The Forc'd Marriage Study Guide

The Forc'd Marriage by Aphra Behn

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Introduction

The Forc'd Marriage, or the Jealous Bridegroom was first performed in 1670, at the Duke's Theatre in London's Lincoln's Inn Fields. It belongs in the category of Restoration drama, which refers to drama written between 1660, when the monarchy was restored, and 1688. The play, a tragicomedy, was Aphra Behn's first and one of the first plays by a woman to be presented on the English stage. Behn went on to write many more plays and was the first woman to make her living as a writer.

In *The Forc'd Marriage*, the heroine, Erminia, is forced by her father and the king to marry Alcippus, a young warrior whom she does not love. The man she loves, and who loves her, is Prince Philander, the king's son, while the king's daughter, Galatea, is in love with Alcippus. In time-honored comic fashion, the tangle eventually gets sorted out and true love wins in the end.

The text of *The Forc'd Marriage* used in this chapter is taken from the edition by Montague Summers published in 1915. It was reprinted by Phaeton Press in 1967 but, as of 2006, was out of print. A more recent edition can be found in *The Works of Aphra Behn: The Plays 1671-1677*, edited by Janet Todd and published by Ohio State University Press in 1996. As of 2006, a less expensive edition was available from Kessinger Publishing, but unfortunately this edition omits both the prologue and the epilogue of the play.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: English

Birthdate: 1640

Deathdate: 1689

Many of the facts about the early life of the dramatist, poet, and novelist Aphra Behn are matters of conjecture. It is likely that she was born in the village of Harbledown, near Canterbury, Kent, England in 1640, the second daughter of Bartholomew and Elizabeth Johnson. When Aphra was three, the family went to live in the West Indies. Her father died during the journey, but his wife and two children lived in Surinam, which was then a British colony. Behn returned to England in 1664 and married a Dutch merchant. Thereafter, she was known as Mrs. Behn, although the exact name of her husband is not known. Her husband died in 1665, which left Behn without any means of financial support. Out of necessity, the following year, Behn went to Antwerp in the Netherlands as a spy for King Charles II, gathering information about Dutch military and political activity. However, the English government made no use of the information she sent back and also failed to pay her. Behn had to borrow money to get back to England, and her financial problems continued. She was put in debtors' prison in 1668 because of debts accumulated during her service to the king.

The circumstances surrounding Behn's release from prison are unknown, but apparently she decided that from then on she would make her living as a writer. She appears to have had no desire to remarry or to otherwise depend upon a man. She had already been writing poetry, but she turned to drama, which offered more lucrative opportunities. From that point until her death, Behn made a living solely from her writing, the first woman ever to do so in England. Her first play was *The Forc'd Marriage*, which was produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields by the Duke's Company in 1670. Over the following seventeen years, Behn had seventeen plays produced. Some of her most popular comedies are: *The Town Fop* (1676), *The Rover* (1677), *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), *The Rover, Part 2* (1681), *The Roundheads* (1681), *The City Heiress* (1682), *The Lucky Chance* (1686), and *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687). So successful was Behn that the male literary establishment was forced to acknowledge her as an equal. However, throughout her career she was a controversial figure. She was an early feminist who argued for equality between the sexes and for education for women. She also pushed the boundaries of what might be presented on the stage, and some of her plays were regarded as scandalous. *The Lucky Chance*, for example, was denounced as lewd, but Behn claimed the charge was made only because she was a woman.

Behn also published poetry and novels. *Poems Upon Several Occasions* appeared in 1684; the novella *Oroonoko*, based on her experience in Surinam and detailing the horrors of slavery, was published in 1688.

Behn died on April 16, 1689, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Plot Summary

Prologue

The Forc'd Marriage begins with a prologue spoken by an actor and then an actress directly to the audience. It identifies the playwright as a woman and appeals to the audience to give the play a good reception.

Act 1, Scene 1

The warrior Alcippus has just returned from a battle in which he distinguished himself in the command of twenty thousand men. The king has to decide whether to honor Alcippus or his own son, Philander, who has also shown valor. He decides to promote Alcippus to the rank of general, pointing out that the former general, Orgulius, had asked to be relieved of his post, since he is getting old. The grateful but surprised Alcippus requests the hand of Orgulius's daughter Erminia in marriage. With Orgulius's approval, the king grants him his wish, to the consternation of Philander, who is also in love with Erminia.

Everyone exits, except for Alcander, Pisaro, and Falatius. Alcander is annoyed to see Alcippus promoted above him. He thinks that he himself fought in the battle with equal valor. He is also unhappy that his friend Philander, the prince, has lost his chance to wed Erminia. Pisaro, a friend of Alcippus, tries to mollify Alcander by saying that Alcippus did not know Philander was in love with Erminia. Pisaro also reveals that Erminia does not return Alcippus's love. Talk then turns to Aminta, Pisaro's sister, who is being courted, without, he believes, much success, by Alcander. After Alcander and Pisaro exit, Falatius reveals that he is also romantically interested in Aminta. He sends Labree to tell Aminta about the wounds he received in battle. In truth, he received none, but he plans to wear patches on his face so the ladies will think he has been wounded.

Act 1, Scene 2

Galatea, the king's daughter, talks with Olinda, her maid, and Aminta. She learns that Erminia is horrified at the thought of marrying Alcippus. Aminta confesses that she herself has been in love many times and is currently in love with Alcander. Erminia enters and speaks of her sorrow, since she is in love with Philander. Her grief is matched by that of Galatea, who is in love with Alcippus. Erminia vows not to let Alcippus into her bed. The two women attempt to console each other.

Act 1, Scene 3

A weeping Erminia protests to her father, saying that she loves Alcippus as a brother but no more. She confesses that she is in love with Philander, who returns her affections.

Orgulius rebukes her, saying that the king would never agree to her marrying the prince and that she should accept Alcippus instead. He wants to bring forward the time of the wedding to that night. Erminia reluctantly agrees, saying she will do her duty, but after her father exits, she rails at her situation, saying that only death will set her free.

Act 1, Scene 4

Philander tells Alcander that he wants Erminia, whom he loves, to defy her father. He claims that Orgulius cannot claim that he was ignorant of their feelings for each other, since everyone knew about their love. He plans to go to the king to win his sympathy, and if that does not work, he will settle matters with his sword.

Act 2, Scene 1

After the wedding is represented on stage, Philander and his sister Galatea enter. They are both angry. Philander feels that he has suffered a humiliation, having to watch the woman he loves being married to someone else against her will. He vows to kill Alcippus, which horrifies Galatea, who is in love with Alcippus. She tries to dissuade him, but succeeds only in getting him to temporarily postpone his vengeance. She responds by saying that if he kills Alcippus, she will kill Erminia. Knowing that neither of these events is likely to happen, she suggests that at the wedding banquet, Philander should make Alcippus a little jealous, and she will do the rest. It appears that she has a plan.

Act 2, Scene 2

Olinda, Alcander's sister, tells Aminta about how deeply her brother is in love with her. Aminta at first pretends she is not interested in Alcander, but she soon admits that she is in love with him, but she wants to keep it a secret. Falatius enters, with patches on his face and tries to convince Aminta of his heroism. Alcander enters and is annoyed to see Aminta with Falatius. He tells Aminta about his love for her. After Alcander exits, Aminta shows her pleasure at his words, which disappoints Falatius, who realizes that Alcander is his rival.

Act 2, Scene 3

In the bedroom at night, Alcippus realizes that Erminia does not wish to sleep in his bed. She confesses what Alcippus seems already to know, that she is in love with Philander. Her heart belonged to the prince before Alcippus asked for it. She says she married Alcippus only to please the king and her father. Angry, he seizes her by the arm and shows her a dagger. She manages to pacify him by speaking about the power of love, and he says that in time he hopes to win her love. He tries once more to persuade her to share his bed, but she is firm in her resolve.

Act 2, Scene 4

At midnight, the sleepless Philander confesses to Alcander his grief at losing Erminia. He accuses her of breaking her vow to him. Alcander urges him not to give up but to possess Erminia and not worry about the sin of taking another man's wife. He tries to convince the prince that this is what Erminia is expecting him to do. Philander decides that he and Alcander should serenade the bride that very night.

Act 2, Scene 5

Pisaro reveals that he has been watching the wedding feast closely. He has observed the looks of love given by Galatea to Alcippus and also the obvious love between Philander and Erminia. He has also noticed the growing hostility between Philander and Alcippus. Pisaro is disturbed by the situation because he also wants to win Galatea's love. He is conflicted because Alcippus is his friend.

Act 2, Scene 6

At the door of Erminia's chamber, while Philander and Alcander look on, a page sings a song about the cruelties of love. Pisaro enters, and he and Philander quarrel. Alcander intervenes, and he and Pisaro fight. Pisaro falls. Alcander and Philander exit, and Alcippus, aroused by the commotion, enters. He helps Pisaro, who says he is not wounded.

Act 2, Scene 7

Philander and Alcander return and encounter Erminia in her nightgown. Erminia demands to know where Alcippus is, since she is concerned for his safety. Philander speaks scornfully to her, but she tells him that she has kept her vow to him. He rejoices at hearing this report. Alcippus enters, sees Philander and Erminia together, and suspects the worse. Alcippus and Philander draw their swords and fight. Alcippus is wounded. Erminia and Alcippus exit together, and Philander wants to chase after them. Alcander convinces him that justice is on his side and that his time to possess Erminia will come.

Act 3, Scene 1

Pisaro explains to Alcippus why he quarreled with Philander. Alcippus hints to his friend of his fear of Erminia's unfaithfulness to him, but Pisaro says he knows nothing about Alcippus being wronged. Pisaro confesses that he is in love with Galatea and that Galatea is in love with Alcippus. Alcippus is amazed at this information, which he had not suspected. He does not know what to do and asks Pisaro for his advice. Pisaro tells him that he should choose Galatea, since he will then inherit half a kingdom, rather than

wasting his time on Erminia who does not love him. He offers to act as a spy for Alcippus, who has to go away to a military camp that day.

Act 3, Scene 2

Falatius encounters Cleontius, Philander's servant. They quarrel over Issilia, Cleontius's sister, and agree to fight a duel. Aminta enters and Falatius protests that she loves Alcander, even though she disguises it, more than she loves him. Alcander enters, offers Aminta his sword and asks her to kill him. He says he thinks he has killed her brother Pisaro. Aminta collapses in the arms of Olinda, Alcander's sister, and then tells Falatius to take revenge against Alcander. After Aminta exits, Alcander tells Falatius to kill him to fulfill Aminta's wish, but he is too cowardly to do so. Alcander exits, and Aminta returns with Pisaro. She asks Falatius if he has killed Alcander yet. Falatius is overjoyed to see that Pisaro is alive, which means he does not have to choose between disobeying the woman he loves and committing murder. Aminta directs him not to tell Alcander that Pisaro is alive. After Pisaro exits, Alcander enters. Aminta informs him that Pisaro is not dead, and she returns his sword. She and Alcander continue their verbal sparring. He admits he loves her but says he will leave her to Falatius. She replies that she can do without both of them.

Act 3, Scene 3

Thinking that Erminia is too puffed up with pride, Galatea reminds her of her humble origins. Erminia seems to say that she has a duty to return Alcippus's love, which produces an angry outburst from Galatea. Erminia weeps and confesses that, in truth, she hates Alcippus. Galatea tells her to remember that Philander loves her and that she should yield herself to his desire. When Erminia asks her how she may conceal such an act from Alcippus, Galatea tells her to trust her; she will arrange it. Alcippus, who is about to go to camp, and Pisaro enter. Alcippus talks about his grief and accuses Galatea of having taught Erminia how to be cruel. Galatea denies it, and Alcippus apologizes. He turns to Erminia and pleads with her to give him some hope. In an aside to Erminia, Galatea tells her to soften her attitude toward Alcippus. After Galatea exits, Erminia speaks more kindly to Alcippus and weeps. Alcippus is touched and encouraged by what he thinks is her new attitude toward him. But as the scene ends, she insists that when they meet again, it must be as friends, not lovers.

Act 4, Scene 1

Galatea and Aminta are met by Philander and Alcander. Philander is planning to see Erminia while Alcippus is away, and Aminta encourages him. Philander asks Galatea to use her charm to get the king on her side, and, by implication, on his. After Galatea and Philander exit, Alcander once again tells Aminta he is in love with her, but she continues to resist him, reminding him of all the women he has loved in the past. But when he decides to leave, she is more forthcoming, and Alcander realizes her true feelings. After

he leaves, Aminta regrets she has let her passion for him be known and thinks she has lost her power as a result.

Act 4, Scene 2

Alcippus tells Pisaro he is distressed and jealous because he knows Erminia does not really love him, in spite of the gentle words she spoke to him. He decides that he will not go to the camp. Instead, he will return to visit Erminia, even though Pisaro tells him that if he finds Philander there he may fly into a rage and do something that will ruin his life. Pisaro makes him promise to remain calm.

Act 4, Scene 3

When it is dark, Philander and Alcander call at the lodgings of Erminia. Isillia, Erminia's maid, lets them in.

Act 4, Scene 4

Philander kneels at the feet of a surprised Erminia and tells her how much he loves her. But he breaks off suddenly, telling her he is unwell. Erminia takes him into an inner room where he can rest.

Act 4, Scene 5

Alcippus knocks at the door, and Alcander realizes to his horror who it is. Alcander steps outside, and there is an argument that leads to a fight. Alcander manages to grab Alcippus's sword, but Alcippus succeeds in getting inside the building. Alcander, who is wounded, follows him in.

Act 4, Scene 6

Isillia informs Erminia that Alcippus is approaching the bed chamber, and Erminia tells Philander to hide. He hides behind the bed but leaves his sword and hat on the table. Alcippus does not take long to notice them. Erminia pretends they belong to her father, but Alcippus knows this is untrue, and he accuses her of treachery. Philander emerges from his hiding place and confronts Alcippus. A violent encounter seems imminent, but Erminia steps between the two men, preventing Alcippus from attacking the unarmed Philander. Philander agrees to leave. Left alone with Erminia, Alcippus accuses her of adultery and strangles her. He throws her on the bed, thinking she may be dead. Pisaro enters, sees Erminia, and, thinking she is dead, rebukes Alcippus. Alcippus says she deserved her fate. Pisaro speaks of some messages that Galatea had sent to him through Philander. At the mention of the names of Galatea and Philander, Alcippus feels conflicting emotions and gives way to a longing for death.

Act 4, Scene 7

Falatius informs Galatea that Erminia is dead. Stunned at this news, Philander falls into the arms of Alcander. The king and Orgulius enter. Orgulius calls for revenge against Alcippus. Galatea says that if Alcippus dies, she will, too. She has that night already explained to the king that she loves Alcippus. She tries to defend Alcippus, saying that the murder would not have happened had Erminia not been forced to marry a man she did not love. The king says that had he known Philander was in love with Erminia, he would have allowed them to marry. The king inquires about Philander, and Galatea thinks he could not bear to live once he found out about Erminia's death. The king says that if Philander is dead, Alcippus too shall die.

Act 4, Scene 8

Falatius and Labree enter. As they speak, a veiled Erminia enters. The men think she is a ghost and fall shaking to the ground.

Act 4, Scene 9

Philander plans to take vengeance on Alcippus by killing him, after which he plans to kill himself. Erminia enters, calling his name, saying she is a soul from Elysium come to visit him. Philander is amazed and frightened. Alcander enters, and Erminia glides away. Philander insists that his vision of her was not a dream. Alcander does not believe him, but then Erminia returns. They are both frightened, not knowing whether she is a ghost, but she soon reveals that she is the living, flesh-and-blood Erminia. Erminia worries that the whole court is alarmed since both Aminta and Falatius have seen her and thought they were seeing a ghost. Aminta and Galatea enter. They have heard the rumors, but Philander leads Erminia out to them. Philander has a plan that involves keeping secret the fact that Erminia is alive. He speaks some tender words to Erminia.

Act 5, Scene 1

Pisaro reports to Galatea that he has seen Alcippus, full of remorse, sitting by a fountain. Galatea asks if Alcippus has mentioned her, and Pisaro replies that he has spoken about her with shame and passion. Pisaro did his best to cheer him up and left him sleeping on a couch.

Act 5, Scene 2

Alcippus awakes and weeps, still full of grief and remorse over his actions. Pisaro and Erminia enter, the latter dressed like an angel with wings. Alcippus, who is looking into a mirror, sees Erminia, who has stolen up behind him, in the mirror. He is frightened, and as he turns around Erminia speaks to him like a disembodied spirit, saying that she is

living in a blessed place and is as happy as a god. She hopes this will end his woe. Galatea enters as a spirit, bows to Alcippus, and exits. Erminia tells him it is she whom he must possess. She continues to instruct him as various figures, representing Glory, Honor, Mars, Pallas, Fortune, and Cupid, cross the stage, bow, and exit. Then they return and dance, making an offering to the figure in the middle, that represents love. Erminia exists, leaving Alcippus speechless. When Pisaro enters, Alcippus tells him he just had a fine dream in which he saw Erminia's spirit in glorious form. Pisaro tells him that Philander has persuaded the king to pardon him.

Act 5, Scene 3

The king meets with Philander and tacitly agrees that his son should marry the one he loves. Philander expresses his gratitude.

Act 5, Scene 4

Alcander pleads with Aminta to show him some love, while Aminta asks him to prove that he really does love her. Alcander is disappointed that she should question his commitment to her, and they exit without having reached an agreement.

Act 5, Scene 5

In a black-draped room, Alcippus weeps before the coffin that supposedly contains the dead Erminia. Philander enters, and there is a tense exchange between the two men. They draw their swords and begin to fight, until Pisaro gets between them. Alcander enters, followed shortly by Galatea and Aminta. Galatea reproaches both men for their quarreling. The king enters and speaks harshly to Alcippus for threatening the prince. Philander and Alcippus then both try to accept the blame for their quarrel, and the king agrees to forgive Alcippus. After the king exits, Philander speaks warmly to Alcippus and bestows on him Galatea as his wife. Alcippus is amazed at the prince's generosity. Philander goes out and returns with Erminia. Alcippus, after he has recovered from the shock, kneels and asks her forgiveness, which she grants. The king enters, with Orgulius, who bestows his daughter Erminia on Philander. The king then gives Galatea to Alcippus. Two more betrothals follow: Falatius to Isillia and Aminta to Alcander. The king makes a final speech in which he wishes the new couples long and happy lives.

Epilogue

The short epilogue is given by a woman, who speaks self-deprecatingly on behalf of her sex, admitting the superiority of men as far as wit is concerned and saying that women can conquer only through their beauty.

Characters

Alcander

Alcander is a friend of Philander. As the prince's confidant, he plays the same role with Philander as Pisaro does with Alcippus. He listens to Philander's woes and gives him advice, telling him to ignore the marriage of Erminia and Alcippus and continue to seek Erminia. He insists that Philander is in the right and that his time will come□a prediction that proves accurate. Alcander is himself a brave soldier, and he is slightly wounded trying to prevent Alcippus entering the room and finding Erminia and Philander together. Alcander is in love with Aminta, who for most of the play pretends that she has no interest in him. It appears that Alcander has something of a reputation as a lover, and Aminta cruelly reminds him of the names of his previous loves.

Alcippus

Alcippus is a valiant young warrior who has just returned from a battle in which he successfully led an army of twenty thousand men. No one disputes his bravery or his right to be elevated to the rank of general. He is also immediately granted his wish to marry Erminia. He appears to be set for a happy life, but his troubles begin when he discovers that Erminia does not love him and refuses to come to his bed. He feels humiliated by this snub and is jealous of Philander. On the wedding night, he gets into a quarrel with the prince, and there is a fight, during which Alcippus is slightly wounded. Later, when he suspects Erminia of infidelity with Philander, he flies into a rage and strangles her. He is then filled with remorse about his actions, because he thinks he has killed her. When he learns the truth, he asks Erminia to forgive him, and he is willing to accept the hand of Galatea in marriage.

Aminta

Aminta, Pisaro's sister, is in love with Alcander, but she makes a pretense of scorning him as a way of testing his love. The two lovers are united at the end of the play.

Cleontius

Cleontius is Isillia's brother and a servant to Philander.

Erminia

Erminia is the beautiful daughter of Orgulius. Since she came to the court, she and Philander have been in love. She is, therefore, horrified when her father and the king give her in marriage to Alcippus, whom she does not love. On their wedding night, she

treats her new husband with respect but refuses to share his bed. Torn between her love for Philander and her duty to her husband and father, she chooses love. When Alcippus discovers that Philander has been to visit her, he accuses her of treachery and strangles her. He thinks she is dead, and she appears to him pretending to be a spirit, telling him not to grieve for her death but to accept the love of Galatea. Thus, she prepares the way for the final resolution. Her stand for love is rewarded when Philander persuades the king to endorse his claim to her hand.

Falatius

Falatius is a cowardly courtier who pretends to have been wounded in battle in order to impress the ladies at the court. He is courting Aminta, with no success, and at the end of the play, the king orders him to marry Isillia.

Galatea

Galatea is the daughter of the king and sister of Philander. The princess is in love with Alcippus and is heartbroken when she hears that he is to wed Erminia. There are more shocks in store for her. She is aghast when she hears her brother threaten to kill Alcippus and says that if he does so, she will kill Erminia. At one point, the two women quarrel, and Galatea accuses Erminia of possessing too much pride. Although her position seems unpromising, Galatea persists in believing that the wrong can be undone. She tells Erminia that she should have Philander, since he is the man she desires. Galatea finally explains to her father that she is in love with Alcippus, and she persuades the king to accede to her desire to marry the young warrior.

Isillia

Isillia is Cleontius's sister and a maid to Erminia. She is eventually betrothed to Falatius.

King

The king is an old man who wants to behave honorably. He appears to be a strong ruler with a sense of justice tempered with mercy; he once banished, but did not execute, Orgulius for leading a rebellion against him. But the king appears to have no idea of who is in love with whom at his court, and he makes the mistake of marrying Erminia to Alcippus even though his own son Philander is passionately in love with Erminia. However, the king does have the ability to forgive and to acknowledge his mistakes, and this is one reason that the play can end happily.

Labree

Labree is the servant of Falatius.

Olinda

Olinda is Alcander's sister and maid of honor to Galatea.

Orgulius

Orgulius is the king's general who asks to be relieved of his position because of his advancing age. He is also the father of Erminia who willingly gives his daughter in marriage to Alcippus. In act 3, scene 3, Galatea supplies more information about Orgulius. It transpires that many years earlier, before Erminia was born, Orgulius led the army in a bid to overthrow the king. For that crime, he was banished to some remote spot, and Erminia was born in a humble cottage. When Erminia's beauty captured Philander's heart, that also elevated her father's fortunes, and he was restored by the king to his former position.

Philander

Philander is the son of the king. He is in love with Erminia and fully expects to marry her. He is furious when Erminia is bestowed on Alcippus because he thought it was general knowledge at the court that he and Erminia were in love. He refuses to accept the new situation, which sours his previous good relationship with Alcippus. He goes to the king to plead his case, telling his sister that if he does not get what he wants, he will settle the matter with his sword. He also tells Galatea that he will kill Alcippus. On two occasions the two rivals draw their swords against each other and begin to fight. He finally manages to persuade the king to grant his desire, and he marries Erminia.

Pisaro

Pisaro is a friend of Alcippus and brother of Aminta. Alcippus trusts him and treats him as his confidant, and Pisaro responds by giving Alcippus sound advice and calming him down at key moments. At one point, Pisaro quarrels with Philander, who calls him a spy, and then fights with Alcander. Pisaro also offers to act as a spy for Alcippus while the latter is away at camp. In the last scene, Pisaro is brave enough to step between the quarreling Alcippus and Philander. Like Alcippus, Pisaro is in love with Galatea, but nothing comes of it.

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Themes

Conflict between Love and Honor

The central theme of the play is the conflict in the heroine, Erminia, between love and honor. She loves Philander, but she has been married against her will to Alcippus. She therefore finds herself in an acutely painful emotional situation, with apparently no power to alter it. She cannot simply stop loving Philander, even if she were to decide to do so, because the heart will not give way to the dictates of reason. Yet she clearly has a need to behave honorably and obey the moral codes of her society. She must honor the king, who bestowed her upon Alcippus as part of his reward for prowess in battle, and her father, who agreed to the match. To disobey them would be to rebel against the basic order of this patriarchal society. This conflict in Erminia between duty and desire is so intense that she cannot imagine anything worse happening to her, as she explains to Galatea in act 1, scene 2: "Fate has bestow'd the worst she had to give." Erminia feels that her whole soul is dying because of what has happened. She cannot conceive of loving anyone other than Philander, and her knowledge that Philander is also experiencing torment, seeing the woman he loves given to someone else, adds to her distress.

The situation is similar for Philander. He too feels a conflict between duty and desire. He holds his love for Erminia sacred; he tells Alcander that they are like twin flames in love: "Our Souls then met, and so grew up together, / Like sympathizing Twins." But like Erminia, Philander is duty-bound to obey the king, who also happens to be his father. He feels betrayed and dishonored by what has happened. He thinks that the whole court knew about his love for Erminia and that the reason Orgulius, her father, had been recalled as general was so Erminia could have a place at the court. Philander tries to recast his sense of duty by convincing himself that the honorable thing to do is to kill Alcippus. He tells his sister Galatea that even the gods sanction revenge in certain situations. (Galatea manages to talk him out of his desire to kill Alcippus, at least temporarily.)

In this painful dilemma, both Erminia and Philander choose love rather than duty. Philander does not appear to think twice about it. He tells his friend Alcander he plans to tell Erminia to disobey her father, and Alcander encourages him in this desire to consummate his love for Erminia regardless of the fact that she has just been married to someone else.

For her part, Erminia refuses to budge in her commitment to love. Showing great courage, she tells Alcippus that she can offer him friendship but no more. As far as love is concerned, she must remain true to the one who has captured her heart. She also shows that she is willing to defy her father and the king by putting aside all scruples and accepting Philander as a secret lover even though she is married to Alcippus.

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In the end, honor and love, desire and duty are reconciled. The king is persuaded to allow Philander and Erminia to marry, and Orgulius consents to the new pairing as well. Harmony is therefore restored.

Subjection of Women

Although the setting of the play cannot be located in any particular time or place, the society depicted is one in which women are almost entirely powerless. This is a society run by men for the convenience of men. When the play begins there are eight male characters on stage, as well as certain male “officers.” There is not a woman in sight. The opening speeches reveal a society which places the highest value on the manly arts of war and conquest. It is Alcippus's valor as a warrior that earns him not only the title of general but also the woman of his choice. In this society, a woman appears to be a piece of property owned by her father or her husband. Marriage is arranged by men, and the women are pawns in the exchange. Having received Alcippus's request for Erminia, the king says simply, “*Alcippus*, with her Father's leave, she's thine.” The entire business is conducted in Erminia's absence. The women do not appear until act 1, scene 2, when Erminia and Galatea have to deal with the emotional turmoil and pain inflicted on them by the male world in their absence.

When Erminia arranges an interview with her father to protest what has been done to her, Orgulius dismisses her as weak and foolish. His argument is that she is young and cannot see what a fine thing it is to be married to a great warrior. When she tells her father the truth about her love for Philander, she is told, “Destroy it, or expect to hear of me.” In this society, women are rewarded by keeping quiet. Orgulius's affection for his daughter, for example, is conditional upon her doing what he wants. When she finally says she will obey his will, he says, “This duty has regain'd me, and you'll find / A just return: I shall be always kind.”

In act 5, scene 5, after the love tangle is resolved, the king affirms once more the masculine nature of the kingdom he rules. His final speech, in which he addresses his “brave Youths,” evokes once more a picture of a warlike society:

When you remember even in heat of Battle,

That after all your Victories and Spoil,

You'll meet calm Peace at home in soft Embraces.

It appears that the real business of life for this unnamed society is battle, victory, and the spoils of war; women are playthings whose job it is to provide the men with some moments of calm and physical love before the next battle begins.

Style

Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse

The play is written almost entirely in either blank verse or rhyming couplets. Blank verse is unrhymed verse written in predominantly iambic feet. An iambic foot consists of two syllables, in which the stress falls on the second syllable. Blank verse is usually written in iambic pentameters. A pentameter is a ten-syllable line with five stresses. In act 1, scene I, for example, Alcippus's line, "To lead on twenty thousand fighting Men," is an iambic pentameter, as is his "Those Eyes that gave this speaking life to thine," in act 5, scene 2. However, Behn writes with a great deal of variation, and much of the blank verse in the play does not follow strict iambic pentameter or any regular metrical pattern. Shorter lines are common.

Much of the play is written in rhyming couplets, a pair of rhymed lines. For example, the two lovers Aminta and Alcander often speak in rhyming couplets. These are Aminta's lines in act 5, scene 4:

Alcander, you so many Vows have paid,

So many Sighs and Tears to many a Maid,

That should I credit give to what you say,

I merit being undone as well as they.

The couplets can consist of single lines by different speakers, as in

Gal. *Aminta*, wilt thou this Humour lose?

Am. Faith, never, if I might my Humour chuse.

Behn frequently makes use of imperfect or partial rhymes in her couplets, as in the following example from act 5, scene 1, spoken by Pisaro:

Then speak as if *Erminia* still did live,

And that Belief made him forget to grieve.

"The Marble Statue *Venus*, he mistook,

For fair *Erminia*, and such things he spoke,

Such unheard passionate things, as e'en wou'd move,

The marble Statue's self to fall in love.

In this quotation, □live□ and □grieve,□ as well as □mistook□ and □spoke,□ are imperfect rhymes, since the vowel sounds in each pair are different. The final couplet is an example to a modern audience of □eye-rhyme,□ in which the words are spelled alike and look similar on the page but are now pronounced differently. Often in such cases, the two words (□move□ and □love□ in this case) were once pronounced similarly, so the eye-rhyme has developed over the course of time as pronunciation has changed.

Tragicomedy

Tragicomedy is a genre that began in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and was revived during the drama of the Restoration period (post-1660). Tragicomedy mingles comedy and tragedy. The comic action often involves young people in love who are wanting to marry. However, some unforeseen obstacle results in a romantic tangle that seems impossible to unravel, so much so that the plot appears to be leading to tragedy until a reversal of circumstances ensures a comic (i.e. happy) ending. *The Forc'd Marriage* is a comedy in the sense that a father or other authority figure (in this case Orgulius) obstructs the course of happy love by imposing an unwanted marriage. The play moves toward tragedy when Alcippus strangles Erminia, after which for several scenes the characters believe that Erminia is dead and the audience is unsure about the truth of the matter. The audience also wonders what penalty Alcippus will pay for his crime. The play returns to comedy with the discovery that Erminia is alive, the king's acceptance of Philander's desire to marry her, and the pairing of Alcippus with Galatea.

Historical Context

Women and Restoration Drama

After English drama had risen to new heights in the Elizabethan and Jacobean era, the theaters were closed in 1642 with the outbreak of the English Civil War. In 1649, King Charles I was executed, and the monarchy was abolished. England became a republic, known as the Commonwealth of England, and later the Protectorate. In 1660, parliament restored the monarchy, and Charles II was installed as king. The drama written during the period that followed is, therefore, known as Restoration drama.

One major change from the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages was that in the Restoration age, women were allowed to perform on stage. In the earlier eras, all female parts were played by men and boys. The first woman to appear as a regular professional actress was Margaret Hughes, who played the role of Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello* on December 8, 1660. One of the most famous of the new actresses was the illiterate Nell Gwyn (1650-1687), who first appeared on the stage in 1665 and in 1668 became the mistress of Charles II. Said to possess a remarkable comic talent, Gwyn was also a friend of Aphra Behn. The leading dramatist of the day, John Dryden, paid Gwyn the compliment of writing leading parts in his plays specifically for her. Her career spanned a seven-year period, ending in 1671 when she was only twenty-one years old. Another actress, Elizabeth Barry (1658-1713), became the most successful tragic actress of the period, noted for her ability to move the audience to tears and to bring even mediocre roles to vivid life. From 1675 to 1682, Barry worked for the Duke's Theatre at Dorset Gardens, the most luxurious theater in London. This was the same company that staged all Behn's plays up to 1681. Another leading actress was Mary Saunderson, commonly known as Mrs. Thomas Betterton (c.1637-1712). It was Mrs. Betterton who played Erminia in the first performance of *The Forc'd Marriage*, at the Duke's Theatre in 1670.

Male members of the audience for Restoration drama enjoyed the novelty of seeing women on the stage, who sometimes were required to act in sexually suggestive scenes. Plays were often written to include breeches roles, which refers to roles in which a female character dresses in male clothes as part of the intrigue and complications of a plot. The men in the audience relished the opportunity of seeing women dressed in the more form-fitting male attire.

Women also took part in theater management. In 1668, after the death of Sir William Davenant, control of the Duke of York's theater company passed to his widow, Lady Davenant. She proved to be an able administrator with a practical knowledge of the theater, and it was under her management that the Duke's company staged Behn's *The Forc'd Marriage*. It was Lady Davenant who noticed the talent of the young Elizabeth Barry and guided her acting career. Barry eventually occupied a position in theater management, as did Mrs. Betterton.

Female Playwrights

During the Restoration, female playwrights wrote for the public stage for the first time. In 1663, a translation of Corneille's *La Mort de Pompée*, by Katherine Phillips, became the first work by a woman, either as author or translator, to be professionally produced on the English stage. In 1670, a female playwright, Frances Boothby, had her tragedy, *Marcelia*, performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and later that year, Behn's *The Forc'd Marriage* was staged at the rival Duke's Theatre. During the 1670s and 1680s, however, Behn was a lone female voice amongst the ranks of playwrights. In the prologues to her plays, she sometimes brought attention to the fact that the author of the play was a woman. In *The Forc'd Marriage*, for example, the actor who speaks the prologue says that women are about to add "wit" to beauty and invade a domain formerly occupied solely by men, that is, the art of writing plays. He appeals to the audience not to be alarmed by this but to give the female-authored play a good reception:

To day one of their Party ventures out

Not with design to conquer, but to scout.

Discourage but this first attempt, and then

They'll hardly dare to sally out again.

Audiences did not always heed this appeal. After *The Dutch Lover* (1687) met a hostile reception, Behn wrote in a preface to the published version that criticism was directed at her by men solely because she was a "defenceless Woman." She argued that had her comedies been published under a man's name, the general verdict would have been that they were as good as any plays written in her time.

In the decade following Behn's death, more female playwrights emerged. In late December 1695 or January 1696, sixteen-year-old Catherine Trotter had her first play, an adaptation of a French short story translated by Behn, produced at Drury Lane Theatre. In 1698, her tragedy, *The Fatal Friendship*, elicited an extremely favorable reception. During the same decade, another playwright, Mary Pix, had ten of her plays produced in as many years. These playwrights were followed by Susanna Centlivre, who produced nineteen plays between 1700 and 1724 and was the most successful female playwright of the century. Some of her plays were still being performed in the nineteenth century.

According to Paddy Lyons and Fidelis Morgan, in their introduction to *Female Playwrights of the Restoration*, in the half-century from 1660 to 1710, over fifty plays by female playwrights were published. Since publishers only brought into print plays that had been successful, the chances are that a far greater number of plays by women were performed but not published, or published anonymously.

Critical Overview

The first recorded response to *The Forc'd Marriage* was by John Downes, the prompter for the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields in London where the first performance took place in December 1670. Downes wrote that the play was □a good play and lasted six days□ (quoted in the theatrical history note in Montague Summers's edition of the play). Six nights was a respectable run in those days, since the audience pool was relatively small and a large number of plays had to be produced. However, another contemporary comment was not so favorable. In *The Rehearsal* (1671), a satirical work on the drama ascribed to George Villiers, the second Duke of Buckingham, Villiers mocks *The Forc'd Marriage* as well as Behn's second play, *The Amorous Prince* (1671). In particular, Villiers pokes fun at the scenes in which Philander serenades Erminia and the later scene in which a fake funeral is provided for Erminia.

Critical opinion since then has not warmed to *The Forc'd Marriage*, which is regarded as one of Behn's weakest plays. Critics have commented on its shallow characterization, conventional plot, and poorly integrated sub-plot. Annette Kreis-Schinck, in *Women, Writing, and the Theater in the Early Modern Period* notes that the dramatic turnaround in the play, in which the forced marriage is ended, is achieved without any elaboration. Kreis-Schinck explains that at this very early stage of her career, Behn □has not yet found a verbal concept for the process of separating the wrong partners. All the dramatist is able to do in her first play is to leave a gesture, a linguistic blank, an absence to be made up in a number of her later plays.□

Some scholars, however, have drawn attention to the importance of the play's prologue. In *The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn (1640-1689)*, Maureen Duffy writes that in the prologue, □Behn claimed the right to deal with sex as outspokenly as the male playwrights did. It must have brought down the house with its daring.□ For Catherine Gallagher, in □Who Was That Masked Woman?: The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn,□ Behn's prologue □announces her epoch-making appearance in the ranks of the playwrights. She presents her attainment, however, not as a daring achievement of self-expression, but as a new proof of the necessary obscurity of the 'public' woman.□

After its initial run, there was at least one further performance of *The Forc'd Marriage*, in January 1671. However, in his edition of the works of Behn first published in 1915, Summers stated that there had been no revival of the play since its first production. Although a number of Behn's plays, especially *The Rover*, are staged quite frequently in the English-speaking world, it appears that Summers's remark made nearly a hundred years ago remains valid; as of 2006, *The Forc'd Marriage* had not been revived.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many essays on drama. In the following essay, he discusses The Forc'd Marriage *in terms of the subjection of women and the divorce practices of the day.*

Given that she was writing plays in a male-dominated profession and society, it is perhaps not surprising that Behn would be concerned with issues such as the status of women and the gender inequalities in social institutions such as marriage. Many of her plays, including *The Forc'd Marriage*, deal with the topic of unsuitable, unhappy marriages and how they might be ended. During the Restoration era in England, a divorce was not easily attained, but Behn writes with an awareness of the legal practices of the time.

Notably, the play is set not in Behn's own time but in an unspecified time and place, apparently an ancient warrior culture in which men hold all the power, masculine values of courage are lauded, and women are given away as the rewards for valor in battle. This is significant because, according to Derek Hughes in *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, the idea underlying many of Behn's plays is that "the subjection of women is an irrational survival from archaic societies which depended upon military strength." Hughes continues, commenting on the fact that at the time it was men who controlled the writing of history: "Men exercise the power of the word because it is always underwritten by that of the sword. The source and continuing support of men's supremacy is in their capacity for violence . . . For Behn, civilization is . . . founded on violence."

Hughes's point is amply demonstrated in the play. In this society, men wield the power and cannot imagine things being any other way. The plot is propelled solely by the forced marriage of Erminia to Alcippus and the determination of Erminia and her true love Philander to circumvent it. Erminia, since she is officially powerless, relies on her strength of character and her determination to honor her true feelings when she stands up to Alcippus and refuses to submit to him sexually on their wedding night. She does this in spite of the aggression that Alcippus shows against her. On the wedding night (act 2, scene 3), for example, when Erminia insists that she is an unwilling partner and will never give her heart to Alcippus, he reacts as if he is on the battlefield rather than in the bedroom. Flying into a rage, he grabs her arm, pulls a dagger, and threatens to kill her, neatly inverting the values of good and evil as he does so: "Recal that Folly, or by all that's good, / I'll free the Soul that wantons in thy Blood." Masculine virtues may serve this anonymous kingdom well when war and conquest are called for, but they serve Alcippus poorly at this moment. It does not seem to occur to him that threatening to kill his wife might not be the best way to win her love. Puffed up with righteous indignation, he implies that if he were to kill her right then, her "ungrateful Soul" would go to hell. Erminia holds her nerve, keeps talking, and manages to mollify the supposedly noble warrior—the "generous Youth," whose virtues Orgulius cannot stop talking about in the first scene—who is in the grip of a homicidal rage because his will

has been thwarted by a woman. Erminia knows she must keep talking to save her own life.

To be fair to Alcippus, however, one might say that he is limited by the warrior code of his society, which emphasizes the need for glory on the battlefield and the upholding of male honor. If the thought of having sexual relations with Alcippus offends Erminia's honor, he perceives her refusal as an affront to his own sense of honor□his legitimate expectation of what is due to a husband from a wife. This is why he reacts violently to her words. It is also clear that the fierce emotions simmering below the surface are not going to be subdued for long, and when in act 4 the plot veers toward tragedy, it can hardly be a surprise. When Alcippus finally does strangle Erminia, suspecting her of adultery with Philander, he resembles another more famous warrior in drama, Shakespeare's Othello, who kills his wife Desdemona when he incorrectly believes that she has been unfaithful to him.

This moment, when Alcippus, full of a sense of righteousness and justice and believing that the gods are smiling at his actions, throws the apparently lifeless Erminia on the bed presents a visually effective climax of raw male aggression in the play. The heroine lies still and apparently dead; masculine honor has been satisfied. Behn then engineers a happy ending partly through employing a device that Shakespeare had used in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*□the heroine who only appears to be dead. The revived Erminia has a chance to exert some power for the first time in the play, although it is a different kind of power than that wielded by the men. When she appears as a spirit, she is able to help prepare Alcippus for his marriage to Galatea, and she also manages to frighten all the men. As Hughes has noted, when Erminia is an ethereal, spiritual presence rather than a flesh-and-blood woman, the men are quite unnerved by her presence and fall down in fear. She is empowered. But as soon as she becomes Erminia once again, the situation returns to how it was in the beginning. She becomes once more an object to be given away by the king and her father. The only difference is that this time the authority figures have managed to identify the correct recipient of the □gift.□

Behn was also aware that she had to present to her audience a plausible scenario whereby Erminia, who is married to Alcippus, might become free to marry Philander. How was this marriage to be dissolved? As Annette Kreis-Schinck points out in her book, *Women, Writing, and the Theater in the Early Modern Period*, there were during Behn's time only two official ways in which a marriage could be dissolved. The first was a decree of nullity issued by a church court which declared the marriage to have been invalid in the first place. The reasons for granting such a decree were consanguinity (i.e. the two partners were related by blood), impotence (which would mean the marriage was never consummated), or pre-contract (one or other of the partners was contracted to marry someone else). After a decree of nullity had been issued, both parties were free to marry someone else, and it was considered that they were marrying for the first time. It was also possible to obtain a legal separation on the grounds of adultery or cruelty. In 1670, the same year that *The Forc'd Marriage* was first performed, it became possible for the first time to obtain a divorce by a private act of Parliament rather than through a decree issued by an ecclesiastical court.

The topic of divorce was, therefore, a lively one at the time, so it is not surprising that it features prominently in a number of Behn's plays. In *The Forc'd Marriage*, the reasons for the annulment of the marriage between Erminia and Alcippus are in keeping with the laws of England at the time: nonconsummation and the existence of a pre-contract. Erminia's refusal to have sexual intercourse with Alcippus, then, is not only a means of creating tension in the play, it is also vital to the final resolution of the plot. This is why it is emphasized again in act 2, scene 7, when Erminia tells Philander, to his great relief, that she has kept her word and has not had physical relations with Alcippus. This creates the possibility that the marriage might be declared invalid. The second reason for the annulment is that there was, in effect, a pre-contract between Erminia and Philander. This is repeatedly emphasized. Philander lays it out in act 1, scene 4, to his friend Alcander: □I offer'd her a Crown, with her *Philander*, / And she was once pleas'd to accept of it.□ He goes on to explain that there was nothing secret about their love. It was the reason that Orgulius, Erminia's father, was recalled from exile, put in charge of the army, and given a salary of twenty thousand crowns a year, so that Erminia could live at the court and be near Philander, the prince. □The world was full on't,□ Philander says, meaning that everyone knew about it. This pre-contract makes Erminia's willingness to receive Philander after she was given to Alcippus blameless. Because of the pre-contract, she was not really married to him. In the final scene, Alcippus himself acknowledges the validity of Philander's contract with Erminia: □But, Madam, you were Wife to my Prince,□ which means he also acknowledges the invalidity of his marriage to her. The play offers no explanation of why the king and Orgulius were so ignorant of what everyone else knew, a mystery that can perhaps be attributed to the lack of skill in the dramatist, in this her first produced play. But Behn did succeed in writing a play that ended with the traditional comic resolution of multiple marriages in a way that her contemporaries could recognize as valid and believable.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *The Forc'd Marriage*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Topics for Further Study

Research divorce trends in the United States. Is divorce becoming more common? What might explain changes in the rate of divorce? What are the social consequences of divorce? How does it affect children? Write a paper in which you describe your findings.

Read *The Rover*, Behn's most popular play, and write a paper in which you compare it to *The Forc'd Marriage*. Why is *The Rover* universally regarded as a superior play to the earlier one? You might want to think in terms of plot and characterization.

Imagine you are an actress who wants to play the part of Erminia in a production of *The Forc'd Marriage*. Write to a theater director arguing the case for a revival of the play. Tell the director why you think a modern production might succeed.

Although in the United States, there is less inequality between men and women than there was in Behn's day in England, inequalities still exist. Make a class presentation in which you describe some social inequalities based on gender and what might be done to solve the problem.

Compare and Contrast

Late 1600s: In 1665, an outbreak of the deadly bubonic plague ravages London. The theaters are closed. The Great Fire of London begins on September 2, 1666, and rages for four days and nights. It destroys two-thirds of the city within the walls, including St. Paul's Cathedral, and leaves a hundred thousand people homeless.

Today: Londoners worry more about being attacked by terrorists than catching diseases or enduring natural disasters. On July 7, 2005, suicide bombers attack London's public transport system, killing fifty-two people and injuring seven hundred.

Late 1600s: The coffee shop, first introduced to the city in 1652, is the center of London's social life. It is a gathering place where, for a small admission fee, men may socialize, smoke, drink coffee, and read the newsletters.

Today: Coffee shops can be found all over London, offering a huge variety of coffee. The U.S. company Starbucks offers coffee and espresso beverages at many locations. It claims on its website that in London, no one is never more than five minutes away from a Starbucks shop.

Late 1600s: The official doctrine of the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church is that marriage is indissoluble; however, the concept is under increasing strain as married couples seek legal ways to end unhappy relationships. The practice of arranging private separation deeds increases, as a first step towards divorce.

Today: Divorce in the United Kingdom is more easily obtainable than formerly. It can be granted on the basis of the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage as a result of adultery; unreasonable behavior; desertion for two years; and living apart for two years (with consent) or living apart for five years. However, divorce rates are declining. Between 2004 and 2005, the number of divorces granted in the UK decreases by 7 percent from 167,138 to 155,052. This is the lowest number of divorces since 2000, and the first annual decrease since 1999-2000. The 2004-2005 figure is 14 percent lower than the highest number of divorces, which peaked in 1993.

What Do I Read Next?

The Rover and Other Plays, edited by Jane Spenser and published in 1998 by Oxford University Press in the Oxford World Classics series, contains four of Behn's most popular and important comedies: *The Rover*; *The Feigned Courtesans*; *The Lucky Chance*; and *The Emperor of the Moon*.

The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700 (1992), by Elizabeth Howe, is a book for general readers about how and why women were allowed for the first time to act on the public stage after 1660. Howe explains the treatment received by the actresses and addresses issues such as the extent to which the arrival of female actresses altered dramatic portrayals of women and encouraged equality between the sexes.

The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Plays by Women (1994), edited by Katherine M. Rogers, contains seven plays, by Behn (*Sir Patient Fancy*), Frances Burney, Susanna Centlivre, Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Griffith Pix, and Mercy Otis Warren. Rogers's introduction discusses the changing status of female playwrights during the period.

William Congreve's *The Way of the World* is one of the greatest of all Restoration comedies. It was first acted in 1700. It includes a brilliant marriage-bargain scene, common to many Restoration comedies, in which each partner duels for an advantageous marriage contract. The play is available in a 2006 Penguin edition, *The Way of the World and Other Plays*, edited by Eric S. Rump.

Further Study

Aughterson, Kate, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies*, Palgrave, 2003.

Aughterson shows how Behn employs comic and dramatic conventions to radical ends and how she forces her audience to engage with issues about gender and sexuality while retaining a witty and accessible style.

Fraser, Antonia, *The Weaker Vessel*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2002.

Historian Fraser presents an engaging account of the lives of women of all classes in seventeenth-century England, from heiresses to prostitutes and actresses. She examines issues relevant to many of Behn's plays, such as marriage and divorce.

Roberts, David, *The Ladies: Female Patronage of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700*, Oxford University Press, 1989.

This is a study of the female audience for Restoration drama. Roberts examines why women went to the theater and how their attendance shaped the kind of plays that were presented. Many plays, for example, exhibited a concern for women's rights.

Todd, Janet, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, Pandora, 2000.

This biography of Behn examines some of the mysteries and contradictions in her life, including sexual intrigues. Todd has done extensive research and makes use of previously unexamined documents from England and Holland. She also discusses Behn's works.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's“For Students” Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on “classic” novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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