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A Comedy of Marriage: Aphra Behn's *The Dutch Lover*

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Aphra Behn's *The Dutch Lover*, which was performed at the new Duke's theatre in 1673, is a kind of pastoral comedy of several marriages portrayed multilayeredly. As the author declares not only in the title page but also in the preface addressing 'Good, Sweet, Honey, Sugar-candied READER,' the play is a comedy which Behn endeavoured to make as 'entertaining' as she could (V, pp. 160, 162)[1]; for the theme of marriage, which is a social theme and is to be recurrent one in Behn's literary activities, is evolved in frivolous and involved ado caused by hidden, confused and disguised identities. The laughter of the play is represented by Haunce Van Ezel, the eponymous lover but is not the hero. He comes along triumphantly in order to marry his fiancée Euphemia, the heroine of the play, but he is only compelled to act the fool in spite of himself. The play, *The Dutch Lover*, is satirical enough to overshadow the theme of marriage. Marriages, the denouement of the play, will be tinted with the author's cynicism.

The play also has a pastoral mood partly because some scenes develop in a grove, a garden or an arbour being a long way from Court, though in the opening scene Alonzo, the protagonist of the play, says he came back from Flanders to Madrid under the order of his Prince Don John. Prince has neither authority nor prestige in the play, which is suggested by Carlo's dislike for 'Princely favour' given to Alonzo that 'will buy no Lands' (V:

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[1]Janet Todd, ed. *The Works of Aphra Behn*. 7 vols. London: Pickering, 1995.

5.2.120). As the mercenary Carlo prefers money to fame, he contracts his daughter Euphemia to the opulent but foolish Dutch merchant Haunce whom he has not even seen. But he does not to hesitate to break off the contract and is willing to give her in marriage to Alonzo on knowing his coming into an inheritance of 12000 crowns a year. The sudden change of his mind indicates not so much monetary domination as the approbation of Euphemia's love for Alonzo because she marries for love, not for money. Though the father regards fortune as a top priority in his daughter's marriage, she is quite indifferent to fortune. She is taken with Alonzo directly after she saw him in the church for the first time. What is more, in order to demonstrate the love's predominance and to produce a pastoral atmosphere, nymphs themselves appear in the play. They dance an amorous dance to the music and sing to console the other heroine, Cleonte, who is perplexed with the love of her supposed half-brother Silvio for her and her own strange feeling 'that pleads so movingly for *Silvio'* (V : 3.4.21):

1. NYMP[H]. *Here at your feet, we tribute pay,*
Of all the glories of the May.
2. NYMP[H]. *Such Trophies can be only due*
To victors so divine as you.
BOTH. *Come, follow, follow, where love leads the way,*
To pleasures that admit of no delay.
1. NYMP[H]. *Come follow to the amorous shade,*
Cover'd with Roses and with Jessamine.
2. NYMP[H]. *Where the love-sick boy is laid,*
Panting for Loves charming Queen.
BOTH. *Come, follow, follow, where we lead the way*
To pleasures that admit of no delay.
[*Nymphs*] Lead [*Cleonte*]out
(V : 3.4.26-37)

This song of nymphs is the keynote of the play, not a mere digression into a

pastoral. Nymphs, who being goddesses must know the truth of the matter is that Cleonte is not sister to Silvio, invite her into love and pleasure, and even more importantly, into marriage. Since a nymph means a bride in Greek, their appearance is symbolic of the theme of the play. Marriage is an end for many female characters of the play while it is not marriage itself but love out of marriage that many male characters seek for as if conforming to the ideology of libertinism. The conflict between them constitutes the play and makes it a comedy.

1

The play begins with announcing the forthcoming two marriages through the dialogue between Alonzo and Lovis, who 'were wont to divide the spoils of Beauty, as well as those of war' between them. Alonzo has just landed at Madrid to marry Hyppolyta whose brother Marcel promised him to give her, while his friend Lovis has also just landed by another ship with Haunce Van Ezel who is going to marry his sister Euphemia. We are told that two pairs are going to marry, but the marriages in themselves are not regarded as delightful. As for marriage, Alonzo agrees with Lovis's opinion that matrimony is not only a 'scandalous way of life' but also a 'folly' (V : 1.1.31-32). They depreciate matrimony as depriving them of freedom. For them, to marry is to be undone. But knowing neither his birth nor his parents, Alonzo considers it as an advantage to ally himself with a nobleman of Spain, her father Ambrosio. Anyway his coming marriage is just a useful expedient not a genuine desire. His inclination is demonstrated by the fact that he is happy to shove Lovis aside and to venture an amorous adventure happened to him suddenly in spite of being engaged to Hyppolyta. As if he is ashamed to resist a temptation of a woman, he follows a maid Olinda to Euphemia's. As a consequence he is to love Euphemia, and she comes to request him to marry him as a matter of

course. But he is reluctant to marry her in spite of his love for her, saying 'a pox of her terms of marriage' (V : 2.6.157). To marry means to give up all his 'inclinations to libertinism' (V : 2.7.82-83).

As Alonzo is not completely agreeable to marrying for status, Lovis cannot approve the marriage of his sister Euphemia to Haunce for his fortune. Naturally, the arranged marriage is disagreeable to Euphemia herself. She urges Alonzo to marry her so as to break her arranged marriage. It is therefore strategic that Alonzo and Euphemia get to have love for each other notwithstanding being engaged respectively because Aphra Behn 'denounces marriage for money as virtual prostitution.'[2] Marcel also has no inclination to marry the rich Flavia as his father arranges while he himself arranged to marry his sister Hippolyta to Alonzo. He loves Clarinda passionately and rejoices at receiving her letter to permit him to see her in her chamber. But the fact is that Marcel does not long to marry her and thinks as follows:

> Only thus much the happier lover I,
> Who gather all the sweets of this fair Maid
> Without the ceremonious tye of Marriage;
> That tye that does but nauseate the delight,
> Be far from happy Lovers; we'l imbrace
> As unconfin'd and free as whispering Air
> That mingles wantonly with spreading flowers.
>
> (V : 1.2.60-66)

Clarinda gives Marcel her consent to meet in her chamber by virtue of his vow to marry her, but his vow seems to be a kind of means to obtain her. It is a wanton love out of marriage that is desirable for Spanish men. Now that he aspires after love out of marriage, Marcel is not qualified for

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[2] Susan Staves. 'Behn, women, and society' in *The Cmabridge Companion to Aphra Behn* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 16.

reproaching Silvio, the supposed half-brother to Marcel, for being a bastard. On the contrary, he reasonably deserves to be reproached for being a legitimate child by Silvio:

> And how dare you upbraid me with my birth,
> Which know, *Marcel*, is more illustrious far
> Than thine, being begot when love was in his raign,
> With all his youth and heat about him?
> I like birds of bravest kind was hatcht
> In the hot Sun-shine of delight, whilst
> Thou *Marcel* wer't poorly brooked
> In the cold nest of Wed-lock. (V : 1.2.155-62)

When we remember her tolerance toward royal amorousness and her own feeling of love represented in her later works, Behn seems to identify her with Silvio. And it is possible to smell satire on marriage in his pleading.

While Alonzo and Marcel are self-contradicting about love and marriage, Silvio is not prepossessed with the concept of marriage. Because he loves ardently his half-sister Cleonte, the relationship excludes him completely from thinking of marrying her. He follows genuinely the law of love, ignoring the law of marriage. That is why his declaration of love to her appears to be the most affectionate. But his case does not much differ from those of Alonzo and Marcel in that all of them do not make a point of marriage. Behn only exhibits a variation of libertine love that resists marrying. Silvio's forbidden love may be more appropriate to a tragedy, but Behn fixes suitably it in her comedy by contrasting him with other libertine lovers to elaborate the theme of marriage. His incestuous love serves to bring out the issue of love and marriage, the theme of the play.

2

Even if they are to marry their sweethearts, men have an aversion to

marriage which, as Olinda aptly states in an aside, 'most young men dread now-a-days' (V : 1.3.141-42). It is because men are not constant, as Dormida, Clarinda's governess, realizes who 'never found a constant just man, as they say, of a thousand' (V : 2.3.17-18). In contrast with false male characters who do love but do not wish to marry, female characters wish to love and marry. They do not separate love from marriage, and expect love naturally leads on to marriage. As long as there are wide differences of view of marriage between men and women, it necessarily follows that conflicts between them and tactics of each other are brought about. Thus a comedy of marriage comes to pass.

Though the sincerity of love of female characters is consistent in the play, the temptation by Euphemia appears to be too flighty. She decides to tempt Alonzo of whom she caught a glimpse just once at the church. The flightiness of the temptress seems to correspond to the frivolousness of Alonzo who gladly falls into temptation without seeing her, as his engagement to a woman that he has never seen corresponds to Euphemia's engagement to a man that she has never seen. A glimpse may be sufficient for her to fall in love, and it is natural for her that love attains to marrage. Though it is true that one of her aims of temptation is to shun marrying the disagreeable betrothed Haunce, there is no doubting the sincerity of Euphemia who whishes to marry him. Her supposed flightiness is a means to oppose men's libertinism, and what's more, it is also a claim to the right of self-determination. Euphemia tries to be independent both from libertinism and from patriarchy to be suited to be a heroine of Behn's work.

Euphemia tries to be attractive to Alonzo by veiling her face and frustrating his efforts to unveil her face as many as four times. The attack and defense, which is the first scene of tactics between a man and a woman in the play, should be noted. A veil is reminiscent of a masquerade, but this is not a fair love game as a masquerade. It is only Euphemia who veils the face. Alonzo exposes his real face and is forced to partake in the game that

she rules. It is undoubted that she carries the game to him and will win against him. Her veil ensures her victory over him and at the same time becomes a sign of her domination. To veil one's face means not only to hide one's identity but also to make it worthless. That Alonzo loves her without knowing her identity proves the worthlessness of identity, and identity means nothing to Euphemia who makes a proposal to Alonzo without recognizing his identity. Alonzo comes to approve the role of her veil by being coquetted with it. In fact, she makes women's subordinate situation to men — both lovers' situation and daughters' situation — invalid without being aware that she thwarts all that identity supposes.

As the day is apparently Euphemia's, Behn does not need to explore the tactics of each other over matrimony. We find the exploration does not compose comedy of the play. Behn chooses to compose comedy by making Alonzo himself endeavour to marry her with abandoning his libertinism; besides she makes Lovis, Alonzo's libertine friend, cooperate with him for the marriage. As soon as he knows the object of the amorous adventure of Alonzo is his sister Euphemia, he insists that Alonzo must marry her. He eagerly gives him a helping hand for their marriage and elaborates a trick. And Alonzo resolves to assume the role proposed to him by his friend in spite of his libertinism. He disguises himself as Haunce to convince her father Carlo of his rudeness and impertinence. Alonzo even plays the fool. Indeed Haunce is to be made a fool because Behn thinks one who regards a wife as 'a dear commodity' (V: 4.2.57) is nothing but a fool. In short, Lovis and Alonzo who detest marriage ridiculously cooperate for marriage. Behn composes comedy of the play by making a libertine exert himself for marriage.

Antonio is another example of libertinism forced to advance toward marriage. He courted Hippolyta, Alonzo's betrothed and Marcel's sister, but it was not because he loved her. He run after her with the false vows of marriage and made her a prostitute in order to revenge himself on Marcel,

who 'made addresses to the fair Clarinda, and by his quality destroy'd my [Antoino's] hopes' (V: 3.3.83-84). He is such a cruel libertine that he confesses his intention to her face. His cruelness stands out all the more because he says it just after she gave up killing him sleeping in her side because of her love for him. But eventually he declares himself that he marries her. When Marcel attempts the life of his sister Hippolyta with a sword to wipe off her sin of debauchedness, Antonio steps between them to save her:

> ANTONIO. Hold, Sir, and touch her not without my leave,
> She is my wife; by sacred vows my wife.
> ALONZO. . . . . .
> She faints — come let us bear her thence.
> ANTONIO. Oh stay *Hippolyta*, and take me with thee,
> For I have no use of life when thou art gone.
> Here kill me brave *Marvel*; — and yet you need not,
> My own remorse and grief will be sufficient.
> (V: 4.3.250-51, 254 -58)

As we know the ruthless libertinism of Antonio, his abrupt and unexpected conversion seems to be incredible. It is so all the rather because Behn does not depict a shadow of his repentance. Behn is not concerned to depict the transition of his sentiment; for it is the implicit argument of the play that libertines turn to indulgent husbands in due course.

As for Marcel, luck steers him to marriage. It is Clarinda that Marcel loves in spite of being engaged to the rich Flavia, but he does not necessarily want to marry Clarinda as I stated. Presumably he does not fancy his marriage to Clarinda who 'wants a fortune' (V: 5.1.194). But here luck interposes in the affair. She proves to be Alonzo's sister, and furthermore Alonzo proves to be a son to the rich Manual who left him a legacy. The disclosed fact gets rid of the hindrance to his marriage to Clarinda. It follows then that he must needs marry her in spite of his

libertinism. Libertines are destined to marry in the play, that is to say, to fail to retain their own identities as libertines.

Silvio is also carried to marriage by luck. His beloved, the supposed half-blooded sister Cleonte, proves not to be kindred at all. His wish that his mother 'deceiv'd him [his father]' (V: 3.4.100) comes true. The apparent invincible obstacle to his marriage with Cleonte dissolves as well as that to Marcel's. But as we were told of his persuasive argument about 'the cold nest of Wed-lock' (V: 1.2.162), we cannot but feel here an ironic consequence.

Thus Alonzo, Marcel and Antonio are to marry respectively in the denouement. Accidentally Haunce marries Olinda and his cash-keeper Gload marries Dorice. What's more, Clarinda's governess Dormida and Alonzo's old servant Pedro renew their old amours. Like so, marriages for which women wish are accomplished in the end.

3

Marriage is the irresistible and destined end in the play, and consummates the comedy. But the play does not advance straight towards the denouement of marriage in an atmosphere fitting for a pastoral comedy. There are many fighting scenes with swords that are not becoming for comedy, as if they mean to break the route to marriage. Marcel is an exponent of the sword. While women regard love and marriage as the honour, he considers honour to be kept by the sword. He attempts to kill Antonio who debauched his sister Hippolyta in order to restore his family honour. As the comedy allows no one to commit murder, he is naturally prevented from revenging himself upon him by Alonzo. But he wounds Antonio by his hand, and then he ventures to attack his own sister. Again Marcel's sword proves to be helpless, because the woman he tries to kill is not Hippolyta but Euphemia who veiled her face. He seems to have a blind

belief in the sword, which is bound to be ineffectual in the comedy. As I have cited, Marcel does not abandon his sword and dares to kill Hippolyta, but the result is Antonio's repentance and declaration for marriage to her. It is marriage, women's honour, that Marcel's sword causes.

Marcel also tries to kill his supposed half-brother Silvio with a dagger, perceiving his incestuous love for Cleonte. But again his weapon is made useless by his father Ambrosio because he discloses that Silvio is not their brother. He has merely fostered him at someone's request. Ambrosio gladly allows them to marry. This also means that his dagger gives rise to the marriage between Silvio and Cleonte. As many as twice Marcel contributes to marriage, which he disfavours as one of libertines in the play. And he himself marries Clarinda owing to the accidental disclosure of her fortune. Marriage is made possible at the expense of libertinism and sword of men. Behn makes the sword play a satirical role. It is not the sword but marriage that restores honour in her play. Is it too much to say that Marcel's sword is Don Quixote's? Marcel, like Quixote, brandishes the sword without realizing that it is too out of date to bear honour. From this point of view, Marcel is a character appropriate for comedy through his vain fighting.[3]

The sword is helpless not only to accomplish expected aims but also to recognize objects. The sword is often drawn against wrong persons. Marcel draws his sword against Alonzo mistaking him for Silvio (2.4) and makes the mistake of assisting his opponent Antonio who fights a battle with Alonzo and Hippolyta disguising herself as Alonzo (4.3). As the play brings forth confusion with identities, every so often they cannot tell who's who. As Marcel mistakes Euphemia for Hippolyta, she cannot but say '[w]hat can he mean?' (V: 2.2.20). Lovis, who can not tell who's who, has

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[3] We can also see a descendant of Don Quixote in Haunce, the fool, who draws a great Dutch knife ridiculously (3.3).

good reason to observe that 'I know not the meaning of all this' (V: 2.2.39). And taking Marcel for his rival, Alonzo remarks, 'What can the meaning of this be?' (V: 2.2.61). The confusion with identities in that scene is unintentional, but the play brings forth intentional confusion where Hippolyta is disguised as Alonzo and Alonzo as Haunce. Early in the play Francisca, a woman to Cleonte, proposes that Silvio should pretend to love the rich Fravia in hope of finding some way to advance her love for Silvio. However, he replies that he acted a feigned love and hid a real one in vain. Indeed the play is abundant in dissimulation and confusion from beginning to end. The audience can recognize the dramatic irony well, but he is to be surprised at the disclosures that Alonzo is a brother to Clarinda and comes into an inheritance and that Silvio is Don Roderigo not a half-brother to Cleonte and Marcel. The audience is also caught up in the confusion of identities and much ado of the comedy. Only the author Behn controls the comedy and provides all lovers with the happy ending of marriage in the pastoral atmosphere, which the audience is to witnesses.

Clarinda complains that 'we marry where our Parents like, not we' (V: 5.1.33), but finally lovers in the play marry where they like, not their parents. It is noteworthy that they marry as they wish though male lovers are not necessarily willing to marry because of libertinism. This conclusion means that marriage is a private matter rather than a family concern or filial obligation. Disagreeing with patriarchy, Behn gives much importance to individuality, especially for women. But the individuality is brought to a head by the confusion of identities. Identities are made disguised, confused and hidden because they must be restored as new ones. It is not the sword but marriage that carries out the task. As the sword is unable to recognize identity precisely and consequently ineffectual in restoring honour and identity deeply connected with honour, it must be bewildering. It follows that men cannot exert their authority and must be bewildering. But marriage, the honour and wish of women, is to furnish a person with a new

identity. As a husband to someone or a wife to someone, he or she gets a new fixed identity. Whereof marriage must necessarily be the denouement of the comedy that consists of disguised, confused and hidden identities. The bewilderedness of men's swords dissolves into marriage. The sense of value of women prevails over that of men. Identities are discovered in favor of marriage. The unfolding of the events may be, however, somewhat idealistic and even ideological. This is the reason why Behn had to insist that she made the play as entertaining as she could. And an entertaining comedy is required to result in a happy ending. But is marriage an implicit happy ending?

4

In the course of nature marriage appears to be a happy ending and women's wish seems to have come true. But we have been told of a cynical and pessimistic remark about marriage by Olinda:

> . . . but this marrying I do not like; 'tis like
> going a long voyage to Sea, where after a while, even the calms are
> distasteful, and the storm's dangerous: one seldom sees a new object, 'tis
> still a deal of Sea, Sea; Husband, Husband, every day— till one's cloy'd
> with it. (V: 4.1.117-21)

When we reflect that the play begins by introducing two persons who have sailed from Dutch to Madrid through a heavy storm in order to marry, the comparison of marriage to 'a long voyage to Sea' is appropriate for the theme of the play. The other truth of marriage told by Olinda is an unavoidable reality and result of what women long for.

If Behn presents us with a pastoral of marriage, its calm life can be cloying as well as a voyage. And it also can be stormy as well as a voyage.

Even if marriage can furnish a person with a new identity, it is not always a fixed and acceptable one. A husband may be cloyed with his wife and a wife may be disgusted with her husband. The play suggests that a happy matrimony may not continue. Neither Carlo's wife nor Don Ambrosio's does not appear on the stage, and Octavia, Alonzo's mother, could not live in wedded bliss and became a widow. Parents who aim to marry their children do not seem to live happy married lives. And if identities are to continue to waver, or if a relationship to others is to alter, a comedy caused by multilayered identities is to continue. Marriage is an ending of comedy and at the same time can be a beginning of comedy. Behn implies a lifelong comedy through a comedy of marriage. She induces the audience to look over a long life in perspective through a temporary event of marriage. The detached perception, represented suggestively by the cynical remark of Olinda, will enable her to touch the theme of marriage through her literary career.