes suggests that Bracegirle may have taken over the role of Hellena following the death of Susannah Verbruggen in 1703 (197).

<sup>201</sup> For more on Queen's Theatre see Barlow, Graham F. "Vanbrugh's Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket, 1703-1709." *Early Music*. 17:4 (November 1989): 515-521.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. 517-518. The building's internal measurement was 124' long by 55' wide.

<sup>203</sup> It served as an opera venue until a fire destroyed it in 1789.

following cast is plausible: Verbruggen (Willmore), Husband (Belvile),<sup>204</sup> Bowman (Frederick), Underhill (Blunt), Mrs. Barry (Angelica), Mrs. Bracegirdle (Hellena), Mrs. Bowman (Florinda), Mrs. Lee (Moretta).<sup>205</sup>

### ***The Rover at John Rich's New Lincoln's Inn Fields (LIF), 1725-1737***

In 1714, John Rich, the son of Christopher Rich, rebuilt the theatre at Lincoln's Inn Fields, but he did not revive *The Rover* there again until 1725. At the time, John Rich managed both Drury Lane and LIF, and he mounted a production of *The Rover* with separate casts at both venues; between February and November of that year, it played four times at Drury Lane and three times at LIF. In this run of productions, James Spiller (1692-1730) became the fifth actor to inhabit the role of Blunt. This also marked the beginning of Lacy Ryan's turn at the lead role. He initially played opposite Mrs. Bullock as Hellena, but by the end of the year, she transitioned to the role of Angellica Bianca and Mrs. Younger took up the novice role. Ryan and Younger remained an on-stage couple in these parts until 1734.<sup>206</sup> Horton only reprised Angellica Bianca three more times once Rich moved most of his LIF cast to Covent Garden for performances there beginning in 1733. The last revival at LIF occurred in March 1737.

### ***The Rover at Goodman's Field, 1730-1734***

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<sup>204</sup> The roles of Belvile and Florinda were cut from the other four performances at Queen's Theatre.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p130. October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1706; Monday, January 20, 1707. Cast not listed. Underhill does not appear on the company roster for the 1705-1706 season, but he is listed as a member for the prior season 1704-1705 for the following season of 1706-1707. This could have been a documentary oversight.

<sup>206</sup> Their last performance at LIF was on May 10, 1732. The next year, Christopher Rich had them reprise their roles at his newly opened venue, Covent Garden.



During the 1729-1730 season, another major playhouse opened, Goodman's Field, which joined the existing contenders, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields.<sup>207</sup> Founded by Irish actor, Thomas Odell, Goodman's Field opened on Halloween in 1729. Greenwich Theatre appeared in the years leading up to the Stage Licensing Act of 1737. The theatre's proximity to an industrial area that employed lower class citizens combined with the theatre profession's ongoing battle with moralizing anti-theatricalists meant that Odell's theatre was ill-fated from the start. Of the 185 plays produced at Goodman's Fields during its inaugural season, only four were Restoration plays, and *The Rover* was one of those four.<sup>208</sup> *The Rover* played at Goodman Fields a total of seven times. In September 1731, actor and company member Henry Giffard assumed management and revamped the theatre with the help of Edward Shepherd, the architect who was assisting John Rich in the construction of Covent Garden. Giffard and his wife, the Irish actress Anna Marcella (Nancy) Lyddal, portrayed Willmore and Angellica Bianca in all six revivals at Greenwich Theatre as well as in one final revival at Lincoln's Inn Fields in March 1737. In April, a reactionary Henry Fielding staged two political allegories at the Haymarket that lampooned Walpole. These productions precipitated the passage of the Stage Licensing Act in June, which effectively closed Greenwich Theatre, as well as the other two unlicensed theatres, Little Theatre at Haymarket and Lincoln's Inn Fields.

### ***The Rover* at Covent Garden Theatre: 1732-1760**

<sup>207</sup> By this time, Queen's Theatre at the Haymarket was a site for opera.

<sup>208</sup> Monday, April 6, 1730 at Goodman's Field with the following cast: Giffard (Willmore), Mrs. Seal (Hellena), Mrs. Giffard (Angellica), Huddy (Belvile), W. Williams (Frederick), Bardin (Antonio), Smith (Pedro), Machen (Stephano), Collet (Phillipo), R. Williams (Sancho), Penkethman (Blunt), Mrs. Purden (Florinda), Mrs. Mountfort (Valeria), MRS. Thomas (Moretta), Mrs. Palmer (Callis), Lucetta (Mrs. Kirk).

John Rich revived *The Rover* at Covent Garden a total of thirty-seven times in the eighteenth century.<sup>209</sup> All sixteen of the revivals in the latter half of the century were staged there exclusively. As a result of his success producing Gay's *Beggar's Opera* and pantomimes at Lincoln's Inn Field, John Rich sought a larger venue.<sup>210</sup> With the capacity to accommodate 3,000 people, Covent Garden Theatre more than fulfilled his wish.<sup>211</sup> To this day, it is likely that Covent Garden remains the largest venue at which *The Rover* was ever performed. The months leading up to theatre's opening were rife with contention between Rich and architect Edward Shepherd, hence why Howard P. Vincent describes the theatre as "built in bickering" (305).<sup>212</sup> The venue finally opened on December 7, 1732 with a production of William Congreve's *The Way of the World*.<sup>213</sup> Rich made a point of announcing that his company at Covent Garden, like his company at Lincoln's Inn Fields, were operating under the patents of Davenant and Killigrew. P. J. Crean notes,

The inference is obvious that Rich, who was the son of a lawyer, and who evidently saw the trend of feeling in Parliament toward a restriction of the playhouses, wished to place beyond shadow of a doubt his sovereign and indisputable authority for the performance of plays (242).<sup>214</sup>

<sup>209</sup> It was revived eleven times in the 1730s; ten times in the 1740s; thirteen times in the 1750s; and three times in 1760.

<sup>210</sup> John Rich is considered one of greatest Harlequin performers of all time. His father, Christopher Rich, renovated Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1714 and managed the theatre until his death; at which time, John took over.

<sup>211</sup> The theatre's accommodation breakdown is as follows: Pit, 632; Boxes, 1,200; Lower Gallery, 820; Upper Gallery, 361. See Vincent pp305-306.

<sup>212</sup> See Vincent, Howard P. "John Rich and The First Covent Garden Theatre." *ELH*. 17:4 (December 1950): 296-306.

<sup>213</sup> Covent Garden underwent two renovations, one in 1782 and another following a fire in 1808. See Saint, Andrew. "The Three Covent Gardens." *The Musical Times*. 123:1678 (Dec. 1982): 826-831. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/964220>

<sup>214</sup> Crean, P. J. "The Stage Licensing Act of 1737." *Modern Philology*. 35:3 (February 1938): 239-255.

Rich served as owner and manager of Covent Garden until his death in 1761. *The Rover*'s first revival at Covent Garden began on December 15, 1732. The cast included many performers who had appeared in revivals at Rich's Lincoln's Inn Fields as far back as the spring of 1725. For the play's debut at Covent Garden, Ryan reprised Willmore; Mrs. Younger, Hellena; and Mrs. Bullock, Angellica Bianca. *The Rover* played ten times in the 1740's; however, after its revival on Wednesday, November 9, 1747, there was an eight-year lapse in revivals.<sup>215</sup> As Angela Smallwood notes, "The Stage Licensing Act of 1737, which instituted pre-production government censorship of plays, inhibited dramatic output of all kinds and turned the mid century into a lean time" (239). The next revival was not until February 1757. After March 15, 1760, the date of the last recorded performance in the eighteenth century, neither *The Rover* nor any of Behn's other plays were staged in their original form again until the 20th century, after a 218-year hiatus.

### **Minor Alterations to Major Adaptations**

It has become common practice among contemporary directors of early modern texts to modify them in some way. A more conservative director might prune lines in order to shorten the play's run time; whereas, a more liberal one might excise scenes, eliminate characters, modernize language, or add entirely new lines. During the Restoration and the early eighteenth-century, in the absence of copyright laws, playwrights appropriated English pre-Commonwealth and European plays and transformed them into new works, and actors and managers altered pre-

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<sup>215</sup> Ryan portrayed Willmore, and Mrs. Horton portrayed Angellica in both productions; the casts otherwise differed. The cast list for the March performance identifies the performers of six roles, indicating that the cast list is either incomplete or the script was reduced and characters omitted. See Stone, George Winchester Jr. ed. *The London Stage. 1747-1776, Part 4, Volume 1*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965.

existing plays at their own will.<sup>216</sup> As Michael Dobson notes, “vintage plays belonged to theatre companies much more securely than to their dead authors” (47).<sup>217</sup> *The Rover*’s first documented alteration, the omission of Stephano, occurred three decades after the play’s premiere in a 1709 Drury Lane revival that opened on Valentine’s Day.<sup>218</sup> More substantial alterations soon followed. Later that year, the Actors Company eliminated six characters in a Queen’s Theatre revival on New Year’s Eve: they omitted Belvile, Florinda, Frederick, Pedro, Antonio, and Moretta. These cuts made the love triangle between Willmore, Hellena, and Angellica Bianca the play’s sole focus. By eliminating Florinda, there was no dark subplot with multiple portending rapes; this alteration reflects the shift in values in the early eighteenth century to emphasize female virtue.<sup>219</sup> A variant revival at Drury Lane in 1717 preserved the role of Belvile but omitted Pedro, Frederick, Florinda, Moretta.<sup>220</sup>

### **Late Eighteenth-Century Adaptations**

Behn’s only connection to the late-eighteenth century stage was by way of adaptations. These included single performances of an altered version of *The Amorous Prince* at the Haymarket in December 1785<sup>221</sup> and Hannah Cowley’s adaptation of *The Lucky Chance* at Drury Lane in November 1786. Not surprisingly, John Philip Kemble’s *Love in Many Masks*, based closely on *The Rover*, enjoyed a more extensive run with nine performances at Drury Lane

<sup>216</sup> Today, literature published prior to 1923 is considered “public domain.” Works published after 1977 will not become public domain until seventy years after the author’s death.

<sup>217</sup> Dobson, Michael. “Adaptations and Revivals,” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*. Ed. Deborah Payne Fisk. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000.

<sup>218</sup> Stephano remained cut from the Drury Lane performances in March and May of 1709.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., pg207, pg219, pg223. This amended version also played on Wednesday, April 19, 1710, and Wednesday, May 24, 1710. The April 19th performance was a benefit for Husband (Belvile).

<sup>220</sup> This was a Valentine’s Day performance.

<sup>221</sup> *London Stage* notes only that it was ‘altered by a Gentlemen.’ Hogan, Charles Beecher. *The London Stage, 1776-1800, Part 5: Volume 2*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965.

from March to October 1790.<sup>222</sup> Behn was not alone in her waning popularity as a producible playwright after the mid-eighteenth century; her male Restoration counterparts were also banished to oblivion. The increasingly more conservative social and political tone of the English nation led to the play's disappearance from the stage. Beyond the impact of broader social and political trends that resulted in a more puritanical climate in England, Behn and her work also suffered as a result of writers who either wrote disparagingly of her or not at all. As Angela J. Smallwood notes, new plays by women decreased in number after the 1723 death of Susannah Centlivre, "the last and most prolific member of the 'School of Aphra'" (239). Female playwrights did not experience a resurgence until the latter half of the century: "Of the 600 (known) plays by women written between 1660 and 1823, nearly 200 appeared between 1770 and 1800" (241).<sup>223</sup> While professional opportunities for women writers in general had increased markedly, Smallwood cautions that the position of women in professional theatre remained "relatively ambivalent":

the Georgian theatre was far from becoming a wholly 'proper' place. For both stage and audience, it offered public exposure, a fact exploited in the most disreputable sense by the prostitutes who traditionally occupied certain areas of the auditorium. Stage drama was thus the most problematic medium within which women writers sought to build professional reputations. Evidence about the constraints imposed on some of the plays which they produced support the somewhat negative views of the professionalization of eighteenth-century women's writing . . . The pressures placed in 1786 upon *The School for*

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<sup>222</sup> See Hogan, Charles Beecher. *The London Stage, 1776-1800, Part 5: Volume 2*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965, which lists the following performance dates: March 8, 9, 13, 20, 27, April 10, 17, May 15, October 14, 1790.

<sup>223</sup> According to Smallwood, the ratio of female to male playwrights in this period was about 1:20, but the ratio of female-authored new pieces chosen for staging was more like 1:5 (242). She adds that starting in approximately 1760, women writers began to receive preferential treatment from the managers of the Theatre's Royal of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, the only London theatre licensed to perform drama" (241).

*Greybeards*, an adaptation of Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* by Hannah Cowley, seem to replicate this sense of deepening restriction (239-242).<sup>224</sup>

While at the end of seventeenth century, theatre was a more venerated medium than prose fiction, by the end of the eighteenth century, the position of these two genres in the literary hierarchy had reversed. As Jane Spencer notes, by the late 1700s, Behn's "main claim to remembrance was the authorship of *Oroonoko*," largely due to the frequent eighteenth-century revival of Thomas Southerne's stage adaptation of Behn's novella (19).<sup>225</sup>

In summation, consideration of variations in casting as well as venue can provide valuable insights into the life of Behn's most famous play in the century after her death. *The Rover*'s potential audience reach grew exponentially from the play's 1677 premiere at Dorset Garden, which could accommodate less than 1,000 patrons, to its revival at Coven Garden, which could entertain 3,000. Behn's play was a proven star vehicle. The most celebrated leading actors of the century acted the parts of the title character and his noble comrade Belvile; similarly, Blunt showcased the work of the most beloved, low comic actors. More than twenty noted comedic actresses took on the role of Hellena, while the courtesan Angellica Bianca served as a vehicle to showcase the century's best tragic actresses. When *The Rover* finally returned to the stage in the late 1770s, its initial revivers made valiant efforts to present the play in what they believed was a "period" accurate manner. By the mid-1780s, directors began to take more editorial and interpretive liberties, which the next sections of this study will illustrate.

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<sup>224</sup> See Smallwood, Angela J. "Women and Theatre." pp238-262 in Jones, Vivien ed. *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*. London: Cambridge UP, 2000.

<sup>225</sup> In *Aphra Behn's Afterlife*, Spencer explains that Behn's authorial identity "varies according to whether it is being drawn by someone who is most concerned with establishing a tradition in the novel, in poetry, or in the drama" (20).

## **Part II. Woman-Directed Revivals of *The Rover* at U.S. Regional Powerhouses in the Twentieth Century**

In 1989 and 1994, *The Rover* enjoyed major productions at two of the most esteemed resident theatres in the United States—the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, IL, and the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, MN. What's more, women directors helmed both revivals. The significance of these combined facts cannot be emphasized enough. For Robert Falls and Garland Wright, the artistic directors of these institutions, to hire a woman to direct a main stage production of a play by a nearly forgotten, seventeenth-century, woman playwright was a bold, uncommon, and feminist-minded decision. In the next two chapters, I will consider the implications of Falls's and Wright's decisions in light of the Goodman's and the Guthrie's histories of programming women playwrights and hiring women directors. I will compare how directors Kyle Donnelly and Joanne Akalaitis perceived Aphra Behn and the opportunity to direct *The Rover*. I will also juxtapose the two directors' staging approaches, along with extra-theatrical texts, such as programs, director's notes, and (p)reviews, in order to construct a production history that considers how these revivals reflect different trends in stage direction and feminist issues in American theatre and society in the 1980s and 1990s.

## Chapter Four:

### **Working Women: Kyle Donnelly's "Period" Proscenium *Rover* at the Goodman (1989) in the Context of 1980s Feminism and the Plight of the Professional Woman Director**

From February 24, 1989 - April 1, 1989 *The Rover* enjoyed a five-week run at Goodman Theatre in Chicago, IL. Surprisingly, no scholarship exists on this major production that marked the play's first major professional revival under a woman's direction. A likely reason for the oversight lies in the scant information listed about it in Mary Ann O'Donnell's trusted *Annotated Bibliography*. O'Donnell's invaluable work, which was first published in 1986 and then reissued in an updated version in 2004, is the only scholarly source to take on the daunting task of documenting Behn's extensive, contemporary production history. The entry on the Goodman revival consists solely of the year (1989), the city (Chicago), and a bibliographic citation for a single review by Richard Christiansen in the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>226</sup> This is unusual given that most entries in O'Donnell's Appendix on contemporary stagings identify each production by date, company/venue, city, and director. Of course, O'Donnell began her project before the internet revolutionized research, making reviews and other production clues far easier to track down. Had O'Donnell's entry contained the Goodman name alone, it would likely have attracted scholars to investigate the production by now. This chapter will restore the production to its rightful place in Behn's contemporary production history.

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<sup>226</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "17th Century *Rover* Wanders with a View That's Fresh in 1989." *Chicago Tribune*. 8 March 1989. A18.



## Getting to the Goodman: Behn's American Tour, 1979-1989

By 1989, it had been ten years since *The Rover* first debuted on an American stage, breaking a two-hundred year streak of neglect. Professional U.S. revivals prior to the Goodman included a semi-professional 1979 staging at the University of Illinois' Circle Theater in Chicago<sup>227</sup> and a professional remount of this production at Folger Theatre Group in Washington, D.C., from December 1981-January 1982, both directed by Michael Diamond; a fall 1979 Off-Off-Broadway New York debut by Meat and Potatoes Company directed by Neal Weaver; an 1982 Off-Off-Broadway production presented by A Women's Project at New York Theatre Ensemble directed by Leslie (Hoban) Blake (b. 1939);<sup>228</sup> a July 1987 revival at Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts directed by John Rubinstein; and a 1988 staging at Phoenix Theatre Company in Dobbs Ferry, NY, directed by Stefan Rudnicki. Thus, male-directed, east coast revivals dominated the first decade of the play's contemporary rejuvenation in America. *The Rover*'s arrival on the main stage of the Goodman Theatre marked a move in a new direction in more ways than one.

A giant in the American theatre landscape and Chicago's oldest and largest not-for-profit theatre, the Goodman was established in 1922 and officially opened its doors in 1925 with the vision of providing excellence in professional training and performance standards. By 1989, it had long ago cemented its reputation as one of the premier theatres in the country.<sup>229</sup> *The*

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<sup>227</sup> Not to be mistaken with Circle Theatre with an 're' ending, which was founded in Chicago in 1985 and is still in operation.

<sup>228</sup> Blake is a career-long theatre artist and arts journalist. Blake's 1982 revival was ostensibly the first contemporary revival of a Behn play directed by a professional female director, followed by Jules Wright's revival of *The Lucky Chance* in 1984 and Carol MacVey's Princeton University *Rover* in 1985.

<sup>229</sup> The Goodman's more recent accolades include being named "Best Regional Theatre in the U.S." in 2003 by *Time Magazine* and receiving a Special Tony Award for Outstanding Regional

*Rover*'s revival at the Goodman marked a milestone in the play's contemporary production history. The Goodman's stature and budget rivaled that of the other U.S. theatres that had recently revived the play. Current Goodman producer, Steve Scott, estimates that the production cost approximately \$250,000, which is a substantial budget by even today's standards. This represented a considerable investment in a work by an unknown female playwright. The Goodman was also Behn's largest contemporary venue to date. It could accommodate 683 patrons,<sup>230</sup> whereas, Williamstown Theatre Festival seated 521; the Mermaid, 600; and The Swan, 426. At the Goodman, Behn's play had the potential to reach a wider modern audience each night than it ever had before in the twentieth century.

### **A Step in a More Equitable Direction: Women Directors at the Goodman**

In 1989 Robert Falls (b.1954) was only three years into his tenure as the Goodman's artistic director, a post he assumed in 1985 and continues to hold to this day. His immediate predecessors William Goodman (1973-1978) and Gregory Mosher (1978-1985) had demonstrated little willingness to hire women directors. Falls's decision to include *The Rover* in the Goodman's 1988-1989 season and to hire a woman to direct it was exceptional and commendable; that season Behn's play was the only production written by a woman, and Kyle Donnelly was the sole woman hired to direct. As Fliotsos and Vierow note, "getting work is especially difficult for freelance women directors. Because white men still occupy most of the positions of power, they maintain financial control and make many of the decisions about hiring

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Theatre in 1992. For a complete inventory of the Goodman's extensive award history visit the Awards page on the organization's website at <https://www.goodmantheatre.org/90/index.php/goodman-theatre-awards/>.

<sup>230</sup> Until 2000, the Goodman was located at the Art Institute of Chicago, which is where *The Rover* was performed. In December 2000 the Goodman opened its doors in a newly constructed theater on Dearborn Street in Chicago's North Loop Theatre District.

and firing” (Flotos and Vierow 18).<sup>231</sup> Some consideration of the Goodman’s hiring and programming practices prior to and following Donnelly’s revival of *The Rover* will illustrate the significance of Falls’s choice.

Earlier in the Goodman’s history, women theatre artists in general were more prevalent than one might expect. Part of the “Little Theatre Movement” in the U.S., the Goodman had a significant impact on the profession in the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>232</sup> Under the leadership of its first artistic director, Thomas Wood Stevens (1880-1942), the Goodman sparked “a wonderful flowering” that spread beyond Chicago (Doule 303).<sup>233</sup> In the organization’s inaugural season 1925-1926, Helen Forest and Ruth Goodkind designed costumes, Muriel Brown ran the Children’s Theatre division, for which she produced, wrote, and directed, and Alexandra Carlisle Jenkins directed a main-stage repertory production.<sup>234</sup> In the years and decades that followed, the Goodman continued to train and provide opportunities to women artists, even if over time these opportunities arose more often in the studio or the children’s theatre. Mary Elizabeth Aurelius, Charlotte Chorpenning (1873-1955), Bella Itkin (1920-2011), and Eunice Osborne directed for the main stage fairly regularly during the 1930s and 1940s. Starting at mid-century, however, main stage directing opportunities for women sharply declined. The only exception

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<sup>231</sup> Flotos, Anne and Wendy Vierow, eds. *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2008.

<sup>232</sup> European in origins, this movement began in the late-nineteenth century with experimental theatre artists such as Andre Antoine in Paris. The movement was characterized by a desire to reform theatre in the face of the growing popularity and competition of film. For more on the subject, see, for example, Chansky, Dorothy. *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*.

<sup>233</sup> Doyle laments the Goodman’s early golden age dying with Thomas Wood Stevens. Doyle, Margy Agnes. “Recollections and Impressions of T.W.” *Educational Theatre Journal*. 3:4 (December 1951): 303.

<sup>234</sup> For insight in Muriel Brown and the origins of the children’s theatre movement in the U.S. see *Spotlight on the Child: Studies in the History of American Children’s Theatre*. Ed. Roger L. Bedard and C. John Tolch.

was Bella Itkin, who steadily directed for the Goodman's main stage throughout the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1970s, even Itkin was relegated to directing productions in the studio theatre and the recently added second stage, which is where Emily Mann, Betsy Carpenter, and Sandra Grand each had their start at the Goodman later in the decade.

The 1980-1981 Season at the Goodman registered a glimmer of hope for women directors. That season artistic director Gregory Mosher (b. 1949) hired Emily Mann to direct *Dwarfman Master of a Million Shapes* by Michael Weller.<sup>235</sup> Mann was the first woman in more than a decade to direct a Goodman main stage production.<sup>236</sup> It was a start. Between then and 1989, Sandra Grand directed two main stage productions of *A Christmas Carol*.<sup>237</sup> Thus, in the decade leading up to Donnelly's staging of *The Rover*, only three main stage productions at the Goodman had women directors at the helm, and two of these were the annual Dickens adaptation in December. This was discouraging to say the least. As further evidence of the bleak situation, only 7% of main stage and second stage Goodman productions between 1977 and 1989 were woman-directed. Sandra Grand and Emily Mann each directed three shows, and Betsy Carpenter and Kyle Donnelly each directed one.<sup>238</sup> Interestingly, in the 1989-1990 season, the season just following Donnelly's staging of *The Rover*, Joanne Akalaitis directed John Ford's Jacobean tragedy, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*; Akalaitis, like Donnelly before her, was the only woman to

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<sup>235</sup> Mann was a formidable force among American women directors in the late 1970s. Prior to breaking ground on the Goodman stage, she had already enjoyed her main-stage directing debut at the Guthrie the previous year in 1979.

<sup>236</sup> Brenda Forbes directed one production in the 1960s, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* by Rudolf Besier during the 1964-65 season.

This information can be obtained by scrolling through the Goodman's digital archives online. Information is broken down by season and stage: subscribers/Repertory (main stage), Children's, studio. <https://www.chipublib.org/fa-goodman-theatre-archive-production-history-files-1/>

<sup>237</sup> She directed *Carol* during the 1985-1986 season and the 1986-1987 season.

<sup>238</sup> Statistics provided via email by Elizabeth Elliott, publicity coordinator for the Goodman. Only four of these eight productions were main stage shows.

direct one of the Goodman's six main stage shows that season. Both Donnelly and Akalaitis were also unique among contemporary women directors at the Goodman in being hired to direct for the main stage without ever having first directed on one of the Goodman's other stages. Throughout the country to this day, women are hired to direct second stage productions more often than main stage productions. Susan Jonas and Suzanne Bennett note: "Women are plentiful when resources are scant . . . and frequently relegated to readings, workshops, the 'second' stage, and children's theatre" (Jonas and Bennet).<sup>239</sup>

The 1990s demonstrated further, albeit slight, improvement in opportunities for women directors at the Goodman. In 1993 Donnelly returned once more to direct Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, another play about female relationships, and in the 1998-1999 season, Regina Taylor and Susan V. Booth co-directed Taylor's play *Oo-Bla-Dee*. Mary Zimmerman directed a studio production in the 1993-1994 season followed by her Goodman main stage debut the next season with *Journey to the West*. She went on to direct two more main stage shows that decade, including *All's Well That Ends Well* in the 1995-1996 season and Homer's *Odyssey* in the 1999-2000 season. By then Zimmerman had earned a permanent place on Robert Falls's creative team, where she remains to this day and now serves as Manilow Resident Director. Zimmerman, Mann, Donnelly, and Akalaitis all demonstrate that when provided opportunities, women directors have excelled in the profession. However, to this day, obtaining that initial chance has proven very difficult, which reinforces the continued value of highlighting 'firsts' and other milestones by women in recent and past theatre history. While the total percentage of women directors employed at the Goodman increased to 15% in the 1990s, women still remained

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<sup>239</sup> Jonas, Susan and Suzanne Bennett. "Report on the Status of Women: A Limited Engagement?" *Women Count NYSCA Report*. January 2002.

severely underrepresented. It was not until the 2000's that the number of women directors improved to a more respectable 29%; since 2010, that percentage has improved to an encouraging 33%.<sup>240</sup> However, numbers can vary significantly from year to year; for example, women playwrights and directors had only a 20% representation rate in the Goodman's 2016-2017 season.<sup>241</sup>

### **Behn, Donnelly, and Feminist Issues in Theater in the 1980s**

Equally as bold and important as Falls's decision to produce Behn's play and have a woman direct it was his decision to hire an early-career woman director. In 1989, Donnelly was just 33 and had been directing professionally for less than a decade. After earning a MFA in Directing in 1980, she opened her own professional acting school, the Actors' Center, in 1983.<sup>242</sup> Over the course of the next several years, she began freelance directing at some of Chicago's newer "off-Loop" theatres, a classification that refers to the host of Off-Broadway-equivalent companies that were emerging in Chicago in the 1970s. Gradually, Donnelly obtained steady work with Northlight Theatre, run by Michael Maggio; the Court Theatre,<sup>243</sup> led by Nicholas

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<sup>240</sup> This percentage holds true thru 2015-2016 season. Statistics provided in email correspondence by Elizabeth Elliott, Publicity Coordinator, Goodman Theatre. March 25, 2014. Information on gender of playwrights and directors can be extracted from season archives available online at <https://www.chipublib.org/fa-goodman-theatre-archive-production-history-files-1/>

<sup>241</sup> The Goodman's 2016-2017 season included 10 productions, of which two were written by a woman, one was adapted by a woman from Ibsen, and two were directed by women. This means that women playwrights and directors had a 20% representation rate that season. *Gloria* by Brande Jacobs-Jenkins; dir Evan Cabnet; *Objects in the Mirror* by Charles Smith; dir by Chuck Smith; *Ah, Wilderness* by Eugene O'Neill; dir by Steve Scott; *Pamplona* by Jim McGrath; dir by Robert Falls; *Christmas Carol* adapted by Tom Creamer; dir by Henry Wishcamper.

<sup>242</sup> Donnelly holds an MFA in Directing from Indiana University (1980). She is currently a faculty member in the Department of Theatre at UC San Diego and is now in her third decade as a professional director. Donnelly has successfully forged a career that encompasses both academia and professional theatre.

<sup>243</sup> <https://www.courttheatre.org/about/>

Rudall; and Bailiwick Repertory Theater. Founded respectively in 1974, 1975, and 1982, these three theatres were still young and gaining footing when Donnelly was directing for them in the 1980s, and history has shown that newer and smaller scale organizations are more likely to provide opportunities to women and other minorities.<sup>244</sup>

What did Donnelly accomplish at these off-Loop theatres that might have made her a desirable job candidate for a theatre of the Goodman's stature? According to *Chicago Tribune* writer Lawrence Bommer, she had demonstrated that she was "particularly skilled in the staging of scripts about strong women" (Bommer). In the years leading up to her Goodman debut, Donnelly directed three noteworthy, female-centered plays. In 1985 at Bailiwick Repertory, she directed Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*, a Northern Irish drama about the effects of the 1981 Hunger Strike on three sisters in Belfast. Next, in 1986 at Northlight Theatre, Donnelly directed *Quilters*, Molly Newman and Barbara Damashek's history play about the daily joys and challenges faced by a pioneer woman and her six daughters. Then, in January 1989, just prior to *The Rover*, she helmed a Court Theatre revival of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, a comedy about a Cockney-accented, flower girl, Eliza Doolittle who undergoes a fairytale-style transformation under the guidance of two male professors. By evincing these particular directing credits, Bommer implies that women directors are best suited for staging plays by or about women, a point of view that is both essentialist and marginalizing; nonetheless, studies have shown that "gender stereotyping . . . seems to play a role in plays women are hired to direct" (Fliostos and Vierow 17). By comparison, in her *Rover* advance story, Glenna Syse also highlighted Donnelly's recent directing credits, but she listed several works by men that

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<sup>244</sup> Court Theatre and Northlight Theatre are still in operation now, some thirty years later. Bailiwick Repertory Theatre closed in 2009, and several former members founded a new incarnation called Bailiwick Chicago.



Donnelly had directed. Bommer's intentionally gender-specific frame of reference for surmising how Donnelly came to direct *The Rover* can be viewed as evidence of the unconscious gender biases of journalists. Surprisingly, none of these writers mentions that Donnelly had already earned two Jeff citations for direction and the Alan Schneider Director Award.<sup>245</sup> While she was an early career director, she had already enjoyed some noteworthy accolades.

In a preview article on *Pygmalion*, the play Donnelly staged just prior to *The Rover*, Sid Smith discusses Donnelly's evolving directing practice in the context of gender. The title of Smith's article warrants full reference here: "Stage of Development: Director Kyle Donnelly decides it's time to try a little tenderness" (Smith).<sup>246</sup> In the article, Donnelly admits to believing when she first started directing that she "needed to be as tough as possible" in order to accomplish her objectives as a woman director. This mindset earned her a "no pain, no gain" image.<sup>247</sup> She continues, "I don't like to be considered tough. I think when a woman's thought to be tough, it's different than when a man is." Donnelly's remark evokes the sexual double

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<sup>245</sup> She had earned a Jeff citation for her direction of Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* (1985) and for Devlin's *Ourselves Alone* (1988). Since its establishment in 1968, The Jeff Awards has honored outstanding theatre artists annually. The first annual Jeff Awards ceremony was held in the Guildhall of the Ambassador West Hotel on October 6, 1969. The Joseph Jefferson Awards Committee evolved in response to a search by Chicago actors for a way to honor local theatre talent. <http://www.jeffawards.org/about/indexn.cfm>

The Alan Schneider Director Award was established in honor of Alan Schneider's significant contribution to the American theatre and his lifelong concern for the development of career opportunities for freelance directors. The award is designed to identify and assist exceptional directors whose talent has been demonstrated through work in specific regions, but who may not be well-known nationally. The selection process begins with nominations from artistic and managing leaders of Theatre Communications Group member theatres. Individuals may not apply directly. <http://www.tcg.org/Default.aspx?TabID=1728>

<sup>246</sup> Smith, Sid. "Stage of Development: Director Kyle Donnelly decides it's time to try a little tenderness." *Chicago Tribune*. (8 January 1989): J16. Proquest.

<sup>247</sup> In his Jeff Award acceptance speech, Kyle Borski, one of Donnelly's cast members in *Three Penny Opera*, thanked her for teaching him the meaning of 'no pain, no gain.' Borski and Donnelly had worked together previously and had good repore, but she feared others would misconstrue his comment. See Smith Sid's article for a full account of the incident.



standard that views toughness in a man as confidence and toughness in a woman as bitchiness. With experience, Donnelly claims that she learned to navigate the gender dynamics of her role as director: “I have changed, I don’t ram things through as much . . . Theatre is a collaborative art, and finding the balance between insistence and guidance is what I’ve been looking for” (Smith). Stage direction inherently entails balancing leadership and collaboration skills. Donnelly’s comment speaks to the tendency to associate these traits with gender. In order to compensate for her own gender, Donnelly had attempted to mimic a masculine model of leadership. Feminist stage direction advocates decentering authority to better embrace the collaborative nature of theatre. Often, as is the case with Donnelly, artists employ feminist directing tenets without even realizing it.

The authors of three separate advance stories on the Goodman’s *Rover* shared the perception that there was a feminist synergy and momentous significance to the occasion of a woman directing a play by the first professional female playwright. This was the 1980s, the decade that saw women shattering the proverbial “glass ceiling” in male-dominated professions and standing shoulder pad to shoulder with men as Melanie Griffith does in the 1988 Academy Award nominated film *Working Girl*. In addition to noting Behn’s historic professional status, all three journalists acknowledged that the production marked Donnelly’s Goodman debut (Bommer, Carroll, Syse). Donnelly had broken the “glass curtain.” Syse, in particular, gave the subject of women directors special emphasis, noting: “A woman in the director’s chair has been rare on the Goodman main stage . . . Donnelly’s assignment there indicates there is an increasing pressure to eliminate the gender gap.” This also marked *The Rover*’s first, major professional revival under a woman’s direction, so this was, indeed, a case of many firsts

converging. Syse quoted Donnelly on the persistence of gender inequity in society in general and at the Goodman:

The equation between men and women is being balanced a little bit better today, but things are not all that different. Nothing much is new. Men still have the balance of power. It wouldn't have taken this long for Goodman to hire women directors if that were not true (Syse).

Syse crafted her article around the idea of a rapport between director and playwright, as her title indicates, “‘Rover’ director takes cue from 1600s playwright.”<sup>248</sup> In a meta-theatrical sense, Behn directs women in contemporary theatre from her position of historic precedent. The “cue” that Donnelly took from Behn, in Syse’s estimation, was figuring out how to become a successful theatre professional as a woman. To demonstrate this, Syse provided an extensive biography of Donnelly, documenting for readers the moment in the director’s childhood that sparked her interest in theatre, her relevant education, and her penurious days as a waitress trying tenaciously to launch a career in the discipline. Syse depicted Donnelly as “a no-nonsense lady with a work ethic” and made sure to include mention of the director’s involvement with a women’s motorcycle club. Thus, Donnelly, while not a spy like Behn, was a rebel in her own right. Syse also broached the subject of feminism with Donnelly, who noted,

I’m not particularly active in the feminist movement . . . I sort of believe in living it myself. I don’t take it on as a cause. To do what Behn did and the way she did it in that period of history is pretty amazing (Syse).

Donnelly’s remarks imply that Behn was a feminist. Donnelly herself, however, was “living” the feminist cause as a working, woman director, but her work itself did not set out to achieve feminist political ends. Donnelly makes an important distinction here with regard to embodying

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<sup>248</sup> Syse, Glenna. “‘Rover’ director takes cue from 1600s playwright.” *Chicago Sun-Times*. (March 5, 1989), pg12.

feminism in life and depicting feminism on stage. Donnelly tempers her view of Behn's feminism, warning that Behn's female characters:

are not the kind of women today's feminists admire . . . But we have to keep in mind the century in which Behn was writing. She felt a pressure to wrap it all up with a happy ending . . . But it is a mistake to come to this play expecting a feminist polemic (Syse).

For Donnelly, Behn's conventional conclusion prevents the play from making a subversive feminist statement. Donnelly's "period" approach and direction of acting style affirmed this viewpoint. On the subject of women and work, in her preview article "Goodman to Stage Early Feminist Play," Margaret Carroll identified Behn as a potential role model for the "the 80's woman striving for professional and personal parity" (Carroll). Echoing Carroll, Donnelly found a parallel between the obstacles that Behn faced and those that women confronted in the 1970s and 1980s: "It's extraordinary that a woman three centuries ago voiced concerns that have re-emerged in the last two decades . . . Her point of view on equal sexual rights and women's rights was coherent and articulate" (Carroll). After the feminist historiographical recovery of Behn, scholars began routinely to insist on the importance of contextualizing our understanding of her and her writing within their late seventeenth-century origins. However, contemporary production history of *The Rover* has demonstrated a recurring tendency among revival artists, audiences, and reviewers to view Behn as a feminist professional role model, even when they acknowledge that the play's sexual politics and traditional ending don't translate perfectly through the centuries.

Journalists presented the exceptionality of Donnelly's professional victory as tantamount to Behn's, and aptly so, for it represented an encouraging departure from sexist hiring practices and promised lasting career benefits for Donnelly. Directing *The Rover* at the Goodman was a

turning point in Donnelly's career, and afterwards more professional opportunities became available to her:

Working at the Goodman was a great step up for me at that time, to take on such a big show was exciting. After [*The Rover*], I really began to work in theatres outside of Chicago, including Huntington Theatre in Boston and Arena Stage in Washington DC.<sup>249</sup>

Within five years of directing *The Rover* at the Goodman, Donnelly had found a new home in Washington, D.C., as producing associate director at Arena Stage, the famed theater co-founded by Zelda Fichlander in 1950.<sup>250</sup> A *Washington Times* article that announced this career move hailed her as a “hotshot Chicago director,” who had become “a genuine power player on the local, and even the national, theater scene” (Pressley D1).<sup>251</sup> Pressley broached the topic of women directors to which Donnelly replied, “I don’t think it’s a big deal anymore to be a woman director. I just don’t think that’s an issue.” Pressley noted parenthetically that outside of shows directed by Zelda Fichlander, women had directed less than 5% of the 300 shows presented at Arena Stage. Moreover, at the time, women playwrights and directors Off-Broadway and in regional theatre had a representation rate of less than 20%. While Donnelly’s response could be interpreted as the complacent view of someone who had beaten the odds, one of her later comments in the same article indicated her awareness of the persisting gender problem in the profession. Pressley noted a recent *American Theatre* article on the increase in women artistic directors; Donnelly counter-referenced a *Miami Herald* article about four artistic directors who

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<sup>249</sup> Email interview, Oct. 29, 2013.

<sup>250</sup> Fichlander (1924-2016) served as founding artistic director of Arena Stage from 1950-1990. In 1976, the American Theatre Wing along with the Broadway League bestowed Arena Stage with the first-ever Regional Theatre Tony Award for outstanding achievement.

<sup>251</sup> Pressley, Nelson. “Donnelly Soars with ‘Misalliance’ - A Peripatetic Director Finds a Home Base and Additional Responsibilities at Arena Stage.” *Washington Times*. (13 November 1994): D1.

were allegedly fired over disputes about commercial needs versus creative risks.<sup>252</sup> Donnelly noted that the article failed to mention that the four terminated directors were all women: “Women are getting the jobs . . . They’re also being fired a lot quicker than the men. I don’t know what it means. I only know it’s a glaring fact.” One of these four women was Joanne Akalaitis, who was asked to resign from The Public after a 22-month tenure at the theatre’s helm. Consistent, lasting change in the equitable hiring and retaining of women in lead positions in American theatre remains an issue to this day.

### **Following Barton’s Direction: The Goodman Script**

The performance script for the Goodman revival was based heavily on John Barton’s Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) promptbooks. Based on what’s available at the Goodman’s archives at the Chicago Public Library, Donnelly and dramaturg Tom Creamer had at their disposal an unmarked copy of the Swan promptbook (1986) and a copy of the Mermaid promptbook with complete blocking (1987). They also consulted Behn’s original, but the archive gives no indication which edition this was, and Donnelly does not recall either. Their use of Barton’s adaptation, instead of solely Behn’s original, while disappointing from a feminist perspective, attests to the authority then ascribed to a text with the RSC name on it. After all, Barton’s two stagings garnered a staggering thirty-seven reviews, making his the most discussed revivals of the twentieth century.

The scholar’s role of discerning a director’s imprint on a play in performance becomes uniquely challenging when the production at hand worked primarily from an adapted script. In the case of the Goodman’s *Rover*, this is compounded by the fact that Donnelly made additional

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<sup>252</sup> The *American Theatre* article to which Pressley refers is “Women at the Helm” by Misha Berson from the May-June 1994 issue.

“major cuts” to Barton’s text, making her revival in a sense an adaptation of an adaptation. It is helpful here to recall the foundation for the Goodman revival by virtue of using Barton’s RSC texts: Barton omitted 550 lines from Behn’s play and added 350 new lines of his own creation. He relocated the setting to a slave occupied colony in the Spanish West Indies, instead of Behn’s Naples, Italy. The new context led to the addition of references to race, the incorporation of an extensive slavery theme, and the cross-racialization of Belvile, Callis, Moretta, and Lucetta, the last of whom was significantly altered and expanded. Barton changed Valeria’s familial status from cousin to sister, introducing her earlier and increasing her presence in the play. In terms of the play’s ending, Barton introduced the end of carnival and the start of Lent and redistributed Willmore’s final lines to Florinda and Belvile.

Donnelly’s additional edits to Barton’s text consisted of internal line cuts to make the play more concise for a contemporary American audience: “it was just too talky,” she asserts (email interview). Rehearsal reports five days prior to the first preview indicate that the Goodman production was running two hours and fifty-one minutes and that Donnelly distributed new cuts to the cast and crew. Her sentiments, therefore, also imply a desire to reduce the play’s running time, a fairly common goal of directors reviving early modern plays. Beyond these pragmatic deletions, the most noteworthy textual adjustments that Donnelly made involve how she handled asides, which will be addressed later. Ultimately, the final Goodman performance script remained largely Barton’s, and Donnelly followed his lead on several staging choices. At the same time, Donnelly made some edits and staging decisions that resulted in a production with

its own distinct style and tone. What follows will explore the Goodman production along these two lines of carryovers and departures.<sup>253</sup>

### **Donnelly as “Actor’s Director”**

Those who have worked with Donnelly characterize her as an “actor’s director.”<sup>254</sup> Given Donnelly’s background founding and running an acting school, this seems fitting. This directorial classification can imply a faithfulness to the playwright’s words and intentions and by extension a less conceptual or modernized approach. Donnelly has also been described as “a rangy director,” a reference to the wide variety of plays she has staged and styles she has employed. As a testament to Donnelly’s versatility, Michael Kilian claimed that after three years in Washington, D.C., “people know what to expect of [Donnelly]: anything.”<sup>255</sup> While Donnelly’s directing history has contained some bolder re-imaginings of canonical texts, such as her transposition of Moliere’s *School for Wives* to the 1968-Nixon era and *The Miser* to the money-hungry 1980s-Michael Milken era, Donnelly is not associated with a distinct staging

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<sup>253</sup> My analysis is based on my joint consultation of the Goodman script and viewing of a recording of a performance at the Goodman Archives at the Chicago Public Library on Friday, August 11, 2017.

<sup>254</sup> The description “actor’s director” is often used in contrast to “designer’s director.” Douglas Wager, the artistic director of Arena Stage who hired Donnelly, described Donnelly as “an actor-centric director.” See Nelson Presley article.

<sup>255</sup> Kilian, Michael. “It’s Not Chicago: Director Kyle Donnelly Has Conquered D.C.” *Chicago Tribune*. 22 October 1995. [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-10-22/news/9510220082\\_1\\_arena-stage-chicago-audiences](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-10-22/news/9510220082_1_arena-stage-chicago-audiences)

aesthetic.<sup>256</sup> In this regard, Donnelly differs from the other women directors of her generation who appear in this study; both Joanne Akalaitis and Karin Coonrod are noted for their unique use of movement and visual imagery.

### **Donnelly's High Carnival "Period" Aesthetic**

Donnelly's production, like Barton's and Rubinstein's before her, was traditional and seventeenth-century period-inspired in all of its design elements. The production's proscenium-style staging underscored its conventionality. While in this regard, the staging format mirrored Restoration theatre practice, it lacked an apron stage; the absence of this element significantly affected how *The Rover* played in this environment. Donnelly classifies the production's aesthetic as " 'High Carnival' . . . an atmosphere in which anything could happen, colorful and playful . . . largely a wild, carnivalesque spectacle" (email interview) [Figure 3]. In fact, her most lasting impression is of "the wildness of the actors—rapelling in, jumping across chasms, death defying feats." This resonates with Thomas Delapa's assessment of the production as "rambunctious, a visual delight." Hedy Weiss praised Donnelly's staging as "precision-paced" and "neatly directed" (Weiss 33). Delapa forgave Donnelly for not taking "great risks in her interpretation" on the grounds that "Behn had risked much to begin with." Both critics' opinions are valid; while Donnelly's staging was vibrant and spectacular, it was also conservative and controlled. On the play as sexual polemic, Delapa added that *The Rover* "is not a feminist tract." Weiss echoed him: "it is so even-handed in its appraisal of human nature that no one could call it a feminist work, though it is certainly quite contemporary (or perhaps just timeless) in its attitudes." While the proto-feminism of Behn's play will remain eternally debatable, these

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<sup>256</sup> Michael Milken (b.1946) is an American financier who was convicted of felony for violating U.S. securities law. Donnelly's production of *The Miser* played at Arena Stage October/November 1996.



reviewers' comments again speak to Donnelly's staging approach. As a combined result of the Goodman's illusionistic proscenium configuration, the production's traditional, time-honoring design elements, and Donnelly's choice of a more distinctly twentieth-century, naturalistic acting style, as opposed to the incorporation of heightened stylization and meta-theatrical Restoration performance techniques that break the third wall, Donnelly eschewed the kinds of directorial choices that can imbue a revival with a stronger vein of feminist subversion.

A highly trained and talented creative staff (all men with the exception of the lighting designer) assisted Donnelly with design for this production: Tony Award-winner John Lee Beatty<sup>257</sup> (Set Designer), Lindsay W. Davis (Costume Designer), Judy Rasmusson (Lighting Designer), Rob Milburn (Co-composer/Sound Designer), Larry Schanker (Co-composer), and Michael Sokoloff (Combat and Masque Choreographer). In keeping with Barton's relocation of the play to the West Indies, the archival documents of dramaturg Tom Creamer point to research on West Indian architecture, culture, and music. Donnelly and her team selected Trinidad as their production's specific geographic inspiration.

### **Set Design**

Critic Thomas Delapa described John Lee Beatty's design as "a sunny fairy tale set."<sup>258</sup> Beatty's rustic, wood-paneled design resembled research images on file of buildings in Roseau Dominica and Cartagena Dominica [See Figure 4]. Beatty's set, while appropriate and effective, also generally resembled the wooden, multi-level structures of the RSC and Williamstown productions [See Figure 5]. Beatty's set utilized sliding panels reminiscent of Restoration "wing

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<sup>257</sup> John Lee Beatty won a Tony Award for Best Scenic Design of a Play for *Talley's Folley* in 1980; he won another Tony in 2013 for his design of *The Nance*. He has received a total of 15 Tony nominations over the course of his career.

<sup>258</sup> Delapa, Thomas. "Lusty, Boisterous Fun Brings 'Rover' to Fore." *Skyline*. 9 March 1989.

and shutter” stagecraft that opened to reveal new locations. The production had four scenic locales: the sisters’ interior space, represented by a drop depicting interior paneling; the Trinidad streetscape; and Angellica Bianca’s and Blunt’s inner dwellings. After the opening scene between the sisters, the panels parted to expose Behn’s 1.2 “long street” where carnival unfolds and Angellica Bianca resides. A two-tier structure located at upstage center served as Angellica Bianca’s apartment. As the production’s major, centrifugal set piece, this fixture operated on a rotating track system with one side depicting the exterior (with lower entrance and upper balcony) of the courtesan’s abode and the other side, her interior chamber. A pair of trellises that flanked the ends of the exterior side of this structure functioned like ladders, which Jack Wetheral as Willmore made playful use of throughout the production. At scene seventeen (Behn’s 4.5), the building structure receded and was replaced by a painted drop of a map for the duration of the performance [See Figure 6]. The giant map simultaneously suggested the play’s theme of roving the world, colonial occupation, and Blunt’s alienation. A stray dog and a lost soul, Blunt would not know his way through life even with a massive map to guide him.

### **Casting and Costume Design**

Donnelly utilized a sizable cast of 28. She kept all minor roles, including Biskey, Diego (Page to Don Antonio), Filippo, Sancho, Sebastian, and Stephano. Nine additional actors comprised the group of “Masquers.”<sup>259</sup> While the relocation of the play to Trinidad did influence casting and dialect, Donnelly did not entirely echo Barton. One third (9 out of 28) of Donnelly’s cast was non-white. She cast black actresses in the supporting roles of Lucetta and Callis; however, Donnelly did not, as Barton had, cast a black actor as Belvile. According to Donnelly,

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<sup>259</sup> The masquers consisted of an evenly diverse mix of black and white and male and female performers—there were four men and five women; five of the nine masquers were non-white.

she paid little attention to race as an “issue” in her production: “this was the 1980s when we all wanted to believe that we could be color blind” (email interview).<sup>260</sup> To this day, age-, color- and gender-blind casting have continued to be subjects of heated debate in contemporary theatre.<sup>261</sup>

Donnelly’s revival was not only a spectacular “swashbuckler,” but also a bonafide period-costume drama.<sup>262</sup> Reviewer Hedy Weiss deemed costume designer Lindsay C. Davis “the real star of the design team” (Weiss 33). According to Weiss, Davis’s “splendiferous costumes” were “a riot of color and detail” (Weiss 33). While Davis based his design on seventeenth-century, British silhouettes, he also occasionally incorporated Trinidadian flourishes in the way of fabrics and objects common to the islands, such as shells and bits of shredded reeds. Richard Christiansen remarked that Davis’s costumes showed off “snowy white bosoms for women and bronzed bare chests for men,” which suggests that the cast shared a generally lusty look. In actuality, the men were the most scantily clad throughout the production; the male bodies on display evoked the ubiquitous 1980s images of the often shirtless model, Fabio. Don Antonio’s devil masquerade costume was the most amusing example of this [See Figure 7]. The sisters’ costumes were all much more modest in keeping with seventeenth-century fashion and

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<sup>260</sup> Barton’s cross-racial casting of Belvile imposed a layer of meaning onto Behn’s play that the play doesn’t support well, even with the addition of dialogue, so it is to Donnelly’s credit that she omitted that aspect of Barton’s adaptation.

<sup>261</sup> Brooklyn’s Queen’s Company, which staged a revival of *The Rover* in 2001 that is the subject of chapter five of this study, has employed gender-blind casting exclusively for the past two decades.

<sup>262</sup> Many reviews of productions prior to 1990 describe the play as a “swashbuckler,” which speaks to a tradition of staging the play in its period with an emphasis on physical antics and sword spectacle. While John Barton’s 1986/1987 RSC productions figure into this common contemporary characterization of the play, reviews of U.S. productions by Michael Diamond (1979, 1981), John Rubinstein (1987), and Kyle Donnelly (1989) indicate that they evoked a similar feel.

social decorum. Hellena's novice attire and Florinda's and Valeria's dresses in scene one established this conservative tone for the female characters [See Figure 8]. Their gypsy costumes, which resembled harem girls with long sleeves, pants, and full facial veils, concealed more than they revealed [See Figure 9]. The long trailing overdress of the gypsy costumes limited the action of Hellena, in particular. The sisters' nymph costumes, sleeveless, flowing full-length dresses, were the most risqué of their wardrobe pieces [See Figure 10]. At the end of Donnelly's production, Hellena changed back into the novice attire in which she began the play. This costume change derives from Barton's Swan production.<sup>263</sup> In Behn's original, Hellena ends the play in her male breeches disguise, which is arguably a more subversive sartorial statement than having her return to aspirational nun attire.

In a *Chicago Tribune* interview, Donnelly described the play as "The Three Musketeers Meet Their Female Match" (Carroll). Her casting, costuming, and blocking choices with regard to the major male characters demonstrated that this comment was not just for comic effect. In her staging, Willmore, Belvile, and Frederick looked and acted very much like a synchronized trio in the spirit of Alexandre Dumas' nineteenth-century novella set in approximately the same time period as Behn's play [See Figure 11]. While Jack Wetherall's Willmore was undoubtedly the 'lead' actor among his pack, his costumes and those of Belvile and Frederick were so similar that they reinforced the concept of libidinous male, group-think. Wetherall, a lean but muscular, 6-ft tall man with blonde hair and blue-eyes, was 39 when he portrayed Willmore at the

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<sup>263</sup> The stage directions for scene xxi of the Swan programme/text state that Hellena appears "in the habit of a novice, which she wore at first" (69). Interestingly, Barton changed Hellena's final costume in the Mermaid revival: "Enter Hellena, in the habit of a cabin boy" (66). By the time his production transferred to the Mermaid, Barton had restored Behn's stage direction regarding Hellena's final costuming.

Goodman.<sup>264</sup> This was his second time in the role, having played the part previously in the 1981 Folger Theatre Group revival directed by Michael Diamond. What Wetherall brought to the role physiognomically split the difference between the actors who had recently inhabited the role. With his heavily bronzed skin, shoulder-length hair extensions, and signature knee-high boots, Wetherall's Willmore resembled Jeremy Irons's Jack Sparrow-inspired Willmore, replete with scruffy beard and hoop earrings, in the 1986/7 RSC revivals. Yet Wetherall's clean-shaven face and ultra fit physique also connected him with the polished Willmore portrayed by a post-Superman Christopher Reeves at Williamstown Theatre Festival in 1987 [See Figure 12]. Handwritten notes in the Goodman's production archive suggest other popular cultural influences on Donnelly's depiction of masculinity, such as the 1984 blockbuster *Romancing the Stone*. The film's promotional poster featured Michael Douglas soaring through the air on a rope, the same method, incidentally, by which Wetherall as Willmore made his entrance in both the Folger Theatre (1981-1982) and Goodman productions.<sup>265</sup> Wetherall may have suggested to Donnelly that this entrance idea be repeated. To purloin Angellica Bianca's portrait, Wetherall shot the string from which it hung, releasing it to the ground; a stage direction introduced by Barton, this choice added to the wild West Indian spectacle of masculinity in Donnelly's staging.

As Hellena, Lisa Zane (b.1961), the older sister of actor Billy Zane (b.1966), was a petite (5'5"), dark-haired, spirited match to Jack Wetherall's blonde, athletic Willmore [See Figure

<sup>264</sup> While Wetherall has appeared in some film and television roles, most notably his recurring role as Vic Grassi on the series "Queer as Folk" from 2000-2004, he has worked primarily as a stage actor.

<sup>265</sup> In his *Washington Post* review, Mel Gussow notes Wetherall's dramatic first entrance descending on a rope.

13].<sup>266</sup> A testament to the enervating, marathon nature of the role, Zane “had to eat a steak before every performance. Some roles require strict vegetarianism, but Hellena required red meat to get through it” (email interview). Zane also recalls with amusement how the offstage cat-and-mouse interaction between her and Wetherall informed their performance onstage.

Jack and I started playing this mutual game with each other on the first rehearsal. We didn't introduce ourselves, not for several days; we just peeked and spied and peered and other wise rehearsed; only spoke to each other in our scenes, which made the initial chemistry very charged and mysterious and flirty. And it worked. We had great chemistry on stage (Email interview).

Rehearsal photos further illustrate the coy connection shared between Zane and Wetherall and how it informed characterization and blocking [See Figures 14-16]. At the time that she played Hellena, Zane was 28 and a decade younger than both Wetherall and Marianne Tatum, who played Angellica Bianca. Zane recalls “feeling like I had to work hard to rate as a woman against my glamorous, worldly, and fulsome rival, [Angellica], and the breeches didn't help” (email interview) [See Figure 17]. Zane’s recollection speaks to the contrasting dynamics of the two female characters in Behn’s play and also to how casting and design choices can further shape the differences between these roles in performance. Donnelly’s casting and direction of Marianne Tatum as Angellica Bianca, along with Lindsay Davis’s costume design for the character, exuded a virtue and elegance that sharply contrasted with the common view of a sexualized courtesan. Tatum played the dignified, experienced woman to Zane’s youthful girl. One critic described Tatum as a “Faye Dunaway-esque beauty”; to compare Tatum to the

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<sup>266</sup> Ellen Jane Smith portrayed Florinda. My search on Smith has revealed very little, indicating that she did not pursue an acting career of the same magnitude of some of the other members of the cast. Kate Goehring portrayed Valeria. Goehring has enjoyed a successful acting career in stage, film, and television, winning countless awards through the years.

celebrity model-turned-actress Dunaway was quite a compliment in 1989 (Weiss).<sup>267</sup> The two actresses also had distinct physical features: Tatum was taller with fair skin and strawberry blonde hair while Zane was slighter with dark brunette hair. For her first entrance, Tatum's Angellica appeared in an impressive, full-length, white lace gown with a matching wide-brimmed hat and a fan [See Figure 18]. While she presented the audience with an Angellica that looked pure and poised, Donnelly chose to introduce Angellica's gun much earlier than in Behn's original; in scene six of Donnelly's staging, Angellica pointed it at the men to invoke order at her line "Hold if you fight for me" (2.1.22). In act two, the color palette of Angellica's wardrobe changed from virginal white to scorned black [See Figure 19].

### **Asides in a Thrust-less Proscenium**

The tone of a contemporary revival of a Restoration comedy can hinge on how a director handles the prevalent aside. Through the joint consultation of the Goodman script and the video recording of a performance, one can discern that Donnelly preserved 62 of Behn's asides.<sup>268</sup> Barton had already omitted some of Behn's asides throughout the play. Donnelly made additional choices regarding how to play the asides that she kept from 2.2 (and elsewhere) that affected the tenor of her production. Without an apron stage, the Goodman's proscenium was not particularly conducive to the effective use of asides in Donnelly's production. A combination of Donnelly's direction and the greater distance between audience and performers muted the impact of the asides that she retained. While the proscenium, with its origins in seventeenth-century opera, originated as a staging configuration for a more pictorial style of

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<sup>267</sup> Weiss, Hedy. "'The Rover' Reaches Its Destination with Comedy and Color." *Chicago Sun-Times*. 7 March 1989, 33.

<sup>268</sup> In actual fact, she retained 67 of Behn's 89 explicit and implied asides. Five of the 67 Goodman asides, while in the script, were not played out as asides in the recorded performance.

performance, by the nineteenth century, with the rise of naturalism, the proscenium had become “a picture frame for realistic illusion” (Steel). Under Donnelly’s direction, the performances were generally naturalistic, not stylized. For asides in particular, this choice of acting style produced more sincere or melodramatic moments than comedic interactions with the audience because action was predominantly contained within the inner-play world of the proscenium area. While Donnelly retained Hellena’s 1.1 asides, Donnelly did not have Zane and other performers consistently deliver asides sharply to the audience.

As directed by Donnelly, Hedy Weiss found the interaction between Angellica Bianca and Willmore to be “loaded with genuine emotion.” Certainly, based upon what we know of Elizabeth Barry’s portrayal of Angellica in the early eighteenth-century, and the association of her and this role with she-tragedy, Weiss’s assessment seems appropriate, to an extent. The emotional tone that Weiss detected was a combined result of the proscenium configuration and Donnelly’s handling of asides and acting style. In thinking about how to approach 2.2 in a performance context with students, Anita Pacheco asserts:

Staging [this] scene allows students to think about where the action will take place, and the numerous asides spoken by Angellica and Willmore locate the scene mainly on the forestage, where the actors could directly address the audience and where the verbal sparring in which Willmore engages with both Angellica Bianca and Moretta could be most clearly and forcefully conveyed to the audience” (367).<sup>269</sup>

While the RSC Swan production used a thrust stage, the Goodman revival did not. In 2.2 (Goodman scene 6), Tatum as Angellica Bianca lay supine on a chaise located at mid-stage for an extended period of time, rising to a seated position on the line “How I despise this railing,” which notably *follows* two of her asides. This blocking worked against distinguishing the ‘outer

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<sup>269</sup> Pacheco, Anita. “Teaching Behn’s *The Rover*” in Nelson and Burroughs, ed. *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*. MLA: New York, 2010.



play' of asides from the 'inner play' between Angellica and Willmore. Perhaps, this effect resulted solely from direction, or, perhaps, Wetherall offered insight on his past experience in the Folger production and suggested a different approach. Critic Mel Gussow disparagingly remarked that under Michael Diamond's direction, "pauses are milked, poses are struck and innuendo is underlined," all of which are comedic choices that work in tandem with asides to achieve a lighter, more metatheatrical style of staging. In comedy, asides serve not only as witty commentary that break up the illusion of the unfolding scene, but also as signposts that tell the audience how to interpret the total event. Pacheco notes: "the asides are divided fairly evenly between Willmore and Angellica in this scene, prompting consideration of the function of asides: Do they necessarily work to establish intimacy between character and spectator? Do Willmore's asides in this scene arouse audience support for the duplicities of the rake hero or encourage us to side with Angellica?" (367). In the Goodman production, the asides for all three characters, Moretta, Willmore, and Angellica Bianca, were either cut or played naturalistically to fellow actors.<sup>270</sup> As a result, Donnelly injected an overall serious tenor to this scene that cast both Angellica and Willmore in a more sympathetic light.

### **Blocking**

The traditional nature of Donnelly's production was reinforced not simply through design but also through blocking, the positioning of performers in relation to one another and within the geography of the stage. Donnelly focused the action upstage and mid-stage; the downstage area

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<sup>270</sup> For example, Moretta's aside "Sure she's bewitched" (2.2.86-87) remains in the script, but the actress played this to Willmore, not to the audience. In addition, Angellica's aside at 2.2.74-75 ("His words go through me to the very soul") and Willmore's asides at 2.2.105-110 ("Ha, death, I'm going to believe her . . . Curse on they charming tongue. Dost thou return my feigned contempt with so much subtlety?") and 2.2.139-140 ("Death, how she throws her fire about my soul!") are in the Goodman script, but were omitted in performance. Presumably, these cuts would have been recorded in the promptbook, which unfortunately does not exist.

was noticeably underused. Deferential kneeling occurred throughout the production. In scene one, Donnelly emphasized the patriarchal structure of the sisters' household by having them kneel to the ground when Don Pedro entered. Donnelly also exploited the romantic convention of kneeling. Willmore bowed and knelt repeatedly before Angellica in scene six (Behn's 2.2). In scene nineteen (Behn's 5.1.206), Willmore fell to his knees at Angellica's mercy, and as she unraveled, she reciprocated the gesture. In a contemporary staging, a director can register feminist resistance to this type of gendered behavior by resisting these physical gestures to hierarchical gender and social roles. One arguably feminist blocking choice in Donnelly's production was actually borrowed from Barton's *Mermaid* revival. In the final scene, Hellena announces to Don Pedro that she will put her dowry towards a marriage-match of her own choosing, eliciting Belvile's "for heaven or the captain," to which Hellena, Florinda, and Valeria respond in turn "the captain." In Donnelly's production, as in Barton's, each sister, one by one, plucked a rapier from her nearby lover's sheath and pointed it at Don Pedro, prompting his full surrender to their wishes.<sup>271</sup>

### **The Rape Scenes**

To her recollection, Donnelly staged the attempted rape scenes in a sober manner believing that "they give the play a gravity that is missing in other aspects of the play" (email interview). However, Donnelly's staging of the three attempted rapes was relatively benign in comparison to other women directors in the 1990's, such as Joanne Akalaitis and Jules Wright, who more graphically confronted the moments of potential sexual violence.<sup>272</sup> Yet, in critic

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<sup>271</sup> See blocking in *Mermaid* promptbook available at Goodman archive.

<sup>272</sup> Wright's London production took place in the fall of 1994, just after Akalaitis's. Her graphic staging of the violence was a conscious response to Barton's comic staging. Unlike Akalaitis, Wright did not infuse her staging of the rapes with absurdist humor.

Richard Christiansen's estimation, Donnelly succeeded at making sure the play's "stunning dark passages" and rather modern view of women came across in her production.<sup>273</sup> Christiansen most enjoyed the production's darker, quieter "moments when the play stops its frenetic pace to cry out in rage."<sup>274</sup> Wetherall played Willmore very drunk, and his pursuit of Florinda included many trips, pulls, lifts, and other physical maneuvers that registered too playfully to be construed as truly violent actions. Just prior to Belville and Frederick's entrance, Wetherall's Willmore tickled Ellen Jane Smith's Florinda, causing her alternately to laugh and scream; this moment, which verged on melodrama, summed up Donnelly's staging of the garden scene. She treaded the line between comedy and tragedy. Wetherall's drunken antics, such as tripping, falling, and sticking his head up Florinda's skirt, were neither farcically exaggerated enough to play as clearly comic nor malicious or aggressive enough to appear truly threatening [See Figure 20].

### **Introducing Audiences to Behn: Program and Director's Notes**

To aid audiences, the program included dramaturgical notes prepared by scholar Joseph Roach. He divided the notes into three sections: "Aphra Behn and *The Rover*" discusses the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1986 revival under the direction of John Barton and Behn's life and career; "Roving" addresses sexual politics and the playhouse in the seventeenth century; and "*The Rover* in the Restoration World" explains the relationship between Restoration politics and the theatre. Roach's notes section included two visuals: a painting of Behn offset on the opposite page by a block quote with the oft-cited passage from Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: "...All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, for it was she who

<sup>273</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "17<sup>th</sup> Century 'Rover' Wanders with a View That's Fresh in 1989." *Chicago Tribune*. March 8, 1989.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

earned them the right to speak their minds.”<sup>275</sup> Roach’s summoning of Woolf echoes the academic trend in the 1980s and 1990s of using the more familiar Woolf as a way to campaign for Behn’s continued recovery without acknowledging Woolf’s full, mixed assessment of Behn. While the program did not contain a director’s note, the Goodman’s season newsletter and educational guide did. Director’s notes can serve as thank you letters to cast, crew, and audience and more importantly as vehicles for directors to introduce or explain their staging approach to patrons and reviewers. Donnelly’s note simply and succinctly captures her assessment of the play as an “exotic . . . erotic . . . celebration of the battle between the sexes” (Newsletter 7).<sup>276</sup> Donnelly’s statement implies that for women in the play mere participation in the battle is its own form of winning [See Figure 21]. Her director’s note also makes clear that she had no interest in overlaying contemporary relevance onto her staging, but instead tried to honor the play’s historical depiction of gender and sexual relations between men and women. This production was ultimately the work of an actor’s director; in this regard, it demonstrated the predominant influence of realism and “invisible” direction that were characteristic of mainstream staging practices throughout the twentieth century.

## Conclusion

The Goodman production was not a decidedly feminist staging due to Donnelly’s use of Barton’s adaptation and her staging approach. Donnelly identifies as a feminist, but hesitates to label herself a feminist director, remarking, “I don’t particularly follow a feminist agenda at all times.” Donnelly recalls that she “was interested in [Behn] as one of the true female playwrights who had a feminist point of view” (email interview). Donnelly’s production preceded the

<sup>275</sup> The Rover program, Goodman Theatre, pg 8.

<sup>276</sup> “The Disappearance of Aphra Behn.” *Onstage*. 3(88/89): Goodman Theatre Series, p7.

publication of feminist directing texts such as *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing as if Gender and Race Matter* (1993), so there was no codified methodology for her to turn to as a resource for how to approach *The Rover* had she so desired. However, she remembers that during the rehearsal process “not letting [the production] get run over by testosterone driven men was a daily challenge” (email interview).

Analyzing the Goodman’s revival with three decades of hindsight on the many ways that director have staged *The Rover* since 1989, it is easy as a feminist artist and scholar to lament the heavy influence of John Barton’s adaption on the first major professional U.S. revival of Behn’s play directed by a woman. But it is not difficult to understand why this was the case. Because of the Goodman production’s historical proximity to the highly successful Royal Shakespeare Company productions (1986-1987), Barton’s script and staging bore a heavy influence on Donnelly’s production. It would be another decade before directors would consistently develop their own performance scripts using Behn’s play as the primary, if not sole, blueprint. Barton’s textual influence aside, Donnelly’s production stands as an historic moment in Behn’s contemporary production history and a telling measure of the gender inequity that existed not just at the Goodman but throughout the theatre industry in the 1980s. The revival of Behn’s play on a \$250,000 budget at the Goodman’s 684-seat theatre exposed her work to higher production values and to its largest potential audience of any contemporary revival.<sup>277</sup> The appearance of a play by an unknown female playwright on the main stage of one of American theatre’s resident powerhouses was no less significant in 1989 than it would be today when plays by women continue to represent only 22% of plays produced around the country. Given the severe

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<sup>277</sup> Presumably, to this day, Covent Garden, which could accommodate 3,000 patrons in the late eighteenth century, was *The Rover*’s largest venue.

underrepresentation of plays by women and the underemployment of women directors at the Goodman before 2000, the production is noteworthy for its challenge to sexist programming and hiring practices. Finally, as the play's first major professional revival in the U.S. directed by a woman, the production stands at the beginning of a trend that has seen more and more women directors, whether freelance-for-hire or (founding artistic) resident director, at theatres of all sizes, finding hope and inspiration in Behn's professional accomplishments and breathing new life into her plays.

## Chapter Five: Mini-Skirts, Misogyny, and Montage:

### A Reexamination of Joanne Akalaitis's Radical *Rover* at the Guthrie in the Context of Sexual Violence and Anti-Victimism in the 1990s<sup>278</sup>

In 1994 *The Rover* received its second professional revival in the United States helmed by a woman, the vanguard international director, Joanne Akalaitis. Like the 1989 staging at the Goodman, the 1994 production also took place at a regional powerhouse, the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, MN, established by British director Tyrone Guthrie in 1959.<sup>279</sup> The organization encapsulated its founder's interests in decentralizing theater,<sup>280</sup> championing the artistic superiority of the thrust stage, and reimagining classical plays (Hornby 609).<sup>281</sup> Unlike the Goodman's traditional, proscenium format, the Guthrie's less conventional thrust configuration encouraged a non-illusionistic, more theatrical staging style. The Guthrie's thrust stage was its

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<sup>278</sup> *The Rover*. By Aphra Behn. Directed by Joanne Akalaitis. Set Designed by George Tsypin. Costume Design by Gabriel Barry. Lighting Design by Jennifer Tipton. Sound Design and Music Composition by Bruce Odland. Perf. by Mark W. Deakins (Belvile), William Francis McGuire (Frederick), Don Harvey/Jesse Sinclair Lenat (Willmore), Christopher Bayes (Blunt), Kali Rocha (Florinda), Miriam Laube (Valeria), Elizabeth Marvell (Hellena), Stephen Yoakam, (Don Pedro), Suzanne Warmanen (Callis), Viola Davis (Angelica Bianca), Lia Rivamonte (Moretta), John Carroll Lynch (Sebastian), Charles Janasz (Biskey), Julie Briskman Hall (Lucetta), Bob Davis (Sancho), Stephen Pelinski (Don Anotonio), Nathaniel Fuller (Stephano/Diego, Phillipo, Servants). Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis, MN. June-August 1994.

\*Denotes Member of Actors' Equity Association.

<sup>279</sup> By contrast, the Guthrie was founded thirty years after the Goodman (1925). For more information on the birth of the resident theatre movement in the U.S. see Martha LoMonaco, "Regional/Resident Theatre" in *Cambridge Histories*.

<sup>280</sup> Tyrone Guthrie had previously founded theatres in the U.K. and Canada after which he modeled the Guthrie. He wanted to move theatre outside of its stronghold in New York and London.

<sup>281</sup> Hornby, Richard. "The Guthrie Theater. *The Hudson Review*. 47:4 (Winter 1995): 609-615.

“most dramatic, influential, and ultimately controversial feature”; within a few year’s of its founding, “open stages popped up all over the country, clearly the stage choice for serious classical theatre” (Steel). Mike Steel likens the Guthrie’s thrust stage to a “full revolt against the dominant proscenium” and a turn to a style reminiscent of “the Elizabethan era with its vestiges of Greek and Roman platform stages thrust out among the surrounding audience” (Steel). When the Guthrie officially opened in 1963, it stood at the forefront of the U.S. resident theatre movement where it remains preeminent to this day. Its legitimizing impact on theater in the U.S. outside of New York City was so great that preexisting regional theatres, such as the Goodman, benefited and grew to new prominence as a result of its success.<sup>282</sup> One of the largest non-profit theatres in the country, the Guthrie could accommodate 1,298 patrons in 1994.<sup>283</sup> This was *The Rover*’s largest revival venue yet. Akalaitis matched this milestone with the play’s largest cast to date—37.<sup>284</sup> In terms of the prestige of the theatre and director and the scale of the venue and cast, this was a benchmark U.S. revival. Adding to the significance of the production, *The Rover* was one of only seven plays by a woman that the Guthrie produced between 1963 and 1999.<sup>285</sup>

<sup>282</sup> For more on the Guthrie’s major, transformative impact on American regional theatre, see Mike Steel’s October 1993 *American Theatre* article “The Not So Empty Stage.”

<sup>283</sup> In the two years leading up to Akalaitis’s production, the Guthrie underwent considerable upgrades as part of a \$3.5 million project. These updates included improved acoustics, increased flexibility for flying props, re-upholstered seats, and a renovated lobby. The theatre itself was reconfigured from the 1,441-seat thrust staged designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch in 1963 to 1,298-seats surrounding the stage in a 180-degree arc. No seat was more than 15 rows or 52 feet away from the stage in order to maintain the intimacy between actors and audience that Tyrone Guthrie deemed so important.

<sup>284</sup> According to Richard Hornby, the Guthrie was then among the largest theatres in the country for non-musical plays (609). It was larger than both of the RSC venues, Williamstown, and the Goodman. In terms of previous revival cast sizes, the breakdown was as follows: Goodman, 28; Williamstown, 33; RSC Mermaid, 25; RSC Swan, 27.

<sup>285</sup> This number is based on solo-authored plays; the 7 is out of a total of 270 plays, which means that in those three decades women playwrights represented a mere 2.5% of programming. This percentage increases slightly if you include the two male/female co-authored productions and the



Moreover, in the 1990s, less than 20% of productions at the Guthrie were woman-directed. On a national level, in the five years that separated Donnelly's revival at the Goodman from Akalaitis's at the Guthrie, the landscape for women directors in professional theatre did not improve significantly. Therefore, Akalaitis's production again demonstrates how woman-helmed revivals of *The Rover* in the late twentieth century illuminate the ongoing gender gap in American theatre.

An award-winning theatrical innovator, Akalaitis gave *The Rover* an avant-garde overhaul, and her production, therefore, represents a distinct shift in staging approach from all previous revivals.<sup>286</sup> Until now, scholarly analysis of the Guthrie *Rover* has rested on the work of Susan Carlson, Cheryl Black, and Susan Copeland.<sup>287</sup> Carlson's essay explores two lines of inquiry: The first half of her study highlights the cannibalized history of Behn's text, from Behn's own appropriation of Killigrew's *The Wanderer*, to Barton's and Akalaitis's permutations of *The Rover*. The remainder of Carlson's essay draws on Mikhail Bakhtin to analyze Akalaitis's use of carnival, anti-carnival, and stylization to explore the relationship between the individual and its community. Cheryl Black, on the other hand, argues that

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female adaptation of a Faulkner novel. The count would then be 10 out of 270 or 4% female playwright representation.

<sup>286</sup>A few months after Akalaitis's revival, in October/November 1994, Jules Wright staged a London revival of *The Rover* that dealt with the attempted rapes frankly and realistically. See my chapter on Thinking Cap Theatre's production for more discussion of Wright's production. See also Nancy Copeland's essay "Reviving *The Rover*" in which she contrasts Barton's and Wright's productions.

<sup>287</sup> Carlson, Susan. "Cannibalizing and Carnivalizing: Reviving Aphra Behn's *The Rover*." *Theatre Journal*. 47(1995): 517-539.; Black, Cheryl. "Transgressive Female Desire and Subversive Critique in the Seventeenth Century Canon: Joanne Akalaitis's Staging of *Phedre*, *The Rover*, and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore'" in *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works*. Ed. Sharon Friedman. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.; Copeland, Susan. *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre: Women's Comedy and the Theatre*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

Akalaitis underscored the feminist critique implicit in Behn's play through the use of extra-textual elements that primed the audience to think critically and staging choices that exploited the subversive potential of carnival. Copeland, who discusses Akalaitis's revival alongside those directed by John Barton (1986-1987) and Jules Wright (1994), argues that Akalaitis, like the other two directors, "confirms the pervasiveness of the 'Restoration' paradigm and the centrality of the Aphra myth to *The Rover*'s place in the late twentieth-century repertoire" (180). By this, Copeland means that, "in spite of her inventiveness," Akalaitis cited putative Restoration conventions, "albeit in a self-conscious" manner (182) and that she perceived a contemporary resonance in Behn's sexual politics. Copeland asserts that Akalaitis's revival was more effective than Barton's or Wright's productions because it foregrounded the differences between the past and the present thereby avoiding a monologic interpretation and achieving a better balance between the play's utopian comedic elements and dystopian tragic elements.<sup>288</sup> While Carlson, Black, and Copeland acknowledge the radicalism and contemporaneity of Akalaitis's approach, they do not situate their analyses within the contexts of the sexual politics of the production's historical moment or Akalaitis's directorial aesthetic and oeuvre. Akalaitis staged *The Rover* at a point in U.S. history when the incidence of rape and sexual assault was at an all-time high, and a heated debate over "victimhood" was emerging among feminists and politicians. In interviews over several decades, Akalaitis vocalized her discontent with sexism—in her profession and society at large—and her interest in theatre as a medium for exploring such social and political

<sup>288</sup> Copeland appears to base her analysis on consultation of Carlson's and Black's articles and reviews of the Guthrie revival. Her investigation into Akalaitis's aesthetic as a director is limited to consultation of Deborah Saivetz's article, "Releasing the Profound Physicality of Performance." *New Theatre Quarterly*. 52:13 (1997): 329-338. She does not reference having reviewed the Guthrie's *Rover* promptbook or screened the recording of the production (NY Public Library has a tape, and there is one in London. The production will finally be digitized in the coming year or so.).

issues. Akalaitis's highly sexualized and violent production stands as a profound example of how the auteur director, throughout her career, has used the stage to explore often controversial, timely subjects. Using absurdist and surrealist theatrical techniques to inform design and performance and the overarching spirit of montage to comprise the production's structure, Akalaitis staged a unique, politicized post-modern revival of *The Rover*. The jagged eclecticism of montage shaped the production's form, tempo, and meaning and infused it with an overall tone of ambivalence that suited Behn's complex comedy. Examining the Guthrie revival in light of the production's historical moment and Akalaitis's directorial aesthetic and oeuvre deepens our understanding of her radical revival, its relationship to American sexual politics, and its significance within Behn's contemporary production history.

### **Women Directors at the Guthrie**

Unfortunately, the Guthrie's progressive approach to staging classical plays did not carry over to its programming and hiring practices. For the first fifteen years of the Guthrie's existence, a rotating bastion of 34 men directed all productions.<sup>289</sup> The year 1979 marked an anomalous departure from this male-dominated tradition. Women directed two of the eight productions that year. Emily Mann directed Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, and Rae Allen directed Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*.<sup>290</sup> Given the tendency to hire women directors to

<sup>289</sup> The vast brigade of male directors included: Tyrone Guthrie, Douglas Campbell, Alan Schneider, Edward Payson Call, Stephen Porter, Mel Shapiro, Robert Lanchester, Joseph Anthony, Philip Minor, Robert David MacDonald, Michael Langham, Israel Hicks, John Hirsch, Edward Gilbert, David Wheeler, Len Cariou, David Feldshuh, Tomas MacAnna, Eric Christmas Eugene Lion, Michael Bawtree, Stephen Kane, Tom Moore, Kenneth Walsh, Ken Ruta, Thomas Gruenwald, Adrian Hall, Nick Havinga, Michael Blakemore, John Cranney, Alvin Epstein, Peter Mark Schifter, Steven Robman, and Anatoly Efros.

<sup>290</sup> Mann is a director and playwright and has served as the artistic director of the McCarter Theatre at Princeton University since the 1990s. Now in her 90's, Allen is a former director and Tony Award-winning actress.

direct plays by women, it is remarkable that both of these plays were male-authored. With two out of 67 productions helmed by women, the rate of women directors at the Guthrie in the 1970s was approximately 3%. During the 1985-1986 season, Mann returned to direct her original play *Execution of Justice* about the assassinations of San Francisco mayor George Moscone and supervisor Harvey Milk. Joanne Akalaitis followed Mann and became the third woman ever to direct at the Guthrie. Akalaitis helmed a production of Georg Buchner's *Leon and Lena (and Lenz)* during the 1987-1988 season and a production of Jean Genet's *The Screens* during the 1989-1990 season. With just three productions out of 82 directed by women, the percentage of women directors working at the Guthrie in the 1980s remained at 3% as it had been in the previous decade.<sup>291</sup> As with the pieces assigned to Mann and Allen in 1979, the first two plays Akalaitis directed at the Guthrie were also male-authored. On the one hand, this suggests a confidence in their ability to direct challenging plays by major male authors; at the same time, it highlights the severe underrepresentation of female playwrights. In the 1970s, only one play out of 67 at the Guthrie was solo-authored by a woman.<sup>292</sup> In the 1980s, the percentage of women playwrights at the Guthrie increased to 7% (6 out of 82 plays); however, only three of these were solo-authored plays.<sup>293</sup>

<sup>291</sup> Women directed three out of 82 productions. Data provided by Guthrie Theater records (PA003), Performing Arts Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>292</sup> Elizabeth Ferrars's *I, Said the Fly* in 1973 was the only female-authored play of the decade at the Guthrie. Two additional plays were co-authored: *Teibele and the Demon* by Eve Friedman and Isaac Basheirs Singer and *Boy Meets Girl* by Samuel and Bella Spewack; both played in 1978.

<sup>293</sup> The three solo-authored plays by women were *Eli* by Leonie "Nelly" Sachs (1981), *Night Mother* by Marsha Norman (1984), and *Harvey* by Mary Chase (1989). Norman's play won the Pulitzer in 1983 and Chase's play won the Pulitzer in 1945; thus, both were tested, vetted works. Two plays were co-authored: *Foxfire* (1981) and *Infidelities* (1987). Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* (1982) was adapted for the stage by Ruth Ford.

The Guthrie continued to make strides in hiring women directors in the 1990s, but men still outnumbered women. During this decade, women directed fifteen out of eighty-one or approximately 19% of the productions.<sup>294</sup> Nine of the productions were the annual December staging of *A Christmas Carol*: Sari Ketter directed eight *Carols*, and Rosa Brainin directed one.<sup>295</sup> Although Ketter also directed a main stage production of *The Royal Family* by George S. Kaufman during the 1995-1996 season, she otherwise was relegated to staging the holiday show, which is easily viewable as a backhanded win for a woman director.<sup>296</sup> Only five of the sixteen productions helmed by a woman director in the 1990s were non-holiday, main stage productions, which further diminishes the cause for celebration. On a broader scale, Off-Broadway and in regional theatre in 1993, women directed 11% of productions.<sup>297</sup> While this decade marked an improvement from previous ones in the hiring of women directors at the Guthrie and around the country, the numbers still reflected a major gender gap.<sup>298</sup>

<sup>294</sup> Seven different women directors contributed to that decade total of fifteen. Seventy-six of these productions were main stage shows. The other five were Lab productions. The Guthrie Lab began during the 1998-1999 Season. Given that this was a new initiative, there were only five lab productions in the last two years of the decade. A woman directed only one of the five productions; Wendy Knox directed *Lysistrata*.

<sup>295</sup> Richard Ooms directed the tenth *Carol* of the decade.

<sup>296</sup> During the 1990s, the other five women directors of the seven total at the Guthrie included the following: Jennifer Tipton (*The Tempest*, 1991-1992); Anne Justine D'Zmura (*Bert's Folly*, 1994-1995); Libby Appel (*Magic Fire*, 1998-1999); Wendy Knox (*Lysistrata*—a Guthrie Lab production, 1998-1999).

<sup>297</sup> See *Backstage*.

<sup>298</sup> Women directed a total of fifteen productions at the Guthrie in the 2000s. While this at first appears to be the same number as the prior decade, it marks a noteworthy development because thirteen of these productions were main stage productions. In the 2000s, women directed twice as many Guthrie main stage productions as women directors working at the theater in the 1990s did. The 2010s have shown even more promise. Data up to the 2016-2017 season indicates that a woman director has helmed 23 productions (approximately 26%) out of the 87 programmed. And yet these numbers also make clear that more than fifty years into its existence, the Guthrie is only half way towards achieving gender equity in its hiring of directors.

The situation for women playwrights in the 1990s was just as grim. Plays by women represented 17% of season programming regionally and Off-Broadway. The rate of representation of female playwrights at the Guthrie fell below this average. In the 1990s, women authored only three of the 81 plays produced during at the Guthrie, and fascinatingly, *The Rover* was one of them. Behn's play was the only play by a woman staged at the Guthrie from 1990-1998. The other two female-authored plays in the 1990s appeared in the last year of the decade: *Magic Fire* by Lillian Groag (published 1955, staged 1999) and *The Darker Face of the Earth* by Rita Dove (published 1994, staged 1999). The Guthrie's programming of *The Rover* affirms Behn's reincorporation into the canon and inclusion in the contemporary performance repertoire by the mid-1990s. Until then, her male contemporaries, Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, dubbed "the big five" by Albert Wertheim, had dominated the canon and revivals.<sup>299</sup> Prior to Behn's *Rover*, the Guthrie had staged only one Restoration play, Vanbrugh's comedy *The Relapse* (1696) in 1972, and the theatre has not staged another work from this period since.<sup>300</sup> The absence of Restoration and early eighteenth-century drama from Guthrie programming is remarkable given its founding mission to reimagine classical plays.

### **Akalaitis of the Avant-Garde: Director as Auteur**

Of Behn's contemporary stage directors, Akalaitis is unique in her association with the American avant-garde. Akalaitis forged an artistic identity in the burgeoning experimental

<sup>299</sup> For more on the reciprocal influences of publication and performance on canon and repertoire formation see Nancy Copeland's essay "Reviving Aphra Behn: The Rover in the 'Restoration' Repertoire." *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research*. 14:1 (Summer 1999): 1-18. On "the big five," see Albert Wertheim, "Restoration Drama: The Second Flowering of the English Theatre," in Michael Dixon and Michele Volansky, eds., *Kiss and Tell: Restoration Comedy of Manners, Scenes, and Historical Context*. Newbury, VT: Smith and Kraus, 1993.

<sup>300</sup> Aside from productions of Moliere and one production of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, the closest contemporaries to Behn that the Guthrie has presented since 1994 are Shakespeare and Sheridan.

theatre climate of the 1960s when artists such as Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski were exploring acting and staging techniques that could free theatre from the prevailing realistic tradition. Theatrical realism and invisible direction were trademarks of theatre in the first half of the twentieth century; the best director was one who carefully uncovered and faithfully carried out the playwright's intention. Stage experimentation in the 1960s resulted in the re-conception of the role of the director. In the wake of Roland Barthes's *Death of the Author* (1967), the auteur emerged as a new type of stage director whose creative authority rivaled that of the playwright.<sup>301</sup> A French cinema term used to classify art films that reflected, above all else, the signature style of a director, auteurism was an early example of film's influence on theatre experimentation. Akalaitis was a forerunner of the highly theatrical, imagistic, and often non-linear style of theatre that had taken hold Off- and Off-Off-Broadway by the mid-1980s. In a 1985 *New York Times* article, critic Frank Rich embraced the modern diversification of direction: "We have room enough for stages where writers dominate—and for those where directors do. . . . It's a sign of a director's theater that a director's actions can speak as loudly as, if not louder than, a writer's words."<sup>302</sup> In the best examples, auteur stage direction has revitalized the theatre, freed practice from the text, and inspired a new visual language. In less effective instances, critics have accused auteur artists of shameless egotism. As critic Mike Steele's remarks attest, by the time of *The Rover*, Akalaitis had cemented her auteur status: "As usual with Akalaitis . . .

<sup>301</sup> The directors Rich identifies as auteurs in addition to Akalaitis are as follows: Peter Brook, Ping Chong, Liviu Coulee, Martha Clarke, Richard Foreman, Tadeusz Kantor, James Lapine, Elizabeth LeCompte, Des McAnuff, Lucian Pintilie, Jose Quintero, Peter Sellars, Andrei Serban, Gary Sinise, and Robert Wilson. Akalaitis is one of only three women out of the sixteen auteur directors that Rich lists.

<sup>302</sup> Rich, Frank. "Auteur Directors Bring New Life to Theatre." *New York Times*. (24 November 1985).



“The Rover” becomes far more her play than Behn’s”; this is a compliment, not a criticism, in Steele’s favorable review (June 17, 1994).<sup>303</sup>

A founding member of the legendary experimental theatre company Mabou Mines, Akalaitis turned her focus to the theatre after leaving a PhD program in Philosophy at Stanford.<sup>304</sup> She then enrolled in acting workshops in San Francisco where she met future Mabou Mines company members, Lee Breuer and Ruth Malechech.<sup>305</sup> In the late 1960s, she and Malechech studied firsthand with experimental theatre pioneer Jerzy Grotowski. The experience greatly influenced Mabou Mines’s work, which adopted a “more abstract, less linear, less psychological mode” (Gholson and Akalaitis 46). Akalaitis was a member of Mabou Mines from 1970-1990.<sup>306</sup> Her directing career began in 1975 within the company and was remarkable from the start. Returning to Samuel Beckett, whose work she had previously performed, she directed a stage adaptation of his radio play, *Cascando*. In 1976, this, her first professional directing credit, earned her an Obie award for direction and fueled her admiration for Beckett’s style and writing.<sup>307</sup>

By the early 1980s, Akalaitis was directing at major resident theatres around the country. Her direction was increasingly characterized as intensely physical, highly visual, and

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<sup>303</sup> Steele, Mike. “Director Has a Hight Old Time with ‘Rover.’” *Star Tribune*. 17 June 1994. 1E.

<sup>304</sup> “In 1970, Lee Breuer and Ruth Maleczech, increasingly frustrated playing to all-expatriate audiences in Paris, were persuaded by Philip Glass, JoAnne Akalaitis and the establishment of the new National Endowment for the Arts, to move to New York and start a theatre company exploring new ideas in language, literature, music, performance and the visual arts. At the time, Philip and friend Rudy Wurlitzer were negotiating for a property in Dunvegan, Nova Scotia, near to a town called Mabou Mines.” <http://www.maboumines.org/company/history/>

<sup>305</sup> Gholson, Craig and Joanne Akalaitis. “Joanne Akalaitis.” *Bomb*. 5 (1983): 46-47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40422367>

<sup>306</sup> The other founding members were David Warrilow and Philip Glass (Akalaitis’s ex-husband).

<sup>307</sup> In 1955 Jerry Tallmer of the *Village Voice* established The Obie Award to honor exceptional theatre Off-Broadway and OffOff-Broadway.



conceptually daring. Outside of the known confines of Mabou Mines, her work proved more prone to controversy. As Andrea J. Nouryeh explains,

Critics, predisposed to accepting experimentation in avant-garde venues, changed their expectations when viewing her works produced for the Public and resident theaters . . . critics were not prepared when she began directing well-known plays in a similar manner or created productions that appeared to be iconoclastic (Nouryeh 181).

Critics weren't Akalaitis's only obstacle. In 1984 at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, MA, Akalaitis staged a production of Beckett's *Endgame* that resulted in what Samuel L. Leiter refers to as "the decade's most talked-of director-author dispute" (481). Beckett objected to Akalaitis's production on the grounds that she had dismissed his stage directions. Beckett calls for "an empty room with two chairs"; Akalaitis staged the play in a trash-laden subway.<sup>308</sup> Always an advocate for multi-racial casting, Akalaitis had also cast black actors as Hamm and his father, which was another issue for the playwright. This incident exemplified the type of disputation that Akalaitis's bold staging choices sometimes aroused.<sup>309</sup> While this was the last time Akalaitis would be permitted to direct one of Beckett's plays, he has remained a creative influence on her work. Decades after the incident, she still named *Endgame*

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<sup>308</sup> Gussow, Mel. "Disputed *Endgame* in Debut." *New York Times*, 20 December 1984. <http://nytimes.com/1984/12/20/arts/stage-disputed-endgame-in-debut.html>.

<sup>309</sup> In the early 2000s, Akalaitis encountered a similar obstacle with Genet's estate. She was banned from directing the plays of the two writers who most greatly influenced her aesthetic as a director. She discusses the Genet incident in an interview with director Anne Bogart: "I don't know what's going on with these estates. Now I'm in trouble with the Genet estate. I'm not allowed to direct any Genet play ever. I don't know what I did wrong. . . It has something to do with Philip Glass and music, which I don't understand. . . I always thought of myself as Mrs. Genet" (200). In Bogart, Anne. *Conversations with Anne*. Theatre Communications Group: New York, 2012.

as “*the modern masterpiece*” (Saivetz, “Releasing the Profound..” 333).<sup>310</sup> As I will discuss shortly, Beckett even figured in her staging of *The Rover*.

When Akalaitis worked at the Guthrie, the theatre had entered a new phase of its existence. Tyrone Guthrie founded the theatre as one “driven by the Word”; the dramatic text was scripture (Steel).<sup>311</sup> Under the artistic leadership of the visionary Romanian director Liviu Ciulei in the early 1980s, the Guthrie evolved from being “primarily an actors’ theatre (in the best sense, promoting not star personality acting but character work of a high order) into a designers’ theatre” (Hornby 610).<sup>312</sup> Ciulei had a background in opera, architecture, and set design. As Steel notes,

Ciulei came from a milieu where theatre was, perhaps, the most important truth-teller in a country where the state controlled virtually every communications medium; state censors monitored every action and theatre became an art of metaphor and allusion . . . Ciulei’s designs brought their own poetic and symbolic meaning to the stage, working with the Word as an equal partner.<sup>313</sup>

To accommodate his affinity for more pictorial theatre, Ciulei removed the rear screen wall of the Guthrie’s thrust stage in order to create a proscenium area upstage and perpendicular to the thrust. Of particular note, Ciulei’s modifications actually created a performance space that more

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<sup>310</sup> Beckett’s agents and American Repertory Theatre came to an agreement on *Endgame*’s opening day, and the production was permitted to run. However, Beckett stipulated that a statement must be attached to the front of every playbill that made clear he denounced the production as “a complete parody.” Akalaitis was also banned from staging Genet’s plays. In spite of her run-ins with Beckett’s and Genet’s estates, Akalaitis remains a celebrant of both authors. See Bogart on Genet incident.

<sup>311</sup> Steel, Mike. “The Not So Empty Stage.” *American Theatre*. 10 (October 1993): 18-20.

<sup>312</sup> The Romanian-born director Liviu Ciulei was the mentor of director Karin Coonrod, whose 2010 revival of *The Rover* for New York Classical Theatre is addressed in chapter seven of this study.

<sup>313</sup> Among the highly visual directors that Ciulei employed while artistic director were Andrei Serban, Lucian Pintilie, Richard Foreman, and Peter Sellars. According to Steel, these directors shared the view that the best way to connect with a mid-1980s audience was “by surprising sets and new visual contexts that undercut the predictable prettiness of traditional period productions.”

closely resembled Restoration theatre's combination of an upstage proscenium with an apron stage. Because of the sharp angles of the Guthrie's thrust seating configuration, Ciulei's changes created sightline issues, and some audience had obstructed views of the proscenium area. When Garland Wright succeeded Ciulei as artistic director in 1986, Wright made further modifications to ensure better audience visibility, but the theatre continued to reflect Ciulei's highly visual stylistic influence. It was, thus, an ideal creative environment for Akalaitis given the integral role of design to her direction: "I feel that good directors are designers and good designers are directors—the two occupations are really knitted" (Bartow 4).<sup>314</sup> In a 1997 interview, Akalaitis argued,

There's an anti-visual bias in the American theatre . . . And journalists try to put together this idea of the *auteur* director as a visually-oriented director because *they*, the journalists, don't understand the visual. They're not dealing with the amazing power of the development of design in American theatre. They think that if there's some kind of 'look' onstage it denies the playwright (Saivetz 331-332).<sup>315</sup>

Akalaitis's comment implies a desire to distance herself from a reductive definition of auteurist direction. While Akalaitis has excelled at visual composition, a key characteristic of auteurism, she embodies the auteur in the fullest and most distinguished sense of the term because of her unique unifying ability to shape productions in a way that could be mistaken for no one else's work but her own. As further compliment, Richard Hornby argues that Akalaitis's "fashionably flamboyant" re-imaginings of the classics "reflect a better understanding of the text than that of most directors today; in this she is similar to Tyrone Guthrie himself" (610).

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<sup>314</sup>Bartow, Arthur. Akalaitis describes the Guthrie as "the greatest theatre I've ever worked in, its shape, its facilities, its respect for directors and actors." Phone interview with author on January 14, 2014.

<sup>315</sup>Saivetz, Deborah. "Releasing the 'Profound Physicality of Performance.'" *New Theatre Quarterly*. 13:52 (1997): 329-338.

From 1987 to 1994, Akalaitis directed a trio of plays at the Guthrie that culminated in *The Rover*. The first was *Leon and Lena (and Lenz)*, a nobility satire by Georg Buchner (1813-1837), the nineteenth-century German author sometimes credited as the first modern playwright and viewed as an antecedent to authors such as Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), Jean Genet (1910-1986), and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989).<sup>316</sup> The second play Akalaitis directed at the Guthrie was Jean Genet's *The Screens*, an epic drama with a five-hour running time and 100 speaking roles.<sup>317</sup> In her staging of *The Screens* and her 1986 staging of another Genet play, *The Balcony*, at the American Repertory Theatre, Akalaitis employed carnival settings.<sup>318</sup> The chaotic and subversive potential of carnival interested her before she began work on *The Rover* and informs her choice to expand the carnival function in her staging of Behn's play. Akalaitis's projects prior to *The Rover* also represent the types of plays and playwrights to which she gravitated. Her directing history confirms her affinity for staging plays on deep, dark subjects by playwrights affiliated with the Theater of the Absurd—Beckett, Buchner, Genet. When she approached plays by authors outside of this group, such as Webster, Shakespeare, or Behn, she found ways to deconstruct and infuse them with elements of the absurd and surreal.<sup>319</sup>

### **“A Sisterhood Across the Centuries”: Behn, Akalaitis, and Feminist Issues in Theatre in the 1990s**

Journalists framed the match-up of Behn and Akalaitis as a pairing of two boundary-breaking, politically-driven women artists. The title of Tad Simons's review article in *American*

<sup>316</sup> Akalaitis returned to Buchner in 1992, staging a production of his last work, *Woyzeck*, at the Public.

<sup>317</sup> Her staging was considered a landmark triumph. See Don Shewey's *Village Voice* review.

<sup>318</sup> Don Shewey likened George Tsypin's set for *The Screens* to “a mustard-tarted Big Top.”

<sup>319</sup> She had also staged the violence very graphically in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* at the Goodman in 1990.

*Theatre* illustrates this: “Feminist Provocateurs of Their Eras: Director Feels ‘Sisterhood’ with Playwright Aphra Behn.”<sup>320</sup> Simons stresses that the affinity between Behn and Akalaitis is “more than just recognition of the fact that Behn, too, was a successful working woman of the theatre who fought long odds and rampant sexism.” Simons quotes Akalaitis expressing a feeling of “sisterhood across the centuries” with Behn. For the director, their connection lay in the fact that Behn, “a soul sister . . . 300 years before it was fashionable to do so, was gleefully defying the status quo by waging a courageous solo fight for sexual and political equality between men and women.”<sup>321</sup> By invoking a familial bond, Akalaitis asserts herself as a contemporary kin who is continuing the battle with her own craft; her view of Behn is very much that of icon and role model.

Given the emphasis on Behn’s and Akalaitis’s subversiveness, press coverage of Akalaitis’s *Rover* at the Guthrie differed notably from coverage of Kyle Donnelly’s Goodman revival. The journalists who covered Donnelly’s production marveled at the milestone of the Goodman hiring a woman director, and the experience was a career-launcher for Donnelly. While the Guthrie’s hiring of Akalaitis served as a reminder of the underrepresentation of women directors, it did not mark a career breakthrough for Akalaitis. She was a returning artist at the Guthrie and a seasoned, celebrated director, who had been navigating a freelance career in the male-dominated field for two decades.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Simons, Tad. “Sisters Across the Centuries.” *American Theatre*. 11:7 (September 1994): 10. Also see Mike Steele, “Feminist Provocateurs of Their Eras: Director Feels ‘Sisterhood with Playwright Aphra Behn,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 10 June. 1994. E5.

<sup>321</sup> pg537.

<sup>322</sup> By 1994, Akalaitis had won five Obie awards, including one in 1993 for Sustained Achievement and four for Direction and Production. As further testament to her exceptional status and high level of accomplishment, Akalaitis was one of those rare women directors who found herself already included in directing texts as early as the 1980s. For example, she is one of

Behn and Akalaitis were a significant pairing not because they were both successful female professionals in theatre, but because of their progressive use of the theatre medium. Akalaitis has continually avowed her feminist beliefs, called out sexism in the theatre, and explored feminist concerns through her direction.<sup>323</sup> Gender politics in the theater profession were on Akalaitis's mind in the 1970s, early in her career. When Sally Sommers inquired about the predominance of men in experimental theatre, Akalaitis responded:

It's not just the avant-garde, it has been traditionally true in theatre that . . . directors have been men. I've been thinking about this a lot. . . . Women can make sneaky, strange, mysterious little non-statements, and men can't get away with doing that. . . . The male is the driving, doing, acting force, and the woman holds all the secrets.<sup>324</sup>

Akalaitis's thoughts read like an inversion of Oscar Wilde's paradoxical musing that women are sphinxes without secrets; for Akalaitis, women possess a subtle, subversive power because of their default social status. To this end, Akalaitis has made a career out of evocatively staging the strange, sublime, and ineffable, particularly as they relate to women's lives and their place in the world.<sup>325</sup> In 1988, Arthur Bartow asked Akalaitis if her responsibilities were focused differently as a woman director, to which she responded:

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three women directors included in Arthur Bartow's 1988 book *The Director's Voice: Twenty One Interviews* and one of five women directors (out of ten directors in total) featured in Susan Letzler Cole's gender-balanced 1992 study *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World*.

<sup>323</sup> In spite of identifying as a feminist and encountering sexism throughout her career, Akalaitis hesitates to identify as a feminist director: "I think that's a ghettoization . . . but you can in describing my work say that I have dealt with feminist issues" (Phone interview with Joanne Akalaitis, January 8, 2015). Akalaitis, like many women directors, does not want to be marginalized by her gender or politics. This speaks to the paradoxical predicament of women in theatre: "they do not want to be counted as 'women artists' but simply as 'artists,' yet when gender is not counted, it continues to count against them" (Jonas and Bennett).

<sup>324</sup> Sommer, Sally R. "JoAnne Akalaitis of Mabou Mines." *TDR*. 20:3 (September 1976): 3-16.

<sup>325</sup> For example, *Dressed Like An Egg* (1978), an original piece that Akalaitis directed for Mabou Mines, drew on Colette's life and writing to create an abstract examination of what it means to be female. As another case in point, in *Request Concert* by Franz Xavier Kroetz, Akalaitis

I'm very conscious of being a woman director in the theatre. I constantly think about it. I cannot stop seeing myself as a feminist. Especially because society today continues to be sexist . . . In 1987, I was the third woman to direct at the Guthrie in its twenty-five year history (4).

Akalitis continued to encounter sexism in the profession in the 1990s. In August 1991, she took on the coveted role of artistic director of The Public.<sup>326</sup> A dying Joe Papp named her as his successor—the first person, man or woman, to continue his legacy. In November 1993, the board of The Public asked Akalitis to resign and replaced her with George C. Wolfe (b.1954). The press extensively covered the occasion; many of Akalitis's supporters came to her defense with letters to the *New York Times's* editor. In a *Back Stage* interview, Akalitis offered her opinion on whether or not her gender figured in her dismissal: "I would never say I was fired because I was a woman, but I would say my being a woman played considerably into my firing" (Dace).<sup>327</sup> This incident was just six months in the past when Akalitis began work on *The Rover*. It is among the "scars of battle" to which Tad Simons alludes in his *American Theatre* review of the production.

### **From Florida to Nevada: New Staging Contexts for *The Rover's* Sexual Politics**

Some people are under the mistaken notion that we don't need to consider gender anymore, that this bias problem is solved. Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas demonstrated gender is still a problem.

-Emily Mann<sup>328</sup>

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staged an entirely silent, slow motion performance about the ritual actions of a blue collar, Queens woman that tracked her movements from the time she arrived home from work until her suicide.

<sup>326</sup> The Public was formerly identified as New York Shakespeare Festival.

<sup>327</sup> Dace, Tish. "Women's Work: Six Directors on Their Lives in the Theatre." *Back Stage*. 35:9 (4 March 1994): 1.

<sup>328</sup> Dace, Wish. "Sexism in the Theatre: 12 Women Playwrights Confront Gender Bias." *Back Stage*. 34:10 (5 March 1993).

In the above epigraph, Emily Mann, the first woman to direct at the Guthrie, echoes the resounding argument of legal scholar Deborah L. Rhodes in her 1991 article “The ‘No-Problem’ Problem: Feminist Challenges and Cultural Change.”<sup>329</sup> In spite of some opponents’ claims that second wave feminism had fulfilled its ends and made feminism obsolete, the early 1990s proved that the fight for gender equality was far from over. In fact, when Akalaitis staged *The Rover*, the documented incidence of rape and sexual assault was at an all-time high in the United States. According to a 1997 report issued by the U.S. Department of Justice, “the highest rate of forcible rape recorded by law enforcement agencies since 1976 was in 1992” (Greenfeld 1).<sup>330</sup> By contrast, from 1995 to 2010, rape and sexual assault rates among females declined by 57%, from 5.0 victimizations per 1,000 females in 1995 to 2.1 victimizations per 1,000 females in 2010 (Planty and Langton 1).<sup>331</sup>

### **The Mini-Skirt Defense, The Thomas-Hill Trial, and The Tailhook Scandal**

While statistics on sexual violence in the early 1990s point to a wide-ranging issue throughout the country, three particular incidents brought ongoing national attention to the problem of sexual assault and discrimination. In October 1989, a jury in Broward County Florida was deliberating on a rape trial and delivered an infamous verdict that the media instantly dubbed “the mini-skirt defense.” On the grounds that the victim’s clothing ‘asked for it,’ the jury

<sup>329</sup> Rhode, Deborah L. “The ‘No-Problem’ Problem: Feminist Challenges and Cultural Change.” *The Yale Law Journal*. 100:6 (April 1991): 1731-1793.

<sup>330</sup> According to the report, this meant that 84 out of every 100,000 women or 1 out of every 1,200 women was a victim of forcible rape. Greenfeld, Lawrence A. “Sex Offenses and Offenders.” January 1997. <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=3963> It also bears noting that spousal rape was criminalized in the U.S. as recently as 1979.

<sup>331</sup> Planty, Michael and Lynn Langton. “Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010.” Special Report. U.S. Department of Justice. March 2013. Revised 5/31/2016. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvsv9410.pdf>



acquitted a vagrant man who had raped a 22-year old woman at knifepoint.<sup>332</sup> The case became a national debate, and in 1990, Florida passed a law that prohibited rapists from justifying their actions based upon the type of clothing worn by their victims.<sup>333</sup>

The next year another sex scandal made national headlines. In July 1991 George Bush named Clarence Thomas as a Supreme Court nominee; in the wake of this announcement, Anita Hill, a law professor who had previously worked for Thomas, came forth claiming that he had sexually harassed her after she declined his romantic advances. Over the course of a highly publicized, three-day trial in October 1991, Thomas was absolved and finally made a Supreme Court justice by a vote of 52-48 by a predominantly male Senate. Although Hill lost the trial, her outspokenness raised public awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace and women's unequal representation in American politics. The following year saw an unprecedented number of women elected to the U.S. Senate, which prompted the media to trumpet 1992 as “the year of the woman.”

In September 1991, the month prior to the Hill-Thomas trial, yet another national sex scandal unfolded. The Tailhook Association, the illustrious organization for “Top Gun” pilots, held its annual Symposium at the Las Vegas Hilton. Over the course of the week-long event, a series of sexual assault incidents occurred that came to be known as “The Tailhook Scandal.” One of the victims, Navy lieutenant Paula Coughlin reported the events to her superior, who took no action. Coughlin then spoke out publicly, and an investigation ensued. The joint report of the

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<sup>332</sup> “Jury Blames Woman’s Clothing in Rape Case.” 5 October 1989. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1989/10/05/Jury-blames-womans-clothing-in-rape-case/3884623563200/>

<sup>333</sup> Davidson, Tom. “Attire Irrelevant in Rape Trials Victim’s Clothing Not An Issue, Senate Says.” *Sun Sentinel*. 30 May 1990. [http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1990-05-30/news/9001100984\\_1\\_lace-miniskirt-victim-jury-foreman](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1990-05-30/news/9001100984_1_lace-miniskirt-victim-jury-foreman)

Department of the Navy and the Department of Defense alleged that one hundred U.S. Navy and Marine Corps aviation officers had sexually assaulted or engaged in “improper and indecent” conduct with 90 victims, 83 of whom were women. The report contained photos of officers wearing t-shirts that read “WOMEN ARE PROPERTY” and accounts of female officers and civilians being forced to “walk the gauntlet,” meaning that the women had to endure the sexual advances of two parallel lines of male officers in their attempts to get to their rooms.<sup>334</sup> While the investigation did not result in any convictions, it did lead to the resignation of the secretary of the Navy and the creation of a “zero tolerance” reform policy that brought the misogyny and sexual violence rampant in the military to the national forefront.<sup>335</sup> Thus, the tumultuous American landscape in the early 1990s provided Akalaitis with no shortage of salient contemporary through-lines for exploring the sexual politics of Behn’s play. Akalaitis boldly confronted the moments of potential violence in *The Rover*, imbuing them with a disturbing contemporaneity that resonated with the national surge in the incidence of rape and sexual assault and the spate of news-garnering sex scandals in Florida, Washington D.C., and Nevada.

#### **“Eclectic to an Extreme”: Akalaitis’s Absurdist Montage Approach to *The Rover***

I never know where things come from. I just like the fact that you can put a lot of stuff on stage.<sup>336</sup>

<sup>334</sup> Coughlin testified that she had spent the Friday night before the Saturday assault in her hotel room. A Lieutenant Rolando Diaz claimed that he shaved Coughlin’s legs on that Friday while she was wearing her uniform and that he later saw her at a room party “wearing a mini skirt and tank top . . . plastered”; the implication of Diaz’s testimony was that Coughlin, under the influence, lacked discretion and was dressed for trouble. See “Tailhook Accuser Participated in Leg-Shaving, Court Is Told.” *The New York Times*. 17 August 1994.

<sup>335</sup> Winerip, Michael. “Revisiting the Military’s Tailhook Scandal.” *The New York Times*. 13 May 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/13/booming/revisiting-the-militarys-tailhook-scandal-video.html?mcubz=0>

<sup>336</sup> See Richard Christiansen’s review of *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (March 11, 1990).

I don't know how you can do theatre now without dealing with . . . *everything*. With this epidemic [AIDS], with all this violence, with all these people being shot in the streets of New York . . . It's not that you have to do plays about it. But it simply has to be there.<sup>337</sup>

While Akalaitis has always filled the stage quite literally with lots for audiences to contemplate, she has often taken a dismissive stance on having a personal aesthetic, thinking of her work instead as a theatricalization of her subconscious imagination.<sup>338</sup> However, through decades of directing, she has demonstrated a consistent interest in using the “abrasive techniques of collage, of surplus imagery” (Nouryeh 183). Akalaitis as “director/cartographer encourages excess”; for her, more is more, rather than too much (190).<sup>339</sup> Whether staging an original work or a canonical text, Akalaitis has demonstrated a flair for creating theatre that reflects many stylistic influences and contains many structural components. Form and style serve her interest in depicting a world on stage that is as abundantly diverse and diversely abundant as the real one it represents. Akalaitis's signature manner of depicting “everything” speaks to her belief that “chaos, not conflict, is the essence of drama” (Saivetz 151, 1998). As Saivetz notes,

The illogical, the disruptive, the disturbing, and the reckless are interesting rather than problematic for her. Her dramaturgical research leads her habitually to unearth the strange and perverse in history, politics, and culture (151).

Akalaitis's “eclectic style” encompasses an always unique combination of “music, sound effects, lighting, scene design, costume design, film, slides, movement, and text . . . distinct elements that

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<sup>337</sup> See 1997 Saivetz interview (334).

<sup>338</sup> In a 2004 interview with Anne Bogart, Akalaitis expressed her reluctance to classify her work: “I actually don't think I have an aesthetic . . . I know it sounds disingenuous, but it's not. I suppose that one realizes that one has an aesthetic by seeing when you repeat things. And I feel it's kind of dangerous for artists to repeat. I'm trying to figure out whether repetition is a personal style . . . I do know that there are certain things I'm very interested in.”

<sup>339</sup> “Form always reflects an inner condition” in her work (Saivetz).

create multiple associations like the facets of a collage” (Nouryeh 179).<sup>340</sup> These trademarks of Akalaitis’s craft connect her directorial approach with montage.<sup>341</sup> Originally a method of film composition, montage is an experimental technique of selecting, editing, and recombining separate images into a new, continuous whole. Russian film director, Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) introduced the concept in the 1920s. Almost from the start, other art forms appropriated the method.<sup>342</sup> Since early in her career, Akalaitis’s oeuvre has exhibited characteristics of montage.<sup>343</sup>

Interpreting Akalaitis’s *Rover* through the lens of montage serves as a useful way of understanding how she melded text, design, and performance to create a highly textured, provocative revival. The diverse elements that comprised Akalaitis’s *Rover* defied simple summary. In an effort to pin the production down, Richard Hornby dubbed it “eclectic to an extreme” (Hornby 610) while David Richard called it “willfully eclectic” (13) and Tad Simons

<sup>340</sup> Nouryeh, Andrea J. “Joanne Akalaitis: Post Modern Director or Socio-Sexual Critic.” *Theatre Topics*. 1:2 (September 1991): 177-191.

<sup>341</sup> Deborah Saivetz discusses montage in specific connection with Akalaitis’s rehearsal exercise called “Stopping-and-Starting” (143).

<sup>342</sup> Interestingly, Eisenstein worked in theatre before moving to the film medium.

<sup>343</sup> Her first directing project, *Cascando*, contained a silent prologue and strong imagery that demonstrated her non-verbal, highly visual approach to staging plays. *Southern Exposure* (1978), *Leon and Lena (and lenz)* (1987), and *Cymbeline* (1989) displayed her interest in layering live performance with slide and film projection. Stylized movement, slow motion, and freeze effect have underpinned Akalaitis’s montage approach to theatre in works ranging from *Request Concert* (1981) and *Through the Leaves* (1984), both by Franz Xaver Kroetz; to Genet’s *The Balcony* (1986); Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1989); and Webster’s *Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1990).

See Canby, Vincent. “Screen: Akalaitis’s ‘Dead End Kids.’” *New York Times*. 5 November 1986, C23. In the Mabou Mines play *Dead End Kids: A Story of Nuclear Power*, staged at The Public in 1980 and developed into a film in 1986, Akalaitis employed the montage method. Vincent Canby’s description of the film in his *New York Times* review is instructive here: “a free-flowing montage of burlesque sketches, comparatively straight historical re-enactments, song-and-dance numbers, old movie footage, and mock-old movie footage.”

noted a “bizarre blend of trans-historian aesthetics” (10).<sup>344</sup> The word “eclectic” serves a synonymous function with montage in these reviews, for it encompasses the broad range of theatre traditions, fashion styles, geographic settings, time periods, and textual and visual media that Akalaitis summoned to assemble her production. Theatre is an inherently complex, collaborative process; a montage staging approach can make it even more challenging—for artists and audiences. Akalaitis describes her production of *The Rover* as “the most technically complicated show I’ve ever done” (Phone interview).<sup>345</sup>

The Guthrie program identified the production’s setting as Spain; however, the densely allusive visual and aural world of Akalaitis’s staging was not contained to a place or time. Absurd, hyperbolic, sexually charged, George Tsypin’s highly conceptual scenic design consisted of a billowing, slitted red scrim, suggestive of a hymen that bisected the thrust playing space. Tsypin’s design was a key vehicle for Akalaitis’s bold vision and a clear nod to her style’s indebtedness to the suggestive symbolism of absurdist and surrealist theater. Near the end of act one, after Lucetta’s duping of Blunt, the scrim retracted, and three towering phallic effigies emerged in its place. The design suggested that this is a world where people are obsessed with sex, a world where sex can be playful and empowering and sexuality fluid, a world where people can be transformed from sexual subjects to objects in an instant. This abstract erotic landscape provided Akalaitis with a versatile environment to enrich eclectically with meaning. Design elements reflected the swirling influence of seventeenth-century England

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<sup>344</sup> Richards, David. “When the Light Touch Is the Right Touch.” *New York Times*. 21 July 1994, C13. Simons, Tad. “Sisters Across the Centuries.” *American Theatre*. 11:7 (September 1994): 10.

<sup>345</sup> Akalaitis reiterated this point in phone interviews on January 8, 2015 and September 26, 2017.

and modern day Barcelona, New Orleans, and Las Vegas.<sup>346</sup> Projections of original Mardi Gras footage shot by Gigi Mullens were projected onto the red scrim that bisected the performance space.<sup>347</sup> Akalaitis replaced Angellica's trio of portraits with a single electric pink neon sign of disembodied lips, evocative of both surreal art and the flashing signs of the Las Vegas strip.

Akalaitis expanded and elaborately conceptualized the element of carnival in Behn's play.<sup>348</sup> She staged a series of four carnival sequences, each with its own theme: drag, oriental, bestial, and dark anti-carnival.<sup>349</sup> The expansive, topsy-turvy ethos of carnival provided Akalaitis with an optimal context for contemporary allusion. The design of the first carnival, the "drag carnival," evoked Vegas kitsch.<sup>350</sup> While Las Vegas, a city synonymous with sin, may not strike one as a surprising source of inspiration for a contemporary *Rover*, it carried weighted significance in Akalaitis's production in light of the recent Tailhook scandal at the Las Vegas Hilton. Costume designer Gabriel Barry dressed revelers as Vegas showgirls.<sup>351</sup> Barry costumed Sancho and Lucetta as a "Vegas couple." Elvis impersonators clearly inspired

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<sup>346</sup> Akalaitis's interest in recontextualizing canonical works can be traced throughout her career. For example, she relocated the setting of Jean Genet's *The Balcony* from France to modern day Central America; Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* from a mythical England in the middle ages to Victorian London; and John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* from the seventeenth century to Fascist Italy.

<sup>347</sup> Mullens was Assistant to the Producing Director at the Guthrie from 1992-1995.

[gigi@turquoisethemovie.com](mailto:gigi@turquoisethemovie.com)

<sup>348</sup> In broad theory, the carnival environment serves as the backdrop for Behn's entire play; however, her stage directions only reference onstage carnival activity in specific places.

<sup>349</sup> For more extensive descriptions of the carnival sequences see Susan Carlson's essay. Also of note, the Guthrie *Rover* soundscape document dated May 4, 1994 identifies the fourth carnival as "Masturbation carnival."

<sup>350</sup> Carlson refers to this, the first carnival in Akalaitis's production, as "a Gypsy carnival," per dramaturg Kathleen Dimmick (528); this is probably because the sisters are dressed in gypsy attire (per Behn, which Akalaitis honors).

<sup>351</sup> Guthrie Theater records (PA003), Performing Arts Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Angellica Bianca's wardrobe, which included a silver jumpsuit, a gold slip, and a gold trenchcoat with gold lame boots, consistently evoked a glitzy Vegas vibe throughout the entire production.

Sancho's look.<sup>352</sup> Barry's costume breakdown describes Lucetta's attire as "knock-down, drop dead sexy outfit, high heels, fantasy outfit - cheap" and Sancho's as "black pompadour wig, sunglasses, white pants."<sup>353</sup> Susan Carlson viewed the "Elvis mystique" surrounding Sancho as just one more example of Akalaitis's contemporary variations on Behn's text (525). Given the prevalence of Elvis impersonators in Las Vegas, the costuming of Sancho can be interpreted as another allusion to the location of the Tailhook scandal. By introducing the Las Vegas allusions in the opening carnival, Akalaitis foregrounded a connection between the British Cavaliers' vacation carnival and the U.S. military officers' post-conference hotel party.

According to dramaturg Kathleen Dimmick, Akalaitis had the Tailhook incident in mind when she staged Florinda's 5.1 gang rape (phone interview).<sup>354</sup> Barry's costume breakdown identifies the location of scene seventeen, Blunt's solo attempted rape of Florinda, as "hotel," further affirming Dimmick's comment (4).<sup>355</sup> In light of these points, the Las Vegas design references introduced in the first carnival were all arguably connected in significance to Akalaitis's inspiration for staging Blunt's two attempted orchestrations of rape. Akalaitis staged the gang rape scene in her own uniquely scatological reimagining of Blunt's lair, a filthy public bathroom.<sup>356</sup> A testament to her schooling in the dark humor of Genet and Beckett, Akalaitis gave new meaning to the idea of "potty humor" with this choice. A scene of stylized violence, replete with a clown chase, the gang rape was a surreal, nightmarish fusion of misogyny and

<sup>352</sup> Guthrie Theater records (PA003), Performing Arts Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>353</sup> Guthrie Theater records (PA003), Performing Arts Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>354</sup> Phone interview with author June 2017.

<sup>355</sup> Guthrie Theater records (PA003), Performing Arts Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>356</sup> Of note, Genet's *The Screens*, which Akalaitis had staged prior to *The Rover*, also contains a disturbing bathroom metaphor.

coulrophobia. Blunt, “a country gentleman” per Behn’s character description, is typically played as a nerdy or physically unkempt simpleton; Akalaitis took Blunt’s foolishness to an absurd level, having Christopher Bayes play him physically as a clown. The clown figure has ties to Theatre of the Absurd and Beckett’s exploration of the character type in *Waiting for Godot* is well documented.<sup>357</sup> As Gabriella Varro notes, “The absurdist tends to take a tragicomic approach to the world, since in a time of trouble it always gives solace . . . to laugh at our despair. Balancing between tragic and comic qualities is a recurring feature in the Theatre of the Absurd” (207).<sup>358</sup> In Akalaitis’s staging, Bayes’s Blunt earned many laughs prior to intermission as an innocuous clown, making animal balloon art out of condoms, the implication being that he had no actual use for them. In the second act, Bayes delved into the dark side of clowning.<sup>359</sup> In her 1989 staging of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* at the Public, Akalaitis had depicted Cloten as a minstrel show clown who evoked uncomfortable laughter. As Blunt, Bayes accomplished similar ends with the audience during the gang rape of Florinda. Carlson’s description of Akalaitis’s staging of the scene brings to mind the fraternity-style sexual hazing that played out in the hallways of the Vegas Hilton:

Frederick threatens [Florinda] with his knife; the men toss her about physically, ripping her clothes and exposing her breasts and buttocks; and they synchronized their violent energy by joining in a ritual clapping during the chase (535).

Carlson’s description resonates with the clown’s tragicomic function in Theatre of the Absurd:

“The absurd captures the exact moment when one is made to laugh despite one’s will at a situation or condition that is utterly hopeless” (Varro 207). McManus notes that the clown can

<sup>357</sup> See, for example, Martin Essin’s landmark critical assessment, *Absurd Drama* (1965).

<sup>358</sup> Varro, Gabriella. “Versions of the Clown in Samuel Beckett’s ‘Waiting for Godot’ and Same Shepard’s ‘Kicking a Dead Horse.’” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*. 16:12 (Spring-Fall 2010): 205-223.

<sup>359</sup> Bayes is now a professor of acting and movement at Yale School of Drama.



“act as bridge between the mimetic world of the play, or show, and the world of the audience” ; this captures the non-illusionistic repore that Bayes/Blunt maintained with the audience (14).<sup>360</sup> According to Dimmick, “Bayes reported that during post-performance discussions, many audience members complained about the depiction of the rape. They were generally uneasy with their implication in the process” (535).

### **Editing and Assembling a Montage *Rover*: The Guthrie Script**

Like all literary works adapted from existing texts, *The Rover* has had a complicated textual history since the ink dried on Behn’s first draft. The play’s complexity has only grown as a result of the many derivative incarnations that have resulted from its contemporary stage revival. Indeed, the play is a “a spongy site of imitation and innovation,” a veritable playground for a bold director like Joanne Akalaitis (Carlson 519). As Susan Carlson notes, staging the play requires an acknowledgement of “the palimpsestic nature of the performance text”:

the various textual transformations of the rover's story—from Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso* (1654) to Behn's *Rover* (1677) to John Barton's RSC resurrection (1986) to Akalaitis's rendition (1994)—are the foundation on which directors visualize and moralize this story (518-519).<sup>361</sup>

Through the performance text that she constructed with Dimmick, Akalaitis foregrounded her montage approach to staging the play. In my first interview with Akalaitis, she likened the experience to “writing a new play” (phone interview).<sup>362</sup> Her comment bespeaks her auteurist

<sup>360</sup> McManus, Donald. *No Kidding! Clown as Protagonist in Twentieth-Century Theater*. Cranbery, NJ: Rosemont, 2003.

<sup>361</sup> Carlson, Susan. "Cannibalizing and carnivalizing: reviving Aphra Behn's 'The Rover.'" *Theatre Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4, 1995, p. 517+. *Academic OneFile*, [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=tamp44898&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CA17885371&it=r&asid=539040dd08a535d67a9a2bb986e18a46](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=tamp44898&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CA17885371&it=r&asid=539040dd08a535d67a9a2bb986e18a46). Accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

Carlson joins Jessica Munns and Nancy Copeland in lamenting the anti-feminist implications of Barton’s adaptation, particularly given the fact that Barton’s text formed the basis for several later productions, namely the Williamstown (1987), the Goodman (1989), and the Guthrie revivals.

<sup>362</sup> Interview with the author on January 8, 2015.

editing process of cutting, adding, transposing, and splicing from several sources. According to a phone interview that Carlson had with dramaturg Kathleen Dimmick, Dimmick and Akalaitis “spent a month with the various texts putting together their version; the texts included Killigrew, two RSC scripts, and Janet M. Todd’s edition of Behn, *Oroonoko, The Rover and Other Works*” (523). Carlson describes Akalaitis’s performance script as “a lean text which makes the spectacle of Akalaitis’s twentieth-century milieu an equal partner to the word” (523).<sup>363</sup> Akalaitis’s working script drew most heavily from Barton’s Swan programme/text, which also appears to be the version that Carlson consulted for her essay on Akalaitis’s revival.<sup>364</sup> The textual legacy of Barton’s *Rover* is itself more complicated than scholarship has recognized. There are essentially four manifestations of his adaptation: the Swan programme/text, the Swan promptbook, the Mermaid programme/text, and the Mermaid promptbook. The RSC Swan programme/text was not the version that was performed at the Swan in 1986 or the following year at the Mermaid, but instead a rehearsal version that went to print, for program purposes, before the final performance script was solidified. This version, which reverses the order of the first two scenes so that the play begins with the British men’s arrival to Carnival, not with the sisters’ refutation of their brother Don Pedro’s paternal orders, was never performed publicly by the RSC. The RSC promptbook for the Swan production makes clear that Barton restored Behn’s opening scene order before opening.<sup>365</sup> To my knowledge, Akalaitis is the only modern

<sup>363</sup> Akalaitis (like Barton) fuses Philippo and Sancho. Carlson refers to the RSC text as “Barton,” as opposed to “Link” for the edition of Behn’s *Rover* or “Killigrew” for the source text.

<sup>364</sup> Behn, *Rover. An Adaptation of The Rover*. Swan Theatre Plays. London: Methuen, 1986.

<sup>365</sup> As a point of comparison, Donnelly’s production at the Goodman drew from Barton’s Swan promptbook, not the published programme/text, and accordingly maintained Behn’s opening scene sequence. The Goodman archive contains both the Swan and the Mermaid promptbooks

director to stage the opening of the play as it appears in the RSC Swan programme/text (1986). Given all of the texts at her disposal, what might have compelled Akalaitis to stage this opening? Perhaps, in light of her graphic staging of the rape scenes and her dark Lenten coda to the play's ending, Akalaitis wanted to foreground male dominion from the start.

Akalaitis's edits to dialogue in the garden scene (Behn's 3.5) demonstrate how contemporary sexual politics informed her staging. In her article on Akalaitis's production, Cheryl Black aptly glosses one of Willmore's lines in the scene as "the restoration [sic] version of the mini-skirt defense" (144). However, Black does not point out that Willmore's lines are Akalaitis's creation, not Behn's or Barton's. A review of the variant lines as they appear in each text illustrates this:

"Egad, child, a judge, were he young and vigorous, and saw those eyes of thine, would know 'twas they gave the first blow, the first provocation"

-Aphra Behn (3.5.41-43)

"Egad, child, those eyes of thine gave the first blow, the first provocation. So doth thy habit."

-RSC, Mermaid Theatre (Sc 11, p46)

"Egad, child, those eyes of thine gave the first blow, the first provocation. So doth thy dress. Why art thou thus attired at midnight in a garden but to lure men?"

-Guthrie Promptbook (Sc 11, p63)

Comparison of these lines demonstrates the extent to which Akalaitis modified Behn's and Barton's scripts to suit her modern, politicized vision of the play. It also speaks more generally to what drives Akalaitis as a director: "I'm interested in history and social and political issues. I

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in addition to the Goodman's own *Rover* promptbook; I have consulted these against the Swan and the Mermaid programme/texts, which I have in my personal library.

feel I have a responsibility to work in these areas” (Bartow 4).<sup>366</sup> Akalaitis also kept Barton’s added line at the start of the garden scene in which Florinda vocalizes sexual desire:

“Now am I on my way to happiness, and now I ache for Belvile.”  
-Guthrie promptbook (Sc 11, p62)

“Well, thus far I’m on my way to happiness”  
-Behn (3.5.1)

Through textual decisions such as this one Akalaitis staked a claim in more strongly depicting female sexual agency. This was offset by scenes that depicted men as violent victimizers. Through the heightened juxtaposition of female sexual agency and victimization, Akalaitis’s production set in relief the fine line that separates the two positions. Akalaitis recalls, “the actresses being disturbed by having to fall in love with guys who were rapists, gang bangers. I had one actress come to me in tears and say ‘I can’t do this’” (phone interview). This anecdote makes two points: It confirms how graphically Akalaitis staged the rapes, and it reinforces the frustration expressed by practitioners and scholars regarding the play’s double-edged trajectory and its culmination in a conventional happy ending. Hume notes, “For Behn, civilization is not founded on language; it is founded on violence” (Hume 10).<sup>367</sup> Akalaitis firmly believes that “images of violence towards women onstage don’t endorse violence towards women offstage”; she adds, “I’m a feminist . . . This is a very bad world, and I think we haven’t come far enough at all (Phone interview).<sup>368</sup>

### **Aural Fixation: Akalaitis’s Soundscape for *The Rover***

<sup>366</sup> Bartow, Arthur. *The Director’s Voice: Twenty-One Interviews*. Theatre Communications Group: New York, 1993.

<sup>367</sup> Hume, David. *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

<sup>368</sup> Phone interview with author September 27, 2017.

According to J.L. Styan, “Restoration comedy was notably musical, and . . . from the beginning a small orchestra . . . probably a few strings with oboe, flute and bassoon—formed a regular part of every production” (35). At Dorset Garden, the music gallery was located above the proscenium arch, though musicians sometimes also appeared on stage with performers (35). Styan points to “the extensive use of music, dance, and song in the comedies” as evidence of the “lightness of their tone and style, a matter easily passed over in reading them” (35). He adds, “the presence of so much music in the comedies should, if nothing else, remind us that the show on the stage was almost as unreal and full of convention as opera itself” (35-36). Behn’s stage directions in *The Rover* call for music in 1.2, 2.1, and 5.1.<sup>369</sup>

In contemporary theatre, sound is a critical design tool for creating musical, natural, and emotional environment. A production’s soundscape can provide strong insight into a director’s vision. In contemporary revivals of classical plays, the soundscape can be an important gauge of concept, style, and tone. Akalaitis’s stage direction has always demonstrated careful attention to the importance of sound. Reflecting on her aesthetic, Akalaitis told Anne Bogart, “I’m interested in music almost like film.”<sup>370</sup> *The Rover* was Akalaitis’s first time working with sound designer Bruce Odland, with whom she has collaborated many times since: “Because I didn’t know him well enough, that show for me was a process of learning how we would work together, learning to trust Bruce” (phone interview).<sup>371</sup> The soundscape for her staging of *The Rover* reinforced the eclecticism of the production. Carlson describes it as “a cacophonous mixture of music and sound—irregularly alternating among classical music, new age soundscapes, and the impatient

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<sup>369</sup> A pastoral song about a shepherd’s arousal precedes Angellica’s first interaction with Don Pedro and Don Antonio (2.1.165-181); this is often cut from modern productions.

<sup>370</sup> Akalaitis interview with Anne Bogart, November 18, 2004.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

ticking of a clock.”<sup>372</sup> The soundscape included selections by Manuel de Falla, an early twentieth-century Spanish composer, alongside contemporary flamenco artists such as the Gypsy Kings and Ketama, a leader of the “new flamenco” movement that fuses flamenco with reggae, pop, funk, and jazz. New Age music by Struntz & Ferrar and Peter Gabriel rounded out the musical dimension of the soundscape. Many of the songs by the above artists that are sampled in Akalaitis’s soundscape can be located on iTunes; students, scholars, and practitioners can peruse them there to gain a sense of the aural environment of Akalaitis’s production. Taken together, these selections suggested both old world and modern day Barcelona. Abstract funhouse sounds punctuated scene ten (Lucetta’s house), and other miscellaneous sound elements, including a drumbeat, a ticking clock, and a recurring gong effect, completed the eclectic aural world of the production.

Critics have noted but not offered explanation for the production’s repeated use of a ticking clock in the show’s soundscape. According to Akalaitis, this idea originated with Odland (Phone Interview).<sup>373</sup> In addition to calling attention to the present moment and the passage of time, this element of the soundscape can also be interpreted as another connection to the absurdist influence of Beckett. Characters in Akalaitis’s *Rover*, much like “characters in Beckett’s plays are stuck in time as a fly becomes stuck on what Langston Hughes once so poignantly called, ‘the sweet flypaper of life,’ and none is able to overcome its limitations” (Morse 36). Like a bizarre fairytale, or a libidinous Las Vegas bender, the recurring clock-ticking forewarned that time would run out and revelry would end. The soundscape’s time referencing also melds compellingly with the play’s sudden nuptials and the allusions throughout

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<sup>372</sup> Pg530.

<sup>373</sup> Phone interview with Joanne Akalaitis, September 26, 2017.

to Las Vegas, where impulse weddings and 24-hour chapels prevail. By costuming Blunt in pants graffitied with the word “time,” designer Gabriel Barry added a sartorial nod to time’s significance in Akalaitis’s staging.

To underscore Akalaitis’s periodic, heightened honoring of Restoration style, Odland created a special sound cue pattern. According to Dimmick, such moments of “Restoration quotation” were ones that “Akalaitis found particularly strong, dated, or linguistically filigreed”; Akalaitis emphasized them through stylized movements (Carlson 537). In these instances, the actors would freeze in stylized poses and speak their lines in a heightened style. This stylization technique was used for the first time immediately following the opening carnival sequence. The ensemble divided into lines and engaged in a choreographed “Restoration walk.” The sound that underscored these “Restoration quotation” moments included a segment of baroque chamber music by seventeenth-century composers George Handel (1685-1759) or Henry Purcell (1659-1695) with a reverberation effect and a gong for ending punctuation [Figure 22].<sup>374</sup>

Akalaitis’s use of sound for Behn’s 3.3 garden rape scene demonstrated her surrealist approach to violence. Hornby described this scene as “the most unusual, and intriguing, of the play . . . Willmore’s sexual voraciousness is neither admirable nor funny” (611). Peter Gabriel’s song “Passion” played under the start of act two and during this scene. Interestingly, “Passion” is the title song from the 1989 album that Gabriel originally composed as the soundtrack for Martin Scorsese’s film *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The 1988 movie, adapted from Niko

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<sup>374</sup> The Restoration quotation moments infused anachronistic tension into Akalaitis’s otherwise updated staging approach. As Patrizia McBride notes, there is “a fundamental ambiguity” to the “gesture of citation that is proper to montage, which is bound to pay homage at the same time as it critiques. . . . [M]ore recent criticism has treated the moment of appropriation as a tactical step that does not inherently possess subversive value, and whose ideological appraisal requires a broad contextualization within relevant sociocultural frameworks” (208).

Kazantzakis's 1955 novel, depicts Christ's struggle with many forms of temptation, most notably lust.<sup>375</sup> "Passion" was a fitting choice given Akalaitis's emphasis on the play's themes of sin and repentance. The track's ominous sound and time-warp tempo strongly inform how Akalaitis staged this moment, which is sometimes played quite comically. This sound cue selection leant itself well to the stylization of violence. In sum, Akalaitis's soundscape drew from an array of artists whose styles span cultures and centuries. Her soundscape also reflected an acute concern with time and tempo. Her pronounced emphasis on asides combined with her accenting of selected moments that she deemed particularly "Restoration" in tone made the overall rhythm of her production very staccato, a constant succession of stops and starts, of slowing down and speeding back up to real time, making time itself a motif in the production.

#### **Foreplay and Interplay: Installations and the Program Guide for The Guthrie's *Rover***

The challenge for me with *The Rover* was to take the feeling and the style of the 17th century and make it thoroughly contemporary. What I wanted was to have Aphra Behn and the 17th century looking at us as we created our own world. The story is basically about a group of rich, innocent, but sexually curious girls and a group of tough, biker-type guys who come into town—we all know what happens in those situations.<sup>376</sup>

As Akalaitis's above remarks from her director's note make clear, her staging was deeply and intentionally informed by its own moment of production. Akalaitis turned the occasion of the play's revival into a multi-faceted immersive event that evoked contemporary sexual politics and practices.<sup>377</sup> Audience initiation into Akalaitis's erotically-charged staging of *The Rover*

<sup>375</sup> In 1990, the album actually won a Grammy Award for Best New Age Album.

<sup>376</sup> Akalaitis, Joanne. "From the first rehearsal." *The Guthrie Program Magazine*, 24.

<sup>377</sup> Akalaitis incorporated extensive, immersive pre-show installations into other productions in the 1990s. This was the case, for example, in her 1997 staging of *The Iphigenia Cycle* by Euripides at the Court Theatre in Chicago. Richard Christiansen's description is illustrative: "Her production . . . spills out from the auditorium into the lobby and even the restrooms, where



began with the provision of programs and props; sponsor 3M provided guests with complimentary red fans bearing the phrase “Hot Summer.” Curiosity aroused, guests encountered the pre-show component of Akalaitis’s *Rover*, an interactive lobby installation called “Aphra’s Hotline,” which consisted of red phone receivers suspended from the ceiling. A nod to the notorious 1-900-sex-hotlines that were ubiquitous in the 1980s and 1990s, these foreplay phones featured recordings of Akalaitis and cast members reciting Behn’s poetry and “miscellaneous writings on female sexuality and sexual double standards” (Black 141). Like the masks worn at carnival, these phones sparked audience intrigue through the anticipation of an anonymous encounter. Of course, not everyone fancied the installation; Richard Christiansen described the phones as “flapdoodle” (Aug. 10, 1994). When audience entered the performance space, they experienced a “subliminal” theatre installation that projected “Aphraisms” at a low-volume from rear speakers.<sup>378</sup> This concept resumed at intermission with a Restoration-inspired rap entitled “Fair Lovely Maid” followed by a recitation of an account of the life of King’s Company actress Elizabeth Farley, whose sexual affairs and pregnancy ended her career and led her to a life of prostitution.<sup>379</sup> Up to fifty especially adventurous patrons received red ruffs and capes and sat directly on stage; by spatially spotlighting and color-coordinating these guests with the set and cast, Akalaitis blurred the boundaries between performer and patron, heightening audience investment.<sup>380</sup>

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videos and posters and scrawled messages on the bathroom mirrors, further fill in the mythic saga that the play takes up” (*Chicago Tribune*. 21 September 1997).

<sup>378</sup>Noted in Soundscape, May 4, 1994. See Guthrie Theater records (PA003), Performing Arts Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>379</sup> See also p530 of Carlson for her recap of the pre-show and theater components.

<sup>380</sup> As Cheryl Black notes, this seating option also represented a “quoting” of the Restoration convention of seating musicians or audience on stage (141). According to Akalaitis, having audience seated onstage wearing ruffs was a decision that happened “at the very last minute.”

The production's extensive program study guide, an assemblage of quotes and passages from a range of voices, announced Akalaitis's desire for the production to be "thoroughly contemporary" and foreshadowed her eclectic, montage staging approach. Excerpts from Angeline Goreau's biography *Reconstructing Aphra* (1980) and Vivian De Sola Pinto's *Poetry of the Restoration* (1966) provided biographical, historical, and literary context on Behn and her era. A passage borrowed from Simon Trussler's RSC Swan programme/text explained the reciprocal relationship between the incidence of sex and violence that occurred on- and off- stage in the Restoration. Block quotes by Samuel Beckett, Margaret Cavendish, Simone de Beauvoir, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Virginia Woolf posed a variety of perspectives on gender roles, sexual conflict, and love that collectively underscored the program's invocation of postmodern collage. The selections from de Beauvoir and Beckett warrant further discussion. The excerpt from de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953) speaks to the juncture at which Hellena, Florinda, and Valleria find themselves in the play, the ambivalence of adolescence, and the new sexual double standards it presents to them:

But for the young woman there is a contradiction between her status as a real human being and her vocation as female. And just here is to be found the reason why adolescence is for a woman so difficult and decisive a moment. Up to this time she has been an autonomous individual: now she must renounce her sovereignty. Not only is she torn, like her brothers, though more painfully, between the past and the future, but in addition a conflict breaks out between her original claim to be subject, active, free, and on the other hand, her erotic urges and the social pressure to accept herself as a passive object (26).

Simone de Beauvoir's sentiments speak to the paradox of the young woman's rites of sexual passage: the simultaneity of agency and victimhood.

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Just before opening, Akalaitis made the decision not to use a large red backdrop ("I told Jennifer and George that we have to lose it, and they both agreed." Gabriel took all the fabric and made audience costumes; it was a happy accident (Phone interview with Akalaitis, September 26, 2017).

Akalaitis's fondness for Beckett was not only apparent in her production's preoccupation with the passage of time and absurdist, tragicomic handling of violence, but also arguably in her treatment of the play's ending. The following final lines from Beckett's novella *First Love* appeared along with an image of hooded hangmen [Figure 23]: "But there it is, either you love or you don't." Out of context, the combination of quote and image preemptively invokes the idea that love is a risky gamble that can lead to dire consequences; considered within the context of the Beckettian source from which it is extracted, the line bears greater meaning. Beckett's novella *First Love*, written in 1945 but not published until 1973, after he had already won the Nobel Prize for Literature, centers on a nameless male protagonist who marries and fathers a child with a prostitute. The protagonist's bleak, nihilistic recollection of this, his first love, is a far cry from what he had once innocently thought the experience would be like; in Akalaitis's *Rover*, the revelry of carnival led to marriage, but the Lenten coda portended misery, not bliss.

### **Hemlines and Blurred Lines: Akalaitis's Sartorial Ending and "the Mini-Skirt Defense"**

In a section of the program guide entitled "From Myth to Mardi Gras," an historical overview of Carnival appeared opposite a bolded excerpt from a 1989 Associated Press article about the Florida rape trial that established "the mini-skirt defense." The excerpt highlighted the views of the jury foreman who believed the victim "asked for it for the way she was dressed" and another juror who felt the victim was "advertising for sex" (Program 29).<sup>381</sup> In the summer of 1994, New York followed Florida's lead in passing a law that prohibited a defendant from blaming the plaintiff's attire for inciting a crime; thus, the subject was newsworthy again at the

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<sup>381</sup> Associated Press, 1989 in "From Myth to Mardi Gras." *The Guthrie Program Magazine*, 29.

time that the Guthrie's *Rover* was enjoying an extended run from June 4-August 20, 1994.<sup>382</sup>

Both Susan Carlson and Cheryl Black acknowledge the program's reference to "the mini-skirt defense," but neither expounds on its contextual and conceptual significance to Akalaitis's staging.

The news-garnering sexual assault trials in the early 1990s set in motion an ongoing debate among two camps of feminists—those who defended victims of sexual assault, "victimist feminists," and their opponents, "anti-victim feminists" (or AVFers). Proponents of the latter, such as Camille Paglia, argued that the women's movement had hindered women's progress and made the entire sex a victim: "According to AVFers, if women are victims, they are victims of victim feminism" (Cole 136).<sup>383</sup> AVFers claimed that "victim feminists" feigned powerlessness, but were, in fact, empowered through the use of emotional manipulation to "exaggerate or fabricate data dramatizing women's vulnerability to rape, sexual harassment, low self-esteem" (136). For the men in Akalaitis's production, carnival represented "an extension of the privileges they possess in a patriarchal society"; for the women, however, the excitement of expressing desire and experiencing agency was ultimately overshadowed by the dangers to which they were exposed and the sex objects they become—"their virginity is under constant threat" (Carlson 533). Akalaitis and Barry reinforced this gender dynamic with costume; the sisters became increasingly more objectified through costume changes and eventual undressing (533). In

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<sup>382</sup> AP. "New Law Says Victims' Attire Cannot Be Cited in Rape Cases." *The New York Times*. 30 July 1994. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/30/nyregion/new-law-says-victims-attire-cannot-be-cited-in-rape-cases.html?mcubz=0>

<sup>383</sup> Noteworthy publications by anti-victim feminists in the early 1990s include Paglia's *Sex, Art, and American Culture* (1992), Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After* (1993), Naomi Wolf's *Fire with Fire* (1993), and Christina Hoff Summers's *Who Stole Feminism* (1994). Cole, Alyson M. "Victims No More (?)." *Feminist Review*. 64 (Spring 2000): 135-138. Also by Cole, see "There are no victims in this class": On Female Suffering and Anti-"Victim Feminism." *NWSA Journal*. 11:1 (Spring 1999): 72-96.

Cheryl Black's estimation, the costumes for the men and women in the play suggested "over determined masculinity" and "over determined femininity." The sisters' "go-go girl wedding outfits, short white skirts, veils, and boots parody traditional bridal attire" (Black 143). Given the sexual-political context of the early the 1990s, the choice of mini-dresses represents more than an undercutting or updating of bridal convention. Rather, the mini-dress is a pointed visual reference to the debate that played out on stage and in the news about the relationship between female sexual agency, accountability, and self-fashioning.<sup>384</sup> For Mary Quant, one of the designers credited with introducing the mini-skirt to the youth of the 1960s, the clothing item was "symbolic of the rejection of formality and the pushing back of boundaries."<sup>385</sup> Yet, with the "mini-skirt defense," the clothing item that was initially a symbol of women's liberation and empowerment had come to signify their false victimhood and complicity in rape. According to Akalaitis, she intended the final dark dance that ended her revival to function as a comment on whether or not the marriages would be happy. Black's description of this moment is useful here:

After two steps in minuet rhythm, the couples abruptly halt. An ominous sound cue, like thunder, is heard. The couples separate, walk away from each other, and freeze, eyeing each other warily from a distance. Black-caped figures appear bearing tall candles. Carnival is over, and Lent has begun (145).

By invoking the mini-skirt defense in the program guide, altering Willmore's lines in the garden scene to echo the argument, and ending the play with the three sisters in bridal mini-dresses, Akalaitis made this topical issue prominent in her production. Through the violent but surreal depiction of the rape in the garden scene and the gang rape in Blunt's chamber, Akalaitis

<sup>384</sup> As Carlson observes, "the play ends . . . with a chilling exposure of patriarchal hierarchies of power" (534).

<sup>385</sup> "Mini was height of liberation, says Mary Quant." *Daily Telegraph* [London, England] 29 Apr. 2014: 13. Business Insights: Essentials. Web. 25 Aug. 2017.  
<http://bi.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/essentials/article/GALE|A366328488/f75e0d0eb3e875732839c24471ff061b?u=tamp44898>

defamiliarized sexual violence and offered a darkly comic, biting indictment of misogynistic victimizers. For Carlson, “Akalaitis’ costuming most dramatically underlines the way carnival exposes the fragility of female agency” (Carlson 533). Carlson asserts that the sisters’ “conscriptio[n] in a system of marriage and property is emphasized in their costuming for their final entrance. . . . outfitted in veils as well as virginal, white, mini-skirted dresses. . . . For the three women, Akalaitis’s carnival cannot be read as a liberating romp . . . rather . . . a chilling exposure of patriarchal hierarchies of power” (534). In Tad Simon’s estimation, “Akalaitis exaggerates the idiocy of the wedding scene, making it look so ridiculous and contrived that it cannot be mistaken for anything but a theatrical convention” (10).<sup>386</sup> Baroque music played under the sisters’ bridal entrance; the tension between their modern costume and the classical music reinforces Akalaitis’s desire to register disapproval at the sisters’ marriages to the cavaliers. The final costumes and composition of Blunt and the three sisters form an interesting juxtaposition. Blunt, a violent misogynist in seventeenth-century period attire, stands encapsulated within a modern neon light. His outdated attire in this very contemporary revival points to the past, specifically to the history of sexual violence against women in patriarchal society; his behavior, like his attire, is outmoded. The mini-dresses of Hellena, Florinda, and Valeria stand as ambivalent signifiers that capture the paradoxical predicament of women in the mid-1990s. The discourses of sexual agency and victimhood permeated public debate about women’s personal and professional lives. Misha Berson’s *American Theatre* article, “Women at the Helm” captures the implications of the conflicting viewpoints for women in the workplace:

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<sup>386</sup> Mike Steele’s description of acting style fits with the vein of hyperbole Simons detects: “Akalaitis opts for a boldly ripe style: the men swaggering until their pelvises must ache, the women almost giddy with their seductive powers” (1E). “Director Has a High Old Time with ‘Rover.’” *Star Tribune*. 17 June 1994.

On the one hand, a number of young, well-publicized neo-feminist pundits like Naomi Wolf and Kate Roiphe are pushing the idea of ‘victimless’ feminism, and researchers, such as social scientist Carol Tavris, are trying to debunk popular notions that women are . . . ‘the better sex, the inferior sex, or the opposite sex.’ On the other hand, news events like the Tailhook affair, the continuing disparity in male and female earning power, and the everyday experiences of women in the world remind us that one’s sex still counts in the workplace.<sup>387</sup>

## Conclusion

Joanne has a socio-political-feminist approach to the classics that, if you allow it, can strike you in a deep way. . . . She doesn’t try to provide answers but she gets those issues rumbling within you. You go away with all that jumbled up inside, and it’s your to do with as you will.

-Fight director, David Leong<sup>388</sup>

Leong’s assessment of Akalaitis’s direction speaks to the critical ambivalence that results from her eclectic style. An Akalaitis production requires the audience to work hard (Nouryeh 180). With particular regard to *The Rover*, Carlson similarly concludes, “Akalaitis’s play clearly demonstrates that Behn’s play is an exercise in possibility, not a meting of judgment” (539). In the end, Akalaitis’s staging of *The Rover* garnered a mixed response from critics. David Richards, for example, conceded that “Akalaitis has a fecund imagination” and that “her pictorial sense is arresting”; however, he claimed that “she rarely disciplines her visions, which can seem self-indulgent as a result. In the end, Behn’s intricate play is obscured by the layers of commentary that are meant to make it pertinent (Richards). Akalaitis staged a revival of *The Rover* that indicted misogynistic sexual violence and patriarchal social conventions by depicting misogyny and male sexual violence through the filter of absurd and surreal theatre techniques. As a solution to Behn’s abrupt happy ending, Akalitis leaves audiences little room to doubt the misery of the marriages, with the couples dividing and exiting separately.

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<sup>387</sup> Berson, Misha. “Women at the Helm.” *American Theatre*. 11:5-6 (May-June 1994): 14+. Academic Onefile.

<sup>388</sup> Quoted in Deborah Saivetz (“An Event in Space,” 152)

Since its 1994 revival at the Guthrie, *The Rover* has not received another major production at an American resident theatre. No other U.S. director has confronted the violence in the play as graphically as Akalaitis did. While some directors choose to minimize the play's darker moments by overlaying them with farcical comedy in performance, others choose to embrace them. Both scenarios have their own implications for the production's overall tone and how the ending signifies; staging the rapes more violently more strongly problematizes the play's ending. Akalaitis's *Rover* wasn't merely radical, it was pointedly absurd and reinforced Nancy Copeland's point about Behn's most produced play: "*The Rover*'s complexities and ambivalence permit the range of interpretations that are necessary if a work is to be kept alive beyond its original historical moment."<sup>389</sup> Using the method of montage and allusive design elements, Akalaitis infused her revival with topical allusions that grounded it in American sexual politics. By employing absurdist and surrealist staging techniques, she inventively navigated Behn's tragicomic universe, experimented with temporal order, and defamiliarized the violence, leaving viewers with a surfeit of politically charged images and sounds to process long after the performance ended.

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<sup>389</sup> Copeland, Nancy. "Reviving Aphra Behn: *The Rover* in the 'Restoration' Repertoire." *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research*. 14:1 (Summer 1999): 1-18.



### **Part III. Woman-Directed Off-Broadway & Regional Revivals of *The Rover* in the Twenty-First Century**

Since 2000, the American stage revival of *The Rover* has occurred at small to mid-size non-profit theatre companies Off-Broadway and regionally. This final section of the study will explore four examples. Classical companies presented three of these revivals. Two were same-sex productions that occurred on opposite coasts of the country in the first decade of the new millennium.<sup>390</sup> The third was a site-specific staging at the World Financial Center in Manhattan. A testament to the interpretive freedoms that exist even within constraints, these revivals represent distinct, innovative staging approaches by women directors working within the parameters of classical theatre practice. Classical companies are defined as such not solely because they stage ancient and early modern plays, but also because their methods of practice: they typically utilize an authoritative edition of the playwright's original text, avoid modernization of diction, and often, though not always, privilege language, elocution, and acting over a directorial concept. The final chapter of this section examines my experience directing a punk-inspired revival that emphasized the play's comic tone by parodying masculinity. Through casting, blocking, environment, and design elements, directors Rebecca Patterson, Erin Merritt, Karin Coonrod, and I discovered exciting new ways to stage *The Rover*.

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<sup>390</sup> Josh Costello adapted and directed an all-female production in 2005 at Chance Theatre in Berkeley, CA. Costello recontextualized the play within a modern day bedroom of Hellena and Florinda, who were played by teenaged sisters; male roles were enacted using dolls and props from a toychest. Nancy Copeland provides several paragraphs of analysis on this production in her chapter "Aphra Behn in the Contemporary Theater" in *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*. Eds. Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs. NY: MLA, 2010.

## Chapter Six

### The Paradoxical Pleasures of Cross-Gendered Revivals: A Comparative Analysis of *The Rover at Queens Company* (2001) and *Woman's Will* (2003)

The subject of transvestism abounds in writing by and about Behn. Scholar Frances M. Kavenik describes Aphra Behn as “one of the boys.” Kavenik likens Behn’s position as a female playwright in a male-dominated theatre culture to a “breeches role.”<sup>391</sup> As Bush-Bailey notes, “the attendant and disappointingly conventional suggestion is that Behn is, ultimately, a woman imitating a man in order to get what she wants” (37). Jessica Munns challenges Kavenik arguing instead that Behn “double-dressed” by proclaiming her own sex and insisting on her right to perform roles proscribed to the male sex: “It is the doubleness of her claims and the doubleness of her vision that characterizes not merely Behn’s ‘feminism’ but her creation of a new sexual space from which to speak” (Munns 195). Joining the conversation, Pearson asks, “Does Behn, then, write as a feminist or one of the boys? Does she remake the patriarchal vision of sex-comedy or does she simply take it over unthinkingly?” (146).<sup>392</sup> These questions take on another layer of significance when posed in the context of cross-gender casting *The Rover*.

At the present moment, cross-gender casting has once again become a topic of heated debated in the theatre industry. Between a recent spate of high profile U.S. and U.K. productions

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<sup>391</sup> Kavenik, Frances M. “Aphra Behn: The Playwright as ‘Breeches Part.’” Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski. *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660-1820*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1991. pp177-191.

<sup>392</sup> Pearson, Jacqueline. *The Prostituted Muse*. New York: St. Martins Press, 1988. Herein Pearson notes that the subject of Behn’s feminism has been heavily debated (146). She cites Donald Bruce, who describes her plays as “expert feminist propaganda,” and by contrast, Katherine Rogers, who concedes to Behn’s feminism in her prefaces, prologues, and epilogues, but contends that such feminist boldness isn’t incorporated into her plays (146).

featuring women in male roles and a wide-scale public skepticism towards the “straight-white-male,” undoubtedly fueled by the 2016 U.S. presidential election, female transvestism has received increased scrutiny. In a recent *Broadway World* article, U.K. director Scott Ellis explored opposing viewpoints on the subject in an attempt to determine whether it is the “new normal” or “just a fad” (March 6, 2017).<sup>393</sup> Ellis runs Merely Theatre in the U.K., a Shakespeare company comprised of five women and five men that “twins” every role during rehearsal, meaning an actor and an actress prepare for the same role so that the production can be performed in various gender-blind configurations during its run. Ellis aspires to a future when producers and audiences will be able “to see beyond the obvious, and look to the character traits an actor shares with a role, free from restrictions of gender,” but he recognizes that everyone is not as liberal-minded as he is. Some still perceive women in drag in classical revivals to be a gimmick, and a few fear that the practice will have dire consequences for the old regime, men. For example, Dominic Cavendish, a theatre critic for the London’s *Telegraph*, recently bemoaned the potential “death of the great male actor” as a result of the increase in actresses playing male roles.<sup>394</sup> As common as female transvestism on stage may seem today, the tradition dates back to the 1600s. The casting method’s prevalence has fluctuated over time, and around the year 2000, it began to regain momentum in contemporary theatre. A brief review of the history of theatrical transvestism as it relates to women playing men will help situate the two cross-gender productions of *The Rover* examined in this chapter within this evolving tradition

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<sup>393</sup> Ellis, Scott. “Artistic Director Scott Ellis Talks Gender-Blind Casting in Shakespeare.” *Broadway World*. 6 March 2017. <http://www.broadwayworld.com/westend/article/Guest-Blog-Artistic-Director-Scott-Ellis-Talks-Gender-Blind-Casting-in-Shakespeare-20170306>

<sup>394</sup> Cavendish, Dominic. “The Thought Police’s Rush for Gender Equality On Stage Risks the Death of the Male Actor.” *The Telegraph*. 23 February 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/thought-polices-rush-gender-equality-stage-risks-death-great/>

and demonstrate that the practice is neither new nor temporary, but an enduring, multivalent aspect of theatre practice.

### **To Pander or Provoke: The Restoration “Breeches” Role**

As Richard Hornby notes, cross-gender performance “is as old as the theatre” (641). With origins in ancient Greece and Rome and Elizabethan England, theatrical transvestism is a resilient tradition that has waned and surged in popularity through the centuries. Historically, male-to-female cross-dressing predated female-to-male cross-dressing and subsequently has dominated the tradition and contemporary critique of it. In spite of its tendency to be overshadowed or dismissed, female transvestism has also experienced a long and compelling history that scholars have finally begun to illuminate in the past few decades.<sup>395</sup>

While the English Restoration is most often celebrated for marking the point in history when women, instead of boys and men, were allowed to perform female roles on the professional London stage, it is also, importantly, the era that marked the beginning of the professional actress performing male roles. From that moment on, controversies over the appropriateness and meaning of female transvestism ensued. The most common type of theatrical transvestism practiced by late seventeenth-century actresses was the “breeches part,” a device popularized by Boccaccio and Shakespeare that called for a female character to cross-dress temporarily as a man for one or more scenes within a play. Female transvestism occurred in at least 89 of the confirmed 375 news plays and adaptations written between 1660-1700 (Roach 32).<sup>396</sup> Scholars

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<sup>395</sup> To this end, Alisa Solomon cautions: “to make male-to-female drag the point from which all discussion of cross-dressing follows simply reinstates the presumption of the male as universal; he remains the standard, the given, even when wearing feather boas and four-inch stilettos” (153).

<sup>396</sup> See Roach, Joseph. “The Performance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*. Ed. Deborah Payne Fisk. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000.

have debated the subversiveness of the breeches role. For some feminist critics, the trend was a “non-disruptive commodification of drag” fueled by audience fascination with seeing actresses’ bare legs and largely unmotivated by a protofeminist or otherwise progressive ideology (Solomon 155). All but five of Behn’s plays feature breeches roles.<sup>397</sup> In *The Rover*, Hellena cross-dresses as a boy page to bait Willmore into acknowledging his wrongdoing. While Willmore sees through her disguise, Hellena, per the playwright’s directions, remains in breeches for the duration of the play. While Behn may have been catering to her audience’s titillation over the exposed calves of the actress playing Hellena, she may also have been sartorially staking a claim for Hellena’s subversive attitude, which remains, even in marriage.

### **Selective Cross-Gender Casting in the 18th & 19th Centuries**

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, actresses took on another, more extensive form of transvestism when they began playing major male roles for the entire duration of a play, an act that “flipped the tables on the Elizabethan custom” of actors portraying Shakespeare’s leading ladies (Hornby 641). For centuries now, this type of selective, female-to-male cross-gendering that finds a woman cast in a single, leading (often Shakespearean) male role has afforded actresses the opportunity to showcase their talent in roles that would otherwise be off-limits (Ferris 2).<sup>398</sup> Because of this practice, esteemed actresses from Charlotte Cushman, Sarah Siddons, and Sarah Bernhardt prior to the twentieth-century to Marianne Hoppe, Ruth Maleczek, and Fiona Shaw more recently, have taken on great, tragic heroes such as Hamlet, Iago, Lear, and Romeo, and they were taken seriously in these parts, according to Marjorie

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<sup>397</sup> Behn’s five plays that do not contain breeches roles are *The Revenge*; *The False Count*; *The Roundheads*; *The City Heiress*; and *The Emperor of the Moon*.

<sup>398</sup> Ferris, Lesley. “Introduction: Current Crossings” in *Crossing the Stage*.

Garber.<sup>399</sup> By contrast, after the emergence of the professional actress, the trend in male-to-female cross-gender casting saw actors taking on “boisterous and vulgar female roles in comedy,” a point I will return to later (*London Stage, 1700-1729* cxxiv). While selective female transvestism remained a part of theatrical practice throughout the past century, it increased in popularity in the 1990s and has remained steadily in use in the twenty-first century. Bulman attributes the increased usage to “a revolution in our way of viewing gender in Western societies—a revolution born of the women’s movement, but soon including the identity politics of the gay movement and a ‘queering’ of our understanding of gender roles” (Bulman *Shakespeare Re-Dressed* 13).

### **In Rare Form: All-Female Cross-Gender Casting**

All-female, cross-gender casts represent a third type of female-to-male theatrical transvestism. This practice has remained the rarest form of cross-gendering throughout the history of the stage, unlike its more prevalent all-male counterpart. A practice with distant roots in the convent plays of Hroswitha (c.935-c.1000) and Hildegard Von Bingen (1098-1179) and the closet dramas of Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), all-female transvestite productions were rare in the Restoration and eighteenth-century; the *London Stage* documents just seven all-female performances in the first decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>400</sup> In modern times, all-female revivals have remained the least common form of female-to-male transvestism. This type of casting has struggled to be taken seriously in the mainstream professional theatre because of its

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<sup>399</sup> Hornby notes that in the nineteenth century more than fifty actresses played Hamlet. See Garber’s *Vested Interests* for more on this tradition.

<sup>400</sup> *London Stage, 1700-1729*, pg cxxiv. Two plays (William Congreve’s farce *Love for Love* and Giovanni Battista Guarini’s pastoral tragicomedy *Pastor Fido* or *The Faithful Shephard* as translated into English in 1647 by Richard Fanshawe) received a combined total of seven performances with all-female casts between 1704-1711. Sadly, no cast records or contemporary commentary about these stagings exist.

more recent association with all girls' schools, prisons, and universities (Aaron 158).<sup>401</sup> Yet, all-female productions provide a refreshing counterpoint to the purportedly historically accurate all-male revivals of early modern plays, which “come at a cost: the cost of not hiring women” (Aaron 151).

### **All Female Classical Companies**

In the 1990s and 2000s in the United States, a few noteworthy female-founded, female-focused classical companies emerged. Unlike freelance directors, founding artistic directors ensure themselves the opportunity to direct: “Some women have chosen to run theatres as artistic directors in order to find steady employment as a director” (Fliostos and Vierow 18). In 1993, Lisa Wolpe founded the Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare Company (LAWSC), a successful organization that was in operation until 2013. In 1995, Joanne Zipay founded Judith Shakespeare Company, a New York company interested in “expanding the presence of women in classical theater.”<sup>402</sup> While not an all-female company, Judith Shakespeare used gender-blind and reverse-gender casting throughout its twenty-one years in existence. In 2000, Rebecca Patterson established the still extant Queen’s Company based in Brooklyn, New York, and in 2003, Erin Merritt formed the now disbanded, San Francisco-based company, Woman’s Will.<sup>403</sup> While LAWSC’s name points quite literally to the type of work it created, the playful monikers of Queen’s Company and Woman’s Will stand out for their feminized appropriation of a male

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<sup>401</sup> Aaron, Melissa D. “‘A Queen in a Beard’: A Study of All-Female Shakespeare Companies.” in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed*, ed. Bulman. Associated UP: New Jersey, 2008. Among the companies Aaron considers are Osiris Company in Britain, Takarazuka in Japan, and Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare Company. Aaron’s interest is in the economic marginalization of all-women companies, for while they present opportunities for women, they tended to be poorly funded by comparison to mixed-sex or all-male companies.

<sup>402</sup> <http://www.judithshakespeare.org/zipay.html>

<sup>403</sup> Also of note, Mark Rylance, the Globe Theatre’s Artistic Director from 1995-2005, announced the formation of The Women’s Company—a temporary, all-female company that performed the Globe’s 2003 summer season, which included productions of *Richard III* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Renaissance tradition. Queen's Company's name brings to mind both the King's Men (formerly the Lord Chamberlain's Men during the reign of Queen Elizabeth), the acting company to which Shakespeare belonged during the reign of James I, and the King's Company, one of the two leading London companies at the start of the Restoration and notably *not* the company that produced Behn's or, for that matter, any female-authored plays. *Woman's Will*, on the other hand, is a double entendre that riffs, obviously, on Shakespeare's first name and succinctly captures the company's mission of empowering women in theatre. Together these three companies made all-female stagings of classical plays the norm, not a novelty.

### **Casting Practices**

The nuances of their missions aside, several common objectives motivate all-female classical theatre companies. The gender-specific casting practices of these all-female companies are inherent to their DNA. Instead of using an "open casting" policy typical of mainstream theatre, these "particularist" organizations

robustly exercise an always to-be-defended freedom of expression. . . Points of view that otherwise would get lost in the dominant discourse find visibility. Often enough, today's particularist opinions become tomorrow's mainstream (Schechner 4).<sup>404</sup>

While producers of all-male productions sometimes claim to do so out of deference to "Original Practice," the same-sex casting method of Shakespeare's day, companies that present all-female stagings of classical plays are motivated foremost by a desire to create more professional opportunities for women in theatre and to provide access to roles of greater complexity and stature.<sup>405</sup> For Erin Merritt, cross-gender classical theatre presented more opportunities to hire

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<sup>404</sup> Schechner, Richard. "Race Free, Gender Free, Body-Type Free, Age Free Casting." *TDR*. 33:1(Spring 1989): 4-12.

<sup>405</sup> Former RSC Artistic Director Mark Rylance routinely cited "Original Practice" as defense for his all-male productions at the Globe. Carol Chillington Rutter, among others, has stressed that this claim to



women than plays by contemporary playwrights did. Therefore, she recalls that there were only a few women playwrights whose work was produced in 2000 when she founded her company:

Caryl Churchill, Paula Vogel, Tina Howe, Wendy Wasserstein, and the final two were portraying rom com female types. Shakespeare was still providing the best roles for women, and he'd written them for boys. We wanted to be able to fuck and fight and contend and carry the shows (email interview).

Merritt also viewed an all-female company as a way for women artists to work together and mentor each other instead of only seeing each other as competition. Leaders of all-female theatre organizations also see their work as a way of engaging in contemporary conversation about representations of gender and sexuality or, alternatively and paradoxically, of moving beyond gender, “taking it out of the equation,” in the words of DeeAnn Weir Morency, a founding member of Queen’s Company (phone interview).<sup>406</sup> The concept of a non-literal, gender-free casting system is precisely what Schechner has advocated for since the 1980s. In 1989, he highlighted the combined implications of naturalistic casting and the abundance of roles for white men:

the American theatre reserves the majority of its best roles for white males—not because they are the best performers available (sometimes they are, sometimes they aren’t) but because the characters to be represented are white males (Schechner 5, 1989).<sup>407</sup>

Twenty years later, Schechner continued to champion the cause of “casting without limits;” in a December 2010 article that bears this maxim as a title, he observed that “In most other areas of

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authenticity of practice is “a tactic of legitimation whose end is political for it leaves Shakespeare in sole possession of white male actors, gay or straight” (88). See her monogram *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare’s Women Today* (1988) for more on this subject.

<sup>406</sup> Phone interview with author, August 2, 2017.

<sup>407</sup> In this 1989 article, Schechner called for “the development of performing arts whose codes of representation are overt,” believing that “where such codes exist . . . these established systems of representation might allow for a radical flexibility in terms of body type, age, gender, and race that is not in play at present (except as parody and travesty)” (6). See Schechner, Richard. “Race Free, Gender Free, Body-Type Free, Age Free Casting.” *TDR*. 33:1(Spring 1989): 4-12.

political, professional and aesthetic life, women are claiming their place, but not as much in theatre. . . The playing field has been tilted for centuries” (26).<sup>408</sup> While he detected progress regarding race- and ethnicity-blind casting, gender remained a problem area: “Slowly but steadily, some of the racism embedded in theatre casting is being overcome. . . Slowly, race-blindness is overtaking race-consciousness,” but this is not yet the case for gender (28). He notes that as a result of “the naturalistic bias,” which “trains spectators to desire a neat fit between performer and character . . . any wide gap between performer and character must ‘justified’” (6). For Schechner “it is more delightful to see the gap than to mask it” (7). Schechner argues for a theatre that can elicit a range of audience responses, including: “times when perceiving the race, gender, etc. of performers matters; times when spectators perceive the categories but it doesn’t matter; and times when it should not even be perceived—not because of disguise . . . but because spectators have been trained to be race, gender, age, and body-type ‘blind’” (9). On these points, the views of Schechner align with those of Queen’s Company’s artistic director, Rebecca Patterson. Schechner is arguing for “an extreme flexibility that allows for situation-specific decisions regarding when to use, when to ignore, and when not to see race, gender, age, and body type” (10).

### **Cross-Gender Revivals of *The Rover***

*The Rover* received its first all-female staging in an academic production in 1989 at the University of Minnesota directed by MFA student Julia Fisher as part of her thesis project. The program cover for this production features a modern-attired, androgynous subject who strongly resembles Candy Darling (1944-1974), the male-to-female transvestite performer of the Warhol-

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<sup>408</sup> Schechner, Richard. “Casting without Limits.” *American Theatre Magazine*. December (2010): 26-30.

era. While the production employed period costumes, its use of a contemporary graphic for the program suggests an interest in relating Behn's blurring of gender roles to late twentieth-century gender politics [Figure 27]. After this university staging, it would be a little more than a decade before *The Rover* would receive its first *professional* all-female revival. In that span of time, sexism in the theatre profession became the subject of many scholarly and trade articles and convenings of expert panels. In December 2000, for example, the year that Patterson and Merritt respectively founded Queen's Company and Woman's Will, Maxine Kern moderated a panel entitled "Expanding the Presence of Women Directors." Held at the prestigious New York Shakespeare Festival at the Public Theater, the panel, co-presented by Judith Shakespeare Company and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation, was the third in a series that formed the basis of a New York State Council-funded study by Kern on the subject of women in contemporary theatre. Karin Coonrod, who directed New York Classical Theatre's revival of *The Rover* in 2011, was one of the five women directors who spoke on this December 2000 panel.<sup>409</sup> The previous panel in May 2000, entitled "Expanding the Presence of Women in Shakespeare Performance," was a timely call to which practitioners Rebecca Patterson and Erin Merritt were already actively responding. In a January 2001 *Backstage* article that recapped Kern's panel sessions, Shellen Lubin attributes the perpetual plight of women theatre artists to poor documentation of women's contributions to theatre history: "Each new generation of women artists has had the tiring job of reinventing the wheel—finding their own way to credibility, access, power, and funding."<sup>410</sup> It is important to understand the current resurgence

<sup>409</sup> The other four directors were Yale M.F.A. director Kaia Calhoun; Leslie B. Jacobson, founder and AD of Horizons Theatre in Washington, D.C.; Australian director, Kim Durban; and Joanne Zipay of Judith Shakespeare Company.

<sup>410</sup> Lubin, Shellen. "Women Directors: Reinventing the Wheel and Rolling It Uphill." *Backstage*. 3:45 (Jan. 19, 2001).

in cross-gender casting within the context of contemporary theatre history. In other words, scholarship must not focus only on distant history and neglect the recent past. The work of the all female-companies that re-introduced twenty-first century audiences to the practice of female transvestism must be properly archived. In what follows, I draw on director and actor interviews and reviews in order to construct a production history of cross-gendered revivals of *The Rover* presented by Queen's Company in 2001 and *Woman's Will* in 2003.<sup>411</sup> I also provide a feminist critique of how transvestism operates in each production.

Women and comedy have a historically complicated relationship plagued by a longstanding cultural skepticism of women's ability to be funny and, more specifically, women's ability to be funny portraying men. This bias speaks to why drag queens have long outnumbered drag kings. Given the greater tendency to cross-gender cast actresses as tragic, rather than comic, heroes in classical revivals, transvestite casting of Behn's comic hero, Willmore, is particularly ripe for examination. As Schechner notes, cross-gender casting invites many questions:

[T]o confront spectators with casting against type is to ask audiences to wonder what such casting means—and to wonder about their own place in various social hierarchies and circumstances; maybe even to inquire into their own personal situations” (30).<sup>412</sup>

Cross-gender casting has interesting implications for the contentious comic/tragic ratio of Behn's play. Casting female performers as Willmore and Blunt, two different types of womanizers, compels one to consider “what can happen when the borderlines of gender are transgressed

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<sup>411</sup> The directors of these productions were not able to provide performance scripts, promptbooks, or video recordings. Good archiving is often a luxury of larger, well-funded, and well-staffed theatres.

<sup>412</sup> Schechner, Richard. “Casting without Limits.” *American Theatre Magazine*. December (2010): 26-30.

toward power instead of away from it, toward a critique of gender roles instead of toward a parody of them” (Solomon 155).<sup>413</sup> Does performative access to masculine power embolden actresses to be funny? And if so, what determines if the cross-gendered portrayal critiques, parodies, or reinforces masculine gender norms? Moreover, in these cross-gendered revivals of *The Rover*, was a homerotic subtext explicit, implicit, or moot? Did the actresses who played men fully embody their roles so that they erased their own gender, or did they inject their performance with a vein of theatricality or parody in order to create an “insistent awareness of gender at play” (Bulman 14)? What do audiences that experience a woman playing Willmore *see*: the female actress, the male character, or both (Klett 169)?<sup>414</sup> In her experience seeing all-female Shakespeare at the Globe, Klett observes, “While all-female casting might seem like a radical innovation, in practice . . . it sometimes worked to erase troubling concerns over cross-gender performance” (170). Cross-dressing is already inherent to the play with Hellena’s crossdressing as a page; what are the implications of Hellena’s cross-dressed moment with a woman playing Willmore opposite a woman playing a woman playing a man? While Patterson and Merritt both had clear ideas of how cross-gender casting signified in their productions, the stage transvestism elicits a multiplicity of interpretations.

### **Queen’s Company, Brooklyn, NY<sup>415</sup>**

<sup>413</sup> Following Solomon’s line of thinking, gender critique lies in understated performance while gender parody lies in hyperbolic performance: “performing maleness means reducing facial expressiveness, reining in exuberance, holding back—the opposite of what drag queens do” (Solomon 157)

<sup>414</sup> Klett, Elizabeth. “Re-dressing the Balance: All-Female Shakespeare at the Globe Theatre,” in Bulman, James C. ed. *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2008.

<sup>415</sup> *The Rover*. By Aphra Behn. Directed by Rebecca Patterson. Fight choreo. by DeeAnn Weir Morency. Perf. by (Hellena), DeeAnn Weir Morency (Willmore), (Florinda), (Belvile), (Valeria), (Fred), (Don Pedro/Lucetta), (Don Antonio/Callis), Virginia Baeta (Blunt), (Angelica), (Moretta). Queen’s Company. The Currican Theatre, New York, NY. 2-25 March 2001.

In 2001, Queen's Company provided *The Rover* with its first professional transvestite revival. Founded by artistic director Rebecca Patterson, who directs all of the company's productions, associate producer Virginia Baeta, and former ensemble member DeeAnn Weir Morency, Queen's Company is "dedicated to the creation of innovative productions of classical plays featuring all-female casts."<sup>416</sup> Since its inception in 2000, the company has averaged one production per year, four of which—nearly one-quarter of its body of work—have been plays by Behn. In addition to *The Rover* (2001), the company has staged *The Feign'd Courtesans* (2002), *The Lucky Chance* (2003), and *Sir Patient Fancy* (2014). Originally from Vancouver, Canada, Patterson earned an MFA in directing from UCLA before making New York City home for herself and her company. She characterizes her aesthetic as minimalist, color- and gender-blind, highly physical, and text-focused. Barefoot performance, which exudes neutrality and a rugged unpretentiousness, is a signature trait of all Queen's Company shows. Her personal assessment of her directing style resounds with her company's mission:

The Queen's Company weds a love of language to a love of life, weaving inspiration from history and world cultures into the fabric of our classical productions, celebrating the poly-cultural American voice. Our work is known for its exquisite use of language, bold physicality, creative storytelling and artistic playfulness. We advocate for gender-blind casting in classical theatre.

This statement of purpose places great emphasis on marrying old and new, combining a reverence for classical texts with a sensitivity to the cultural diversity of society today in order to create a vital, new tapestry in performance. Of significance, the mission notes but does not elaborate upon why Queen's Company employs all female casts and advocates "gender-blind

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Cast members to identify: Shelia Lynn Buckley, Jacqueline Gregg, Vanessa Hidary, Valentina McKenzie, Toks Olagundoye, Maureen Porter, Jill Repplinger, c.c. seymour [sic], Ami Shukla, Hope Singesen

<sup>416</sup> <http://queenscompany.org>

casting.” As a result, the organization’s mission does not read as particularly feminist, and this is not an oversight.

### **Feminism, Humanism, and Female Cross-Gender Performance**

Nancy Copeland makes a common assumption about the gender politics of artists that stage all-female revivals of Behn’s plays; she attributes this type of production to Behn’s reputation as a protofeminist.<sup>417</sup> Patterson demonstrates that feminist politics do not automatically follow simply because of a director’s female embodiment; this applies to both the director’s interpretation of Behn’s play and to her perception of Behn herself. As the co-founder and primary director of a company that exclusively casts women, Patterson could easily be construed as a feminist; however, she eschews this label. While she was raised with a feminist perspective, she is “cagey about identifying as feminist,” feels labels can be limiting, and prefers to see herself as a humanist (phone interview).<sup>418</sup> In this same spirit, she does not perceive Behn as a protofeminist writer, but instead as “very much one of the boys,” an opinion that aligns Patterson with scholar Frances Kavenik and sets her apart from other directors in this study (phone interview). Emphasizing the historical over the political, Patterson believes that Behn’s plays should still be staged not because of their prescient sexual politics, as some have, but because of their significance as “a piece of our own history, women’s history, and women playwrights’ history” (phone interview). Patterson aspires to bring gender-blind casting to the mainstream because, in her view, it empowers actresses by liberating them from gender labels. A reviewer of Queen’s Company’s April 2016 *Taming of the Shrew* observes and applauds this

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<sup>417</sup> In this regard, she refers to Queens’ Companies productions and a 2005 revival of *The Rover* directed by Josh Costello. See Copeland, Nancy. “Aphra Behn in the Contemporary Theater.” *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*. Eds. Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs. NY: MLA, 2010.

<sup>418</sup> Patterson, Rebecca. Telephone interview with the author. 14 June 2012.

tenet in action: “because every actor was cast according to how her personality fit the role, not according to gender, the production is an organic ensemble theatrical experience” (Anderson). For Patterson, *The Rover* performed by all women becomes a more playful investigation of power dynamics, instead of a heavy play about gender. Patterson notes with a tinge of pride that Queen’s Company is known to “make misogyny user friendly” (phone interview). DeeAnn Weir Morency, who acted the role of Willmore in Queen’s Company’s production, recalls: “Our intention back then was that it was about human stories and that 50% of the population was cut off because women weren’t allowed to play these roles” (phone interview). Weir-Morency expresses the company’s interest in using theatre as vehicle to move beyond the idea that gender is the defining piece of identity. Echoing Patterson, Weir-Morency also invokes the term “humanist” to characterize the philosophical worldview of the company. But for Weir-Morency, in particular, feminism and humanism are compatible concepts; Queen’s Company’s mission

came out of a desire to level the playing the field. Is that also feminist, yeah, I do think it is. But it’s more than just feminist. In some ways it’s almost like post-feminism, transcending the idea of the delineation between masculine and feminine. We’re human, we’re people (phone interview).

Humanism, like feminism, is a loaded term with its own complex history. A secular intellectual philosophy, humanism emphasizes reason, scientific inquiry, and worldly human fulfillment over theism. Established in 1977, the Feminist Humanist Alliance is a branch of the American Humanist Association that arose out a growing acknowledgment of that historically humanism has sometimes contributed to discrimination against women and non-heterosexual populations.<sup>419</sup> Patterson’s aspirations to universalize gender-blind casting resonate with Richard Schechner. While he advocates “a broad range of ‘impersonations’ and ‘crossings’—from the parodic to

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<sup>419</sup> <http://feministhumanists.org>



serious drag kings and queens,” he also welcomes “effacing differences in order to project a universality ‘we are all humans’ transparency,” a point that especially resounds with Patterson’s viewpoint (Schechner 30, 2010).

### **The Interpretive Multiplicity of Female Cross-Gender Performance**

Of course, how directors and actors perceive their cross-gender direction or performance can vary from how critics and audiences interpret it.

Clearly American audiences are not color or gender blind anymore than they are body-type or age blind . . . Gender, race, age, and body type each signal specific sociopolitical meanings . . . It is impossible for spectators to see performers cast ‘against the text’ . . . without wondering what such casting means (Schechner 5-6, 2010).<sup>420</sup>

Writing about all-female productions of Shakespeare at the Globe, Gemma Miller draws on Judith Butler’s idea that drag’s potential to subvert norms is undermined if the performer engages in ironic self-referencing” (8). Here’s the rub with Queen’s Company: their desire to seek out the universals in canonical texts butts heads with what feminists have long argued against. Does the simple fact of having an all-female bodied cast sufficiently problematize what Catherine Belsey calls the “liberal-humanist alliance with patriarchy” in order free up Queen’s Company to celebrate an ethos of humanist universality (221)?<sup>421</sup> Can an all-female cast be viewed as “deconstructing the hierarchies of spectator and performer, subject and object . . .

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<sup>420</sup> Examining the idea of ‘fill in the blank’-blind casting from all angles, Schechner compellingly asks, “Can spectators (and producers, directors, performers . . .) be trained to be responsive to these categories in some cases and not in others? . . . How long would it take for differences . . . ‘not to be seen’? And why would such a state of intentional socioaesthetic blindness be a good idea?” (10).

<sup>421</sup> Catherine Belsey discusses patriarchy’s reliance upon humanist ideals to bolster its position. See *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*.

male/female hierarchies and expose gender as a discursive formation” (Gemma Miller 12)? Miller’s examination of Phyllida Lloyd’s *Julius Caesar* at Donmar Warehouse in 2012-13 and *Edward II* in 2013 argues that these productions were feminist and subversive because they neither parodied nor seamlessly performed masculinity; costume plays a key part in Miller’s position: the “deliberate foregrounding of the distinction between the corporeal body of the actor and the fictional body of the stage character had the effect of a Brechtian Verfremdungseffekt” (12). Aoife Monk finds the tendency to perceive female cross-dressing as form of ‘gender-blind casting’ problematic. For her, this view leaves the gender meanings within the plays themselves unchallenged by attempting to erase the question of gender instead of critiquing the status of the text or to disrupting the image of history (90). It rests, instead, on the idea of cross-dressing as a means for female actors to attain the greatness of male actors on the stage.

### **Text and Performance Conditions**

Patterson developed her performance script for *The Rover* from the Oxford University Press edition (1996-01-04). She did not modernize the language—in her words “a pitfall” for revivals. She did, however, develop a physical storytelling technique that expands scene transitions and helps viewers deal with the potential difficulty of the multiple plotlines. For example, she might integrate characters that would otherwise be offstage into these transitions to suggest where they have been or where they are going.<sup>422</sup> For this and other productions, she keeps casts at a maximum of twelve and enjoys the intimate “pressure cooker” experience of staging a play with that many bodies in a small Off-Off-Broadway venue with only a 24x24

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<sup>422</sup> Patterson commissioned playwright Liz Duffy Adams—who would later write *Or.*, a three-person play about Nell Gwynn, Behn, and the men in her life, most notably, Charles II and William Scott—to write the prologue for Queen’s Company’s revival of *The Rover*. In lieu of Behn’s epilogue, Patterson choreographed a movement tableaux.

square foot playing space. Patterson re-contextualized the play to the American Civil War. This choice informed costume and props. All performers who played male roles wore rapiers.

Patterson's philosophy on cross-gender performance is greater than the sum of the actress's and character's parts. According to Patterson,

In my productions, male characters are performed as written – that is as Renaissance men, who move through the world quite differently from contemporary men – transcending gender, they are complete in their humanity and can be played equally well by either male or female actors. It has been my experience that gender-blind casting speaks to a diverse audience – queer, straight, men and women – it is a true reflection of our rich and complex community (phone interview).

Aaron Grunfeld's review of *Sir Patient Fancy* highlights Queen's Company's effective manifestation of its gender-blind mission:

The company knows that love and lust don't come from manhood or femininity, they come from human nature. This liberated spirit and humanist passion puffs *Sir Patient Fancy* into a giddy pleasure" (Grunfeld *New York Theatre Review*).<sup>423</sup>

DeeAnn Weir Morency played Willmore and served as fight choreographer for the 2001 production.<sup>424</sup> Morency recalls with exhilaration the experience of playing the title hero:

As an actor there is a freedom when you're stepping into a role that you're not supposed to be playing. You can't make any assumptions when you start the process. There's a piece that is an unknown that you're going to get to explore. [It was] clean slate for me mentally, emotionally, very fresh, very open (phone interview).

She continues, "There's something that gets unlocked when we transcend the idea that it's just a gendered behavior. As a lesbian I know lots of badly behaved lesbians... the dynamics become more universal" (phone interview). "The character is made-up anyway, so why can't a woman

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<sup>423</sup> Grunfeld, Aaron. "Aaron Grunfeld on *Sir Patient Fancy* by the Queen's Company." *New York Theatre Review*. <http://newyorktheatrereview.blogspot.com/2014/03/aaron-grunfeld-on-sir-patient-fancy-by.html>. March 19, 2014.

<sup>424</sup> Morency holds an MFA in acting from Trinity Rep in Rhode Island. She now works as an interfaith minister in Berkeley, CA.

play a male,” quips Morency. In terms of the garden scene, “We played up the drunkenness. . . Willmore’s not a bad guy. He just loves women...there’s something about every woman that he can fall in love with. We didn’t want to make him this uber predator.. more along the lines of Don Juan. As fight choreographer, Morency worked with Patterson to build lots of physical comedy into the garden scene. The emphasis was on comedy, not averted tragedy: “We didn’t want Florinda’s power to be taken away from her. We wanted her to be empowered. So the dynamic we strived for was to make sure that she was in control and that he just looked like a drunken idiot.”

With regard to the potential homoerotic implications of a cross-gendered *Rover*, Weir Morency emphasizes: “We were not doing a lesbian *Rover* . . . From the very beginning it was about the universal nature of these stories” (phone interview). Unlike Split Britches, for example, the downtown New York City company founded by Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver, and Deb Margolin in 1980, which overtly espoused a lesbian feminist performance aesthetic, Queen’s Company, while founded by women who identify as lesbian, does not consciously apply a lesbian critical filter to its work. Only with Hellena’s breeches role did Patterson allow a wink and nod to the audience because it is anchored in the text. Weir-Morency recalls: “Nothing was more successful for us than our productions of Aphra Behn’s plays. There was something that happened because it was all female that made the comedy work” (phone interview).

### **Cross-Gender Casting and Behn’s *Violent* Humor**

According to Virginia Baeta, who played Blunt, the attempted rapes of Florinda were especially “terrifying to work on” until they found “a rehearsal key that made every choice make sense” (Email interview). She continues, “it took us some very uncomfortable rehearsal to get to a point where the scene didn’t feel like it was in any way glorifying the abuse of women” (Email

interview). To navigate this issue, Baeta played Blunt as “a terrified puffer fish” who aspires to but falls short of normative masculinity. To complement this idea, Patterson intensified the power differential by directing the actor playing Florinda to take control of the scene once she realizes that Blunt is harmless:

We didn’t follow the stage directions ‘pulls her,’ and instead found Blunt running away from Florinda. The way we played it, Frederick’s entrance ups the stakes and the terror for Blunt first, and briefly the actual risk for Florinda because Frederick is a man who would be capable of the actual rape. But by this point - the audience has seen that Florinda will not go limp in the face of the fight and Frederick is more interested in messing with Blunt. She quickly escapes the risk by linking herself to Belville. The comedy can continue (Email interview).

With the exception of one drag performance, Baeta has always played cross-gender roles “straight”: I haven’t been invited to play a man in a parody style. The only exception to this may have been “breeches” roles like Viola where I was playing a woman who - occasionally badly - plays a man” (Email interview).

### **Woman’s Will, San Francisco, CA<sup>425</sup>**

In 2003, the now disbanded, San Francisco-based, all-female company Woman’s Will presented the second professional cross-gender revival of *The Rover* in the United States.

Founded in 2000, Woman’s Will upheld a three-pronged mission:

to provide opportunities for women and girls to work together in a supportive yet challenging environment, to entertain and educate through high quality classes and performances, and to expand the boundaries in which audiences and artists see themselves (Merritt).

The first two objectives speak to the company’s interest in promoting gender equity and cultivating a multi-generational theatre community of women for women. The third objective

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<sup>425</sup> *The Rover*. By Aphra Behn. Directed by Erin Merritt. Perf. by Kendra Chell (Hellena), Rami Marron (Willmore), Lianne Marie Dobbs (Florinda), Emily Rosenthal (Belvile), Jeanette Harrison (Valeria), Desiray McFall (Fred), Alexia Burland (Don Pedro/Lucetta), Alison Wright (Don Antonio/Callis), Teri Stockton (Blunt), Bernadette Quattrone (Angelica), Joan Bernier (Moretta). Woman’s Will, San Francisco, CA. Various locations. 12 July - 24 August, 2003.

indicates what the company hoped to achieve in performance by using all-female casts—for viewers and performers to move beyond preconceived ideas about gender and sexual limitations. A testament to the organization’s commitment to inclusivity, Woman’s Will identified as “a multi-ethnic company” with “a strict policy of non-discrimination,” and strove for “triple accessibility” at every event: “all people must be able to reach our events, afford our events, and relate to our events” (Merritt). Woman’s Will cultivated a welcoming, user-friendly ethos: check stereotypical notions of angry, polarizing feminists at the door.

Unlike Queen’s Company’s production, which was staged in a dedicated theatre space, Woman’s Will’s revival was the company’s ‘free-in-the-parks play’ of the 2003 season and, therefore, was performed outdoors. This environmental, travelling production played in a dozen different public parks between July 12th and August 24th, 2003.<sup>426</sup> To accommodate the frequent change in locale, the set, designed by Alison Tassie, consisted of a single backdrop of various bedquilts woven together to form a tapestry. In keeping with a seventeenth-century period aesthetic, costume designer Amy Nielson dressed the women in corsets and colorful, full-length satin dresses; the men wore period attire in hues of brown and gray. In one reviewer’s estimation, the costumes were “the production’s most instructive element,” providing “all the social standing and military ranking information we need.” Because of the open air, public setting, Merritt tamed the staging of sexual behavior in order to accommodate a general

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<sup>426</sup> The twelve parks were as follows: John Hinkel Park; Centennial Park, Pleasanton; Live Oak Park, Berkeley; Frank Ogawa Plaza, Oakland; The Barn, Marin Art and Garden Center; Memorial Park; Hayward Park; Rengstorff House; Mountain View; Alta Plaza Park; San Francisco; and Dolores Park.

The Institute of Outdoor Theatre <http://www.outdoor-theatre.org>  
The Institute was founded in 1963 with a mission to serve the historical outdoor drama movement in the United States. Since then our mission has expanded to include all types of outdoor theatre from countries throughout the world. Shakespeare festivals, musical theatre, religious and historical plays and all other forms of outdoor theatre are featured on this website.

audience. Also in keeping with the often lighter vein of outdoor, summertime theatre, the production emphasized the play's entertainment value, which is not to say that Merritt made a concession that went against her sense of the spirit of play because in her view, the play is meant to divert: "It's nice to know there was a woman writing successfully long ago, but to me this is just a fun romp, and the reason to do it is because it's charming and sexy" (email interview).

Merritt does not shy away from identifying as a feminist and a feminist director, stances that come as no surprise given that she is a founding member of the all-female Woman's Will. However, this does not mean she seeks out a play in order to impose a feminist view upon it: "I would not stage a play to force a feminist message onto it if I felt that it in any way compromised the integrity of the play. I would just choose another play or stage it 'straight' rather than change the core message of the play" (email interview). As an artist and director, Merritt's finds inspiration in a range of sources, from Brecht, Jim Hendrix, Monty Python, Peter O'Toole, and Peter Sellers to Patrick Dooley (a Bay Area director/producer), Tony Taccone (AD of Berkeley Rep), and butoh dance. Aside from a fondness for the practice of Molly D. Smith, Merritt's directorial influences are almost entirely men—a point echoed by other women in this study that implicitly reinforces the fact that men dominate the field. This was Merritt's second encounter with *The Rover*; in 1992 she played Hellena in a production with Palo Alto Players directed by Shaun Loftus. The first sentence of Merritt's director's note identifies Behn as a feminist and what follows it emphasizes Behn's sexual daring in her professional and personal life, her independence, and free-mindedness. Merritt concludes her note by drawing a comparison between Behn's age and the moment of Woman's Will's revival:

[W]hatever we may think in 2003, having fought our own battles in a society governed by presidents lascivious and presidents puritanical, there is a true beauty and grace to this play's morals that people must be free to be themselves . . . Here,

no one is bounded by social or gender roles, everyone is welcome to play, and all is forgiven in the end.

Merritt's pro-sex assessment of Behn's play was aided by using an all-woman cast: "I felt having women would allow the audience to see the play the way it was originally intended, as a sex-positive ode to free love" (email interview). Merritt did not perceive Florinda's moments of distress as impending rapes. In the garden scene,

I staged it that he was too drunk and therefore comically inept for her to be in any real danger, and that her weakness as a personality is the only thing that kept her from escaping earlier in the scene. In fact, this is the scene in which she first notices that she has some small bit of agency and takes it. She ended up roughing him up a fair deal and escaped him just as the others came to her rescue (email interview).

Similar to Patterson's production for Queen's Company, Merritt maneuvered the play's sometimes potentially problematic moments of violence by empowering the female characters at risk.

A central concern for anyone directing *The Rover* involves how to cast and inform the role of Willmore. In Merritt's opinion, played by a woman, "Willmore was automatically less threatening," in fact, "we felt . . . that Willmore could be more of a lech and still be [more] lovable than a man playing the role could be" (email interview). For this and other classical productions, Woman's Will "always played the shows 'straight' . . . [they] portrayed male characters" as men. Rami Magron, who played Willmore, echoes Merritt's sentiments and adds that: "While Willmore is a chauvinist, it didn't occur to me to play him as a parody of a man, but he is a broad character. People did forget that I was woman, which was a compliment" (phone interview). With regard to the garden scene, a great deal of drunken comedy led up to that moment. In Magron's words, "the darkness didn't need to be drawn out. To modern audiences it's so clearly so wrong" (phone interview). For every production, the actresses that acted male



parts took a one-day workshop called “Find Your Inner Man.” The workshop, sometimes led by longtime San Francisco, drag king Leslie Einhorn and sometimes by director Erin Merritt, taught actresses how to approach the psychological and physical accepts of masculinity. One part of the session included “packing” and applying facial hair so that the actresses could more fully embody their roles and see and feel how the the addition of these defining male characteristics affected their performance in rehearsal. As Rami Margron recalls, “the facial hair did take it to the next level.” Interestingly, however, Woman’s Will had a strict policy of not using facial hair in actual shows. Binding and packing was up to the individual actress. A testament to the vital role of costume in constructing gender, Margron chose to keep her fight gloves on for the entire show, removing them only for sex: “They really helped me feel more manly,” she remembers. Margron notes, “this was before the explosion of trans people in Bay area;” thus Woman’s Will was ahead of the trend. While Merritt and her cast were aware of the potential homoerotic implications of their production, (“and in fact our Willmore and our Angelica fell in love in that show”) “we felt they [the actresses playing male characters] were playing men so that at heart the shows were heterosexual” (email interview).

I usually stage work that I think has a particular resonance to the time, but this one, both times I’ve done it, has felt refreshingly irrelevant, more about humankind’s timeless joie de vivre, and has made me wistful that in our time sex was so carefree. If I were going to update it, that’s what I’d want to comment on (email interview).

In her warm review entitled “Getting What They Want,” Lisa Drostova riffs on Cyndi Lauper’s iconic song to remark that all the way back in 1677 girls just wanted to have fun. Seemingly already accustomed to the cross-gender performance practices of Woman’s Will, Drostova offers no critique of this aspect of the production other than to praise the chemistry between Rami Margron as Willmore and Bernadette Quattrone as Angelica Bianca. In the end, she praises the

play for its depiction of women having fun and finding love and the production for making it all so fun to watch (Drostova *The Easy Bay Express*)<sup>427</sup>. In accordance with Drostova, Chad Jones, too, was struck by the production's diverting quality ('Rover sends fun and games right over) and found it a perfect fit for Woman's Will and outdoor performance: "The 12-woman cast is called upon to play good men behaving badly, good women behaving scandalously, and bad women behaving scrupulously. There's an upside-down simplicity to the play . . . that lends itself to an unadorned outdoor setting" (Jones, *The Oakland Tribune*). Gemma Miller argues that female-male cross-dressing can be used to "challenge not only what gendered bodies should look like, but what the world in general should look like . . . [and] effect nothing short of a feminist revolution" (13). Certainly, this is what Patterson aspires to in her paradoxical use of female performers to theatricalize the humanity of a gender-blind world. The marked increase in female theatrical transvestism since 2000 when both Queen's Company and Woman's Will were formed suggests the successful roles that these two organizations have played in challenging heteronormative casting practices and promoting acceptance of female-to-male cross-dressing.

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<sup>427</sup> <https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/getting-what-they-want/Content?oid=1071106>

**Chapter Seven:**  
**Poetry in Motion in the Marketplace:**  
**An Examination of Karin Coonrod's Pro-Woman *Rover* for New York Classical Theatre**<sup>428</sup>

**“We are poets in space.” -Karin Coonrod**

In her monograph on stillness and movement in the seventeenth-century theatre, P. A. Skantze astutely observes that Behn is “a poet and writer whose metier seems to be motion” (108).<sup>429</sup> Before it even begins, *The Rover, or The Banished Cavaliers* announces its preoccupation with going places and doing things; its very title makes this explicit. The word “rover,” in the sense of pirate or “sea-rover,” serves not only as an epithet for Willmore and his traveling companions, but arguably also as a concise introduction to the play’s structural and thematic interest in personal agency and amorous adventure.<sup>430</sup> Admittedly, this fixation derives in part from its source-text, *Thomaso, or the Wanderer* by Thomas Killigrew, who gave his play a sub-titular nod to a man in motion. While both plays reference their male lead in the title, it is the women in Behn’s play who direct the action once the play has begun: “Let’s ramble,”

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<sup>428</sup>*The Rover*. By Aphra Behn. Directed by Karin Coonrod. Costume Design by Oana Botez. Fight choreo. by Shad Ramsey. Composer - Lucian Ban. Perf. by Kersti Bryan\* (Florinda), April Sweeney\* (Hellena), Jorge Alberto Rubio (Don Pedro), Jesse Graham (Callis), Kelly McCrann (Valeria), Michael Daniel Anderson\* (Frederick), Cooper D’Ambrose\* (Belvile), M. Scott McLean\* (Willmore), Sarah Stephens, (Woman), Joshua Jeffers (Biskey), David Ryan Smith\* (Don Antonio), Vanessa Morosco\* (Angelica Bianca). New York Classical Theatre. World Financial Center, Battery Park City, NY. March 2-20, 2011. \*Denotes Member of Actors’ Equity Association.

<sup>429</sup> Skantze argues that in *The Rover* Behn “reconfigures the traditional seventeenth-century equation between wandering wantonness (motion) and virtue (stillness)” (114). She considers specifically the implications of Angelica Bianca’s trinity of portraits, signs of still beauty and virtue, against Hellena’s “inconstant” motion. See her chapter on Behn, “Decidedly Moving: Aphra Behn and the Staging of Paradoxical Pleasures” in Skantze, P. A. *Stillness in Motion in the Seventeenth Century Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>430</sup> The etymology of “rover” as a noun, meaning pirate, dates back to 1393 while the verb form dates back to 1450. *OED*.

[http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/search?searchType=dictionary&q=rove&\\_searchBtn=Search](http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/search?searchType=dictionary&q=rove&_searchBtn=Search)

Hellena boldly proclaims at the conclusion of 1.1. As Jane Spencer notes, in the seventeenth-century, this word carried the connotation of “looking for sex, and derivatives of ‘range’ and ‘rove’ are associated with ramble in this sense. Hellena’s decree appropriates for the women an activity supposedly reserved for men, and suggests that she would like to be ‘a rover’ like Willmore” (338).<sup>431</sup> Behn’s choice of the word “rover” for her play’s main title, and Hellena’s use of the word “ramble” foreground the importance of sexual adventure to both men and women in the play. Given this, it is fitting, indeed, that in March 2011 Behn’s play received a truly roving, site-specific, production at the World Financial Center in Manhattan, an island metropolis where sex, liberty, and commerce have long and notoriously intermingled [See Figure 38].<sup>432</sup> Director Karin Coonrod seized the grand setting to create an impassioned red *Rover* that resembled a moving poem in the marketplace. Through editing, casting, blocking, and design elements, Coonrod curbed the play’s depiction of misogyny and male violence and instead capitalized on the opportunity to portray Behn’s women as literally and symbolically active, empowered agents.

Koonrod’s 2011 revival was co-produced by New York Classical Theatre (NY Classical), a professional, not-for-profit, Off-Broadway company, and Art Brookfield, a for-profit organization that creates public art by commission throughout the country.<sup>433</sup> The two organizations first partnered on *Hamlet*, NY Classical’s production prior to *The Rover*, and continue to collaborate to this day. Founded in 2000, NY Classical’s mission is “to reinvigorate and create audiences for the theatre by presenting all-free productions of popular classics and

<sup>431</sup> Spencer, Jane, ed. *The Rover and Other Plays*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008.

<sup>432</sup> The World Financial Center was since redubbed ‘Brookfield Place.’ For the sake of historical accuracy, I refer throughout to the name of the complex at the time of NY Clasical’s production.

<sup>433</sup> New York Classical Theatre shares the same initials as New York City Transit; therefore, the theatre uses the abbreviation NY Classical, not NYCT.

forgotten masterpieces in non-traditional public spaces throughout New York City.”<sup>434</sup> NY Classical’s projects involve six to eight-week residencies with three-week-long open rehearsals on site that allow the public to observe the process.

### **Female Directors of Classical Theatre**

While Artistic Director Stephen Burdman directs most of NY Classical’s productions, co-producer Art Brookfield stipulated that a woman must direct *The Rover*. As Burdman recalls, Debra Simon, who was then the Artistic Director of Art Brookfield, wanted to acknowledge Women’s History Month. Simon arguably detected synergy in partnering the first professional female playwright with a female director. Women’s History Month aside, Simon’s request had even greater significance in light of the lowly status of women directors in professional theatre at the time. Women comprised only 22% of directors employed Off-Broadway during the 2011-2012 season.<sup>435</sup> This statistic did not reflect a scarcity of women directors; it simply highlighted their rate of underemployment. Women directors who specialize in classical theatre, however, do represent a smaller subset of artists. Deborah Warner and Phyllida Lloyd, both British and past collaborators at Royal Shakespeare Company, have proven to be the most prolific, high profile, and commercially successful women directors of the classical canon in the past twenty years. Women directors native to the U.S. who concentrate on the classics make up an even rarer, lesser-known group, a fact attested to by Burdman who has worked exclusively in this genre for two decades. Joanne Akalaitis, who directed the 1994 Guthrie revival of *The Rover*, has directed many classical plays, but she may not have been an option due to budget,

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<sup>434</sup> <http://www.newyorkclassical.org/about/> accessed on August 7, 2017.

<sup>435</sup> According to the same study, women made up 33% of directors off-Broadway between 2010-2015. Numbers can fluctuate greatly from one year to the next. Stable improvement continues to elude the industry. See “Women Count: Women Hired Off-Broadway 2010-2015.” League of Professional Theatre Women.

scheduling, or aesthetics. While Tony-award-winning director Julie Taymor earned acclaim for her 1999 film adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* and, budget allowing, could have been tapped for NY Classical's production, she has worked mostly outside the confines of classical theatre.<sup>436</sup> Arin Arbus, on the other hand, is now a celebrated director of the classical canon, but in 2011 she was just two years into her tenure with Theatre for a New Audience at the Polonsky Shakespeare Center in New York City. Thus, Karin Coonrod, a former artist-in-residence at the Public Theater and a director with an extensive resume of classical credits uptown, downtown, and abroad, was arguably the most accomplished woman in New York for the job, and fortunately for Art Brookfield and NY Classical, she was in town and available.

Coonrod's love of classical drama began as an undergraduate English major at Gordon College in Massachusetts. She went on to study directing at Columbia University under the mentorship of Romanian-born theatre director, Liviu Ciulei (1923-2011). Acclaimed for his provocative interpretations of classical plays, Ciulei was instrumental in the shift towards a focus on design during his time as artistic director of the Guthrie in the early 1980s. In addition to Ciulei, Coonrod names "painting, music, dance, the church, British director Peter Brook, Italian opera and theatre director Giorgio Strehler, the Russians, and her Italian mother" among her creative influences (phone interview). A lecturer at Yale University since 2002, Coonrod divides her time between teaching the craft of directing and staging plays internationally with Compagnia de' Colombari, the New York-based classical company that she founded in 2004. Its tagline, "generating spectacle wherever we go," speaks to the spirit of spontaneity and visuality that characterizes the work of the company and its founder. With Colombari, Coonrod staged the medieval mystery plays in public spaces in Orvieto, Italy, from 2004-2006, and more

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<sup>436</sup> In 1997, Taymor won a Tony Award for her musical direction of *The Lion King*; she was the first woman to win a Tony Award in this category.

recently, she staged an adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* outdoors in the Jewish ghetto in Venice. A review of the company's complete mission further elucidates Coonrod's artistic interests:

Compagnia de' Colombari (Company Colombari) is an international collective of performing artists, generating theater in surprising places. Colombari intentionally clashes cultures, traditions and art forms to bring fresh interpretation to the written word—old and new—and commits to using any means possible to flesh it out. Colombari brings performers and audiences together, thereby transforming strangers into community. Colombari is founded on the twin principles that the magic of great theater can happen anywhere and be made accessible to everyone.<sup>437</sup>

Coonrod's and Burdman's companies share a desire to breathe fresh life into classical plays using innovative methods. The affinity between their missions made them well-suited for collaboration on *The Rover*.

Both Coonrod and Burdman had had previous exposure to and experience with the theatre of Aphra Behn. Burdman first encountered the playwright when he served as a carpenter for the 1987 Williamstown Theatre Festival revival of *The Rover* directed by John Rubinstein. He recalls this being a glorious, bravado production. Nearly twenty years later, in 2004, Burdman directed a production of *The Feigned Courtesans* for NY Classical.<sup>438</sup> Coonrod, on the other hand, fondly remembers her first exposure to Behn, which was as an audience member at Jules Wright's 1984 staging of *The Lucky Chance* for the Woman's Playhouse Trust in London. Ten years later in January 1995, Coonrod directed a critically-acclaimed production of Behn's commedia dell'arte farce *Emperor of the Moon* at the original Ohio Theatre, a beloved, Off-Off-Broadway institution that frequently hosted guest company productions.<sup>439</sup> Arden Party, the first

<sup>437</sup> <http://www.colombari.org/about-us> accessed on August 7, 2017.

<sup>438</sup> July 29-August 22, 2004 in Central Park West.

<sup>439</sup> Founded in 1984, the Ohio Theatre was a converted factory in Soho located at 66 Wooster Street. A staple of the downtown theatre scene, the original Ohio Theatre was a place where living legends such as

theatre company that Coonrod founded, presented *Emperor of the Moon*. A downtown company in operation from 1987-1997, Arden Party was noted for its distinctive reimagining of classical plays, particularly Shakespeare, hence the company's nominal nod to Shakespeare's mother's family, the Ardens.

### Creating a Text for Panoramic Performance

As with every play that Burdman stages for NY Classical, he made preliminary cuts to Behn's text in accordance with his company's original brand of panoramic theatre, which requires that "the whole script is adapted to the venue" (144).<sup>440</sup> Burdman always begins by cutting specific references to people, places, and things that do not exist physically and temporally in the space of the performance: for example, "Shakespeare might have said it's an 'elm tree', but we knew it was actually an oak tree the actors were referring to, so we did the word substitution and it became an oak tree" (Ney 144). Period and locale are suggested, largely through costume, but not explicitly spelled out so that audiences know just enough to engage their imaginations to fill in the rest (Burdman phone interview). With *The Rover*, Burdman needed to ensure that the show's running time did not exceed 90 minutes, so he made fairly sizable alterations. He reduced the core cast-size from eighteen to twelve and omitted the Blunt subplot in its entirety, a choice that resulted in a streamlined and more female-focused performance script: "I focused it down to issues of women's independence, which was really at the core of the play" (Kreuzer).<sup>441</sup> Burdman identifies as a feminist and has demonstrated a track

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Tony Kushner, Anne Bogart, and Maria Irene Fornes staged some of their early career work. In 1995, under the leadership of Artistic Director Robert Lyons, Soho Think Tank became the resident company at the Ohio Theatre. In 2010 the theatre was relocated to Christopher Street and renamed the New Ohio Theatre.

<sup>440</sup> Burdman worked from an Oxford World Classics edition of *The Rover and Other Plays*.

<sup>441</sup> Kreuzer, Terese Loeb. "Money, Lust, and Revenge on Two Different Stages." *Downtown Express*. 20:43(March 9-15, 2011).



record of making editing and directing choices that position women strongly in his stagings of classical plays: “I am always looking to maximize women’s potential onstage, particularly in my milieu in which women’s characters tend to be underwritten” (phone interview). Burdman passed his cut of the script on to Coonrod, who made additional edits as she deemed necessary to meld the text with its site-specific performance context. “The space and text were synchronized,” says Coonrod. She continues:

With theatre texts, I never feel obliged to use every word . . . I want to dance with that person, to make a piece that lives in theatre in our time, that honors in the deepest way the vision of that text, not necessarily in making it relevant, I’m not particularly interested in that word. I prefer the word anachronistic . . . so that people don’t get distracted but go into it more deeply.

Coonrod’s approach to editing classical texts for performance bespeaks a condensed economy of meaning that resounds with her overall aesthetic as a director; she seeks to distill the essence of the work into poetry in motion.

### **Director as Poet and Visual Artist**

In a *New York Times* interview with Steven Drukman, Coonrod likened directing to “staging sculpture” and cited her “twin loves of great narrative and pictorial form” as the forces behind her aesthetic (Dec. 15, 1996).<sup>442</sup> In his *New York Times* review of Coonrod’s next directing project after NY Classical’s *Rover*, the 2011 production of *Love’s Labor’s Lost* at the Public Theater’s Lab space, Ben Brantley notes her reputation for “bringing out the athletic side of Shakespeare” (Oct. 31, 2011).<sup>443</sup> Brantley’s comment underscores the importance of bodies and movement to Coonrod’s style. While she is emphatic about elocution, particularly the importance of actors hitting their consonants, she is also deeply interested in enlivening classical

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<sup>442</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/15/theater/realizing-her-dream-of-a-surrealistic-henry-vi.html>

<sup>443</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/01/theater/reviews/loves-labors-lost-at-public-theater-review.html>

theatre by physicalizing it. Coonrod also notes the importance of temporal tension to her approach to staging classical texts, describing her style as “very anachronistic, but very controlled” (phone interview). Similar to Joanne Akalaitis, Coonrod’s aesthetic represents a postmodern, hybrid style that imaginatively marries old and new. This sensibility was evident in Coonrod’s staging of Behn’s *Emperor of the Moon*, which effectively “combine[d] elements of commedia dell’arte, dance, doo-wop, and sign language” (Sheward).<sup>444</sup> In NY Classical’s *Rover*, the space itself, a twenty-first century, commercial complex, was an anachronism. Coonrod carried the architectural tension of past-meets-present into the production’s musical accompaniment, which included classical renditions of twentieth-century pop songs such as Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Want to Fun” as well as its graffiti-inspired carnival masks and period-blending costumes. “I like the sleight of hand,” insists Coonrod. Careful not to overstate her aesthetic approach to a play, Coonrod prefers to leave an impression, like a poem.

### **Getting Actors and Audience Moving: Burdman’s Panoramic Theatre**

After several centuries of structurally formalized distance between performers and audience as a result of the box set model, the ubiquitous three walls with a proscenium arch, theatre-makers wanted to revitalize this important relationship.<sup>445</sup> To do this, practitioners have experimented with the role of the audience by returning to theatre’s ancient origins: “The rediscovery of ritual . . . set the orbit of western theater to a reverse course and restored the initial role of the spectator as a participant in the action and the theater event as a shared physical and

<sup>444</sup> Sheward, David. Backstage.

<sup>445</sup> Key innovators, practitioners and theorists of non-conventional theatre include Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Erwin Piscator, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Herbert Blau, Susan Bennett, Jiri Veltrusky, Jan Mukarovsky, Elizabeth Sakellaridou, Richard Schechner, Anne Ubersfeld, and Otakar Zich.

emotional experience,” notes Elizabeth Sakellaridou (14).<sup>446</sup> Over time, theatrical experimentation has given way to a set of now codifiable ‘unconventional theatre practices’ that may exist together or in isolation to create an immersive experience. These include an interest in blurring or dissolving formal theatrical boundaries that separate performers from spectators; synchronizing fictional and real time; transforming non-theatrical spaces into performance sites (“site-specific”); and inviting or requiring audience participation or interactivity. In theorizing these praxes, scholars Hans-Thies Lehmann and Erika Fischer-Lichte have conceived of the artistic product as a “theatre event,” instead of simply a performance.<sup>447</sup>

To inspire and engage audiences, NY Classical gets them moving, quite literally, using a staging practice that Burdman coined “panoramic.” The form combines elements of environmental theatre, promenade theatre, and nineteenth-century presentational staging techniques. Burdman explains:

We’ve developed staging techniques . . . modeled on late nineteenth century banana crosses. One of the things I say to actors is, ‘If it feels completely wrong, it’s probably completely right.’ . . . this is reminiscent of the nineteenth century when you’re playing with no mikes to twelve hundred, fifteen hundred people (Ney 240).

NY Classical presents its panoramic offerings indoors and outdoors, transforming commercial buildings in unexpected ways and popping up in green spaces across the city;<sup>448</sup> it activates audiences through the use of shared space and collective movement; and it allows performers to

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<sup>446</sup> See Elizabeth Sakellaridou’s article entitled “‘Oh My God, Audience Participation!’: Some Twenty-First-Century Reflections” for a review of how theatre evolved from “a total congregational ritual to the gradual designation of functions and roles until the final segregation of the audience and its relegation to a mere viewing position—a fact both stipulated linguistically (theatron=what we see) and institutionalized architecturally by the concrete design of the Greek amphitheater” (13). See also Gray Read on poet Guillaume Apollinaire’s influence of early twentieth-century directors of environmental theatre.

<sup>447</sup> See Lehmann’s *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999) and Fischer-Lichte’s *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2008).

<sup>448</sup> The parks NY Classical performs at include Central Park, Battery Park, Prospect Park, Battery Park City, Brooklyn Bridge Park and Governors Island.

speaking facing out in order to maximize their vocal power for the audience without compromising intimacy with scene partners. Panoramic theatre is Burdman's unique brand of site-specific theatre that operates on the premise that "the deeper the audience's involvement, the greater their emotional experience and commitment to the show" (Ney 70).<sup>449</sup> At a NY Classical production, patrons can expect to move anywhere from seven to ten times; therefore, there is no intermission (Ney 144).

### **The Influence of Promenade on Panoramic Theatre**

Promenade is a form of site-specific theatre that can reinvigorate the actor-audience relationship. Just as Aristotle taught philosophy while walking around the Lyceum in Ancient Athens, demonstrating the benefits of active learning, so performers have acted plays while perambulating through civic parks and buildings with audience in tow, demonstrating the joy of active spectating. "A stroll or walk in a public place for pleasure or display," "a formal dance," "a parade:" promenade, by general definition, implies movement. As a theatrical form, it draws on the peripatetic tradition of medieval mystery plays, which made spectators active observers as they moved through a daylong succession of short biblical plays. Promenade "promises more vigorous audience intervention. Moving in space assures the spectator of freedom and creativity" (Sakellaridou 26). Actress April Sweeney, who played Hellena in NY Classical's *Rover*, recalls some audience members embracing the unrestrained form: "Audience . . . moved in more ways than one with us. . . We often moved very quickly, sometimes ran and danced from place to place. Spectators would also do that. Of course not all but some would play along and dance and be a bit festive" (email interview).

### **The Role of Environmental Theatre in Panoramic Theatre**

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<sup>449</sup> See Ney, Thomas. *Directing Shakespeare in America*.

In contemporary theatre practice, promenade style is often used in union with an environmental performance context. Burdman's ongoing joint-application of these two forms to the classical canon reinforces the effectiveness of the pairing. NY Classical's *Rover* unfolded all around its audience as it traveled through the unique setting of the World Financial Center, a three-building, 150,000-square foot, waterfront complex located behind the World Trade Center. The event began at the southern end of the complex at the entrance at 200 Liberty Street and ended in the Winter Garden [Figure 39]. Additionally, like Queen's Company's 2001 revival, NY Classical's *Rover* was performed in the month of March during Mardi-Gras.<sup>450</sup> The show's press release, postcards, and program cover used this popular holiday to forge a connection with Behn's much lesser-known seventeenth-century play [Figure 40]. Beyond being timely, the Mardi-Gras angle also helped to prepare audiences for their aerobic involvement in the immersive world of a site-specific theatre event. Similar to Akalaitis's Guthrie revival, the NY Classical production provided up to six guests at each performance with beads and masks to partake in the carnival revelry. Of course, without conventional boundaries separating patrons from artists, audience members *not* chosen to dress and mask like the cast were still active participants by virtue of their proximity to and engagement with the performers who led them throughout the event to new scene locations and because movement was a built-in part of the experience [Figure 41]. In transitions, cast members donned handheld, black and white masks, inspired by French painter Jean Dubuffet's childlike graffiti art, to usher the audience along as if at carnival [Figure 42].<sup>451</sup> The traveling in between scenes worked on several levels: it echoed the play's preoccupation with roving; provided audience time to process the previous scene *or* to

<sup>450</sup> On March 8th, there was a special Mardi Gras performance with additional post-show festivities.

<sup>451</sup> Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) was a French painter and sculptor revered for using "low art" aesthetics, such as graffiti, children's art, and primitive art, to create works that celebrate unconventional beauty.

interact with performers; infused the event with heightened anticipation about what would happen next; and depending on the pace and energy of the actors guiding the audience, helped to inform the unfolding emotional and physical journey of characters. These recurring moments of conjoined performer/patron experience allowed audience members to register literally, rather than vicariously, a sense of the physical life of performers/characters over the course of the performance.

### **The Public Marketplace as Performance Space**

As Read Gray notes, “architecture and theater are sister arts creating worlds where people interact in studied spatial relationship” (53). This speaks to why the World Financial Center was such an evocative setting for staging *The Rover*; this was a serendipitous instance of a play about the sexual marketplace being staged in a bustling financial and retail hub. With people buying, selling, and trading in real time, the facility made for a richly resonant backdrop given Behn’s career-long fixation with women’s sexual commodification and marriage as form of prostitution. With particular regard to Angellica Bianca’s character, the meeting of Behn’s play in that space at that time also invited associations with the New York City’s thriving, modern-day escort industry. Looming in the recent past was Governor Eliot Spitzer’s 2008 resignation as a result of his involvement in a sex scandal with Kristen Davis, the former owner of an elite, female escort service that boasted many high profile clients. Davis, dubbed “the Manhattan Madam” by the tabloids, ran for New York governor in 2010, shortly after serving a four-month sentence at Rikers Island. While she lost the election, she has spent the past decade campaigning for the decriminalization of sex work and writing, speaking, and advocating for compassion for women involved in prostitution.

### **Blocking in the World Financial Center**

Coonrod's demonstrated interest in the spatial geometry of staging plays made her well-suited for the challenge of staging *The Rover* in this sprawling urban environment. The august setting of the World Financial Center provided Coonrod with the opportunity to position actors in dramatic contrast with the architecture of the space, exploring the interplay of above and below, near and far, up and down, shadow and light. Within the different spaces of the complex, Coonrod staged scenes either in the round or in a three-quarter thrust configuration. The opening moment, for example, featured the entire company, surrounded by audience on all sides, engaged in a choreographed, celebratory dance. "The space is a character in the play," notes Burdman (email interview). The text becomes subservient to the environment, and the emphasis is instead on how the spectacle unfolds among the natural architecture of the theatricalized space. For example, Coonrod utilized an upper level, cut-out enclosure in the World Financial Center as Angellica's balcony. On the lower level, the audience joined Willmore in gazing up to discover Angellica framed by the architecture; then, Willmore joined the courtesan, making distant voyeurs of the audience he had just left behind [Figures 43- 45]. The last scene of the play unfolded in the The Palm Court, a voluminous space with a glass ceiling atrium, marble floors, lined with palm trees. This grandiose location, combined with the elimination of the misogynistic subplot involving Blunt, arguably made the ending's triple marriage more palatable, even celebratory, in this production. Angellica Bianca made her final exit up an expansive staircase. Before leaving, she struck a tableau, hands held high and valiant like a heroic statue. Coonrod's blocking and direction painted Angellica Bianca in a solitary, but exalted, light [See Figure 46]. In addition to the evocative environment, the production's promenade style had particularly meaningful implications given the significance of roving and rambling to the world of the play. As adapted by Burdman and directed by Coonrod to center on

young women's escape from paternal constraints and pursuit of personal and sexual autonomy, NY Classical's *Rover* allowed audiences to witness the women in hyperrealistic pursuit of their desires. For Coonrod and her cast, the consensus was that the women won in their production: "I saw the women as winners and framed them that way in the space." The victory wasn't merely imagined or attempted; it was actualized.

### **Cloaked in Color—Oana Botez's Costume Design**

In addition to the architecture of the World Financial Center, the other major design statement in NY Classical's *Rover* was costume. Because panoramic theatre involves no scenery and minimal theatrical lighting, costume is always a critical element.<sup>452</sup> This did not go unnoticed by one reviewer who remarked that Botez had "the lion's share of the design effort" (Fulton). Oana Botez, Coonrod's friend and colleague and an award-winning costume and set designer for theatre, film, opera, and dance, designed the costumes. Born in Romania, Botez made New York City her home after earning an MFA in Design at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.<sup>453</sup> Coonrod and Botez had collaborated before on a production of *The House of Bernard Alba* at the Riverside Church Theater in 2004. Botez's costume design for *Alba* consisted of a wardrobe of stark black and white with carefully chosen bursts of red. This has proven indicative of her visual aesthetic ever since: strikingly minimalist and monochromatic. This sensibility was also evidenced in her design for *The Rover*.<sup>454</sup> Coonrod classifies the costumes as "modern period" (phone interview). The fabrics and colors of the costumes suggested the early modern period, but their lack of ornamentation and modified tailoring evoked a crisp,

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<sup>452</sup> Burdman notes that some general supplemental lighting that blended with the environment was used for *The Rover*, but the production did not otherwise contain any type of conventional theatrical lighting design.

<sup>453</sup> A freelance designer, Coonrod has also worked as an adjunct instructor of costume design at Brooklyn College, Colgate College and MIT.

<sup>454</sup> A sampling of her design work is available on her website at <http://www.oanabotez.com>.



contemporary silhouette. The moire and brocade silk fabrics that Botez selected imbued the men's and women's costumes with a sense of old world, baroque refinement. As modern counterpoints, Botez dressed the British gents in leather trench coats, an update on the wool gabardine used for this style of outerwear when it originated in the late-nineteenth century, and the women wore skirts with mid-calf hemlines redolent of mid-twentieth-century dress-lengths.

Coonrod asked that the entire cast—men and women—be dressed in shades of pink and red in order to suggest visually the power of women in the world of the play; of course, these colors can also exude passion and danger. Angellica Bianca's scarlett red ensemble included a tailored top with a deep square neckline and dramatic three-quarter bell sleeves; her look had a sophisticated allure. In lieu of three hanging portraits of Angellica Bianca, Coonrod elected to use a single, life-size photographic rendering reminiscent of spokesperson effigies used in retail merchandising. Willmore likely evoked absurd laughter when he tried to make off with Angellica's cardboard clone. The human scale of this metonymic sign served as a poignant representation of the idea of merchandising and manhandling a woman [Figure 47]. Hellena, Florinda, Valeria, and Callis wore full skirts and jackets with high collars and peplum detailing at the hips. Each actress donned a distinct shade of pink or red: Hellena wore cherry red; Florinda, salmon pink; Valeria, burgundy; Callis, orange-red [Figures 48-52]. The men's look was layered, comprised of a button-down shirt, pants, a three-quarter-length coat, and a scarf, in varying combinations of fabrics and hues in the same color palette as the women [Figures 53-56]. The vibrantly dressed cast popped against its more neutral-colored commercial backdrop. Critic Fulton thought the costumes conveyed a fashion sense that worked in harmony with the building's lavish interior: "[the costumes] have a richness which effectively complements the

space's marble luxury, helping to smooth the transition between the play and the real world, against which it frequently rubs as tired brokers head home for the day" (Fulton).

Other mentionable costume elements included footwear and disguise. At the first rehearsal, everyone was given the boots that they would be wearing for the run of the show: they were dark leather and knee-high in the style of military or riding boots. April Sweeney (Hellena) wore hers at every rehearsal because they helped inform what she saw as Hellena's tom-boy spirit. The women's combination of colorful, feminine dresses with rugged, masculine boots beneath was a strikingly androgynous design choice. For the women, this was the gender-neutralizing equivalent to the men being costumed in colors that Coonrod viewed as female-empowering. In the absence of a backstage area or dressing room, costume changes were virtually nonexistent. Hellena's breeches costume was simplified to the addition of a mask. The women's gypsy disguise was the only detectable costume change in the entire performance; this consisted of the addition of over-skirts in a red and white floral brocade and black eye masks that merely hinted at their disguisedness and allowed them to "watch from a powerful position" [Figure 57] (Coonrod, phone interview)<sup>455</sup>. In keeping with the overall elegant tenor of her design, Botez's gypsy costumes were not literal and bohemian, but instead refined and inspired by the rose imagery introduced in Behn's 1.2 stage directions: "Enter . . . women dressed like courtesans, with papers pinned on their breasts, and baskets of flowers in their hands." The paper, which Willmore reads aloud, bears the inscription, "Roses for every month" (1.2.80). Throughout the scene, roses function as an extended sexual metaphor, providing Willmore several dirty puns about gardening and distilling. By connecting the sisters' costumes to these other minor, would-be courtesans in the scene, Coonrod elevates the flower metaphor, evoking

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<sup>455</sup> Phone interview with the author on July 17, 2017.

its beauty instead of its sexual sting.<sup>456</sup> In sum, from a critical distance, the costume design's colorful, tone-on-tone palette, baroque fabrics, and modern tailoring imbued the production with a stylized visual unity that was consistent with Coonrod's sense of theatre as a poetic, pictorial mode of storytelling. At the same time, the homogeneity of the wardrobe may have made it difficult for audience members to distinguish characters from one another easily. Moreover, NY Classical's cast was racially homogenous. While the strolling violinist and the Spaniards were non-white performers, the cast of NY Classical's *Rover* was predominantly white, a distinction that sets it apart from the revivals presented by the Guthrie (1994), Queen's Company (2001), Woman's Will (2003), and Thinking Cap (2013). Based on NY Classical production photos, the actresses who portrayed Hellena and Angellica Bianca bore a physical resemblance to one another. This factor combined with their complementary red costumes verged on commentary about judging on appearance. Through casting, costume, and the use of universal black masks that, in reality, offered no disguise, Coonrod visibly underscored the difficulty of distinguishing virgin from whore, making them appear arbitrary and interchangeable to the point of canceling one another out.

### **Violence-Redux**

As a result of textual adaptation and direction, the depiction of all forms of violence was minimized in NY Classical's production. The elimination of the Blunt subplot considerably reduced the presence of misogyny and the threat of sexual violence in the production—only Willmore's attempted assault on Florida remained.<sup>457</sup> Coonrod also elected to underplay the

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<sup>456</sup> One of the women cautions Willmore to "Beware such roses" (1.2.87).

<sup>457</sup> Director Amy Hodge also cut the role of Blunt for her 2012 staging with Past Pleasures Company at Hampton Court Palace. For critical analysis of this production, see pp306-308 of S. S. Gammanpila's 2016 article on modern London productions of Behn's plays. See Gammanpila,

spectacle of physical violence between men, which she achieved by using smaller epees, instead of swords, for the duels between the Englishmen and the Spaniards. This weapon substitution alone could be read as emasculating. Given the abundance of playing space at the venue, elaborate swordplay would have been safe and feasible. Coonrod's choice not to engage in this type of spectacle arguably kept the men in the production from upstaging the women and indirectly supported her view of the play as pro-woman. Coonrod's placement of performers within the vast World Financial Center also contributed to the diffusion of violence. For instance, Willmore's attempted assault on Florinda (3.5 of Behn's text) began with the striking visual of Willmore chasing Florinda up a moving escalator on the second floor while the audience watched from the first floor below. Coonrod's choice to stage Florinda's escape effort on a motorized surface powered in the reverse direction offered palpable commentary on the exhausting obstacles faced by a young girl who ventures outside alone in a patriarchal society. The end of the scene culminated in a third-floor rotunda, two levels above the audience. For Burdman, the great distance between the audience and the performers made the scene "anticlimactic" because it was difficult for viewers to see and hear what was happening (phone interview). At the same time, Coonrod's variant use of the space as both an immediate foreground for some moments and a remote background for others is intriguing. Moreover, her far-off, isolated blocking of the garden scene might have lent itself to a truer-to-life representation of the event, given that sexual violence typically occurs in private spaces. Crying rape in a dedicated theatre space and crying rape in a public space that has been transformed into a performance space have different implications. Certainly, in this non-theatrical, site-specific

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S. S. "It's only test is in performance": Aphra Behn and the Modern London Stage." *Women's Writing*. 23:3 (2016): 298-311.

context, NY Classical saw the potential for the public to perceive Florinda's distant cries of "rape" as a true emergency; therefore, they obtained special security clearance from the World Financial Center so that the actress playing Florinda could have permission to yell the word. For some, the secluded blocking of this scene's ending might have heightened their curiosity by virtue of not confirming for them exactly what happened, but instead leaving an impression for them to decipher. Coonrod's soft-focus approach to staging violence in *The Rover* can be read as a signpost of her directorial aesthetic: "We are poets in space . . . that's my agenda . . . creating the poetry in space" (Coonrod phone interview).

Reviewer Will Fulton praised Coonrod's use of the expansive World Financial Center:

What could easily be a messy process of herding the audience from place to place is handled commendably well . . . Coonrod makes great use of the architecture, providing the audience with pleasantly variable physical relationships to the actors over the course of the show, many of which are generally not available in conventional theatrical spaces. The lobby in particular lends itself to some excellent escalator gags (Fullton).<sup>458</sup> [Figure 58]

For April Sweeney, who played Hellena, the production was an "exhilarating" experience and signified on various metaphoric levels precisely because of Coonrod's measured movement of bodies throughout the space. From the opening moment, Sweeney's character was running quite literally away from paternal constraint and towards freedom. Coonrod staged 1.1 in a narrow hallway with audience seated on the floor. Her use of this more closed-off location served as a fitting spatial analogy for the private interior setting specified in Behn's stage directions and underscored the sisters' patriarchal containment at the start of the play. Sweeney delivered her first lines with her back to viewers, and then, on a word, turned and dashed full speed ahead, stopping just before running into the seated crowd. This moment served as a powerful

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<sup>458</sup> Fulton, Will. "The Rover." 2 March 2011. <http://www.nytheatre.com/Content/Index/will-fulton-2011-3-2-the-rover>. Accessed on August 1, 2017.

introduction to Hellena for the audience and set the tone for how the remainder of the performance unfolded. Sweeney had first encountered Behn's play as a sophomore in college, and while she felt that "the meat of the play on some level was gone" because of the textual edits, she appreciated the sharpened emphasis on her character's journey:

It was focused on Hellena's escape, escaping the family structures, the agency of oneself, crawling your way out. Karin made the play like a playground. I had a sense of exuberance because I essentially ran everywhere (phone interview).

Sweeney saw her Hellena as a panther, fleeing, jumping, prowling. She recalls Coonrod likening the collective movement of the cast to "a flock of birds" soaring through the space (phone interview). Coonrod staged the witty seduction scenes between Willmore and Hellena with the actors positioned on opposite sides of a corridor with a gulf of approximately 40-feet between them; Sweeney recalls this moment being exciting and metatheatrical, the space between them serving as a metaphor for the ideological barriers to their love.

### **Critical Reception**

While the World Financial Center's contemporary resonance with the themes of Behn's play and Coonrod's thoughtful use of the space were intellectually compelling, visually alluring, and physically engrossing, several critics felt that the space worked against the production. Of course, this is due in part to the fact that panoramic theatre, whether staged indoors or outdoors, comes with some built-in challenges that require additional effort on the part of participants. One problem is the audience's potential for distraction because of the open, public environment, and in the case of this particular production, the time spent traveling to new locations in between scenes. Critic Saltz explains:

The frequent interruptions prevent it from casting a spell long. During the walkabout you're more inclined to ponder the oddness of the undertaking than to consider the work at hand. And you may find yourself, along with some innocent

bystanders, squinting at the merry band of theater folk and wondering: What makes them want to do this? (March 11, 2011).

Another obstacle is audibility, which Burdman works to address with “frontal presentational style,” directing the actors to deliver their lines while directly facing the audience (Finkle April 14-20, 2011). Burdman puts a positive spin on the situation: “The more challenges, the deeper their investment with the show. If they want to hear, they jockey to be in front. As a result, the audience is very, very attentive. They don’t come to our shows expecting sound reproduction” (Finkle). *New York Times* reviewer, Rachel Saltz found the space an odd fit for live theatre: “for all the cast’s hard work and Ms. Coonrod’s skill, it is tough to escape the feeling that this marriage of art and commercial space is a forced one” (March 11, 2011). Similarly, Jacob Gallagher-Rose found the panoramic approach to be an unnecessarily literal approach to the play: it “ranges widely but never finds compelling reasons for roaming” (March 9, 2001). In a sense, it left him motion-sick; the ambulatory performance style combined with the inherently meandering plot lacked a satisfying cohesion.

While Coonrod did not direct *The Rover* with an intentionally feminist agenda or directing method, NY Classical’s staging still arguably contained qualities that align with the goals of feminist theatre. Through the joint-editing efforts of Burdman and Coonrod, the performance script emphasized the personally and sexually progressive aspirations of the women in the play. The promenade staging approach and Coonrod’s blocking and movement of actresses, in particular, reinforced the tailored script’s female-focus and empowered the women, depicting them not as objectified rambling roses, but as subjects with a visible agency that rivaled their roving male counterparts. Coonrod’s minimization of physical and sexual violence curtailed misogyny and kept male spectacle from becoming an overpowering energy in the performance. Last, Botez’s costumes infused the staging with an androgynous visual balance

that softened the men and strengthened the women and ultimately reinforced the adapted script's focus on Hellena's liberating escape. While Coonrod is comfortable identifying as a feminist, she does not connect feminist ideology in a conscious way to her work as a director: "I guess I don't like labels. I don't like to show my hands." As an example, she recalls a time that she directed a successful production of *King John*: "it was a hit and people came and people didn't know who directed it." Her comment implies that potential patrons would be less likely to attend a Shakespearean production directed by a woman. Yet Coonrod acknowledges that gender inequity is an issue in the profession: "I know the problem . . . I have lived through the problem . . . I have lamented the problem . . . I've also been very lucky." Of course, Coonrod is also incredibly talented, a fact attested to by her extensive directing resume and Ivy League residencies and teaching affiliations.<sup>459</sup> Nonetheless, she emphasizes her awareness that opportunity can be a product of good fortune and timing: "I remember my first breakthrough. I was given the opportunity to direct whatever play I wanted in 1995 [at the Public]—anything but *The Tempest*—and I chose *Henry VI*." One of the most apt insights on the subject of gender and directing that Coonrod offered during our interview involved the power of laughter: "the woman's laughter is huge. I think that's what threatens men. I think our laugh is what allows us to work."

In the end, Coonrod's staging for NY Classical represented a visually and intellectually compelling union of text, theme, and context. Its style and form resonated with P. J. Skantze's view that "The give and take of Behn's particular work in the theatre can only be interpreted through an understanding of staging, of motion, of moments carefully choreographed and

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<sup>459</sup> Since 1995, Coonrod has held directing residencies at Colgate, Columbia, Stanford, The New School, American Repertory Theater at the Harvard Institute, California Institute of the Arts, NYU, Fordham, University of Iowa, and Sundance Theatre Lab.



collected together to be dispersed again” (113). Parading through the corridors of the World Financial Center, amidst retail stores and Wall Street traders, Behn’s characters and Coonrod’s cast were on heightened public display and also literally and figuratively liberated by their ability to move to freely. In a compelling instance of theory and practice aligning and informing one another, Coonrod’s staging of *The Rover* functioned as a poetically performative manifestation of P. J. Skantze’s argument that Behn “parodies the mercantile aspect of sexual as well as dramatic relations while making interesting visual and aural commentary by propelling women into ambulatory commodities who trade and who trade themselves” (113).

## Chapter Eight

### Who's the "Punk" Now?: Thinking Cap Theatre Rocks a Gender-Parodic *Rover*

"You have to reinvent everything, you are effectively a kind of author . . . The text always has to be reimagined for the age in which it is being staged. You have to address your audience as directly as Shakespeare did."<sup>460</sup>

-Calixto Bieito

"I also do a lot of etymology, looking up the origins of words, and I always read the plays in the original . . . I research my work quite a lot but I don't read the academics."<sup>461</sup>

-Di Trevis

Many years before I began this dissertation, I had already contemplated how I might someday stage *The Rover*. A period revival was never a consideration. In the spirit of Catalan director Calixto Bieito, I fantasized about a fresh, thought provoking approach that would engage a 21st-century audience. As it turns out, the seeds of inspiration for what would become my staging concept were planted during a graduate seminar when I read a satiric poem about Behn written by rival author, Robert Gould (1660?-1709/1709). In this poem, Gould infamously calls Behn a "punk": "Punk and poetesse agree so pat, you cannot well be this, and not be that."<sup>462</sup> Gould derisively equated Behn's status as a professional woman writer presenting literature for public consumption with a prostitute selling sex for money on the open market.<sup>463</sup> This was my

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<sup>460</sup> From a 2003 interview with Maria M. Delgado in *Contemporary Theatre Review*.

<sup>461</sup> From an interview with Elizabeth Schafer in *Ms-Directing Shakespeare* (30).

<sup>462</sup> As Catherine Gallagher points out, by Gould's own admission, this sentiment is a paraphrase from Rochester's "Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country" (41).

<sup>463</sup> In "Who was that masked woman? The prostitute and the playwright in the comedies of Aphra Behn," Catherine Gallagher asserts that Behn used "the overlapping discourses of

first encounter with the Restoration usage of “punk” as slang for a prostitute. Like British director Di Trevis, I have always delighted in etymological research, and so I was struck by the juxtaposition of the meaning of “punk” in the 17th century and its late 20th century usage as an umbrella title for an alternative art, fashion, and music subculture that emerged in England in the 1970s. Although three hundred years separated the 1670s from the 1970s, bold sartorial trends united them, from powdered periwigs, corsets, breeches and petticoats in the former era to mohawks, artfully tattered clothing, neon color palettes, and body piercing in the latter. Rebellious gender and sexual politics also characterized both periods. In sum, in both eras to be a punk was to be an outcast. In 2003, the meaning of “punk” further evolved to include a verb form with celebrity Ashton Kutcher’s creation of a candid camera style reality show aptly named “Punk’d,” wherein the word became synonymous with pranking. “Punk’d” episodes unfold similarly to Restoration comedies, both abounding with plots—frequently hatched, sometimes foiled, and always exposed.

In 2012 my past musings on Gould, Behn, and the etymology of “punk” were finally put to use when I proposed directing *The Rover* and writing a chapter about the experience for this project. The heteroglossia of the term “punk” suffused my staging concept.<sup>464</sup> I saw in this approach a way to turn Gould’s slanderous epithet on its head, to engage in feminist critique by satirizing masculinity and male violence in the play, and to make the play accessible and entertaining for a contemporary audience with whom punk rock culture and “punking”

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commercial, sexual, and linguistic exchange” to construct a scandal around herself and that Behn thereby “introduced to the world . . . the professional woman as a new-fangled whore” (23).

<sup>464</sup> I take the term “heteroglossia” here from Mikhail Bakhtin.

resonate.<sup>465</sup> As the founding artistic director of Thinking Cap Theatre (TCT), a professional, non-profit theatre company in Fort Lauderdale, FL, I was in an ideal position to program *The Rover* as part of the company's 2013 season. Founded in January 2010,

Thinking Cap Theatre is devoted to presenting experimental, provocative, and socially-conscious plays. TCT is also committed to presenting works that depict a range of identities more reflective of today's society; to dismantling norms and stereotypes through non-reactionary, honest means; *and to freshly presenting both well-known and rarely-staged classical plays.* (Italics mine.)

Thus, staging *The Rover* not only had practical implications for my dissertation, but also posed a perfect opportunity to fulfill a key aspect of Thinking Cap's mission. In what follows, I chart and analyze in two parts my directing journey: first, the preproduction process—casting, dramaturgy, design (set, sound, lights, wardrobe), and rehearsal; then, postproduction assessment—performance analysis and critical reception as they relate to feminist comic theory and my overall “punk” vision.

### **I. TCT's *Rover* in Preproduction**

Given the total show budget of \$10,000, I reread the play to determine if there were any characters that could be doubled or eliminated so that I could minimize casting costs. The *dramatis personae* in the first printed quarto of Behn's script contains eighteen named characters and numerous other unnamed ones, including a page, officers, soldiers, servants, and masqueraders. I reduced the cast size by more than a third, utilizing a cast of only twelve actors. I eliminated the role of Moretta as a separate character and gave her lines that seemed critical to the plot to Lucetta; in the end, this dramaturgical decision played seamlessly. The actor who played Callis also doubled as the soldier who arrests Belvile in act two. In order to reduce costs,

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<sup>465</sup> My director's note (see appendix) in the program provided the audience with insight into how and why I “punked” *The Rover*.

I eliminated five other minor parts, including Stephano, Phillip, Sancho, Biskey, and Sebastian. These excisions led to other minor adjustments; for example, in the absence of the bravos, Biskey and Sebastian, Lucetta displayed Angellica's portrait. Many productions of *The Rover* in recent years have employed multi-racial casts, and ours did, too. Our cast contained eight white actors, two African American actors, and two Hispanic actors.<sup>466</sup> I felt strongly about having a racially and ethnically diverse cast that more accurately reflects the world in which we now live, but similar to Kyle Donnelly (discussed in chapter four) and Erin Merritt and Rebecca Patterson (discussed in chapter six), I did not have a specific agenda beyond that.<sup>467</sup>

Using Janet Todd's edition of Behn's work, I created the performance script, which was a challenging and time consuming process.<sup>468</sup> The scholar in me wanted to preserve word for word the integrity of the original play; the director (and producer) in me was willing to make some cuts in order to achieve a leaner, tighter script that would be likelier to hold a contemporary audience's interest. Behn's play, including the prologue and epilogue, contains approximately 30,000 words and could easily lead to a running time of three hours or more. Our final performance script was approximately 22,000 words and yielded a running time of just under two hours, including a 10-minute intermission.<sup>469</sup> I did not alter or update diction, nor did

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<sup>466</sup> The cast's classical training varied greatly, with some having extensively studied and performed early modern and Restoration drama (Scott Douglas Wilson/Willmore, Mark Duncan/Blunt, Nori Tecosky/Hellena, Yevgeniya Kats/Florinda, Theo Reyna/Don Pedro) and others having little or no background in classical drama (Desiree Mora/Lucetta, Lela Elam/Angellica Bianca).

<sup>467</sup> By comparison, Jules Wright consciously imbued her production with a political agenda by casting the Spanish characters with black actors and Angellica with an Indian actress-dancer in order to make the play a vehicle for examining white colonization of non-white people.

<sup>468</sup> Throughout this chapter, all references to Behn's script derive from Janet Todd's 1996 Complete Works edition published by Routledge.

<sup>469</sup> To be exact, our script's word count was 21,868, compared to the original script's count of 30,007. Our intermission followed Blunt's 3.4 monologue about Lucetta's duping of him.

I eliminate any scenes. However, I did make internal line cuts throughout the play and omit entirely the prologue, epilogue, and the lute song in 2.1.<sup>470</sup>

In spite of successfully whittling down our production's running time to two hours, some reviewers still criticized the show's length. Rod Hagwood of the *Sun Sentinel* described it as a "marathon performance" and suggested in parentheses that "a good 20 minutes *could* be shaved off" (Hagwood). *New Times* reviewer, John Thomason remarked: "Truth be told . . . while I'm intellectually impressed with Stodard's innovations, this is still an overlong night at the theater, dense and taxing in its 17th-century language though utterly simplistic in its narrative path" (Thomason). In spite of my editorial efforts, Thomason went on to criticize "Behn's obscure and repetitive diction." As Hagwood's and Thomason's remarks make clear, even a shortened Restoration play is still a long play by most people's standards today.

Thinking Cap Theatre mounted *The Rover* in Fort Lauderdale at Empire Stage, an intimate, 50-seat, black box theatre with a playing area that measures 25 feet wide, 12 feet deep, and 8 feet high from the floor to the lighting grid. From the earliest phase of preparation to the final dress rehearsal, the size limitations of the venue impacted design decisions. A period staging of *The Rover* at Empire Stage would have proven difficult. Swordplay was an impossibility given the low ceiling. My punk concept afforded my colleagues and I the creative license necessary to stage the play effectively and navigate around the space limitations.

Our set design captured the social urbanity and the urban decay of both modern day Naples and the heyday of punk London. Set designer Chas Collins transformed the black box space into a T-shaped playing area that resembled a three-quarter thrust configuration. At

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<sup>470</sup> According to Artistic Director Stephen Burdman, New York Classical Theatre's production (discussed in chapter seven) directed by Carin Koonrod eliminated some scenes in their entirety.

upstage center, Collins built a subway car reminiscent of the Naples Metro<sup>471</sup> and the London Tube. It had two sets of subway doors that remained permanently open for easy entrance and exit. In the absence of a deeper stage that could accommodate moving scenery to reveal new locations, such as “the long street” specified in the stage directions of 1.2, this subway car concept allowed us to suggest travel to and from various parts of the city. This design choice served as both a familiar marker of modern city life and a metaphor for movement that helped to facilitate plot progression. Collins covered the upstage walls on either side of the subway car with graffiti wallpaper, which she further distressed to fit our punk, grunge aesthetic. At upstage left, between the subway car and the graffiti wall, stood a four-foot tall statue of the Virgin Mary, which infused the set visually and thematically with something from the old world. I enjoyed observing the subtle ways that actors interacted with the statue in performance: for instance, sometimes Willmore polished Mary with his scarf, and often Don Antonio prayed to her and kissed the top of her head for good luck before engaging in a fight. Because we had a fixed set, I altered the location of some scenes to make them fit within our conceptual world. For example, instead of staging the opening scene of the play in Hellena and Florinda’s private chamber, I relocated the scene to an outdoor café. While the two sisters and Callis sat at a table downstage center discussing their personal desires and paternal restrictions, Don Pedro entered at upstage right from the Metro to deliver his father’s command to Florinda.

Perpendicular to the subway playing area, Collins designed an elevated thrust area that functioned as Angellica Bianca’s balcony. Located on the third and highest row of seats, nestled in between audience members, Angellica’s balcony featured a throne-like seat encompassed by sheer, distressed drapes that allowed her to be concealed and revealed as needed. All of

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<sup>471</sup> In Italian, the Metropolitana di Napoli.

Angellica's scenes in act one occurred in this area. Her later scenes took place in the downstage subway area. During intermission we pinned back the curtains on the balcony and repurposed the area to suggest Don Antonio's holding room for Belvile.<sup>472</sup> Critic Michelle Solomon applauded how well we maneuvered a sizable cast in a small venue:

It is a large cast for sure, but Stodard has reconfigured the small space to a three-quarter seating arrangement, therefore leaving room to create different levels through the middle of the small house. The limited mainstage area, surprisingly, never seems crowded and she's smartly worked out how to make use of extra playing space, including a fascinating courtesan's chamber against the back wall that blends into audience seating.

Roger Martin, a regular reviewer of productions at Empire Stage, described Collins' set as "an ingenious, T shaped, tiered playing area."

The punk concept permeated the show's soundscape. Sound designer David Hart, created an eclectic soundscape that married classical with contemporary. He interspersed electronic remixes of classical songs, including "Danza Espanolas"; "Lakme"; "Suite Espanola"; "Peer Gynt"; and "The Wedding March" from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, alongside classic rock tracks by Joan Jett & The Black Hearts; The Bangles; Pat Benatar; and Led Zeppelin. The soundscape also included some newer rock tracks by Santagold; Daft Punk; The Killers; Does It Offend You, Yeah?; and IAMX. The music of female rock icons such as Blondie, Cyndi Lauper, and Madonna played during pre-show and intermission. The upbeat, rock-inspired soundscape served as a familiar through-line to keep the audience engaged and to keep pace and energy high during the show.

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<sup>472</sup> Here I refer to 4.1 of Behn's play. Stage directions read: "A fine room [with a table] Discovers Belvile as by dark alone."



Costuming early modern plays can be daunting because they typically have large casts and require many costumes changes. Even with a reduced cast of twelve and a more modern fashion aesthetic, creating a costume plot was still a complicated process. Scenic artist Chas Collins and I co-designed the costumes for our production working with a wardrobe budget of approximately \$1,700, which roughly equated to \$150 per actor. Several months prior to the start of rehearsal, we broke the play down by character and scene in order to identify when each character changes clothes and how much time they have to do so. When costume changes could be simplified or eliminated, we did so, not merely as a cost-cutting measure, but also as a way to achieve swift transitions between scenes.

Collins and I dubbed our costume aesthetic high fashion grunge. In reviewer John Thomason's estimation, our production was "among several things, a fashion show." Our wardrobe consisted of a combination of rented, new, secondhand, and handmade items. The *Sun Sentinel* reviewer, Rod Hagwood, took note of our wardrobe's hybrid style: "[Stodard] and her design team have wisely bathed the whole production in now-ness (the Brit-chic, neo-punk costumes in particular look like a Vivienne Westwood runway show)." Female rock and pop icons from the 1970's and 1980's, such as Cyndi Lauper, Madonna, Joan Jett, and Blondie, informed our costuming of major and minor female characters. Their clothing incorporated items such as corsets, gloves, and leather goods that were equally reminiscent of the Restoration period and the punk era. Image 59 features Hellena, Florinda, Callis, and Valeria in their carnival attire [IMAGE 59]: Hellena's black and white, naughty nun look, comprised of lace bodysuit beneath a corset on top and a tartan miniskirt on the bottom, was inspired by Madonna's *Like A Virgin* album. Florinda's look embraced Madonna's and Lauper's grunge aesthetic. She wore an artfully torn, white, long-sleeved top as a base with a pink, paint-

splattered, sleeveless peplum shirt and a denim vest layered over it. With this, she wore pink leggings beneath pink, cut-off denim shorts. Valeria's rocker look was futuristic and fashionable in the spirit of David Bowie. She wore a silver metallic strapless mini-dress with electric blue leggings and Moto boots. Callis, a conservative, guardian figure in Behn's play, was reimagined and fashioned as a personal assistant to Hellena and Florinda in our production. Her costume for 1.1 was professional business attire, which consisted of a simple gray suit jacket and matching skirt. By contrast, her carnival costume, inspired by Cat Woman, entailed a black lace bodysuit with black leather pants and boots. With touches of fur, feathers, and metal hardware, Angelica Bianca's wardrobe was a fusion of Cyndi Lauper with steampunk style. Lauper's 1984 *True Colors* album cover inspired Angelica's bold, colorful makeup and plumed headdress [IMAGE 60]. In act one, she wore a black and white, color blocked shirt and pant set with a lush, champagne-colored fur vest. In keeping with the steampunk inspiration for her look, Angelica Bianca's act two costume consisted of a full-length black dress with a corset bodice, a fitted, black and white jacket, and a playful red and black satin hat that brought to mind *Alice in Wonderland*.

An array of Early British punk musicians influenced our styling of the male characters [IMAGE 61]. As the title character and leader of his pack, Willmore's wardrobe called for special attention. Willmore's most important costume piece was his black leather jacket reminiscent of the ones worn by members of The Clash and The Ramones and by the Thunderbirds in *Grease*. A quintessential punk signifier, Willmore's jacket marked him as a rebel and a bad boy. A skull cap, pocket chain, and black leather moto boots enhanced his rocker look. Instead of conventional pants, Willmore donned a navy and red tartan kilt with black and red striped tights underneath; these clothing items gave his look an edgy, neoclassical

flair, calling to mind all at once Restoration petticoats, punk counter-culture regalia, and the contemporary fashion runway. Willmore also wore knee-pads that cheekily read “pox” and “on’t” in hand-scrawled print. This practical accessory proved essential to actor Scott Wilson’s highly physical, comedic performance. Wilson’s carefully manicured facial hair also warrants noting for its devilish, Don Juan quality [IMAGE 62].

Willmore’s supporting cast wore punk-inspired costumes with nods to Behn’s original characterization. Frederick’s rocker look was inspired by skateboarding culture. In act one, he wore a black and white guitar patterned necktie as a headscarf, a bright blue, short-sleeved military style shirt with epaulets, black shorts adorned with white skulls; green tights beneath the shorts, Union Jack socks, and white bowling style shoes decorated with black and blue spray paint to resemble graffiti. Belvile’s status as a noble soldier informed his more sophisticated rocker look. He wore a button-down shirt, a brown plaid three-quarter length tartan jacket, a Union Jack tie, distressed slim fit denim jeans, brown leather ankle boots, and a tan wool newsboy hat [IMAGE 63]. Because of Blunt’s clownishness and rural class association, we chose geek punk for his look. For him, we mixed patterns and played with fit. On top he wore a plaid, long-sleeved button down shirt and a plaid sweater vest—a classic nerd clothing item—beneath an oversized tartan blazer. On bottom he wore army green cargo shorts, orange tights, and black ankle boots. He carried his money around his waist in a red fanny pack—an essential dork accessory. Thomason fittingly described our Blunt as “a cross between Johnny Rotten and a clueless tourist.” *West Side Story* inspired the wardrobe of Don Pedro and Don Antonio. They wore black skinny jeans and shirts and ties in Spain’s national colors of red and gold [See IMAGE 64]. When in disguise, they donned capes and Lucha-libre masks, a nod to indigenous

wrestling culture, the American World Wrestling Federation, and the popular film *Nacho Libre*, which I will address at greater length later.

Our rehearsal period spanned five weeks, beginning on Saturday, January 5, 2013; we rehearsed five to six days each week. We began our first day of rehearsal with a table reading of the script followed by an open discussion. We then began working through various handouts that I created to familiarize the cast with Restoration theatre, culture, and politics. We spent many hours during the first two weeks of rehearsal translating dialogue line-by-line into modern language in order to help the actors more fully understand what they were saying.

Feminist values are vital, though implicit, to my work as a director. I don't announce my feminist identity at the start of each new rehearsal process. However, decentering authority, emphasizing collaboration, allotting equal importance to the views of men and women artists, and investigating how gender operates in a script and plays out onstage form the foundation of my craft. Admittedly, in application, feminist directing practices can sometimes feel at odds with maintaining a central vision and conveying a sense of leadership. As Beth Watkins notes, it's a delicate balance, and in the end, the director must be the final arbiter of decisions.<sup>473</sup> Fortunately, in the case of *The Rover*, I had a clear, strong concept, and while some cast members were initially less convinced of how well it would work, the more we rehearsed, the more I held my ground, the more we discovered that it was succeeding.

Reading *The Rover* as a work of literature and reading it as a blueprint for performance are two separate endeavors. Making the shift to the latter task proved revelatory for me. I have long hailed Behn as a literary hero and her noted play as an important work for its depiction of

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<sup>473</sup> See Watkins, Beth. "The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education." *Theatre Topics*. 15(September 2005): 185-200.

complex, articulate women. Until I staged the play myself, I had assumed that a feminist-minded production of the play would hinge on a director's treatment of Hellena, Florinda, and Angellica Bianca. I was wrong. In the third week of rehearsal, Mark Duncan, who acted Blunt, remarked: "This is turning into a really male-centric play, and it's directed by you!" My first inclination in the moment was to react defensively. But I simply replied, "It's not my direction. It's Behn's play." Mark's comment was a pivotal moment in the process for me. I realized that my concept was working even better than I had anticipated as a framework for critique. I just did not recognize until that moment the extent to which my feminist lens needed to be, and in fact had been, focused on the men.

## II. Postproduction

### Performance Analysis

Behn wrote in several dramatic modes, including tragedy, comedy, and tragi-comedy. While the title page of *The Rover* plainly identifies the work as a comedy, its funny factor onstage hinges on acting and direction, more specifically, how the performers embody gender roles and how the director stages the play's much discussed scenes that threaten physical or sexual violence. Depicting male misogyny through sincere, dramatic acting and emphasizing the play's potentially dark moments through realistic staging techniques have major implications for audience reception, and they don't produce humorous results. This style of production effects the play's generic identity, shifting it from a comedy to a tragicomedy and problematizing its conventional happy ending. Yet, as outlined earlier in the introduction, this type of approach became a trademark of revivals of *The Rover* in the 1980s and 1990s.

In his article, "Teaching Willmore," James Evans considers the pedagogical consequences of this period of darker revivals. Reflecting on forty years of teaching Behn's

play, Evans notes a distinct change in students' reactions to Willmore during the 1990s. He attributes this "interpretive trend" to his regular classroom use of the filmed recording of the 1994 Women's Theatre Trust production directed by Jules Wright.<sup>474</sup> As the only available recording of the play in performance, the production was afforded a lot of power in shaping students' views, which is particularly significant given Wright's vision. Under the direction of Wright and dramaturgy of Lizbeth Goodman, *The Rover* received an unapologetically feminist, graphically violent, post-colonial staging. According to Goodman, the production was meant to be "politically challenging." Wright, an avowed feminist, claimed, "If you're going to deal with misogyny then you want the men in the cast to take on the violence . . . you have to display brutality in order to confront the audience with such behavior" (Schafer 36-37). In Evans' estimation, Wright's interpretation combined with menacing camera angles made for archival footage of an unlikeable Willmore that is at odds with the play's Restoration production history.

Evans argues, instead, for consideration of the original casting of *The Rover* to gain insight into how Behn might have intended her play and the title role to be performed.<sup>475</sup> The first Willmore, William Smith, was an actor acclaimed for his work in lighter comedic roles, which "offers the rationale for a more comic Willmore" (Evans 1). The casting of Smith as Willmore (who would go on to play Willmore again in *The Rover II*) suggests that Behn "originally conceived the character to emphasize his comic dimension and so to represent him as a flawed yet still desirable partner for Hellena" (2). According to Evans, considering these points may lead readers "to see Behn, hardly reluctant to challenge a patriarchal society, as a more interesting playwright—satiric, realistic, pragmatic, and commercial" (2). With regard to

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<sup>474</sup>Evans no longer uses the recording of Wright's production as a teaching tool.

<sup>475</sup> Although I had already directed Thinking Cap's punk production by the time I discovered Evans' article, his argument only further validates my decision to emphasize satire in my staging.

this chapter, the most important adjective in Evans' list of descriptions of Behn as a playwright is *satiric*. Evans' argument provides validation for my approach to directing Scott Wilson's parodic performance of the title role, which I will say more about shortly.

First, I would like to return to Jules Wright's statement on how to treat male violence in *The Rover*: "If you're going to deal with misogyny then you want the men in the cast to take on the violence . . . you have to display brutality in order to confront the audience with such behavior" (Schafer 36-37). With all due respect to Wright, I disagree. In fact, I would argue that even though she, Akalaitis, and other directors who led the trend towards darker stagings of *The Rover* in the 1990's believed the choice represented a strong feminist or contemporary stance, ironically, the choice fed inadvertently into an antifeminist tradition that denies women's comedic potential. As Kathryn Kein notes, women and feminism have had a "fraught relationship . . . with humor in our cultural imagination. Women have long battled a perception that they, as a sex, are biologically not funny" (671). And to some extent, women in general and feminist scholarship in particular have internalized this viewpoint. In her essay, "Comic Theory from a Feminist Perspective," Joanna E. Rapf acknowledges that feminist film scholars have shown resistance to comedy as a genre because "feminist theory has been largely informed by psychoanalysis, discourse theory, and narrative theory, particularly the work of Lacan and Foucault" (193). As a case in point, Rapf notes that Laura Mulvey does not reference comic films in her canonical essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and that "it would be difficult to apply her thesis to comedy because her ideas involve *identification* with screen characters whereas comedy asks for distance" (194). Rapf continues:

Man's illusions are the basis of comedy, and laughter arises from the gap between illusion and reality, a gap that is difficult to perceive without psychological distance. This need for distance explains why many of the

landmark concepts of feminist film theory do not work well when applied to comedy (194).

Moreover, “comic films do not give back to the male spectator ‘his more perfect self’” (195).

Rapf proposes a new path of exploration for feminist film criticism and persuasively argues that comedy can function as a feminist method for critiquing patriarchy. Applying her theory to the films of Jerry Lewis, Rapf argues that “far from presenting idealized masculine images, Lewis and other male comics often present parodies of such images: in this light they may be seen as critiquing the patriarchy, not exalting it” (194). Rapf provides evidence of Lewis deflating masculine ideals through his performance of male stereotypes. She writes, “Comedy thrives on stereotypes because if the characters seemed real, it would be difficult to laugh at them . . . distance is the key here . . . forbidding the identification that is so crucial to the classical feminist approach to film theory” (195). Rapf’s theory serves as a useful framework for analyzing my approach to staging *The Rover*.

Drawing on Ros Ballaster’s point that Willmore “has ‘more’ will” than his likely, real life inspiration, John Wilmot, Evans goes a step further, asserting that the ‘more’ in “Behn’s naming indicates the comic exaggeration that constitutes the basis of her character . . . Willmore is an over-the-top figure, often ridiculous” (6). Although my production preceded the publication of Evans’ article by one year, our perceptions of Willmore align. In portraying the title character, I encouraged Wilson to perform hyperbolic masculinity and to seek inspiration from a range of legendary comedians, including Laurel and Hardy, The Three Stooges, and W.C. Fields. Audiences and critics alike detected and appreciated these comic nods with which Wilson layered his character. For instance, John Thomason praises iconic and contemporary acting references in Wilson’s portrayal of Willmore: “[Wilson] makes for a gracefully thuggish roustabout, acting with his entire body — channeling the Three Stooges, the Marx Brothers, and



Charlie Sheen in equal measure, with an infectious ebullience.” Critic Michelle Solomon echoes Thomason, “Wilson owns this play and well he should . . . he’s a master at never letting a double entendre go unnoticed. His Rover is drawn almost as if it’s a cartoon character, but never caricatured — part Jack Black, part Snagglepuss . . . But there’s no mistaking why even a courtesan can’t resist his wild charms.”

The exaggerated manner in which Wilson performed Willmore mocked hyper-masculine stereotypes and, in keeping with Rapf’s theory, precluded (male) audience identification with the character. The physicality he injected into his performance was part frat guy, part slapstick comedian [IMAGES 65 & 66]. Images sixty-five and sixty-six provide a glimpse of how Wilson used his face, hands, and body for comic effect. Image sixty-five depicts Wilson’s first appearance in the play as Willmore; he greets Belvile with a grand pointing gesture and a wide grin. Just prior to this, Willmore had met Blunt with a playful, brotherly fakeout punch to the stomach. Image sixty-six shows Willmore sarcastically pretending to be afraid of a vengeful Belvile. Wilson’s rubbery, Jim Carrey-esque facial expressions undercut his eloquent bloviating, making his character appear at turns a sex-crazed cad or a clueless dolt. For example, in the breeches scene (4.2 of Behn’s play), our Willmore appeared torn between avoiding interruption and pleasing his stomach, for Hellena was disguised as a pizza delivery boy. Willmore’s falling for Hellena’s disguise for even the briefest moment was made that much more comically ridiculous because of the obvious fakeness of Hellena’s mustache—indicated by her holding up her finger to her lip to reveal a mustache painted on with black marker [IMAGES 67 & 68].

Reviewer Michelle Solomon attests to the successful staging of this scene:

Tecosky has the most chemistry with Wilson and when the two are on stage together, it’s pure delight. She’s also given one of Stodard’s most inventive sight gags. Her Hellena dresses as a pizza delivery boy with a

story to tell, and Tecosky plays it with just the right edge of campiness letting the sight gag speak for itself.

Wilson even managed to evoke humor when Angellica held his character at gunpoint in 5.1, falling to his knees to cover his groin and then rising to plug the end of the gun with his index finger, an absurd choice suggestive of either extreme arrogance or stupidity that only works in a parodic, comedic performance context [IMAGES 69 & 70]. When Antonio arrived to aid Angellica, Willmore humorously mocked Antonio's eyepatch, a costume piece that Antonio began wearing only after receiving a slapstick eye poke from Willmore in a previous scene [See IMAGE 71].

My direction of the garden scene, one of the much-discussed scenes among literary critics for its potential portrayal of attempted rape, also warrants mention. I directed Wilson to underplay the possibility of Willmore appearing as an actual, viable threat to Florinda. In the words of Evans, Willmore is "attractive but inept, a fool and marplot, not a plotter" (3). Therefore, I wanted to emphasize the random, accidental, and drunken circumstances that led to Willmore's arrival at Florinda's open garden gate. As Evans notes, so much in the play happens by chance for Willmore: "he meets Hellena because she ventures into Carnival, learns about Angellica because she...advertise[s], and stumbles upon Florida because she opens a garden gate" (3). Inebriated and oblivious, Willmore is "not a rapist on a mission" (Evans 3). To this end, our Willmore was not a belligerent womanizer, but a foolish, tired dolt, who was equally matched in height and ultimately outsmarted by his female counterpart in the scene.

With the help of fight choreographer, Paul Homza, I subverted and exploited potentially violent moments for their comic potential. I encouraged Homza to reference both classic and contemporary films noted for their depiction of masculine stereotypes and fight scenes. Given the masquerade costumes Collins and I designed for Don Pedro and Don Antonio to wear in the

first fight scene—red capes and Lucha libre masks—the 2006 film *Nacho Libre* starring Jack Black was an immediate inspiration. Pedro and Antonio sparred like second-rate WWF wrestlers. They amused audiences with their physical antics, fake-outs, and machismo posturing. The performative quality of commercial wrestling struck me as an interesting analogue for Restoration dueling. While dueling is by definition, “a highly ritualized confrontation between two gentleman instigated by an insult to one’s honor and involving deadly weapons,” we elected for a parodic substitute that privileged style and visual spectacle over substance or honor (Runge 273). When Willmore and Blunt intervened “to draw and part” the Spaniards, all four men paused and snapped in unison in a comic nod to the Jets’ famous four-count snap from the opening scene of the 1961 film version of *West Side Story*. As Laura Runge notes, “duels performed . . . on stage . . . provide playwrights with an easy opportunity to comment on the performative nature of much human interaction and the way that interaction may transform apparently fixed identity” (273). Our production parodied the performative nature of dueling by playing the scene with an even more exaggerated comic reference. *Miami Herald* critic, Christine Dolen, described Homza’s choreography of this scene as “Looney Tunes funny.”

With a satiric precedent in place for staging the first duel scene, the next task was to determine how to vary the references and comically top the first fight in the next one. I used comic substitution for the second duel in the play, the 4.2 match-up on the Molo between Pedro and Belvile (disguised as Antonio). Instead of drawing swords, Belvile and Pedro drew and fought with hand puppets that looked like miniature versions of themselves, right down to their micro-sized red capes and grimaces [Image 72]. The puppets’ likenesses to their puppet masters brought to mind the 18th century paintings by Hogarth that featured human subjects accompanied by mimetic primates, a comment on human vanity. The puppets functioned as

bathetic toy weapons that mocked dueling and divested it of the masculine ideal of honor. As Runge notes,

the duel proves itself an effective device for addressing the ways in which individuals and society fall short of their ideas and ideals . . . the outcome of a duel forces a resolution by determining who gets to be right. However, the determination may be arbitrary, as the outcome ultimately depends on the combatants' strength, agility, concentration, or some other factor and not on the question of honor that led them to fight in the first place (270).

In our production, that “other factor” was a punching puppet. While violence often exists in comedy, the violence “cannot have long-term damaging effects on the characters in question . . . the end result is inert” (Stewart 95-96). By parodying violence, I was able to critique harmful masculinity norms and preserve the comic tone of Behn’s play.<sup>476</sup>

### **The Ending**

Ann Marie Stewart notes that nine (nearly half) of Behn’s plays contain scenes of sexual coercion; eight of these nine plays include scenes of rape or near rape; seven of these eight are classified as comedies (98). *The Amorous Prince* and *The Rover* have the happiest endings of Behn’s plays that depict attempted rape. Yet *The Rover* is also Behn’s most violent comedy. As Stewart notes, “there are more sexual assaults in *The Rover* than in any other of Behn’s dramas, comedy or tragedy. Moreover, the assaults are the fiercest quality in all of Behn’s drama” (101). Stewart puts forth several ways of interpreting the ending of the play so that it

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<sup>476</sup> As McAllister notes, “We cannot know whether the original audience for Behn’s *The Rover* felt any qualms when watching the first Willmore and then Blunt and Frederick threaten Florinda with rape, but because twenty-first century students often find those scenes deeply troubling, a group of students might want to consider how a modern production could preserve a comic tone in those scenes” (313). See Marie E. McAllister’s chapter in *Teaching British Women Playwrights*. Pearson argues that *The Rover* “stages competing models of masculinity and of patriarchy, and even considers the possibility that there might be a space outside patriarchy that men could inhabit . . . In Naples, too, as in England, . . . patriarchy is shown to be theoretically powerful but comically impotent in practice. Behn is ‘reconfiguring patriarchy,’ imagining a ‘post-patriarchal’ world where women can achieve their own agency” (Pearson 56).

might be seen as troubling patriarchal order in spite of the fact that it ends with “a generic multiple marriage ending to neutralize the trauma of . . . attempted rape” (97). She suggests that the attempted but foiled rape that precedes the marriages together with Angellica’s interruption of the marriage ceremony undercut the restoration of patriarchal order. Furthermore, Stewart notes that Hellena’s marriage to Willmore is one of choice, symbolic of her successfully overthrowing the authority of her brother and father. Behn’s stage directions indicate that Hellena reenters the final scene “as before in boy’s clothes.” Stewart writes, “Perhaps the cross-dressed Hellena symbolizes who will ‘wear the pants’ in their relationship. The audience is at least certain that their love will not be a traditional one, for both have proved they are dissemblers and will continue to be after they marry” (102). Behn’s explicitness that Hellena does not have a costume change is significant. Had Behn *not* specified this in the stage directions, she would be leaving a director to decide whether to change Hellena’s attire into a conventionally feminine, gender appropriate outfit or to leave her in her breeches disguise or to dress her in something else entirely. Behn’s decision to stamp the latter as Hellena’s final sartorial look makes a pointed statement about gender roles and power that visually disrupts the restoration of order.

### **Critical Reception**

Using iconic film and celebrity comedian references, slapstick techniques, such as physical comedy, sight gags, and eye pokes, and satiric techniques, such as hyperbole, understatement, and substitution, I staged a production of *The Rover* that mocked misogynistic behavior and deflated hyper-masculine ideals. The production was an overwhelming success with critics and audiences, many of whom commented on what a challenging undertaking it is to stage an unfamiliar, early modern play. To this end, Christine Dolen concluded:

Staging a lesser-known, large-cast theatrical classic on a modest budget is a risky move for a small company. But with the intelligence and imagination Stodard has brought to *The Rover*, Thinking Cap's risk pays off.<sup>477</sup>

The production garnered two noteworthy accolades. It received a Carbonell Award<sup>478</sup> nomination for Costume Design. Similar to Chicago theatre's Jeff Awards, The Carbonell Awards are the most prestigious award granting organization in South Florida. Established in 1976, the organization awards the best work in the three county area of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach. Although TCT did not win the award for Best Costume Design, it was an honor to be recognized. This was TCT's first Carbonell nomination and indicates just how cleverly and resourcefully we incorporated the punk concept into our costume design, a particularly significant accomplishment given our total show budget of \$10,000; the other two theatres nominated in this category, The Maltz in Jupiter and Actor's Playhouse in Miami, have annual operating budgets of \$6 million and \$4 million respectively. For my direction, I earned the 2013 "Best Director" award in the *New Times*' annual "Best of Broward/Palm Beach" issue. In the end, my punk vision accomplished all that I hoped it would and more. I satisfied my desire to turn Gould's slanderous epithet on its head and to make the play accessible and entertaining for a contemporary audience. I also learned invaluable lessons about the germination of ideas, creative instinct, self-trust, and trusting the rehearsal process. My experience made the gaps and fissures between feminist criticism and feminist theatre practice stand out in relief. I found the focus on rape and violence in contemporary scholarship on *The Rover* to be interesting in theory but heavy-handed and misleading for application in a

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<sup>478</sup> Established in 1976, Carbonell nominations are announced annually in January and winners are named at an awards ceremony on the first Monday in April.

performance context. To this end, I determined that it is not only possible, but also arguably most effective and enjoyable to critique masculinity and patriarchy in *The Rover* by using satiric acting and staging methods.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion: Aphra Behn, Archiving, and Activism

We are all products of our time, not only the culture, in terms of the political times we're in, but the artistic aesthetic of the times.

~Libby Appel, 2015<sup>479</sup>

### Towards a Feminist Contemporary Archive

Behn's contemporary production history reveals an interesting web of connections among the various artists who have revived her work. Some directors have staged *The Rover* more than once. This was the case with Michael Diamond, who followed his 1979 revival with a production at the Folger Theatre Group in Washington, D.C. from December 1981-February 1982.<sup>480</sup> Jack Wetherall, who played Willmore in Diamond's Folger production, reprised the role in 1989 under the direction of Kyle Donnelly at Chicago's Goodman Theatre. Some directors have staged additional plays in Behn's canon prior to or after directing *The Rover*. For example, after mounting *The Rover* in 2001, Rebecca Patterson of Queen's Company then staged *The Feign'd Courtesans* (2002), *The Lucky Chance* (2003), and *Sir Patient Fancy* (2014). As another case in point, in January 1995, Karin Coonrod directed a production of Behn's commedia dell'arte farce *Emperor of the Moon* at the original Ohio Theatre in New York City; fifteen years later Coonrod helmed New York Classical Theatre's production of *The Rover*.

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<sup>479</sup> *Directing Shakespeare*, p34.

<sup>480</sup> In 1984, *The Rover* enjoyed its first English revival at Upstream Theatre in London with a production directed by Peter Stevenson. According to Nancy Copeland, there are no records or reviews that point to or suggest that the Upstream production cut or adapted the play (p58, footnote 13 in "Re-producing *The Rover*," 1990).



Many artists who have revived the plays of Behn remember fondly their first encounter with her work. For Karin Coonrod, it was as an audience member at Jules Wright's 1984 staging of *The Lucky Chance* for the Woman's Playhouse Trust in London. For Stephen Burdman, the artistic director of NY Classical, it was working as a carpenter intern on the 1987 Williamstown Theatre Festival production directed by John Rubinstein. For Erin Merritt, it was performing the role of Hellena in a Palo Alto Players community theatre production directed by Shaun Loftus in 1993. For playwright Liz Duffy Adams, it was through the invitation of Rebecca Patterson to write an original verse prologue for Queen's Company's 2001 revival of *The Rover*. That experience prompted Duffy to read more of Behn's work, which eventually led her to write two plays about Behn, the 10-minute play *Aphra Does Antwerp* and the full-length *Or*. Behn scholarship can benefit greatly from the insights of the contemporary theatre artists who are reviving Behn's plays throughout and beyond the U.S.

From the Goodman's main stage proscenium and the Guthrie's main stage thrust to black box and warehouse venues, public parks, and site-specific commercial buildings, *The Rover* is enjoying a diverse contemporary stage revival that demonstrates its adaptability to an array of times and places. Queen's Company's production at The Currican Theatre's black box space made for an all-around intimate experience as the large cast maneuvered within the theatre's small confines in close proximity to patrons. By contrast, in revivals by Woman's Will and NY Classical, the sizable casts were visibly diminished by the vastness of the outdoor and public staging contexts. Moreover, *The Rover*'s revival in "real places" in Woman's Will's and New York Classical's productions lent added meaning to the dramatization of the play's settings and themes (Carlson 9). The actual green space that formed the backdrop of Woman's Will's revival added verisimilitude to the play's many outdoor scenes, particularly the carnival progression, the

garden scene, and the duel at the Molo. The mercantile environment of New York Classical's production saliently underpinned the play's preoccupation with women's sexual commodification posing added implications to Angellica Bianca's questioning of Willmore's mercenary motives and Hellena's likening the dowry system to prostitution.

Interpreted through a feminist lens, these three contemporary, classical productions represent a range of approaches to directing the performance of gender and depicting the sexual politics of the play. The productions reinforce the reality that what one might interpret as feminist from an audience perspective might not have consciously been staged with feminist ideology in mind. At the same time, each production was undeniably pro-woman as a result of acting, editing, direction, and design. While both Queen's Company's and Woman's Will's revivals employed all-female casts and performed male roles 'straight,' which is to say sincerely not parodically, they are the product of two different directorial perspectives on feminism. Patterson considers herself a humanist, not a feminist; whereas Merritt embraces identification as a feminist and a feminist director. Patterson's—and by extension Queen's Company's—interest in exploring the universality of the stories contained in classical texts, illustrating the shared humanity of a diverse society, and using gender-blind casting as a vehicle to explore those ends, has a decidedly post-feminist bent. On the other hand, Merritt's interest in the *The Rover's* depiction of sexually active and empowered women and her wish for Woman's Will's production to inspire viewers to 'go home and fuck' strikes a familiar chord with sex-positive feminism, an ideological extension of the "sex wars" of the early 1980s that espoused the idea that women could fuck their way to freedom.

### **Aphra Behn and Revival Activism**

"Feminist artists using smart humor to address sexism with theatre and performance"

~Guerrilla Girls

Americans, when they think about equality, think about equality of opportunity; an absence of formal barriers, no prohibitions in admission criteria, job training programs, and scholarships, to name but a few examples. The American public's notion of equality has never extended to equality of results.

~ Nancy Levit, 1998<sup>481</sup>

We need to *agitate continually about women's place* in the field.

~Jill Dolan, 2009

The idea of appropriating a dead artist, and Aphra Behn in particular, as a contemporary icon is not a new idea. Since the 1990s, the Guerilla Girls have drawn inspiration from famous literary women to engage in theatre activism. Members of this organization take the name of a deceased woman artist, preserving their own anonymity and focusing instead on fighting discrimination and racism in a way that honors the work of their famous namesake.<sup>482</sup> Member Donna Kaz, who endured a decade of domestic violence, adopted the name Aphra Behn. This was an apt choice given Behn's preoccupation with violence against women. As an early modern proto-feminist, the first professional female playwright, and a forerunner to the modern playwright-director, Behn set the mark high for future generations of women artists. Yet, more than three centuries later, while women writers and directors exist in larger numbers and gender equality as an abstract idea prevails in America, women in theatre have not yet consistently achieved the professional results that they have long sought. Women remain historically underrepresented in major awards ceremonies and underemployed on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regionally. In a September 2017 *American Theatre* article that examines U.S. play production by gender and period, Rob Weinert-Kendt indicates that the percentage of new plays

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<sup>481</sup> Levit, Nancy. *Men, Women, and the Law*. New York: NYUP, 1998, p137.

<sup>482</sup> <http://guerrillagirlsontour.com/meet-the-girls/>

by women (written post-2007) is slowly increasing based upon the 2017-2018 season programming of Theatre Communication Group's 380 member theatres; out of 1,917 slated productions, female authors of new plays have a 26% representation rate. However, revival (1967-2006) and classical (prior to 1967) plays by women remain less common: women playwrights represent 15% of revival productions and 9% of classical productions.<sup>483</sup> Weinert-Kendt accompanies his article with a photograph of Maureen Porter portraying Aphra Behn in a 2015 Third Rail Rep production of Liz Duffy Adams' *OR*;; in his gloss of the image, he emphasizes that neither Behn nor Adams appear on the 2017-2018 rosters of TCG member theatres.

Behn and feminist scholars have much to gain by aligning themselves with practitioners to implement an activist approach. Feminist critic and scholar Jill Dolan poignantly urges women in theatre to "agitate," to appreciate the importance of "continually" calling attention to women's standing in the theatre profession. Elsewhere Dolan aptly argues that we have made a spectacle, but we have not made enough of a difference: "We have done too little to popularize feminist methods."<sup>484</sup> We must identify, discuss, write, and stage plays about the obstacles to gender and sexual equality in order to dismantle sedimented prejudices, effect change, and empower women through theatre and within the profession. As Behn's biographer Janet Todd notes, Behn perceived gender as fluid and constructed and did not want to be reduced to an essentialist gender modifier: "in the last resort her desire was not to appear simply as a woman-writer at all—indeed a woman-anything. Her reiterated point was that she wrote as any one did,

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<sup>483</sup> Weinert-Kendt, Rob. "The Gender & Period Count: The More Things Change..." *American Theatre*. New York: TCG. 26 September 2017.

<sup>484</sup> Dolan, Jill. "Making a Spectacle, Making a Difference." *Theatre Journal*. 62:4 (Dec 2010).

and was as good as (almost) any man. Sex and gender were . . . the subject of art not its determinants” (435). Many women directors today would also prefer to be recognized for their work, not their gender. However, as Jonas and Bennett have made evident, as long as inequity prevails in the profession, calling attention to the accomplishments of women and pointing to the employment obstacles they continue to face as an underrepresented group remains a vital, political method for tracking and assessing progress and agitating for change.

Since its initial revival by smaller or university-affiliated organizations in London, Chicago, and New York in the late 1970s, *The Rover* has enjoyed a vibrant international stage history at major, mid-size, and modest venues, with directors and casts ranging from professional to semi-professional to amateur. While *The Rover* enjoyed a woman-directed revival by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2016, it awaits another American revival of the magnitude that it enjoyed in 1987 at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, in 1989 at the Goodman, and in 1994 at the Guthrie. At the same time, the ongoing revival of her plays by smaller companies throughout the U.S. suggests a widespread, grass roots interest in her work that speaks to a level of local feminist engagement with works by women role models. In this way, staging Behn’s canon represents a form of feminist theatre activism and a way of staging (contemporary) feminist theatre history that allows artists and audiences to move “beyond the words on a page . . . to the physical, gestural, collective, emotional, and collaborative discourses of feminist history” (Canning).<sup>485</sup> The occasion of reviving a play by Behn calls attention to feminist issues not only by virtue of the themes that Behn explores in her dramatic work, but also because her professional status reminds us of the history of women in professional theatre. Reviving a play

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<sup>485</sup> ““I am a feminist scholar’: The Performative of Feminist History.” *Theatre Research International*. 26(2001): 223-32.

by the first professional female playwright invites one to take stock of the profession. Just as Behn paved the way for ‘the school of Aphra,’ the first generation of women who sustained careers writing for the stage,<sup>486</sup> so she continues to play a vital role as a feminist icon and role model in contemporary theatre and will continue to do so as long as the outer world of her plays’ revival—the professional theatre industry and American society at large—remains rife with the latent misogyny that permeates the inner world of *The Rover*. Sexism remains a systemic threat to the idea, to say nothing of the reality, of gender equality in the theatre profession, and Behn’s contemporary production history in America demonstrates that when women directors stage her plays the occasion poses a synergistic opportunity to explore not only the history of women in theatre but also the current state of women in the profession. Behn may have broken the glass curtain in her own day, but the cyclical nature of history has meant that professional female playwrights, and more recently, professional female directors, have continued to face institutional disadvantages. In the wake of the numerous sex scandals in the 2010’s, including Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, Brett Ratner, and Louis C.K.,<sup>487</sup> masculine privilege, sexual violence, and female victimization remain major issues in American society, and Behn’s most popular comedy, therefore, stands as a work of perennial importance for juxtaposing early modern and contemporary gender and sexual politics.

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<sup>486</sup> The ‘School of Aphra’ included Susannah Centlivre (1667-1723), Eliza Heywood (1693-1756), Delarivier Manley (1663-1724), Mary Pix (1666-1709). For discussion of Behn and Centlivre, see Copeland’s *Behn and Centlivre*. Jane Spencer notes, “During the 1690s, despite attacks on her reputation, [Behn] was explicitly taken as a model to be followed by women writing for the theatre” (84). See Spencer, Jane. *Aphra Behn’s Afterlife*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

<sup>487</sup> Criss, Doug. “The (Incomplete) List of Men Accused of Sexual Harassment After Harvey Weinstein.” *CNN*. 1 November 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/25/us/list-of-accused-after-weinstein-scandal-trnd/index.html>

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## Appendix I

### The Impact of *The Rover*'s Twentieth Century Print Revival on Production History

An examination of Behn's contemporary production history must also include mention of Behn's print revival. In addition to appreciating the impact of scholarship on stage productions, it is also important to acknowledge the effect of increased publication on revivals. In 1978 when *The Rover* was effectively revived for the first time since the eighteenth-century, the play was not readily available in print the way that it is today. After Summers' complete works edition (1915), *The Rover* appeared by itself in print once in the 1950s, once in the 1960's, once in the 1970's, and three times in the 1980's.<sup>488</sup> Of the three times *The Rover* appeared in print in the 1980's, one was an Italian translation,<sup>489</sup> another was Barton's adaptation for Royal Shakespeare Company,<sup>490</sup> and a third was in a collection edited by Dale Spender and Janet Todd.<sup>491</sup> This means that directors Michael Diamond, Neal Weaver, Lesley Hoban Blake, Carol Elliott MacVey, and John Barton would likely have based their performance scripts on the text in the 1967 *Regents Restoration Drama Series* or the 1974 collection *Restoration Comedy*. The 1967 edition, published by a university press, would have stood as the authoritative text throughout the 1980s. It seems likely that this was also the edition that Kyle Donnelly would have consulted in

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<sup>488</sup> Link, Frederick M., ed. *Regents Restoration Drama Series*, Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1967.; Jeffares, A. Norman, ed. *Restoration Comedy*. London: The Folio Press, 1974, vol. 2.

<sup>489</sup> Papettie, Viola, trans. and ed. *Il Giramondo [The Rover]: Commedia in cinque Atti*. Milan: La Tartaruga, 1981.

<sup>490</sup> Barton, J. adapt. *An Adaptation of The Rover (The Banished Cavaliers)*. London: Methuen, 1986.

<sup>491</sup> Spender, Dale and Janet Todd, eds. *British Women Writers: An Anthology from the Fourteenth Century to the Present*. New York: Peter Bedrick, 1989.

1989, even though her production relied heavily on John Barton's 1986 adaptation. The watershed publication moment for Behn's most popular play came in the 1990's. During this decade, *The Rover* appeared in print 22 times.<sup>492</sup> This meant that Behn's most popular play was more widely available than ever before and no longer a rarity hidden away in a university library or in the limited reach of a dramaturg or literary manager at a major theatre organization. As a result of the play's greater availability in the 1990s, it enjoyed an increase in revivals by smaller companies in different types of venues around the U.S. and U.K. since 2000. During this decade, Janet Todd also published an eight-volume edition of the complete works of Behn.<sup>493</sup> The first complete edition since Summers' 1915 collection, Todd's 'complete works' has stood as the definitive volume.<sup>494</sup> However, a five-volume edition of Behn's complete works is currently under contract with Cambridge University Press under the general editorship of Elaine Hobby.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> For a detailed bibliographic list of entries during the 1990's, see O'Donnell, pp38-39.

<sup>493</sup> Todd, Janet, ed. *The Works of Aphra Behn*. 7 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto; Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1992-1996. *The Rover* appears in volume 5.

<sup>494</sup> Recently, however, Sarah Ross and Paul Salzman have called into question the authority of Todd's collection because it was published by Pickering and Chatto, and not a university press typically connected to the publication of authoritative editions (9). To this end, they assert: "While an invaluable resource, this edition cannot be described as an authoritative, scholarly edition in the way that such a category is usually applied to volumes published by university presses" (9).

<sup>495</sup> Ross, Sarah C. E. and Paul Salzman. *Editing Early Modern Women*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016.

## **Appendix II**

### **DIRECTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Did you program Behn's work, or were you invited to direct her work?
2. Which version of The Rover did you work with? How did you arrive at the decision to use this version of the text?
3. In a few sentences, how would you describe your overall approach to staging The Rover?
  - a. Did you consciously politicize the piece in light of any topical contemporary events?
  - b. Was your production mostly diverting, with emphasis on the farcical aspects of the work? Or was more emphasis given the play's darker aspects? Or something else?
4. At the time you staged Behn's work, did you perceive her as a (proto)feminist writer?
5. (How) did feminism figure in your staging of Behn's work?
  - a. Do you consider yourself a feminist director?
  - b. How did your own gender, as a female director, bear on your planning and the rehearsal process, especially given the play's complex depiction of 17<sup>th</sup> c. gender and sexual politics?
6. How did you approach the multiple impending rape scenes in The Rover?
7. In what type of theatre space did you stage The Rover, and how did constraints of the space impact your staging?
8. Did you relocate the work to another place and/or time? If so, where and when?
  - a. Did your production use classically trained actors?
  - b. Were period or modern costumes used?
  - c. Were American or British (or other) accents used?
  - d. Was cross-gender casting used?
  - e. How did race figure in casting? (How) did race figure in conceptually/ideologically in your production?
9. What were the greatest challenges of staging Behn in the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> c.?
10. What were the greatest rewards of staging Behn in the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> c.?
11. What, if anything, about the experience of staging Behn surprised you?
12. Looking back on the project, what stands out as the most lasting impression or impact of your staging?
13. (Why) should Behn's work continue to be staged? What does her work tell us about the past? The present?

### **About the Author**

Nicole Stodard is a theatre scholar, designer, and award-winning director. A member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), she holds a BA in English from Lafayette College, an M.Phil. in Theatre from Trinity College, Dublin, and a PhD in English from the University of South Florida. In 2010, she founded Thinking Cap Theatre (TCT), a professional, 501c3 theatre company located in Fort Lauderdale. In addition to serving as producing artistic director of Thinking Cap, Nicole is the executive director of The Vanguard Sanctuary for the Arts, where TCT holds residence. Nicole's areas of research include early modern and Restoration drama, experimental theatre, and feminist and LGBTQ issues in contemporary theatre.







