



“Why thus disguis’d and muzzl’d?: Subversive Potential of Disguise in Aphra Behn’s *the Rover*”

Sevilay Yavuz Çeşmeci

Doğuş University, İstanbul

ABSTRACT

In Aphra Behn’s *the Rover*, the theme of disguise plays a pivotal role in exploring identity and gender. By using costumes, altered appearances, and assumed identities Behn offers her characters a means to subvert restrictive norms of Restoration period. Disguise, in this context, becomes a tool for self-discovery, personal liberation, and comic relief, highlighting the tension between appearances and reality. Central to the plot, the disguises enable characters to explore desires, challenge authority, and engage in flirtations that would otherwise be impossible within the confines of their true identities. The fluidity of gender roles and identities, exemplified with disguise, not only reflects the play’s libertine themes but also reveals Behn’s nuanced approach to the complexities of individual agency and societal expectations. In the light of Bakhtin’s “carnavalesque” approach, which emphasizes the subversion of dominant cultural structures through disguise, humor, chaos, and the reversal of order, this paper argues that disguise in *The Rover* functions as a theatrical enactment of carnivalesque principles. Characters’ playful engagements with deception mirror the transformative and liberating forces of carnival, where social and gender roles are questioned, redefined, and overturned. Ultimately, this article reveals how Behn uses disguise not only as a comedic tool but also as a way to critique and reflect upon the power dynamics of Restoration society.

Keywords: carnivalesque, disguise, restoration comedy, gender roles, The Rover