

Queering Aphra Behn

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For Sara with my love.

For my late parents who encouraged me to read and taught me to be true to myself.

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To my 'PhD Buddy' Cara Gathern and my friend Sally Richardson.

Abstract

Thesis title: Queering Aphra Behn

This thesis queers the work of Aphra Behn through a queer stylistic re-reading and re-evaluation of a selection of Behn's work. Building on the work of contemporary queer theorists, the thesis takes a diachronic historicist approach using queer stylistics, queer temporality, queer hauntology and incorporates an adaptation of Varnado's work on tracing queer desire in Early Modern texts.¹

In this thesis, I will propose that the Restoration period was a 'cycle of salience'² not just for lesbian legibility but more broadly queer and including what we would now call, transgender legibility. In Behn's prose narrative *The Lovers Watch* (1686) Behn both queers time and reveals how the character of Iris re-fashions her lover to challenge notions of Libertine masculinity. A close reading of Behn's poem *The Golden Age* (1679) exposes an alternative version of paradise where Behn proposes a non-binary space in opposition to hegemony and patriarchy. In *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687), Behn problematizes dominant ideologies in respect of gender and sexuality to expose queer relationships and Silvia's embodiment of transgenderism. Behn's play *The Rover* (1677) has been acknowledged as a critique of libertinism, patriarchy and male violence. However, this thesis shows how the queer temporality of Carnival and the medium of farce, reveals an underlying homoeroticism and the suspension and destabilization of hegemony, patriarchy and heterosexuality. Through a close reading of *The Emperor of The Moon* (1687) Behn's use of the carnivalesque, farce and the grotesque, together with her queer imaginings, offer queer desires, queer erotic energy and challenges to heteronormativity. In the final chapter I analyse Behn's cross-dressed characters in a selection of five plays showing how Behn problematizes concepts of gender and reveals how Behn's representation of cross-dressed characters raises the ghost of transgenderism.

¹ Christine Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy: Reading for Queer Desire in Early Modern Literature*, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota press, 2020).

² Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 84-85.

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³ Adapted quote from Behn’s 1671 play ‘The Amorous Prince’ in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 5, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), III.3.22. All further citations refer to this edition.

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for woman more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.⁴

⁴ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*, (London & New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), p.35.

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Introduction

This thesis is my personal journey tracing queer temporalities and shapes of queer¹ desire in the work of Aphra Behn. Traub proposes a theory for lesbian history that she calls ‘cycles of salience’.² Traub suggests that we should accept multiple discourses of sexuality and engage with similarities and differences between the past and the present.³ Traub’s historiographical hypothesis describes a recurrent, uncanny, intermittent familiarity throughout history that ‘can look a lot like lesbianism’ (85), but that she prefers to describe as ‘symptomatic preoccupations about the meaning of women’s bodies and behaviours’ (85). Traub seeks to investigate the cultural conditions that allow these identities to emerge at particular moments in history suggesting that they ‘may be linked temporally and conceptually to moments of social crisis which have their source in anxieties peripheral to eroticism’ (359), including concerns about morality, social discipline and violent political upheavals (359). This thesis considers the historical, aesthetic, political and philosophical time of the Restoration Period as a discrete historical period congruent with Traub’s hypothesis. However, I take Traub’s theory further to show that the time Behn was writing was a ‘cycle of salience’ not just for lesbian legibility but more broadly queer and including what we would now call transgender legibility.

Aphra Behn is thought to have been born in 1640 and would have grown up during the political upheavals of the Civil Wars. Little is known of her early life although it is thought that she went to South America, where she found the material for her book *Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave* (1688) and was sent by Charles II’s government to Antwerp as a spy.⁴ When she returned to England she was possibly imprisoned for debt and on her release set out to make a living as a

¹ I use the word ‘queer’ in the most inclusive and widest possible sense including sexual and/or gender identity that does not conform to expectations of binary gender, gender that may be fluid or problematic in relation to gendered expectations or dominant ideologies, and unconventional or nonnormative behaviour or desires (with or without an erotic component). I would draw attention to the fact that Varnado is a big inspiration in content and terminology. Christine Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy: Reading for Queer Desire in Early Modern Literature*, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota press, 2020), p. 3.

² Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, (2016), p. 84-85. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³ Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, (2016).

⁴ Janet Todd, *Aphra Behn: A Secret Life*, (London: Fentum Press, 2017).

professional writer.⁵ Behn is considered one of the most successful writers of the Restoration Period, after Dryden⁶ and her plays include *The Forc'd Marriage* (1671), *The Dutch Lover* (1673), *The Rover* (1677) and *The Luckey Chance* (1687); together with poems, novels (including translations from French) and arguably the first epistolary novel written in English,⁷ *Love-Letters from a Nobleman to his Sister* (1684-1687). In 1976 Cixous, writing about women and the history of writing, wrote:

Such a woman the poet could desire only by breaking the codes that negate her. Her appearance would necessarily bring on, if not revolution—for the bastion was supposed to be immutable—at least harrowing explosions.⁸

Cixous's description of the poet could have been written to describe Behn who is said to be the 'first English woman to earn her living solely by her pen'⁹ and whose work I will show is both proleptic and transgressive. Her work fell out of fashion after her death in 1689 until her work was re-discovered by Second Wave Feminists in the 1960/70s. Behn is now part of the English canon and often taught in universities. Although she would not have attended university, she was obviously well-read, as we can see through the allusions to Greek and Roman authors and philosophers in her work. Although a Tory and a staunch supporter of the monarchy, Behn's work suggests that her Libertine philosophy, proto-feminism and beliefs about gender and sexuality were extremely radical for her time.

Behn's work is often openly queer, for example naturalizing homoeroticism¹⁰ in *The Rover* (1677), homoerotic relationships¹¹ and more in *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687) and arguably challenging notions of binary gender in her poem to 'To the Fair Clarinda Who Made Love to me, Imagin'd More Than Woman' (1688). I use the word 'queer' in the most inclusive and widest possible sense including sexual and/or gender identity that does not conform to

⁵ For biographies of Aphra Behn see Marueen Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess: The Life of Aphra Behn*, (London: Phoenix Press, 2000) and Janet Todd, *A Secret Life*, (2017).

⁶ John Dryden (1631-1700).

⁷ The first epistolary novel is thought to be *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1669) attributed to Gabriel-Joseph de la Vergne, comte de Guilleragues (this was a translation while Behn's novel was an original).

⁸ Cixous, Hélène, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen and Paul Cohen, *Signs*, 1 (1976), pp. 875 – 893, (p. 879).

⁹ Todd, *A Secret Life*, (2017), p. xi.

¹⁰ For example, Hellena's acceptance of the abbess's attraction to her in Act III of *The Rover*, see Chapter 4 (p. 220).

¹¹ For example, the queer relationship between Cesario and Philander, see Chapter 6 (p. 170).

expectations of binary gender, gender that may be fluid or problematic in relation to gendered expectations or dominant ideologies and unconventional or nonnormative behaviour or desires (with or without an erotic component).

Behn's poem 'To the Fair Clarinda' has been frequently explored by critics,¹² and indeed formed part of my own MA thesis.¹³ This is a poem (printed in Appendix One, p. 196), where Behn experiments openly with sexuality. Although critics have suggested that 'To the Fair Clarinda' is about a same sex/non-heteronormative relationship, they have not labelled it as specifically queer. My analysis pushes to label this poem as queer and I use this poem as an example of how I will apply queer stylistics and Varnado's 'reading for queer desire in Early Modern Literature'¹⁴ to reveal queerness and the portrayal of the transgender body in Behn's work. Queer stylistics offers a subversive method of rereading, deconstructing and reinterpreting texts which removes the assumptions of compulsory heterosexuality.¹⁵ Varnado's theory posits a queer reading practice, a way of reading for erotic or affective energy that extends forward from the time a book is written to the time it is read. (See pages for a theoretical discussion on these theories).

'To the Fair Clarinda' is an erotically charged poem has no gendered pronouns and Clarinda is only described as 'you' which leaves an ambiguous fluidity to her gender and in Chapter Two (p. 65), I go on to explore Behn's vision of an ungendered paradise in her poem *The Golden Age* (1679). While the speaker in 'To the Fair Clarinda' describes her lover as a 'Fair lovely Maid' (I.1), she goes on to suggest that the description might be 'Too weak, too Feminine for Nobler thee (I.2) and that 'Lovely Charming Youth' (I.4) might be a better description - the word "youth", of course, describes someone who is not quite a man. The speaker in the poem, struggles with her desire for a woman and by calling her 'youth' she suggests this 'may serve to lessen my soft constraint' (I.6). In other words, to describe her as a

¹² Jennifer Frangos, 'Aphra Behn's Cunning Stunts: "To the fair Clarinda"', *The Eighteenth Century*, 45 (2004), pp. 21 – 40.

¹³ Jane White, 'Words indeed can no more show' Aphra Behn and the Poetics of Lesbian Salience in the Seventeenth Century, (2015). <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/brightonline/issue-1/words-indeed-can-no-more-show-5-aphra-behn-and-the-poetics-of-lesbian-salience-in-the-seventeenth-century/> [accessed 14 December 2022].

¹⁴ Christine Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy: Reading for Queer Desire in Early Modern Literature*, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota press, 2020).

¹⁵ Geoffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language and Affect in Shakespeare's Time*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Don Rodrigues, *Shakespeare's Queer Analytics: Distant Reading and Collaborative Intimacy in 'Love's Martyr' – Arden Shakespeare Studies in Language and Digital Methodologies*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2022).

youth makes it easier for her to accept her as a lover. The fact that the lovers ‘struggle but in vain (I.8) indicates that, despite wrestling with their conscience, sex does occur. The line, ‘For sure no Crime with thee we can commit, (I.14) leaves little doubt that this is a poem about sex between two women – or is it? Could it be describing sex between what we would now call a trans¹⁶ man and a woman?¹⁷ If the woman had been caught having sex it would not have been considered a crime (although perhaps not socially acceptable). The line ‘With thy deluding Form thou giv’st us pain’ (I.10) suggests both that their form does not fit a binary notion of gender/sex and that the speaker is struggling to negotiate both writing about and engaging in, this ‘beauteous Wonder of a different kind’ (I.18). The use of the phrase ‘different kind’ again suggests that this is a love between two women. The line, ‘For who, that gathers fairest Flowers believes/A Snake lies hid beneath the Fragrant Leaves’ leads Frangos to suggest that ‘the speaker and Clarinda can lay claim to this powerful icon of sexuality and put it to their own uses’.¹⁸ In other words, Clarinda has the power to pleasure the speaker in the way that (some) women believe only a phallus can. On the surface Behn’s description of Clarinda as ‘Soft *Cloris* with the dear *Alexis* join’d’¹⁹ might suggest she is describing Clarinda as part woman and part man (or even a trans man). I suggest that this reference is ironic as Behn’s poem ‘Selinda and Cloris’ (probably published in 1685) is about two women who come together after the betrayal of a faithless lover (Alexis) and vow that no man will come between them. In this experiment into queer inversion Selinda and Cloris express the women’s physical and intellectual attraction in a pastoral form where the speakers trade lines in a way that is more traditionally performed as a wedding song, ‘*Cloris*: Then we will sing, in every Grove/The greatness of your Mind—/ *Selinda*: —And I your Love’.²⁰ At the end of the poem women come together to sing:

¹⁶ A person whose gender is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

¹⁷ This is an idea that I explore in Chapter Six (p. 194), where I suggest that the erotic scene between Olivia and Mirtilla in Behn’s play *The Younger Brother* (1692?) could be interpreted as a scene between a trans man and a woman.

¹⁸ Jennifer Frangos, ‘Apra Behn’s Cunning Stunts: “To the fair Clarinda”, *The Eighteenth Century*, 45:1 (2004), p. 30.

¹⁹ Aphra Behn, ‘To the fair Clarinda, who made Love to me, imagin’d more than Woman’, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 1, ed. Todd, Janet, (Ohio: Ohio State University, 1992) 1.19.

²⁰ Aphra Behn, ‘Selinda and Cloris Made in an Entertainment at Court’ in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 1, ed. Todd, Janet, (Ohio: Ohio State University, 1992), p. 177, l. 75-77.

And All the Day,
With Pride and Joy,
We'll let the Neighb'ring Shepherds see,
That none like us,
Did e'er express,
The heights of Love and Amity;
And all the day, &c. (I.77-84)

The reference to Hermes and Aphrodite²¹ in 'To the Fair Clarinda' suggests the poem is influenced by *The Faerie Queene* (1590) where Spencer uses the image of the hermaphrodite to describe the reunion of Amoret and Scudamour. However, I believe that given the instability about notions of sexuality and gender in the seventeenth century,²² Behn uses the trope of the hermaphrodite as code to negotiate her portrayal of female sexual desire and the instability of the category of 'woman',²³ rather than suggesting that Clarinda is a hermaphrodite. As I have suggested, we could push even further than this critique, by reading this poem as either love between a woman and a transwoman or a transman.

Behn was writing in the period after the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660. The period prior to the Restoration was a turbulent time in English history including The English Civil War (1642-1651), the execution of Charles I (1649), the exile of Charles II and a short period when England was ruled as a republic (1649-1660) until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The social, cultural and political changes of the period included the Anglo-Dutch wars, Charles II's uneasy relationship with Parliament (who considered the King influenced by Catholic forces), ongoing political fighting about liberty and property, significant increases in scientific knowledge, increased travel/mobility, the rise of print culture and distribution of news, increased wealth and the beginnings of Capitalism (with corresponding poverty and marginalization), colonialization and imperialism.²⁴

²¹ In Greek mythology Hermaphrodite was born to Hermes and Aphrodite.

²² Roberta Martin, C., 'Beauteous Wonder of a Different Kind: Aphra Behn's Destabilization of Sexual Categories', *College English* 61 (1998), pp. 192 – 216, (p. 193).

²³ Frangos, p. 22.

²⁴ See Tim Harris *Restoration: Charles II and his Kingdom*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 4th edition, 2012); Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991); David Armitage, 'The Ideological Origins of The British Empire', (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David McNally, 'Blood Money: War, Slavery, Finance, and Empire', (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2000); Juliette Singh, 'Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements', (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).

These events contributed to the Restoration period being a time of anxiety and shifting perspectives of gender and sexuality where Barker suggests images of the body and its passions were reframed and re-established²⁵ as we have seen in my analysis of Behn's poem 'To the Fair Clarinda'(page). In an entry from Pepys' diary for 9th February 1668,²⁶ he chronicles a 'lewd book' he read and subsequently burned, 'and I to my chamber, where I did read through *L'escholle des Filles*; and after I had done it, I burned it, that is might not be among my books to my shame'.²⁷ Barker doesn't believe this was 'the tortured predicament of a single, aberrant individual' (10) rather, it resulted from the historical events preceding the Restoration (for example the effects of the Civil Wars). In this thesis, I acknowledge Barker's assertion that Pepys' guilty secret and internalized sexuality is a metaphor for the anxieties of the times regarding the body and sexuality (10). Going back further, to the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the Elizabethan era was disassembled, Barker suggests, within a few years 'a new set of relations between state and citizen, body and soul, language and meaning was fashioned' (10) alongside a paradigm shift in attitudes towards sex and sexuality.²⁸ All these anxieties led to questions about the nature of the body, identity and natural versus performative identities which would become a particular focus of Restoration drama.²⁹ These shifts in attitude were reflected on the stage where the Restoration rake hero's obsession with sex and pleasure both constructed and reflected a new understanding and expression of sexuality. Weber suggests that 'after the Restoration, sex remains a dangerous and unpredictable passion, harbouring a potential for destruction, but a power no longer seen invariably in terms of the divine or the demonic'.³⁰ Weber goes on to explain that the Restoration did not mark the beginning of a 'sexual liberation', rather a different way of thinking about sex and our relationship with others and society in general.³¹

²⁵Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, (London and New York: Methuen, 1984) (1984), p. 10. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²⁶ The Diary of Samuel Pepys, entry for 9 February 1668 in Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A Selection*, ed. Robert Latham, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 873.

²⁷ Pepys, p. 873.

²⁸ Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 144 – 153.

²⁹ Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*, (Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 2003), p. 3.

³⁰ Harold M. Weber, *The Restoration Rake-Hero: Transformation in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 19.

³¹ Weber, (1986), p. 19.

When Charles II rode triumphantly into London on 26th May 1660, after more than eleven years of republican government, Dryden tells us there were cheers from Londoners, ‘spurred with eager thoughts of past delight’.³² Legally Charles II’s rule was backdated to the death of Charles I in January 1649,³³ effectively manipulating time, as Atwood suggests, ‘both twelve years late but retroactively right on time’.³⁴ Charles II himself manipulated time by appearing late for his own coronation, as Pepys recalls, ‘with a great deal of patience I sat from past 4 till 11 before the King came in’.³⁵ Following significant political or social upheavals queer theorists have suggested that people experience time differently and from these observations produced a theory of queer temporality. Hauntology theorises the idea that the present is haunted by the past and that the ghost of alternative futures can influence history (See pages for a theoretical discussion of queer temporality and queer hauntology). Combining these theories, I show how the Restoration period can be considered as a period of queer salience.

Lateness was to become fashionable in the Restoration period amongst the literati and, as Atwood suggests, ‘queer attitudes towards time [developed] alongside the regimentation of normatively productive clock-based time’ (105). Atwood also suggests that ‘the way London playgoers interacted with time in the Restoration playhouses produced a space in which queer temporality could be expressed and experienced’ (89). For example, there was a queer dichotomy of temporality in the theatre where precise comic timing was essential to the plot of Restoration comedy while conversely audiences showed scant regard for punctuality. Atwood further suggests that the ‘Restoration and early eighteenth-century playhouses were the cultural epicentres of unpunctuality’ (89). Atwood also argues that rather than queering gender, the Restoration fop queers time (85). On stage Atwood records how the character of ‘the rake uses clock time as his *modus operandi*: his romantic ventures depend on its precision’ while ‘the fop’s watch remains a fashionable accessory, not a tool for telling time’ (90). The fop, with his habitual lateness, works

³² John Dryden, ‘Astraea Redux’ in *Dryden a Selection*, ed. John Conaghan, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1978), l. 280.

³³ Harris, *Restoration*, (2006), p. 1-4.

³⁴ Emma Katherine Atwood, ‘Fashionably Late: Queer Temporality and the Restoration Fop’, *Comparative Drama*, (2013), 85 – 111, (p 104). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³⁵ The Diary of Samuel Pepys, entry for 23rd April 1661 in *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, (2003), p. 130.

in a different, queer, temporality which disengages him from and subverts, the normal concept of time that regulates social interaction (87) because, as Freeman suggests, ‘In theory, queer time always communes with alternative social behaviour and contracts’ (86). Harris argues that ‘[p]olitically, the Restoration was a self-conscious attempt to put the clock back’.³⁶ Using Atwood, we can perhaps argue more broadly that these theatrical practices open a window into seeing the social, political and cultural discourses of the period as acknowledging a strange temporality from the very beginning of the Restoration.

It was not just on the Restoration stage where notions of time were physically and intellectually condensed and expanded. Dryden’s poem ‘Astræa Redux’ (1660) was one of many poems celebrating the return of Charles II. ‘Astræa Redux’ is a poem of propaganda and celebration for the return of the King. The poem was also an act of personal forgetting, as only a year before Dryden had written an elegy for Cromwell.³⁷ In ‘Astræa Redux’ Dryden takes Puritan religious imagery and uses it to support Royalism by invoking the power of prayer for the return of the King.³⁸ Dryden conflates the temporality of the Interregnum with the temporality of the Restoration:

His blessing’s worth, took care
That we should know it by repeated pray’r;
Which stormed the skies and ravished Charles from thence,
As Heav’n itself is took by violence.³⁹

After the Restoration, it was not only Dryden who changed direction. For instance, Marvell (1621-1678) who had published ‘not only an elegy but as well a powerful and polemically sensitive celebration of protector and protectorate’,⁴⁰ had to ‘appropriate a stance and a manner that would enable him to claim loyalty to the king and simultaneously strike against court’.⁴¹

³⁶ Harris, p. 47.

³⁷ Ingo Berensmeyer, ‘The Art of Oblivion’ in *European Journal of English Studies*, 10 (2006), 81 – 96, (p. 89). < <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825570600590978> >[accessed 8 June 2019]

³⁸ Berensmeyer, p. 90.

³⁹ Dryden, ‘Astræa Redux’, ll. 141 -144.

⁴⁰ Steven Zwicker, ‘Lines of Authority: Politics and Literary Culture in the Restoration’ in Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker, eds. *Politics of Discourse: Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, (California: University of California Press, 1987), p. 237.

⁴¹ Zwicker, p. 237-238.

The restoration of the monarchy might be seen as an attempt to defy linear time, to wipe out the previous eleven years and create a period that was essentially 'out of time' moving backwards to restore the past. It was a time that was both new and progressive but at the same time regressive - a time when, 'Youth that with joys had unacquainted been/Envied grey hairs that once good days had seen'.⁴² It was not simply the restoration of a king, but as Zwicker suggests, it was 'a restoration of arms and arts, a reinvigoration of science and letters, a revival of wit and eloquence, an elevation of style and manners, anda restoration of abundance and pleasure'.⁴³ When Charles II returned to England, he came with a Court of people who, in combination with the political circumstances and their aesthetic and political ideology, questioned social, political and moral values. In particular Charles II's Court embraced Libertinism. The term Libertine evolved from the sixteenth century when the Protestant reformer John Calvin⁴⁴ used the term to describe opponents to his policies.⁴⁵ In Early Modern Europe the word 'Libertine' 'could denote a challenge to orthodox religion, an attempt to construct an authentic self on the basis on the passions, a loosening of family bonds and respect for maternal authority.....'.⁴⁶ Libertinism spread from France to England in reaction to the puritanical regime of the Interregnum, restrictions on behaviour and the constraints of domesticity. When Charles II returned from France, he brought with him the flamboyant fashions and the lifestyle of the French Court. In Restoration England the term Libertinism usually implies the 'kind of sexual behaviour manifested by the Court Wits of Charles II'.⁴⁷ Libertines revived the satire and sexual mockery that permeated the Civil War and the Interregnum⁴⁸ (which included characters like Abiezer Coppe (1619-1672), who was 'leader of the drinking, smoking, swearing Ranters'⁴⁹ and John Crouch the writer of the scurrilous Royalist newsbook *The Man in the Moon*)⁵⁰ for their own ends.

⁴² Dryden, 'Astræa Redux', l. 25-16.

⁴³ Zwicker, p. 91.

⁴⁴ John Calvin (1509-1564).

⁴⁵ Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, 'Libertine and Libertinism, Polemic Uses of the Term in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century English and Scottish Literature', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 12 (2012), pp. 1 – 27, (p.15).

⁴⁶ James, Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. x.

⁴⁷ Turner, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Turner, Ch. 4.

⁴⁹ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 210.

⁵⁰ Turner, p. 64.

We might argue that Libertines lived in a queer temporality and that the Restoration period was itself a period of queer temporality. If we use the framework of ‘queer time’ we can reconfigure how we talk about and understand Libertinism itself.

Libertinism embodies a dream of human freedom, recognised from the outset as both infinitely desirable and as unattainable, a magical power enabling one to overcome a sense of alienation and helplessness.⁵¹

Libertines questioned social, political and moral values, appropriating and reinterpreting the ideas of Hobbes (1588 – 1670) and Lucretius (c.99 BC – 55 BC). Chernaik⁵² and Turner⁵³ claim that Libertine behaviour was an expression of their aristocratic privilege and elite status, using an epicurean ideology to justify violence and oppression in the name of freedom while maintaining their upper-class identity. Rejecting the status quo, Libertines lived with an asynchrony with seemingly little care or thought for the future as Behn’s poem ‘The Libertine’ so aptly demonstrates:

A THOUSAND martyrs I have made,
All sacrificed to my desire:
A thousand beauties have betray'd,
That languish in resistless fire.
The untamed heart to hand I brought,
And fix'd the wild and wand'ring thought.

I never vow'd nor sigh'd in vain
But both, tho' false, were well receiv'd.
The fair are pleased to give us pain,
And what they wish is soon believ'd.
And tho' I talk'd of wounds and smart,
Love's pleasures only touch'd my heart.

Alone the glory and the spoil
I always laughing bore away;
The triumphs without pain or toil,
Without the hell the heaven of joy;
And while I thus at random rove
Despise the fools that whine for love.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.1

⁵² Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom*, (1995).

⁵³ Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, (2002).

⁵⁴ Published in 1688 as ‘A Thousand martyrs I have made’ in *Lycidus: or The Lover in Fashion* <<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2248531844/fulltextPDF/2384396863D94291PQ/1?accountid=9727>> [accessed 31 January 2022].

As Behn suggests, male Libertines sacrificed women for their egotistical desires ('All sacrificed to my desire'), considered that love for them only referred to sex and desire ('Love's pleasures only touch'd my heart') and considered those who love as fools ('Despise the fools that whine for love'). This is just one example where Behn confirms her view that Libertines adopted ideas of hedonism.

The Libertine's desire to live in the moment, their rejection of family life and the desire for sex without guilt or consequences⁵⁵ suggests a similar subculture to that suggested by Halberstam who, in the twentieth century, talks of contemporary subcultures outside of 'wage time' and 'family time', a 'non-time' that is not dictated by 'bourgeois rules of respectability',⁵⁶ biological clocks, the needs of children, the requirements of family, inheritance and family history. The Libertine's subculture suggests a different lifestyle with alternative alliances and economic practices like Edelman's twentieth century rejection of 'reproductive futurism'.⁵⁷ Edelman posits that the assumptions of society's heteronormative 'linear' timeline foregrounds the production of children. If society's assumption that 'normal' time is bound to the importance of procreation then this leaves alternative lifestyles, such as Libertinism, as existing in a non-normative and, what we might call, a queer temporality. Like the queerness that Edelman embraces, the Libertine's desire to 'seize the day' and their refusal to embrace the fact that the future is defined by procreation and the importance of the family, suggests an unconscious desire to problematize the repression felt by the fact that time was beginning to become more ordered in the seventeenth century through the increased accuracy and availability of time pieces and the textualization of time. This is the time during which Behn was writing and, I argue, the anxieties of the period are constantly challenged, debated and reflected in her work.

In Chapter One (p. 42), I suggest that Iris in *The Lover's Watch* refashions Damon into an alternative version of Restoration Libertine masculinity. Dabhoiwala describes the Libertines of Charles II's Court as cultivating 'an ethos in which unbridled lechery was seen as enhancing rather than diminishing masculine

⁵⁵ Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, (1991), Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom*, (1995).

⁵⁶ Halberstam, *In A Queer Time*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

distinction'⁵⁸ and which, despite the association 'between lust and degeneracy' (150) and because this behaviour went unpunished, 'strengthened the association between sexual licence and social eminence' (151). However, it is a common misconception that Libertinism is just about rebellious sexuality, in fact it is primarily a philosophy underpinned and influenced by the work of Hobbes (1588 – 1670) and Lucretius (c.99 BC – 55 BC). Behn herself was intellectually engaged by Lucretian philosophy. Her admiration of Creech's translation of Lucretius can be found in her work and specifically in her poem 'To The Unknown DAPHNIS on his Excellent Translation of Lucretius' (1683):

The Mystic Terms of Rough *Philosophy*,
Thou dost so Plain and Easily Express:
Yet deck'st them in so soft and Gay a Dress:
So Intelligent to each Capacity;
That They at once Instruct and charm the Sense;⁵⁹

Here Behn shows how well Creech explains his philosophy ('so Plain and Easily Express') and how it both educates and charms her ('They at once Instruct and charm the Sense' (49). Libertinism was not just about sex; it was also about a philosophical engagement with time, mortality and alternate ways of dealing with that problematic, which we might describe as queer.

While Libertinism exhorted sexual freedom for men and women, with sex not just considered natural but irresistible, it was primarily a masculine ideology, as Turner argues, 'its doctrine of sexual freedom is always complicated by the politics of class and gender'⁶⁰ which Behn highlights in her other work, including in her play *The Rover* (1677), (see Chapter Four, p. 120)⁶¹. In her short story *The Adventure of The Black Lady* (1684) Behn offers a realistic glimpse of the dilemma facing women, sexual manipulation, and the Church's Poor Law system in the Restoration period. The protagonist's illegitimate pregnancy puts her in a difficult position, but once she has lost her money her situation is almost hopeless. It is only by submitting to a

⁵⁸ Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 150. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁵⁹ Aphra Behn, 'To The Unknown DAPHNIS on his Excellent Translation of Lucretius' in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 1, ed. Todd, Janet, (Ohio: Ohio State University, 1992), pp. 46-49, (p. 26).

⁶⁰ Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, (2002), p. x.

⁶¹ In Chapter Four (p. 120) I show how Behn adopts Carnival in the *The Rover* as a gender queer space and how her main female characters explore a range of queer tropes to counteract the inequalities and dangers of libertinism.

man's desire that she can have a respectable life. This story is an excellent example of the inequality between the sexes and how female gender is disadvantaged. Male Libertines were exclusively upper-class and could engage in outrageous displays of sexual rebellion negotiating 'a dangerous line between erotic exploration and total ostracism from society'.⁶² The female Libertine,⁶³ on the other hand had, to be more circumspect. Women had far more to lose as breaking the rules could lead to pregnancy, disgrace, banishment, penury and even prison.

I have discussed the historical context of Behn's work and I will now outline the theoretical concepts that I will apply to her work. The foundations of my thesis are based on a close textual analysis of Behn's work.⁶⁴ My theoretical approaches are based on diachronic historicism (a way of engaging with texts beyond their historical period, see pages 18 – 19 for a theoretical discussion of diachronic historicism), queer stylistics and an adaptation of Varnado's methodology for tracing queer desire in Early Modern texts.⁶⁵ Behn's work has already been critiqued in terms of proto feminism by several critics⁶⁶ and now is the time for her work to be re-evaluated and queered. My queer approach is particularly relevant because, as I will show, Behn's work is so open to being queered and it is particularly apposite to do this now when there is a resurgence of political and social resistance to queer lives, transgender and nonbinary identities. My diachronic historicist/queer stylistic approach means re-analysing Behn's work from the perspective of a contemporary, queer reader and allowing my knowledge and twenty-first century consciousness to affect her work so we can experience the queer emotions, feelings and shapes of queer desire, particularly in relation to gender and social values, that arise from reading Behn's work today. As Bengry suggests, 'queering the past is an act that

⁶² Linker, Laura, *Dangerous Women, Libertine Epicures, and the Rise of Sensibility, 1670-1730*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 3

⁶³ For a study of the figure of the Female Libertine see Laura Linker, *Dangerous Women, Libertine Epicures, and the Rise of Sensibility, 1670-1730*, (London and New York, Routledge, 2016)

⁶⁴ Belsey describes textual analysis 'as a research method involv[ing] a close encounter with the work itself, and examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help'. Catherine Belsey, 'Textual Analysis as a Research Method' in Gabriele Griffin, *Research Methods for English Studies*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 160.

⁶⁵ Varnado, (2020).

⁶⁶ For example: Ann Marie Stewart, Rape, Patriarchy, and the Libertine Ethos: The Function of Sexual Violence in Aphra Behn's "The Golden Age" and *The Rover*, Part 1, in *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research*, (1997); Anthony Kaufman, "'The Perils of Florinda': Aphra Behn, Rape and the Subversion of Libertinism in *The Rover, Part 1*" *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research* (1996); Anita Pacheco, 'Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn's "The Rover"' in *ELH* (1998), pp. 323-345.

happens in the present'.⁶⁷ Diachronic historicism is a way of continually reinterpreting a text as it is read at different points in time over the years and bringing our own interpretations and experiences to illuminate a text. As a queer diachronic historicist, I bring my own interpretations to Behn's texts and seek to find meanings that may have been hidden or erased through heteronormative readings. As Goldberg and Menon suggest:

To queer the Renaissance would thus mean not only looking for alternative sexualities in the past but also challenging the methodological orthodoxy by which past and present are constrained and straitened.⁶⁸

Diachronic historicism is a way of engaging with texts beyond their historical period (unlike a purely historicist reading where literature is interpreted in relation to the time it was written). Diachronic historicism validates the reading of a text in relation to how we read as contemporary readers and how a text sounds when read 'twenty years, two hundred years, or two thousand years after it was written'.⁶⁹ It allows texts to be continually reinterpreted and acknowledges that texts are not static, rather they travel across space and time. Dimock describes this reading as 'the dynamics of endurance and transformation that accompanies the passage of time'⁷⁰ which allows texts to travel 'across space and especially across time'.⁷¹ For example, the meaning and nuances of words and phrases changes over time, sometimes quite dramatically and sometimes subtly and this way of reading allows us to include these changes and validates our reading of a text beyond its historical period. The concept of diachronic historicism is based on 'resonance' which is the theory of sounds that are 'received and amplified across time, moving father and father from their point of origin' which 'causes unexpected vibrations in unexpected places'.⁷² Diachronic historicist readers engage with texts at different points in time with different interpretations, like plays that are re-interpreted with each performance. Future readers of a text remake a text each time it is read. Diachronic historicist readers enrich a text with new readings while acknowledging that there are meanings that can never be fully recovered from

⁶⁷ Justin Bengry, 'Can and should we queer the past?', Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscombe, *What is History Now?*, (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 2021), p. 52.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, 'Queering History,' *PMLA*, 120 (2005), 1608 – 1617, (p. 1609).

⁶⁹Wai Chee Dimock, 'A Theory of Resonance', *PMLA*, (1997), pp.1060-1071, (p. 1060).

⁷⁰ Dimock, p. 1061.

⁷¹ Dimock, p. 1061.

⁷² Dimock, p. 1061.

the original. Diachronic historicism, together with the proleptic nature of Behn's work, validates my reading of Behn's texts beyond their original creation and reception.

Varnado traces queer shapes of desire in Early Modern literature and her work is informed by psychoanalytic theory. Varnado addresses Sedgwick's goal of articulating 'some ways of understanding human desire that might be quite to the side of prohibition and repression'.⁷³ Varnado suggests that the word queer:

can illuminate the moments in texts where desire makes strange motions, takes strange shapes, or goes awry—and not even in the expected ways. It can account for turns of feeling that—although insistently, ineffably askew—may not result in anything as historically legible as same-sex acts or same-gender-desiring social identities. It can ultimately reveal that, at times, what is queer about the shape of desire of erotic energy in an early modern text is not a person, an act, or an identity, but rather the larger system or structure through which affects and relations circulate.⁷⁴

Through a close reading of a selection of texts Varnado develops an adverbial queer analytic to describe 'outlandish, excessive, overwrought, peculiar, surprising and in-between'⁷⁵ formations of desire in Early Modern texts. Building on Sedgwick's⁷⁶ early work on queer theory Varnado broadens traces of queerness in Early Modern literature beyond same-sex or 'deviant' desire to produce, 'a reconception of what we regard as literary traces of queerness and a new theory of how desires—especially weirdly, unconventional nonnormative ones—are held and communicated in texts'.⁷⁷ Varnado finds traces of queer desire in unexpected behaviours, unexpected turns of phrase, surprising elements, unexpected twists, obsessions, excesses and weird, unconventional and impossible desires which are not necessarily confined to human bodies. As Varnado states above, finding 'queer' in Early Modern texts goes beyond identifying same sex attraction (which can, of course, be found in Aphra Behn's work); it means searching the text for strange twists and turns, feelings, energy and surprising elements that do not readily fit with our expectations and may not be as obvious as same-sex attraction.

⁷³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick quoted in Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy* (2020), p. 5.

⁷⁴ Varnado, p. 3.

⁷⁵ Varnado, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1950-2009, American critic who is considered one of the founders of queer theory.

⁷⁷ Varnado, (2020), p. 8.

In addition to the methodological principles of diachronic historicism and identifying queer shapes of desire, I employ queer stylistics as my method of analysis (through Behn's lexicology, linguistics, semantics, grammar, imagery, intertextuality, characterization, plotting, narrative voice, phonology, narrative arc and poetic rhythm and rhymes alongside the form and structure of her work) in new ways. Queer stylistics offers a subversive method of rereading, deconstructing and reinterpreting Behn's texts which removes the assumptions of compulsory heterosexuality,⁷⁸ heteronormativity, binary gender and normal paradigms to reveal the transgressive elements in her work. The term 'queer stylistics' has been interchangeable with the term 'queer linguistics' and originates from the field of linguistics. Queer linguistics 'provides analysis of language data that are informed by the insights of queer theory'.⁷⁹ It also questions the assumption of the binary categories of male and female as normative and heteronormativity as a default sexual orientation. Queer linguistics can also be used to reveal how heteronormativity is reinforced through verbal and written language, literary and visual forms, genres and discourses.

Authors have used queer stylistics as a cutting-edge approach to queering texts in a variety of ways. Masten⁸⁰ combines a philological reading with queer theory, which he terms 'queer philology'. Masten explores the relationship between sexuality and writing in Shakespeare's time (including how texts were produced in print). Linking the history of language and the history of sexuality (through spelling, printing, editing, lexicology and even individual letters) Masten reveals a connection between language and identity. He offers new insights into social identity, sexuality, gender, the human body and subtle sexual meanings from the Early Modern period (including expanding the discourse around the homoeroticism of boy players on stage and how this was visualized in texts) which have been erased through heteronormative reading and editorial practices. In a similar way Rodrigues⁸¹ employs computational analytics and queer theory to question deviations and non-

⁷⁸ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5 (1980), pp. 631 - 660.

⁷⁹ Motschenbacher and Stegu, 'Queer Linguistic', p. 520.

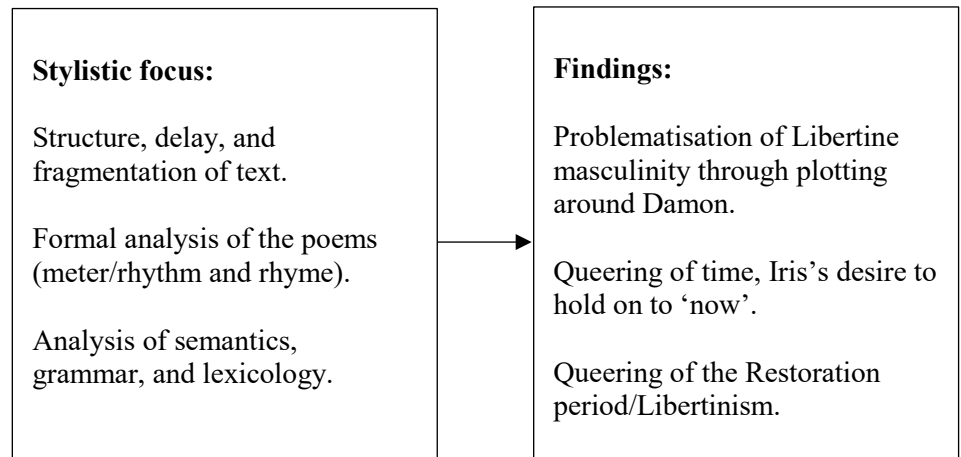
⁸⁰ Geoffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language and Affect in Shakespeare's Time*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

⁸¹ Don Rodrigues, *Shakespeare's Queer Analytics: Distant Reading and Collaborative Intimacy in 'Love's Martyr' – Arden Shakespeare Studies in Language and Digital Methodologies*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2022).

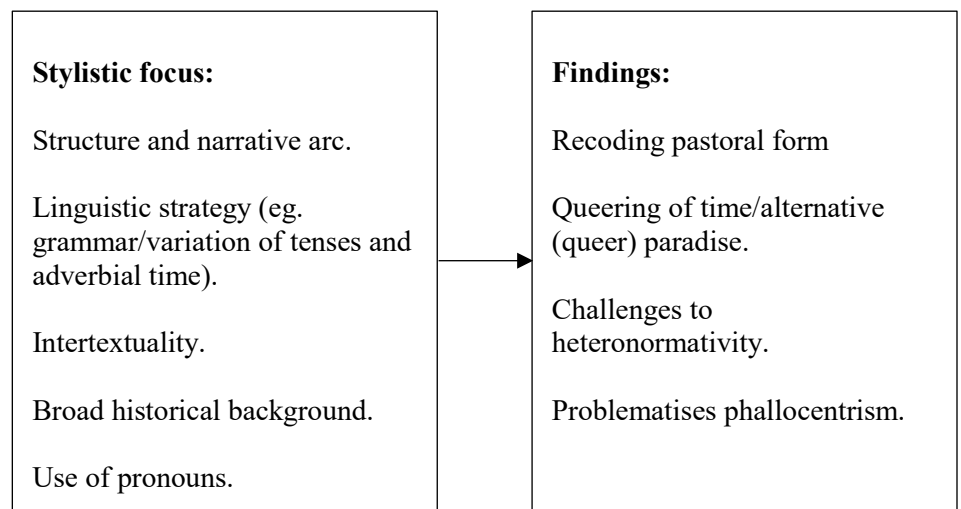
normative stylistic patterns to explore Shakespeare's participation in Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr* (1601). Through a close non-normative, queer reading Rodrigues shows that Shakespeare may have been involved in editing Chester's work and that *Love's Martyr* was a collaborative production. I use queer stylistics in my thesis to show how the 'style' of Behn's writing reveals 'queerness' to a twenty-first century reader. See Figure 1 (p. 23-24) for examples of where I have employed queer stylistics to analyse Behn's work in this thesis and the following chapters.

Figure 1. Examples of the application of queer stylistics applied to Behn’s work in this thesis.

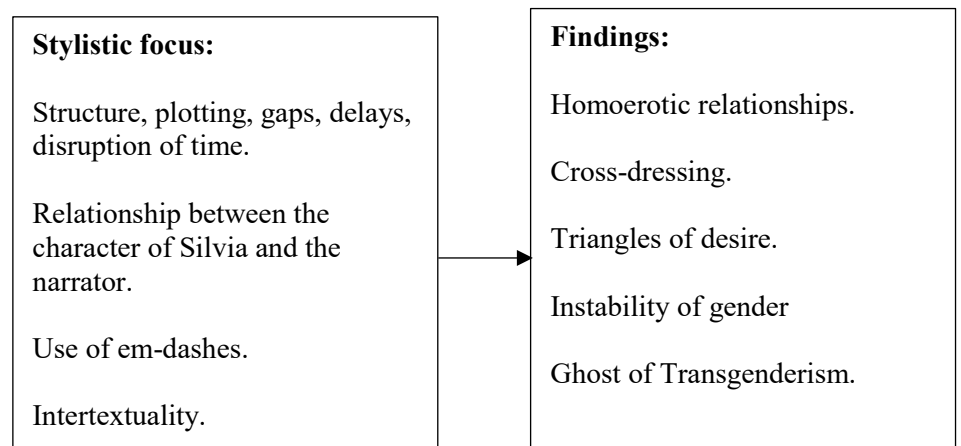
The Lover’s Watch (1686)

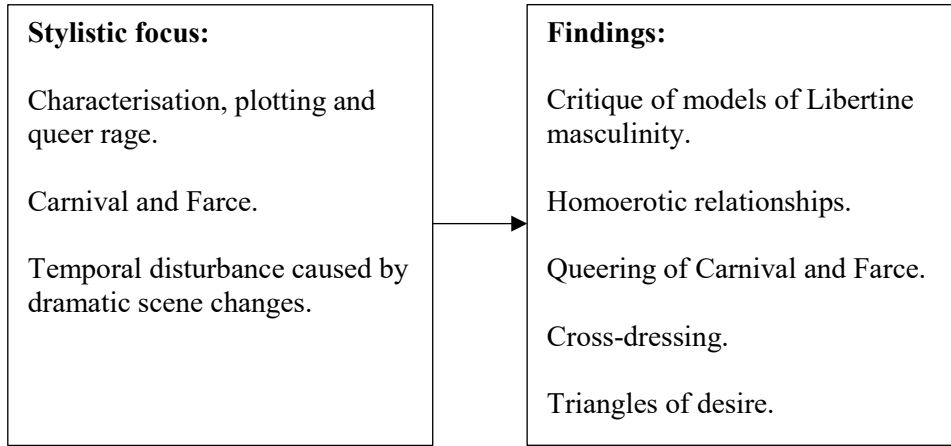


‘The Golden Age’ (1679)

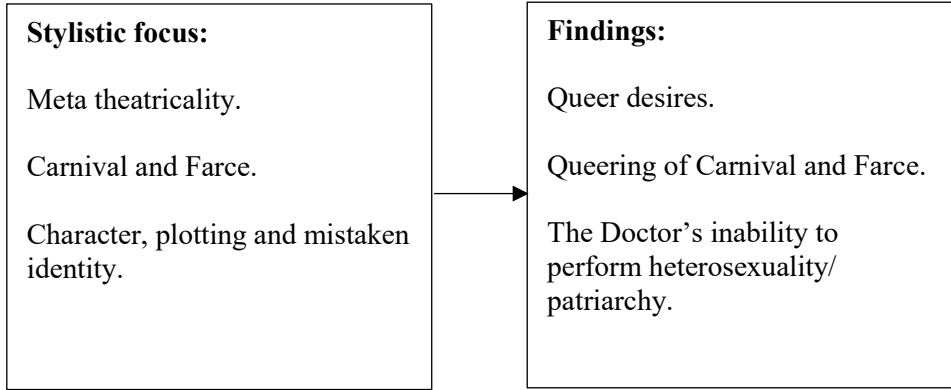


Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister (1684-1687)

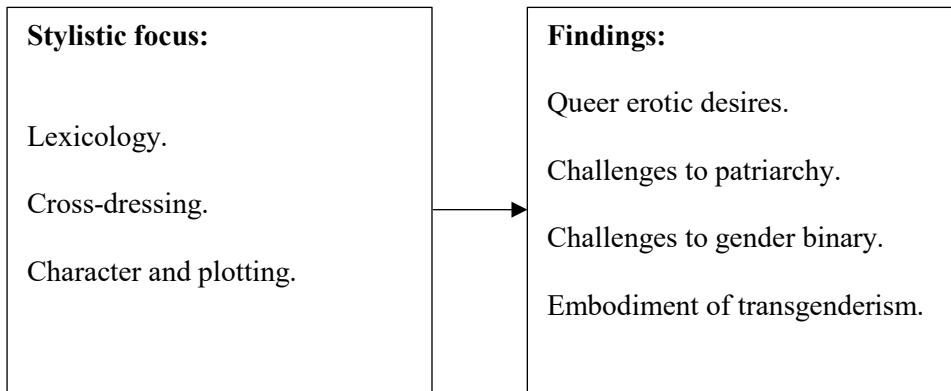




The Emperor of The Moon (1687)



A Selection of Behn's Plays (1671 – 1692)



Queer stylistics is the tool that has allowed me to reveal how queerness permeates throughout Behn's work and not always in obvious ways. I apply Varnado's theoretical concepts to Behn's work and use queer stylistics as my method to trace queer desire and notions of queer time to explain how these shapes of desire are realized. My critique of Behn's work differs from other critics because it removes the assumption of heteronormative paradigms to re-interpret a selection of her poetic, narrative and dramatic work as queer.

Queer stylistics is one of the most recent critical approaches to emerge from the foundations of queer theory which began in response to Foucault who focussed much of his research on the seventeenth century as a turning point, and wrote:

At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had a little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies 'made a display of themselves'.⁸²

Foucault rejects the narrative that the seventeenth century was the beginning of 'an age of repression emblematic of what we call the bourgeois societies'⁸³ where the subject of sex became silenced, sexuality was confined to the home and 'the legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law'.⁸⁴ The questions and answers that Foucault set out 'provided the impetus and intellectual tools for an investigation into a new area of inquiry, the history of sexuality'⁸⁵ and the early 1990s saw the introduction of a new field of critical theory - 'queer theory'.

⁸² Michel Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*, (trans. Robert Hurley), (London, Penguin Books, 1980), p. 3.

⁸³ Foucault, p. 17.

⁸⁴ Foucault, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Jeremy Webster, 'Queering the Seventeenth Century: Historicism Queer Theory, and Early Modern Literature', *Literature Compass*, 5 (2008), 376 – 393, (p. 377).

While there has been significant work into the queering of history from a male perspective, most notably Foucault,⁸⁶ Bray,⁸⁷ Goldberg⁸⁸ and Halperin⁸⁹ there has been less research into historic female queer or transgender identities. Authors who have contributed greatly to the search for female queer identities since the Renaissance include Donoghue⁹⁰, Faderman⁹¹ and Traub;⁹² while Stryker⁹³ and Feinberg⁹⁴ have done similarly inspiration work on transgender history. Lochrie suggests that we cannot ‘assume heteronormativity of the past based on the widespread agreement about what heterosexuality means in the present’.⁹⁵ However, we must also ensure that presumptions of what we now understand as ‘normal’ do not obfuscate our understanding of the past, as it was not until the 1840s that ‘normality’ become a social category.⁹⁶ Despite the fact that Traub suggests that ‘the erotic matrix of early modern culture seems to have been remarkably incoherent and open’,⁹⁷ there is always a temptation to underplay interpretative representations of queer desires to avoid accusations of queering texts that are not queer. However, I concur with Goldberg’s belief that ‘the failure to raise questions of sexuality in these texts has often meant nothing less than the tacit assumption that the only sexuality that ever obtains is a transhistorical heterosexuality’.⁹⁸

I use queer stylistics to follow Traub’s suggestion that we should confront what we do not know or cannot know by analysing patterns within narratives of identification, behaviour and social status across time.⁹⁹ Analysing Behn’s work to

⁸⁶ Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge*, (1980).

⁸⁷ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, (New York: Colombian University Press, 1982).

⁸⁸ Jonathan Goldberg, ed. *Queering the Renaissance*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁸⁹ David Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Sexuality: and Other Essays on Greek Love*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁹⁰ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, (London: Scarlett Press, 1993).

⁹¹ Lilian Faderman ‘*Surpassing The Love of Men*’ (London: The Women’s Press Ltd. 1981).

⁹² Traub, Valerie, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁹³ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History*, (New York: Seal Press, 2017)

⁹⁴ Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1996)

⁹⁵ Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. xvii.

⁹⁶ Traub, (2002).

⁹⁷ Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*, (London and New York: Routledge Revivals, 1992), p. 16.

⁹⁸ Goldberg, *Queering the Renaissance*, (1994), p. 6.

⁹⁹ Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

search for new and hidden meanings through my queer diachronic historicist approach (where texts are analysed within the context of the time they are read, not just the time they were written) involves engaging with time and I will also apply the theoretical approach of queer temporality to Behn's work. Theories and discussions of queer temporality ask us to challenge conventional notions of time – but we need to consider what both Behn's contemporaries and ourselves might consider as 'normative' time before assessing to what extent Restoration writers and artists might have 'queered' those notions.

Our understanding and our perception of time (and space) have been transformed through a history of scientific, mathematical and philosophical concepts.¹⁰⁰ Perceptions of time have depended upon varying contexts and new science which means that time has been perceived in different ways over the centuries.¹⁰¹ For instance, in some ancient cultures people believed in the 'wheel of time' (the cycle of rebirth and reincarnation), while Islamic and Judeo-Christian religions saw time as linear (beginning with the act of creation). During the Middle Ages scientific knowledge changed little and the Catholic Church incorporated the teachings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. During the 16th and 17th centuries there was a paradigm shift in the understanding of the world and a desire to understand natural laws based on observation and experimentation, which led to modern science as we understand it today.¹⁰² There are several key figures of the Scientific Revolution who shaped our understanding of science and time. The astronomer Copernicus's (1473-1543) heliocentric views brought about a revolution in astronomy which resulted in a demand for a greater accuracy in the measurement of time.¹⁰³ Francis Bacon's (1561 – 1626) radical approach to knowledge and scientific methods were based on observation and reasoning. The work of the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650) (geometry, linking form and motion to quantifiable numeric values) and Isaac Newton (1642-1726/7?) who 'founded classical mechanics on the view that *space* is distinct from body and that *time* passes

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 97.

¹⁰¹ For further information on the history of time see Leofranc Halford-Stevens, *The History of time: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰² For an introduction to history and philosophy of time see Emily Thomas, *Absolute Time: Rifts in Early Modern British Metaphysics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), (Ch. 1.)

¹⁰³ Samuel Macey, *Clocks and Cosmos: Time in Western Life and Thought*, (Hamden: Archon Books, 1980), p. 24.

uniformly without regard to whether anything happens in the world'.¹⁰⁴ The work of these legendary philosophers and scientists led to the rapid advancement of the science of physics and the way philosophers and scientists thought about time.

During the seventeenth century, philosophers and scientists questioned whether time was dependent on the mind and body of humans¹⁰⁵ or whether time was 'absolute'. In other words, whether the passage of time is affected by our activities (time stops if we stop doing something) or alternatively, time is unaffected by our activities because time is a fundamental part of the universe (absolute time). As Thomas shows in her exploration of the development of absolute time the period from the 1640s to the 1730s was 'one of Britain's richest and most creative metaphysical periods'.¹⁰⁶ Given Behn's intellectual engagement is not surprising that time is a central theme in some of Behn's work, for example in *The Lover's Watch* (1668) where the protagonist attempts to stop time.

We know that Behn had an interest in time and a knowledge of the natural sciences, including notions of time, atomism, the natural world and astronomy. Behn translated scientific texts including Fontenelle's *A Discovery of New Worlds* (1688) where she counters the claim that women were not clever enough to learn about science. Behn argues 'not only for the adoption of Copernicanism, but also for the inclusion of women in scientific discourse'.¹⁰⁷ By entering the masculine sphere of translating scientific texts and by popularizing these texts, Behn challenged 'both traditional gender roles and the social position of seventeenth-century natural philosophy'.¹⁰⁸ It was during Behn's lifetime, in the 1660s, that science produced the ability to count minutes reliably thereby allowing people to calculate time accurately. Alongside the ability to count time accurately a new paradigm for portraying time unfolded in prose. People began to keep diaries in three common forms, either singly or in combination. These included diaries of religious self-examination (containing details of prayer, church attendance and religious observance), almanacs (including historical information, predictions about the future

¹⁰⁴ 'Newton's Views on Space, Time and Motion', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, < <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/newton-stm/> > [accessed 29th June 2022].

¹⁰⁵ Emily Thomas, *Absolute Time: Rifts in Early Modern British Metaphysics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Goodfellow, "'Such Masculine Strokes': Aphra Behn as Translator of 'A Discovery of New Worlds'", *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 28 (1996), 229 - 250, (p. 230.)

¹⁰⁸ Goodfellow, p. 230.

and space for the owner to record details of their day-to-day life) and book-keeping (which might include details of expenditure, accounts, or a general household diary).¹⁰⁹ Time, for those who could afford clocks or watches in the mid-seventeenth century, came into the home and became personal. Pepys recorded with great excitement being given a watch on 13th May 1665, ‘But Lord, to see how much of my old folly and childishnesse hangs upon me still, that I cannot forbear carrying my watch in my hands in the coach this afternoon and seeing what a-clock it is 100 times’.¹¹⁰ Watches worn by the rich were worn ‘to suggest that the owner somehow possessed time as well as timekeeper’¹¹¹ and for their significance as jewellery rather than as accurate timepieces.

Outside the home time had been clearly divided by day and night. However, the introduction of public street lighting fundamentally revolutionized the rhythms of city life’.¹¹² In 1660 there was no permanent street lighting in any European city (oil lamps were established in the streets of London between 1684 and 1694).¹¹³ However, when street lighting was established in London, it meant that time outside of the home in the city was extended, curfews were relaxed and more activities could take place after dark. Coffeehouses, theatres, taverns and shops could stay open, while Charles II ‘s court, like that of Louis XIV, took advantage of the ability to light up the night sky to provide splendid baroque spectacles.¹¹⁴ Street lighting and the ability to count time accurately would have completely revolutionized commerce, work and entertainment, particularly in the city.

Contemporary theorists have analysed the social and political construction of Western concepts of time. These theorists include Thompson who considers the differing way that people perceived time before and after the advent of clocks. Thompson suggests that the creation of industrial capitalism and the modern state relied on clock time.¹¹⁵ Alliez analyses ancient and medieval concepts of time through the thoughts of Kant (1724-1804) and Marx (1818-1883) to reveal the

¹⁰⁹ Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time, Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form 1660-1785*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), P.50.

¹¹⁰ Pepys, p. 490.

¹¹¹ Sherman, p. 84

¹¹² Craig Koslofsky, *Evening’s Empire A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.130.

¹¹³ Koslofsky, p. 131.

¹¹⁴ Koslofsky, p. 93.

¹¹⁵ E. P. Thompson, E.P., ‘Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’, *Past and Present*, (1997), pp. 56 - 97.

connection between time and money in Western culture.¹¹⁶ By the second half of the seventeenth century, coffee houses that were open at night became popular, which meant that commerce was extending into the night hours as well as daylight hours.¹¹⁷ We know that Behn was concerned with the politics of time, as Hughes's account of Behn's play *The Luckey Chance* (1686) reminds us that 'the power of temporal measurement is shown in an almost obsessive concern with the day-night cycle'.¹¹⁸ Hughes shows that the play involves the struggle to keep the rich from claiming possession of the night hours as well as daylight hours for commercial exchange. We can see from Behn's work, see chapters one (p. 44), two (p. 65) and four (p. 120), that she engages deeply in the philosophical concepts of time. Although not referring specifically to Behn, when Grosz suggests that 'time has been represented in literature and poetry more frequently and ably than in science',¹¹⁹ we might include Behn's work in her assumption. Gervitz suggests, 'In Behn's narrative fiction, readers can see an author outside natural philosophy taking up the ideas of the New Science and the rhetorical challenges generated by those ideas'.¹²⁰ Behn brought the scientific and philosophical preoccupations of the Royal Society¹²¹ to a wider audience, including women,¹²² through her fiction and her translations.¹²³ I will use the theoretical concepts of diachronic historicism, queer stylistics and queer temporality to demonstrate Behn's radical engagement with the problematic Early Modern conceptions of time in her work (personal time; absolute vs. relative time; commercialization of time) and how these can be illuminated by a queer temporal approach. When I refer to temporality as queer in this thesis, I am interpreting Behn's work through a twentieth/twenty-first century vision while exploiting Behn's engagement with philosophical concepts time to offer a new and radical re-interpretation of her work as queer.

¹¹⁶ Éric Aliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹¹⁷ Koslofsky, p. 175.

¹¹⁸ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1988), p. 162.

¹¹⁹ Grosz, p. 98

¹²⁰ Karen Bloom Gervitz, 'Behind the Scientific Self' in J. Hayden, ed. *The New Science and Women's Literary Discourse: Prefiguring Frankenstein*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹²¹ The Royal Society was founded in 1660 for the promotion of science and its benefits.

¹²² For further examples of how women writers contributed to the new science and integrated science into their literary narratives see J. Hayden, ed. *The New Science and Women's Literary Discourse*, (2011)

¹²³ For example, her translation from French of Fontenelle's (1667-1775) *A Discovery of New Worlds* (1688) where she demonstrates her knowledge and understanding of Copernicanism.

I will build on the work of several contemporary queer theorists who incorporate theories of queer temporality into their work. Freeman argues that temporal and sexual dissonance are intertwined through the ‘pull of the past on the present’¹²⁴ and considers how experiences of and representations of time are represented in queer literature and art. Freccero combines the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist dimensions of queer theory to think through the problems of time and argues ‘for a reading practice that accounts for the queerness of temporality, for the way past, present, and future time appear out of sequence and in dialogue in our thinking about history and texts’.¹²⁵ and Halberstam suggests that we should ‘try to think about queerness as an outcome of ‘strange temporalities’.¹²⁶ Halberstam proposes that queerness stemming from these ‘strange temporalities’ can include different, non-normative, ways of living; experiencing time differently, different life expectancies and different priorities and where queer time is not exclusively linked to sex or gendered identities.¹²⁷ The theory behind queer temporality allows us to reimagine the past to discover queerness that has been hidden and I will examine how this queerness is revealed through a queer stylistic/temporal reinterpretation of Behn’s work.

The recent turn towards queer temporality emerged at the end of the twentieth century following the AIDS epidemic when gay communities saw their futures rapidly disappearing, creating a need to concentrate on the present rather than the future.¹²⁸ This led queer theorists to consider how we think about time and how time is experienced by individuals and groups of people who see the world differently and whose lifestyles and expectations may problematize heteronormative timelines. People may experience time differently for several reasons. For example, people who have been marginalized through race, disability, or gender; people who identify as queer; or people who choose not to follow the hegemonic or patriarchal values considered ‘normal’ in their society. While the AIDS epidemic was the beginning of the contemporary ‘queer time’ narrative, there are other times in history, following significant political or social upheavals, that have produced queer temporalities.

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, (2010), p. 62.

¹²⁵ Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, (2006), p.2 and summary.

¹²⁶ Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), p.1.

¹²⁷ Halberstam, (2005), p.1.

¹²⁸ Halberstam, (2005), p.2.

To describe a particular time in history as queer requires an understanding that historical time is not necessarily perceived as progressing in a linear fashion, that time for some people and communities can be experienced differently and that this aberration can be described as queer. Queer time resists the temporal order. It brings the past and the present together through the haunting of the present by the past.¹²⁹ As Freeman states, ‘queer time elongates and twists chronology’ and ‘generates a discontinuous history of its own’.¹³⁰ Freeman also suggests that the sensation of asynchrony ‘can be viewed as a queer phenomenon – something felt on, with or as a body, something experienced as a mode of exotic difference’.¹³¹ I will show that reading through a twenty-first century, queer consciousness illuminates the myriad of ways that Behn queers time in her work.

In the 1980s Kristeva, in her article ‘Women’s Time’,¹³² outlines the relationship between the feminist struggle and the concept of time and suggests that linear time has been associated with masculine socio-economic and political time. Kristeva attempts ‘to situate the problematic of women in Europe within an inquiry on time: that time which the feminist movement both inherits and modifies’.¹³³ Kristeva describes different types of time, ‘cyclical time’ is the relationship between time and women’s bodies, ‘cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock’;¹³⁴ ‘monumental time’, for example, the time of myths of resurrection, eternity without escape and ‘linear time’ which is the progression of history associated with masculinity and patriarchy. Kristeva posits that women’s lives fall within cyclical and monumental time and I suggest that queer time follows an equally multi-layered and complex temporality in opposition to heterosexual, masculinized, linear time.

In recent times, the Covid pandemic may have altered many people’s perception of time and the assumption that time is a given. Time has become something we may not all have. Time changed, for some people life is completely

¹²⁹ I will also suggest that the past can also be haunted by the future (the ‘not yet’), see my comments below on hauntology.

¹³⁰ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds*, (2010), p. x.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Freeman, *Theorizing Queer Temporalities*, (2007), 177 – 195, p. 159.)

¹³² Julia Kristeva *Women’s Time* (Translated by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake,) ‘in *Signs*, 71, (1981), pp. 13 – 35.

¹³³ Kristeva, p. 15.

¹³⁴ Kristeva, p. 16.

taken up with endless work and others, whose working life has been put on hold, or find themselves alone for long, lonely days, perceive time differently to the way they did before the pandemic.

In her reflection on time, Baraitser considers the way we experience time and how this has been affected by contemporary issues such as climate change, social inequality, violent conflicts and decolonization.¹³⁵ Baraitser talks of time's suspension '[s]taying, maintaining, repeating, delaying, enduring, waiting, recalling and remaining'.¹³⁶ Among her theories of time, Baraitser links Kristeva's theories of women's maternal, eternal, cyclical time¹³⁷ (see references and my Chapters Four p. 120 and Six p. 170) to Edelman's theory of lives lived in opposition to procreation.¹³⁸ Rather than suggesting that these two theories are mutually exclusive, Baraitser argues 'for bringing repetition and reproduction into relation with one another in the name of queering maternity (i.e uncoupling it from its normative associations), but without aligning it with the death drive' (pp.78 – 9). Both Kristeva and Edelman's theories refuse a linear narrative and both theories Baraitser suggests are queer (Ch 4). However, what particularly interests me is Baraitser's description of what happens to time in the event of a disaster (in this case she is discussing time in relation the death of a child):

..... one's relation to everyday life that goes through a dramatic shift, one in which time can no longer unfold predictably or reliably. A crisis has occurred in the reliability that the future will unfold. In one sense. Time is completely suspended, crystalline, a time in which nothing flows because nothing can be expected, whilst at another it continues as a form of daily engagement, or saturation with suspended time' (9).

This feeling of suspending time is something that Behn addresses in *The Lover's Watch*. The protagonist, Iris, hasn't suffered a loss, but she predicts that she might, so she tries to control time while she is parted from her lover (see Chapter One, p. 44).

In this thesis I am pushing at concepts of time. Kristeva re-conceptualizes time for women in the twentieth century and Baraitser reflects on perceptions of time in our contemporary society. I am rethinking the concept of time in relation to queer

¹³⁵ Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹³⁶ Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, (2017).

¹³⁷ Kristeva 'Women's Time' (1981).

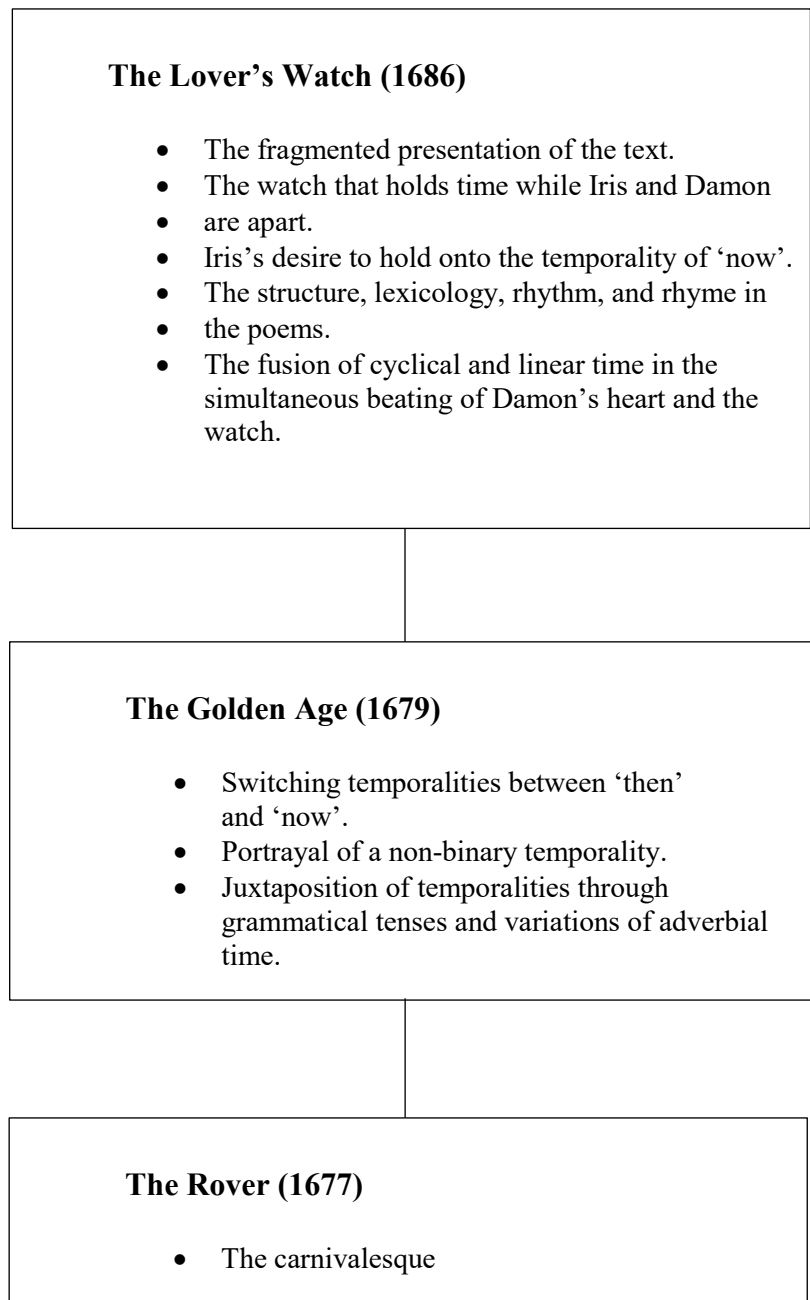
¹³⁸ Edelman, (2004).

lived experiences and echoing these experiences back into Behn's work and forward from Behn's writing to the twenty-first century.

I will use the framework of queer temporality (see Figure 2, p. 35) to identify queer temporalities in Behn's work. The restoration of the monarchy and the narratives and tropes surrounding its celebration and self-conception might be seen as an attempt to defy linear time, to wipe out the previous eleven years and create a period that was essentially 'out of time' moving backwards to restore the past. The tumultuous events of the English Civil War, the restoration of the monarchy and the Libertines created what we might call a queer temporality. The Libertine's resistance to the established order, together with their ideas of hedonism, embracing physical pleasures, avoiding responsibility, living for the moment, rejection of family life and the desire for sex without guilt or consequences¹³⁹ all combine to produce what we might call a different, queer temporality in the Restoration period. Behn explores and problematizes time in the Restoration era to reveal how we can see time as queer and how this queer temporality affects gender. This vision of a queer temporality can open alternative versions of Restoration binary gender codes, including those associated with dominant accounts of the period, which might allow us to reconsider The Restoration Period in a different, more nuanced way.

¹³⁹ James, Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Figure 2. Examples of the identification of queer temporalities in Behn's work.



I will now return to one final theoretical concept that I use in this thesis. Hauntology is a conceptual methodology which I use to deconstruct Behn's texts. Hauntology theorises the idea that the present is haunted by the past and that the spectre (or ghost) of alternative futures influence history. Hauntology is related to notions of queer time and is a philosophical concept developed by Derrida.¹⁴⁰ Emerging from Derrida's work on deconstruction, hauntology originates from *Spectres of Marx* (2006) where he uses the term spectrality to 'describe a mode of historical attentiveness that the living might have to what is not present but somehow appears as a figure or a voice'.¹⁴¹ Derrida describes the spectre of Communism haunting Western Society and appropriates early modern notions of time from Hamlet's line 'The time is out of joint'¹⁴² to describe how spectrality is out of sync with linear time and how time is broken. Derrida compares Hamlet's shock at his father's murder to how Western Society views the threat of Communism, and how these events change the way we perceive the world.

The theoretical and cultural interest in ghosts and haunting has two contrasting models. Hauntology not only refers to how the present is haunted by elements from the past but is also a methodology related to queer temporality, which is equally sensitive to historical change and influenced by theoretical preoccupations. Hauntology complements my diachronic historicism where haunting is something that happens in different ways over time as we bring our contemporary consciousness and unconsciousness to a text. Hagglund argues that 'hauntology' marks 'a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*'.¹⁴³ It is this 'not yet' that offers a mechanism to deconstruct seventeenth-century texts. One model is Abraham and Torok's¹⁴⁴ family secrets and the transgenerational phantom who resides in the ego of the living 'which should be expelled through psychotherapy'.¹⁴⁵ The second is Derrida's more cultural deconstructive model which allows for the uncovering of secrets through close reading of texts, which I shall use in combination with queer stylistics for this thesis. The ghost or spectre is a metaphor for what we cannot see

¹⁴⁰ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, (2006). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁴¹ Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, (2006), p. 69-70.

¹⁴² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Philip Edwards, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) I.5.189.

¹⁴³ Hagglund, (2012), p. 17.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas Abraham and Maria Took, *The Shell and the Kernel*, vol 1, ed., trans. and intro. Nicholas Rand, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁴⁵ Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Theory*, (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 34.

and cannot grasp, but we may be able to feel, the ‘ungraspable visibility of the invisible’ (6). It is the place between life and death, the thing we cannot easily identify or define but that we sense is there, ‘neither soul nor body, and both one and the other’ (5). Derrida explains that the difficulty of knowing the spectre is ‘not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge’ (5); or at least what we call knowledge or think of as knowledge and which we do not yet have the language to speak about.

Hauntology and queer historiography have been linked by theorists, most notably by Castle.¹⁴⁶ Castle suggests the ‘ghost’ of lesbianism has haunted Western literature¹⁴⁷ and reveals the presence of queer women in several texts from the eighteenth century onwards. Some of these representations have been hidden from view or, as Castle suggests, ‘ghosted’ by a heteronormative, patriarchal society. Avery states that ‘haunting raises spectres, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, present and future’¹⁴⁸ linking hauntology to temporality. Freccero states that ‘[g]hostliness and homosexuality have a long history of association’¹⁴⁹ and Davis suggests that we do not converse with spectres with the expectation of revealing secrets but ‘it may open us up to the experience of secrecy as such: an essential unknowing which underlies and may undermine what we think we know’.¹⁵⁰ Most importantly, Davis suggests that ‘hauntology is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study’.¹⁵¹ We can use hauntology to reveal the ghost of non-binary and transgender bodies which have been ignored or written out of history by a heteronormative, patriarchal society. As Freccero suggests, ‘The past is in the present in the form of a haunting. This is what, among other things, doing a queer kind of history means, since it involves the possibility of being haunted, even inhabited by ghosts’.¹⁵² In my twenty-first century reading of Behn’s work I draw on hauntology in my analysis of Silvia’s character in *Love-*

¹⁴⁶ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*, (Columbia, Columbia University Press, 1993).

¹⁴⁷ Castle, (1993).

¹⁴⁸ Gordon Avery, *Ghostly Matters; Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) p. xvi.

¹⁴⁹ Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, (2006), p. 77.

¹⁵⁰ Colin Davis, Hauntology, spectres and phantoms, *French Studies*, 59 (2005), 373 – 379, (p. 377) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/kni143>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

¹⁵¹ Davis, p. 379.

¹⁵² Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, p. 80.

Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister (1684-1687) (see Chapter Three, p. 96) and in my final chapter as a methodology to raise the spectre of transgenderism from the cross-dressed characters in a number of her plays. Behn's cross-dressed characters embody their transgenderism more and more convincingly over the course of the plays that I analyse in Chapter Six (p. 170). These cross-dressed characters echo back the spectre of transgenderism that is haunting western society today. Conjuring the ghost of transgenderism in Behn's work contributes to the epistemology of transgender studies which demonstrates that transgenderism has always been part of humanity and as such is something to be embraced, supported and celebrated rather than marginalized and demonized.

Taking a queer stylistic approach to re-reading Behn gives us new insights into her work and helps us to use close textual and stylistic reading to identify queer temporalities, queer identities, and the ghost of transgenderism. I have shown why my thesis engages with recent debates within queer temporality: desires issuing from another time making demands on the present; gender created or deconstructed across space and time and how contemporary debates on LGBTQ equality predisposes a heteronormative timeline (marriage, children, a future). I will use these close readings to suggest ways in which Behn asks us to rethink linear temporality which in turn enables us to reflect on historicity. To these ends I use a combination of theory, historical events and aesthetic practices to queer the work of Aphra Behn.

In Chapter One, I use Behn's prose narrative *The Lover's Watch* (1668) as an example of Behn's complex and eccentric queering of time. *The Lover's Watch* is a love story which problematizes the connection between masculinity and Restoration libertinism, and I use this reading to suggest that Libertinism and the Restoration period can be described as a period of queer temporality. I use a queer stylistic approach to show how *The Lover's Watch* problematizes time and captures the anxieties of the period. Three objects in the story play a significant role in representing and disturbing time. These objects are the watch that Iris gives to Damon with Cupid's wings clipped, the case that Damon has made to enclose the watch and the mirror that Damon gives to Iris. The story showcases Behn's ability to bring a complex philosophical debate about time, the anxiety of love and the anxieties of the period into a seemingly simple love story. I explore the structure of the narrative and poems that make up *The Lover's Watch* and use queer stylistics to reveal its discursive style and suggest that Iris attempts to hold on to the moment of

‘now’ and Damon’s compliance with Iris’s instructions posit a notion of ‘queer’ time. Iris uses the conventions of a lover in thrall to his mistress and effectively reverses their roles to problematize his gender and subvert the King’s authority. I argue that, through the character of Damon, Behn crafts an alternative to male libertinism which gives power to women.

Chapter Two is a close reading of Behn’s poem *The Golden Age* (1679) and I use queer stylistics as an analytical framework to show how the poem uses and adapts pastoral conventions through several aesthetic means. In this poem Behn describes an alternative version of paradise where she problematizes linear time to produce a queer temporality by proposing a non-binary space in opposition to hegemony and patriarchy. I re-read, deconstruct and reinterpret the poem through an analysis of Behn’s linguistics, semantics, grammar, imagery, intertextuality and narrative arc, that is informed by queer theory and removes the assumptions of heteronormativity, binary gender and ‘normative’ paradigms. ‘The Golden Age’ is the first poem in Behn’s collection, *Poems upon Several Occasions; with a Voyage to the Island of Love* published in 1679. Much of the inspiration for ‘The Golden Age’ comes from Behn’s translation and adaption of the chorus from Act 1, Scene II of the Italian poet, Tasso’s 1573 play *Aminta*.¹⁵³ Both Tasso’s pastoral drama and Behn’s poem ‘have a common source in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*’.¹⁵⁴ As I progress through the chapter, I read Behn’s entire poem alongside the reader, stanza by stanza, to allow the reader to re-read the poem with me through the lens of queer stylistics as I deconstruct and interpret the stanzas. By challenging heteronormativity and phallogocentric discourses Behn offers a non-binary space where she investigates and problematizes masculine codes of behaviour in relation to wealth, authority and sexual desire. Behn recodes the pastoral form to subvert assumptions of gender binary and problematize the repetition of gender performance through her use of language and her unstable use of gender identifiers and pronouns between the stanzas.

In Chapter Three, I show why I believe Silvia, a character in Behn’s prose narrative *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687), is one of the most transgressive female characters in literary history. I investigate how the

¹⁵³ Heidi Laudien, ‘Aphra Behn: pastoral poet’, *Women’s Writing*, 12 (2005), 43 - 58, (p. 47).

¹⁵⁴ Jessica Munns, ‘Pastoral and Lyric: Astrea in Arcadia’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, eds. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 214.

instability of Behn's portrayal of masculinity and femininity in this prose work problematizes dominant ideologies in respect of both gender and sexuality. Written and set during a time of dramatic political events and loosely based on the scandal involving Lord Ford Grey's elopement with his sister-in-law,¹⁵⁵ the work is divided into three parts. The focus of Book I is Philander and Silvia's transgressive relationship, while Books II and III lean towards homoeroticism and Silvia's increasing masculinity. The first part of *Love-Letters* is written in epistolary form and consists of letters primarily between Philander and Silvia with no omniscient narrator. The second part is a combination of letters and third person narration. The final book consists primarily of an external narration with almost no letters. Through the three volumes the change in narrative and generic methods and markers coincide with the development of the characters and a tension between Silvia's increasing masculinity and the narrator's desire to maintain Silvia's femininity. Queer stylistics enables me to consider how the different styles Behn uses across the trilogy emphasize the instability of gender and gender identity, together with how her use of both grammatical delay and the epistolary form effectively queer time.

There are several incidents in the plot of *Love Letters* that reveal Behn's unstable portrayal of both masculinity and femininity and suggest a queerness through her problematization of both gender and sexuality. These include Philander's inability to consummate the longed for meeting between him and Silvia; Philander's encounter with Silvia's father in the garden when disguised as Melinda; three erotic triangles between Philander, Cesario and Mertilla, Philander, Foscaro and Silvia and Philander, Octavio and Silvia; Mertilla's cuckolding of Philander and Philander's homoerotic attraction to Cesario; the homoerotic duelling scene between Philander and Foscaro; Silvia's enjoyment of cross-dressing; Octavio's confusion over Silvia's gender and the men's attraction to her while cross-dressed. At the beginning of the novel Silvia is a pawn, controlled by her family and then by Philander. As the novel progresses and as Silvia embodies the ghost of transgenderism, she gains empowerment and finds a way to take control of her life while negotiating her identity as a woman disguised as a man.

¹⁵⁵ Donald R. Wehrs, 'Eros, Ethics, Identity: Royalist Feminism and the Politics of Desire in Aphra Behn's *Love Letters*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 32 (1992), 461 – 478.

Many critics have acknowledged that *The Rover* (1677) is a proto-feminist critique of libertinism, patriarchy and male violence.¹⁵⁶ In Chapter Four, I will show that the play is haunted by an underlying homoeroticism, how a consideration of ‘queer rage’¹⁵⁷ enables us to understand Angellica’s actions, how the queer temporality of the Carnival challenges gender norms and finally how Behn employs the medium of farce to critique heteronormativity. In *The Rover* Behn then creates a proto-feminized, queer reappropriation of libertinism. Through a queer stylistic reading, in the light of Varnado’s ‘new reading for queer desires in Early Modern literature’,¹⁵⁸ and taking into consideration Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque,¹⁵⁹ Chapter Four considers how Behn adopts Carnival in *The Rover* as a site of queer time and queer space. Carnival provides the perfect genre to reveal discursive modes of queer behaviour, sexuality and gender, while the medium of theatre allows clear visual codes to emphasize the queerness of the characters. I will show how, using characterization, plotting and erotic triangles, Behn queers the time and space of the Carnival.

Critics have suggested that *The Emperor of The Moon* (1687) is a critique of Whig politics or women’s exclusion from the world of science.¹⁶⁰ However, in Chapter Five, through a close re-reading of the play I examine Behn’s use of the carnivalesque, masquerade, farce and the grotesque to show how Behn uses these tropes to queer the play. At the beginning of the play the main character, Doctor Baliardo, is feminized by Behn through his ‘reading of foolish books’.¹⁶¹ In the second act we are immediately made aware that there is something strange about the Doctor, when he enters ‘with all manner of Mathematical Instruments, hanging at his Girdle’ (I.2) and his servant brings onto the stage a large (the stage direction suggests over twenty feet in length) phallic telescope. I argue that the Doctor’s obsession with

¹⁵⁶ For example: Anita Pacheco, ‘Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn’s “The Rover”’ in *ELH* (1998), 323-345; Sarah Oliver, “‘Banished his country, despised at home’: Cavalier Politics, Banishment, and Rape in Aphra Behn’s ‘The Rover’”, *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research*, 27 (2012), 55-74 and Anthony Kaufman, ‘The Perils of Florinda’: Aphra Behn, Rape and the Subversion of Libertinism in *The Rover, Part 1*’ *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research* (1996), 1 – 121.

¹⁵⁷ Jack Halberstam, ‘Violence/Queer Violence: Representation, Rage and Resistance’ in *Social Text*, (1993), 187 - 201 (p. 37).

¹⁵⁸ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 2-3.

¹⁵⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984)

¹⁶⁰ For references and further details see the main body of the text.

¹⁶¹ ‘The Emperor of the Moon’, Janet Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 5, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996), I.1.95, p. 163.

his telescope and the moon, his inappropriate desires towards the nymphs on the moon, his voyeuristic and illicit gazing, are all queer.

Throughout the play the farcical scenes are Rabelaisian¹⁶² (the earthy, bawdy humour that is found in Early Modern Carnival), corporeal, vulgar, grotesque and animalistic, both disturbing and out of alignment with heteronormativity. What I will go on to call Behn's queer imaginings are highlighted through disturbing gothic and sometimes violent humour, including grotesque images of exaggerated bodily openings and protuberances all of which are presented as unnatural and 'queer'. In the finale the actors wear extravagant clothes and masks and partake in fantastical, spectacular, exotic, elaborate singing and dancing and carnivalesque events which offer the theatrical freedom to allow for the expression of queer desire, non-conformity, erotic energy and non-binary gender where marginalized identities are exposed. During this scene Behn distorts time and space while metaphorically reversing the science of the telescope, to bring the moon to earth and reveal a combination of classical, astrological and oriental figures. At the very end of the play the Doctor realises he has been tricked and his final line, 'that he knew nothing yet' (III.672), suggests knowledge, while the fact that he knew 'nothing' leaves interpretation open and suggests that nothing is fixed or resolved including what might generally be considered as 'normal' which offers an opening for a queer epistemology.

There are very many instances where Behn problematizes binary gender in her work, some of which I have analysed in this thesis.¹⁶³ In my final chapter, I show how Behn uses her cross-dressed characters to explore both the performance and embodiment of gender to reveal issues of same sex attraction, non-binary and transgenderism. Through a close reading of several of Behn's plays including, *The Amorous Prince* (1671), *The Dutch Lover* (1673), *The Feign'd Courtesans* (1679), *The Widdow Ranter* (1689) and *The Younger Brother* (1696) I re-examine Behn's cross-dressed characters from a queer perspective and using a queer reading position I consider the implications of the introduction of women actors on stage during the Restoration Period. I argue that, as a woman trying to make a living in a man's

¹⁶² Relating to the work of Rabelais, the sixteenth-century writer of satire and the grotesque.

¹⁶³ Other critics who have identified the problematisation of gender binary in Behn's work include Jennifer Frangos; 'Apra Behn's Cunning Stunts' (2004) and Roberta C. Martin, 'Beauteous Wonder of a Different Kind' (1998).

world, the popularity of cross-dressed women on stage would have offered a ‘safe’ way for Behn to present homoerotic desire while still allowing her plays to be commercial successes. Behn highlights how gender binary her world was and how the balance of power was entirely weighted towards men. Behn’s female to male cross-dressed characters eliminate traditional binary gender roles to gain power, the chance to speak freely and enter places and relationships that they could never do as women and in this respect her practice could be said to be like other writers in the Early Modern period. However, we will see from the examples of the plays in this chapter, how Behn’s representations of cross-dressed women developed over her career and, as these characters develop, so the ghost of transgenderism emerges much more clearly.¹⁶⁴ In this selection of Behn’s work, the earlier plays find the women cross-dress for expediency or to embrace the power to avenge a lover and by so doing disrupt homosocial relationships and notions of patriarchy, but then return to women’s dress and marry, some happily and some reluctantly. However, towards the end of Behn’s career the cross-dressed Ranter¹⁶⁵ absorbs and sustains her masculine identity without being censured and Olivia¹⁶⁶ questions her need to dress as a woman to be loved. I suggest that Behn wrote these characters to explore the construction of gender, but I also believe that as we read Behn’s work we find these characters haunted by the ghost of what we now call transgenderism and the ghosts of trans bodies where the past and the present combine through the social, scientific, political and sexual anxieties of the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries.

¹⁶⁴ I reveal the ghost of transgenderism in Behn’s work a similar way to Castle who reveals the ghost of lesbians in modern culture (Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 1993).

¹⁶⁵ ‘The Widdow Ranter’ in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 7, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996).

¹⁶⁶ ‘The Younger Brother’ in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 7, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996).

Chapter One

Queer Time in *The Lover's Watch* (1686)

In my Introduction I explain that for this thesis I take Traub's theory of cycles of lesbian salience further.¹ I consider that the Restoration Period (partly because of its own sense of being 'late' and a retrospective self-consciousness about erasing and recreating historical events)² is a cycle of salience, where queer and what we would now call transgender bodies, are made legible through Behn's work. Behn's prose narrative *The Lover's Watch* (1668) is an example of Behn's complex and eccentric queering of time. I will use a queer stylistic approach³ and Varnado's methodology for tracing queer desire in Early Modern texts⁴ to show, through the form, structure, characterization and plotting, how she problematizes time, captures the anxieties of the period and where the protagonist, Iris, fashions an alternative masculinity for her lover. *The Lover's Watch* was written in 1686 and Sherman tell us that in 1680 London had become the 'horological centre of Europe'.⁵ Time was becoming textualized⁶ and absorbed into narrative form where Sherman suggests that 'these texts are no mere witness to their culture; they are active embodiments of one of its newest, most important and withal most elusive organizing principles: its temporality'.⁷ In Behn's *The Lover's Watch* we find a perfect example of experimental writing about time. While the story engages with the diurnal form through the hourly/daily instructions the protagonists give to each other, it also radically engages with the concept of time itself. It was written at a time when scientists and philosophers were questioning whether the passage of time is dependent on what humans do, or whether time is a fundamental part of the universe and unaffected by human activities.⁸ It is this dichotomy that is the central premise of the story. We know that Behn was interested and indeed knowledgeable, about the new science (see my Introduction) and I will show how Behn engages with

¹ Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, (2002).

² Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture*, (1993), p. 91.

³ See my Introduction.

⁴ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020).

⁵ Sherman, *Telling Time*, (1996), p. 8.

⁶ See my Introduction.

⁷ Sherman, (1996), 27.

⁸ See my Introduction.

discourses on time through *The Lover's Watch*. In the story, Behn feminizes time (through Iris's influence over Damon) and, I will argue, queers time (through Iris's attempts to hold on to time) to produce a feminized queer temporality. As we will see the character of Iris attempts to challenge the idea of absolute time by using the physical object of the watch and her instructions to Damon to stop the progression of that absolute physical time and hold on to the moment of their love. However, we do not find out if this works, presumably because Behn (with her scientific brain) knew that time is absolute and not dependent on what humans do. In some respect the very act of reading can seem like a suspension of time. This feeling of suspension is magnified in the story by the fact we are left suspended at the end not knowing whether the protagonists have a future together. Behn's story and form are a metaphysical experiment concerning the idea of suspending a moment in time while simultaneously exploring an alternative feminized and queer temporality.

To explore Behn's experimental story about time, I will take a queer stylistic approach to her work. Queer linguistics 'provides analysis of language data that are informed by the insights of queer theory',⁹ questions the assumption of the binary categories of male and female as normative and can be used to reveal how heteronormativity is reinforced through verbal and written language. However, inspired by the work of Masten¹⁰ and Rodrigues,¹¹ I use the term queer stylistics in this chapter as a broader, subversive method of rereading, deconstructing and reinterpreting *The Lover's Watch* through an analysis of Behn's imagery, characterization, plotting and the rhythm and rhymes of her poetry.

In this chapter, and indeed throughout this thesis, I will show through the medium of Aphra Behn's work, how the Restoration period and Libertinism can be described as a period of queer temporality. Recent work in queer history has opened new questions and new insights into how we think about the past and how this can link to the present.¹² As I show in my Introduction, the theory behind queer temporality allows us to reimagine the past to discover queerness that has been hidden and I will examine how this queerness is revealed through a queer stylistic reinterpretation of *The Lover's Watch*.

⁹ Motschenbacher and Stegu, 'Introduction: Queer Linguistic', (2013), p. 520.

¹⁰ Masten, *Queer Philologies*, (2016).

¹¹ Rodrigues, *Shakespeare's Queer Analytics*, (2022).

¹² For example, Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), Bengry, 'Can and should we queer the past?', (2021)

In my Introduction, I suggested that the AIDS epidemic was the beginning of the contemporaneous ‘queer time’ narrative and that there are other times in history, following significant political or social upheavals, that have produced queer temporalities. Through my analysis in this chapter, I will argue that Behn’s queering and feminising of time in *The Lover’s Watch* offers an alternative version of Restoration masculinity from the conventions and practice of Libertinism. Therefore, it is useful to consider how Libertinism itself can also be viewed as a distinct temporality. Libertinism can be seen as a queer practise and ideology which characterized a specific cultural moment in the 1670s and 1680s. I suggest that Libertines lived in an alternative temporality,¹³ a queer temporality that problematized a heteronormative timeline to foreground ‘pleasure in the moment’, where women were central, but only as objects of men’s desires and their voices were silenced. ‘Queer time’ is a temporality outside and beyond what Halberstam, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, calls ‘the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safely, and inheritance’¹⁴ and they suggest that moving away from a ‘normal’ temporality opens new opportunities and new, queer ways of living. They also argue that the rejection of the heteronormativity of familial and reproductive time¹⁵ or ‘reproductive futurism’,¹⁶ means rejecting time as only related to a future determined by procreation, in other words linear time measured by the assumption of marriage, children and grandchildren.

In *The Lover’s Watch*, we will see how Iris wants to suspend time. The time that Iris wants to suspend is what I shall call the ‘nowness of now’. This is the time when she is apart from her lover Damon and involves suspending linear time while trying hold on to the present-ness of time when they were together. Trying to hold on to the ‘nowness of now’ we might argue, could be defined as trying to hold on to a queer temporality. Iris’s ‘nowness of now’ is the present ‘now’ moment and defining the ‘present’ is a problem that has concerned theorists of time and history in the Western tradition as far back as Aristotle.¹⁷ Dinshaw explores queer ways of being in time and the queerness of time itself. She explains in her analysis of the meaning of ‘now’ that ‘[a]s soon as you fix on it, it’s gone, it’s a has-been, and we’re onto the

¹³ Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, (1991), Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom*, (1995).

¹⁴ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*, (2005), p. 6.

¹⁵ Halberstam, (2005).

¹⁶ Edelman, *No Future*, (2004).

¹⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 2.

next *now*'.¹⁸ 'Now' is a tricky concept and certainly an impossible temporality to hold on to. The temporality of 'now' – the present-ness of intense experience - is central to *The Lover's Watch* and in a similar vein Dinshaw explores the queer temporality of The Smiths 1984 hit single 'How Soon is Now', a song popular in the 1980's gay club scene. In the song Morrissey's questioning of 'now' (When you say it's gonna happen now/When exactly do you mean?)¹⁹ both questions and demands a different type of time, a non-linear time, an asynchronic, temporal queer time that engages with the relationship between time and the embodiment of desire. While Morrissey's 'now' is empty, and all he can see in the future is emptier 'now' moments, Iris's 'now' is the complete opposite, it is exactly the time she wants to be in and that she wants to hold on to. Behn's engagement with the temporality of 'now' haunts *The Lover's Watch*, stretching across time to Morrissey's song in the 1980s. Morrissey is yearning for someone to love him 'now', while the character Iris in *The Lover's Watch*, has found her love in the 'now' and is desperately trying to hold on to it. The temporary of 'now' is not simply queer in the sense of non-heteronormative, non-linear, strange or a different time. Rather, for both Behn's story and Morrissey's song, the queerness emerges at the intersection between temporality and yearning desire, that moment when desire disrupts the linearity of time.

As Freccero suggests, 'queer time' is 'perverse, it argues for an eccentric relation between events and their effects, and it challenges the empiricism of what qualifies as an event. It is also queer because desire infuses it'.²⁰ Freccero's argument of time as queer when infused by desire is fundamental to *The Lover's Watch*. We see through Behn's work how queer temporalities are expressed through the form of her work for example, as Varnado suggests, the term queer, 'can illuminate the moments in texts where desire makes strange motions, takes strange shapes, or goes awry'.²¹ An example of this is the way Behn moves backwards and forwards through different temporalities in her poem 'The Golden Age' (1679) (see Chapter Two p. 65), the sudden switch to farce in *The Rover* (1677) (see Chapter Four, p. 120) and, as I will show below, the form and structure of *The Lover's Watch*.

¹⁸ Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?* (2012), p. 2.

¹⁹ Johnny Marr and Steven Patrick Morrissey, 'How Soon is Now', (Warner Chappell Music, Inc. Universal Music Publishing, 1984).

²⁰ Carla Freccero, 'The Queer Time of Lesbian Literature: History and Temporality' in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 20.

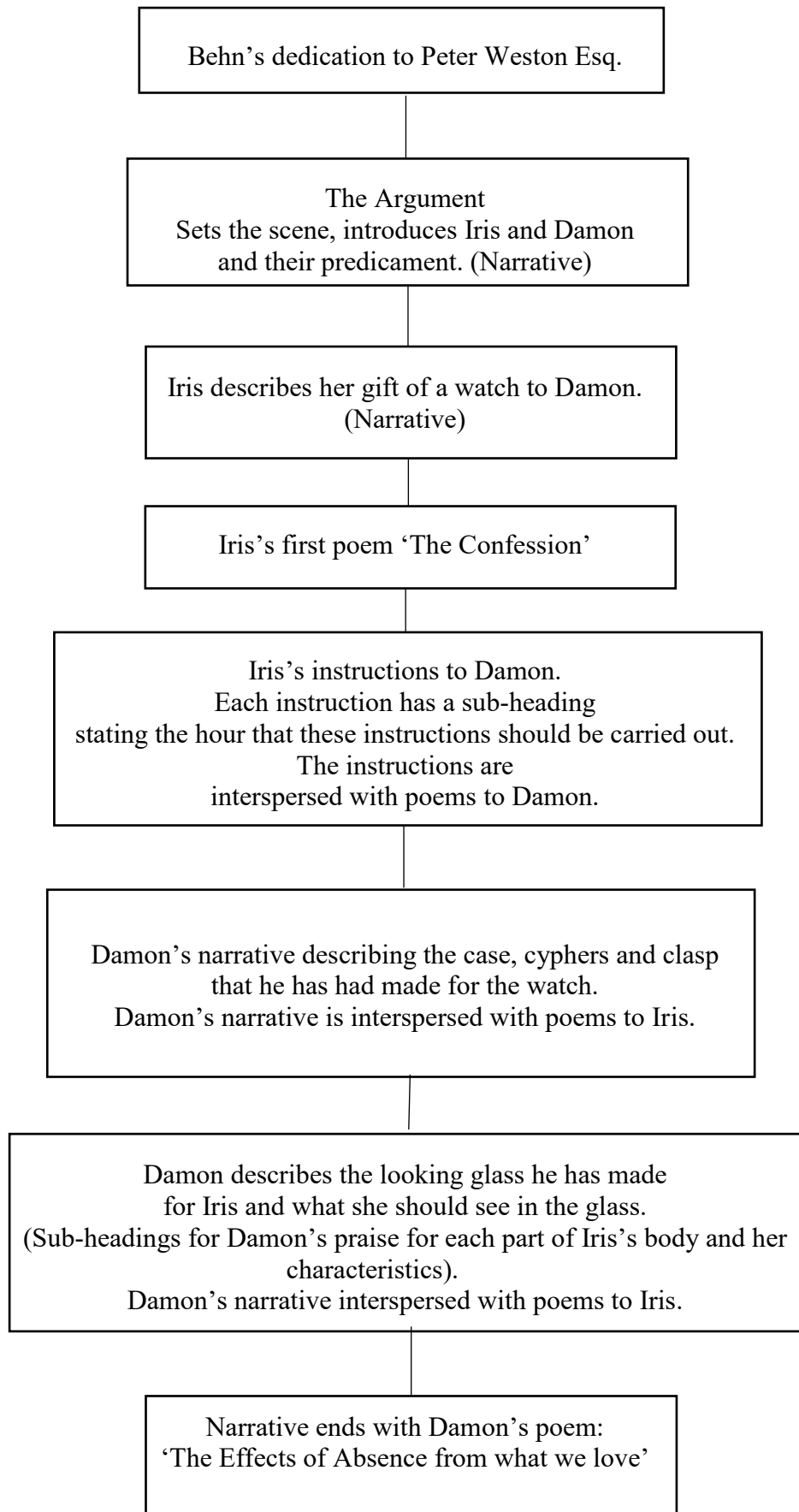
²¹ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 3.

The Lover's Watch is a complex philosophical debate about time, the anxieties of love and the anxieties of the period fitted into a seemingly simple love story. Published in London in 1686 and translated and adapted from de Bonnecourse's prose narrative *La montre d'amour* (1666), I will begin by showing, through the lens of queer stylistics, how Behn queers both time and notions of the body in *The Lover's Watch* by the way of the paratext and structure of the story. The lovers in the story are part of the King's court, 'the most Happy and August Court of the best and greatest Monarch of the World' (283). The 1686 edition printed by W. Canning²² begins with fifteen pages of dedications, the length of which both delays the time before the story begins and disturbs the readers' sense of time before the story has even begun. Paratextual material thus acts as a proleptic reading experience of what reading the whole poem places upon the reader. *The Lover's Watch* disrupts the reader's sense of time on several levels as we read. It is disrupted by the time it takes us to read through the dedications to get to the story; it is disrupted by the gap between when the writer wrote the story and when the reader reads (as with any story) and then, when we get to the main text, the narrative consists of prose interspersed with poems, which fracture the linearity of the narrative itself. The form of the narrative encourages us to consider what time is, or what it means to us, through these juxtaposed reading levels, even before we learn that the protagonist in the story is attempting to alter time and bend time to her will. See my Figure 3 (p. 49) for the structure of *The Lover's Watch*.

²² Aphra Behn, *La Montre: or The Lover's Watch*, (London: Printed by R.H. for W. Canning 1686) <<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240972843/CC433D9645704723PQ/1/thumbnail?accountid=9727&imgSeq=13>>[accessed 2nd April 2022].

Figure 3.

The Structure of Apra Behn's *The Lover's Watch*



The sections of prose are divided into headings, each named as an hour of time, in a similar way to a Mediaeval 'Book of Hours'.²³ The delay in beginning the story, and the fragmented presentation of the text, give the reader the sense of a strange or queer temporality in the way the story is presented. This paratext interrupts the linearity of the narrative to open a queer reading. Reading through the lens of queer stylistics enables us to see that this disjunction becomes queer, because this is a linear time-based narrative, but at the same time Behn problematizes the linearity of her own story by fragmenting its basic structure. In addition to the narrative's unusual engagement with time, we will see how Iris's desire to contain Damon runs counter to the Libertine obsession with freedom and attitudes to sex and asks him to counter the masculine, Libertine, desire for sexual freedom. Damon's complicity with Iris's demands is in complete opposition to masculine Libertine ideas of guilt-free sex and lack of commitment.²⁴ The power in this story is with the woman (Iris); she controls Damon, his actions, thoughts and even his dreams. Behn does not present Damon as a Libertine; indeed, we will see how Iris uses the conventions of a lover in thrall to his mistress to disempower him, effectively reversing their roles, problematizing his gender and subverting the King's authority by giving him orders. Through the queer positioning of Damon, Behn offers an alternative masculinity to Libertine masculinity; one that gives power to women and challenges the idea that men should hold power over women.

Behn dedicates *The Lover's Watch* to Peter Weston, a man she describes as having Damon's attributes, 'all the attracting Beauty of my young Hero; all that charm the Fair; without the affectation of those that set out for Conquests',²⁵ with Damon's 'agreeable Modesty' (279) and 'Abhorrence to Lewdness' (280). Little is known about Weston apart from the fact that he was a lawyer, but Behn's biographer, Maureen Duffy, has suggested that Behn uses her dedication to him to comment on the fickleness of other men and rebut critics who had suggested she was obscene.²⁶ Before the story begins Behn reveals her antipathy to what she considers the negative attributes of Restoration masculinity such as 'the forward noisy

²³ A Medieval Book of Hours is a decorated Christian prayer books that structured time for their readers and contained prayers, psalms, and texts.

²⁴ See my Introduction.

²⁵ Aphra Behn, *La Montre: or The Lover's Watch*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 4, ed. Todd, Janet, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 279. (All further citations refer to this edition.)

²⁶ Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess*, (2000), p. 259.

Confidence, which usually attends [the male] Sex' (279) and their 'natural Propensity to Debauchery' (279). In the story Damon not only complies with Iris's demands, but purchases a case crafted to contain the watch that Iris gives him (the signifier for Iris's desire to hold on to Damon and their love). He also gives Iris a looking glass that 'mirrors' her gift, both literally and figuratively. *The Lover's Watch* attempts to contain time and love, both within the text and within the referenced objects of the watch, the watch case and the looking glass. In her dedication Behn describes *The Lover's Watch* as a 'little unlabour'd piece'²⁷ for the enjoyment of the Restoration Court. However, it is so much more than this; it is a metaphysical reflection on the temporal nature of love. I will go on to call this queer because of the way it is written and its strange engagement with time.

Even though *The Lover's Watch* is based de Bonnecorse's original French text *La Montre*,²⁸ it makes sense to accept this as largely Behn's own work (given the additions and reworkings of the original material) for the purposes of re-analysing Behn's text through the medium of queer stylistics. Postmodern notions of mimesis and translation²⁹ allow us to acknowledge *The Lover's Watch* as an original work through its creativity. Todd describes *The Lover's Watch* as an 'imitation'³⁰ where, 'although Behn retains the structure and thematic content of Bonnecorse's work, the text has been much expanded'. Trofimova describes *The Lover's Watch* as having been translated 'rather freely', with 'extensive additions of her own' and where the character Iris differs from Bonnecorse's characterisation, 'showing traits that could have belonged to Behn herself'.³¹ Even without translating the original text a cursory glance shows us that the original text was modest compared to Behn's. For example,

²⁷ Aphra Behn cited in Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess*, (1989) p. 259.

²⁸ Balthasar de Bonnecorse, *La Montre*, 1666,
< https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/La_montre/7CdzMMwMmcEC?hl=en >
(Digitalized in 2017 and accessed 14 April 2022).

²⁹ Kirsten Malmkjær, *Translations and Creativity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Thomas M Greene, *Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*; (Yale: Yale University Press, 1986); Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

³⁰ Janet Todd, in Aphra Behn, *La Montre: or The Lover's Watch*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 4, ed. Todd, Janet, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 278.

³¹ Violetta Trofimova, 'French Influence on English Culture in the Second Part of the Seventeenth Century. Aphra Behn as Creative Translator and Mediator Between the Two Cultures', (2007)
<<https://www.raco.cat/index.php/CLR/article/download/106211/148057>>
(Accessed 14th April 2022).

Bonnecorse's verses are often only two or four lines in length, whereas Behn's verses are far longer.

The first piece of prose is 'The Argument', which explains the background to the narrative which concerns a beautiful, wealthy, young couple called Iris and Damon. Iris is impelled go to the country for a period, while Damon must attend the King and is unable to accompany her. Aware of Damon's impatience at their enforced separation, Iris sends Damon a '*Watch* of my fashion' (284) that she describes as having been designed 'without fault, very just and good, and will remain so as long as you continue to love me' (284). Iris is anxious that if she and Damon are apart, he might not continue to love her. Iris wants to hold on to the present-ness of time that contains their love, which I shall call the 'nowness of now'. If Damon's love should cease, 'the String [of the watch] will break, and it will go no more' (284). The loss of Damon's love would mean that all types of time would stop for Iris.

Although the watch that Iris gives to Damon marks the passage of time, this time is held within the framework of the continuous present. Iris attempts to keep Damon's love in the linguistic temporality of 'now' by containing time within the watch and her instructions to him. However, to try to hold to 'now' is an impossibility; 'now' is slippery. As Dinshaw suggests there is no determinate moment in 'now',³² as soon as it is here it is gone, it ceases to exist. Iris clips the wings of the figure of Cupid in the middle of the watch, 'The naked *Love* which you will find in the middle of it, with its Wings clip'd' (286) to stop time flying away. Iris explains that Cupid's darts will point to each of the 24 hours on the watch in turn and direct how Damon should pass the time during her absence.³³ However, the watch will only work while the couple are apart, 'Tis only useful in my Absence' (284). When the couple are together again the watch will change its motion, 'twill change its Motion' (284), presumably returning to normal linear time.

Each hour of the clock instructs Damon to reflect on their love and on each half hour to sigh, 'since the quality of a Lover is, to sigh day and night' (287). Additionally, Iris instructs Damon's heart to keep time with the movement of the watch, '*Love* himself ought to conduct it' (287). It is the beating of Damon's heart

³² Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?* (2012), p. 2.

³³ This is an example of how Behn elaborates on Bonnecorse's original text as there is no mention of Cupid's wings being clipped in the original version.

that keeps the watch going, ‘your Heart should keep Time with the Movement’ (287). The simultaneous beating of Damon’s heart and the ticking of the watch combine to fuse cyclical and linear time ensuring that Damon’s body and mind are totally embedded in Iris’s temporal moment of ‘now’, although paradoxically in Iris’s absence. The time that the watch counts is dependent upon Iris instructions to Damon that she provides for each day that they are apart. The watch that Iris sends to Damon changes ‘normal’ time while they are apart and Iris’s ‘nowness of now’ time transcends the binaries of both the object (the clock) and their bodies, which in turn critiques heteronormative time through its strangeness and seeming impossibility. Reading this story through the lens of queer stylistics and considering that this story was written during a period when textualizing time in narratives was new, and primarily confined to diaries and travel narratives, the very idea of textualizing time and embodying such a strange temporality which disrupts normative linear time in this way, we can describe as queer because this is a moment in the text ‘where desire makes strange motions, takes strange shapes, or goes awry.’³⁴

The narrative continues with instructions as to what Damon should do at each hour of the day, what time to get up, to dress, to read letters, to write, to eat, to visit friends, to take a walk and to go to bed. For instance, eleven o’clock is the time for Damon to write his letters to her, ‘If my watch did not inform you ‘tis now time to Write’ (295). In this instruction both the watch and Iris are giving Damon instructions. At six o’clock Damon is instructed to go for a walk, ‘You yet have Time to Walk; and my Watch fore-saw, you cou’d not refuse your Friends, You must to the *Park*, or to the *Mall*’ (316). We can assume that the location Behn refers to here is St. James Park and the Mall in London. (Park scenes were familiar to Restoration audiences and were a regular feature of the Restoration theatre³⁵ where the public performance of body and style helped to define aristocratic masculinity.)³⁶ The watch not only marks out time for Damon but appears to be able to foresee what Damon might wish to do. Iris’s instructions to Damon are both a measure of her absence and a replica of her presence.

³⁴ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p, 3.

³⁵ J.L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 29-34.

³⁶ David Roberts, ‘Caesar’s Gift: Playing the Park in the Late Seventeenth Century’, *ELH*, 71 (2004), 115 - 139.

We have observed Behn's antipathy towards masculine libertinism in her dedication to Peter Weston. Through the narrative of *The Lover's Watch* Behn offers an alternative version of masculinity by telling a man how to behave as a lover and effectively creating a new version of masculinity through the clock and Iris's instructions. Iris's instructions take away Damon's masculine authority and freedoms, and while Behn uses his character to problematize Restoration masculinity, she also literally appears to unsex him through her total control over him and undermines conventional binaries of gender and sexuality – and it is this very crossing of normative boundaries of gender which we can describe as queer.³⁷ This control extends to instructing him to kiss her letters, 'you ought to kiss my Letters a Thousand times' (293) and instructs him to 'sigh with Pleasure' (294) when reading her letters. Iris then instructs Damon not to send her 'Letters of Gallantry' (297), rather, he should write 'all Tender, unaffected Love' (297) with 'more softness than Wit, in your Passion, more Nature, than of Art; more of the Lover, than the Poet' (297). Iris even expects Damon to thank her for allowing him to write to her, 'and thank me, that I permit you to write to me' (298). There is no moment of Damon's life that she does not seek to control through her instructions and the watch. At 8 O'clock Iris tells Damon, '[d]o not rise yet; you may find Thoughts agreeable enough when you wake, to entertain you longer in Bed' (287) and suggesting that he is allowed to 'reflect on all that I have ever said and done, that has been most obliging to you.... (288). At 2 O'clock Damon is instructed to have dinner, 'Leave me all those fond Entertainments, or you will dis-oblige me, and make Dinner wait for you; for my *Cupid* tells you, 'tis that Hour' (303). Iris even instructs Damon where to sit for dinner, 'I wou'd not have you plac'd over against a very Beautiful Object' (303). Iris's concern that Damon might sit next to a beautiful woman demonstrates her anxiety over Damon's faithfulness and her desire to contain any Libertine, masculine instincts he might have because the story offers a new notion of masculinity which runs counter to hegemonic notions of masculinity. The instructions that Iris gives to Damon are extremely prescriptive and overbearing and dictate what Damon should do, how Damon should conduct himself and how Damon

³⁷ Varnado refers to 'modes of feelings and expression [that are] are made queer by a twist to their shape—by their strange proliferations their unaccountable excess of intensity, their atypical and errant crossings'. Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020).

should think. However, as we will see later, Damon is far from deterred by Iris's instructions.

Iris's instructions are interspersed with poems which have a very specific and deliberate structure. Using the frame of queer stylistics and drawing on Varnado's work on reading for queer desire in Early Modern literature,³⁸ I will now undertake a close formal analysis of the poems in the story. Scodel suggests that following the religious, political and social upheavals of the period 1650 – 1740, 'Major talents cultivated discursive and didactic forms such as satire, epistle, and georgic in which public poetic voices participated directly in debates over politics, religion and manners'.³⁹ Additionally, Fussell states that 'The history of prosody.....is inseparable from the history of ideas'⁴⁰ and 'the art of versification, or of 'verse', is an act involving serious philosophical considerations.⁴¹ Weiss reminds us that Fussell describes a 'new syllabic prosody emerging in Restoration England [that] was indebted to both an older 'metaphysical theory of universal order' and a new mathematical 'Newtonian intellectual climate''.⁴² The purpose of this analysis is to show how Behn embeds her awareness of time, through Iris's marking of time and her anxieties, into the rhyme and rhythm of the poems in *The Lover's Watch*. Iris's desire to hold on to the queer temporality of the immediacy of now is embedded into the words, structure, rhymes and metre of the poems. I will show that by deconstructing the poems we can see how Behn uses the poems to reflect Iris's queer holding, or making, of time. At the beginning of the story, for example, is a poem called 'The Confession':

*That Love's my Conduct where I go,
And Love instructs me all I do.
Prudence no longer is my Guide,
Nor take I Counsel of my Pride.
In vain does Honour now invade,
In vain does Reason take my part;
If against Love it do perswade,
If it rebel against my heart. (285)*

³⁸ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020).

³⁹ Joshua Scodel, 'Lyric Forms' in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650-1740*, ed. Steven N. Zwicker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.120.

⁴⁰ Paul Fussell, *The Theory of Prosody in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Archdale Books, 1966), p. 37 <<https://archive.org/details/theoryofprosodyi0000fuss/page/37/mode/1up?view=theater&q=Newton>> [accessed 14 December 2022]

⁴¹ Fussell, (1966), p. 37.

⁴² Courtney Weiss Smith, *The Science of Prosody, Circa 1677*, <<https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/science-prosody-circa-1677>> [accessed 13 December 2022].

This poem comes just as we have learnt about Iris's gift of the watch to Damon. The poem begins with a regular metre in the first six lines (iambic tetrameters) and sounds like the ticking of a clock, or the marking of time. However, there is a slight variation (same metre but different stresses) in lines seven and eight where, crucially, the poem talks about rebelling against the supremacy of love (*If against Love it do perswade/If it rebel against my heart*). The interrupted metre suggests the disruption of time when love's sovereignty is challenged, which echoes the movement of the watch that will be interrupted if Damon ceases to love Iris. The choral repetition at the beginning of lines five and six of '*In vain*' and the subjunctive '*If*' at the beginning of the last two lines enhances the rhythmic beat of marking time. We might also consider Behn's use of the word 'if' as a representation of an alternative temporality within the context of her poetics and queering of time. Behn uses the word 'if' at the beginning of both the lines where the metre of the poem is disrupted, and the supremacy of love over other emotions of conduct is questioned. The word 'if' signifies a strange temporality, a time that may or may not exist, a past regret or a possibility in the future. 'If' is a word that is as slippery conceptually as Iris's temporality of the immediate and continuous present - 'the nowness of now' - and could be described as a queer temporality because it does not fit with a linear, heteronormative linear time.

Five pages later, under the sub-title '9 A-Clock' when Iris is suggesting that Damon shouldn't take 'too much pains in dressing' (290), there is a poem entitled 'The Question', this is the first stanza:

*Tell me! What can he design,
Who in his Mistress absence will be fine?
Why does he cock, and comb, and dress?
Why is the Cravat-string in print?
What does the Embroyder's Coat confess?
Why to the Glass this long Address?
If there be nothing in't?
If no new Beauty fill his Mind? (290)*

This poem has a less regular rhythm than 'The Confession'. Although most of the lines are iambic tetrameters, the second line, '*Who in his Mistress absence will be fine?*' (290) is a slightly longer line (pentameter) and the seventh line, '*If there be nothing in't?*' (290) is a trimeter (iambic line of three feet) with a preponderance of

single syllable words which gives a jerkiness to the rhythm and reflects the jumpiness of Iris's mind. Through the irregular metre of this poem, we can feel Iris's jealousy as she worries, '*If no new Beauty fill his Mind?*' (290). However, the repetitive questioning still gives the poem a sense of marking time. For example, the standard iambic rhythm in the line '*Why does he cock, and comb, and dress*' (290) sounds like a beat that is marking time. There is a repetition of questioning words at the beginning of each line beginning with '*Tell me*', followed by the adverbial '*Who*', '*Why*', '*What*', '*Why*' and then followed by more repetition as the subjunctive '*If*' is repeated at the beginning of the last two lines, as it was in 'The Confession'. These questions are persistent and appear to hold the poem (and time) from moving forward which echoes Iris's desire to hold on to the time when she and Damon are together. However, some of the beats force time forward in a paradoxical relationship between the rhythm and content.

The next poem is 'The Sigh' and follows Iris's instruction that while he is dressing Damon should wonder, 'Would it please Heaven, that I might see Iris today!' and that when he realizes it is impossible to see her, he should sigh and whisper to himself:

*Ah! Charming Object of my wishing thought!
Ah! Soft Idea of a distant Bliss!
That only art in Dreams and Fancy Brought'
To give short Intervals of Happiness
But when I waking, find thou absent art;* (291)

This poem has a regular, soporific, rhythm with the repetition of '*Ah*' at the beginning of the first two lines and regular iambic pentameters in lines one to five while Damon thinks of the sadness of finding Iris gone when he wakes up. Through an analytical approach to these poems, we can see how Behn writes the poems to reflect the queer temporality of the overall narrative arc. The structure and lexicology of these poems, contain what Varnado describes as 'literary traces of queerness'⁴³ which complement Behn's problematization of heteronormativity. It is not simply the words Behn uses; it is the combination of words and the varying rhythm of the poems that create for the reader Iris's paradoxical knowledge and desire for the

⁴³ Varnado, p. 8.

impossibility of holding onto the time when she and Damon are together and reveal her anxiety and jealous emotions.

In 'The Caution', we can feel Iris's jealousy and insecurity⁴⁴ at the thought of Damon visiting friends through the irregularity of the rhythm, as the poem appears to rise and fall with the different length of the lines:

*My Damon, if you Heart be kind,
Do not too long with Beauty stay;
For there are certain Moments, when the Mind
Is hurry'd by the Force of Charms, away.
In Fate, a Minute Critical there lies,
That waits on Love, and takes you by surprize.
A Lover pleas'd with Constancy,
Lives still as if the Maid he lov'd were by:
As if his Actions were in View;
Or that his very Soul she knew
Take heed; for tho' I am not present there,
My Love, my Genius, waits you every where. (312)*

We can see how emotions are concealed within the rhythm of the poems, only to be revealed when you listen to them. As we have seen, the rhythmic poems that sound like the regular movement of a clock are interspersed with irregular lines that seem to reflect Iris's jealousy and anxiety. Where the poems do not have a regular rhythm replicated throughout the stanza the irregular lines interrupt the flow of the poems in the same way that the poems themselves fracture the whole narrative to disturb conventional notions of linear time. On the other hand, where we find a regular rhythm and metre in the poems, they reflect a queer marking or holding of time that reflect Iris's desire to hold on to the queer temporality of now. Each poem also relates specifically to each instruction.

After the instructions about Damon eating dinner, Iris writes:

*My Damon, 'tho' I stint your Love,
I will not stint your Appetite:
That I would have you still improve,
By every new, and fresh Delight.
Feast, till Apollo hides his head.
Or drink the Am'rous God to Thetis Bed. (304)*

⁴⁴ Bonnacorse's title for this section is '*Visites un peu dangereuses*' (slightly dangerous visits) whereas Behn's title is the unequivocal '*Dangerous Visits*' and is an example of how Behn's changes the emphasis in Bonnacorse's work, in this case to intensify Iris's jealousy.

Surprisingly, at the end of Iris's narrative, we find Damon far from horrified at such a controlling gift. Damon is delighted with it and describes the watch as 'so dear and precious a Present as this of your charming *Watch*' (348). Damon describes a case he is having made for the watch, 'I will give it a Case of my Fashion' (348-9) and in the shape of a heart, 'I Design to give it the Figure of a Heart' (349). Damon does not just acquiesce to Iris's demands, the case he has made for the watch literally and figuratively encloses time. Damon's case for the watch does not appear in Bonnecorse's original text and is evidence of how Behn makes the story her own. The watch case signifies an encasing and protection of time and the desire to hold on to the 'nowness' of the time when they are together, while they are apart. Indeed, Damon goes on to describe in detail four cyphers, which he has designed to decorate the case and a clasp to keep the watch safe, 'but that it may be safe forever' (357). The clasp is made in the image of the lovers' clasped hands with the motto 'Inviolable Faith' (357). The case, the cyphers, and the clasp that Damon designs indicate his complete acceptance of Iris's desire to contain the 'nowness of now' that I described earlier in this chapter.

After Iris's narrative, Damon responds with a narrative that is also interspersed with poems. I describe above how in Behn's dedication to Peter Weston she reveals her view of Libertine masculinity, and she characterizes Damon as an alternative to this. Damon's poems reflect a faithfulness and exclusiveness that is quite the opposite to male Libertine poetry which is concerned with living and enjoying the moment at the expense of women.⁴⁵ For example, one of Damon's first poems to Iris includes the following stanza about constancy:

*A constant Love knows no Decay
But still advancing e'ery Day,
Will last as long as Life can Stay,
With e'ery Look and Smile improves,
With the same Ardour always moves,
With such, as Damon, charming, Iris loves! (354)*

In these six lines there are two rhyming triplets across the six lines, and all are tetrameters, apart from the final one which is a pentameter. This final line particularizes the theme of the poem, which is the constancy and permanence of true

⁴⁵ See for example the poems of John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester (1647-1680).

love, through the naming both Damon and Iris; it is also a longer line as if to underline the stanza with the difference serving to highlight the difference between Damon's poem and male Libertine poetry.

In the second part of the narrative, Damon reflects Iris's gift back to her literally through his own gift to her of a looking glass, 'I have here presented you with One, which I know is very true; and having been made for you only, can serve only you' (361).⁴⁶ Damon gives Iris a mirror because he thinks that she does not believe him when he says she is beautiful, 'shall I speak in vain of your adorable Beauty' (361). Like the watch that Iris gives to Damon, this mirror has been made specifically for Iris and will only work for her. Damon tells her that if other women look in the mirror it 'twill say nothing to their Advantage' (362). Both Iris and Damon's gifts appear to have some magical qualities that are very personal and will only work for their specific recipients.

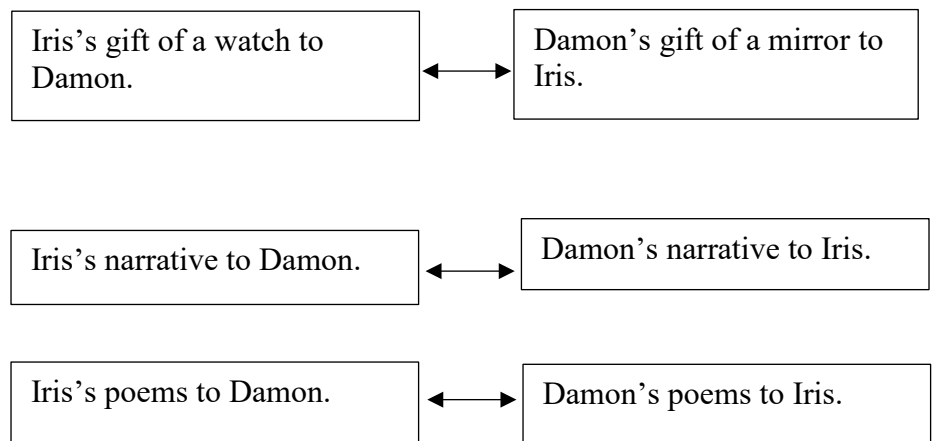
Damon also reflects Iris's gift to him by giving her tasks in a similar format to Iris's instructions to him. Rather than telling her what to do Damon instructs Iris to look in the mirror each day and consider a different part of her body. Damon's narrative uses the mirror as prosopopoeia, 'I am, my adorable Mistress! a faithful *Glass*; and you ought to believe all I say to you'. The mirror begins by regarding Iris's shape, 'I must begin with your shape, and tell you, without Flattery, 'tis the finest in the World' (362) and continues with her complexion, her hair, eyes, mouth and neck and then with her grace, 'With what a Grace you walk! – How free, how easie, and how unaffected!' and continuing with her discretion, goodness and complaisance, wit and modesty. In a similar way to Iris's instructions to Damon, Damon's narrative is also fragmented and interspersed with poems he has written to her. For example, after considering her hands, he writes:

*Oh! How the Hand the Lover ought to prize,
'Bove any one perculiar [sic] Grace,
While he is dying for the Eyes,
And doting on the lovely Face. (369)*

⁴⁶ The mirror that Damon gives to Iris and the catalogue of her attributes does not appear in Bonnacorse's original text.

This poem has an alternate rhyme scheme and the rhyming words at the end of the alternate lines appear to bat the words backwards and forwards, offering the sense of a reflection. Like his poem, Damon’s gift to Iris reflects hers to him both literally and metaphorically. See Figure 4 (p. 61) for examples of how the protagonists’ gifts, narrative and poems reflect each other in *The Lover’s Watch*).

Figure 4. Reflections in *The Lover’s Watch*



Through Damon’s gift of a mirror to Iris, Behn problematizes time. A mirror is an object that offers both reflection and refraction. When Iris looks in the mirror it signifies Iris’s entrapment in non-linear time (the moment of time that is trapped by the mirror is non-linear because to produce the mirror image in the glass light literally deviates off a linear progression and bends to produce the image in the mirror). The moment when Iris looks at her reflection in the mirror is caught in the temporality of ‘now’, an image of time that is not passing as it does when they are apart. Like the watch, the mirror stands in for the absent body of the lover. Damon thinks that Iris should believe him when he says she is beautiful, describing himself as ‘a faithful *Glass*’ (362). Damon believes he is offering Iris self-knowledge by suggesting that looking in the mirror will tell her of her charms each hour, ‘to spare what you call flattery/Consult your Glass each Hour of the Day’ (361). However, a close reading of this passage illuminates a gap in our understanding of the narrative, a strange sense that something is missing, a feeling that might be described as queer. We know that the mirror Damon gives her has been specifically designed for Iris and

will not work for anyone else, ‘but this reflects only *Iris*’. We know that Damon compares himself to her glass, ‘when I speak of your infinite Merit; and when I refer to your Glass, you tell me, that flatters, as well as *Damon*’ (360) and we know that Iris distrusted her own glass, as Damon says, ‘since you have so long distrusted your own Glass’ (361). However, these lines suggest that we might be expected to wonder more about the significance of the mirror that Damon gives Iris. The gift of the mirror from Damon to Iris works like the gift of the watch that Iris gives to Damon. Each gift embodies the physicality of the other and each gift is designed to hold on to the continuous present of what they had - the ‘nowness of now’ - while they are apart. However, there is a substantial difference between the two voices in the story. Iris’s voice is authoritative and controlling while Damon’s voice is primarily passive, accepting and reflective, both literary and figuratively. Behn thus positions Iris’s and Damon’s voices in opposition to heteropatriarchy. This dichotomy can be described as a queer inversion of both heteronormativity and gender roles.

Once the descriptions of the gifts, the instructions and the poems have finished the story ends with Damon’s distress at their parting, ‘there is no torment so great, as the Absence of a Lover from his Mistress’ (375) and a poem imagining their future, ‘Thou Joy in Prospect future Bliss extream’ (375). These two lines also reflect their attitude to time in the present and future, Damon’s distress at his time spent away from Iris and the prospect of future bliss to come. However, Damon wonders if their future time will be only a dream and never a reality, ‘but ne-er to be possest but in a Dream’ (379). The idea that their future may simply be a dream, a time that may never happen, serves to further highlight their anxiety and the idea that this temporality of their present - the ‘nowness of now’ - is a fantasy that both the protagonists are trying desperately to hold on to. Behn simultaneously shows that such desire is both intelligible and unachievable – and the juxtaposition of those time scales can be said to encapsulate notions of what queer time is.⁴⁷ This poem is very different to the *Carpe Diem* poems because rather than living for the moment, Damon is crucially very concerned for his future with Iris. I have shown how, using the methodology of queer stylistics, that there are several ways in which Behn’s story queers time. In summary these include Behn’s delay in beginning the story, the

⁴⁷ Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place*, (2005), Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?*, (2012). Freeman, *Time Binds*, (2010)

disjunction of the paratext and the fragmented presentation of the text where poems interrupt the narrative. All these together suggest the validity of a queer reading of this work. Iris's control over Damon effectively reverses their roles, problematizes his gender and sets up for a contemporary reader a queer validation of such reversals and problematization of binaries. The time that the clock counts while Iris and Damon are apart that holds time within what we might call a queer framework of the continuous present. The simultaneous beating of Damon's heart and the ticking of the watch combine to fuse cyclical and linear time to produce what we would now call a queer temporality.⁴⁸ Iris's instructions for each day that she is apart from Damon where she attempts to mimic the 'nowness' of the time when they were together can be described as queer because it is an impossibility which transcends the passing of time. The fact that when the lovers are reunited the magical clock will stop and the lovers will return to their normal time, which simultaneously feels like a continuous present but is also linear absolute time, highlights the queerness of the temporality of the poem's reading experience while Iris and Damon are apart. Damon's gift of a mirror to Iris signifies Iris's entrapment in a queer, non-linear time, while the image in the mirror stands in for the absent body of the lover.

The Lover's Watch is a love story that captures the anxieties of the period. It is an experimental story about our relationship with time, a story that problematizes time and confronts the theory of absolute time through the lover's desire to hold on to the moment that contains their love. It is also a story in which Behn problematizes the connection between masculinity and Restoration libertinism and a story about a strong woman with a voice who fashions an alternative masculinity for her lover. Most of all it is a story of a queer temporality which we see through the fractured linearity of the text, the poems that interrupt the narrative, the juxtaposed reading levels and the story itself where Iris attempts to hold on to the immediate and continuous present - 'the nowness of now'. Freeman describes queer temporality as being 'visible in the forms of interruption'⁴⁹ which resists and disrupts the temporal order, like the form of the narrative and the watch that Iris gives to Damon. Read through the prism of queer stylistics we can see how Behn's experimental and

⁴⁸ Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place*, (2005), Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?*, (2012), Freeman, *Time Binds*, (2010).

⁴⁹ Freeman, *Time Binds*, (2010), p. xxii.

disruptive engagement with time in the narrative structure, poetic discourse, plotting and characterization, suggest that the *The Lover's Watch* is queer.

Chapter Two

Paradise Queered: Behn's Ungendering of Paradise in 'The Golden Age' (1679)

I will use queer stylistics, queer temporality and diachronic historicism¹ as an analytical framework to reconsider Behn's poem 'The Golden Age' (1679). I will show how the poem uses and adapts pastoral conventions through several aesthetic means to describe an alternative version of paradise. In the poem Behn problematizes linear time and proposes a non-binary space in opposition to hegemony and patriarchy. I will reread, deconstruct and reinterpret the poem through an analysis of Behn's linguistics, semantics, grammar, imagery, intertextuality and narrative arc that is informed by queer theory and removes the assumptions of heteronormativity, binary gender and 'normative' paradigms. In her writing and in her poetry, Young suggests that Behn challenges 'the hegemonic conventions of both the genre and gender' and 'the binary, gendered opposition long assumed to be the truth rather than construct'.² However, in this poem Behn does more than challenge 'genre and gender'; she problematizes heteronormative temporality, argues that binary gender, patriarchal values and religion have destroyed paradise; argues that time has been manipulated by hegemony to support patriarchy and heteronormativity and all within one poem that both critiques the aforementioned and offers an alternative, queer, temporality.

'The Golden Age' is the first poem in Behn's collection, *Poems upon Several Occasions; with a Voyage to the Island of Love* published in 1679. Much of the inspiration for 'The Golden Age' comes from Behn's translation and adaption of the chorus from Act 1, Scene II of the Italian poet, Tasso's 1573 play *Aminta*.³ Both Tasso's pastoral drama and Behn's poem 'have a common source in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*'.⁴ As I progress I will include Behn's entire poem, stanza by stanza, within this chapter to allow the reader to re-read the poem with me through the lens of queer stylistics as I deconstruct and interpret the stanzas. Behn takes a piece of work from a man, in an essentially male medium, to produce a piece of work that

¹ See my Introduction and Chapter One (p. 44).

² Elizabeth V. Young, 'Aphra Behn, Gender and Pastoral', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 33 (1993), 523 - 543, (p. 537).

³ Heidi Laudien, 'Aphra Behn: pastoral poet', *Women's Writing*, 12, (2005), 43 - 58, (p. 47).

⁴ Jessica Munns, 'Pastoral and lyric: Astrea in Arcadia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 214.

subverts the socio-cultural authority of the phallus to produce a proto-*écriture* feminine:

Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where it writes itself, where it dreams, where it invents new worlds.⁵

The Golden Age was an idyllic temporality in Christian and Classical cultures ‘in which man lived effortlessly and in complete harmony with nature, free from time, change and death’.⁶ The quest for paradise dominated early modern utopian thought and ‘characteristically embodied the iconic tropes of the Golden Age’.⁷ The idea of a golden age originated in Hesiod’s⁸ *Work and Days* which describes the five ages of man beginning with the Golden Age, a period of peace and harmony. In the Christian tradition paradise is described as the Garden of Eden, ‘And the Lord God planted a garden eastwards in Eden’.⁹ In Renaissance poetry paradise was used in various ways, for example, as a metaphor for man’s struggle for perfection in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) or to show the return to The Golden Age as political in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590).¹⁰ Paradise has been used to celebrate ‘country houses or the pleasures of retirement to the country’¹¹ and in an ironic sense to describe a place of sexual freedom’, for example in Libertine poetry.¹² I will show in my analysis of stanza IV how Behn draws on a multiplicity of discourses including Miltonian, Digger and Libertine rhetoric to describe her version of a non-binary, pre-lapsarian age where masculine and feminine genders were considered constructs.¹³ The post-capitalist world has exposed gender as a construct and I will show, through

⁵ Hélène Cixous ‘The Newly Born woman’ in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers, (Oxford: Routledge, 1994), p. xxix.

⁶ Isabel Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 9.

⁷ Nicole Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia 1600-1800*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 17.

⁸ Hesiod, Greek poet 750 – 650 BC.

⁹ *The Holy Bible, Authorised King James Version*, (London: Collins, 2011), Genesis, 2:8.

¹⁰ Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas*, (1992), p. 11-12.

¹¹ Rivers, (1992), p.12.

¹² Rivers, (1992), p.12.

¹³ ‘Behn develops her theory of sexual politics in other pastoral poems, continuing to exploit the traditional form to argue that masculine and feminine gender are constructs which reinforce established power and fail to satisfy women's needs and desires. In "The Golden Age," the pastoral convention of nostalgia enables Behn to present a vision of a world without gendered social structure.’ (Young, ‘Gender and Pastoral’, (1993), p. 537).

my new reading, that Behn was delineating this assumption as early as the seventeenth century.

We might think of pastoral poetry as queer in relation to notions of particularly linear and absolute time. Grosz suggests that time, ‘needs to be thought in terms which liberate it from the constraints of the present, for time is the force of differing’.¹⁴ By deconstructing the poem using queer stylistics (as I have in the previous chapter) I will show how Behn liberates time from the linear and literally ‘straight’ modes of conception by switching between different temporalities. The *Carpe Diem* topos, which Behn incorporates at the end of her poem, challenges the nature of time with its emphasis on sex for pleasure, a continuous present and an erasure of the future. Bringing a diachronic historicist approach to this poem we can see how *Carpe Diem*’s fixation on mortality resonates with Edelman’s twenty-first century queer opposition to ‘the pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value’¹⁵ and the notion that the progression of time is only related to a future determined by procreation (see also my Introduction, p. 6 and Chapter One, p. 44). Edelman describes the ‘all-pervasive figure of the child’ in our culture that positions queer as narcissistic, antisocial and rejecting the future because of homosexuals’ inability to reproduce¹⁶ (an assumption which has proved fallacious). I suggest that like Edelman’s theory, the *Carpe Diem* poets embrace mortality, or what Edelman calls the ‘death drive’.¹⁷

Pastoral poetry traditionally romanticizes country life and contrasts mythical visions of a bucolic utopia¹⁸ with city and court life while presenting a time when ‘nature was a refuge from the ills and anxieties of urban life through a return to an unblemished Golden Age’.¹⁹ However, from Virgil to Spenser,²⁰ pastoral poetry has been used not simply to describe a natural, rustic way of life but as a sophisticated and subversive place to safely hide political messages and influence behaviour. van Es states, ‘Pastoral.... is very far from being a “safe” form of literature: right from its

¹⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 178.

¹⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, (2004), p. 3-4.

¹⁶ Edelman, (2004).

¹⁷ Edelman, (2004), p. 9.

¹⁸ In practice agricultural life was often hard and brutal, see Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City*, (London: Vintage, 2016), Ch. 4.

¹⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, (California: Harper Collins, 2019), p. 7.

²⁰ ‘Spenser recognized the dual capacities of pastoral convention to shield himself and to challenge authority as he exploited the form to create two different but inherently political means of expression.’ Young, ‘Aphra Behn, Gender and Pastoral’, (1993), p. 524.

beginnings it is a mode with strong political investment’;²¹ while Sidney expresses the fact that ‘sometimes, under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep, can include the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience’.²² The sixteenth-century writer and literary critic, George Puttenham described pastoral poetry:

... not of purpose to counterfeit or represent the rustically manner of loves and communication: but under the vaile of homely persons, and in rude speeches to insinuate and glance at greater matters, and such as perchance had not bene safe to have been disclosed in any other sort, which may be perceived in the Eglogues of Virgill, in which are treated by figure matters of greater importance then the loves of Titirus and Corydon. These Eglogues came after to containe and enforme morall discipline, for the amendment of mans behaviour....²³

Puttenham implies that pastoral poetry could be a place to hide matters that might not be safely disclosed in any other way, offering a possible hiding place for the subversive or queer, as I will show in this chapter. Pastoral poetry, as English suggests, ‘[h]as a long history of homoerotic association, dating back to the genre’s origination’.²⁴ The pastoral offers an alternative, idealized world that has traditionally ‘served as an imaginative safe-haven for homosexual passion’,²⁵ where ‘all desires arising from love are allowed and enabled to thrive’.²⁶ It is a safe place that endorses all love equally. Pastoral poetry offered Behn a queer space free from gender binary and gender performance while contradicting the seventeenth century political theory that organized domestic and public spheres along gender binary lines.

I will explore ‘The Golden Age’ through the lens of queer stylistics, diachronic historicism and queer temporality to reveal how Behn juxtaposes gender neutrality with very specific binary pronouns within the first few stanzas of the poem to subvert binary and patriarchal representations of a poetic space. Behn also repeats words for emphasis, mixes grammatical tenses and uses variations of adverbial time to contrast

²¹ Bart van Es, ‘Spenserian Pastoral’, in *Early Modern English Poetry: A Critical Companion*, eds. Patrick Cheney, Andrew Hadfield, Garrett A. Hadfield Jr., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 79.

²² Sir Philip Sidney, ‘The Defence of Poesy (1589)’, *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 229.

²³ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, eds. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 38.-39.

²⁴ Elizabeth English ‘Tired of London, Tired of Life: The Queer Pastoral in *The Spell*’ in *Sex and Sensibility in the Novels of Alan Hollinghurst*, ed. Mark Mathury, (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017) p. 99.

²⁵ Don Adams, *Alternative Paradigms of Literacy Realism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 7.

²⁶ Adams, (2014).

and juxtapose temporalities within the narrative arc of the poem. These linguistic strategies and word choices allow Behn to problematize gender and heteronormativity, reconsider the concept of time and subvert the linearity of time, to produce a queer temporality. Using Kristeva's theoretical approach which suggests that there are 'strange temporalities' and 'tributaries of time' which link female subjectivity, and that deconstructing traditional modalities of time²⁷ will free a space for individual difference²⁸ I show how Behn explores and reconsiders concepts of time subverting the patriarchal status quo and offering scope for alternative, ungendered and fluid sexualities. As Grosz suggests, reconsidering concepts of time, 'might result in new concepts of nature, culture, subjectivity and politics: they are explorations of how far we can push the present to generate an unknown – what is new, what might not have been'.²⁹ Behn's uses grammar, metaphor and rhyme to suggest precisely this and expose what Kristeva (in the twentieth century) describes as a 'shattering of discourse'³⁰ and a 'fragmentary phenomena'³¹ in the signifying practices of poetic discourse.

Before we begin our reading of the poem, we should perhaps consider how sex and gender was perceived in the Early Modern period. When Gowing states 'the gendered body of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is almost unrecognizable to modern eyes'³² she is referring to the physical appearance of the body in terms of visible marks left from the effects of disease and childbirth, but she continues, 'the very nature of sexual difference took different forms'.³³ It had been thought that much of the medical literature in the seventeenth century was based on the ancient model of sexual difference determined by Galenic humoral theory. Men were hotter and dryer than women while women had wetter and colder bodies. Women's sexual parts were the same as men's but because women were lacking the superior heat necessary to thrust their sexual parts outside their body, women's sexual parts were on the inside while men's parts were on the outside, eg. vagina as reversed penis, womb as reversed scrotum. Women in other words, are inverted and hence less

²⁷ For example, monumental time (eternal, transcending time), linear time (associated with the masculine) and cyclical time (biological rhythm associated with women).

²⁸ Kristeva 'Women's Time', (1981), p. 14 -17.

²⁹ Grosz, *Time Travels*, (2005), p. 1.

³⁰ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, (1984), p. 16.

³¹ Kristeva, (1984), p. 16.

³² Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 2.

³³ Gowing, *Common Bodies*: (2003), p. 2.

perfect, men'.³⁴ It was believed that seed from male and female bodies were required to combine for conception to occur and it was commonly believed that conception would not occur unless the woman experienced an orgasm. This has become the dominant theory in Renaissance literary study since Lacquer³⁵ and Greenblatt's work on Shakespeare.³⁶ However, the fact that cultural influences such as religion, folklore, popular stories and songs influenced people's knowledge (and domestic medicine was practiced by women across class levels) leads other theorists to debate these views.³⁷ Adelman queries whether the common view at the time would have been related only to medical texts and considers the validity of the historical evidence, suggesting that the 'elevation of the one-sex model to hegemonic status – as the single prototype that determined the way that early modern people thought about anatomical sexual difference - sometimes turns out to be only the most recent way of reinforcing lack, made respectable by its apparent claim to historical accuracy'.³⁸ In practice vernacular medical texts argued, questioned and recycled representations of sex and the body. While 'it has suited contemporary scholars to argue that the one-sex model of antiquity continued until the Enlightenment'³⁹ Billing provides a compelling argument 'questioning the cultural significance of one-sex anatomy'.⁴⁰ Quoting several Renaissance anatomy texts⁴¹ Billing makes a case for a two-sex model as holding 'currency at the turn of the seventeenth century'.⁴²

The existence of the hermaphrodite was of particular interest and is debated in many texts of the period, for example by Sharp, who states 'Some think that Hermaphrodites are only women that have their Clitoris greater, and hanging out

³⁴ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 26.

³⁵ Laqueur, *Making Sex* (1990), p. 26.

³⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

³⁷ Janet Adelman, 'Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare and the One-Sex Model' in Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell, eds. *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, (Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1999).

³⁸ Adelman, 'Making Defect Perfection', (1999), p.25.

³⁹ Christopher M Billing, *Masculinity, Corporality and the English Stage 1580 – 1635*, (London and New York: Routledge: 2008), p. 16.

⁴⁰ Billing, *Masculinity*, (2008), p. 16.

⁴¹ Including Thomas Vicary, *The Anatomy of the Body of Man* (1587) and Nicholas Udall, *A Treatise of Anatomy* (1553) Phillio Barrough, *The Method of Physicke* 1583).

⁴² Billing, *Masculinity*, (2008), p. 29.

more than others have and shew like a Mans Yard'.⁴³ Changing gender appears in Renaissance accounts where women become men as their genitals are pushed out, for example in the event of extreme exercise.⁴⁴ In 1680 the case of Arabella Hunt and Amy Pulter, Arabella Hunt's explanation, when she discovered her 'husband' was in fact a woman, was that Amy was 'of a double gender'.⁴⁵

Donoghue, who has researched extensively into lesbian relationships in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, establishes a link between hermaphrodites and homophobia. Donoghue suggests that the slippage between identification as hermaphrodite and lesbian went both ways and 'it was rare to find either mentioned without reference to the other'.⁴⁶ There was some confusion as to what was meant by the term 'hermaphrodite' ranging from double-sexed people to women who had slightly masculine characteristics and vice versa. Sharp links hermaphrodites to sexual deviance in women whose clitoris 'grows so long that it hangs forth at the slit like a Yard, and will swell and stand stiff if it be provided, and some lewd women have endeavoured to use it as men do theirs'.⁴⁷ Gowing suggests that in 'Renaissance culture we seem to be left with a world of flexible sex and no secure corporeal basis for gender roles'.⁴⁸ However fluid sex may have appeared, '[e]arly modern bodies were subject to the corporeal power of both family and state',⁴⁹ and gender roles were rigid and hierarchical.

Trumbach suggests that 'Europeans before 1700 presumed that all males desired women and adolescent boys';⁵⁰ while it was likely that women were attracted to both men and women, 'their relations with women were usually structured by differences in age'.⁵¹ However, while sex between men is well documented, it is more difficult to document sex between women as there are fewer legal sources to provide us with this information. If a person was not categorized as

⁴³ Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book or the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered*, ed. Elaine Hobby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1999), p. 40.

⁴⁴ See examples in Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp 122 -134.

⁴⁵ Patricia Crawford and Sara Mendelson, 'Sexual Identities in Early Modern England: The Marriage of Two Women', *Gender and History*, 7 (1995), 362 – 377, (p. 371).

⁴⁶ Emma Donoghue, 'Imagined more than women: lesbian as hermaphrodites, 1671-1766' *Women's History Review*, 2 (1993), pp. 832 – 848.

⁴⁷ Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, (1999), p. 40.

⁴⁸ Gowing, *Common Bodies* (2003), p. 3.

⁴⁹ Gowing, (2003), p. 5.

⁵⁰ Randolph Trumbach, 'The Transformation of Sodomy from the Renaissance to the Modern World and its General Sexual Consequences', *Signs*, 37 (2012) 832 – 848, (p. 835.)

⁵¹ Trumbach, 'The Transformation of Sodomy' (2012), p. 833.

male or female, they were considered hermaphrodite. Martin argues that the seventeenth and early eighteenth century was ‘a period of transition and instability in attitudes toward gender classification in Britain and Europe’.⁵² Scientific, legal and medical discourses about sex were slowly changing replacing the one-sex model of human anatomy,⁵³ affording ‘us a unique opportunity to discover individuals who experimented with gender and sexuality along a gender and sexual continuum’.⁵⁴ It is during this time, while ideas of gender were unstable, that Behn was subverting and manipulating gender and sexuality in her writing, challenging ‘the authority of dominant sexual discourses by turning indeterminate, private, gender positions into ‘public’ performances’.⁵⁵ In addition to using the ambiguous figure of the hermaphrodite some of Behn’s poems slide ‘between the binaries of male and female into a space of radical sexual indeterminacy’⁵⁶ such as ‘The Golden Age’.

‘The Golden Age’ is a poem of ten stanzas where the structure of the poem falls into the following parts, outlined in Figure 5 (p. 73).

⁵² Martin, “‘Beauteous Wonder,’ (1998), p. 193.

⁵³ See Laqueur, *Making Sex*, (1990) and Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999).

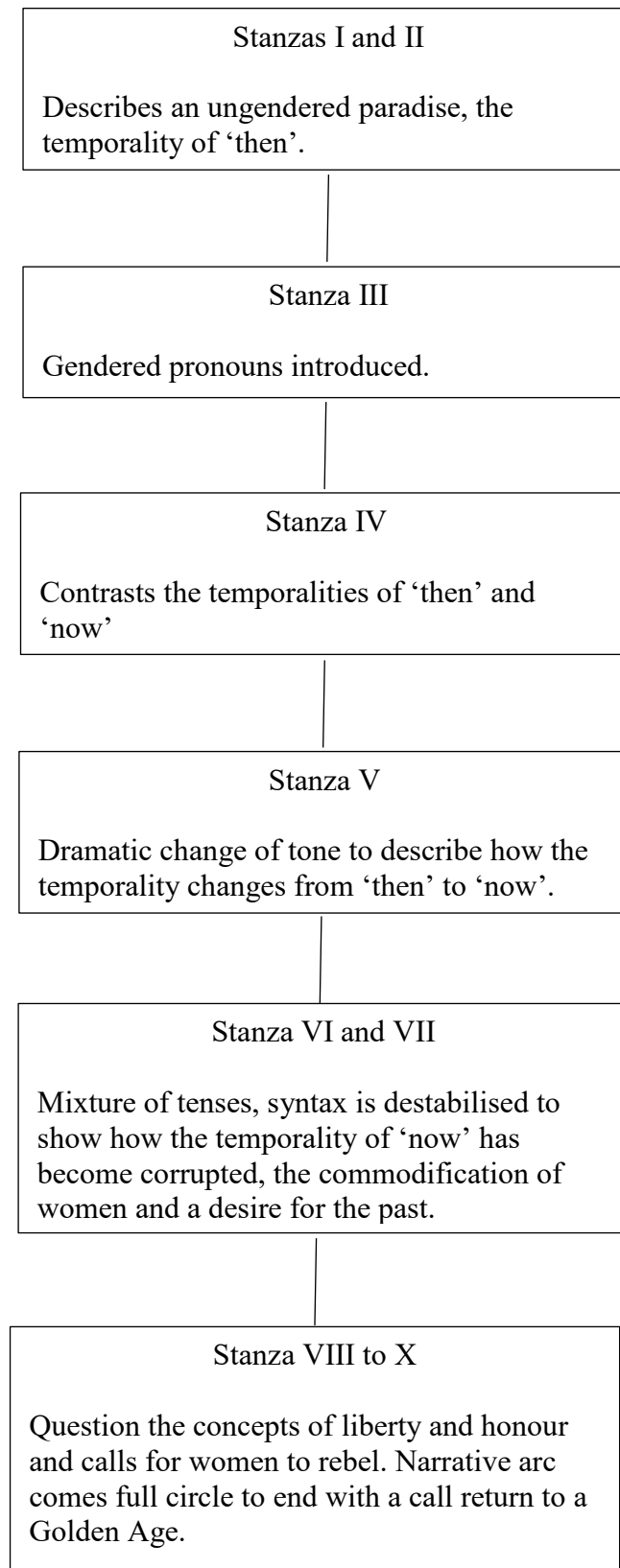
⁵⁴ Martin, *Beauteous Wonder*, (1998). p. 193.

⁵⁵ Martin, (1998), p. 192.

⁵⁶ Martin, (1998), p. 192.

Figure 5.

The Structure of 'The Golden Age'



In the first two stanzas of the poem gender is not specified (there are gendered nouns but not gendered pronouns) and Behn represents life as good.⁵⁷ (As part of my queer stylistic deconstruction of these stanzas, I have put some possessive and gendered pronouns and adverbial words of time in bold type.)

I
 Blest age! when ev'ry purling stream
 Ran undisturbed and clear,
 When no scorned shepherds on your banks were seen,
 Tortur'd by love, by jealousy, or Fear;
 When an eternal Spring dressed ev'ry Bough,
 And Blossoms fell, by new ones dispossessed;
 These **their** kind Shade affording all below,
 And those a bed where all below might rest.
 The Groves appear'd all dressed with Wreaths of flowers,
 And from **their** Leaves dropped Aromatic Showers,
 Whose fragrant Heads in Mystic twines above,
 Exchang'd **their** Sweets, and mix'd with thousand
 Kisses,
 As if the willing Branches strove
 To beautifie and shade the Grove
 Where the young wanton Gods of Love
 Offer **their** Noblest Sacrifice of Blisses.

II
 Calm was the Air, no winds blew fierce and loud,
 The Skie was dark'ned with no sullen Cloud;
 But all the Heav'ns laugh'd with continued Light,
 And scatter'd round **their** Rays serenely bright.
 No other murmurs fill'd the Ear
 But what the Streams and Rivers purl'd,
 When Silver Waves o'er Shining Pebbles curl'd;
 Or when young *Zephyrs* fan'd the Gentle Breez,
 Gath'ring fresh Sweets from Balmy Flow'rs and
 Trees,
 Then bore 'em on **their** Wings to perfume all the Air:
 While to **their** soft and tender Play,
 The Gray-Plum'd Natives of the Shades
 Unwearied sing till Love invades,
 Then Bill, then sing agen, while Love and Musick
 makes the day.⁵⁸

In these two stanzas Behn describes an ungendered and inclusive time of harmless and guilt-free sex where there is no binary distinction between masculine and

⁵⁷ Where words are in bold this is my addition to indicate to the reader where specific words are located within the poem.

⁵⁸ Aphra Behn, 'The Golden Age' in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 1, ed. Todd, Janet, (Ohio: Ohio State University, 1992) (All further citations refer to this edition.).

feminine and ‘all’ are equal. There are no gendered pronouns in these two stanzas and she uses the third person gender neutral word ‘their’ repeatedly including, ‘**their** kind Shade’ (I,7), ‘on **their** Wings to perform’ (II, 26) and ‘**their** soft and tender Play’ (II, 27). Although Behn does use the gendered noun ‘shepherds’ in stanza one, the shepherds are described as not being in the scene, so this use of a gendered noun does not preclude the stanza’s ungendered status or the sense of equality. In stanzas III and IV the poem becomes both temporal and gendered as it moves away from a description of an ungendered paradise into a binary temporality associated with notions of a linear temporality:

III

The stubborn Plough had then,
 Made no rude Rapes upon the Virgin Earth;
 Who yielded of **her** own accord **her** plenteous birth;
 Without the Aids of **men**;
 As if within **her** Teeming Womb
 All Nature, and all Sexes lay,
 Whence new Creations ev'ry day
 Into the happy World did come;
 The Roses filled with Morning Dew,
 Bent down their loaded heads,
 T'adorn the careless Shepherds Grassy Beds
 While still young opening Buds each moment grew,
 And as those withered, drest **his** shaded Couch a new;
 Beneath who's boughs the Snakes securely dwelt,
 Not doing harm, nor harm from others felt;
 With whom the Nymphs did Innocently play,
 No spiteful Venom in the wantons lay;
 But to the touch were Soft, and to the sight were Gay.

IV

Then no rough sound of Wars Alarms
 Had taught the World the needless use of Arms:
 Monarchs were uncreated **then**,
 Those Arbitrary Rulers over **men**:
 Kings that made Laws, first broke 'em, and the Gods
 By teaching us religion first, first set the world at
Odds:
 Till **then** Ambition was not known,
 That Poyson to Content, Bane to Repose;
 Each Swain was Lord o'er **his** own will alone,
His Innocence Religion was, and Laws.
 Nor needed any troublesome defence
 Against his Neighbor's Insolence.
 Flocks, herds, and ev'ry necessary good
 Which bounteous Nature had design'd for Food,
 Whose kind increase o'er spread the Meads and Plains,
 Was then a common Sacrifice to all th'agreeing Swains.

In stanzas III and IV Behn introduces gendered pronouns. Behn describes how the earth (the body of women) is gendered as female, using the pronoun ‘her’ three times (twice in line 33) to describe the earth which is allowed to reproduce in her own time, ‘Who yielded of **her** own accord **her** plenteous birth’ (III.33) and ‘As if within **her** Teeming Womb’ (III.35). Behn uses male pronouns to describe individuals, but also uses them symbolically to describe the State and the patriarchal triumvirate of God, ruler and father. Behn uses the word ‘men’ twice, ‘Without the Aids of **men**’ (III.34) and ‘Those Arbitrary Rulers over **men**’ (IV.52). The male gendered pronoun ‘his’ is used three times in these two stanzas, ‘And as those withered, drest **his** shaded Couch a new’ (III.43), ‘Each Swain was Lord o’er **his** own will alone,’ (IV.57) and in the following line, ‘**His** Innocence Religion was, and Laws’ (IV.58). Using pronouns Behn sets up a gendered binary opposition between nature as ‘her’ and the shepherd as ‘his’. In stanza IV this opposition becomes a metaphor for masculinizing time when ‘Kings that made Laws, first broke ‘em,’ (IV.53). In ‘both Western and non-Western cultures, nature was traditionally feminine’⁵⁹ but by the 1600s ‘the metaphor of the earth as a nurturing mother was gradually to vanish as a dominant image as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and to rationalize the world view’.⁶⁰ Traditionally, the image of nature in pastoral poetry was ‘an escape backward into the motherly benevolence of the past,’⁶¹ but in this poem Behn expands upon this tradition to argue for an alternative non-binary future where everyone lives in harmony, rather than simply longing for the past.

In stanza IV gender and time enter the poem simultaneously as Behn establishes the contrast between ‘then’ (when nature was feminized) in stanza III, a time when ‘The Roses filled with Morning Dew; (III,39) and ‘now’ (where time is masculinized) which coexist over the remainder of the poem. Behn describes the temporality of ‘then’ as the time before man interfered with paradise, ‘**Then** no rough sound of wars Alarms’ (IV, 49), ‘Monarchs were uncreated **then**/Those Arbitrary Rulers over **men**’ (IV, 51-52) and ‘till **then** Ambition was not known’ (IV, 55). Behn uses the word ‘then’ three times at the beginning of stanza IV and rhymes **then** with **men**, which can be read through a queer linguistic lens as a critique of the

⁵⁹ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, (2019), p. xxiii.

⁶⁰ Merchant, (2019), p. 2.

⁶¹ Merchant, (2019), p. 7.

fact that it was the addition of men that destroyed the paradisaical temporality that she describes as ‘then’. Behn uses the adverb ‘then’ to specifically locate this temporality in a time and space, suggesting that life has changed since the introduction of two distinct genders. Across these first four stanzas Behn’s semiotic practice disassociates her version of time from patriarchal/masculine linear time to a time that we might call queer, because there are no binary distinctions. Behn then implies through these minor shifts that the introduction of men and a binary temporality, destroys paradise.

In stanza V there is a dramatic change of tone. Behn begins this stanza by describing time’s passage through the adverbial ‘since’, ‘Right and Property were words **since** made’ (V.65), a time between the past and the present, between ‘then’ and ‘now’. She then uses the adverb ‘when’ to describe what caused the change of temporality from ‘then’ to ‘now’, from the past to the present, ‘**When** Power taught Mankind to invade/ **When** Pride and Avarice became a Trade’ (V.66-67). In other words, the temporality changes ‘when’ men embraced power and greed.

V

Right and Property were words **since** made,
When Power taught Mankind to invade:
When Pride and Avarice became a Trade;
 Carried on by discord, noise and wars,
 For which they barter’d wounds and scarrs;
 And to Inhaunce the Merchandize, miscall’d it Fame,
 And rapes, Invasions, Tyrannies
 Was gaining of a Glorious Name:
 Stiling their savage slaughters, Victories;
 Honour, the Error and the Cheat
 Of the Ill-natured Bus’ey Great,
 Nonsense, invented by the Proud,
 Fond idol of the slavish Crowd,
 Thou wert not known in those blest days,
 Thy poison was not mixd with our unbounded joyes;
 Then it was glory to pursue delight,
 And that was lawful all, that Pleasure did invite,
 Then 'twas the Amorous world injoy’d its Reign;
 And tyrant Honour strove t’usurp in vain.

In this stanza Behn uses the most violent language including ‘invasion’, ‘war’, ‘slaughter’, ‘rape’, ‘tyranny’ and ‘poison’. This stanza describes a linear temporality

associated with the beginnings of capitalism,⁶² as Behn draws attention to the commodification of this time⁶³ with the use of specific nouns and verbs, for example ‘Property’ (V,65), ‘trade’ (V68), ‘barter’d’ (V, 69) and ‘Merchandize’ (V, 70) and warns that ‘Pride and Avarice became a Trade’ (V, 68). Through her lexicology, grammar and imagery Behn shows that commodification, the desire for property and the politics of trade, made men violent and caused wars, ‘And Rapes, Invasions Tyrannies/Was gaining of a Glorious Name/Stiling their savage slaughters, Victories’ (V, 71-73). Behn shows how men rename the negative word ‘slaughters’ to the positive word ‘victories’ to indicate how rhetoric can be used to make war acceptable. Shortly after this, Behn’s uses the word ‘honour’ (‘Honour, the Error and the Cheat’, V,74) which on the surface suggests that cheats were held in high regard. However, if we consider that the word ‘honour’ is also used to suggest something that is morally right we can see how she is using this rhetoric to express quite the opposite, particularly as this is followed two lines later by the word ‘nonsense’, ‘Nonsense, invented by the Proud’ (V.76) to destabilizes the idea that the word ‘honour’ is something principled and I will discuss later in this chapter how Behn challenges the semantics, history and ideology surrounding the word ‘honour’.

In stanza VI Behn contrasts the past and present. Behn describes the past where ‘The flow’ry Meads, the Rivers and the Groves’ (84), but three lines later this temporality is invaded by the temporality of ‘now’, ‘And **now** the woods, and **now** the streames invade’ (VI,87) using the word ‘now’ twice for emphasis. Behn’s use of the word ‘now’ could mean here one moment, there the next, but I argue Behn’s use of the word ‘now’ make a distinction between how things were before and how they are now.

VI
 The flow’ry Meads, the Rivers and the Groves,
Were fill’d with little Gay-wing’d Loves:
 That ever smil’d and danc’d and play’d,
 And **now** the woods, and **now** the streames invade,
 And where they came all things **were** gay and glad:
 When in the Myrtle Groves the Lovers sat
 Oppressed with a too fervent heat;
 A Thousand Cupids fann’d their wings aloft,
 And through the Boughs the yielded Ayw **would** waft:
 Whose parting Leaves discovered all below,
 And every God his own soft power admir’d,

⁶² See Tompson. ‘Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’, (1967), p. 56-97 on the relationship between clock time and Capitalism.

⁶³ See my Introduction where I discuss Behn’s antipathy to the commodification of time.

And smil'd and fann'd, and sometimes bent his Bow;
 Where'er he saw a Shepherd uninspir'd.
 The Nymphs **were** free, no nice, no coy disdain
 Deny'd their Joyse, or gave the Lover pain;
 The yielding Maid but kind Resistance makes;
 Trembling and blushing **are** not marks of shame,
 But the Effect of kindling Flame:
 Which from the sighing burning Swain she takes,
 While she with tears all soft, and down-cast eyes,
 Permits the Charming Conqueror to win the Prize.

There is a mixture of tenses throughout stanza VI. Behn juxtaposes the past tense of 'were' with the present tenses of 'are' and 'now' together with 'makes', 'takes' and 'permits'. Behn uses 'now' as an adverb of time twice in line 87 and she switches between 'were', 'now', 'now', 'were' and 'would' in the first nine lines of the stanza and 'are' towards the end of the stanza. This mix of tenses disrupts the flow of poetic language which read through the lens of queer stylistics and Varnado's reading for traces of queer desire⁶⁴ could be described as queer. The disruptions to Behn's syntax destabilize the symbolic to enable the signification of an alternative temporality that has become corrupted.

Behn's semantics suggest that nature has lost its innocence. The lovers are 'Opprest' (VI, 90), the women 'Trembling and blushing' (VI,100) and 'tears all soft, and down-cast eyes' (VI, 103). The women's reactions may not be 'marks of shame' ('Trembling and blushing **are** not marks of shame,' VI,100) but this shame shows how the idyllic space becomes corrupted. The final line shows how time has objectified women, 'Permits the Charming Conqueror to win the Prize' (VI, 104) and women are commodified. This highly binary gendered description of the relationship between men and women, where fear as much as lust drives behaviour, shows us Behn using the conventions of pastoral poetics to produce political points and gendered insights.

In stanza VII Behn continues to use a mix of tenses to contrast the temporalities of 'then' and 'now', a linguistic strategy that signals a simultaneous desire for a lost past and its passing that we might describe as queer.

VII
 The Lovers **thus, thus** uncontroul'd did meet,
Thus all their Joys and Vows of Love **repeat**:

⁶⁴ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p.3.

Joys which were **everlasting**, **ever** new
 And **every** vow inviolably true;
 Not kept in fear of Gods, no fond Religious cause,
 Nor in obedience to the duller Laws.
 Those Fopperies of the Gown were **then** not known,
 Those vain those Politick Curbs to keep man in,
 Who by a fond mistake created that a sin;
 Which freeborn we, by right of Nature claim our own.
 Who but the Learned and dull moral Fool
 Could gravely have foreseen, man ought to live by Rule?

As the narrative moves into the final stages here Behn disrupts and slows the pace of reading by repeating the word 'thus' three times in the first two lines. This repetition and engagement with the reader continues to destabilize and queer the temporality of the poem and affect the reader in a queer way. In successive lines there are several other words in this stanza which signify repetition such as 'repeat' (VII, 106), 'everlasting' (VII, 107), 'ever' (VII 107) and 'every' (VII, 108). These repetitive words come immediately prior to the line 'Not kept in fear of Gods, no fond religious cause/Nor in Obedience to the duller Laws' (VII, 109-110) and they serve to highlight the importance of this line and her ambivalence to religion, where Behn accuses religion of keeping people in fear.

The last stanzas of the poem question liberty and the concept of honour and narrative comes full circle to culminate in a call for a return to the Golden Age, for the liberation of women and for freedom of speech where women can speak unconstrained, 'Let the wishing Maid confess/What all your Arts would keep conceal'd' (X, 168-169) and a loving and peaceful sexual liberation, 'And let the peaceful *Swain* love on' (X, 175).

VIII

Oh cursed Honour! thou who first didst damn
 A woman to the Sin of shame;
 Honour! that robb'st us of our Gust,
 Honour! that hindered mankind first,
 At Love's Eternal Spring to squench his amorous thirst.
 Honour! who first taught lovely Eyes the arte,
 To wound, and not to cure the heart:
 With love to invite, but to forbid with Awe,
 And to themselves prescribe a Cruel Law;
 To veil 'em from the Lookers on,
 When they are sure the slave's undone,
 And all the Charmingst part of Beauty hid;
 Soft looks, consenting Wishes all den'd.

It gathers up the flowing Hair,
 That loosely plaid with wanton Air.
 The Envious Net, and stinted order hold,
 The lovely Curle of Jet and shining Gold;
 No more neglected on the Shoulders hurl'd:
 Now dressed to Tempt, not gratify the World:
 Thou, miser Honour, hoard'st the sacred store,
 And starv'st thyself to keep thy Votaries poor.

IX

Honor! that put'st our words that should be free
 Into a set formality.
 Thou base debaucher of the generous heart,
 That teachest all our Looks and Actions Art;
 What love design'd a sacred Gift,
 What Nature made to be possest,
 Mistaken Honour made a Theft,
 For Glorious Love should be confessed:
 For when confin'd, all the poor Lover gains
 Is broken Sighs, pale Looks, Complaints & Pains.
 Thou foe to Pleasure, Nature's worst Disease,
 Thou tyrant over mighty Kings,
 What mak'st thou here in Shepherds Cottages;
 Why troublest thou the quiet Shades & Springs?
 Be gone, and make thy Fam'd resort
 To Princes Pallaces;
 Go Deal and Chaffer in the Trading Court,
 That busy market for Phantastick Things;
 Be gone and interrupt the short Retreat
 Of the Illustrious and the Great;
 Go break the Politicians sleep,
 Disturb the Gay Ambitious Fool,
 That longs for Scepters, Crowns, and Rule,
 Which not his Title, nor his Wit can keep;
 But let the humble honest *swain* go on,
 In the blessed paths of the first rate of man,
 That nearest were to Gods alli'd
 And form'd for love alone, disdain'd all other Pride.

As we can see from this swift read-through of the poem's narrative arc the turn halfway through stanza IX sees Behn speaking directly to the reader ('Be gone, and make thy Fam'd resort/To Princes Pallaces, IX, 152-153) to suggest that honour and pride should be confined to the court ('Go Deal and Chaffer in the Trading Court/That busie Market for Phantastick Things', IX, 152-155) which she describes as a place of trade and ambition.⁶⁵ Behn wishes this temporality to be gone and to

⁶⁵ The dichotomy between court and country is a traditional topic in pastoral poetry, usually depicting the court as corrupt and the country as a place of retreat. As Williams suggests: 'the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence and simple virtue' and the city as 'a place of noise, worldliness and ambition'.⁶⁵ While Tasso writes 'Go shake the sleep at night/of all the great and bold'⁶⁵ Behn suggests 'Be gone and interrupt the short Retreat/Of the Illustrious and the

return to a time when 'In the blessed paths of the first rate of man/That nearest were to Gods alli'd /And form'd for love alone, disdain'd all other Pride' (IX. 163-165) as this final stanza returns the reader to the alternative queer temporality she presents at the beginning of the poem.

X

Be gone! and let the Golden age again
Assume its Glorious Reign;
Let the young wishing Maid confess,
What all your Arts would keep conceal'd:
The Mystery will be reveal'd,
And she in vain denies, whilst we can guess,
She only shows the jilt to teach man how,
To turn the false Artillery on the Cunning Foe.
Thou empty Vision hence, be gone,
And let the peaceful *Swain* love on;
The swift pac'd hours of life soon steal away:
Stint not, yee Gods, his short live' joy.
The Spring decays, but when the Winter's gone,
The Trees and Flowers a new come on;
The Sun may set, but when the night is fled,
And gloomy darkness does retire,
He rises from his Watry bed:
All glorious, Gay, all drest in Amorous Fire.
But *Sylvia*, when your Beauties fade,
When the fresh Roses on your Cheeks shall die,
Like Flowers that wither in the Shade,
Eternally they will forgotten lye,
And no kind Spring their sweetness will supply.
When Snow shall on those lovely Tresses lie,
And your fair Eyes no more shall give us pain,
But shoot their pointless Darts in vain,
What will your duller honour signifie?
Go boast it then! and see what numerous Store
Of lovers will your Ruin'd Shrine Adore.
Then let us, *Sylvia*, yet be wise,
And the Gay hasty minutes prize:
The Sun and Spring receive but our short Light,
Once sett, a sleep brings an Eternal Night.

Great' (IX, 156-157). Tasso then writes: 'let us live and go/the happy way that lived the men of old'⁶⁵ while Behn writes: while those who live in 'Shepherds Cottages' (IX, 150) should be left alone as 'That nearest were to Gods Alli'd/And form'd for love alone, distain'd all other Pride' (IX 164-165).

In the poem's final stanza Behn unites the radical undermining of conventional time and grammar and the narrative calls for a return to paradise ('Be gone! And let the Golden age again/Assume its Glorious Reign', X 166-167). Behn calls on women ('To turn the Artillery on the Cunning Foe/thou empty Vision hence, be gone/And let the peaceful Swain love on', X, 173-175) to stand up against the temporality of 'then', when women had to consider honour, to be coy and dress for men. In the second half of stanza X Behn states that life is short ('Stint not yee Gods his short liv'd Joy', X178) and suggests that before women get old ('But *Sylvia* when your Beauties fade', X, 184) women should think about whether there is any point in honour ('What will your duller honour signifie?' (X, 192). Behn uses 'when' as a warning of time passing ('When the fresh Roses on your Cheeks shall die', X, 186) and ('When Snow shall on those lovely Tresses lie', X 190) and warns women to be wise ('Then let us *Sylvia* yet be wise/And the Gay hasty minutes prize', X, 195-196) and live for the day in the temporality of 'now'.

As we have seen, 'The Golden Age' encompasses different temporalities beginning with what we can now call a queer temporality offering an alternative to heteronormativity, a fleeting, vulnerable and fragile temporality, a time 'When an Eternal Spring drest ev'ry Bough' (I, 5) and blossoms offered shade and a place to rest, 'These their kind Shade affording all below/And those a bed where all below might rest' (I.7-8). The second temporality warns how paradise will be destroyed, 'And Rapes, Invasions, Tyrannies/Was gaining of a Glorious Name' (V, 71-71). The final stanza is a call for a return to the Golden Age and a rallying call for women to reject restrictions and live, 'All Glorious, Gay, all drest in Amorous Fire' (X, 183). At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed how the *Carpe Diem* motif challenges the idea of a heteronormative temporality and read through the lens of queer stylistics, this motif queers time; and perhaps we can return to other poems written in this form through this lens to reconsider the insertion of queer readings into all so-called Golden Age poetry. In the finale of her poem, Behn uses the *Carpe Diem* motif as a rallying call to all women to rebel, to forget about honour, to seize the day and enjoy their desires without the restrictions placed on them by a binary, masculine and patriarchal society. Hyman suggests '*carpe diem* poetry offers its readers a

provocative asynchrony, a deliberate untimeliness'.⁶⁶ Hyman's radical positioning on *Carpe Diem* poetry accords with my positioning of Behn's queering of time that I discuss at the beginning of this chapter and Behn's adaptation of the *Carpe Diem* motif, together with her female voice, adds to the queerness of the poem.

Kristeva argues that 'breaking grammatical rules subverts the temporal and causal assumptions built into conventional sentence structure'⁶⁷ and we have seen through the prism of queer stylistics how Behn problematizes gender and subverts time through her use of grammar and semantics across the narrative arc of the poem. 'The Golden Age' begins with Behn describing paradise, a nostalgic, oneric world of permanent springtime, a pastoral idyll of clear streams, blossoms, cloudless skies and gentle breezes. Nature is presented as a desiring and ungendered body where lovers, 'Exchang'd their Sweets, and mix'd with thousand Kisses' (I,12). These early stanzas are queer because they are 'unsettling in relation to heteronormativity'⁶⁸ in terms of their problematization of gender, space and temporality. I quoted earlier how Grosz suggests that we should think of time in a way that liberates it from the constraints of the present⁶⁹ and as we have seen through this poem Behn's poetic discourse liberates us and offers a different, queer concept of time, which is as relevant now as it was over three hundred years ago.

I will now show how Behn deliberately shapes her reader's interpretation of her work through her interconnectedness with other texts.⁷⁰ Read through the prism of queer stylistics we can see that intertextuality can be used as an additional mechanism to disrupt and subvert time. Kristeva calls this interconnectedness in texts 'intertextuality' or 'transposition' and describes intertextuality as 'the *transposition* of one (or several) sign systems(s) into another'.⁷¹ The pastoral mode is infused with intertextual self-consciousness. The nature of connecting old and new texts might be seen as a queer form of haunting, a re-writing and revisioning of old texts that gives

⁶⁶ Wendy Beth Hyman, *Impossible Desires and the Limits of Knowledge in Renaissance Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 108.

⁶⁷ Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics', *Feminist Review*, 18 (1984), 56 – 73, (p. 60).

⁶⁸ Carla Freccero, 'Queer Times', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 106 (2007) 485 – 494, (p. 485).

⁶⁹ Grosz, *Time Travels*, (2005), p. 178.

⁷⁰ 'Intertextuality is the recognition that no text is ever truly autonomous; no text is ever produced or read apart from other texts. A text always implicates other texts in its weave.' In Robert M Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) p. 88.

⁷¹ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, (1984), p. 59-60.

new meanings to old texts and where the temporal return subverts and dislocates time. A queer reading shows us that the interconnectedness between texts resulting from deliberate or unconscious intertextuality combines different temporalities together. The reader is drawn into the period of the old text, while reading the new. This combination of temporal experiences and the feelings that it engenders, while not legibly queer, give us a sense of something strange or unexpected that we might call queer. Behn's readers would have been familiar with a sub-genre of queer pastoral poetry, for example in Marvell's 'The Garden' where, 'such was that happy garden-state/while man there walked without a mate'⁷² and in *Paradise Lost* where Eve is attracted to her own image in a lake, before God leads her away to Adam:

As I bent down to look, just opposite.
 A shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared
 to look on me; I started back,
 It started back, but pleased I soon returned
 Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
 Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,⁷³

Stanza II of 'The Golden Age' echoes Spencer's 'Prothalamion', where he contemplates the fleeting perfection of marriage and where nature is offered as a respite from the politics of court, 'Calme was the day, and through the trembling ayre/Sweete breathing zephyrus did softly play.'⁷⁴ Behn's readers would have expectations of this generic form of pastoral poetry and through the use of self-conscious but coded intertextuality across the poem Behn represents the fleeting perfection of the Golden Age.

Read through the lens of queer stylistics, we find that Behn's use of intertextuality strengthens her description of the Golden Age. By using images that would have been familiar to her readers she brings different temporalities together and offers a description of a queer space that transcends time. Stanza III reminds us of Ovid's description at the beginning of *Metamorphoses*. Ovid writes, 'The fertile earth yet was free, untouched of spade or plough/And yet it yielded of itself of

⁷² Andrew Marvell, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno, (London: Penguin Books, 1996), VIII:1&2, p. 101.

⁷³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), Book IV, 460-466, p. 85.

⁷⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, eds. Richard A, McCabe, (London: Penguin Books, 1999) I:1&2, p. 492.

everything enough'⁷⁵ while Behn writes, 'The stubborn plough had then/Made no rude rapes upon the Virgin Earth' (III, 31-32). Behn's use of 'The stubborn plough' (III, 31) is explicitly a euphemism for man whilst the earth is gendered as female. In her description of paradise before it is destroyed, Behn appropriates the phrase 'teeming womb' ('without the Aids of men/As if within her Teeming Womb', III, 34-35) from the speech in Shakespeare's *Richard II* ('This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings')⁷⁶ where John of Gaunt describes England as 'This other Eden, demi-paradise'⁷⁷ before it was 'bound in shame'⁷⁸ and uses it in a similar context where a perceived temporal paradise is about to be destroyed and where Behn genders paradise and Shakespeare genders England, as female. Behn's use of intertextuality here allows a woman poet's voice to participate in the pastoral 'conversation' and, in her own words, 'to tread in those successful Paths my Predecessors have so long thriv'd in'.⁷⁹ Intertextuality describes the relationship between texts, as Kristeva suggests, 'the *transposition* of one (or several) sign systems(s) into another'⁸⁰ and we can see how Behn does this from what I have shown in this chapter.

In stanza III Behn uses intertextuality to cascade coded sexual, and what we might describe as queer, ideas from Hesiod and Ovid, through Shakespeare and Tasso and into her own work. In *Metamorphoses* the temporality described by Ovid can be described as queer because the earth was fruitful without being cultivated, in other words nature is seen as collaborative, rather than gendered, 'And gentle blast did cherish things that grew of own accord/The ground, untilled, all kind of fruits did plenteously afford'.⁸¹ In a similar vein in *Aminta*,⁸² Tasso describes how the 'first fair age of gold' (*Aminta*, I.2.319) was fruitful without the interference of man.

In his chorus Tasso describes this time as paradise, not just because streams ran with milk, but because the land was fruitful without being ploughed:

Oh, first fair age of gold,

⁷⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), i.115-116, p. 34.

⁷⁶ 'This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings' William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Andrew Gurr, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), (II, I, 51).

⁷⁷ *Richard II* (II, I, 42).

⁷⁸ *Richard II* (II, I, 63).

⁷⁹ Aphra Behn, Preface to 'The Luckey Chance' in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol 7, ed. Janet Todd, (London: William Pickering, 1996), 120-121, p. 120.

⁸⁰ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, (1984), p. 59-60.

⁸¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding (2002), i.123-124, p. 34.

⁸² Torquato Tasso, *Aminta*, trans. Charles Jernigan and Irene Marchegiani Jones (New York: Italica `press, 2000).

Not just because streams ran
With milk, and trees they honeyed dew distilled:
Nor that earth did mold
Its fruit from unploughed land (*Aminta* I.2.319-323)

Behn expands the metaphor of an unploughed, fruitful land by describing how women are not torn apart or penetrated by men, as the plough (man) makes ‘no rude rapes upon the virgin Earth’ (III, 32). The idea of a time where the land is fruitful in this way creates a strange, alternative, exotic, non-normative temporality. Continuing to draw from Tasso, Behn reinterprets and expands the following lines from *Aminta*, ‘and serpents roamed not ire nor venom filled/no dark cloud ever chilled’ (*Aminta* I.2.324-325) to write:

Beneath who’s boughs the Snakes securely dwelt,
Not doing harm, nor harm from others felt;
With whom the Nymphs did Innocently play,
No spiteful Venom in the wantons lay;
But to the touch were Soft, and to the sight were Gay. (III.44-48)

In these lines Behn uses coded phallic imagery to describes an unfallen, guilt-free world without masculine virility or sexual disease. Behn codes snakes as phalluses that were benign and unthreatening. In Behn’s paradise the phallus contains no sperm, (or perhaps no syphilis), ‘No spiteful venom’ (III,47) and is flaccid, ‘But to the touch were soft’ (III,48). Munns suggests that Behn offers a ‘subversive vision of female sexuality and desire freed from either the power of the phallus or the failure of the penis’.⁸³ But it is more than a ‘subversive version of female sexuality’ it offers a version of a gender free paradise. This is a world unconcerned by sexual difference and where men are not defined by an erect phallus.

Stanza IV’s description of paradise as time before war and weapons echoes Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* where he writes, ‘No horn nor trumpet was in use/no sword nor helmet worn’.⁸⁴ Behn suggests that there was no distinction between people who are ruled and those who rule, in the temporality of ‘then’, ‘Monarchs were uncreated then’ (IV, 51). Moreover, the reader is warned how both hegemony, ‘Those Arbitrary Rulers over men’ (IV, 52); and the teaching of religion will create division,

⁸³ Jessica Munns, ‘‘But to the touch were soft’’: pleasure, power and impotence in ‘The Disappointment’ and ‘The Golden Age’ in Janet Todd, ed. *Aphra Behn Studies*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 187.

⁸⁴Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding (2002), i.113, p. 34.

‘By teaching us Religion first, first set the World at Odds’ (IV, 54). In this perfect queer temporality, there was no ambition, ‘Till then Ambition was not known/That Poyson to Content, Bane to Repose’ (IV, 55-56) echoing Milton’s ambivalence to fame in *Paradise Lost*, ‘Let none admire/That riches grow in hell; that soil may best/Deserve the precious bane.’⁸⁵

Although Behn’s parliamentary politics were far removed from the Diggers, in terms of her beliefs about gender and sexuality, they were not so different. Behn’s interpretation of paradise offers a radical reading of paradise recalling Digger rhetoric. The first Digger manifesto begins:

In the beginning of Time, the great Creator Reason, made the Earth to be a Common Treasury, to preserve Beasts, Birds, Fishes, and Man, the lord that was to govern this Creation; for Man had Domination given to him, over the Beasts, Birds, and Fishes; but not one word was spoken in the beginning, that one branch of mankind should rule over another. And the Reason is this, Every single man, Male and Female, is a perfect Creature of himself; and the same Spirit that made the Globe, dwels in man to govern the Globe; so that the flesh of man being subject to Reason, his Maker, hath him to be his Teacher and Ruler without him, for he needs not that any man should teach him, for the same Anoynting that ruled in the son of man, teacheth him all things.⁸⁶

This radical statement includes the belief that the earth was created by reason, the land belonged to everybody, no man has the right to rule over another and that men and women were created equally. We can find these millenarian notions in Behn’s work, for example the line ‘Each Swain was Lord o’er his own will alone’ (IV, 57) is in sympathy with Winstanley’s line ‘but not one word was spoken in the beginning, That one branch of mankind should rule over another.’⁸⁷ While Behn’s final line of stanza IV, ‘Was then a common Sacrifice to all th’agreeing Swaines’ (IV, 64) suggests the earth belongs to everybody, described by Winstanley as a ‘Common Treasury’.⁸⁸ In this stanza we find Behn using intertextuality to echo Winstanley’s radical views in her poem.

In stanza VII, through the prism of intertextuality, Behn questions the Christian narrative of repression as the consequence of sin, ‘Who by a fond mistake Created that a Sin’ (VII, 113). In a similar way Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, describes Adam as

⁸⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard, (2000), Book 1, 690-692, p.20.

⁸⁶ *Tony Benn Presents Gerrard Winstanley A Common Treasury*, ed. Andrew Hopton, (London and New York: Verso, 2011), p. 6.

⁸⁷ *Tony Benn Presents Gerrard Winstanley*, (2011).

⁸⁸ *Benn*, (2011).

having free will, ‘Sole pledge of his obedience: so will fall/He and his faithless progeny: Whose fault?/Whose but his own?’.⁸⁹ Milton frees Eve from blame for the Fall, ‘Daughter of God and man, immortal Eve/For such thou art, from sin and blame entire’.⁹⁰ In the line, ‘Which freeborn we, by right of Nature claim our own’ (VII, 114)⁹¹ although Behn uses the word ‘freeborn’ rather than ‘liberty’, she does describe liberty, ‘Each Swain was Lord o’er his own will alone’ (IV, 58). If we are alert to key words through intertextual recognition, we find that there is a tri-partite discourse about liberty, both explicit and implicit in the poem. In the seventeenth century the definition of ‘liberty’ was becoming more explicitly political⁹² and in his pamphlet against censorship, *Areopagitica*, Milton states, ‘Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.’⁹³ Behn’s use of intertextual engagement effectively draws attention to other writers as well as her own work’s question about sin, free will and liberty to compliment her quest for the free, gender neutral or ‘queer’ temporality that she is exploring in her poem.

Earlier in this chapter I suggested that in stanza V Behn destabilizes the word ‘honour’. If we look more closely at the dynamics of the word in the poem, using our queer stylistic approach, we can also see how Behn can be said to queer epistemology and politics. In stanza VIII the word honour is repeated four times at the beginning of the stanza:

Oh cursed Honour! thou who first didst damn
 A woman to the Sin of shame;
 Honour! that robb'st us of our Gust,
 Honour! that hindered mankind first, (VIII.117-120)

As Gowing acknowledges ‘honour has generally been conceptualized as one of the means by which standards of behaviour and social relations between men and

⁸⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, (2000), Book III, 95-97, p. 55.

⁹⁰ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IX, 291-292, p. 193.

⁹¹ The phrase ‘freeborn we’ is reminiscent of Leveller rhetoric, Leveller women petition parliament for the rights of women in the 1640s, Diane Purkiss, *The English Civil War*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2006) p. 506-507.

⁹² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, (London: Fontana Press, 1988) p. 182.

⁹³ John Milton, *Areopagitica and Other Writings*, ed. William Poole, (London: Penguin Classics, 2014), p. 136.

women were regulated'⁹⁴ and Thomas suggests that in the Early Modern period 'women's retention of their chastity [was] their only involvement in honour' and 'women's presumed overriding concern [was] with their sexual reputation'.⁹⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that honour should feature in Behn's poetic problematization of paradise as binary and patriarchal. Critics have discussed the way honour has been used and interpreted in Behn's novella *Oroonoko* (1688) in different ways,⁹⁶ and Gowing describes sexual dishonour in the Early Modern period as 'a concept and a process with the disrupting power of its own, applied most powerfully to women' and which shamed women into conformity.⁹⁷ It is the way honour/dishonour is applied to women that is Behn's focus in the 'The Golden Age' where the word 'honour' describes the moral conduct inflicted on women because of binary gender in the temporality of 'now'. Honour is perceived as something heroic for men, like fighting a duel over a woman or protecting their family, but for women it is primarily about saving their honour, being chaste and 'saving' themselves for their husbands.⁹⁸ Behn argues that by dividing the sexes 'honour' damns women for the 'Sin of shame' (VIII, 118) and states that honour, as moral conduct, not only represses women ('Soft Looks, consenting Wishes, all deny'd', VIII, 129) but frustrates the desires of men.

'Honour' and the Blazon tradition are part of a discourse about appropriate femininity and within the same stanza that Behn problematizes the word 'honour' she conflates this with a critique of the Blazon tradition. Petrarch's portrayal of feminine beauty, where women are portrayed through their individual body parts, 'informed the Renaissance norm of a beautiful woman'.⁹⁹ Behn shows us that it was

⁹⁴ Laura Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3 (1996) 225 - 234, (p. 225).

⁹⁵ Courtney Thomas, 'The Honour & Credite of the Whole House: Family Unity and Honour in Early Modern England', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2015), 329 – 335, (p. 331).

⁹⁶ Janet Todd, 'Who is Silvia? What is she? Feminine identity in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister*' in *Aphra Behn Studies*, Todd, Janet, ed., (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 203; Anita Pacheco, 'Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, (1994), 491 – 506 (p. 497); Stephanie Athey and Daniel Cooper Alarcón, 'Oroonoko's Gendered Economies of Honor/Horror: Reframing Colonial discourse Studies in the Americas', *American Literature*, 65 (1993) 415 - 443, (p. 423).

⁹⁷ Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', (1996), p. 225.

⁹⁸ We can see through Behn's work that she problematises this view, for example Hellena in Behn's play *The Rover* (1677) who wants to explore her sexuality but who is dressed as a man to sleep with Wilmore (see Chapter Four, p. 120) and Behn's transgressive character Silvia in *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687) (see Chapter Three, p. 96).

⁹⁹ Nancy Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 265 – 279, (p.265).

‘honour’ that caused women to hide their hair through her use of the word ‘it’ rather than she (‘It gathered up the flowing Hair/That loosely plaid with wanton Air/The Envious Net, and stinted order hold’, VIII, 130-131), which gives honour a scary agency. The requirement for women to be honorable caused women to cease to be natural by hiding their hair (‘The lovely curls of jet and shining gold/No more neglected on the shoulders hurled’, VIII, 133-134) to avoid being seen to tempt men and risk compromising their honour. Through repeated descriptions of hair, Behn highlights how the Blazon tradition reduces women by concentrating on their individual body parts and in a woman’s voice.

The Blazon tradition is a perfect example of Cixous’s contention that the repression of women has been hidden within masculine writing, ‘adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction’.¹⁰⁰ As Hyman suggests women were invariably cast as ‘passive object or disembodied muse, but never instantiating voice’.¹⁰¹ Behn suggests that honour represses the naturalness of women, ‘And all the Charmingst part of Beauty hid’ (IIX.128). Rather than appearing in their natural, pre-lapsarian beauty, ‘honour’ causes women to change their appearance (Now drest to Tempt, not gratify the World’, VIII,135) to satisfy the codes of behaviour inflected on them by men.

In stanza IX, Behn condemns honour, pride and artifice as restraining and ruining love, ‘For when confin’d all the poor Lover gains/Is broken Sighs, pale Looks, complaints, & Pain’ (IX, 146-147). Although Libertine poets were hostile to the concept of honour, for example Cowley writes, ‘Where Honour or where Conscience does not bind/No other Law shall shackle me’,¹⁰² Behn’s debate on honour and the Blazon tradition highlights the disadvantages of the binary division of gender, particularly for women, showing how it is an unequal concept. In deconstructing and historicizing it Behn suggests a rewriting of moral codes and political status – an undermining of heteropatriarchal ideologies that is queer historicist in practice. This is clear through our queer stylistic approach to reading Behn’s poem and very explicit in the broader historical background about gender and marriage in the time she was writing. The ecofeminist philosopher Merchant argues

¹⁰⁰ Hélène, Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, trans. Keith Cohen and Paul Cohen, *Signs*, 1 (1976), 875 – 893, (p. 879).

¹⁰¹ Wendy Beth Hyman, *Impossible Desires and the Limits of Knowledge in Renaissance Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) p. 288.

¹⁰² Abraham Cowley, ‘Upon Liberty’ in *The Penguin Book of Restoration Verse*, ed. Harold Love, (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 4.

how married women were becoming more dependent on men, ‘in seventeenth century England, significant changes were taking place in the productive work of women in domestic life, in the home, in family industries ... and in professional employment’¹⁰³ and these changes curtailed ‘the married woman’s role as partner, so that she became more dependent on her husband.’¹⁰⁴ When we read Behn’s poem in the light of Merchant’s work and the work of the feminist anthropologist Rubin¹⁰⁵ it helps us to understand how the binary gender system was justified by patriarchy and enables us to read her poem as an active and resistant counter-argument to that model of women’s roles as well as a simultaneous critique of it. Behn argues for a paradise that would be ungendered and that we might call queer.

Rubin argues in her analysis of female sexual oppression that a binary gender system was necessary and heterosexuality reinforced, to ensure ‘the social organization of sexuality and the reproduction of the conventions of sex and gender’ in certain forms of patriarchy and capitalism.¹⁰⁶ In Behn’s poem she writes explicitly against enforced heterosexuality when, as we have seen, she deliberately avoids gendered pronouns in her description of a queer, paradisaical temporality. Enforced heterosexuality ensures that women were available both as free labour (housekeeping/child-rearing etc) and as a mechanism of exchange/marriage/kinship between men.¹⁰⁷ Rubin describes this as the “exchange of women”, stating that “women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favours, sent as tribute, traded, bought and sold.” Moreover, Rubin explains this “traffic in women” is not confined to primitive societies but becomes even more pronounced in civilized societies.¹⁰⁸ Marchant, Rubin’s anthological analysis of women and critics who have written more specifically on women in the seventeenth century¹⁰⁹ help us to appreciate just how ahead of her time Behn was and highlight her proleptic intelligence.

¹⁰³ Evelyn, Fox Keller, *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 150.

¹⁰⁴ Keller, *Secrets of Life*, (1992), p. 150.

¹⁰⁵ Gayle S. Rubin ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex’ in *Deviations, a Gayle Rubin Reader*, (New York: Duke University Press, 2011)

¹⁰⁶ Rubin ‘The Traffic in Women’, (2011), p. 33 – 65.

¹⁰⁷ Rubin, (2011), p. 901-924.

¹⁰⁸ Rubin, (2011), p. 910.

¹⁰⁹ See also Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Helen Wilcox and Elaine Hobby eds. *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeen-Century Englishwomen*, (Oxford: Routledge, 1989).

At the time Behn was writing, the curtailment of women's activities would have been particularly provoking because the period of the Civil Wars had seen women engage more in society, for example in political movements,¹¹⁰ but the restoration of the monarchy and the 'return to order' meant a return to the pre-Restoration gender order where women were often subordinate to men and had to give up these roles. As a revolutionary pre-cursor to the Franco-feminists¹¹¹ Behn uses the pastoral form in what Pohl, when discussing women's utopian thought, describes as a 'symbolic recoding of representational spaces'.¹¹² By challenging both heteronormativity and phallocentrism, Behn resists the symbolic discourses 'through which man objectifies the world'¹¹³ and offers a non-binary space where she investigates and problematizes masculine codes of behaviour in relation to wealth, authority and sexual desire.¹¹⁴

If we now turn to look at the way pronouns are used throughout the poem, we can see how Behn uses pronouns to suggest alternative concepts of time and politics. The first two stanzas of the poem describe an innocent, genderless oneiric space, a time of queer temporality where there are no differences in gender to disrupt the beauty and peace. Behn writes the first stanzas of 'The Golden Age' describing a non-binary temporality *prior* to the social construction of gender and the influence of hegemonic ideologies and by so doing produces a very specific queer temporality which both unsettles and challenges heteronormativity and phallocentrism.¹¹⁵ These stanzas are ungendered and except for stanza V, the remaining stanzas include references to gendered pronouns or use of the word 'man'. By introducing gendered pronouns between the first two stanzas and stanza V Behn uses a structural device to suggest that when humans are divided into two distinct genders this pastoral idyll begins to fall apart.

¹¹⁰ Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p.419-420.

¹¹¹ For example, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous.

¹¹² Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia*, (2017) p.2.

¹¹³ Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body: Towards and understanding of "L'Écriture Feminine"', *Feminist Studies*, 7 (1981) 247 – 263, (p. 248).

¹¹⁴ 'Behn uses the form of the pastoral for self-exploration, dramatization, and expression, and her pastorals offer a powerful revision of the pastoral in terms of constructing a space for the articulation of female desire and also for their challenges to heteronormativity in the pastoral tradition and in culture at large', Laudien, 'Aphra Behn: pastoral poet', (2005), p. 43.

¹¹⁵ '.....Behn's pastorals do not exist simply for their beauty, but they are also recommendations, propositions, and ways of looking and thinking about social and sexual relations' (Laudien, 2005), p. 46.

Behn challenges, subverts and destroys traditional gender binaries through her description of an ungendered paradise. With her re-coding of ‘honour’, ‘Oh cursed Honour! Thou who first didst damn/A Woman to the Sin of shame’ (VIII,117-118) Behn resists Cixous’ contention, almost three hundred years later, that as women, we ‘have been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with stupid sexual modesty’.¹¹⁶ Cixous states that ‘Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be coned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem’.¹¹⁷ Throughout her work Behn speaks up for women and through a queer stylistic reading of this poem, we see how Behn recodes the pastoral form to subvert assumptions of gender binary and problematize the repetition of gender performance through her use of grammar, imagery, narrative arc, unstable use of gender between the stanzas, repetition of words, intertextuality and even through the irregularity of the format of the poem itself.

Kristeva posits that poetry is a means of articulating the poet’s instincts that defy the structure of language and allow ‘the flow of *jouissance* into language’¹¹⁸ and I suggest that challenging gender was both a conscious and an unconscious decision for Behn.¹¹⁹ Indeed, ‘The Golden Age’ suggests that Behn could imagine a world free from the performativity of a socially constructed binary gender system¹²⁰ and shared Rubin’s dream ‘of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does and with whom one makes love’.¹²¹ Reading the poem through the prism of queer stylistics and diachronic historicism, we see how through the structure of the poem and symbolic recoding Behn uses the pastoral form to offer a version of the Golden Age that is simultaneously a mythical and an ideological narrative. Behn creates a queer temporality by switching between the temporalities of ‘then’ and ‘now’ and, by switching grammatical tenses, she evokes a temporality like Kristeva’s ‘future perfect’. Kristeva’s ‘perfect future’ is a way of expressing the fact that fate is not inescapable and where, if only we had enough time and thought we, could create a

¹¹⁶ Cixous, ‘Medusa’, (1976), p. 885.

¹¹⁷ Cixous, (1976), p. 881.

¹¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, (1984) p. 79.

¹¹⁹ See for example Behn’s other poems including *To the fair Clarinda, who made Love to me, imagin’d more than Woman, On Juniper Tree, The Willing Mistress, The Disappointment*,

¹²⁰ ‘Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substances, of a natural sort of being’, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2nd edn (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) p. 45

¹²¹ Rubin, *Traffic in Women*, (2017), p. 917.

perfect future.¹²² In the same way that Kristeva talks about the possibility of a perfect future, so Behn's linguistic strategy of moving between the temporalities of 'then' and 'now' reminds us of what has been lost which, alongside her mix of tenses, problematizes heteronormative time, to suggest that the temporality of 'now' is not inevitable and offering an alternative perfect non-binary temporality that could still exist in a future and that we might call queer.

¹²² Alice Jardine's Introduction to Julia Kristeva Women's Time' (Translated by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake,) 'in *Signs*, (1981) 7:1, p. 5.

Chapter Three

Queer Metalepsis, Erotic Triangles, Cross-Dressing and Gender Identity in *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687)

In my re-appraisal of *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687), I will show how Behn problematizes dominant ideologies in respect of gender and sexuality (including what we now call transgenderism) that still exist today. I will show why I consider Silvia to be one of the most transgressive characters in literary history. Using a queer stylistic/diachronic historicist approach,¹ I will apply queer readings to Behn's characterisation, plotting, grammar, style, tropes (particularly those of erotic triangles and cross-dressing) and narrative voice.

Issued in three parts between 1684 and 1687, *Love-Letters* was Behn's first published prose work² and arguably one of the first epistolary novels written in English,³ a form that was to become popular in the eighteenth-century.⁴ The epistolary form offers a sense of realism, producing a liminal space between the public and private, with the advantage of intensity and immediacy.⁵ Critics have discussed the historical events and the political and sexual intrigues alluded to in the novel⁶ alongside its literary genre and if it should be considered the first novel written in English.⁷ Aughterson has identified how Behn, 'is explicitly experimenting with modes of prose fiction, and forging the lineaments of the British novel'.⁸ I will argue that *Love-Letters* is experimental but, re-read through the lens of queer stylistics, it is also highly transgressive and queer. I will examine the

¹ See previous chapters.

² Janet Todd, 'Textual Introduction to *The Works of Aphra Behn*', vol 2, (London: William Pickering, 1993), p. vii.

³ The first epistolary novel is thought to be *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1669) attributed to Gabriel-Joseph de la Vergne, comte de Guilleragues (this was a translation while Behn's novel was an original).

⁴ For example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and Frances Burney *Evelina* (1778).

⁵ Warren Chernaik, 'Unguarded Hearts; Transgression and Epistolary Form in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters* and the *Portuguese Letters*' in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 97 (1998) 13 – 33, (p. 25).

⁶ Wehrs, 'Eros, Ethics, Identity', (1992, p. 461-478).

⁷ Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'The First English Novel: Aphra Behn's *Love Letters*, The Canon, and Women's Tastes', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 8 (1989), pp. 201 - 222.

Sonia Villegas Lopéz, "'The Conscious Grove": Generic Experimentation in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* '(1684-87), *Women's Writing*, 22:1, 2014, p.p 69-83.

⁸ Kate Aughterson. "'Unlink the Chain: Experimentation in Aphra Behn's Novels' in Kate Aughterson, Deborah Phillips, *Women Writers and Experimental Narratives: Early Modern to Contemporary*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) p. 24.

problematic relationship between the author, narrator and the characterization of Silvia. Just recently, Chaskin has also suggested that the metalepsis caused by the conflict between the character of Silvia and the narrator in the story could be described as queer, ‘the narrative slips – between the action of the scene, the narrator’s interpretation of it and the implied ideology of the text has the potential to be queer’.⁹ However, my argument goes further than this and I will show how *Love-Letters* is more than ‘potentially queer’ and a queer stylistic reading identifies many areas of queerness in the text in addition to the queer metalepsis suggested by Chaskin.

The queer tropes that Behn uses in the novel include homoerotic relationships (male to male and female to female), triangles of desire and Silvia’s cross-dressing.¹⁰ There is a particularly transgressive scene at the end of Book II where Behn presents a scenario that combines the image of a transgender body, pregnancy, infidelity, adultery, bigamy and homosexuality. This scene offers significant challenges to heteronormativity, patriarchy and hegemony. I will also highlight an incident in Book III where the cross-dressed Silvia is exposed as a woman and where Behn predicts how the transgender body was, and still is, problematized by authority. Over the course of the three books, Chaskin suggests that Silvia transitions from a naïve, romantic heroine to a promiscuous cross-dressing rake,¹¹ while Todd proposes that by the end of the story although ‘Philander will always be a lord, Silvia is no longer a lady’.¹² These are useful insights and have informed and validated my own reading as I have progressed. But I will go further still in my reading of the novel as both queer and trans-aware. At the end of the story, we see how Silvia negotiates her transgenderism¹³ and attempts to find her own voice in a patriarchal society. Book I’s focus is on Philander and Silvia’s transgressive relationship and Libertine behaviour,

⁹ Hannah Chaskin, ‘Masculinity and Narrative Voice in Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*’ in *Women’s Writing*, (2021), p. 76.

¹⁰ In Chapter Six (p. 168) I argue that Behn uses cross-dressed characters to explore the performance and embodiment of gender to reveal the ghosts of possible transgender bodies from the seventeenth century.

¹¹ Chaskin, ‘Masculinity and Narrative Voice,’ (2021), p. 76.

¹² Janet Todd, ‘Who is Silvia? What is she? Feminine identity in Aphra Behn’s *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister*’ in *Aphra Behn Studies*, Todd, Janet, ed., (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 202.

¹³ I use the term transgenderism as distinct from cross-dressing, Silvia embodies masculinity rather than simply wearing masculine clothing.

while Books II and III lean towards homoeroticism and Silvia's increasing rejection of her performed femininity.

Love-Letters was written and set during a time of dramatic political events including plans for a rebellion, a plot to assassinate the King and his brother¹⁴ and events leading to the Monmouth Rebellion.¹⁵ Behn combines contemporary political and sexual intrigues in the novel while loosely basing some of the characters on real-life, drawing on the scandal involving Lord Ford Grey's elopement¹⁶ with his sister-in-law, Lady Henrietta Berkeley. The book begins with fictional letters between two lovers named Philander and Silvia. In Silvia's first letter to Philander, she describes their predicament, 'for sure no Brother ever lov'd a Sister with so criminal a flame before'.¹⁷ Silvia critiques Philander's rhetoric of love by describing it as 'criminal' (13) for loving her while marrying her sister and for pursuing her as a lover, 'when I was too young to understand your subtle distinctions' (13). Silvia describes herself as 'unexperienc'd' and 'innocent' (13) and in a further letter to Philander as 'a Maid that cannot fly' (22). Silvia criticizes Philander for taking advantage of the fact that she was too young and innocent to understand the difference between the love for a brother and sister and between a man and woman.

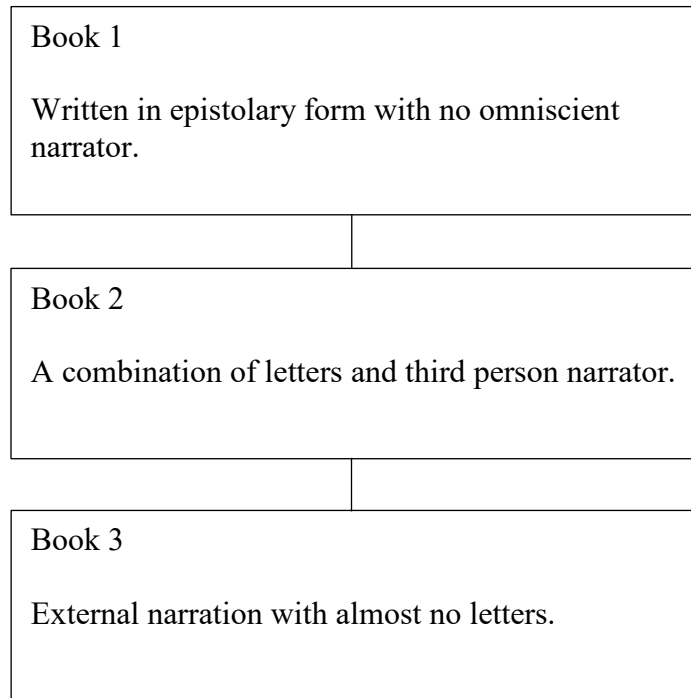
¹⁴ Following the Popish Plot, The Rye House Plot was a Protestant plot to assassinate Charles II and his brother, James in the spring of 1683.

¹⁵ The Monmouth Rebellion was a plot to overthrow James II who had become King after the death of Charles II.

¹⁶ Lady Henrietta Berkeley ran away with her brother-in-law, Lord Ford Grey, who was tried for abduction before the King's Bench on 23rd November 1662.

¹⁷ Aphra Behn, 'Love-Letters from a Nobleman to his Sister' in *The Works of Aphra Behn, vol 2*, (London: William Pickering, 1993), p. 13; (All future citations refer to this edition.)

Figure 6. **The structure of *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister***



The first part of *Love-Letters* is written in epistolary form and consists of letters between Philander and Silvia with no omniscient narrator. The second part is a combination of letters and third person narration (the narrator is ungendered). The final book consists primarily of an external narration with almost no letters (see Figure 6, p. 96). Through the three volumes the change in narrative methods coincide with the development of the characters and I will consider how Behn uses different styles across the trilogy to emphasize the instability of gender and gender identity.

The novel begins with ‘The ARGUMENT’ where, in italics, an ungendered narrator sets the scene. Chernaik suggests that ‘epistolary novels tend to move slowly and are in some way better adapted to presenting the internal, psychological dimension than external action’.¹⁸ This is certainly true of *Love-Letters*; for example, eighteen letters are exchanged between the protagonists, agonizing over their predicament before they meet.

¹⁸ Chernaik, ‘Unguarded Hearts’, (1998) 97:1, p. 25.

In Philander's first letter to Silvia, we find he has been arguing with himself over the 'conflicts between Love and Honour' (11). Philander's argument forms the basis of Book 1 where he questions the seventeenth-century assumption that incest controverts 'natural law'.¹⁹ Philander justifies his love for Silvia despite being married to her sister, 'I think and know enough to justifie that flame in me, which our weak alliance of Brother and Sister has rendered so criminal' (11). Philander continues his justification to Silvia, 'What Kin my charming *Silvia* are you to me? No tyes of blood forbid my Passion; and what is it to my Divine *Silvia*, that the priest took my hand and gave it to your Sister?' (11). He goes on to say, 'tis nonsense all; let us (born for mightier joys) scorn the dull *beaten road*, but let us love like the first race of men, nearest allied to God' (12). Philander even uses the biblical precedent of Adam and Eve's offspring²⁰ to justify their relationship. Silvia's first two responses to Philander's letter are sent on the same day and begin innocently, 'I confess with blushes, which you might then see kindling in my face' (12). In Silvia's next letter she describes taking a walk 'fill'd with sad soft thoughts of my brother *Philander*', but at the same time she is in a state of 'torture and confusion' (14). In his fourth letter Philander grows impatient to hear from Silvia and writes, '*Twice last night, oh unfaithful and unloving Silvia!* I sent my Page, to the old place for Letters, but he returned the object of my rage, because without the least remembrance from my fickle Maid' (15). He goes on to describe how he is woken from a dream the next morning to receive two letters from Silvia. In his dream Silvia submits to him, 'methought my *Silvia* yielded! With a faint struggle and soft resistance' (15) but that Silvia has accused him of her undoing, 'will you ruine me because you may?' (15) to which Philander replies, 'is it undoing to Love?' (15). Using coercive, language Philander sets out to groom Silvia until she agrees to sleep with him, 'our souls were toucht with the same shafts of Love before they had a being in our Bodies' (16). Behn's use of aptronyms is soon established through the appropriateness of Philander's name and his voice as a philanderer and Libertine who justifies his desire for Silvia, '[M]y soul was Married to yours in its first Creation; and only *Silvia* is the wife of my sacred, my everlasting vows' (16). This is a long letter where Philander tries to convince Silvia that there is nothing wrong with their passion despite the fact

¹⁹ For details of the argument see Ellen Pollak, 'Beyond Incest' in *Reading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hunter (Virginia: The University of Virginia, 1993).

²⁰ Todd, foot note in '*The Works of Aphra Behn, vol 2*' (1993), p. 12.

that he is married to her sister, 'I am Married..... no, my soul was Married to yours in its first Creation' (16). Philander suggests that as Silvia loves only him, but will likely marry somebody else, he writes, 'to Bless *Philander* with what you must some time or other sacrifice to some hated loath'd object' (16) therefore, she may as well sleep with him rather than save herself for a husband she doesn't love.

There is a delay before Silvia receives another letter from Philander. Through a queer stylistic approach, we can interpret the intervals and delays in the story as part of the queer relationship that Behn has with the reader by leaving a space for individual interpretation. Not to say that these gaps are specifically legible as homosocial; rather they fracture the linearity of the narrative and offer strange openings or omissions which affect the reader in a queer way.

In the fifth letter Philander states how much he loves Silvia and is desperate to see her. Letter six finds Silvia saying, 'Not yet? —not yet? Oh ye dull tedious Hours when will you glide away? And bring that happy moment on, in which I shall at least hear from my *Philander*' (21). Silvia grows desperate to hear from Philander, 'I am here forgotten still, forlorn, impatient...' (22) but despite longing to hear from him, she is still questioning his behaviour, 'why did you take advantage of these freedoms I gave you as a Brother' (22). Letter six is followed in a second letter from Silvia to Philander beginning, 'Another Night oh Heav'ns and yet no Letter come!' (23). In letter eight, in response to Philander's request to see her, 'admit me again to those soft delights', the tone of Silvia's voice changes to fury using words like 'prostitution' (25) and 'rape' (26). Silvia writes, 'can *Philander's* Love set no higher value on me than base poor prostitution!' (25).

Analysing Behn's style through the prism of queer stylistics, Behn's construction of the delays between the letters suggests a queering of time. The protracted build up to Philander and Silvia's meeting is a delay; Philander's unwillingness (or inability) to consummate their eventual meeting is a delay; and even Behn's use of em dashes in Silvia's early letters present a form of grammatical delay while representing the unsaid or unsayable.

We learn later that Philander has the 'Liberty to range the house of Belfont as a Son' (49) and he takes advantage of his position in Silvia's father's household. After eighteen letters between Silvia and Philander they eventually meet. When Silvia eventually agrees to meet Philander, she admits that she will be too weak to resist him, 'I long for my undoing' (30) and describes herself as 'a poor lost Virgin

languishing and undone; sighing her willing rape.....' (30). Silvia's conflicting thoughts about Philander suggest that she has been struggling with her feelings and we do know exactly what makes Silvia change her mind in favour of sleeping with Philander. We can see through these letters that Silvia is being groomed by Philander. He continually justifies their passion, until her passion for him overwhelms her. For instance, he suggests that she will suffer an enforced marriage and endure what Philander describes as 'the clumsy Husband's careless forc'd insipid duty's' (16). In other words, he suggests that Silvia will have sex with a future husband out of duty rather than love, so it would be fine for her to have sex with him. Philander is manipulative and has been emotionally blackmailing her, saying for example, 'Oh why shoul'd my Soul suffer for ever' (16). Silvia hesitates, but eventually gives in to her passion for Philander. Reading through the prism of queer stylistics, the absence of a continuous narrative in an epistolary novel suggests a queer disruption of time and leaves the reader wondering what happens in between the letters. What we do know is that over this time Philander manipulates Silvia from innocence to desire.

After Philander and Silvia eventually meet to consummate their love, Philander writes, '[W]hat *Demon*, malicious at my Glory, seiz'd my vigor?' (57) and we learn from his letter that, despite Silvia's enthusiasm, 'she burnt with equal fire' (59), Silvia is still a virgin, 'For yet my *Silvia* is a Maid' (56). Despite Philander's claim of 'never failing power' (57), when it comes to the sexual act, he is unable to perform, 'Then, then ye Gods, just then by an over transport, to fall just fainting before the surrendering Gates, unable to receive the yielding treasure!' (56-57). Philander's failure to consummate their relationship recalls Rochester's 'The Imperfect Enjoyment' where he writes, 'Eager desires confound my first intent/Succeeding shame does more success prevent/And rage at last confirms me impotent'.²¹ When Philander attempts to have sex with Silvia he is impotent. In a letter to Silvia, Philander claims an 'excess of Passion' (57) as the cause of his failure together with Silvia's constant delays in allowing their tryst, 'which by your delay consum'd it self in burning' (59). It is unusual to find a woman writing about impotence and I suggest that Behn's voice here and in her poem 'The

²¹ John Wilmot, 'The Imperfect Enjoyment' in David M. Vieth, *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot Early of Rochester*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 38.

Disappointment' (1680), gives me licence to suggest that a woman writing about impotence could be described as a queer.²² Behn's transgressive voice as poet and absent narrator here on a topic about which women were supposed to be silent generates a discursive space in which women do and are allowed to talk about sex from a position of possibly mockery, but also authority, which I suggest queers her character. However, the consequences of Philander's failure work in his favour as they result in Silvia taking all the blame for their incestuous relationship, his failure and her passion for him, 'to shew desire is such a sin in virtue as must deserve reproach from all the world' (65) and insisting that the fault was hers, 'No, the fault's in me, and thou art innocent —' (65). Philander's failure has increased Silvia's lust for him, 'I find a strange disorder in my blood, that pants and burns in every Vein, and makes me blush and sigh' (67). A consequence, deliberate²³ or otherwise, of Philander's inability to consummate his meeting with Silvia is her increased passion for him and a desperate desire to please him. Despite longing to be with Philander, Silvia encourages him to leave her and go to Cesario, '[B]y all your sacred love, by those dear hours this happy night design'd in favour of you, to go without delay to Cesario' (73). Silvia would rather wait a little longer for Philander, than him risk the disapproval of a jealous Prince.

Following the incident where Philander is unable to consummate his relationship with Silvia, we learn in a letter from Philander to Silvia of an account of his encounter with Silvia's father. Philander leaves Silvia's bedroom disguised in her maid's gown and headdress. There could be an element of intertextuality in this incident as it echoes Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (first published in 1602) where, as Chess suggests, Falstaff's crossdressing 'is motivated by his fear of being caught seducing Mistress Ford'.²⁴ As he attempts to leave undiscovered, Philander meets Silvia's father in the garden who mistakes him for the maid, Melinda. Silvia's father catches hold of the gown Philander is wearing and asks him to 'retire with me into the Grove where I have a present of a heart and something else to mask you' (60) and leads Philander away by the hand. Philander attempts to avoid

²² Behn also talks about impotence in her response to Rochester with her poem 'The Disappointment' (1680).

²³ In Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) Horner feigns impotence to gain access to, and seduce, as many women as he can.

²⁴ Simone Chess, *Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Early Modern English Literature: Gender, Performance, and Queer Relations*, (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 1.

Silvia's father's advances, 'Sir for Heavens sake (sweetning my voice as much as possible) consider I'm a Maid, and would not be discover'd for the world' but Philander fails to deter him. Silvia's father continues his pursuit of Philander, who he still thinks is the maid and places an item into each of Philander's hands, '[H]e clapt fifty Guinnies in a Purse onto one hand and something else that shall be nameless unto the other' (61). Despite every opportunity, Philander was unable (or unwilling) to consummate his relationship with Silvia but within minutes of bumping into Silvia's father he has her father's phallus in his hand, an incident that Philander suggests 'would have given me great diversion' (60) had the incident not occurred when he was trying to escape unseen from visiting Silvia. Both Silvia's father and Philander end the night unfulfilled. Beneath the humour of Philander's encounter with Silvia's father the event both feminizes and queers Philander and highlights the complex matrix of the men's jealousy, patriarchal possessiveness and lust that objectifies women and Silvia in particular. By conflating these two examples of patriarchal control through sex Behn shows the power that men have over women. Silvia's father treats a servant woman as a commodity, with the assumption of her compliance, and Philander may have withheld sex from Silvia to enhance his control of her. However, the incidents where Philander is dressed as a woman and where he fails to have sex with Silvia problematize his sexuality. As Chernaik suggests, female clothing symbolizes Philander's failure and by placing these two events together 'makes him doubly impotent and the parody of his own seduction of Silvia effectively deconstructs the ideology of Libertinism'.²⁵ While deconstructing Libertinism, and obviously written as a very funny scene, this event queers Philander by presenting him dressed as a woman and holding Silvia's father's penis in his hand. This incident problematizes Philander's heterosexuality just after his heterosexuality has been challenged by his sexual failure with Silvia.

We have seen how Behn queers Philander through the incident with Silvia's father and I will continue my queer stylistic analysis of the text to show how Philander's heteronormativity is further problematized in the narrative, through the application of Sedgwick's theory of erotic triangles and cuckolding.²⁶ There are three erotic triangles across the books and these are between Philander, Cesario and

²⁵ Chernaik, 'Unguarded Hearts' (1998), p. 28.

²⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1985).

Mertilla; Philander, Foscario and Silvia; and Philander, Octavio and Silvia. In Girard's work on the 'male-centred novelistic tradition,'²⁷ he was concerned with discovering triangles between two male rivals for a woman, tracing the relationship of power through triangulated desire. Girard was not specifically tracing heterosexual/homosexual erotic relationships, however, Sedgwick, in her re-reading of Girard's work, suggests that the 'hidden symmetries that Girard's triangle helps us discover will always in turn discover hidden obliquities',²⁸ and suggests that 'in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to a beloved, that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent.'²⁹ Neely describes erotic triangles as 'the intense bonding rivalry of two male friends over an exchangeable woman'³⁰ and suggests that 'such triangles are assumed to degrade women and occlude their desires'.³¹ Behn's plotting which places Silvia and Mertilla into erotic triangles echoes Rubin's analysis of patterns of female oppression in capitalist societies.³² Rubin identifies gender as a socially imposed division of the sexes where the sex-gender system oppresses women, creates heterosexuality, privileges men's rights and where enforced heterosexuality ensures that women were available both as free labour (housekeeping/child-rearing etc) and as a mechanism of exchange/marriage/kinship between men (see also Chapters Two (p. 65) and Four, p. 120). I will suggest in the subsequent analysis that by deconstructing these patriarchal relationships through triangular plotting, Behn effectively queers and disrupts desire.

In the first book, we learn that Silvia's sister Mertilla makes a cuckold of Philander. We are informed that Mertilla had promised to marry Cesario but instead married Philander and had an affair with Cesario. The relationship between Philander and Cesario becomes homoerotic because, as Sedgwick argues, "To cuckold" is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man by another man' and is '*necessarily*

²⁷ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

²⁸ Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*, (1985). p. 22.

²⁹ Kosofsky Sedgwick, (1985), p. 21.

³⁰ Carol Thomas Neely, 'Strange Things in Hand': Perverse Pleasures and Erotic Triangles in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment*, ed. Valerie Traub, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 332.

³¹ Neely, 'Strange Things in Hand', (2016), p. 332.

³² Gayle S. Rubin 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex' in *Deviations, a Gayle Rubin Reader*, (New York: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 33 – 65.

hierarchical in structure, with an “active” participant who is clearly in the ascendancy over the “passive” one.³³ Sedgwick’s assertion is played out in the plots of *Love-Letters*.³⁴ The homoeroticism between Philander and Cesario is confirmed when, far from blaming his wife for her infidelity, Philander, in the following passage from one of his first letters to Silvia, uses Mertilla’s broken vows, not only to excuse his desire for Silvia, but to reveal his own desire for Cesario:

Mertilla I say, first broke her Marriage Vows to me; I blame her not, nor is it reasonable I shou’d, she saw the young *Cesario*, and Lov’d him. *Cesario*, whom the envying World in spite of prejudice must own, has unresistable Charms, that, Godlike form, that sweetness in his face, that softness in his Eyes and delicate Mouth; and every Beauty besides that Woman doat on and Men envy: That lovely composition of Man and Angel! With the addition of his eternal Youth Illustrious birth, was form’d by Heav’n and Nature for universal Conquest! (17)

Philander doesn’t blame Mertilla for cuckolding him with Cesario because he finds Cesario irresistible himself. Within the conventions of a seventeenth century narrative Philander’s homoerotic gaze on Cesario is acceptable because Cesario’s youth and beauty blurs the boundary between boy and woman. Shakespeare’s Sonnet 20 is one of the most famous examples of the blurring of gender in the male gaze, ‘A woman’s face with Nature’s own hand painted/Hast though, the master-mistress of my passion’.³⁵ By suggesting that however much he is attracted to Cesario he (Philander) would ‘run a Thousand times more hazards of life and Fortune for the Adorable *Silvia* (17), Philander uses his erotic feelings towards a young man as part of his seduction of Silvia. Philander and Cesario’s rivalry for Mertilla creates an erotic bond between the rival men while affording Behn the opportunity to queer heteropathy by using one form of sexuality (Philander’s homoerotic attraction for Cesario) to enhance his heterosexual seduction of Silvia.

The choice of Cesario’s name supports a queer reading and dispels any doubt in the mind of the reader that the relationship between Philander and Cesario might not be homoerotic. Behn’s readers would have been familiar with Shakespeare (earlier in the book Behn draws upon the comic in Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of*

³³ Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*, (1985), p. 49-50.

³⁴ Pollak, in ‘Beyond Incest’ (1993), suggests that ‘[t]he world of *Love Letters* both exemplifies this ethos and, through the heroine’s ability to identify it, provides a critique of its structural principles’ p. 171.

³⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 36, 20:1-2.

Windsor). There can be no coincidence in Behn's choice of the name Cesario, the name Viola took when she cross-dresses as a boy and falls in love with Orsino in *Twelfth Night* (1601-1602). Read through the lens of queer stylistics Behn's uses intertextuality is a way to direct her readers to the queerness of the relationship between Philander and Cesario (see also Chapter Two (p. 63) on how Behn uses the interconnectedness between texts to combine, disrupt and queer time).

The novel plots a parallel erotic triangle between Philander, Silvia's suitor Foscario and Silvia. When Philander sees Foscario leaving Silvia, 'for there I saw Foscario, my young, my rich and powerful Rival' (81). Philander in his jealousy draws a sword on him, 'I quickly turn'd the Sword from my own heart to send it to his elevated one' (81). The incident ends with no harm, as *Foscario* refuses to fight, 'he refused to arm his hand' (82). When Silvia's family find out about her relationship with Philander, 'all that I fear'd has fallen upon me' (92) they arrange for her to marry Foscario. Silvia writes to Philander, 'I have only time to say, on *Thursday* I am desin'd a sacrifice to *Foscario*...' (96). While preparations for the wedding are under way Silvia escapes from her home, having asked Philander to arrange for his servant to bring a chariot and meet her in the woods. However, in the meantime, Philander finds Foscario, leaps out of his hiding place and calls out, 'we must adjust an odd account between us' (105). The two men duel, and both are injured leaving Philander unable to meet Silvia. These two duelling incidents are complex and highlight the men's vulnerability. Neither man wins either of the duels, but both would have been humiliated by their wounds. As Lowe suggests, duelling involves 'wounds, penetration and sexual humiliation'.³⁶ The phallic significance of a sword penetrates both space and body, and losing a duel clearly diminishes manhood.³⁷ Even if a man is not killed the bloody wounds sustained will 'weaken him both literally and symbolically'.³⁸ In a further letter to Silvia, Philander describes his second duel with Foscario, 'we fought, and many wounds were given and received on both sides, till his people coming up parted us just as we were fainting with loss of blood in each others arms' (105). The phrase, 'they fell into each others arms' and the language of the description of Foscario's concern for Philander,

³⁶ Leah Lowe, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 79.

³⁷ Lowe, *Manhood and the Duel*, (2003).

³⁸ Lowe, (2003).

‘he cried out with a feeble voice—to have me, who now lay bleeding on the ground put into the Chariot, and to be safely convey’d wherever I commanded’ (106) both echo primarily emotional and even erotic connotations of lover’s meetings. This narrative draws linguistic attention to the homoerotic aspect of their duelling. This is a classic erotic triangle of two rivals for Silvia and where the relationship between the two men appears as strong, or stronger, than between either of the men and Silvia.

The third erotic triangle is between Philander, Octavio and Silvia. Octavio first meets Silvia and Philander at the beginning of Book II when Silvia is dressed as a young man using the name Fillmond to travel safely. Octavio is confused by his feelings for Fillmond and the narrator informs us that he ‘was almost angry that he felt such an emotion for a youth, tho the most lovely he ever saw’ (123) and that Octavio ‘had no thoughts of fear, or any thing cou’d check his new beginning flame’ (123). Attracted to the couple, Octavio offers them, ‘all the services of a Man of power’ (123), finds lodgings for Philander and Silvia near his palace and vows to pursue his love for Silvia even though he believes she is a young man, ‘so Love had contriv’d for the better management of this new affair of the heart, which he resolv’d to pursue, be the fair object of what sex soever’ (124). This is a particularly subversive statement as it suggests that Octavio has fallen in love with Silvia and will pursue her regardless of the gender they present. Behn’s characterization of Octavio reveals Behn’s ambivalence to binary gender, as we have witnessed in her other work (see Chapter Two (p. 63) on *The Golden Age* and in Chapter Six (p. 168) on transgenderism in Behn’s plays). Octavio sees Philander as his rival for Silvia who, disguised as Fillmond, ‘captivated the Men no less than the Women’ (127). Despite Octavio’s attraction to Silvia, he also ‘reflected on the beauty of *Philander*, on his Charming youth and Conversation, and every Grace that adorns a Conqueror, he grew inflamed, disordered, restless, angry’ (125). Rather than hating Philander as a rival, the narrator suggests that Octavio likes Philander even more and describes him as a ‘Rival that he could not hate nor did his passion abate one thought of his friendship for Philander, but rather more increas’d it, insomuch that once resolv’d it shou’d surmount his Love if possible’ (125). Yet again we find Philander and another man, Octavio, as a rival for Silvia and the relationship between the two men becoming equal to, if not more important than their relationship with Silvia.

A queer interpretation of the relationship between Philander and Octavio is validated when we find it surfacing again towards the end of Book III. Philander visits Octavio in a monastery to make peace with him and attempt to persuade Octavio not to take holy vows. The narrator informs us that Philander had ‘besought him to quit a design so injurious to his Youth’ (377). In this scene we find another incident where Philander and Octavio’s relationship with each other clearly means as much, if not more to them than their relationship with Silvia. Octavio describes his relationship with Philander as ‘*that Friendship in my Heart, which your good qualities and beauties at first sight engag’d there, and from esteeming you more than perhaps I ought to do*’ (377) and as ‘above a Sister, or a Mistress’ (377). In addition, on parting, Octavio gives Philander a ‘ring of great value from his Finger, presented it to *Philander*, and ‘beg’d him to keep it for his Sake; and to remember him while he did so’ (377). A ring is a traditional symbol that confirms their love and as they went their separate ways ‘they Kist, and Sighing parted’ (377) as if they were lovers. The giving of the ring, the kiss and the phrase ‘*esteeming you more than perhaps I ought to do*’ are clear indications of Octavio’s homoerotic feelings towards Philander. The narrator keeps using encounters to disturb heteropatriarchal notions of desire, love and marriage. This is queer.

Using a queer lens, we can see in Behn’s plotting of the relationships between Philander, Cesario and Mertilla, Philander, Foscario and Silvia and Philander, Octavio and Silvia, that Behn clearly demonstrates how the relationships between the men are homoerotic. Although we cannot know the reason for Behn’s emphasis on erotic triangles, they effectively both queer the text and highlight the importance of male homosocial relationships in a patriarchal society and the implied passivity and commodification of women, where women were considered a negotiable symbol of masculinity and patriarchal power.

Throughout the last two books of *Love-Letters*, Silvia’s cross-dressing can be read as a recurrent, queer theme. In the epistolary style of Book 1 Silvia is portrayed as a naïve, romantic young woman, who, on hearing of Philander’s marriage to her sister, ‘threw my self with fury on the ground and prest my panting heart to the cold earth’ (14). However, it is also in Book I, while waiting for Philander to come to her room, that Silvia first begins to question her femininity, believing that the strength of her passion is unwomanly, ‘that my Love is now arriv’d to that excess, that every thought which before but discompos’d me, now puts me into a violent rage

unbecoming my Sex' (55). Book II begins with Silvia cross-dressed and is a mix of epistolary style and narrative, changing from epistolary to narrative when Silvia is cross-dressed and back to an epistolary style when Silvia must "own her sex" (127). The narrator appears to step in to control Silvia when she strays too far from being a woman and this creates a triangle between the author, the narrator (who is ungendered) and Silvia. This triangle reveals a tension between what Behn might have wanted to write and what she might have considered socially acceptable. Behn uses the narrator to avoid Silvia having the opportunity to fully express her ambivalence towards her gender. When Silvia reveals that she is a woman she is allowed to tell her own story.

The first time that Silvia dresses as a man is when she has left home to run away with Philander and believes she has been abandoned, 'alas, where are you? Why wou'd you thus abandon me' (101). Eventually Silvia learns that Philander is on his way to Paris and, in a short note to Philander, she arranges to meet him there, 'I have sent Brilljard to see if the Coast be clear that we may come with safety, he brings you instead of *Silvia*, a young Cavalier....' (106). At this point in the story Silvia is 'drest like a youth, to secure herself from discovery' (121) and to enable her to travel safely. As their journey continues Philander, Silvia/Fillmond,³⁹ Brilljard and two servants head for Holland. During their travels, purely for the purposes of keep herself safe, Silvia marries their servant Brilljard. This means that Brilljard is now living in close quarters with Silvia and Philander and is forced to endure seeing and listening to the couple making love, 'To see her clasp him fast when he threw himself into her soft white bosom, and smother him with kisses' (125). This makes Brilljard jealous and his 'thoughts dis'urb'd him all the night, and a certain jealousy, or rather curiosity to every motion of the Lovers, While they were employ'd after a different manner' (126). Philander and Silvia make love many times during the story but the fact that the narrator particularly focusses on the time he makes love to Silvia in the presence of another man is problematic. On the one hand Behn positions the reader within the male gaze that makes women objects for male, heterosexual pleasure, on the other hand the reader is being asked to visualize a man watching another man make love to a woman which could be described as queer.

³⁹ Janet Todd suggests that Behn choice of the name Fillmond was based on the French words *fille du monde* translated as 'worldly woman' see Janet Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol 2, (London: William Pickering, 1993), footnote, p. 127.

Although initially Silvia dresses as a boy to aid her escape, she finds she likes it and now wants to continue cross-dressing and ‘beg’d she might live under that disguise’ (126). Philander agrees because he is attracted to Silvia in boy’s clothes, a fact that is unsurprising given his attraction to Cesario. Moreover, the narrator states that Philander ‘was well enough pleas’d she shou’d continue in that agreeable dress, which did not only add to her beauty...’ (126). However, for Silvia there is something more, she finds something ‘in herself’ while dressed as a boy, ‘but she pleas’d with the Cavalier in her self’ (126). Cross-dressing gives Silvia a sense of freedom, but she is also clearly excited by the ambiguity of her sexuality which affords her the opportunity to attract women as well as men. The narrator informs us, that she ‘fail’d not to make a conquest on some unguarded heart of the fair Sex’ (126) and she ‘boast[s] of her female conquests to *Octavio*’ (126). Todd suggests Silvia ‘enjoys the heady erotics of assumed homosexual dalliance’⁴⁰ but I disagree. Silvia’s character is more complicated than that. Silvia enjoys ‘being’ a man and, when she is a man, she enjoys the attraction of women, so it is not a ‘homosexual dalliance’.

When Philander cross-dresses, during the incident in the garden with Silvia’s father, he loses power whereas when Silvia cross-dresses, she gains ‘a thousand little Privileges’ (126) particularly in respect of the attention she receives from both men and women. However, when Silvia falls ill, she is ‘oblig’d to own her own Sex and take Women Servants out of decency’ (127) and we find another conflict in the tripart relationship between the author, narrator and Silvia. As soon as Silvia strays too far from heterosexual femininity, Behn, as the author, uses the narrator to bring Silvia back again (in this case through Silvia falling ill and having to admit to being a woman) and thereby maintain social acceptability.

We have established that the first book of *Love-Letters* is epistolary,⁴¹ a form which has been generally associated with femininity in the late seventeenth century.⁴² It is no coincidence that it is in this book where we find Silvia at her most feminine and where there is no narrator to come into conflict with Silvia over her

⁴⁰ Janet Todd, “‘The hot brute drudges on’”: ambiguities of desire in Aphra Behn’s *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*’, *Women’s Writing*, 1 (1994) 277 - 290, (p. 284).

⁴¹ Examples of novels written in an epistolary form include de Guilleragues’s *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1669), Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Richardson’s *Clarissa, Or, the History of a Young Lady*, (1748) and Burney’s *Evelina*, (1778).

⁴² Chaskin, ‘Masculinity and Narrative Voice’, (2021), p. 76.

sexuality or gender. In Books II and III Behn introduces the narrative voice and, as I will now show, there is a queer metalepsis through the conflicting relationship between the narrator and Silvia's voice. As Chaskin suggests, there is a slippage between the action, how the narrator interprets the action and the ideology this might imply, which could be interpreted as queer.⁴³ By the time the narrator enters readers have already formed their first impressions of the characters through the letters in Book I. Unusually, therefore, it is not the narrator who forms our initial opinions of the characters.

The narrator is, like Silvia, ambiguously gendered⁴⁴ and is typically used to explain events and add opinion and interpretation. The narrator's comments and interpretations are more often alongside Silvia's letters than Philander's. For instance, when Silvia writes a letter to Octavio the narrator comments, 'She read it over, and was often about to tear it, fancying it was too kind' (187), whereas Philander's letters have less support from the narrator, suggesting that the narrator has more regard to the development of Silvia's character and, as we will see, the narrator is particularly concerned to ensure that the reader knows that Silvia is a woman. Through the relationship between Silvia and the narrator Behn introduces a queer discursive trope where, as Silvia becomes more masculine, a tension builds, as the narrator draws our attention to the disjunction between the narrator's attempt to reassert Silvia's femininity and Silvia herself. As Chaskin also notes, the third-person narrator of *Love-Letters* appears as a function of, and to contain, Silvia's masculinity.⁴⁵

At the beginning of Book II, when Octavio first meets Silvia and is attracted to her, although she is disguised as young man, the narrator points out on several occasions that Silvia has feminine attributes having 'a pretty gayety' (123) and 'a thousand little Modesties both in her blushes and motions' (123). The narrator ensures that the reader is kept aware of Silvia's femininity even when she is dressed as a man. As I mentioned earlier, we do not know whether the narrator is Behn's own voice or if she uses the narrator to distance herself from containing Silvia when she strays too far from her femininity. The conflict in the relationship between Silvia and the narrator over Silvia's gender continues in Book III where the narrator steps in to

⁴³ Chaskin, (2021), p. 76.

⁴⁴ Chaskin, (2021), p.77.

⁴⁵ Chaskin, (2021), p.76.

remind us that Silvia, ‘was of nature soft and apt for Impression; she was, in a word, a Woman’ (278). According to the narrator, although she may behave and dress as a man, Silvia is still essentially a woman, she is not hermaphrodite, nor does she physically become a man.⁴⁶ So what is Silvia’s gender if the narrator insists that she is a woman but Silvia herself feels more like a man? I suggest Silvia embodies the ghost of transgenderism. In Chapter Six (p. 168) I offer a radical re-reading of Behn’s plays where I argue that Behn uses cross-dressed characters to explore the performance and embodiment of gender to reveal the ghosts of possible transgender bodies from the seventeenth century. In *Love-Letters* I also see the ghost of transgenderism explored through the character of Silvia while at the same time being challenged by the narrator. As readers we develop a relationship with the narrator of a story, and we expect the narrator to be supportive of the ‘heroine’. However, there is a tension between Behn as author, the narrator and Silvia. Through her use of the narrator Behn can distance herself from containing Silvia’s instincts and maintain social acceptability while not censoring Silvia directly, as the author.

In Book II the narrator recounts a homoerotic encounter between Silvia and her maid. Silvia, desiring revenge on Octavio (for a letter that was in fact written by Brilljard), dresses up her maid Antonett in fine clothes and darkens her room so that when Octavio arrives for a sexual assignation with her, he will mistake Antonett for Silvia. Having disguised Antonett Silvia embraces her to ensure that her maid ‘was much of her own shape and bigness’ (211). Silvia then puts on Antonett’s clothes where, ‘[S]he appear’d so like Antonett (all but the face) (211). The plot to deceive Octavio fails and Silvia tries to work out whether Octavio doesn’t seduce her because he is angry with her, or if he wasn’t fooled by Antonett’s disguise. Later, to see why the disguise might have failed, Silvia embraces and kisses Antonett, ‘[S]he imbrac’d her, she kiss’d her bosom, and found her touches soft, her breath and Bosom sweet as anything in Nature cou’d be’ (224). Silvia does not simply test her theory that Antonett was sufficiently disguised; she embraces and kisses Antonett and clearly enjoys the experience. Goldberg noted that this incident offers ‘[a]utoeroticism, twinship, and homoeroticism’⁴⁷ and read through the prism of queer stylistics, these

⁴⁶ In the Early Modern period it was thought that bodies of uncertain sex had the potential to change sex, for females to become males and vice versa. See Gowing, ‘Common Bodies,’ (2003).

⁴⁷ Jonathan Goldberg, *Desiring Women Writing: English Renaissance Examples*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 71.

scenes between Silvia and Antonett explicitly raise the ghost of the queer and certainly read through our contemporary historicist mode, are queer. What begins as a romantic scene between Octavio and Silvia transmogrifies into a scene where Silvia kisses the breasts of a woman who is the image of herself and finds herself aroused by the experience.

There is a second scene where we see what we now can now call queer plotting in action and where Silvia's cross-dressing is seen through the eyes of Octavio. Towards the end of Book II Octavio visits Silvia and finds her dressed '*en Chavalier*' (245) and appearing 'ten thousand times more Charming than ever; that dress of a Boy adding extreamly to her Beauty' (245). Silvia explains to Octavio, how she had been 'undone' by Philander and how 'she was so unfortunate as to be with Child by the ungrateful man' (248-249). In this scenario we find Silvia dressed as a man and telling her lover that she is pregnant. Silvia falls into Octavio's arms and agrees to marry him, 'I swear! I'll marry you, love you, and give you all!' (250). In the previous scene Silvia embraced another woman, but now cross-dressed as a man and pregnant by an incestuous relationship with her brother-in-law (Philander), whose child will be illegitimate, as she is married to a different man (Brilliard) she agrees to commit bigamy by marrying yet another man (Octavio). Behn uses Silvia to embody and problematize several gendered, sexual, reproductive and transgressive issues that present a significant challenge to heteronormativity, patriarchy and hegemony, and in this sense, both queers the plot and narrative tropes and suggests new and different ways of being. It is a scene that supports Foucault's suggestion that the beginning of the seventeenth century 'was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will'.⁴⁸ Although the character of Silvia is based on the scandalous Lady Henrietta Berkley, much of her character and details of the action and plot is clearly created by Behn. Through the characterization and plotting around Silvia, Behn reflects on what Lowenthal describes as the anxieties that led to questions about the nature of the body, identity and natural versus performative identities that became a particular focus of Restoration drama.⁴⁹ Behn uses Silvia's character to raise questions about the nature of the female body and the shifting perspectives of gender

⁴⁸ Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge*, (1980), p. 3.

⁴⁹ Lowenthal, *Performing Identities*, (2003), p. 3.

and sexuality in the Restoration period, which through the readings I am presenting here we might describe as queer.

I will now discuss one of the most important and prophetic scenes that Behn writes where Silvia is silenced not as a woman might be silenced, but as a transgender person is silenced. Book III begins with Octavio obsessed with his thoughts for Silvia and describing her as ‘Imperious and Proud even to Insolence’ (257). Brilljard, is distraught that Silvia is going to marry Octavio, ‘he Suffered a thousand Pains and Jealousies’ (268) and arranges for Octavio’s arrest on the fictitious grounds of betraying the State, saying to Octavio, ‘I am your Accuser, and come to charge your Innocence with the Greatest of crimes’ (268). Octavio and Silvia (still dressed as a young man) are arrested. When they are allowed to meet the guard sees Octavia and Silvia embrace and the narrator informs the reader that Silvia ‘appear’d of the Masculine Sex’ (265). Here the narrator is still asserting Silvia’s essential femininity by using the word ‘appeared’. However, as the story continues so Silvia becomes more convincingly masculine to outsiders. After their arrest Brilljard, Octavio and Silvia (still cross-dressed) are brought to the State House. To distract the court from his spurious claim of Octavio’s treachery Brilljard announces that Silvia is his wife, ‘she is my Wife, my lawful married Wife’ (269), to which Octavio’s uncle cries out, ‘a Woman, this? By my Troth, Sweet Lady, if you be one, methought you were a very pretty Fellow’ (269). Octavio’s uncle uses the neutral pronoun ‘this’, which dehumanizes Silvia and suggests that he considers the way that Silvia presents herself is sub-human.

Chaskin reminds us that Miranda in Behn’s play *The Fair Jilt* (1688) manages to falsely accuse a young friar of rape because she can manipulate the court explicitly through a female body.⁵⁰ Silvia, on the other hand is a woman cross-dressed as a man who is outed as a woman to the court by Octavio’s uncle. Silvia is therefore perceived as a liar by the court. Silvia is silenced and the entire incident is dismissed as ‘a Cuckold’s Dream’ (269). The court’s dismissal of Silvia highlights the queerness of her identity as it appears to the court. Silvia is unable to use her femininity to manipulate the court and the court suggests further that her husband should have prevented the incident ‘by keeping her under Lock and Key’ (269). Cross-dressed Silvia is not able to maintain the authority of a man or manipulate the

⁵⁰ Chaskin, ‘Masculinity and Narrative Voice’ (2021), p.86.

sympathy afforded to a woman. Credibility is denied to Silvia because she does not fit into the category of male or female making her 'other', a queer transgressor outside the sympathies of the court and society in general. Until this point in the story Silvia's gender transgression has only been challenged by the narrator, it has not been challenged by formal expressions of authority. However, when Silvia gets to court this freedom changes and she is denied a voice. When Silvia is offered a chance to speak, 'What say you Madam?' she speaks with 'a Distain that sufficiently show'd the Pride and Anger of her Soul' (269) but her comments are dismissed, 'tis a plain case she has more mind to the young Count than the Husband, and we cannot compel People to be honest against their Inclinations' (260). Silvia's comments are simply dismissed as irrelevant and likely to be untrue because her appearance does not conform to her assumed essential gender. This is probably one of the most important and prophetic scenes in Behn's story where there is not just a tension between the author, narrator and Silvia but Silvia is also censured by authority. Through a queer lens, this scene can be read as how transgender people are denied a voice when they come up against hegemonic authority, as it still is today, almost four hundred years after Behn was writing.

Towards the end of Book III Silvia's cross-dressing has become even more convincing. Travelling back to Brussels dressed as a man, Silvia meets a handsome young gentleman called Alonzo and, even though 'she appear'd with much more Beauty, than he fancied ever to have seen in a man' (387), Alonzo 'was absolutely deceived in her' (387), unlike Octavio who, when he first meets Silvia in Book II, was confused by her gender. Alonzo assumes that Silvia's feminine qualities are 'all those Signs of Effeminacy to unassur'd Youth' (387) and Alonzo admires Silvia 'without suspecting' (387) that she is a woman. Silvia and Alonzo share a room in lodgings and during the course of their evening together Alonzo fell 'upon **his**⁵¹ Neck, and kissing the fair disguis'd, with a hearty Ardour, as ever he did one of the other sex' (388). So convincing is Silvia's masculinity that at this point even the narrator is using male pronouns to describe her. However, the narrator shortly returns to female pronouns to counter Silvia's masculine identity and remind the reader that Silvia is a woman. The narrator describes how Alonzo, 'warm'd **her** Heart; which he mistoke for Friendship, having mistaken **her** Sex' (388). The narrator not only

⁵¹ I have highlighted the narrator's use of pronouns in this section for clarity.

describes Silvia with female pronouns but reminds the reader that Alonzo has mistaken her sex. Then the narrator recounts how, later that night, ‘when **she** put off **her** Perriwig, Silvia ‘discovered nothing of the woman; nor feared **she** any thing but **her** Breasts’ (394).⁵² This is the point in the text where I believe Silvia fully embodies the ghost of transgenderism because she sees nothing in her that is a woman apart from one aspect of a female body, her breasts. Silvia does not, as she does at the beginning of the story, cross-dress for safety or because she enjoys the confused attentions of women and men; she feels ‘nothing of the woman’. This incident also draws our attention to the tension between Silvia’s increasing masculinity and the narrator. Firstly, the narrator returns to using feminine pronouns to describe Silvia and then feels the need to mention Silvia’s breasts to remind us that she is, in fact, still a woman. The more Silvia becomes masculinized the more the narrator confirms her femininity.

On the very last pages of *Love-Letters*, we hear that Brilljard finds Silvia ‘in the Arms of a young *Spaniard*, and of whom they make so considerable Advantages, that in a short time they ruin’d the Fortune of that Nobleman’ (438). Silvia goes from place to place, ‘forced to remove for new *Prey*, and daily makes considerable Conquests’ (439). Chernaik suggests, Silvia begins the trilogy as victim but becomes a victimizer.⁵³ Although it can be suggested that Silvia virtually transforms into a proxy Philander, both in terms of her gender and her corrupt behaviour, it is far more important to consider Silvia’s transformation in terms of her original situation (as a powerless young woman in love with a man who takes advantage of her and the daughter in a family who will force her to marry a man she does not love) and why she must change. Through the character of Silvia, Behn writes a story to show how one woman attempts to find her own voice in a patriarchal society. In Book I Silvia is a pawn, controlled by her family and then by Philander. At the end of Book, I Silvia disguises herself as a man for safety. In Book II Silvia continues cross-dressing because she obviously enjoys it, attracting admiration from both men and women. However, the advantages of being cross-dressed are challenged when Silvia’s female body is exposed, and her gender is perceived as a deception. In the patriarchal, hegemonic setting of a court room Silvia was unlikely to have a voice as a woman

⁵² This is an interesting use of the word ‘nothing’ which is a contemporary euphemism for vagina.

⁵³ Chernaik, ‘Unguarded Hearts’, (1998), p. 28.

but cross-dressed as a man she suffers a double disadvantage. Silvia is seen as a woman and as a deceiver. In Book III Silvia embodies the ghost of the transgender body,⁵⁴ she has, ‘discovered nothing of the woman’ (395) in herself, apart from the physicality of her breasts. Silvia’s inability to sustain her masculine identity problematises her status as transgender. Silvia is perceived as neither male or female and this status is not acceptable when she encounters authority.

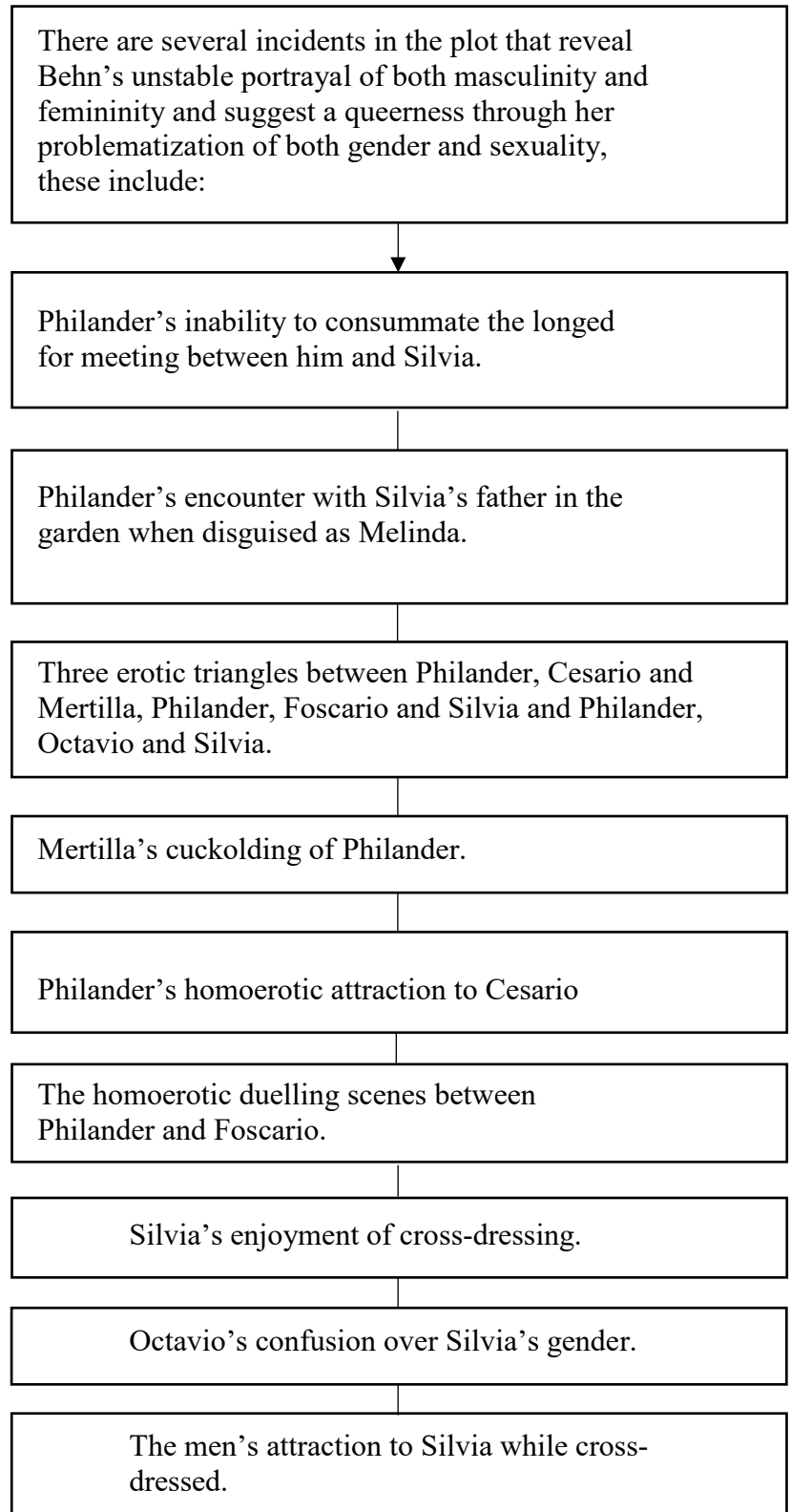
Using contemporary queer theory and a queer stylistic approach, a close analytical reading of this novel shows how Behn problematizes dominant ideologies in respect of gender and sexuality. As I have shown in this chapter Behn uses queer tropes, queer plotting and queer characterization. There is a queer triangular relationship between Behn as author, the narrator and Silvia’s character; queer gaps and delays in the narrative (evidenced through Philander and Silvia’s letters and the delay in the time before they meet); Silvia’s cross dressing (and what I call the ghost of transgenderism); Octavio’s confusion over Silvia’s gender (and the men’s attraction to her while cross-dressed); Philander’s inability to consummate his relation with Silvia at the beginning of the novel; three erotic triangles (between Philander, Cesario and Mertilla, Philander, Foscario and Silvia and Philander, Octavio and Silvia); Mertilla’s cuckolding of Philander; Philander’s encounter with Silvia’s father in the garden when disguised as Melinda; two incidents of homoerotic duelling (between Philander and Foscario); homoerotic attraction between Philander and Cesario; and a homoerotic encounter between Silvia and her maid. (See Figure 7 (p. 116) for the ways that queerness is revealed in *Love Letters*).

At the beginning of the novel, Silvia is a pawn, controlled by her family and then by Philander. As the novel progresses and as Silvia embodies the ghost of transgenderism, she gains empowerment and finds a way to take control of her life while negotiating her identity as a woman disguised as a man. This analysis raises further questions for Behn’s work and in Chapter 6 (p. 168) I analyse a selection of Behn’s plays to show how Behn uses her cross-dressed characters to explore the performance and embodiment of gender to reveal queerness and transgenderism.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See my Introduction where I explain my rationale for applying hauntology to seventeenth-century drama to reveal the ghosts of possible transgender bodies from the seventeenth century.

⁵⁵ The plays I analyse in Chapter Six (p. 170) are *The Amorous Prince* (1671), *The Dutch Lover*, (1671), *The Feign’d Courtesans* (1679), *The Widow Ranter* (1689) and *The Younger Brother* (1696?).

Figure 7. Some ways that queerness is revealed in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*.



Chapter Four

Carnival as a Gender Queer Space in *The Rover* (1677)

In this chapter, I will re-interpret Behn's play *The Rover* (1677) through a queer stylistic approach,¹ where I combine contemporary queer theory² with the intersection between queer temporality³ and Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque.⁴ I consider how Behn adopts Carnival in the *The Rover* as a gender queer space⁵ through an exploration of the four main female characters, Hellena, Florinda, Lucetta and Angellica. I will also show how Behn uses these characters to explore a range of queer tropes to counteract the inequalities and dangers of libertinism and the carnivalesque to produce a feminized, queer re-appropriation of proto feminism. Reading Florinda's near rape scenes through a queer lens we can see how Behn exposes the double standards of gender binarism, how it is broken and how Florinda, the most feminine and least 'carnivalized' of the main female characters, suffers the most under the Libertine ideal.

In this thesis, I use the term carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian⁶ sense of liberation and subversion and as a literal description of events that happen at the Carnival. I also find the carnivalesque in the structure and mutability of Behn's poetic and dramatic discourse - dialogic, linguistic and subversive - which Kristeva describes 'as the only space in which language escapes linearity (law) to live as drama in three dimensions.'⁷ In the same way that Carnival can offer a space of inclusion, change and freedom, Behn's poetic language is syntactically and grammatically liberating, inclusive and sometimes subversive. As in previous chapters I will reveal how Kristeva's theories on language can illuminate Behn's writing to reveal the problematization of phallogentric discourses and a fracturing of linear temporality through her poetic discourse.

¹ See my Introduction.

² With reference to Varnado's Reading for Queer Desire' in Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020).

³ See my Introduction.

⁴ As expressed in Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (1984).

⁵ The terms 'Queer Temporality' and 'Gender Queer' are explained in my Introduction.

⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (1984).

⁷ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, (1980), p. 79.

It has been acknowledged by critics, including Stewart, Kaufman and Pacheco,⁸ that Behn's play *The Rover* is a proto-feminist critique of libertinism, patriarchy and male violence. By interpreting the play through a queer lens, I will offer a new, queer, reading of *The Rover* where I will show how, using genre, characterization, plotting and erotic triangles, Behn queers the time and space of Carnival to critique heteronormativity. In Act III the notion of same-sex attraction is naturalized through Hellena's acceptance of the Abbess's attraction to her,⁹ and it is through the female characters that Behn reveals the queer temporality of Carnival. Examples of how Behn's female characters reveal the queer temporality and gender queer space of Carnival include Hellena cross-dressing, the scenes between Hellena, Angellica and Willmore and Lucetta's actions which, although not explicitly homoerotic, do not fit into the gendered expectations of the period.¹⁰ I also appropriate Halberstam's phrase, 'queer rage'¹¹ to label Angellica's emotions following Wilmore's behaviour to her. I define queer as including desires which may not necessary be homosocial but that are different, problematic, or that go amiss. As Varnado suggests, queer desire can be described as:

the moments in texts where desire makes strange motions, takes strange shapes, or goes awry—and not even in the expected ways. It can account for turns of feeling that—although insistently, ineffably askew—may not result in anything as historically legible as same-sex acts or same-gender-desiring social identities.¹²

I have defined my use of 'queer' to describe strange desires in my previous chapters and will continue to define queer desires further in this chapter.

If we consider the way we are defined by time, how we relate to one another, how we respond to events both individually and collectively and how our lives are controlled by time, then 'queer time' describes experiencing time differently and how time can be disrupted (see my Introduction and Chapter One).¹³ Although

⁸ Stewart, 'Rape, Patriarchy, and the Libertine Ethos', (1997); Kaufman, 'The Perils of Florinda': (1996), Pacheco, 'Rape and the Female Subject' (1998), p. 323-345.

⁹ Behn, *The Rover*, (III.1.38-39).

¹⁰ I will argue that Lucetta's behaviour can be read as within the realms of 'queer desire' in the light of Varnado's theory that in Early Modern texts queerness can be found in unexpected, strange moments and erotic feelings which may not be 'historically legible as same-sex acts.' See Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020).

¹¹ Jack Halberstam, 'Violence/Queer Violence', (1993).

¹² Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 3.

¹³ Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place*, (2005), Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?*, (2012). Freeman, *Time Binds*, (2010)

Bakhtin himself does not describe Carnival as ‘queer’, reading through the prism of queer stylistics we can see that Bakhtin’s interpretations of Carnival focusses on how Carnival time is experienced differently. This difference in Carnival temporality is particularly relevant to women and the marginalized because Carnival breaks down class, patriarchal and gender binaries and, as a recent critic of Carnival suggests, has the ‘potential to open up multiple discursive accounts of sexuality’.¹⁴ Although the appropriation of Carnival in the play has been discussed by several critics, strangely no critics have either discussed or emphasized the queerness of Carnival in Behn’s work¹⁵ despite the fact that in *The Rover* Carnival provides the perfect setting to reveal discursive modes of queer behaviour, sexuality and gender, while the medium of theatre in its iconicity and three-dimensional performance allows clear visual codes to emphasize the queerness of the characters.

In the early modern period, Carnival was celebrated throughout Europe from early in the year (sometimes from late December) until Shrove Tuesday, the day before the beginning of Lent. Carnival celebrations varied depending on locality and local traditions, the weather and the political situation, but usually consisted of processions and floats, competitions and the performance of plays.¹⁶ Carnival was a time of festive indulgence involving food, sex and violence, both literal and symbolic. Drunkenness and disorderly behaviour were common, together with violence in the streets. People wore masquerades and disguises, switched genders and reversed roles. For example, men dressed as women and women as men, masters dressed as peasants and peasants dressed as masters.¹⁷

Carnival was a popular subject for Early Modern writers. Critics, including Vaught,¹⁸ Stallybrass and Allon,¹⁹ and Bristol,²⁰ have suggested that ‘numerous

¹⁴ Ernst van der Wal and Lize van Robbroeck, *Narrating Defiance: Carnival and the Queering of the Normative*, <<https://ernstvanderwalcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/Ernst-van-der-Wal-Narrating-Defiance-Carnival-and-the-Queering-of-the-Normative.pdf>> [accessed 13 December 2020].

¹⁵ There has been work on the queering of contemporary Carnival, for example by Ernst van der Wal and Lize van Robbroeck, ‘Narrating Defiance: Carnival and the Queering of the Normative’ <<https://ernstvanderwalcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/Ernst-van-der-Wal-Narrating-Defiance-Carnival-and-the-Queering-of-the-Normative.pdf>>(accessed 22nd November 2022).

¹⁶ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (London: Temple Smith, 1978).

¹⁷ For a more detailed account of European carnivals see Burke, *Popular Culture*, (1978), Ch. 7 and Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre, Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*, (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), p.40.

¹⁸ Jennifer C Vaught, *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England*, (London: Routledge, 2012)

¹⁹ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*, (London: Methuen, 1986).

²⁰ Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre*, (1985).

writers during the English Renaissance appropriate elite and popular festive materials related to Carnival and the carnivalesque for multiple causes and agendas'.²¹ Carnival offered a legitimate space to break rules and explore ideas outside of cultural sanctions while disrupting the normal narratives of time.²² Given the dramatic role that the carnivalesque played in the lives of individual people during this period it is unsurprising that, as Vaught suggests, 'the vibrant festival context during the early modern period widely informs sixteenth- and seventeenth-century plays and poetry'.²³ In *The Rover* Behn uses Carnival as an opportunity to disrupt 'normal' narratives of time and allow her female characters to experiment with their sexuality and their relationship to men.

Most importantly for my theoretical approach, is that Carnival offers a space for queering time, Bakhtin describes the 'feast' of Carnival as 'always essentially related to time'.²⁴ Bakhtin states that, within the chronotope²⁵ of the pageant, the masks and disguises offer 'the right to be "other" in this world';²⁶ in other words to be someone outside existing and conventional categories of identity, space and time. Bakhtin also describes Carnival as 'the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and complete'.²⁷ Carnival, in Bakhtin's interpretation, is a space and time that allows for change, the freedom for people to express difference, 'a space where 'a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age'.²⁸ It is also a place where there are no class barriers, people from all sections of the community come together equally, a 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions.'²⁹ Bakhtin's work on Carnival, particularly his notion of 'otherness', enables us to read *The Rover's* use of Carnival to queer time and as a gender queer space by exploiting

²¹ Vaught, *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England*, (2012), p. 1.

²² Vilma Castaneda, 'Queering the Carnavalesque', <https://www.academia.edu/7510016/Queering_the_Carnavalesque> (accessed 11 August 2021).

²³ Vaught, *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England*, (2012) p. 4.

²⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (1984), p. 8.

²⁵ How the organisation of time and space are represented in language.

²⁶ M.M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 159.

²⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (1984), p. 10.

²⁸ Bakhtin, (1984), p. 10.

²⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (1984), p. 10.

the temporality and space of the carnivalesque with its masks, disguises and the right to be different. Carnival is a suspension and destabilization of normal linear time, a time of subversion and erotic difference, when the marginalized in society are included and an opportunity for change and difference. Bristol suggests that Carnival encompasses a ‘desire for a freer and more abundant way of life’³⁰ an analysis which might further illuminate my reading of ‘The Golden Age’ (1679) (see my Chapter Two, p. 65).

The purpose and longer-term impact of Carnival has also been debated by critics. For example, Underdown questions whether Carnival stimulated rebellion and affirmed ‘an alternative moral, sexual, and social order’ or simply offered ‘a brief moment of festive licence’ which ‘reinforced the key values that it pretended to subvert’.³¹ While Bristol suggests that ‘[t]he riotous behaviour of Carnival celebrations indiscriminately attacks both legitimate authority and illicit sexual activity’³² and that Carnival is ‘an idiom of social experimentation, in which utopian fantasies are performed and collective desires for a better life are expressed’³³ I will take this insight further and show that Behn uses Carnival in *The Rover* as a space to experiment with non-normative and queer ideas and as a space to discuss the means to critique heteronormativity, patriarchy and the inequalities and dangers of libertinism.

Critics have written about Carnival and masquerades in relation to Cavaliers, the Restoration period, Behn and her audience. For example, Lomax argues that ‘Carnival may have appealed to Restoration audiences because of its emphasis on sexual freedom and to Aphra Behn because it extended this freedom to women as well as men’.³⁴ Castle, in her seminal work on masquerades,³⁵ suggests that by the eighteenth century the masquerade had ‘lost its comic associations’, but it still ‘hides something, keeps a secret, deceives’.³⁶ However, I will show that *The Rover* is evidence that the masquerade was becoming subversive as early as the second half of

³⁰ Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre*, (1985), p.87.

³¹ David Underdown, *A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 93.

³² Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre*, (1985), p. 69.

³³ Bristol, (1985), p.52.

³⁴ Marion Lomax, ed. Introduction to *The Rover, Aphra Behn*, (London: A&C Black Publishers, 1995), p. xix.

³⁵ Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

³⁶ Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, (1986), p.104.

the seventeenth-century. Payne argues that Carnival is a critique of Restoration society in the play:

in the carnival world of *The Rover*, which partakes of the folk traditions as well as the decadent trends of carnivalization, both utopian and nightmarish carnivalesque elements merge to subvert the stylized posturing culture of the English drawing room and reveal more dramatically the disjunctions of Restoration society, particularly the male aristocratic economy.³⁷

Payne also suggests that the ‘restrained carnival spirit under the stylized masquerade reflected Restoration culture in its artificiality barely concealing a savage world of passion, violence and anarchy, more in need of regeneration than ‘Restoration’.³⁸ Payne’s comments apply to the violence perpetrated by the men in the play where, simmering beneath the seemingly light-hearted fun and freedom of Carnival, lies the violence that is inflicted on women by the Cavaliers and is characterized in the play through Florinda’s near rapes and Willmore’s behaviour towards Angellica. Payne also suggests that the characters of Belvile and Willmore are ‘blinded by their preconceptions of women’s roles and unable to negotiate the regeneration of the carnival that the women attempt to perform’³⁹ and we see this through Willmore’s treatment of women. Willmore typifies the glamorous, adventurous, witty, charming, irresistible Cavalier with ‘horrible loving eyes’,⁴⁰ but these characteristics mask his deceitfulness and violent behaviour. Although canvassing some sympathy from the audience for the fate of the banished Cavaliers, ‘banisht his Countrey, despis’d at home, and piti’d abroad’ (I.1.123) through the cumulative plotting, Behn portrays the reality of the Cavaliers’ violence towards women and embodies ‘the violent, debauched image of the Cavalier promoted by Puritans’.⁴¹ I will be taking a more queer-critical view of Carnival to show that Behn does so much more than these critics suggest. Behn explores ways that her female characters can negotiate and resist carnivalesque libertinism through her queering of the female characters and the

³⁷ Linda R. Payne, ‘The Carnavalesque Regeneration of Corrupt Economies in “The Rover”’, *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 22 (1998), 40 - 49, (p. 41).

³⁸ Payne, ‘The Carnavalesque Regeneration’, (1998), p. 41.

³⁹ Payne, (1998), p. 44.

⁴⁰ Aphra Behn, ‘The Rover’ in *The Works of Aphra Behn, Vol 5* (London: William Pickering, 1996), I.2.155. (All further citations refer to this edition).

⁴¹ Sarah Oliver, “‘Banished his country, despised at home’: Cavalier Politics, Banishment, and Rape in Aphra Behn’s ‘The Rover’”, *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research*, 27 (2012) 55 - 74, (p. 58).

temporality of Carnival. Although there are elements of Carnival that were dangerous to women, if we see Carnival through a queer lens, we can expand on the ways that Carnival could offer agency to women beyond gender swapping and role reversal.

Through an explicit focussing on queerness, and reading through the lens of queer stylistics, we will be able to see how Behn critiques the Libertine model of the carnivalesque. Morris argues that ‘during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Carnival often served as an opportunity for social disorder, controlled chaos and sensual indulgence’⁴² and suggests that in *The Rover* Hellena ‘uses the carnival season to ‘go rogue’ against patriarchal desires by carving out a space for youthful experiences between a sheltered childhood and a (future) closeted adulthood’.⁴³ Contemporary theorists have critiqued Carnival as queer; for example, Castaneda, who describes contemporary Carnival as a place where difference becomes central rather than marginalized, ‘the carnivalesque is that space which exposes the limitations of representation associated with sexuality and gender and creates new ways of reimagining a space in which other possibilities of sex and gender can manifest’,⁴⁴ and van der Wal and van Robbroeck who suggest that Carnival ‘is not only a force that can impose its own set of regulations and provide coherency for its own structures, but it is also a phenomenon with the capacity to disrupt the hegemony of city space.’⁴⁵ While these critics are discussing contemporary Carnival, in this chapter, I go back to the Early Modern period to queer Carnival.

I will show that Carnival it is not just a place for women to rebel. It is through Behn’s queering of Carnival that women gain the opportunity to resist and even reset the societal expectations of patriarchy, libertinism and the heteronormativity of the Restoration period.

I have described Carnival, Bakhtin’s theories of Carnival and their relationship to queer time and critics work on Early Modern Carnival, but how does Behn queer

⁴² Sarah Morris, ‘A Roving Woman The Rover, Part 1 and Hellena’s Self-Creation of Youth’ in Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves (eds.) *The Youth of Early Modern Women*, (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2018), p. 60.

⁴³ Morris, ‘A Roving Woman’, (2017), p. 60.

⁴⁴ Vilma Castaneda, Queering the Carnavalesque, <https://www.academia.edu/7510016/Queering_the_Carnavalesque?email_work_card=view-paper> [accessed 14th July 2022].

⁴⁵ Ernst van der Wal and Lize van Robbroeck, *Narrating Defiance: Carnival and the Queering of the Normative*, <<https://ernstvanderwalcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/Ernst-van-der-Wal-Narrating-Defiance-Carnival-and-the-Queering-of-the-Normative.pdf>> [accessed 13 December 2020].

Carnival? Although the assumptions of normative Carnival replicate heteronormative and patriarchal boundaries, I will show that Behn takes advantage of the upside-down world of Carnival, with its emphasis on freedom, renewal, masquerades and inclusivity, to queer three of her female characters (see figure 8, p.131), Hellena because of her cross-dressing and homoeroticism, Angellica for her ‘queer rage’ and Lucetta whose behaviour challenges and problematizes normative expectations, all of which enables them to navigate the disadvantages of libertinism. What I have suggested is that the queer time and space of Carnival in *The Rover* provided the perfect setting for Behn to challenge patriarchy and heteronormativity. As Castle argues, ‘the masquerade projected an anti-nature, a world upside-down, an intoxicating reversal of ordinary sexual, social and metaphysical hierarchies’.⁴⁶ Carnival offered Behn a space to situate her female characters in a place of escape, a place where they could behave differently, a place where Behn naturalizes same-sex attraction, where women can draw on the ‘masculine’ side of their nature, where Hellena cross-dresses⁴⁷ and where women do not have to conform to societal expectations. Carnival is a temporality where Behn explore elements of queerness and problematizes accepted ideas of normativity, experiments with different ways of being and challenges the inequalities and dangers of libertinism for women. Carnival offers a suspended time free from the prohibitions of normal life, although Behn also exposes the double standards of this liberating temporality and how it can work against women.

Before turning to the characters and events in the play, it is important to note that the setting and timing of *The Rover* plays out notions of a time suspended, as the play is set during the interregnum, when Cavaliers had fled England to continental Europe. Lomax considers setting *The Rover* in the 1650s is significant to Behn’s use of carnival:

Cromwell’s Protectorate had suppressed pastimes and sports and, to Royalists, the period must have seemed like an indefinite extension of Lent. Joining in the festivities of Carnival which were denied them at home, exiled cavaliers whiled away the time until the new order of the once-revolutionary Parliamentarians could be overthrown.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Castle ‘*Masquerade and Civilization*,’ (1986), p. 6.

⁴⁷ See Chapter Six (p. 170), where, in a radical re-reading of Behn’s plays I argue that she uses cross-dressed characters to explore the performance and embodiment of gender to reveal the ghosts of possible transgender bodies from the seventeenth century.

⁴⁸ Lomax, ‘Introduction to *The Rover*’, (1995), xvii.

The English characters are based on the displaced Royalists who escaped abroad, and it must have felt as if time for them had been suspended while they waited for the monarchy to return. For these Royalists abroad it was hiatus between the horrors of the Civil Wars and the Restoration; a strange time that might be described as queer because of its strangeness, because it would have involved a different way of living with different priorities and when time was experienced differently.⁴⁹

The Rover is based on the play, *Thomaso* (1654), by Thomas Killigrew (1612-1683). *Thomaso* is set in Madrid, but Behn changes the location of her play to Naples. I think it extremely likely that, as Corse suggests, Behn ‘deliberately locates her play in Naples because of its reputation as a volatile and unpredictable city’⁵⁰ which would fit it with the ‘casual and spontaneous fighting [that] occurs in the five acts of *The Rover*’.⁵¹ Significantly, Naples was also known during this period to be a city with a mixture of different cultures and with a reputation for ‘sexual indulgence’.⁵²

The Rover opens through the eyes of two women and begins *in medias res*. The impact of this beginning suggests a feminizing of time. Not just because it plunges into the middle of an intense conversation between the two women, but because it does not build up with an introduction to the characters or the story; rather it dives straight into the women’s predicament to fracture linear time. In Kristeva’s article ‘Women’s Time’ she outlines the relationship between the feminist struggle and the perception of time and suggests that linear time has been associated with masculine socio-economic and political time.⁵³ Kristeva’s analysis of time is both material and psychoanalytic, relating to personal, embodied experiences of time. Although Kristeva was writing in the 1980s, the fact that Behn’s play opens with two women speaking on stage *in medias res* is a disruption which we could describe as ‘Women’s Time’. This is how the play opens:

⁴⁹ Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place*, (2005), p.1.

⁵⁰ Taylor Corse, ‘Seventeenth-Century Naples and Aphra Behn’s ‘The Rover’, *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 29 (2005) 41 -51, (p. 43).

⁵¹ Corse, ‘Seventeenth-Century Naples’, (2005), p. 43.

⁵² Corse, (2005), p. 45.

⁵³ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, (1981), p 13-35.

FLORINDA What an Impertinent thing is a Young Girl bred in a Nunnery? How full of Questions? Prithce no more *Hellena*, I have told thee more than thou understand'st already. (I.1.1-3)

HELENA The more's my grief, I wou'd fain know as much as you, which makes me so Inquisitive; nor is't enough I know you'r a Lover, unless you tell me too, who 'tis you sigh for?

(I.1.1-6)

Florinda and Hellena, are described as being in '*A Chamber*' and are in the middle of an intimate and frank conversation about love, their rights and resistance to the patriarchal society in which they live. Hellena looks out from her immediate physical confinement to imagine what it would be like to have a lover: 'I begin to have a shrew'd guess, what 'tis to be so, and fancy it very pretty to sigh, and sing, and blush, and wish, and dream and wish, and long and wish' (I.1.9-11). Hellena asks why Florinda blushes, and she replies, 'With Indignation, and how near soever my Father thinks I am to Marrying that hated Object' (I.1.19-20). Florinda's family have arranged a forced marriage for her and she considers the wider implications of their confinement and attempts to assert her independence by rebelling against her family-planned marriage, 'I would not have a man so dear to me as my brother follow the ill custom of our country, and make a slave of his sister' (I.1.59-61) and '[I]et him consider my youth, beauty and fortune, which ought not to be thrown away on his Age and Joynture' (I.1.73-74). Florinda considers herself worth more than an object of exchange for her male relations to marry off, against her will, to an old man. For the sisters Carnival is a time and space of protest against patriarchy and normativity. When Hellena says to her brother Pedro, 'It's not 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' (I.1.87-88) she is suggesting that it is better to have no sexuality than to be forced into a heterosexual relationship unwillingly. Through a radical queer reading of Helena's statement, we can link heterosexuality, outside the space of Carnival, as something that is forced.

The women are contained by men in an indoor space (the chamber), but they are also contained by virtue of being women in a patriarchal society with the looming prospect of incarceration in a convent for Hellena and an arranged marriage for Florinda. Through their exchange we see and feel how the women are trapped in an actual space and, as women, how they are trapped in a patriarchal society. The women are suspended in time on a threshold, where they can see the outside world,

but their access is restricted by the male members of their family. We know that women of Florinda and Hellena's class would not have been allowed to roam freely,⁵⁴ but they can see the men able to go where they please. For example, while the women are discussing their future, Don Pedro enters the women's room with his servant, who is carrying Carnival masks. Hughes suggests that the masks indicate Don Pedro's access to the world outside.⁵⁵ I suggest that the wearing of masks also suggests something more duplicitous in contrast to the openness of the women's speech. The masks tell us both that the men are going to Carnival and that they will hide their identity. The women's powerlessness is accentuated when Don Pedro says to Florinda, 'Callis, take her hence and lock her up all this Carnival, at Lent she shall begin her everlasting Pennance [sic] in a Monastery' (I.1.127-128). Through these instructions we learn that Hellena will be locked up during the Carnival until she goes to the convent at Lent, and then she will be locked away forever against her will.

The sisters are clearly aware of the freedom that the temporality of Carnival can offer them, and we see this when Hellena says to Florinda that at Carnival she will be able to experience '[t]hat which all the world does, as I am told, be as mad as the rest, and take all Innocent freedoms' (I.1.63-64). The women see Carnival as a place where, in Bakhtin's words, 'all were considered equal'.⁵⁶ Carnival is an opportunity for freedom, for the women to take on a disguise and escape from their entrapment. Critics, including Kristeva, describe carnivalesque discourse as 'a social and political protest'⁵⁷ and Halberstam states, 'Carnivals are precisely protests, and they are protests that never envision a return to "normal life"'.⁵⁸ Bakhtin suggests that 'Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people'.⁵⁹ The idea that Carnival is a space of freedom for everyone means it can be described as a queer space because it embraces everybody, including those on the margins of society. For

⁵⁴ Gowing 'Common Bodies', (2003). See Chapter One (p. 42) on the prominent ideology during the seventeenth century that restricted women's role to the domestic sphere. For example, 'in conduct books, women were repeatedly advised to ensure their reputation by keeping within the walls of the home'.

⁵⁵ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 93.

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (1984), p. 10.

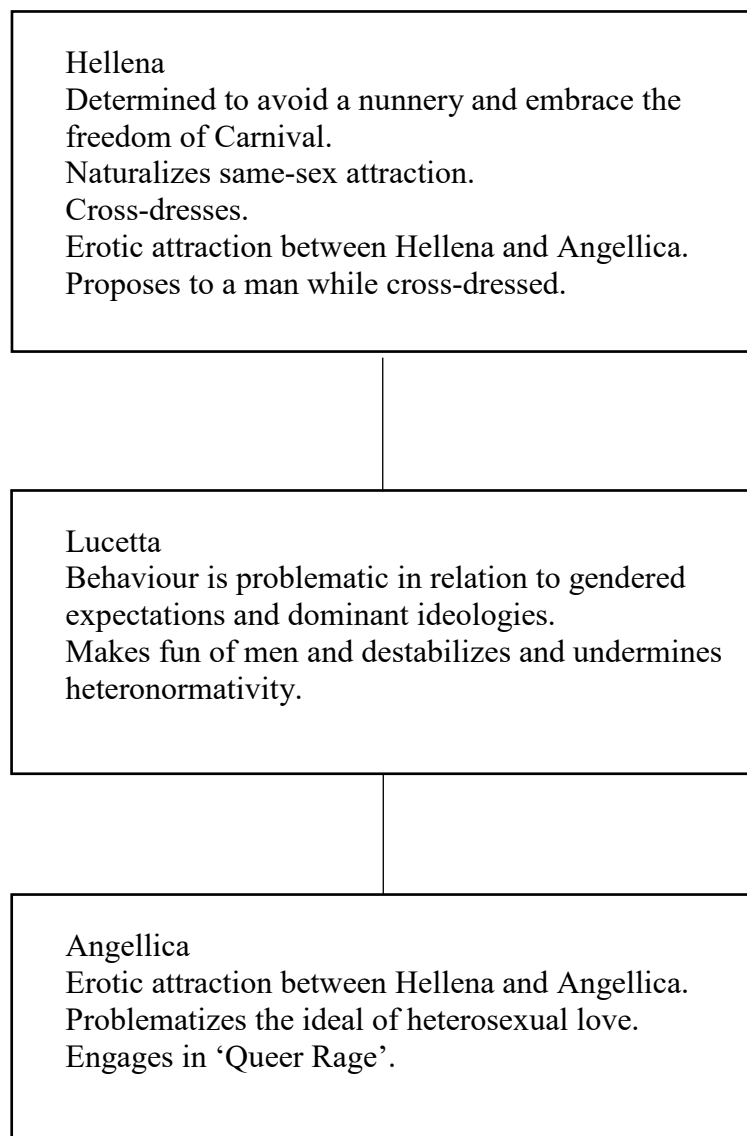
⁵⁷ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, (1980), p. 65.

⁵⁸ Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism, Sex Gender, and the End of Normal*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), p. 135.

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (1984), p. 7.

Florinda and Hellena during their initial conversation and, when they leave their confinement to dress up and go out, Carnival becomes a time and place of protest to the way they have been confined and commodified by patriarchy. During this scene we establish that the male members of the sister's family seek to use them by marrying Florinda off to a rich old man and imprisoning Hellena in a religious life against their wishes.

Figure 8. Behn's Queer Women in *The Rover*



I have discussed how at the beginning of the play, Behn problematizes time by opening the play *in medias res* and through the eyes of two women, suggesting a feminizing and fracturing of time and how Hellena and Florinda are confined by patriarchy. I will now explore how the characterization of Hellena, Lucetta and Angellica exposes triangles of desire and homoeroticism; how the trope of cross-dressing and Behn's use of genre and plotting, queer spaces of the play and how this queerness helps the women to challenge the inequalities and dangers for women presented by libertinism. Hellena is determined to avoid a nunnery and embrace the freedom offered by Carnival to find a sexual relationship, 'I'm resolv'd to provide myself this Carnival' (I.1.34-35). Cixous suggests that women have 'been turned away from [their] bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike with that stupid sexual modesty'⁶⁰ and Behn uses the audience's assumptions to overturn this view through her characterization of Hellena. Hellena unashamedly expresses her sexual desire from the beginning of the play, 'I love mischief strangely, as most of our Sex do' (I.1.23-24) and, later, in masquerade, when confronted by Willmore, she is both confident in her erotic desire and prepared to argue with him, 'Why must we be either guilty of Fornication or Murder if we converse with you Men? — and is there no difference between leave to love me, and leave to lye with me?' (I.2.187-189). Hellena's wit allows her to banter with Willmore in a mix of insults and flirtation.

Critics have emphasized Hellena's sexual freedoms, but if we interpret her character through the framework of queer stylistics this flags up the homoerotic elements of her character and how Hellena's frank sexuality is exposed through the freedoms offered by the carnivalesque nature of the play. This, together with the triangular plot that I describe below, reveals a new reading of Hellena's character where she functions as a queer trigger. By this I mean that the transparency of Hellena's queerness gives us licence to queer other characters in the play. We know that Hellena believes that an enforced heterosexual marriage is 'a worse confinement than a Religious life' (I.1.87-88) and in Act III we are made aware that Hellena is open to love between women when Hellena says to Florinda, 'I shou'd have staid in the Nunnery still, if I had lik'd my Lady *Abbesse* as well as she lik'd me' (III.1.38-39). Hellena is not shocked that the abbess of her convent was sexually attracted to

⁶⁰ Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', (1976), p. 885.

her. Rather, the notion of same-sex attraction is naturalized through Hellena's acceptance of the Abbess's attraction.

Behn plots an erotic triangle between Hellena, Angellica and Willmore, where Hellena and Angellica's rivalry for Willmore's love generates a bond between the two women creating an erotic triangle. As I have already shown (see Chapter Three, p. 96) Sedgwick queers Girard's theory of erotic triangles where 'in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to a beloved, that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent.'⁶¹ As Sedgwick explains, Girard 'finds many examples in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival'.⁶² While Girard's triangular examples involve two men and a woman, Sedgwick argues that the triangle 'would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the gender of one of the participants'.⁶³ Although the structure of the triangle would be unaffected by the change of gender, the meaning is, and when the triangle includes two women, as in this case, it becomes more active. Sedgwick's argument enables us to consider Hellena and Angellica's attraction to each other is as strong as their attraction to Willmore because of their rivalry for his love. However, Sedgwick's argument that the triangle is not affected by changing the makeup of the triangle to two women and a man does not always hold true. Where two points of the triangle in a patriarchal society are men, this can emphasize the commodification of women, how women's lives are always represented in relation to men and how women's desires are repressed because relationships between men are considered more important. Women's relationships with men, or with each other, become secondary to homosocial relationships 'between men' which take precedence particularly, as Sedgwick suggests, 'within the male-centred novelistic tradition',⁶⁴ where patriarchal economics and kinship arrangements in the seventeenth century meant that dominant narratives privilege a triangle 'between men' in terms of tropes and plots. Behn

⁶¹ Kosofsky Sedgwick explains Girard's theory in 'Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles' in *Between Men*, (1985), p. 21.

⁶² Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Between Men', (1985), p. 21.

⁶³ Kosofsky Sedgwick, (1985), p. 23.

⁶⁴ Kosofsky Sedgwick, (1985), p. 21.

problematizes the homosocial/patriarchal power of the ‘between men’ triangle by creating a triangle between two women and a man. This plot function is further complicated by one of the women (Hellena) being dressed as a young man. While Behn legitimizes Sedgwick’s argument that the points of an erotic triangle can be of any gender, the fact that Hellena makes love to Willmore dressed as a young man could be seen to validate the argument that the ‘between men’ trope takes precedence, or that the plot is completely queer. Erotic triangles are a recurrent trope in Behn’s work (see Chapters Three, p. 96) and Six, p. 170) and as a literary device, erotic triangles gave Behn a way to avoid limiting the implicit sexuality to a binary opposition while offering a covert way to introduce homosocial relationships into her work and is an example of the queer aesthetic we find in Behn’s work.

In addition to Hellena’s resistance to forced heterosexual marriage, her unashamed sexuality, her acceptance of same sex attraction and her inclusion in an erotic triangle, she also appears cross-dressed in Act IV. It is a busy scene with most of the characters in the play on stage talking and fighting with masqueraders passing through and adding to the melee. Willmore enters in fine clothes, Angellica enters with Moretta and Sebastian and the audience’s attention is focussed on the conversation that ensues between Willmore and Angellica. It is an emotional scene as Angellica rails at Willmore accusing him of choosing Hellena over her because of Hellena’s wealth, ‘Twas the Two Hundred Thousand Crowns you Courted’ (IV.266). The audience’s attention is then drawn to Hellena who enters the stage dressed as a young man. Hellena introduces herself to Angellica, but the other characters and the audience sees a young man introducing himself in a gently flirtatious manner:

Madam,
 You’ll hardly pardon my Intrusion
 When you shall know my business!
 And I’m too young to tell my Tale with Art;
 But there must be a wondrous store of goodness,
 Where so much Beauty dwells

(The Rover, IV.1.301-306)

The young man (Hellena) tells Angellica and Willmore a story (to torment Willmore) of a young lady in love with an English man who jilts her. Hellena sees how this story is making Angellica suffer and her concern for Angellia leads her to suggest stopping her story, ‘In your fair Eyes I read too much concern, To tell my farther business’ (IV.2.348-349). However, Angellica begs her to continue and the erotic

tension between the two women builds when Angellica says, “Prithee, sweet Youth, talk on, thou maist perhaps Raise here a storm that may undo my passion, And then I’ll grant thee anything’ (IV.1.350-352). Angellica’s use of the sexually provocative words: ‘storm’, ‘undo’ and ‘passion’ indicate her sexual attraction to the cross-dressed Hellena alongside the suggestion that Hellena could raise Angellica’s passion to the point of giving her anything. This scene fizzles with queer desire for a knowing audience, not just through what is said, but by seeing Hellena dressed as a young man and her engagement with an older woman. (Although the audience sees an erotic encounter between a man and a woman, this is a queer scene because the audience is aware that they are both women.) In this scene Behn both plays with and validates the notion of queer desire through the sexual freedom offered by Carnival and Hellena’s desire to ‘provide for herself this Carnival’ (I.1.34-35) to explore her sexuality.

Behn’s most dramatic and obvious queering of Hellena’s character and the plot occurs later in Act V when Hellena proposes marriage to Willmore as he attempts to take her to bed. Hellena says to Willmore, ‘let but old gaffer *Himen* and his Priest say amen to’t, and I dare lay my Mother’s daughter by as proper a Fellow as your Father’s son, without fear or blushing’ (V.1.415-419). There is ambiguity in the way this line can be interpreted; either Hellena is saying she will lie her body (‘my Mother’s daughter’) beside his (his Father’s son), or Hellena displaces her body through the suggestion that she has put aside being a daughter (‘lay my Mother’s daughter by’) to be as much a man as Willmore (‘a proper a Fellow as your Father’s son’) and without embarrassment (‘without fear of blushing’). The ambiguity of the referencing fractures the comfortable sense of a heteropatriarchal closure, exposing the problematics for a speaking woman in the world. The latter interpretation suggests that Hellena might have to eliminate her female body as the only way to find equality with Willmore. Hellena’s words and the suggestion of sex and marriage between two men (on stage we see Hellena dressed as a young man) - and marriage sanctioned by the Ancient Greek mythological god of marriage and a priest (‘old gaffer *Himen* and his Priest say amen to’t it) - suggest a dramatic undermining and questioning of binary relationships and the trope of ‘between men’. Encompassing both queer desire and gender-nonconformity in this scene Behn queers the play and titillates her audience with images on stage, not just of an older man persuading a younger man into bed, but a young man proposing sex and a religiously sanctioned

marriage to an older man. Willmore and Hellena's attraction collapse heterosexual norms reminiscent of Viola and Orsino's attraction in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601-1602).⁶⁵ *Twelfth Night* would have been well known by Behn's audience as it was performed several times during the Restoration Period (during the 1661/62, 1663 and 1668 seasons) by the same company as *The Rover* (The Dukes Company). The actors Thomas Betterton (1635-1710) and Cave Underhill (1634-1710?) appeared in both plays,⁶⁶ suggesting good knowledge of characters and connotations across both plays.

Let me now turn to Lucetta. From the *Dramatis Personae* we know that Lucetta is 'A Jilting Wench'. Lucetta has Blunt in her sights:

LUCETTA This is a Stranger, I know by his gazing; if he be brisk, he'l venture to follow me; and then if I understand my Trade, he's mine, he's English too; and they say that's a sort of good natur'd loving People, and have generally so kind an opinion of themselves, that a Woman with any Wit may Flatter 'em into any sort of Fool she pleases.' (I.2.193-197).

Despite Blunt believing that he is 'belov'd by such a Gentlewoman' (II.1.59-60), the audience already understands that Blunt is going to be conned by Lucetta. For instance, he doesn't see that he is being made a fool of when Lucetta gives him a bracelet in exchange for a diamond, telling his friends that 'she presented me with this Bracelet, for the Toy of a Diamond I us'd to wear' (II.1.50-51). Lucetta is free from patriarchal control, even though she has a home, an 'Old Jealous Husband' (III.2.2) and Philippo, her lover, who thinks he controls her but just wants to sleep with her, 'Blame me not, *Lucetta*, to keep as much of thee as I can to my self—come, that thought makes me wanton!—let's to Bed!' (III.3.82-83). Lucetta makes the most of the 'topsy-turvy' world of Carnival to lure Blunt into her house to rob him of his fine clothes and money. Behn deliberately parallels Angellica's and Lucetta's characters, and at the same time inverts them. Angellica watches the men parade for her, 'I'm not displeas'd with their rallying; their wonder feeds my vanity' (II.1.115-116) while Lucetta parades and chooses a man, '*She often passes by Blunt, and gazes on him*' (I.2.198). Lucetta pretends to be a woman of quality fallen on hard times

⁶⁵ In *Twelfth Night* Viola is disguised as a boy (Cesario) and helps Orsino court Olivia despite loving him herself and Olivia marries Viola's brother thinking he is Viola/Cesario.

⁶⁶ *The London Stage, 1660-1800, a calendar of plays*. HathiTrust, <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020696632&view=1up&seq=459&skin=2021>> (accessed 17th August 2021).

who loves and desires Blunt and says to him, ‘at first sight of that sweet Face and Shape, it made me your absolute Captive’ (III.2.10-11), but she takes advantage of his naivety to seduce, trick and humiliate him.

Lucetta is a woman who takes advantage of men which, together with the positioning of her behaviour in the carnivalesque setting and her involvement in the later farcical scene in Act III (as we will see), can be seen to render her character as different or outside the ‘normal’ expected behaviour for her society and for which I suggest we can use the term queer. In the opening scene of Act III Blunt is part of the street scene which I remember in the 1986⁶⁷ RSC production of *The Rover*, as buzzing and colourful and where the characters are bantering about lovers, drinking and marriage. Sancho enters this scene and pulls Blunt away to take him to Lucetta, ‘Enter SANCHO and pulls down Blunt by the sleeve. They go outside’ (III.1). The colourful, noisy scene continues without Blunt until the next scene which switches to the darkness and quiet of Lucetta’s house. Lucetta has lured Blunt to her house, ‘Now we are safe and free; no fears of the coming home of my Old Jealous Husband’ (III,2,1-2). Blunt is completely taken in by her believing that ‘she’s damnably in Love with me’ (III.2.13-14). Lucetta’s servant escorts Blunt to her chamber where Lucetta is waiting for him in bed. Lucetta tells him to ‘put out the Light, it may betray us else’ (III.2.45) and encourages Blunt to take off his clothes saying, ‘Are you not undrest yet?’ (III.2.43). In the darkness Blunt stumbles around, ‘Puts out the candle, the bed descends, he gropes around to find it’ (III.2.48) until he falls down a trap and he is robbed of his clothes and valuables. This scene is Rabelaisian;⁶⁸ Blunt literally falls naked down into a sewer and reappears, presumably covered in excrement, ‘creeping out of a Common-Shoar, his Face, &c. all dirty’ (III.2). The switch from the buzzing, noisy, colourful street scene to the dark interior of Lucetta’s house is a dramatic switch of tempo. The introduction of the farcical scene into the main body of the play is not simply funny, it creates a sudden, strange, temporal disturbance at the very moment when the genre changes - a moment in Early Modern literature which Varnado⁶⁹ might suggest can be illuminated by describing it as queer. As Varnado proposes the word queer:

⁶⁷ I believe this was interpreted similarly in the 2016 RSC production, but I have only seen this via a black and white recording.

⁶⁸ Lomax, ‘Introduction to *The Rover*’, (1995), xxiv.

⁶⁹ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p, 3.

can illuminate the moments in texts where desire makes strange motions, takes strange shapes, or goes awry—and not even in the expected ways. It can account for turns of feeling that—although insistently, ineffably askew—may not result in anything as historically legible as same-sex acts or same-gender-desiring social identities. It can ultimately reveal that, at times, what is queer about the shape of desire of erotic energy in an early modern text is not a person, an act, or an identity, but rather the larger system or structure through which affects and relations circulate.⁷⁰

Added to this disturbance to the flow of the play, there is another shift when Blunt's desire for an erotic encounter with Lucetta ends with a reversal of roles, from a Cavalier taking advantage of a woman, to a woman making a fool of a man.

In this scene, Behn encourages her audience to laugh at men. Lucetta's behaviour problematizes heteronormativity because it is problematic in relation to gendered expectations and dominant ideologies. Considering the more obvious 'queer' events in the play such as cross-dressing, the naturalization of homoerotic desire and by analysing Lucetta's behaviour through a combination of queer stylistics and Varnado's new reading for queer desire in Early Modern literature,⁷¹ we can describe this scene and Lucetta's behaviour as 'an unexpected twist';⁷² an unexpected and strange turn of events in the text that may not be explicitly homosocial but that does not follow normative behaviours and which we can describe as queer. Lucetta overturns society's expectations by declaring love to a man and then tricking him into bed to rob him. Lucetta uses and makes fun of men through the trope of 'woman on top' including both Sancho (who is described in the *Dramatis Personae* as her pimp) and Blunt. Not only does Lucetta con a man, Blunt, but she is supported in her plan by a man who would usually be expected to be the one giving her orders. The farcical scene is non-normative through its destabilization and undermining of heteronormativity.

It was far from unusual to have a farcical scene in Restoration comedy; indeed, it was during the Restoration that the term farce took 'its place in dramatic nomenclature'.⁷³ Restoration audiences developed a great appetite for farce despite it being considered by some play writes as low in aesthetic value.⁷⁴ Holland suggests

⁷⁰ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 3.

⁷¹ Varnado, (2020).

⁷² Varnado, (2020), p. 2.

⁷³ Leo Hughes, *A Century of English Farce*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p.6.

⁷⁴ Peter Holland, 'Farce' in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. Payne Fisk, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 107.

that Dryden (1631 – 1700) had the ‘ability to both attack farce and to write them.’⁷⁵ In several of her plays including *The Rover* and *The Emperor of The Moon* (1687) Behn follows the conventions of farce through the ‘emphasis on physical action, on disguise and trickery’.⁷⁶ Although it has been suggested that farce is a fundamentally conservative form of theatre,⁷⁷ the fact that it is intrinsic to the carnivalesque suggests that it could be described as the opposite of conservative. There are two elements of farce that could have been disturbing to some Restoration audiences. One is the foregrounding of servants in the action (for instance Scaramouch and Harlequin in *The Emperor of The Moon*) and the second is the emphasis on the body and socially unacceptable behaviour (amply demonstrated in *The Emperor of The Moon*, see Chapter Five, p. 146). The disturbing elements in farce, like comedy in general, ‘tests the limits of heteronormative relationships and gender roles’⁷⁸ and this is particularly relevant in the scenes between Lucetta and Blunt.

Lucetta is not trapped by patriarchy, she does not suffer at the hands of the Cavaliers, rather, in the way of carnivalesque inversion and the suspended time of the interregnum, she turns Cavalier behaviour upside down to become the one who takes advantage of Blunt’s desire in order to seduce and humiliate him. Diamond argues that Blunt’s confusion reflects the ‘ambiguity of signs representing the status and characters of women’⁷⁹ and that it could be ‘read as an extratextual reference to the Restoration actress and her female spectators’.⁸⁰ Much more radically, this reading through a queer lens suggests that within the social and temporal context of her work Behn uses the conventional medium of theatrical farce to destabilize and problematize heterosexual ‘normality’ by making fun of heterosexuality and men’s desire for sex, while at the same time giving control to a woman.

Using Varnado⁸¹ and reading the play through the prism of queer stylistics, illuminates the intersection between Blunt’s erotic desires and Lucetta’s desire to make a fool of him which, added to the intersection/disturbance between the main plot and the play’s sudden departure into farce, disturb heteronormativity. In the

⁷⁵ Holland, ‘*The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*’, (2000), p. 108.

⁷⁶ Holland, p. 108.

⁷⁷ Holland, p. 108.

⁷⁸ Andrew Stott, *Comedy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) p. 128.

⁷⁹ Elin Diamond, ‘Gestus and Signatures in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*’, *EHL*, 56 (1989), 519 – 541(p. 530).

⁸⁰ Diamond, ‘Gestus and Signatures’, (1989), p. 530.

⁸¹ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020)

context of Behn's work, where we can find open references to the problematization of gender and homosocial relationships, these gaps or disturbances in the play allow for a subtle interpretation or 'queering', or a 'literary trace of queerness'⁸² in the text that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Angellica is a courtesan and, like Lucetta, believes herself financially independent of men. Angellica comes to Carnival with 'no time for Love; the bravest and noblest of Mankind have purchased [her] favours at so dear a rate' (II.1.135-136). She is the only woman who does not hide behind a mask; indeed, her picture is displayed advertising herself, and the stage direction reads, '*Enter TWO BRAVO'S, and hang up a great Picture of Angellica's against the Balcony, and Two little ones on each side of the Door*' (II.1.88-89). Until she meets Willmore, Angellica's relationships with men have been for her own financial benefit. Angellica's power comes from her ability to choose the men allowed to 'buy' her while maintaining an emotional detachment, 'nothing but Gold shall charm my heart' (II.1.129-130). Angellica appropriates the male language of a Petrarchan poet 'all I have to wound with is my eyes' (II.1.268) but her profession as a courtesan excludes her from the marriage marketplace,⁸³ so she uses her beauty to acquire power and money. Her power also comes from her ability to choose the men allowed to 'buy' her while maintaining an emotional detachment, 'nothing but Gold shall charm my heart' (II.1.129-130). However, Willmore transforms Angellica from a powerful, confident courtesan into a woman suffering unrequited love for a man who treats her appallingly. Angellica can control men when they have to pay for her, but once she is emotionally involved, 'I have given him my Eternal rest,/My whole repose, my future joys, my Heart!' (IV.2.232-233), her power is lost. Although not physically raped, Willmore steals Angellica's heart, her strength, her confidence and her independence.

In Act V, to take revenge on Willmore and attempt to take control over her life, Angellica enters wearing 'a Masking Habit and Vizard' (V.1.188) and on the stage we see Angellica following Willmore around the stage with a pistol pointed at his breast while she speaks her heart:

Love, that has rob'd it of its unconcern,

⁸² Varnado, '*The Shapes of Fancy*', (2020), p. 28

⁸³ Pacheco, '*Rape and the Female Subject*', (1998). p 323.

Of all that Pride that taught me how to value it.
And in its room
A mean submissive Passion was convey'd,
That made me humbly bow, which I nere did
To anything but Heaven.
Thou, perjur'd Man, didst this.....

(*The Rover*, V.1.231-237)

In this extract Angellica tells Willmore how he has destroyed her and explains how, before Willmore wilfully lied to her, she valued her pride and never submitted to anything other than Heaven. The disguise and a gun allow Angellica to confront Willmore and tell him exactly what he has done to her:

Had I remain'd in innocent security,
I shou'd have thought all men were born my slaves,
And worn my pow'r like lightning in my Eyes To have destroy'd at pleasure when
offended:
— But when Love held the Mirror the undeceiving Glass
Reflected all the weakness of my soul,

(*The Rover*, V.1.264-269)

In this speech Angellica expresses her despair. Before she met Willmore, she was a powerful, confident woman who believed that 'all men were born my slaves' (V.1.265). However, after she has been deceived by Willmore, she believes that love has acted as a mirror ('the Mirror the undeceiving Glass') to reveal her weakness as a woman ('Reflected all the weakness of my soul'), which in turn un-queers time and makes her as vulnerable as Florinda. Through Angellica's speech Behn problematizes the ideal of heterosexual love and suggests how the only way the women can oppose the negative elements of libertinism is to embrace an element of queerness. Although Angellica has not been physically raped, she rages against the violence and duplicity perpetrated by a man of power towards a powerless woman. Angellica rages because Willmore has completely broken her. In the context of queering *The Rover* through a queer stylistic approach I suggest that it might be useful to appropriate Halberstam's term 'queer rage' to describe Angellica's feelings. Behn's representation of Angellica's rage is 'queer' because, like the 'queer rage' that Halberstam describes some three hundred years later, it occupies a political space that disrupts the narrative of compulsory heterosexuality and because it is the

response to violence against minorities.⁸⁴ Halberstam describes this as the rage which turns the victim into the aggressor, that comes when a victim of rape retaliates, the rage that retaliates against ‘violence perpetrated by powerful white men usually against women or people of colour.’⁸⁵ In her theory of ‘queer rage’ Halberstam does not advocate violence and indeed Angellica does not shoot Willmore. Rather, Halberstam suggests that as women we should ‘allow ourselves to imagine the possibilities of fighting violence with violence’⁸⁶ and thereby gain empowerment by removing the assumption that ‘might and right’ are exclusive to masculinity.

Halberstam states:

role reversal never simply replicated the terms of an equation. The depiction of women committing acts of violence against men does not simply use “male” tactics of aggression for other ends; in fact, female violence transforms the symbolic function of the feminine with popular narratives and it simultaneously challenges the hegemonic insistence upon the linking of might and right under the sign of masculinity.⁸⁷

The image of Angellica entering in ‘a Masking Habit and Vizard’ (V.1.188) and pointing a gun at Willmore in Act V disrupts the implicit assumption of a woman as victim. However, both Angellica and Hippolyta in Behn’s play *The Dutch Lover* (1673) (see Chapter Six, p.170), imagine the violence needed to avenge their lovers but are unable to find it within themselves to act violently without either hiding behind a mask, wielding the masculinized image of a gun, (or in Hippolyta’s case a dagger) or embodying a masculine gender. Through their imaginings the two women behave as Halberstam suggests but then feel the need for disguise or masculinized props to act. I will argue in Chapter Six (p. 170) that the women’s need to cross-dress or use masculine props is part of Behn’s exploration of gender which she never fully resolves in her work.

Through Behn’s writing, we feel the women’s powerlessness and anger and experience the actions they take to mitigate their frustration. To survive outside a patriarchal world in *The Rover* Behn uses the backdrop of Carnival where the women can embrace a degree of freedom and what we might call queerness. However, there

⁸⁴ Halberstam uses the word ‘queer’ in this sense to ‘denote a postmodern, postidentity politics focused on but not limited to sexual minorities’. Halberstam, ‘Violence/Queer Violence’, (1993), p. 190.

⁸⁵ Halberstam, ‘Violence/Queer Violence’, (1993), p. 191.

⁸⁶ Halberstam, p. 191.

⁸⁷ Halberstam, p. 191.

is also danger for women in Carnival and libertinism and we see this through the characterization and plotting around Florinda. Perhaps because Florinda conforms most to patriarchal conventions of femininity, she might be considered the least ‘queer’ of Behn’s major female characters. We see how Florinda rebels against patriarchy through the rejection of a family-planned marriage and eventually marries Belvile, the man she loves. Florinda does not cross-dress like Hellena, she does not fly off into a ‘queer rage’ like Angellica or perform in a farce in the way Lucetta does. Florinda’s only rebelliousness is her resistance to an arranged marriage and the desire to escape her confinement to meet the man she loves, but we learn that she is nearly raped several times. Florinda’s first near rape was by the occupying French soldiers in Pamplona where she was ‘expos’d to such dangers, as the Licenc’d Lust of common Souldiers threatened, when Rage and Conquest flew through the City’ (I.1.66-68). Florinda is almost raped by Willmore when she goes out alone at night to meet Belvile and meets Willmore who asks her to ‘come I say—whe thou may’st be free with me, I’ll be very secret. I’ll not boast who ‘twas oblig’d me, not I—for hang me if I know they name’ (III.2.136-138). Willmore attempts to persuade Florinda that there would be no sin in their having sex ‘because ‘twas neither designed nor premeditated; ‘tis pure accident on both sides’ (III.2.141-142). Later, while looking for somewhere to hide from her brother, Florinda enters Blunt’s house by chance and stumbles upon him fresh from his humiliation with Lucetta and, seeking revenge ‘on one Whore for the sins of another’ (IV.1.614-615), Blunt threatens to rape her, ‘I will kiss and beat thee all over; kiss, and see thee all over; thou shalt lye with me too’ (IV.1.612-614). Then again at the end of this scene Florinda is threatened with rape when the men want to batter the door down to get at the woman Blunt has locked up (not knowing it is Florinda) to see if she is ‘of quality, or for your diversion’ (V.1.80-81). Florinda becomes a victim and is almost raped four times. Behn’s repeated plotting of a near-rape trope highlights the misogynistic attitude and the violence of both the cavaliers and libertinism towards women. As we have seen, these attitudes are only challenged in *The Rover* by the female characters who embrace an element of queerness. Florinda maintains her femininity throughout the play and Behn’s plotting shows us how this leaves her vulnerable to predatory men. Through the scenes of Florinda’s near rapes we see how Behn exposes the double standards of gender binarism. Florinda is the most feminine and least ‘carnivalized’ of the main

female characters and it is she who suffers the most under the Libertine ideal. On the other hand, Hellena's wit, her gender non-conformity and the fact that she dresses as a man, allow her to compete equally with Willmore, while Lucetta embodies Cavalier qualities to deceive Blunt and Angellica embodies 'queer rage' when she confronts Willmore.

Behn uses rape, both politically and dramatically and her portrayal of the Cavaliers casual violence towards women exposes the double standards of libertinism and the carnivalesque while using the 'lens' of libertinism to queer libertinism itself by making us see it through the eyes of the 'other' (ie women). *The Rover* explores the underlying reality of libertinism, sexual politics and sexual violence against women. Behn exposes how libertinism is a paradox, because the freedom that favours the male characters in the play enjoy, is not freedom for women. The women in the play must embrace a form of queerness, whether that be through the shape of their desires, queer actions, or gender non-conformity to participate equally with, or escape from, men.

I have shown that to navigate libertinism and the carnivalesque women in *The Rover* reveal what Varnado describes as desires that do not fit into 'same-sex erotics' or 'eroticized relations of power and service.' The women's 'modes of feelings and expression are made queer by a twist to their shape—by their strange proliferations their unaccountable excess of intensity, their atypical and errant crossings'.⁸⁸ Queerness is found in Hellena's cross-dressing and the scenes between Hellena and Angellica and Hellena and Wilmore. Angellica's behaviour is queer when she turns from victim to aggressor. Lucetta's behaviour is queer because it does not 'fit' the societal expectations of behaviour, while Florinda, although she gets the man she loves in the end, suffers for her femininity.

At the beginning of this chapter, I acknowledge that critics have recognized *The Rover* as a proto-feminist critique of libertinism. Stewart suggests, Behn's 'depiction of rape on the Restoration stage is directly connected to libertinism'.⁸⁹ In its most basic form libertinism suggests a desire for religious, political and sexual freedom. However, what constituted freedom for women was entirely different to that for men who were able to 'exercise greater legal and social liberties than those

⁸⁸ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 2-3.

⁸⁹ Stewart, 'Rape, Patriarchy, and the Libertine Ethos, (1997), p. 26.

permitted to women in almost any time period or place'.⁹⁰ While Behn embraced the religious, philosophical and political aspects of libertinism, we can see from her writing an awareness of the difficulty for women to participate in the sexual freedom enjoyed by men. Through *The Rover* Behn explores ways to draw attention to the negative aspects of libertinism for women and as I show she does this through queering her characters, genres, plotting, naturalizing of same-sex attraction and problematizing heteronormativity to create a feminized, queer re-appropriation of libertinism. Because of their wealth and class some of the female characters in *The Rover* enjoy a degree of Libertine freedom but are acutely aware that the freedom it offers to men is not available to them; as Hellena suggests she could end up with 'a cradle full of noise and mischief, with a pack of repentance at my back' (V.1.430-431). Male Libertines were exclusively upper-class and could engage in outrageous displays of sexual rebellion, negotiating 'a dangerous line between erotic exploration and total ostracism from society'.⁹¹ The female Libertine, on the other hand, had to be more circumspect. Women had far more to lose as breaking the rules could lead to pregnancy, disgrace, banishment, penury and even prison. In *The Rover* Behn does not simply expose the inequality that women suffer under libertinism or Carnival, rather she completely destabilizes the concept of Libertinism and how we think of it. Analysing *The Rover* through the lens queer stylistics radicalizes our reading of the play. We can see how Behn explores a range of queer tropes to counteract inequality, such as queer temporality, gender embodiment, cross-dressing, homoeroticism, farce, 'queer rage', 'queer shapes of desire' and erotic energy through her subversion of gender norms, the problematization of the social regulation of heterosexual marriage and, through Florinda's near rapes, where Behn uses rape as lens for queering and destabilising heterosexuality.

⁹⁰ Linker, *Dangerous Women*, (2016), p.2.

⁹¹ Linker, *Dangerous Women*, (2016) p. 3.

Chapter Five

Shapes of Queer Desire and Queer Performativity in *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687)

This chapter explores shapes of queer desire¹ and queer performativity in Behn's play *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687). Taking a queer stylistic approach² which I combine with Varnado's methodology for tracing queer desire in Early Modern texts³ I will examine genre, stage properties, staging, performance of identity and the embodiment of identities in the play to show how we can consider each aspect queer. Like Behn's play *The Rover* (1677), *The Emperor of The Moon* is set in Naples and features two women who are confined by patriarchy. I will show how Behn uses characterisation, plotting, carnivalesque, masquerade, farce and the grotesque to reveal strange, unexpected desires, queer bodies, erotic energy and shapes of queer desire in the play. Critics writing about *The Emperor of The Moon* have focussed on Behn's contribution to the popularisation of science,⁴ her desire to include women in the male dominated world of science and have also interpreted the play as a critique of Whig politics.⁵ While I have no argument with any of these views, re-reading *The Emperor of the Moon* in the light of Varnado's new reading for queer desire in Early Modern literature⁶ reveals how Doctor Baliardo's obsession with his telescope, the moon, his imagination and his belief in immortality can be illuminated by thinking of them as queer, and the play as a critique of normative gender and sexuality. I will also show how, read through the lens of queer stylistics, the scenes of mistaken identity/transformation, particularly through Behn's characterisation of Harlequin,

¹ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020)

² See Introduction (p. 6) and earlier chapters.

³ See Introduction (p. 6).

⁴ 'Behn's science farce represents a particular moment in the evolution of experimental laboratory practice because it demonstrates the subtle acceptance of telescope technology that emerged in England during the late seventeenth century. The Royal Society of London attained a Royal Charter in 1662, and developments in all aspects of experimental science, anatomy in particular escalated across England and Europe'. Vivian Appler, "Shuffled Together under the Name of a Farce" Finding Nature in Aphra Behn's 'The Emperor of the Moon', *Theatre History Studies*, The University of Alabama Press, 37 (2018), 27 – 51, (p. 31).

⁵ The play was written before the death of Charles II (but not performed in his lifetimes) and Doctor Baliardo's improper spectatorship has been linked to the unstable political climate of the time when Tories attempted to discredit Whigs. See Al Coppola, 'Retraining the Virtuoso's Gaze: Behn's "Emperor of the Moon: The Royal Society, and the Spectacles of Science and Politics', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 4 (2008) 481 - 506, p. 483. See also Paul R. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁶ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy* (2020), p. 2-3.

challenge the audience to problematize the stability of gender and identity and how Scaramouch's embodiment of the grotesque 'queers' farce. Behn problematizes heterosexual identity through her characterisation and plotting, and by engaging her audience in farcical and comedic scenes which involve carnivalesque plots of mistaken identity, grotesque bodies and cross-dressing.

I refer to Varnado's work on queering Early Modern texts in my previous chapters and in this chapter, I am particularly indebted to Varnado for addressing Sedgwick's goal of articulating 'some ways of understanding human desire that might be quite to the side of prohibition and repression'.⁷ As I stated in my Introduction, Varnado suggests that the word queer:

can illuminate the moments in texts where desire makes strange motions, takes strange shapes, or goes awry—and not even in the expected ways. It can account for turns of feeling that—although insistently, ineffably askew—may not result in anything as historically legible as same-sex acts or same-gender-desiring social identities. It can ultimately reveal that, at times, what is queer about the shape of desire of erotic energy in an early modern text is not a person, an act, or an identity, but rather the larger system or structure through which affects and relations circulate.⁸

As Varnado states above, finding 'queer' in Early Modern texts goes beyond identifying same sex attraction (which can, of course, be found in Behn's work); it means searching the text for strange twists and turns, feelings, energy and surprising elements that do not readily fit with our expectations. These unexpected twists and turns may be found in a character's behaviours, in their desires, or through descriptive words and unexpected turns of phrase; particularly when these elements are expressed in a carnivalesque or farcical setting which allow for the expression of a wide variety of identities, liberation, otherness and subversion (see Chapter Four, p. 117) where I discuss both Carnival and farce).

I will show how *The Emperor of the Moon*, particularly through Behn's characterisation of the Doctor, Scaramouch and Harlequin, encompass shapes of queer desire. However, before discussing how the play is queer, there can be no doubt that the play humorously exploits the popularity of Natural Science through the Doctor's obsession with his large telescope and observations of the moon.⁹ In

⁷ Kosofsky Sedgwick quoted in *The Shapes of Fancy*, Varnado (2020), p. 5.

⁸ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 3.

⁹ Other work satirising science and the Royal Society at the time were Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* (1676) and Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1666).

addition to the obvious comic implications of a huge, phallic, telescope centre-stage, it served to engage a wide audience, both male and female, with current debates in science¹⁰ while simultaneously literalizing the male gaze on women, given that for centuries the moon has been envisaged as female.¹¹

Behn's engagement with science in the play highlights similarities with her contemporary, the philosopher, scientist and writer, Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), who, as Pohl suggests, 'challenged the exclusive circle of the 'new science', which consciously barred women'.¹² There are other similarities between these two authors. Cavendish like Behn 'challenge[d] seventeenth-century concepts of identity and gender'.¹³ Pohl states that Cavendish elevated 'the (female) subject to a new non-gendered and singular status and thus finally create[d] a truly emancipatory poetic space'¹⁴ particularly through her utopian prose tale *The Description of New World Called the Blazing World* (1666). Pohl describes *The Blazing World* as a 'hermaphroditic' text where the concepts of gender and identity in the seventeenth century are challenged by Cavendish.¹⁵ In *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) Cavendish problematizes gender as a stable identity through the women's rejection of heterosexuality, where virginity is represented as 'a queer space' in opposition to the 'restrictive and binary early modern sex/gender system' and the idea that normative sexuality for women only exists in marriage.¹⁶ Cavendish's character, Lady Happy, comments, 'marriage to those that are virtuous is a greater restraint than a Monastery',¹⁷ and we find a similarity here with Hellena's views on marriage in Behn's play *The Rover* when she says to her brother Pedro, 'It's not enough you make a Nun of me, but you must cast my Sister away too? exposing her to a worse

¹⁰ 'Behn's participation in the popularization of science concepts through her late drama and prose may be understood as protofeminist for the increased access it afforded readers and audience members who were not working within the relatively closed ranks of the Royal Society, women as well as men,' Appler, "Shuffled Together", (2018), p. 28.

¹¹ The moon has been feminized since antiquity, from the lunar cycles linked to women's cycles and as binary opposition to the sun.

¹² Nicole Pohl, 'Of Mixt Natures': Questions of Genre in Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* in Stephen Clucas, *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 55.

¹³ Pohl, 'Of Mixt Natures', (2019), p. 54.

¹⁴ Pohl, (2019), p. 51.

¹⁵ Pohl, (2019), p. 51.

¹⁶ Theodore A. Jankowski, quoted in Katherine R. Kellet 'Performance, Performativity, and Identity in Margaret Cavendish's "The Convent of Pleasure"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 48 (2008), 419 - 442, (p. 421).

¹⁷ Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*, 1688, (Mint Editions, 2021) I:2.

confinement than a Religious life' (I.1.87-88). Both Cavendish and Behn's characters suggest that it is better to have no sexuality than to be forced into a heterosexual relationship unwillingly (for further discussion of the ways in which Behn foregrounds this see Chapter Four (p. 120) where I show that Hellena in *The Rover* believes that it is better to have no sexuality than to be forced into a heterosexual relationship unwillingly).

In her work, Cavendish puts forward the case for a multiplicity of genders, where the mind is prioritized over the body. In both Cavendish and Behn's work we find exciting and queer explorations of gender. Both authors were engaged in promoting the inclusion of women into the male dominated world of science and both authors explored and problematized concepts of gender binary through their work. However, critics have debated Cavendish's proto-feminist credentials,¹⁸ while we see in the *Lucky Chance* (1686) that Behn was confident in acknowledging the 'masculine' part of herself (see also Chapter 6, p. 170):

All I ask, is the Priviledge for my Masculine Part the Poet in me, (if any such you will allow me) to tread in those successful Paths my predecessors have so long thriv'd in, to take those Measures that both the Ancient and Modern Writers have set me, and by which they have pleas'd the world so well.¹⁹

Clearly the 'New Science' was exploring exciting developments in many different areas, turning the world upside down, while revolutionary discoveries challenged traditional and intellectual values.²⁰ Cavendish and Behn were both authors who were interested in science, including women in science, and exploring and challenging representation of gender and sexuality.

In figure 9 (p. 151), I show how queerness is presented in the *Emperor of the Moon*. To say that *The Emperor of the Moon* is queer we first need to consider the meaning of queer in relation to Early Modern texts. In Varnado's book²¹ she builds on Sedgwick's²² early work on queer theory to broaden traces of queerness in Early

¹⁸ Lisa T. Sarasohn, 'A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 49, (1984), pp. 289-307.

¹⁹ Preface to 'The Lucky Chance' in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 7, ed. Janet Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), p. 217.

²⁰ Sarasohn, 'A Science Turned Upside Down', (1984).

²¹ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020)

²² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1950-2009, American critic who is considered one of the founders of queer theory.

Modern literature beyond same-sex or deviant desire to produce, ‘a reconception of what we regard as literary traces of queerness, and a new theory of how desires—especially weirdly, unconventional nonnormative ones—are held and communicated in texts’.²³ Critically, for my queer reading of *The Emperor of the Moon*, Varnado describes queer desire as ‘not always orientated toward or confined to natural human bodies:

Rather, it is often staged through prosthetic material objects—clothing and accessories, animals, body parts, instruments, ornaments—that carry erotic charges, altering the shape of desire in the scene. Material things transmit affect, mediate relations, engender connections, and indicate or hold investment. Thus, in a systematic model of queerness, human and non-human materials participate in the same affective networks, congealing feelings and transmitting desire—both within the worlds created in texts, and through time, to us.²⁴

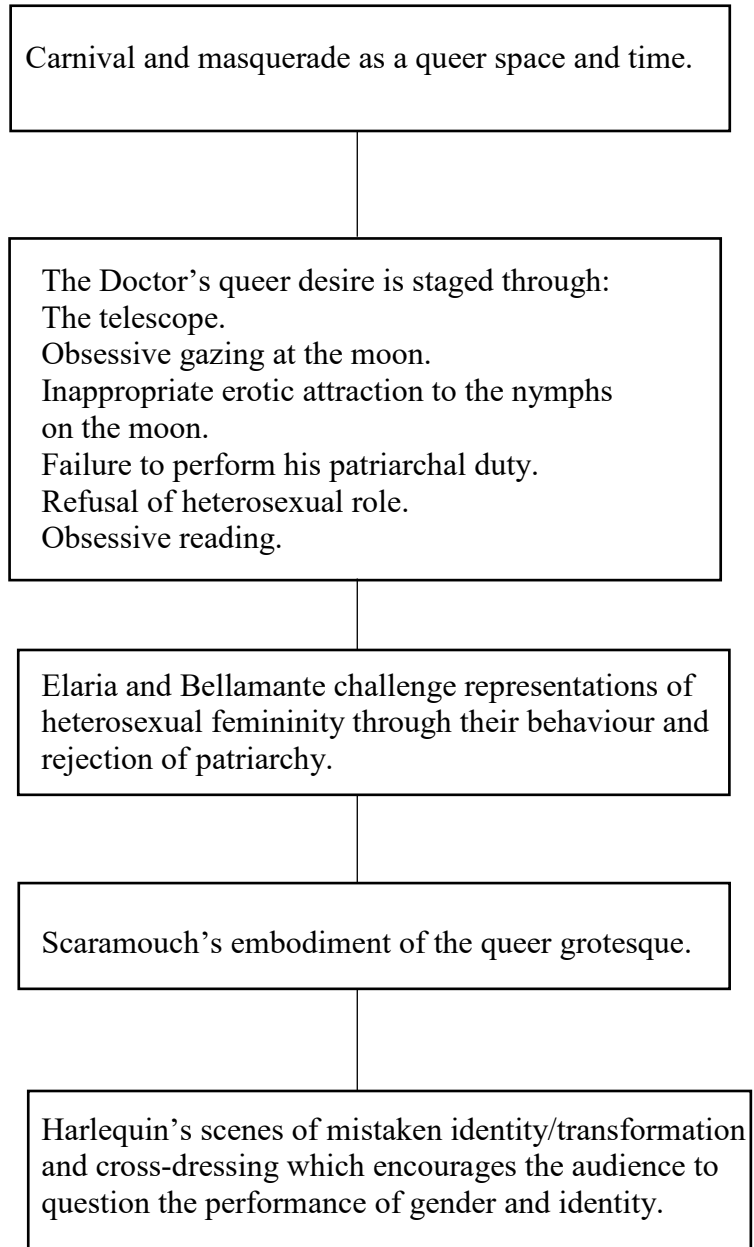
I will show how the Doctor’s telescope, his desires and obsessions, lend themselves to Varnado’s theory.

²³ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 8.

²⁴ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 9.

Figure 9.

How queerness is presented in *The Emperor of the Moon*



The play opens with the Doctor's daughter, Elaria and his niece, Bellamante entering the stage. Elaria is singing:

*A Curse upon that faithless Maid,
Who first her Sexes Liberty betrayed;
Born free as Man to Love and Range,
Till Nobler Nature did to Custom change.
Custom, that dull excuse for Fools,
Who think all Vertue to consist in Rules.* ²⁵

In this song Elaria curses Eve who was born free but betrayed women and caused them to be bound by rules. We are immediately alerted to the fact that, like Behn's play *The Rover* written some ten years earlier, this play is going to involve female resistance to patriarchy. We learn from the *Dramatis Personae* (p. 158) that Elaria and Bellamante have lovers called Cinthio and Charmante who the Doctor forbids them from meeting. The women are trapped ('confined a Prisoner to my apartment', I.1.69) in a similar way to Hellena and Florinda in *The Rover*. We hear in Act II that when the Doctor goes out, he locks the women in the house, telling Scaramouch 'on your Life, let not a Door be open'd till my Return' (I.2.79-80) and again in Act II he says, 'Bar up the Doors, upon Life or Death let no man enter' (I.2.163-164).

However, in this first scene rather than the appearance of an unsympathetic brother (like Pedro, Hellena and Florinda's brother in *The Rover*, who tells Callis to lock up Florinda until she goes to a convent at Lent), the Doctor's servant, Scaramouch, enters to tell them that there is a plan to bring the women and their lovers together, '—there are such Strategems abrewing, not only to bring you together, but with your Father's consent too' (I.1.72-73) and that there will be a farce, 'Wherein your Father shall be so impos'd on, as shall bring matters and most magnificently about.—' (I.1.104-105). In this play, rather than going out to the Carnival like Hellena and Florinda, Carnival will come to Elaria and Bellamante.

We first encounter the Doctor when he enters '*with all manner of Mathematical Instruments, hanging at his Girdle*' and '*SCARAMOUCH bearing a Telescope twenty (or more) Foot long*' (I.2). The Doctor and Scaramouch have the following exchange:

²⁵ The Emperor of the Moon', Janet Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 7, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), I.1.1-6. p. 165, (All future citations refer to this edition).

DOCTOR Set down the Telescope — Let me see, what Hour is it?

SCARAMOUCH About six a Clock, Sir.

DOCTOR Then 'tis about the Hour, that the great Monarch of the upper world enters into his Closet, Mount the Telescope.

SCARAMOUCH What to do, Sir?

DOCTOR I understand, at certain moments Critical, one may be snatch'd of such a mighty consequence to let the sight into the secret Closet

SCARAMOUCH How, Sir, Peep into the Kings Closet; under favour, Sir that will be something uncivil.

(I.2.1-7)

We soon learn through Behn's satire, exaggerated monsterring of heteronormative desires and her use of stage properties, that the Doctor's obsession with his large (phallic) telescope and the moon are linked to desire and illicit gazing. Firstly, the Doctor's inappropriate desire to 'Peep into the Kings Closet' (I.2.8) which has been linked to political speculation,²⁶ Restoration politics,²⁷ and, what would become known in the twentieth century as the 'male gaze',²⁸ on 'a Beauty young and Angel like' (I.2.82). The Doctor's strange desires can be framed through what Varnado describes as an 'unaccountable excess of intensity'.²⁹ The Doctor's compulsive gazing on the moon, the imprisonment of his female relatives and, as we will see later, his obsessive reading, triples his exaggerated monstrousness. His obsession with his huge telescope, particularly as it is presented on stage as a large phallic object (and must have made the audience laugh), reveals an attachment to the 'wrong objects',³⁰ and his belief in spirits on the moon falls within the nature of impossibility which accord with Varnado's definition of queerness where she argues that queerness can be identified in Early Modern texts through obsessions and desires that have gone awry in unexpected ways.³¹

²⁶ Coppola, 'Retraining the Virtuoso's Gaze,' (2008), p. 482.

²⁷ For an account of the interrelationship between politics and popular culture in the Restoration Period see Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*, (1993).

²⁸ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Braudy, Leo and Cohen, Marshall, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁹ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 4.

³⁰ Varnado, (2020), p. 4.

³¹ Varnado, (2020), p. 3.

The Doctor is described by Scaramouch in Act 1 as ‘a little Whimsical, Romantick, or Don Quick-sottish, or so—’ (I.1.82) and ‘always travelling to the Moon’ (I.i.86). His daughter, Elaria, describes him as ‘rather Mad’ (I.1.83) and we see from Elaria’s comments that the Doctor truly believes there is a world on the moon:

ELARIA And so Religiously believes there is a World there, that he discourses as gravely of the People, their Government, Institutions, Laws, Manners, Religion and Constitution, as if he had been bred a Machiavel there. (I.1.87-90).

We can see from Elaria’s comments to Scaramouch that the Doctor totally believes in his fantasy and is totally removed from reality. She then explains to Scaramouch how the Doctor’s obsession with travelling to the moon began:

ELARIA With Reading foolish Books *Lucian’s Dialogue of the Lofty Traveller*, who flew up to the Moon, and thence to Heaven, an Heroick business called, *The Man on the Moon*, if you’ll believe a *Spaniard*, who was carried thether, upon an Engine by wild Geese; with another Philosophical Piece, *A Discourse of the World in the Moon*; with a thousand other ridiculous Volumes too hard to name.

(I.1.92-97)

Scaramouch replies, ‘Ay, this reading of Books is a pernicious thing. I was like to have run Mad once, reading *Sir John Mandivel*’ (I.I.98-99) Through this exchange we see how Behn links the Doctor’s excessive reading and his obsessions to a form of madness. Indeed, the book quoted by Scaramouch, a fourteenth-century travel fantasy, fits rather well with the Doctor’s character. The Doctor’s character and his reading can be compared to a character called Peregrine in Richard Brome’s comedy *The Antipodes* (1638) who is unable to consummate his marriage because he is so obsessed with reading travel narratives.³² Varnado describes Peregrine as:

a kind of queer figure in that he refuses an insertive, heterosexual role. His case involves nothing so straightforward as a homoerotic love object, though. Instead Peregrin is consumed by a surfeit of reading, born out of an overwhelming, crippling desire to be elsewhere, to escape his life by displacing himself.³³

³² Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 17 – 20.

³³ Varnado, (2020), p.18.

Most importantly for a queer reading of the Doctor's character, like Peregrin, he also refuses a heterosexual role when he says to Charmante (who he believes is a character who has visited him from the moon) that 'Man was not made for Woman' (I.2.45). The Doctor is asked by Charmante if he has, 'An absolute abstinence from carnal thought' (I.2.58) and the Doctor answers, 'I dare not boast my Virtues, Sir; is there no way to try my Purity?' (I.2.60-61). Neither Peregrine nor the Doctor are obviously homosexual, but both characters problematize heterosexual identities. The Doctor both rejects heterosexuality and problematizes masculinity. Mannheimer argues that reading fiction feminizes the Doctor.³⁴ Reading fiction during the late seventeenth-century was considered a feminine pursuit and this, combined with his obsession with the symbolically feminized moon (although his obsession with the feminized moon may appear heterosexual it is exaggerated and impossible and so queers normativity), offers the audience another sign of how the Doctor's character resists heteronormativity.

The Doctor's obsession with looking at the moon through his telescope (with all its obvious Phallic/Freudian/queer implications) means he has little concept of reality and this affects the women around him.³⁵ He has his daughter and niece strictly guarded, particularly after Cintheo plays music under Elaria's window one night, for which, as their governess, Mopsophil, explains, 'you are kept so close a Prisoner to Day, and more strictly guarded than usual (I.1.22 – 24). Elaria complains to Bellemante, 'here we are mew'd up to be espous'd to two Moon-calfs for aught I know; for the Devil of any Human thing is suffer'd to come near us, without our Governante and Keeper, Mr *Scaramouch*.' (I.1.162-165). Elaria explains that not only are they locked up, but they are not allowed to meet anyone human and are likely being kept by the Doctor to marry some strange, non-human creatures. Later we find the Doctor confirming the women's incarceration when he says to Harlequin, 'My Daughter never goes abroad, sir, farther than our Garden—' (III.1.405). When Charmante (in disguise) asks the Doctor if the women are chaste, he replies, 'I think they are, and I'll care to keep 'em so; for I confess Sir, I wou'd fain have a Hero to

³⁴ 'by virtue of his giddy credulous reading, Baliardo evokes all too clearly the prototypical consumer of prose fiction: a figure already recognizable in the late seventeenth century, and already identified as female', Katherine Mannheimer, 'Celestial Bodies: Rapture as Theatrical Spectacle in Aphra Behn's 'Emperor of the Moon'', *Restoration*, (Tennessee: University of Tennessee, 2011), 36 – 90 (p. 42).

³⁵ Additionally, of course, the audience are voyeuristic simply through the act of being an audience – the audience are watching the Doctor watching.

my Grandson' (I.2.108-109). The Doctor believes he is keeping the women chaste for them to marry spirits from the moon and become immortal because Charmante has told him:

CHARMANTE Sir, Man was to have been Imortalliz'd by the Love and
Conversation of these Charming Silfs and Nymphs and Woman by
the Gnomes and Salamanders, and to have stock'd the World with
Demy Gods, such as at this Day inhabit the Empire on the *Moon*.
(I.2.46-49)

However, the women and their lovers (Cinthio and Charmante) take advantage of the Doctor's susceptibility to devise a plot to dupe him and enable their marriages. Through the medium of queer stylistics, we can see that the Doctor's inability to perform heterosexuality, his inability to carry out his patriarchal 'duty' as the head of the household (by arranging suitable marriages for the women) and his strange obsessions problematize heteronormativity. Strangely this queer stylistic reading position reinforces heteronormativity through the women's conventional desires and marriages.

Most interestingly, Behn critiques 'normality'³⁶ and opens a space for sexual dissidence through manipulating and pushing at genre, using the medium of farce and humour (including the obvious laughter that the Doctor's 'phallic' telescope on stage must have produced in her audience) to test the limits of normative genre and heteronormativity. As Stott suggests:

The history of comedy is filled with examples of sexualised joking that indicates a greater permissiveness and tolerance to ambiguity and excess that may in turn lead to a bursting of the boundaries that seek to contain 'self' and 'other'.³⁷

Through comedy, Behn finds a way to bypass the limits imposed by cultural expectations and we find disturbing, gothic, grotesque, and sometimes violent humour in the play. In the following exchange the audience are encouraged to find

³⁶ In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) Foucault 'describes normalizing power as it emerged through the coalescence and refinement of myriad disciplinary practices that aimed to control and cultivate the capacities of individual bodies', *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 54, <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/cambridge-foucault-lexicon/normalization/70C71BDAC52F379E80471A0F34F41624>> [accessed 22nd November 2022].

³⁷ Stott, *Comedy*, (2014), p. 128.

humour in Elaria and Bellemante's heterosexuality. As we gathered from his comment to Charmante in Act I, the Doctor thinks his female relations are innocent. However, Elaria is secretly sending letters to her lover (she asks Scaramouch, 'And hast thou delivered my Letter, to his nephew Don *Cinthio*?', I.1.35). In addition, far from being innocent, Bellemante goes to church to watch the men ('I coul'd not tell which I shoul'd look on most', I.1.129) and tells Elaria, '—but Oh the Beaus, the Beaus, Cousin, that I saw at Church', I.1.38-30). Elaria teases Bellemante saying, 'Oh you had great Devotion to Heaven then!' (I.1.140). Through this exchange Behn uses comedy to test the limits of gender roles and open a space for the women to discuss sexuality.

The charade to dupe the Doctor begins when Charmante visits him, '*drest in a strange Fantastical Habit*' (I.2) and the Doctor is led to believe that he has been visited by an ambassador from the moon. Charmante's '*Fanstastical Habit*' is part of the strange, camp, fanciful and carnivalesque landscape of the play which includes the staging and props together with the grotesque and farcical scenes (for further discussion on the carnivalesque, see Chapter Four, p. 120). The way Charmante is dressed is visually symbolic and predicts the carnivalesque events to come. Charmante convinces the Doctor that he will see a beautiful nymph through his telescope, and he tests the Doctor's sexuality by suggesting that he must have an 'Absolute abstinence from carnal thought, devout and pure of Spirit; free from sin' (I.2. 58 – 59) to see the beautiful nymph. The Doctor replies to Charmante, 'I dare not boast my Vertues' (I.2.60). Although the Doctor suggests he has no carnal thoughts, the fact that he is so desperate to see the nymph suggests otherwise. Through the telescope the Doctor sees, 'a Beauty young and Angel like, leaning upon a Cloud—' (I.2.82-83) and his gaze is clearly sexual and voyeuristic³⁸ as he describes himself as 'Ravished with delight' (I.2.82) and his emotions and body as 'all Rapture' (I.2.88). When the Doctor says that the nymph has disappeared behind a cloud, Charmante emphasizes the voyeuristic nature of the Doctor's gaze when he says, 'She saw you peeping then' (I.2.86). The Doctor wants to meet the nymph asking if 'they will fall in Love with an old Mortal' (I.2.102). Varnado suggests that queerness in Early Modern texts can be found in desires that are beyond 'the

³⁸ The Doctor's gaze is voyeuristic and as the audience is watching they share in his voyeurism.

boundaries of the human'³⁹ and the doctor's desires for this fantastical creature cross boundaries of human norms and are analogous to 'a phenomenon occurring *in the queer realm of desire*'.⁴⁰ The Doctor's desires are directed towards something that is not 'normal', something that crosses the boundary between normality and difference into a realm of a strange or 'queer' erotic fantasy. The Doctor tells Charmante that he has, 'a Neece and Daughter which I love equally, were it not possible that they might be Immortaliz'd?' (I.2.105-106). Through Charmante's charade, which combines science, supernatural, mystical and celestial images, the Doctor is duped into believing that the Emperor of the Moon has fallen in love with his daughter. Charmante has told the doctor that the spirits, 'in Conjunction with Mortals, beget Immortal Races' (I.242) so the Doctor is led to believe that he will, 'have a Hero to my Grandson' (I.2109). Not only are the Doctor's desires bound up with an object, his telescope, which is a physical extension of his phallic desires and status, but they are also directed towards the non-human as his obsession, together with the trick played on him by Charmante, leads his desire to be orientated towards the spirits from the moon. The combination pushes Behn's narrative to absolute extremes disrupting norms of desire and might then be called queer desire.

After this encounter, the Doctor tells Scaramouch to keep his daughter and niece away from the sight and even thoughts of mortal men as, 'there are mighty things design'd for them, if we can keep 'em from the sight of Man' (I.2.139-141). The Doctor's obsession with science causes him to believe that the women will marry the men from the moon. By linking the Doctor's obsession with the moon and his telescope to the control of his female relatives we see how Behn links what I have argued is the Doctor's queer desires to patriarchy and to the male domination of science. The audience is encouraged to laugh at the Doctor, and I suggest that here Behn is critiquing, even making fun of, the male dominance of science and patriarchy. However, while on the one hand Behn opens a space for non-normative/queer behaviours she simultaneously closes this space down by encouraging the audience to laugh at it. The Doctor is presented as pompous and patriarchal and his wish for his female relatives to marry appears heteronormative, until we realize that his desire for the women to marry men from the moon is strange.

³⁹ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 9.

⁴⁰ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 8.

The Doctor's desires (both sexual and generative) are embedded in objects (his telescope, the moon and his books) and through this theatrical concretization Behn uses queer dramatic strategies to undermine 'straight' heteropatriarchal desires. These objects become the mechanism to produce the Doctor's erotic, impossible and queer desire and the means of critiquing their outcomes in patriarchal norms.

I will move on from the Doctor's queerness as a trope, to discuss how Behn queers the play through farce. By the middle of the 1680s, as serious drama became less popular, there was a rise of farce in the theatre.⁴¹ The comedy and the physicality of farce would have attracted Behn's audience although she was aware of its critics. In her dedication at the front of *The Emperor of the Moon* Behn writes, 'I am sensible, my Lord, how for the Word Farce might have offended some..... As too debas'd and vulgar to entertain a Man of Quality' but she goes on to say that her play was not meant, 'for the Numbers, who comprehend nothing beyond Show and Buffoonery.' Although Hume suggests that *The Emperor of the Moon* 'has more dazzle than substance'⁴² I propose that we follow Behn's suggestion in her introduction and look beyond 'Show and Buffoonery' to see how she uses farce as a radical means to challenge heteronormativity and queer the play. The first mention of farce in the play is when Scaramouch explains to Elaria that Cinthio and Charmante are, 'laying their heads together for a farce' (I.1.101) to enable their marriages to the women.

Farce is the very best presentation of the carnivalesque, and Vaught suggests that the carnivalesque includes 'a literary figure or style that exhibits comic distortion or exaggeration and is ludicrous, strange or absurd'.⁴³ This is certainly true of Harlequin's character, whose comedic displays are extremely exaggerated and physical. At the beginning of the play Harlequin uses his body to create humour as he tries out different ways to kill himself because Mopsophil, the woman he loves, has betrayed him. After considering hanging and drowning he tries to tickle himself to death, 'It is resolved I'll hang myself—..... What if I drown my self? —I am Very Ticklish, and am resolv'd to dye that Death' (I.2.160-168). The stage direction reads,

⁴¹ Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 366.

⁴² Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, (1977), p. 375.

⁴³ Jennifer Vaught, *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 6.

He falls to tickle himself, his Head, his Ears, his Arm-pits, Hands, Sides and Soles of his Feet; making ridiculous Cries and Noises of Laughing several ways, with Antik Leaps and Skips, at last falls down as dead. (1)

I will show how farce can be read as queer. Harlequin uses both his speech and his physical body in ridiculous, excessive ways to produce laughter. Other characters in the play hide in cupboards, mistake each other's identity and fall over each other in the dark. The laughter this kind of humour produces in Behn's audience is the laughter that is described by Bakhtin⁴⁴ as 'Carnival laughter'. Stallybrass and White describe Carnival laughter as excessive, vulgar, and earthy,⁴⁵ and involving grotesque realism. The grotesque is animalistic, destabilizing, vulgar, disturbing and out of alignment with heteronormativity. If we define the grotesque as strange, not 'normal', not 'natural', a way that the human body is distorted or exaggerated it then becomes, in Varnado's terms, queer and the grotesque become a dramaturgical device to represent queerness through its otherness, its unconventionality and its difference. Stallybrass and White describe Bakhtin's presentation of grotesque realism as a figural and symbolic resource for parodic exaggeration and inversion:⁴⁶

the material body-flesh conceptualized as corpulent excess – to represent cosmic, social, topographical and linguistic elements of the world..... Grotesque realism images the human body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete. The openings and orifices of this carnival body are emphasized, not its closure and finish. It is an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yeaning wide and its lower regions (belly, legs, feet buttocks and genitals) given priority over its upper regions (head, 'spirit', reason)..... a figural and symbolic resource for parodic exaggeration and inversion⁴⁷

We see Scaramouch's embodiment of excessive, grotesque physicality again when he is creeping around Bellemante's chamber in the dark and hears somebody coming. Scaramouch attempts to hide and positions himself into outlandish and obscenely sexualized positions:

He puts himself into a Posture ridiculous, his Arms a-kimbo, his Knees wide open, his Backside almost touching the Ground, his Mouth stretched wide and his Eyes Staring. Harlequin groping, thrusts his Hand into his Mouth, [Scaramouch] bites him, the other dares not cry out (I.2)

⁴⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984).

⁴⁵ Stallybrass & White, *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*, (1986), p. 8.

⁴⁶ Stallybrass & White, (1986) p. 9.

⁴⁷ Stallybrass & White, (1986) p. 9.

These images of bodily openings and protuberances exemplify Stallybrass and White's description of grotesque realism. The physicality of Scaramouch's behaviour, his open knees, his wide-open eyes and mouth and Harlequin putting his hand in to Scaramouch's mouth suggest a grotesque parody of a desperate homoerotic encounter. The visual performance of farce in this scene offers a doubleness because Behn both challenges heteronormativity through Harlequin's performance (his embodiment of excessive, grotesque, queer farce) but at the same time invites the audience to laugh at its queerness.

Behn uses several different styles of comedy in the play and throughout the play the repeated farcical scenes are Rabelaisian, carnivalesque, corporeal and grotesque. Behn's farcical scenes also offer comedy through the often-used trope of confused identity, such as when Charmante is hiding in a cupboard and in the darkness is mistaken by Cinthio as a lover of Elaria's. As Elaria explains to Bellemante, 'My Father was coming into the Chamber, and had like to have taken *Cinthio* with me, when, to conceal him, I put him in your Closet, not knowing *Charmante's* being there, and which in the Dark, he took for a Gallant of mine' (II.1.15-18). When Cinthio is discovered, he acts as if he is mad, and Elaria says 'Oh Heavens! A mad Man, Sir' (I.2.42). Behn's use of farce makes the audience laugh at confusion over identity, but she also presents mistaken identity as a serious trope. At the end of this scene, Charmante says 'what Fools are we, we cou'd now know one another by Instinct?' (II.2.60-61). Through Charmante Behn problematizes the idea of judging people for the way they look or the gender they present by calling people fools for not relying on instinct. Rather, people should be recognized for what they are, in other words Charmante (and indeed Behn herself) implies that we should recognize the 'essence' of a person rather than just their clothes or performance. Behn repeats this assertion in a later play when Olivia, in *The Younger Brother* (1696), thinks Wellborn should have recognized her even when she was cross-dressed (see Chapter Six, p. 170). Fluid and multiple identities, how we present ourselves, and how we are perceived by others, is an important and recurrent theme in this play, as it is throughout much of Behn's work.

In another scene of confused identity in Act II, Harlequin's identity is problematized when he dresses up as a woman. The scene begins, '*Enter HARLEQUIN in Womens Cloth[es]*' (185). Harlequin is dressed in women's clothes

to deliver messages to the women from their lovers and to deliver a note from him to Mopsophil, while remaining undiscovered:

HARLEQUIN If I can now but get admittance, I shall not only deliver the young Ladies their Letters from their Lovers, but get some opportunity, in this Disguise, to slip this *Billet Deux* into *Mopsophil's* Hand, and bob my Comrade *Scaramouch*. — Ha, — Whar do I see? — My Mistress at the Window, courting my Rival! — Ah Gipsie! —
(II.1.326-329)

Harlequin wants to deliver a letter to Mopsophil who both he and Scaramouch want to marry. The farce in this scene is ridiculous and makes us laugh, but the farce is also visually discomfoting, visually queer and makes us think. When Harlequin arrives in the garden of the Doctor's house, he finds Scaramouch up a ladder at Mopsophil's window serenading her. Scaramouch hears a noise in the garden and, catching sight of the cross-dressed Harlequin, says, 'Ha, — Discover'd! — A woman in the Garden!' (II.1.343). Harlequin then compounds his deception by '*Bawling out, Crying*' (p, 185) and claiming to be Scaramouch's wife ('but thou— my lawful Spouse?', II.1.352) and pregnant by him ('see here, — the Witness of my Love and Shame', I.2.356) pointing to his stomach. Mopsophil is so angry that she announces she will not marry either Harlequin or Scaramouch; in fact, she will marry the following day, 'either to the 'Apothecary or the Farmer, men I never saw, to be reveng'd on thee. Thou termagant Infidel' (2.I.363-364). Mopsophil would rather marry someone she doesn't know than either Scaramouch or Harlequin. When Scaramouch discovers that the woman is Harlequin in disguise he says to the Doctor (who arrives to see what the fuss is about):

SCARAMOUCH A Mungrel Dancing-Master; therefore, Sir since all the Injury's mine, I'll pardon him for a Dance, and let the Agility of his Heels save his Bones, with your Permission, Sir.

Scaramouch wants to fight Harlequin. Scenes of violence towards male-to-female cross-dressers, particularly on the public stage, were not uncommon and highlight 'the limits and restrictions of the Early Modern hierarchical sex/gender system'⁴⁸ which Chess so rightly suggests 'have emotional and political resonance in our

⁴⁸ Simone Chess, *Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Early Modern English Literature: Gender, Performance, and Queer Relations*, (London: Routledge, 2016), p.12.

modern, twenty-first-century context, wherein crimes against gender variant individuals are all too common'.⁴⁹ Cross-dressing problematizes Harlequin's heterosexuality. On the one hand Behn is saying we should accept the way a person presents themselves (whatever gender than might imply) but on the other hand she suggests you might be prejudiced about the fluidity underneath. Harlequin cross-dresses as a disguise in a heterosexual plot, but his cross-dressing, in the light of other mistaken identity plots in the play, becomes part of Behn's wider problematization of identity and transformation and how gender is embodied. I take this further in Chapter Six (p. 170) where I argue that Behn uses cross-dressed characters to explore the performance and embodiment of gender to reveal the ghosts of possible transgender bodies from the seventeenth century. Harlequin's performances of identity and transformation exemplify the queer, topsy-turvy world of the carnivalesque where people switched genders and reversed roles. Chess suggests that male to female cross-dressing can be seen as site of anxiety with 'the threat of social downward mobility that comes with casting off masculinity.'⁵⁰ Harlequin's male to female cross-dressing has little obvious benefit to his character (cross-dressing does not help Harlequin to secure Mopsophil's affections) beyond its obvious humour, unlike female to male cross-dressed characters where the benefits are more obvious such as the opportunity to access male privileges. However, there are benefits to this form of gender subversion in terms of how it adds to our understanding of attitudes towards gender and identity in the Early Modern period. For instance, by Harlequin pretending to be Scaramouch's cheated and abandoned pregnant wife, Behn foregrounds how some men treat women at the same time as emphasizing visually how farce enjoys breaking and crossing boundaries. In addition, the way Scaramouch instantly wants to fight Harlequin when he discovers that he is cross-dressed, highlights the anxieties caused by the problematization of gender identity, which is as relevant today as it was then.

Harlequin's carnivalesque transformations include switching gender roles and switching class roles. On his way to the town, Harlequin deceives an officer by insisting that he is a baker, despite, '*riding in a Calash..... dressed like a Gentleman*' (188):

⁴⁹ Chess, *Male-to-Female Crossdressing*, (2016), p.12.

⁵⁰ Chess, (2016), p.7.

HARLEQUIN

Ar't mad?—Dost not see I am a plain Baker, and this is my Cart,
that comes to carry Bread for the Vice-Roy's, and the Cities Use?
— ha —

(III.1.8-10)

Harlequin pretends to be a tradesman - a simple baker driving a cart - so he can enter the town without paying custom fees. When a clerk appears to see what the scuffle is about, Harlequin quickly changes his clothes (*'the mean time Harlequin whips a Frock over himself, and puts down the hind part of the Chariot, and then 'tis a Cart,* p. 189). Harlequin transforms his identity by changing his clothes backwards and forwards between a gentleman's clothes and a baker's clothes until the poor officer is so confused, he believes he must be drunk. In this scene Behn shows how a simple change of dress can transform a person's identity and highlights the anxiety caused by an individual who is not contained within their class identity in a similar way to those whose expression of gender does not match their biological sex. This is a perfect example of how Behn's work is appropriate today, a time when sections of our society are still so threatened by those whose biological sex do not match their gender.

I have discussed queer and grotesque farce and I will now examine the way in which the play uses the carnivalesque⁵¹ and masquerade and how this is presented as queer in the play. I explain in Chapter Four (p. 117) how Carnival disrupts time, reveals discursive modes of queer behaviour and offers a legitimate space to break rules, including exchanging gender roles and social status. It is an inclusive, gender queer space where difference can be expressed free from the confines of heteronormativity and patriarchy. When the Doctor leaves the house, the women appear, *'dress'd in Masking Habits'* (II.1) and Charmante and Cinthio in *'Gothic Habits'* (II.1) to take part in a masquerade dance with dancers provided by Charmante and Cinthio's friends. Behn's audience would have viewed an exciting spectacle with music, dancing, costumes, and the escape from real life that the Carnival and in particular a masquerade embodies. Castle suggests that a masquerade *'is always provocative: it imitates an alternative view of the 'nature of things and embodies a liberating escape from the status quo'⁵² while '[t]he true self remained*

⁵¹ See also Chapter Four (p. 117) on Behn's queering of carnival in *The Rover*.

⁵² Terry Castle, 'The Carnivalization of Eighteenth-Century English Narrative', 99 *PLMA*, (1984), 903 – 916, (p. 904).

elusive and inaccessible—illegible—within its fantastical encasements’⁵³ and provided ‘unusual opportunities for erotic experimentation and release’.⁵⁴ A masquerade allows the mask wearer a disguise, an opportunity to present themselves differently to the world, or safely embody a fluid identity.

Todd describes the final scene of *The Emperor of the Moon* as requiring:

ten blacked actors, two descending chariots, the embodied signs of the zodiac landing on stage to a symphony of music, the moon changing phases and descending as a machine which opens to disgorge the lunar emperor to the sound of flutes.

(p.155)

This is yet another form of transformation because, rather than going to Carnival, the Doctor’s house (and the stage) where the women have been trapped is transformed into the queer space and time of Carnival. However, this is not just a transformation, because it also has all the anxiety of queerness invading a domestic space. At the beginning of the final scenes the stage direction reads, ‘*The Gallery richly adorn’d with Scenes and Lights*’ and this leads to the culmination of the trick played on the Doctor. The Doctor, Elaria, Bellemante and Mopsophil enter the stage where ‘*Soft Musick is heard*’ (199):

BELLEMANTE	Ha—Heavens! What’s here? —what Palace is this? —No part of our House I’m sure. —
ELARIA	‘Tis rather the Apartment of some Monarch.
DOCTOR	I’m all amazement too, but must not show my Ignorance. — Yes, <i>Elaria</i> , this is prepar’d to entertain two Princes. (III.1.440-444)

When the Doctor enters the gallery, we see he is amazed but truly believes what he is seeing and says to the women:

DOCTOR	Let not thy Female Ignorance prophane the highest Mysteries of Natural Philosophy? ‘To Fools it seems Inchantment—but I’ve a Sense can reach it,—sit and expect the Event—Hark—I’m amaz’d, but must conceal my Wonder—that Joy of Fools—and appear in wise Gravity’ (III.1.451-453).
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⁵³ Castle, (1986) p. 4.

⁵⁴ Castle, (1986) p. 41.

Here the Doctor appears conflicted. On one hand he believes what he is seeing, but on the other hand he suggests his ‘wonder’ is, ‘that Joy of Fools’, as if he is beginning to realize that he is foolish to believe in what he is seeing. Bellemante then draws the Doctor’s attention to a sound that the Doctor says he recognizes as, ‘From the Spheres—it is familiar to me’ (III.I.455). There follows a series of spectacular exotic, elaborate and carnivalesque scenes, beginning with:

The Scene in the Front draws off, and shews the Hill of Parnassus; a noble large Walk of Trees leading to it, with eight or ten NEGROES upon Pedestals, rang’d on each side of the Walks. Next KEPLAIR and GALLILEUS descend on each side, opposite to each other, in Chariots, with Perspectives in their Hands, as viewing the Machine of the Zodiack. Soft music plays still.

In this scene, Behn places science (the telescope) alongside a cast of characters representing colonialism (*eight or ten NEGROES upon Pedestals*), a classical background and images of the zodiac. The representation of science alongside these classical images appears to include the ‘new science’ in classical history. However, Behn also problematizes the cultural value of the new science because it is presented as part of the masque.⁵⁵ Although we do not know if ‘negroes’ meant white actors in disguise, the inclusion/representation of black performers would have been seen as exotic and ‘different’ to a Restoration audience.⁵⁶ The next stage direction reads:

Next the ZODIACK descends, a Symphony playing all the while; when it is landed, it delivers the twelve Signs: Then the Song, the Persons of the Zodiac being the Singers. After which, the Negroes Dance and mingle in the Chorus (III.1)

The singing of ‘A Song for the Zodiack’ asks the audience to enter an alternative temporality (*‘Let the Woods and the Mountains resound with the Joy, And the Echoes their Triumph return’*, III.1.486-487) and celebrate the *‘Triumphs and Joy’* (III.1.492). The combination of celestial and erotic images in the song offers an alternative temporality and it is suggested nothing like this has been seen, *‘This thousand, thousand years’* (496), a time when love ruled the heaven, earth and sea and commanded the stars. The song depicts each of the signs of the zodiac in

⁵⁵ Appler, ‘Shuffled Together’, (2018), p. 45.

⁵⁶ Elaine Hobby, ‘Staging Reading in Aphra Behn’. “‘This Reading of Books is a Pernicious thing’ Restoration Women Writers and Their Readers”, (California, The Huntington, 2021).

sexualized terms, ‘The wanton Aries’ (III.1.510), ‘Gemini smiling and twining of Arms’ (III.1.521), ‘Virgo her blushing modesty’ (III.1.526), Sagittarius all his loose desire’ (III.1.529) and ‘Pisces, which intwin’d do move/Shows he soft Play, and wanton Arts of Love’ (III.1.532-533). Once the Zodiac song has finished there follows more fantastical, carnivalesque and inclusive scenes as a ‘Cloud of Foreigners appears’ (III.1.574) and the chariot brings the emperor down to earth:

.....the Globe on the Moon appears first, like a new Moon; as it moves forward it increases, till it comes to the Full. When it descends, it opens, and shews the Emperor and the Prince. They come forth with all their Train, the Flutes playing a Symphony before him, which prepares the Song. Which ended, the Dancers mingle as before (III.1)

This is a complex theatrical production requiring special effects where the audience sees an image of the moon increasing from a new moon to a full moon as it descends towards the audience. Through the stage directions Behn distorts both time (the speed at which the moon changes from new to full) and space (for the audience it would seem as if the stage itself was acting as a telescope as the moon gets closer to the audience). The effect of this moving image suspends reality and completely immerses the audience in the Doctor’s world. If we apply queer stylistics to this staged spectacular this meta-theatricality means the audience is watching in a double way, firstly as a pure Carnival performance but secondly as a queer inversion of reality. Each of these extravagant scenes appear like a moving tableau, cosmic and fantastical, a carnivalesque spectacle that, as recent criticism of Carnival suggests, has the ‘potential to open up multiple discursive accounts of sexuality’.⁵⁷ The combination of different cultural, classical and celestial elements included in the spectacle offer the possibility of disrupting normative performative hegemony and opens a space where marginalized identities are included through for example the inclusion of ‘negroes’ and ‘foreigners’.

During the series of songs and ‘carnavalesque’ events the characters take advantage of the Doctor’s gullibility and the girl’s suiters, Don Cinthio and Don Charmante, masquerading as the Emperor of the Moon and his brother Prince of Thunderland, claim their brides. When Scaramouch is thanking the Doctor for

⁵⁷ Ernst van der Wal and Lize van Robbroeck, *Narrating Defiance: Carnival and the Queering of the Normative*, <<https://ernstvanderwalcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/Ernst-van-der-Wal-Narrating-Defiance-Carnival-and-the-Queering-of-the-Normative.pdf>> [accessed 13 December 2020].

awarding him Mopsophil as his bride he ‘*Puts off his helmet*’ (III.1) and the Doctor realizes he has been tricked, “Oh, I am undone and cheated in every way—’ (III.1.631) but the philosopher, Keplair, explains, ‘You’re only cur’d, Sir, of a Disease’ (III.1.633). At the end of the play, rather than being outed as a fraud, the Doctor is cured of his ‘disease’ and realizing his foolishness the Doctor says, in a Faustian manner, ‘Burn all my Books, and let my Study Blaze, Burn all to Ashes, and be sure the Wind Scatter the vile contagious Monstrous Lies’ (III.1.661-663); he then invites everyone to ‘revel with me’ (III.1.666). The play ends with the Doctor saying to himself, ‘He that knew all that ever Learning writ, Knew only this—that he knew nothing yet’ (III.671 – 672). What is the meaning of the Doctor’s reaction to his foolishness being revealed? Is Behn suggesting that her audience should be wary of believing in science, or believing in books? Coppola suggests that through this ending Behn is staging ‘an attack on misguided natural philosophy’,⁵⁸ ‘attempting to identify, stimulate, and ultimately retrain a troubling appetite for uncritical wonder in her audience, one which traverses all domains of culture: aesthetic, scientific and, especially political’.⁵⁹ Appler argues that Behn is suggesting that ‘Reason must temper Sensation; if one succumbs to images transduced by such devices as the telescope, one runs the risk of taking false information for the truth’.⁶⁰ Behn’s play certainly satirizes the ‘new’ science, but with a queer lens we can take this sceptical mind-set engendered by these events a step further and suggest that a natural scepticism to all represented so-called knowledge – including whatever might be considered the norm – should be the best (and queered because it accepts all truth as relative) interpretative position. However, as Coppola also argues the doctor’s obsession ‘is highly destabilizing to the domestic order of sex and marriage’.⁶¹ I suggest that the characterization of the Doctor, through the neglect of the women and his lust for the nymphs on the moon, problematizes marriage and heteronormativity. More radically, I suggest that *The Emperor of the Moon* is queer. The play’s masquerades, carnivalesque setting and the farcical humour all coalesce to highlight the Doctor’s obsession with the moon which corresponds to Freccero’s description of queer as ‘a certain unsettling in relation to heteronormativity’⁶² or as Varnado

⁵⁸ Coppola, *Retraining the Virtuoso’s Gaze*, (2008), p. 481.

⁵⁹ Coppola, (2008), p. 481.

⁶⁰ Appler, ‘Shuffled Together’, (2018), p. 29.

⁶¹ Coppola, *Retraining the Virtuoso’s Gaze*, (2008), p. 482.

⁶² Freccero, ‘Queer Times’, (2007), p. 485.

suggests, ‘a disturbance or departure from some normative trajectory of desire’.⁶³ The Doctor is the patriarchal figure, the head of the house and, by focussing queer desires on the Doctor, Behn disrupts notions of patriarchy and heteronormativity. The Doctor’s final line ‘that he knew nothing yet’ suggests a double negative. The Doctor ‘knew’ suggests knowledge, while the fact that he knew ‘nothing’ leaves interpretation open and suggests that nothing is fixed or resolved including what might generally be considered as ‘normal’ which offers an opening for a queer epistemology.

In this chapter, I have taken a queer stylistic approach which I have combined with Varnado’s theories for identifying shapes of queer desire in Early Modern texts⁶⁴ to reveal queer desire and queer performativity in Behn’s play *The Emperor of the Moon*. The Doctor’s queer desires are staged through his obsessive gazing at the moon, his inappropriate erotic attraction to the nymphs on the moon, his refusal of a heterosexual role, his failure to perform his patriarchal duty and his obsessive reading. Elaria and Bellamante challenge heterosexual femininity (through their behaviour and rejection of patriarchy), while Harlequin’s scenes of mistaken identity, transformations and cross dressing question the performance of gender and Scaramouche embodies the queer grotesque through his farcical performances. Behn problematizes heterosexual identity throughout the play which ends with a magnificently spectacular, camp and carnivalesque finale.

⁶³ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 5.

⁶⁴ Varnado, (2020)

Chapter Six

‘Transmogrification’¹ in Behn’s Plays

In a radical re-reading of a selection of Behn’s plays, I argue that she uses cross-dressed characters to explore the performance and embodiment of gender to reveal the ghosts of possible transgender bodies from the seventeenth century. A life’s work changes over time, and I examine five of Behn’s plays in chronological order to show how her representation of cross-dressed characters changes. I suggest that over time Behn’s cross-dressed female characters, in the plays I analyse here, become more immersed in their ‘masculine’ roles and Behn explores what we would now define as transgender identities. Transgender identity has a long history² and Zemon Davis suggests that Early Modern ‘literary sources for inversion include not only the traditional tales of magical transformation in sex, but also a variety of stories in which men and women *choose* to change their sexual status’.³ Dekker and van de Pol suggest that cases involving women cross-dressing as men ‘became visible in the late sixteenth century’,⁴ stating that women’s reasons for cross-dressing included poverty, the desire to enter military services or their love for another woman. In this final chapter I argue that the cross-dressed characters in Behn’s plays open a space for trans spectrality, or the ghost of the transgender body.

In my Introduction (p. 6) and Chapter One (p. 44), I discuss the social, cultural and political changes,⁵ particularly in relation to gender and sexuality, that caused anxiety for the Restoration theatre and audiences alike. These anxieties lead to questions about the nature of the body, identity and natural versus performative identities, which would become a particular focus of Restoration drama.⁶ I will argue that the embodiment of transgressive elements through cross-dressing in Behn’s work suggest an uncanny haunting of unresolved issues where, as Freccero suggests,

¹ Adapted quote from Behn’s 1671 play ‘The Amorous Prince’ in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 5, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996), III.3.22. (All further citations refer to this edition).

² See Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1996).

³ Natalie Zemon David, ‘Women on Top’ in *Early Modern Europe: Issues and Interpretations*, ed. James B. Collins and Karen L. Taylor, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 401.

⁴ Rudolf M Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1989), p. 2.

⁵ Science, travel, print culture, news, wealth, colonialization, and imperialism.

⁶ Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*, (Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 2003), p. 3.

‘the ghost comes back because there is something unfinished’.⁷ In terms of Behn’s work the ‘ghost’ or the ‘unfinished’ is the exploration of gender/transgender identities. Halberstam suggest that the ‘challenge for new queer history has been, and remains, to produce methodologies sensitive to historical change but influenced by current theoretical preoccupations.’⁸ In the light of Halberstam’s suggestion that we use contemporary insights to help us understand the past, I apply hauntology⁹ to the deconstruction of Behn’s texts. Derrida describes Hauntology as the ‘ungraspable visibility of the invisibility’.¹⁰ Hauntology is the haunting of social or cultural elements from the past (or conversely, the future). Through hauntology we can uncover anxieties about gender and transgender and I will show that Behn’s plays are haunted by trans spectrality in a way that is as relevant today as it was then. Using a queer stylistic approach¹¹ and incorporating the theories of Butler,¹² Kristeva,¹³ and Freccero,¹⁴ I will analyse a selection of cross-dressed characters in Behn’s plays. I will also consider reasons for female to male cross-dressing, how cross-dressed women were received in society and on the Restoration stage, how they disturbed notions of heteronormativity, and how they challenged patriarchy through the presentation and performance gender.

In the early modern period, it was sometimes acceptable for women to dress as men for short periods of time, for example, during Carnivals, riots or while travelling,¹⁵ but women who attempted to permanently pass as men challenged the understanding of sexual difference, patriarchy, and the stability of heterosexual marriage. Court cases involving men discovered to be women caused a great deal of fascination for the public and Behn refers to one such case in her play *The False Count*, first performed in 1681. In the play the character, Francisco, sees his wife whispering with her sister, and she says to him, ‘What, are you jealous of the

⁷ Carla Freccero ‘Queer Spectrality: Haunting the Past’ in Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Theory*, (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 337

⁸ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 46.

⁹ see my Introduction where I explain my rationale for applying hauntology to seventeenth-century drama.

¹⁰ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, (2006), p. 6.

¹¹ See Introduction (p. 6) and earlier chapters.

¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2nd edn (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

¹³ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’ (1981).

¹⁴ Freccero ‘Queer Spectrality’, (2013).

¹⁵ Dekker van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism*, (1989), p. 6.

Peticoat?’¹⁶ and he replies, ‘Peticoat, Come, come, Mistress *Pert*, I have known as Much danger hid under a Peticoat, as a Pair of Breeches. I have heard of two Women that Married each other’ (II.2.53-55). This exchange shows the anxiety and the challenge to patriarchy caused by women who love women. It is thought likely that these comments were inspired by Behn’s knowledge of the case of the marriage between Arabella Hunt and James Howard in 1680 which was eventually annulled when James Howard was discovered to be a woman, Amy Poulter.¹⁷ By the middle of the eighteenth-century women who passed as men were called ‘female husbands’¹⁸ or ‘passing women’ and were censured for challenging the accepted understanding of sexual difference, threatening the stability of heterosexual marriage¹⁹ and heteropatriarchy. Marion argues that somewhere along the line of gender history it became ‘common practice for scholarship to minimise gender difference and to elevate same-sex attraction’.²⁰ This practice blurred the distinction between (what we would now term) lesbian and transgender identity while suggesting that embracing men’s character and clothing was a means to attract other women, rather than an expression of gender identity. Reading women who passed as men as ‘lesbian’ allows transgender identity to be written out of history. Therefore, what needs to be taught is a much more nuanced understanding of cross-dressing that acknowledges a range of identities and sexualities. Like Manion, I argue that throughout history cross-dressed women/transgender men articulated ‘their sense of self with language and cultural forms available to them’,²¹ and I will show that Behn uses the form of cross-dressed characters to explore what we now call transgender identity.

In the late seventeenth century, female to male cross-dressed characters on stage offered a space to ‘act out’ conflicts over gender and social mobility. In Restoration drama, parts that required women actors to dress as men were termed

¹⁶ The False Count’ in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 6, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996), II, 2, 52.

¹⁷ Sara Medelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 249.

¹⁸ The term was popularized by Henry Fielding’s novel *The Female Husband*, 1746.

¹⁹ Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 1.

²⁰ Manion, *Female Husbands*, (2021), p. 9.

²¹ Manion, (2021), p. 12.

'breeches roles'²² and critics have argued whether these parts significantly altered the balance of power in favour of women in the theatre,²³ 'temporarily accord[ed] female characters the linguistic and social resources of men'²⁴ or were 'little more than another means of displaying the actresses as a sexual object',²⁵ designed to show off their bodies and titillate the audience. I build on these critics' work but take a new direction to show how a close and nuanced reading of Behn's plays reveals that she was far more radical than this and that she used her cross-dressed characters to explore the performance and embodiment of gender and reveal the ghost of transgenderism.

Prior to the Restoration, boy actors played female parts on stage and cross-dressing in plays during the Renaissance period was 'a staple of comic tradition with a long dramatic lineage'.²⁶ Women first appeared on the public stage in England at the end of 1660. Before that date women had only performed in private productions or visiting foreign theatrical companies.²⁷ At a performance of *Othello* on 8th December 1660 the speaker of the Prologue doesn't just inform the audience that Desdemona will be played by a woman but lets them into a secret, he 'saw the lady drest'.²⁸ Immediately the audience's 'gaze' is drawn to the actor's body and her sexuality. Women actors were, as Mulvey posits in her 1973 essay on the representation of women in the cinema, 'simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact'.²⁹ The introduction of female actors 'altered the representation in drama and even reshaped dramatic form'.³⁰ Women on stage offered different, dramatic and literary effects to playwrights, it provided marketing opportunities from the audience seeing women on

²² 'No fewer than 89 out of 375 new plays written and produced between 1660 and 1700 [included] breeches parts' J.L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 134.

²³ Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1988), p. 26-31.

²⁴ Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, (2002), p. 169.

²⁵ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English actress: Women and drama 1660-1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1992), p. 59.

²⁶ Jean H. Howard, 'Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 30 (1988) 418 - 440, (p. 429).

²⁷ For further information on the introduction of actresses to the English stage see Howe, *The First English Actress*, (1992), Chapter One (p. 42).

²⁸ Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women Sexuality, and The English Stage, 1660-1720*. (New York: Cornell University Press, (2006), pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 3rd edition, ed. Leitch, Vincent, B. (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001) p. 1959.

³⁰ Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, (2006), p. 2.

stage and the opportunity to explore female sexuality and the place of women in society.

In addition to engaging with Butler's theory of gender as a performance,³¹ I will also draw on Kristeva's theory where, in the early 1980s, Kristeva suggests that 'the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*'³² which would essentially allow for 'the singularity of each person'³³ and 'the multiplicity of every person's possible identifications.'³⁴ Belsey sums up Kristeva's idea as follows:

The point is not to create some third, unified, androgynous identity which eliminates all distinctions. Nor indeed is it to repudiate sexuality itself. It is rather to define through the internalization of difference a plurality of places, of possible beings, for each person in the margins of sexual difference, those margins which a metaphysical sexual polarity obliterates.³⁵

Kristeva's theory that allows such possibilities for sexual difference is particularly relevant, as I will explore later, through Ranter's character in *The Widdow Ranter* (1689).

Traub suggests that 'we err when we treat crossdressing, whether literary or social, as the exemplary instance of female homoeroticism in the early modern period'.³⁶ There are incidents of homoerotic attraction in *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687), (see Chapter 3, p. 93) and Hellena's naturalization of homoerotic desire in *The Rover* (1677) (see Chapter 4, p. 117). However, I will show that Behn does not simply engage with homoeroticism in her characterisation of her cross-dressed characters; I will argue that she problematizes binary gender to allow for multiple identifications of gender and sexuality, including trans spectrality (the ghost of the transgender body). Behn's cross-dressed characters disturb notions of heteronormativity and explore transgenderism in addition to homoerotic desire. Behn gives us a clue to her attitude towards the construction of

³¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (1990).

³² Kristeva, 'Women's Time', (1981) p. 33.

³³ Kristeva, (1981) p. 35.

³⁴ Kristeva (1981) p. 35.

³⁵ Cotherine Belsey, 'Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and gender in the comedies' in Drakakis, J. (ed) *Alternative Shakespeares*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 129.

³⁶ Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, (2002), p. 170.

gender and engages with the ghost of the trans body with her acknowledgement of the ‘Masculine Part the Poet in me’³⁷ in her preface to *Luckey Chance* (1686).

As a woman writing professionally, Behn was a scandalous threat to the male hierarchy and Owen has suggested that ‘misogyny and fear and dislike of women’s sexuality permeate the Libertine writings of Rochester and others’.³⁸ At the beginning of her career Behn ‘construct[ed] herself as one in a group of her male colleagues’,³⁹ if not better than them, as her Preface to *The Luckey Chance* (1686) attests, ‘I dare to say I know of none that write at such a formidable rate, but that a woman may well hope to reach their greatest heights’.⁴⁰ By the time she wrote the Preface to *The Luckey Chance* Behn acknowledges the ‘Masculine Part’ of herself, a quote that some critics have used to illustrate her attitude towards the construction of gender.⁴¹

All I ask, is the Priviledge for my Masculine Part the Poet in me, (if any such you will allow me) to tread in those successful Paths my predecessors have so long thriv’d in, to take those Measures that both the Ancient and Modern Writers have set me, and by which they have pleas’d the world so well.⁴²

Read alongside her work, this passage suggests that Behn posited that gender could be fluid.⁴³ It is this perspective that led her to problematize gender and engage with what we would now call trans spectrality. However, Behn felt it necessary to call upon the ‘masculine part’ of herself to find equality with the great male writers.

In Behn’s plays there are several instances of cross-dressing and I have chosen characters from five plays (*The Amorous Prince* (1671), *The Dutch Lover* (1673), *The Feign’d Courtesans* (1679), *The Widdow Ranter* (1689) and *The Younger Brother* (1692?) to analyse in this chapter, three plays were written/performed in the

³⁷ Preface to ‘The Dutch Lover’ *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 5, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), p. 162.

³⁸ Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 159.

³⁹ Judy A. Hayden, *Of Love and War: The Political Voice in the Early Plays of Aphra Behn*, (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2010), p. 13.

⁴⁰ Preface to ‘The Dutch Lover’ *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 5, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), p. 162.

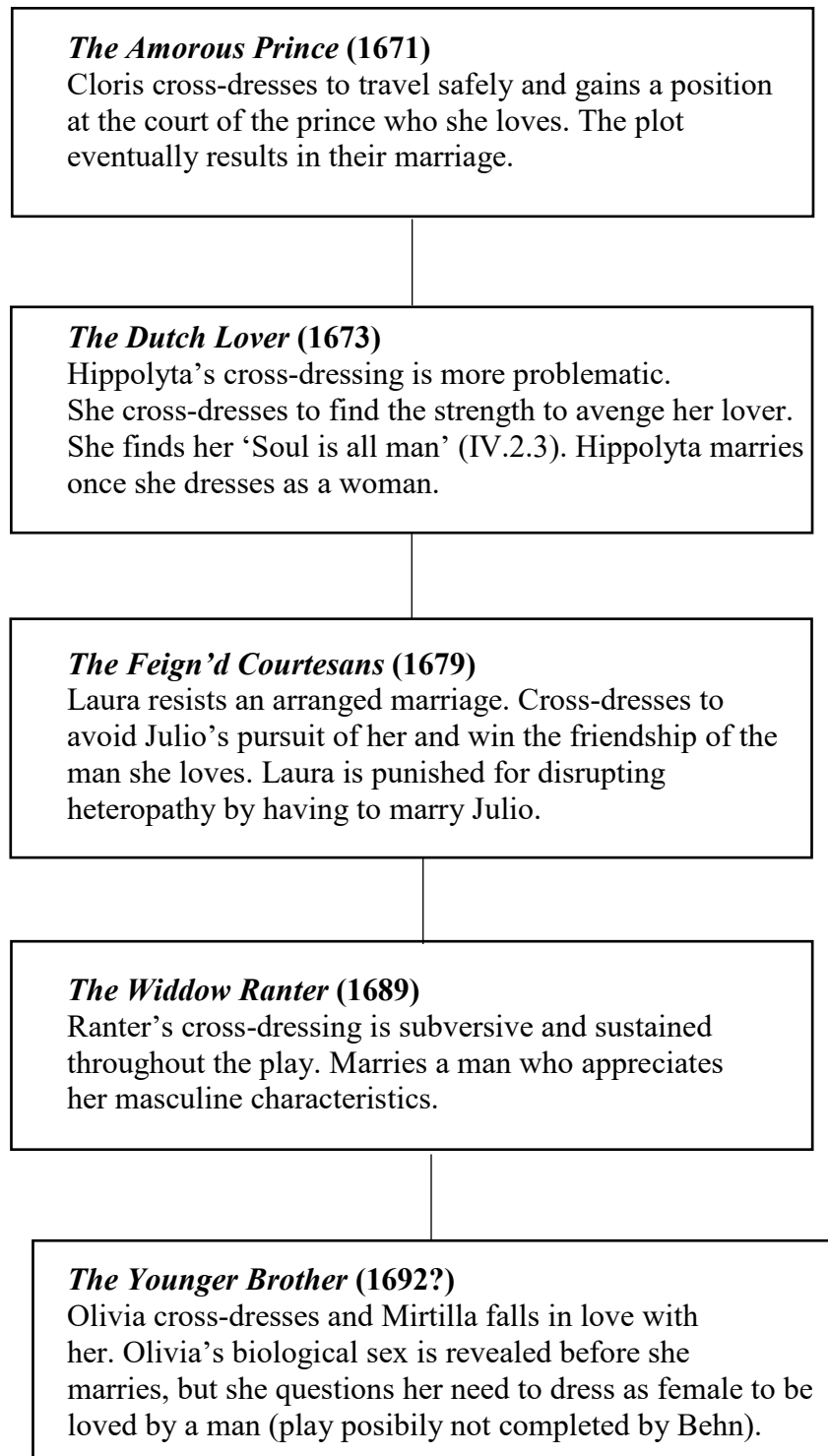
⁴¹ For example, Jessica Munns, ‘Pastoral and Lyric: Astrea in Arcadia’ in Derek Hughes and Janet Todd, eds. *The Cambridge Guide to Aphra Behn*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴² Preface to ‘The Luckey Chance’ in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 7, ed. Janet Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), p. 217.

⁴³ See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: 1990) for an analysis ideas about anatomy, sex and gender over the centuries.

1670s and two later in her career. In figure 10 (p. 176), I show how Behn's cross-dressed characters develop over the five plays.

Figure 10. How Behn's cross-dressed characters from 1671 to 1692.



about her biological sex or how she feels; he is acknowledging that, in the Butlerian⁴⁵ sense, gender is a performance. Guilliam asks this question because, in relation to his own gender, his statement, ‘I wo’d Love would Tranmogriphy me to a Maid now’ (III.3.22) suggests he wishes to literally transform into a woman following his successful disguise at the Carnival. Guilliam also enjoyed the experience of being attractive to another man, ‘There was *Claud* the Shepherd as fre[a]kish after me’ (III.3.27). Hayden argues that Guilliam’s statement ‘evokes suggestions of transvestism and homosexuality’⁴⁶ but I suggest it does more than that. In the exchange between these two characters, we see that Guilliam does not simply wish to cross-dress for expediency; he wants to change his gender performance from male to female because of events when he was dressed as a woman. In responding to de Beauvoir’s claim that ‘one is not born, but rather, *becomes* a woman’,⁴⁷ Butler suggests that ‘there is nothing in her account that guarantees that the “one” who becomes a woman is necessary female’.⁴⁸

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.⁴⁹

In the light of Butler’s theory, when Guilliam sees Cloris cross-dressed, he remembers what it was like for him to be cross-dressed at Carnival. At Carnival he describes himself as having been a ‘woundiest handsom lass’ and how a man found him attractive. Guilliam wants that feeling back, ‘I wo’d Love would Tranmogriphy me to a Maid now’. Guilliam is gendered as male because that was the gender he was assigned at birth and that is the role he has been playing, but in the temporality of Carnival he was able style himself as a woman and he obviously liked it and wants to do it again. Through the character of Guilliam, Behn is providing comedy for her audience, but she is also conjuring up the ghost of the transgender body.

⁴⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2nd edn (New York and London: Routledge, 1990)

⁴⁶ Hayden, *Of Love and War*, (2010), p. 107.

⁴⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. E.M. Parshley, (New York: Vintage, 1973), p.301.

⁴⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (1990), p. 11.

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, 40:4, (1998), p. 519.

Behn uses two striking words in Guilliam's statement: 'freakish' and 'transmogrify'. 'Transmogrify' is a word in use from the seventeenth century meaning 'to alter or change in form or appearance, to transform, metamorphose (utterly, grotesquely, or strangely)' and generally thought to refer to a person'.⁵⁰ Transmogrify is a rare word, in fact the *Oxford English Dictionary* only give ten examples of its use between 1656 and 1888 and one of them is from Behn's *The Amorous Prince*. Other examples from the *OED* include E. Ravenscrot, *Eng Laywer* III.30 (1678) ('I'll go put on my other dress, and be transmogrifi'd to Dulman') and from Shadwell's *Squire of Alsatia* (1688) ('I know I am Transmography'd: But I am your very Brother, Ned.', III.i.43). As we see from the examples in the *OED*, the word transmogrify was used during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to signify a transformation in the of dress or the character of an individual. Perhaps we can solidify this and suggest one of the connotations calls forward to our contemporary use of the word 'trans'.

Behn's use of the word 'freakish' to describe Claude the shepherd's attraction to Guilliam is also unusual. There are only nine examples in the *OED* from the mid-seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, where it is used to describe capricious or whimsical behaviour⁵¹ for example, in Wycherley's *Gentleman Dancing-master* (1673) ('The most wild and freakish garb that can be imagined', I.i). Set in the context of Behn's work, the word 'freakish' can be linked to the portrayal of differently abled women's bodies that occur in her work (eg. Belvideera in *The Dumb Virgin* (1688), Celesia in *The Unfortunate Bride: or, The Blind Lady a Beauty* (1688) and the dwarf and giant sisters in her play *The Second Part of The Rover* (1681). It has been suggested that through these characters Behn emphasizes women's disenfranchisement and isolation from an ableist and patriarchal culture while at the same time using these characters to evaluate the construction and embodiment of femininity.⁵² In the same way that Behn explores differently abled female characters in her plays, she explores differently gendered bodies through the character of Guilliam in *The Amorous Prince* and her use of the word 'freakish'.

⁵⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204918?redirectedFrom=Transmogrify#eid>>[accessed 25 October 2021)].

⁵¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/74348?redirectedFrom=freakish#eid>>[accessed 12 June 2022)]

⁵² Susannah B. Mintz, Freak Space: Aphra Behn's Strange Bodies, *Restoration Studies in English Literary Culture 1660-1700*, 30:2, (2006), p. 1 – 19.

I will now return, briefly, to Cloris's cross-dressing. Cloris (still disguised as Phillibert) and Guiliam find work at the prince's court. Cloris secures employment as page to Prince Frederick. Cloris's disguise as a young male page gives her the opportunity to speak honestly and tell Frederick how, despite being disappointed by a lover, he/she will always remain faithful, 'though she be false she has my heart' (IV.3.63). This has two outcomes. Firstly, Cloris's confession reminds Frederick how badly he behaved with Cloris and secondly, he also finds himself attracted to his page as he says, 'This Boy has strange agreements in him' (IV. 3.73). The play follows the typical trope of romantic comedy in that Frederick eventually marries Cloris when her identity is revealed as a woman at the end of the play. Despite her cross-dressing, the play has a happy ending for Cloris, and she marries the man she desires. Unlike Guiliam, Cloris's cross-dressing is typical for the genre. Cloris cross-dresses for expediency, to travel safely and follow the man she loves, she does not question her gender expression and her motivation for cross-dressing is based on the love for a man rather than specifically problematizing her femininity.

I will now consider the motivation and the effects of Hippolyta's cross-dressing in Behn's play *The Dutch Lover*, first performed in 1673, two years after *The Amorous Prince*. In this play the female to male cross-dressing plot begins to become less conventional and problematizes gender. Critics suggest that Behn probably wrote the play as propaganda for the Third Anglo Dutch War.⁵³ They have also suggested that Behn uses the play to question stereotypes of manhood, male relationships and nationhood (English, Dutch, Spanish),⁵⁴ where Gabbard describes the contemporary masculine stereotypes as 'the aristocratic warrior ethos, the code of honor, effeminacy, pride, libertinism and heroism'.⁵⁵ These stereotypes of manhood are played out over the course of the play. However, what is of interest to me is one of the female characters in the play, Hippolyta.

At the beginning of the play, Alonso, arrives in Madrid to marry Marcel's sister, Hippolyta. However, before Alonso arrives, Hippolyta allows Antonio to seduce her because she thinks he wants to marry her. Marcel believes Hippolyta and Antonio's affair has shamed him and brought dishonour on their family. Marcel is

⁵³ Hayden, *Of Love and War*, (2010), p. 127 and D. Christopher Gabbard, 'Clashing Masculinities in Aphra Ben's *The Dutch Lover*', SEL, (2007), 557 – 572 (p. 557).

⁵⁴ Gabbard, 'Clashing Masculinities', (2007) 47.3. and Robert Markey quoted in Gabbard, (2007), 558.

⁵⁵ R.W. Connell quoted in Gabbard, 'Clashing Masculinities' (2007), p. 558.

too ashamed to admit what has happened to Hippolyta and tries to deter Alonso from marrying his sister until Alonso falls in love with Euphemia. Antonio wants to kill his sister, for losing her honour, describing his desire to kill her as ‘That punishment that’s due to her foul lust’ (II.2.11). Hippolyta’s behaviour challenges patriarchy on several accounts. She has followed her own sexual desires, dishonoured her family and disrupted the homosocial relationship between her brother Marcel and his friend Alonso. In Act III, while Hippolyta watches Antonio sleep, she plans to kill him for his treachery to her (seducing and thereby discrediting her and setting her up as a courtesan). However, Hippolyta realizes that, as a woman and she cannot kill, ‘tis an act too horrid for a woman’.⁵⁶ She wakes Antonio up from his sleep, whereupon he attempts to seduce her saying: ‘But I can love as truly my blunt way’ (III.3.64). However, once he has possession of her dagger, he humiliates her again saying, ‘Stand off false woman, I despise thy love’ (III.3.71) and telling her he never loved her but disgraced her to avenge her brother, ‘twas not love to thee, But hatred to thy Brother *Don Marcel*’ (III.3.81-81).

It is later, in Act IV, that Hippolyta enters the scene cross-dressed (‘*Enter HIPPOLYTA dressed like a man.....*’ (IV.2) and ready to kill Antonio. Hippolyta speaks the lines, ‘Thus I dare look abroad again/Methinks I am not what I was/My soul too is all man/Where dwells no tenderness no womanish passions’ (IV, 2, 2-4). Hippolyta must erase her female body, invoke the ghost of transgenderism, and dress as a man to avenge her lover; as she says, ‘let no feeble woman dwell about me’ (IV.2.154). Hippolyta’s trans body only exists at the point of transgression, that is when she wants to kill Antonio. However, cross-dressed Hippolyta feels so different that even her soul has changed gender, ‘My soul too is all man’. Like Guilliam in *The Amorous Prince*, Hippolyta transforms her gender performance from female to male. If, as Butler suggests:

.....the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ ‘The Dutch Lover’ *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 5, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), III.3.9, p. 198.

⁵⁷ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, 40, (1998), 519 – 531, (p. 520).

then it is possible that Hippolyta, and indeed other characters in Behn's plays - including Silvia in Behn's prose narrative *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687), see Chapter 3 (p. 93) and particularly those who sustain their cross-dressing, transform their gender identity through the breaking of convention and the subversion involved in cross-dressing. If we believe that Behn's writing is prophetic and the haunting of a text (where the present is haunted by the past and marks 'a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*')⁵⁸ can move forwards as well as backwards, then these female characters embody the ghost of what we would now call transgenderism. Although Hippolyta does not sustain her cross-dressing, we are given no doubt that she feels very different when she is cross-dressed as a man. This suggest that cross-dressing for her is more than a disguise rather, she embodies masculinity when she is wearing men's clothes.

Hippolyta eventually gets the chance to fight Antonio, but she also ends up fighting with Alonso and when her brother arrives on the scene and intervenes in the fight, he wounds her. Once the men realize who she is, Marcel tries to kill her and Hippolyta survives only when Antonio protects her, 'Hold, Sir, and touch her not without my leave, She is my wife by sacred vows my wife' (IV.3.250-251). Hippolyta's physical body lets her down; '*She faints, Antonio kneels to her*' (IV.3) and she submits to a man, Antonio, for protection. Once Hippolyta submits as a repentant and humble woman the ghost of transgenderism is suppressed. Hippolyta says to her brother, 'That goodness, Sir, has Call'd me back to life/To pay my humble thanks, could you have mercy too, to pardon me— you might redeem my soul' (IV.3.260-262). When Hippolyta cross-dresses her 'soul too is all man' but when she submits to Antonio her soul is redeemed. Once Hippolyta has submitted, the men make-up with each other and, as Hippolyta returns to her feminine body, the ghost of the transgender body vanishes and the heteropatriarchal order is restored. Behn raises the ghost of the transgender ghost only to repress it and the status quo is resumed. By the end of the play Hippolyta returns to her family as Antonio's wife and the men re-establish their honour and masculinity.

Behn's play *The Feign'd Courtesans* (1679) is about exiled cavaliers and three women: two sisters Marcella and Cornelia and Laura Lucrecia. Marcella wants to avoid a forced marriage and Cornelia incarceration in a convent. By cross-dressing

⁵⁸ Martin Hagglund, quoted in Mark Fisher 'What is Hauntology?', (2012), p. 17.

Marcella and Cornelia knowingly violate societal norms to gain a degree of freedom that would otherwise be denied to women of their class. However, the character I wish to discuss in this chapter is Laura because her cross-dressing differs from Marcella and Cornelia. She is described by Julio as ‘a brave masculine lady’,⁵⁹ moreover she is the only woman who repeatedly cross-dresses throughout the play, her personality is expressed through her cross-dressing, she develops a friendship with another man while cross-dressed and she invokes the ghost of transgenderism. Indeed, Lowe suggests:

Not only is Laura’s sexual desire and contempt for morality more closely associated with masculinity than femininity with the play’s social context, but her sexuality is further complicated by hints of homoeroticism when she presents herself as Count San Coeur.⁶⁰

Laura does not want to end up in an inevitable arranged marriage which she describes as ‘That unconcern’d Domestique Necessary’ (II.1.163). For Laura, an arranged marriage is something a woman must do to survive, a domestic necessary for women in her society and something that takes no account of a woman’s wishes or desires. Laura is contracted to marry Julio (whom she has never met) but is in love with Galliard. Laura takes on two disguises in her pursuit of Galliard. One disguise is as a man, Count San Coeur, (so she can become Galliard’s friend). The other disguise is as a courtesan (to hide from Julio). In typical comic fashion Galliard falls in love with Laura when she is pretending to be a courtesan. Laura tells her page, Silvio, that she has entertained Galliard and ‘sent him pleas’d away’ (II.1.145). However, Galliard loves her as Silvanetta and not as herself, so she cross-dresses as a young man, Count San Coeur, to at least win Galliard’s friendship. Laura makes a convincing youth, as we see from this exchange between Laura and her page:

LAURA How dost though like my shape—my face and dress[?]
 My Mien and Equipage, may not pass for man?
 Look it *en Prince*, and Masculine[?]

SILVIO Now as I live you look all over what you wish; and such, as will

⁵⁹ ‘The Feign’d Curtizans’, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 6 ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), I.1.92 – 93.

⁶⁰ Leah Lowe, ‘Gender and (Im)morality in Restoration Comedy: Aphra Behn’s “The Feigned Courtesans”’, *Theatre Symposium: A Journal of the Southeastern Theatre Conference*, (2007), 92 – 239, (p. 101).

Despite her disappointment, and in order to at least maintain her friendship with Galliard, Laura pretends to have a lover too, telling him, 'I have a Mistress Sir, of quality!/Fair as imagination' (III.1.118-119). This is the trope that Cloris also used in *The Amorous Prince* where a cross-dressed woman pretends to have a female lover so that they can develop a relationship with the man they love. Both Laura and Cloris's relationships with men (when they are disguised as men) are based on the sharing of their love for a woman and this exposes how men's homosocial relationships could be built upon their shared attraction to women. However, in Galliard's case his desire would appear to lean more towards homoeroticism, and this is further evidenced a little later in the same scene when he says, 'Pox on't, that one cannot love a woman like a man, but one must love like an Ass.' (III.1.150-151). Although the line 'love like an Ass' suggests the cliched tradition of love and desire for women turning men into fools, within this context there is potential for a homoerotic subtext. To maintain his friendship Laura responds to Galliard's homoeroticism by replying in a similar fashion, 'Ile be bound to ly with all the women in *Rome*, with less ado than you are brought to one' (III.1.152-153). A queer stylistic reading of these exchanges suggests it is only initially that Laura bases her friendship with Galliard on their shared love for women. Their friendship is really based on a shared homoeroticism, ('one cannot love a woman like a man') because they would both much rather love a man. This suggests that men's social relationships with each other could be built on their shared attraction to men as much as, or more than, women.

At the end of the play, all disguises are dropped, the characters' identities are revealed, and Marcella and Cornelia get the men they desire. However, Laura ends up with Julio, the man she has been trying to avoid ('Is this yet *Julio*! And do all the powers conspire to make me wretched[?], V.1.603-604). Before Julio accepts Laura as his wife, we see Galliard confirm to Julio that she is still a virgin, 'I swear she is innocent!' (V.1.646) and Laura is obliged to marry Julio despite her reluctance, 'And must I, must I force my heart to yield/and yet his generous confidence Obliges me' (V.1.649-650). The play ends within the conventions of romantic comedy where everybody gets married, the women's sexuality is contained by marriage and heteronormativity and patriarchy are re-established. Although Laura doesn't get the man she wants, her marriage to Julio, the man she was originally contracted to marry, re-establishes patriarchal control. Laura's marriage to Julio also banishes the ghost of

her transgender identity. Laura and Julio's marriage is not central to the final scene and her exclusion might be considered punishment for her success in passing as a man, the fact that she does not fit neatly into a binary gender, and her apparent willingness to engage in sex rather than remaining a virgin. In the play Behn opens the possibility for women's autonomous sexuality but simultaneously shuts it down with a traditional, patriarchal denouement.

We have seen how, in *The Amorous Prince*, Cloris cross-dresses to follow the man she loves, and in *The Dutch Lover*, how Hippolyta cross-dresses to find the courage to avenge her lover. By the end of the plays these two characters return to dressing as women, the ghost of transgenderism is banished, the social order is reinstated, and they marry for love. However, in *The Feign'd Coutesans*, Laura marries because she is obliged to and the unsatisfactory ending is, I suggest, punishment for her behaviour which disrupts the homosocial relationships between the male characters. In these plays the ghost of the transgender body gives way to a conventional heteropatriarchal closure. However, I will argue that Behn takes the embodiment of the transgender ghost further in the next two plays that I discuss.

The final characters that I will analyse are from two of Behn's later plays *The Widdow Ranter* (1689) and *The Younger Brother* (1693). I suggest that towards the end of her career Behn's cross-dressed characters in these plays become more subversive, more deeply subsumed into what we would now label as transgender identities and haunted by trans spectrality. Behn's play *The Widdow Ranter* was first staged in 1689, after Behn's death. Chernaik acknowledges four plays⁶¹ of the period, including *The Widdow Ranter*, which use cross-dressing to critique attitudes to sexual inequality and where:

the central character is a genuinely androgynous figure, a woman whose male dress is not a temporary disguise but expresses her inward nature, with all its contradictions, freeing capacities and feelings which in other circumstances would have remained hidden.⁶²

While agreeing with Chernaik that Ranter's character could be described as androgynous, I suggest that Ranter is more than a character of indeterminate sex,

⁶¹ The other plays Chernaik mentions are Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* (1662), Shadwell's *The Woman-Captain* (1680) and Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love* (1691).

⁶² Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.195.

rather Behn uses Ranter's character, to explore transgender identity. In the play the character of Ranter was bought by Colonel Ranter from a ship. The Colonel marries her and when he dies, he leaves her a fortune. Before considering her cross-dressing, we already know that she has experienced an unusual transformation from a servant to a woman with economic freedom and the ability to re-marry on her own terms. Arguably, because the play is set in the colonies rather than in England, Behn has the freedom to develop Ranter's character outside the censure of conservative English society where these transformations would be troubling to her audience.⁶³ Friendly describes Ranter as:

A Woman bought from the Ship by Old Colonel *Ranter*, she serv'd him half a year, and then he Marry'd her, and dying in a year more, left her worth Fifty thousand Pounds Sterling, besides Plate and Jewels.....⁶⁴

Ranter possesses characteristics considered masculine such hard-drinking and pipe-smoking and Friendly describes her as 'a great Gallant' (I.1.82). Ranter explains to Christante, 'you know my humour Madam, I must smoke and Drink in a Morning, or I am Maukish all day' (I.3.27-28). Therefore, by the time we see Ranter cross-dressed she has made one transformation from servant to independent woman, and she has been established as an androgynous figure.

Ranter wants to marry Colonel Dareing, but he is only interested in Christante. Rather than sit around and sigh Ranter say, 'Pox on't no, why should I sigh and whine and make my self an Ass, and on him conceited no, instead of snivelling I'm resolv'd' (IV, 164 – 165). Ranter hatches a plot to pretend to have just arrived from England as Dareing's rival for Christante. Ranter, dressed as a man proposes fighting a duel with Dareing in front of Christante. In the meantime, Ranter hands Christante a letter explaining what she is going to do:

Dear Creature, I have taken the habit to free you from an impertinent Lover, and secure the Damn'd Rogue *Dareing* to my self, receive me as sent by Colonel *Surelove* from *England* to Marry you—favour me—no more—your *Ranter*'

⁶³ Lowenthal *Performing Identities*, (2003), p.71.

⁶⁴ 'The Widdow Ranter' in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 7, ed. Janet, Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), I.179-82.

Before they fight Christante suggests to Dareing that he should marry Ranter, ‘Ay, she’s the fittest Wife for you, she’ll fit your Honour’ (IV.1.235). However, Dareing expresses his horror at the idea of marrying Ranter:

Gad I’d sooner marry a She Bear, unless for a Penance for some horrid Sin, we should be eternally challenging one another to the Field, and ten to one she beats me there; or if I should escape there, she would kill me with Drinking.
(IV.1.236– 237)

Dareing highlights Ranter’s combative ‘masculinized’ nature, while the use of the title ‘She Bear’⁶⁵ highlights Ranter’s transformations from servant to an independent woman of means, from a woman to a woman presenting as a man and even, through Dareing’s description of her, to an animal. Dareing and the disguised Ranter spar until Dareing recognizes Ranter and is so impressed at the lengths she has gone to win his love that he offers to marry her:

DAREING ‘Give me thine hand Widow, I am thine—and so intirely will never—be drunk out of thy Company—*Dunce* is in my Tent—prithee let’s in and bind the bargain.’

RANTER Nay faith, let’s see the Wars at an end first.

DAREING Nay, prithee take me in the humour, while they Breeches are on—for I never lik’d thee half so well in Petticoats.

RANTER Lead on General, you give me good encouragement to wear them.

(IV.2.278-283).

The most interesting point in this exchange is that Dareing’s offer of marriage to Ranter is on the understanding that she wears breeches for their wedding because he ‘never lik’d thee half so well in Petticoats’ (IV.2.282). Ranter’s reply (‘you give me good encouragement to wear them’, IV.2.283) might be interpreted to mean that she thinks he is encouraging her to always wear breeches, or that she will metaphorically ‘wear the breeches’ in their relationship. Also, Behn uses four em dashes in Dareing’s speech.⁶⁶ Barchas (in her essay on how Henry Fielding (1707-1754) edited

⁶⁵ The phrase relates to the myth of Callisto who, in Greek mythology, was transformed from a nymph to a she bear.

< https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/The_Myths/Zeus%27s_Lovers/Callisto/callisto.html > [accessed 29th September 2021].

⁶⁶ This assumes that the em dashes were Behn’s insertion rather than the printer’s decision.

his sister's writing) suggests that Sarah Fielding used em dashes for several reasons in her writing including 'the intentional refusal to complete an idea',⁶⁷ 'to enhance, by means of graphic design, the meaning of her text',⁶⁸ 'to emphasize the important role of non-verbal communication'⁶⁹ and to convey 'speech which cannot be adequately captured by verbal transcription alone'.⁷⁰ Each of these reasons could apply to Behn's writing. However, reading with a queer stylistic approach, and given that Behn was writing a play, the dashes allow for interpretation on stage (or in the reader's mind) through eroticized gestures and tone of voice. We know that Dareing wants Ranter to continue to wear breeches and I suggest that Behn's em dashes could convey a homoerotic component to Darieng's attraction or that Behn constructs an erotic tension (which is physically realized on stage through dress and gesture, and arguably echoed in the implicit stage directions of the typography) between a transgender man (Ranter) and Dareing. Ranter cross-dresses to secure the man she loves but the fact that we see her behaving like a man throughout the play and the fact that she does not return to women's clothing at the end of the play suggest that her transgender behaviour is part of her (albeit fictional) continued lived identity.

The Indian Queen in the play also has cause to cross-dress. She is married to Cavarnio, the Indian King but is loved by the English General, Bacon. She cross-dresses to avoid capture by the British. The Queen enters the stage near the beginning of Act 5, where the stage direction tells us she is '*dress like an Indian Man, with a Bow in her hand and Quiver at her Back*'. Unfortunately, unlike Ranter, who is recognized by Dareing, the Queen is not recognized for who she is and is killed by Bacon, the man who loves her. The Queen's short foray into cross-dressing neither helps her (it is the cause of her death) nor makes her less feminine, as the Queen explained, 'I have no *Amazonian* fire about me' (V.3.191-192). The Queen's unsuccessful cross-dressing highlights the contrast between the conventional trope of women who dress as men specifically to escape circumstances and Ranter, who embodies transgenderism and challenges binary notions of gender.

⁶⁷ Janine Barchas, 'Sarah Fielding's Dashing Style and Eighteenth-Century Print Culture', *ELH*, 63, (1996), 633 – 656, (p. 637).

⁶⁸ Barchas, p. 640.

⁶⁹ Barchas, p. 640.

⁷⁰ Barchas, p. 641.

Finally, I turn to two female characters where, it has been suggested, Behn portrays female-female eroticism,⁷¹ but where I will argue that Behn equally explores transgenderism. The play is *The Younger Brother* (the exact date of writing is not known but it was first performed in 1696 and is likely to have been written later in Behn's career).⁷² There is some debate about the play's true authorship, but Hughes makes a strong case for Behn,⁷³ and Rubik states that 'computational analysis supports Behn's authorship for most, but not all, of the play'.⁷⁴ It is surprising that so little has been written about *The Younger Brother* as the relationship between Mirtilla and Olivia is one of the most interesting relationships in Behn's plays. Mirtilla 'mistakenly' falls in love with Olivia who is disguised as a page named Endimion.⁷⁵ It can be argued that Mirtilla's desire for Olivia cannot be easily dismissed because the audience are aware that Endimion (the cross-dressed Olivia) is a woman, but Mirtilla doesn't know that at the beginning of their relationship. On one level this can be read as a representation of female-to-female desire, but I disagree. Lansdowne suggests that the women who were attracted to 'cross-dressed women, femmes of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century breeches romance are centre-stage and very much censured for their 'depraved Appetites''.⁷⁶ Walden suggests:

To construct an erotic tension between two female characters, playwrights often employed the narrative convention of the cross-dressed female heroine. Since the disguised heroine's sartorial codes signify her as male, she becomes a potential object of desire for another women. The erotic energy that passes between the disguised heroine and the desiring subject resonates with the broader cultural discourse of female-female desire and sexual practices, signifying those very behaviours and longings to the audience.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Dawn M Goode, 'Under a Petticoat: Excess Femininity and Lesbian Desire on the Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century British Stage', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36, (2013), 177 – 190.

⁷² Margarete Rubik, Headnote to 'The Younger Brother' in *The Cambridge Edition of The Works of Aphra Behn, Vol. IV*, eds. Rachel Adcock, Kate Aughterson, Claire Bowditch, Elaine Hobby, Alan James Hogarth, Anita Pacheco, Margaret Rubik, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 705.

⁷³ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, (1988), p. 175 -176.

⁷⁴ Headnote to 'The Younger Brother', (2021), 718.

⁷⁵ In classical mythology Endimion spends his life asleep to preserve his beauty and one may wonder if Behn's choice of this name is significant, perhaps suggesting that Olivia feels more attractive dressed as a man.

⁷⁶ George Lansdowne quoted in Goode, 'Under a Petticoat', (2013), p. 179.

⁷⁷ Denise A. Walen, 'Constructions of Female Homoerotics in Early Modern Drama', *Theatre Journal*, 54 (2002) 411 - 430, (p. 411).

These women could engender fear as Goode suggests, they represented a threat ‘to an emergent binary gender-sexuality system needed to shore up the institution of marriage, which had become less about political and economic considerations and more about potentially destabilizing individual choice’.⁷⁸ It could be argued that Mirtilla is the most subversive of the female characters in the play. Women like Mirtilla, who fall in love with other women, do not have male clothes to take off at the end of a play to reveal they were indeed women and an opposite gender to the person they fell in love with. However, in Mirtilla’s case, the audience can believe her love is ‘mistaken’ (because she believed she was falling in love with a man), so she does not pose a threat. I will go further than these debates to suggest a more subversive interpretation of Olivia and Mirtilla’s relationship in *The Younger Brother* which favours Olivia’s transgenderism.

The play is a comedy involving primogeniture, the trials of the younger brother of the title, and arranged marriages for both women and men. Olivia is horrified at the thought of marrying the man who has been chosen for her, which she considers no more than prostitution without the benefit of satisfaction, variety, or money: ‘Like him—no, no, I never shall – what come a stranger to my Husbands bed? ‘Tis Prostitution in the lewdest manner, without the satisfaction, the Pleasure of Variety, and the Bait of Profit....’ (I.1.41-43). Olivia has been cross-dressed and assuming the part of Endimion for so long that when talking about men she includes herself as a man with the word ‘us’, ‘Love spoils a fine Gentlemanand makes us fit company for none but ones self’ (I.1.57–60). Mirtilla has married a wealthy man, Sir Morgan Blunder, but she has an affair with George’s friend, Prince Frederick, and pursues George’s sister (the cross-dressed Olivia/Endimion). Here we see that Mirtilla is not simply a dangerous character because she does not have male clothes to return to (see my earlier comment), she also breaks the rules and is not content with one lover, behaving like a female Libertine. In terms of ‘queerness’ we could look further into Mirtilla’s excessive and unusual behaviour. However, it is Olivia’s behaviour that particularly interests me in this chapter because I wish to focus on the women who cross-dress. Olivia is sure of herself when disguised as Endimion and describes to her brother how Mirtilla ‘doats even on me in Breeches’ (I.1.78) and how she had not dissuaded Mirtilla from her affection but ‘paid her Advances back with equal

⁷⁸ Goode, ‘Under a Petticoat’, (2013), p. 179.

This is clearly a very funny scene, and a queer scene that Varnado might describe as illuminating ‘moments in texts where desire makes strange motions, takes strange shapes, or goes awry—and not even in the expected ways’.⁷⁹ The em dashes in Mirtilla’s line (‘Rise, — When Lovers are alone they pardon Ceremony. — I sent for you to end the Night with me; say — how shall we employ it?’) raise speculation as to what is not being said and the sexual tension that the audience might pick up from the actor’s gestures. I suggest that this scene can be interpreted as woman-to-woman eroticism or trans man-to-woman eroticism because Olivia is performing the gender of a man named Endimion.

Later, George brings The Prince to Mirtilla’s room to catch Olivia and Mirtilla together, and as the women hear the men approach, they search for a place for Olivia to hide. Mirtilla suggests that Olivia hides under her skirts ‘Here, let my Train secure you — Till now I have never found the right Use of long Trains and Farthingals’ (IV, 241 – 242). In this scene Goode suggests that Behn ‘offers an evocative suggestion of female-to-female cunnilingus’ by ‘suggestively (cunningly) plac[ing] one woman hidden between another woman’s legs, clearly imitating the possibility of oral sex being the ‘right’ use for a woman’s large skirts’.⁸⁰ However, although this scene has been interpreted as a homoerotic scene between two women, it is equally open to interpretation as a scene between a woman and a transman because Olivia is performing a masculine gender when she is Endimion. Indeed, as it is Olivia under Mirtilla’s skirt, the sex act that Behn insinuates does not preclude Mirtilla from still believing that Olivia is a man.

In a later scene, Olivia returns to Mirtilla’s room and, just as Olivia is encouraging Mirtilla into bed, The Prince and George enter the room and, as the Prince gets hold of Olivia, her breasts are revealed to Mirtilla, ‘*The Prince holding Olivia by the Bosom of her Coat, her Breast appears to Mirtilla*’ (V.2). Significantly it is Mirtilla, not the Prince, who sees Olivia’s breasts first. This is the first time that Olivia’s biological sex is revealed to Mirtilla and she realizes she has been engaging in an erotic encounter with a woman. Up until this point, we know that Mirtilla thinks that Olivia is a man. Later the Prince asks Mirtilla, ‘Didst thou not take this

⁷⁹ Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy*, (2020), p. 3.

⁸⁰ Goode, ‘Under a Petticoat’, (2013), p. 181.

Woman for a Man?’ (V.2.168) Mirtilla answers, ‘I did’ (V.2.169). This exchange of lines, (where we find out that Mirtilla believed Endimion was a man) is paradoxically written in a parody of marriage vows. The details of the sex scene between the two women are important because the act they performed would not have led to Olivia revealing her sex. It is also pertinent that Olivia’s breasts were exposed to Mirtilla after their encounter because until then she was not aware that she was engaging in an erotic encounter with a woman. The performance of this scene would have allowed the audience to know that Mirtilla had only just become aware that Olivia was a woman. The specificity of the sex act, the revealing of Olivia’s breasts to Mirtilla and Mirtilla’s insistence that she thought Olivia was a man give weight to an interpretative and audience position of viewing Olivia’s cross-dressing as transgenderism.

When Welborn complains to Olivia that she is a ‘malicious Charmer’ (V.2.186) for not giving him a hint that she was in disguise, he says: ‘Nay, if you conceal’d your precious Talent, how shou’d it profit any Body?’ (V.2190-191), Olivia replies, ‘Conceal’d it?— No, Faith, I made a very fair Tender; but you refus’d it, as not being Currant Coin.’ (V.2.192-193). Their conversation is couched in financial terms and Olivia thinks Welborn should have recognized her value for herself, rather than the way she dresses. Unlike Ranter, Olivia reveals herself to him and changes into women’s clothes before he marries her. It is possible that Behn left this play unfinished before she died,⁸¹ and this may not have been her intended ending for Olivia. However, if Behn did write this ending, then the point Behn makes is that people should be loved for themselves, not for how they dress.

There are very many instances where Behn problematizes binary gender in her work, some of which I have analysed in this thesis. However, as we can see from the examples of the plays in this chapter it appears that Behn’s representations of cross-dressed women developed over her career and as these characters develop, so does the ghost of transgenderism. In this selection of Behn’s work, the earlier plays find the women cross-dress for expediency or to embrace the power to avenge a lover, and by so doing disrupt homosocial relationships and notions of patriarchy, but then return to women’s dress and marry, some happily and some reluctantly. Towards the end of Behn’s career the cross-dressed Ranter absorbs and sustains her masculine

⁸¹ Rubik, Headnote to ‘The Younger Brother’ (2021), p. 715.

identity without being censured and Olivia questions her need to dress as a woman to be loved. I suggest that Behn wrote these characters to explore the construction of gender, but I also believe that as we read Behn's work we find these characters haunted by the ghost of transgenderism and the ghosts of trans bodies where the past and the present combine through the social, scientific, political, and sexual anxieties of the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries.

Conclusion

This thesis has been a very personal journey following on from my MA thesis¹ where I traced representations of woman-to-woman love in seventeenth-century women's writing. My work is based on a close textual analysis of Behn's work. Belsey suggests that textual analysis begins with the question 'how can we best let the text itself set the agenda for research that will generate insights?'² This is how my thesis began, by letting Behn's work talk to me and beginning what I like to describe as my 'relationship' with Aphra Behn. This 'relationship' has led me on a surprising journey in terms of what I discovered by reading her work through my queer lens. I had expected to find her problematizing gender because "'To the Fair Clarinda Who Made Love to me, Imagin'd More Than Woman' (1688)³ experiments openly with sexuality and has always been one of my favourite poems (a sort of 'rite of passage' poem when I came out as a lesbian late in life). However, I was surprised to find her work haunted by the ghost of what we would now call transgender bodies.⁴ I should not of course have been surprised by this. Behn's work is always surprising, exciting, radical and proleptic! My 'relationship' with Behn has affected not just this thesis but my personal views on life, leading me to describe myself with the inclusive description of 'queer' rather than lesbian (not least to disassociate myself with lesbians who marginalize transgender identities). During the time of writing there has been a deepening hatred towards our transgender community from the public, trans exclusive feminists, and even from parts of the gay community. Reading Behn's work, and I hope, reading this thesis, shows us that queer identity has always been a fundamental part of the world, part of our history and is something to be celebrated.

My thesis is a re-evaluation the work of Aphra Behn. I have analysed a selection of Behn's work, including her plays, narrative fiction and one of her poems. Building on the work of contemporary queer theorists I have taken a diachronic historicist approach, using queer stylistics as a methodology

¹ Jane Iremonger, *'Words indeed can no more show' Aphra Behn and the Poetics of Lesbian Salience in the Seventeenth Century*, (2015)

² Belsey, 'Textual Analysis as a Research Method' (2013).

³ See Appendix Two (p. 199)

⁴ See Chapters Three (p. 96) and Six (p. 170).

incorporating queer temporality and queer hauntology⁵ to reveal how Behn queers time, queers gender, and conjures up the ghost of what we now call transgenderism. I show how Behn queers time in the Restoration period through her prose narrative *The Lovers Watch* and how the character of Iris re-fashions her lover to challenge notions of Libertine masculinity to offer an alternative masculinity and power to women. Through a close reading of 'The Golden Age' I demonstrate how Behn describes an alternative version of paradise which offers a non-binary space in opposition of hegemony and patriarchy. In *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* I reveal what I consider to be one of the most transgressive female characters in literary history and show how Behn problematizes dominant ideologies in respect of gender and sexuality to reveal queer relationships and Silvia's embodiment of transgenderism. Through my reading of Behn's play *The Rover* I show how the queer temporality of the Carnival (this is the first time that Carnival has been queered in Behn's work) and the medium of farce reveals an underlying homoeroticism and the suspension and destabilization of hegemony, patriarchy and heterosexuality. Through a close reading of *The Emperor of The Moon* I offer an argument which shows that Behn's use of the carnivalesque, farce and the grotesque, together with her queer imaginings, reveal queer desires, queer erotic energy and challenges to heteronormativity. Finally, I have analysed cross-dressing in selection of five of Behn's plays in chronological order. My analysis of these plays shows how Behn problematizes binary gender and that as the plays progress over time Behn's representation of cross-dressed characters reveal the ghost of what we would now call transgenderism.

I conclude, that acknowledging Aphra Behn as a proto feminist does not do justice to the radical and transgressive nature of her work. I offer an original contribution to knowledge by re-claiming Aphra Ben's work as part of the queering of literary history, including transgender history, which is of relevance during the current climate of antipathy towards queer, non-binary and transgender communities. I have analysed and queered a small selection of Behn's work – there is more to do, and my hope is that this thesis will inspire others to queer the work of more Early Modern writers.

⁵ See my Introduction and previous chapters.

Appendix One

Definition of Terms

Diachronic Historicism

Diachronic historicism is a way of engaging with texts beyond their historical period (unlike a purely historicist reading where literature is interpreted in relation to the time it was written). Diachronic historicism validates the reading of a text in relation to how we read as contemporary readers and how a text sounds when read ‘twenty years, two hundred years, or two thousand years after it was written’.¹ It allows texts to be continually reinterpreted and acknowledges that texts are not static, rather they travel across space and time. Dimock describes this reading as ‘the dynamics of endurance and transformation that accompanies the passage of time’ (1061) which allows texts to travel ‘across space and especially across time’ (1061). For example, the meaning and nuances of words and phrases changes over time, sometimes quite dramatically and sometimes subtly and this way of reading allows us to include these changes and validates our reading of a text beyond its historical period. The concept of diachronic historicism is based on ‘resonance’, which is the theory of sounds that are ‘received and amplified across time, moving farther and farther from their point of origin’, which ‘causes unexpected vibrations in unexpected places’ (1061). Diachronic historicist readers engage with texts at different points in time with different interpretations, like plays that are re-interpreted with each performance. Future readers of a text remake a text each time it is read. Diachronic historicist readers enrich a text with their new readings while acknowledging that there are meanings that can never be fully recovered from the original.

Hauntology

Hauntology theorizes the idea that the present is haunted by the past and that the spectre of alternative futures influence history. Hauntology marks ‘a relation to what

¹ Wai Chee Dimock, ‘A Theory of Resonance’, *PMLA*, (1997), 1060-1071, (p. 1060). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

is *no longer or not yet*'.² It is a method of deconstructing texts which emerges from Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (2006) where he uses the term "spectrality" to 'describe a mode of historical attentiveness that the living might have to what is not present but somehow appears as a figure or a voice'³ (specifically, in *Spectres of Marx*, the spectre of communism haunting Europe). The ghost or spectre is a metaphor for what we cannot see and cannot grasp, but we may be able to feel, the 'ungraspable visibility of the invisible'.⁴ It is the place between life and death, the thing we cannot easily identify or define but that we sense is there, 'Neither soul nor body, and both one and the other'.⁵ Derrida explains that the difficulty of knowing the spectre is 'not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge';⁶ or at least what we call knowledge or think of as knowledge and which we do not yet have the language to speak about. Freccero asserts that 'The past is in the present in the form of a haunting. This is what, among other things, doing a queer kind of history means, since it involves the possibility of being haunted, even inhabited by ghosts.'⁷ Davis suggests that 'hauntology is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study'.⁸ I use hauntology throughout this thesis but specifically to identify the spectre of transgenderism through the cross-dressed characters in Behn's work.

Queer

I use the word 'queer' in the most inclusive and widest possible sense including sexual and/or gender identity that does not conform to expectations of binary gender, gender that may be fluid or problematic in relation to gendered expectations or dominant ideologies and unconventional or nonnormative behaviour or desires (with or without an erotic component).

² Martin Hagglund, quoted in Mark Fisher 'What is Hauntology?', *Film Quarterly*, 66 (2012), 16-24 (p. 17).

³ Freccero, Carla, *Queer/Early/Modern*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 69-70.

⁴ Jacques, Derrida, *Spectres of Marx, the state of debt, the work of mourning and new international*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), p.6.

⁵ Derrida, p.5.

⁶ Derrida, p.5.

⁷ Freccero, p. 80

⁸ Colin Davis, Hauntology, spectres and phantoms, *French Studies*, Volume 59 (2005), 373 -379 (p. 379) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/kni143>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

Queer stylistics

The term ‘queer stylistics’ has been interchangeable with the term ‘queer linguistics’ and originates from the field of linguistics. Queer linguistics ‘provides analysis of language data that are informed by the insights of queer theory’.⁹ It also questions the assumption of the binary categories of male and female as normative and heteronormativity as a default sexual orientation. Queer linguistics can also be used to reveal how heteronormativity is reinforced through verbal and written language, literary and visual forms, genres, and discourses.

Queer temporality

The recent turn towards queer temporality emerged at the end of the twentieth century following the AIDS epidemic when gay communities saw their futures rapidly disappearing, creating a need to concentrate on the present rather than the future.¹⁰ This led queer theorists to consider how we think about time and how time is experienced by individuals and groups of people who see the world differently and whose lifestyles and expectations may problematize heteronormative timelines. People may experience time differently for several reasons. For example, people who have been marginalized through race, disability, or gender; people who identify as queer; or people who choose not to follow the hegemonic or patriarchal values considered ‘normal’ in their society. While the AIDS epidemic was the beginning of the contemporary ‘queer time’ narrative, there are other times in history, following significant political or social upheavals, that have produced queer temporalities.

⁹ Heiko Motschenbacher and Martin Stegu, ‘Introduction: Queer Linguistic approaches to discourse’, *Discourse & Society*. 24 (2013), 519 – 535, (p. 520).

¹⁰ Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), p.2.

Appendix Two

To the fair Clarinda, who made love to me, imagin'd more than Woman (1866)

Fair lovely Maid, or if that Title be
Too weak, too Feminine for Nobler thee,
Permit a Name that more Approaches Truth:
And let me call thee, Lovely Charming Youth.
This last will justifie my soft complaint,
While that may serve to lessen my constraint;
And without Blushes I the Youth persue,
When so much beauteous Woman is in view,
Against thy Charms we struggle but in vain
With thy deluding Form thou giv'st us pain,
While the bright Nymph betrays us to the Swain.
In pity to our Sex sure thou wer't sent,
That we might Love, and yet be innocent:
For sure no Crime with thee we can commit;
Or if we shou'd—thy Form excuses it.
For who, that gathers fairest Flowers believes
A snake lies hid beneath the Fragrant Leaves.

Thou beauteous Wonder of a different kind,
Soft *Cloris* with the dear *Alexis* join'd;
When e'r the Manly part of thee, wou'd plead
Thou tempts us with the Image of the Maid,
While we the noblest Passions do extend
The Love to *Hermes*, *Aphrodite* the Friend.¹¹

¹¹ Aphra Behn, 'To the fair Clarinda, who made Love to me, imagin'd more than Woman' in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 1, ed. Todd, Janet, (Ohio: Ohio State University, 1992)

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