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Interpreting Abdelazer

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Introductory Observation

Abdelazer is the villain of Aphra Behn's play, *Abdelazer* or *The Moor's Revenge*. *Abdelazer* is Behn's only tragedy.¹ It discusses the role of Abdelazer who feels that he has been unjustly deprived from his right as a king. The old King of Spain killed his father, the Moorish King, and put the orphaned prince Abdelazer under his protection, then made him General.

No one can ignore the fact that Abdelazer has got respectable position in Spanish army, but he believes he deserves more than what he receives from the old King of Spain. He wants to be the King. Yet, he does not inherit the kingship because his father was killed and his kingdom was confiscated. Therefore, Abdelazer plots to revenge, and he has committed many crimes under the pretext of searching for his identity. Indeed, he is able to get rid of the most of the royal family, and he is about to crown himself the king. With the help of Queen Isabella, he kills her husband, the King, he kills her son Ferdinand, the succeeding King, he captures her second son Philip, and then he kills her to be able to marry her daughter Leonora.² Thus, he reminds

¹ *Abdelazer* is Behn's only tragedy. See for example Derek Hughes, *Versions of Blackness: Key Texts on Slavery from the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. vii and xii. Janet Todd, *Aphra Behn Studies* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), p 226.

² For detailed information about this story, see Derek Hughes, Janet M. Todd, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp 90-91.

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Leonora at the time of proclaiming her Queen that he is a “prince” speaking to a “princess,” and “they are both of royal blood” (Stewart 226). He tells her:

I can command this Kingdom you possess,
(Of which my Passion only made you Queen)
And re-assume that which your Father took
From mine, a Crown as bright as that of *Spain*. (133)³

However, *Abdelazer* or *The Moor's Revenge* has been historically seen as an imitation of *Lust's Dominion* or *The Lascivious Queen*⁴ which is considered Behn's source. Thus, *Lust's Dominion* concentrates on Spain at the time of the “reconquista” which is the name of the action that the Spaniards have achieved to reclaim Spain from the Moors. Hence, Behn's *Abdelazer* (1676) “is set in the late Middle Ages, when Spain was acquiring its permanent territorial shape by displacing the Moorish and Portuguese presences on the peninsula” (Cuder-Domínguez 68). Therefore, Behn depicts what is going on in the reality. Janet Todd also clarifies:

Like Dryden's great political drama, *The Conquest of Granada*, Behn's tragedy was set in Spain and turned on the hatred of Muslim and Christian. It had, however, a very tenuous connection with history, converting as it did the excessively pious fifteenth-century Queen Isabella into a lust-crazed murderer. Far more it drew on literature, and Behn's Moor came from a Renaissance theatrical tradition of rationally villainous Muslims. (*The Secret Life* 185-86)

The sons of the Spanish King and most other lords disdain Abdelazer. They consider him a slave, and they directly degrade him in front of others. Philip is so angry of his mother to have a relation with a black Moor, Abdelazer. The black person is a symbol for slavery in Behn's time.⁵ Philip may forgive his mother if she has a relation with one of the Spanish lords, with Mendoza for example, but he cannot believe that his mother is fond of Abdelazer. He reproaches her, “But as you have abus'd my Royal Father, / For such a sin the basest of your Slaves / Wou'd blush to call you Mother” (16), because he considers him, “Poor angry Slave” (149). Mendoza, the Cardinal, calms Philip and praises him as a Prince; meanwhile, he derogates Abdelazer, “Forbear, my Prince, keep in that noble heat, / That shou'd be better us'd then on a Slave” (18). Mendoza also considers all Moors slaves, “(And those all Moors, the Slaves of Abdelazer)” (52). Surely, one can understand what Spanish Lords want to say by repeating the derogatory word “slave.” They mean all moors are slaves to Abdelazer and because Abdelazer is a slave, he and all his people are slaves to Spaniards.

³ The Kessinger Edition does not provide the division of act, scene and line number, so I write instead the page number.

⁴ This play is defined in wikipedia as “*Lust's Dominion*, or *The Lascivious Queen* is an English Renaissance stage play, a tragedy written perhaps around 1600 and first published in 1657, probably written by Thomas Dekker in collaboration with others.” “Lust's Dominion - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.” *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. N.p., 15 Nov. 2011. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lust%27s_Dominion>.

⁵ The meaning of the word ‘black’ is clarified by Janet Todd: “the word ‘black’ distinguishes the bodies of people who can be bought and sold from those of people who cannot.” See Janet Todd, *Aphra Behn Studies* (Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 245.

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Accordingly, Philip decides to revenge on Abdelazer, yet his revenge becomes two-folds for the reason that Abdelazer is a slave and an avenger. He cannot imagine that a slave dares to face a noble man and has a relation with a royal Queen! It is something unimaginable according to him. In one of his threats, Philip declares that, "I'll wear my Sword to th' Hilt, bnt I will find / The subject of my Vengeance. / Moor, 'tis for thee I seek, where art thou Slave?" (95). Later, Alonzo shares Philip's thought that Abdelazer and his people are mere slaves although his sister is Abdelazer's wife. He mocks them and describes them as "coward slaves": "Do not pursue 'em, Sir, such Coward Slaves / Deserve not death from that illustriate hand" (103). Moreover, Queen Isabella is in intimacy with Mendozo, yet Philip does not even remark to her relation with Mendozo because he is a Spaniard. It is supposed, at least, to show his displeasure of their relationship, yet he vents his displeasure against only Abdelazer.

In fact, Behn does not emphasize the blackness of the Moor as a sign for his crimes. She presents Abdelazer as a revengeful character not because of his blackness but because he wants to revenge in illegal way. Derek Hughes notices that:

Behn seems to have been actively uninterested in using the nascent racism of her time. As noted, *Lust's Dominion*, the source of *Abdelazer*, is dominated by explicit contempt for the black African. Behn omits this to the point of removing not only the polarity between Negro and white but even the words themselves. (*Versions of Blackness* xxi)

From this point, Abdelazer refuses to remain forever a slave for Philip and his people because both are sons of Kings in spite of their different complexions. Abdelazer remarks to these contradictions at the beginning of the play. He states:

Although my skin be black, within my veins
Runs bloud as red, and Royal as the best.
My Father, Great *Abdela*, with his Life
Lost too his Crown: both most unjustly ravisht
By Tyrant Philip; your old King I mean. (11)

Then Abdelazer openly tells Alonzo and the other lords that he will not remain slave after this time, the time of Ferdinand's murder. He predicates, "And can you think, that after all my Toy's / I wou'd be still a Slave! to Bastard Philip too!" (81).

Abdelazer's Perspective of Friendship

In fact, friendship is a bond, which is beyond any description. It is based on mutual understanding, sacrifice, love, trust, and care. So, the friendship which is only intended to achieve desires is surely insubstantial and its result is sometimes destructive. Abdelazer's friendship is based on utility. In reality, he takes advantage of his friendship with other Moorish soldiers Osmin, Roderigo and Zarrack to direct them to the point he likes. He intelligently let them believe of the necessity of helping him in order to get his rights. Despite their efforts in

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helping him, he considers them slaves. Abdelazer uses the word “slave” many times either to curse someone of his friends or to degrade another without paying attention to the reality that many Spanish people also call him a “slave.” Therefore, it is unreasonable to hear him talk about slavery while he is a slave in the eyes of others. Indeed, Abdelazer does not respect his friends although they are from the same country, they are officers in his army and they are his main supporters. Because Abdelazer loves only himself, and he does not give any consideration to friendship, his friend Osmin conspires against him at the end. Osmin enters at the time when Abdelazer is about to rape Leonora. Abdelazer is being enraged at the interruption, so he heavily insults Osmin and then stabs him. This unreasonable action agitates Osmin to revenge. Because Osmin sets Abdelazer’s enemies free, Abdelazer has faced his fatal destiny after the great success he has built.

Abdelazer also benefits from his friendship with the Spaniards to achieve his ambition. Alonzo is honest in his friendship either to Abdelazer or to Philip. At the beginning, Alonzo supports Abdelazer because he is the husband of his sister. He feels Abdelazer is wronged by Philip and Mendozo. Alonzo discovers the real character of Abdelazer only after the murder of his sister, so he turns to use all his strength to help Philip. His support for Philip is not only because he is his friend, but it is also a kind of duty and obedience to Philip, and revenge against Abdelazer. They turn to help each other and stand in the same trench to face Abdelazer because he is their common foe. In reality, Alonzo is the future husband of Leonora, so he has to stand with his brother-in-law. Surely, if Alonzo does not stand with Philip to face Abdelazer, Abdelazer will get the throne and Leonora, Alonzo’s fiancée.

Meanwhile, Abdelazer and Mendozo are not friends as Abdelazer claims. They in fact stand against each other from the beginning, yet the Queen is able to unite them on Abdelazer’s request especially when Abdelazer is in need for his help to defeat Philip. In the battle and when Abdelazer is about to be defeated, he rushes to Queen Isabella to seek her help. He asks her to use her magnetism to bring Mendozo and his army from Philip’s side to his side. In this time, Abdelazer pretends as if he is a friend for Mendozo, he tells him, “Peace and eternal Friendship 'twixt us two” (99). In fact, they are not friends, and their friendship which Abdelazer tries to show is based on utility. Under the banner of friendship, Abdelazer exploits Mendozo to defeat Philip, and Mendozo helps Abdelazer to please the Queen. As Abdelazer uses Isabella to subjugate Mendozo, he uses Mendozo to trick Philip. Philip is going to flee to Portugal to seek help. So, under the suggestion of Mendozo who is now in the side of Abdelazer, they raise the slogan of peace, then they have caught Philip in an ambush. In order to get rid of both Mendozo and Philip, Abdelazer incites Isabella to say that her son Philip is a bastard and his father is Mendozo. By this, Philip and Mendozo become criminals, so he easily puts them in jail. As a result, Spaniards are about to nominate him a King instead of the illegitimate Philip. If he kills or prisons Philip and Mendozo without defaming their reputations, Spaniards will resist.

Abdelazer’s Interpretation of Religion

In *Abdelazer*, Behn presents Abdelazer as an unbearable character while his opponents Philip, Ferdinand, Mendozo, Alonzo, Leonora and even his wife Florella are presented as the

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best models of Christianity. Abdelazer is hated by all for the reason that he commits crimes against the royal family. Behn suggests that no one can commit all those heinous crimes if he fears God. Therefore, she nominates Mendoza to declare at the beginning of the play that Abdelazer should be deprived from his posts, and the main reason is Abdelazer's disbelief. Mendoza avows:

By the Authority of my Government,
Which yet I hold over the King of Spain,
By warrant from a Council of the Peers,
And (as an *Unbeliever*) from the Church,
I utterly deprive thee of that Greatness,
Those Offices and Trusts you hold in Spain. (19)

When Abdelazer tries to defend himself by ascertaining that he should not be questioned in his religion, Mendoza accuses him of using religion as a cover to commit not only crimes but also treason. Therefore, Mendoza does not like to trial him but to punish him as soon as possible. Mendoza asserts, "It needs no tryal, the proofs are evident, / And his Religion was his veil for Treason" (19). Before knowing Abdelazer's wicked character, Alonzo stands against Mendoza's declaration. His brave behaviour stems out from his duty to the husband of his sister Florella that is why he objects: "Why should you question his Religion, Sir? / He does profess Christianity" (19). Alonzo feels that his duty is to support the husband of his sister. However, the argument between Mendoza and Alonzo regarding Abdelazer's religion has got serious debate. According to the Lords, he should receive severe punishment if he pretends to be Christian. Abdelazer, in his defense, criticizes those who suspect his Christianity, insisting of his unmatched faith, and interpreting their charges as a kind of jealousy. Philip intervenes to support Mendoza and insists to punish Abdelazer if not for his blasphemy, it is for his other crimes. Philip confirms, "Damn his Religion, he has a thousand crimes / That will yet better justifie your sentence" (20).

Abdelazer is really an infidel despite his attempts to show himself as a pure Christian. It seems that he has converted to Christianity to cover his malignant crimes, and this is clear in his words and behaviour, and the reactions of others towards him. The faithful Christians just like Philip, Florella and Leonora are often using religious discourse in their speeches especially in the critical situation. For instance, when Abdelazer furnishes his wife Florella with a dagger and commands her to kill the King Ferdinand if he comes to her chamber, she disagrees to commit this crime not because she is afraid of the King but because of Heaven's punishment that is why she replies, "Heaven forbid!" (63). She really wants to keep her chastity and to be faithful to her husband, so she is ready to defend herself by all available means except killing because it is forbidden by God. Unfortunately, her religious morality turns on a deaf ear because Abdelazer sees himself above God. In his response to her, he considers himself more qualified than God, he insists that "No matter what Heaven will, I say it must" (63). Furthermore, **A b d e l a z e r e m p l o y s r e l i g i o u s d i s c o u r s e i n h i s s p e e c h i n o r d e r t o m a s k h i s i n t e n t i o n o f g e t t i n g t h e t h r o n e .** Otherwise, he renders himself equal to God, so no one in earth should infringe

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his order. When he nominates Leonora to be the Queen of Spain, he declares, "She must be Queen, I, and the Gods decree it" (118).

On some other occasions, when he feels the teaching of divine is conflicting with his whim and desire, he puts himself above God; this can be clearly observed in his insistence to prevent Leonora from marrying her lover Alonzo because he wants her for himself. He orders her, "But Heaven and I, am of another mind, / And must be first obey'd" (118). In fact, Abdelazer is not ruled by the Christian teachings, but he "is ruled by his sexual urges and lust for domination" (Stewart 68). Therefore, his actions are in contradiction to his words. Leonora in her turn defends her love for Alonzo for the sake of God's satisfaction. She derives her strength in facing the tyranny of Abdelazer from her religion. So, she refuses to marry Abdelazer and prefers to marry Alonzo. In her argument with Abdelazer she reminds him of "Heav'ns will I'm not permitted to dispute" (128), and "Oh Heaven forbid that..." (131).

Because he is really a whimsical person, he does not realize that he often puts himself in direct comparison with God. At times especially when he is in need for something, he pleads God. At other times, he curses God for not bestowing him that thing. Once when he tries to convince Leonora to love him, he confesses of his harshness in dealing with her and with others, yet he blames God for not taming and outfitting him with sweet talk: "Which Heaven ne're gave me so much tameness for" (132). When she does not listen to his temptation, he shifts to praise himself and to advise her that she will never find a man like him. He boasts, "Beauties great as thine have languish'd for me. / The Lights put out! thou in my naked arms / Wilt find me soft and smooth as polisht Ebony" (134). Not out of this, at the beginning of the play when lords and soldiers try to enter his apartment to search for Queen Isabella, he threatens as if he has the divine right. He says that no one dares to enter his house without his permission whether they are kings, lords or even God. This arrogance can be seen when he pacifies the Queen:

Oh, do not fear, no Cardinal enters here;
No King, *no God*, that means to be secure.
Slaves, guard the doors, and suffer none to enter,
Whilst I, my charming Queen, provide for your security. (9)

"no God" is considered a direct underestimation to God in the sense that he personifies God as a man who is preventing from entering his apartment; it is really something out of Christian religion. However, he remains in his intransigence that no one dares to search for the Queen in his apartment. He says, "He that dares enter here to seek the Queen, / Had better snatch the She from the fierce side / Of a young Amorous Lion, and 'twere safer" (10).

It is worth mentioning that Abdelazer is aware of the others' hatred towards him. Spanish Lords consider him a skunk in the kingdom of Spain. Thus, he reveals this bitter reality to the Queen when he nags of "thousand eyes / Throw killing looks at me" (5). His inferiority can be seen in the expressions of the Spanish eyes; and this apartheid pushes him to go on in his plan of revenge. No one can ignore the fact that he is a rhetorical speaker and a brave colonel, and he is

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able to use his mind, sweet words, and courage to go forwards in his revenge. However, he substitutes the looks of contempt by praising and describing himself as God. He proudly brags:

Now all that's brave and Villain seize my soul,
Reform each faculty that is not Ill,
And make it fit for Vengeance; noble Vengeance!
Oh glorious word! fit only for the Gods,
For which they form'd their Thunder
Till man usurp their Power, and by Revenge
Swayed Detiny as well as they,
And though, almighty love! (11)

Accordingly, his view of himself as a superman is affirmed by the Queen at the beginning of the play when she sees him as God. She tells him, "Smile whilst a thousand *Cupids* shall descend / And call thee *Jove*, and wait upon thy smiles" (4). However, Abdelazer is a man of egotistical nature that he feels all his actions are orders of God. Because he sees all actions as matters of inspiration, he proudly narrates and glorifies all his evil deeds at the end of the play.

Abdelazer uses religion to cover his villainy. To be able to pretend of religion, it means to avoid many critical situations. To prove more, Philip and Mendozo avoid certain death by using religious means. They disguise themselves in friar's clothes to be able to escape from Abdelazer's pursuit. So, their disguises regard as an allegory to do whatever they like under the cloak of the friar. Surely, they will not be able to escape if they do not dress the priest's dress. Ironically, it is Abdelazer who criticizes this act: "That case of Sanctity was first ordain'd, / To cheat the honest world" (55), although he himself the first beneficiary of a cloak of religion. The dress of priest can be also used in evil as it happens with Roderigo. Abdelazer orders Roderigo to go to Queen Isabella's lodging to murder her. Roderigo is disguised in friar's cloth and because he is in religious cloak, he is able to enter her lodging, and then kill her. Surely, if he does not wear friar's dress, he will not be able to kill her, and he cannot even enter her lodging. These two incidences: the escape of Philip and Mendozo in friar's dress, and the murder of the Queen in friar's dress prove that by the cloak of religion one can achieve and get what one can never get by normal ways.

Abdelazer's Lost Honour

Abdelazer has his own interpretation for honour. He evaluates honour from his point of view which serves his narrow interests. At the beginning of the play, he complains to Florella that he is going to lose his honour because of the intransigence of Philip and Mendozo who insist to snatch him from all his posts. His speech seems as if he seeks help from her. He nags, "But the worst wound is this, I leave my wrongs, / Dishonours, and my Discontents, all unreveng'd" (21). Really, he appears at the beginning as an oppressed man that is why Alonzo completely supports him and stands strongly against the decision of Philip and Mendozo. Alonzo does not know his wicked character, so he feels if Abdelazer's honour is confiscated, his honour is also confiscated. He mollifies Abdelazer, "But Sir, my Honour is concern'd with yours, / Since my lov'd Sister

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did become your Wife; / And if yours suffer, mine too is unsafe” (22). But when Alonzo realizes the fact that Abdelazer is treacherous and Philip is the man of honour, he asserts Philip’s honorable glory: “...I know the Prince’s soul, / Though it be fierce, ’t has Gratitude and Honour!” (131). Alonzo’s awareness comes late; as a result of that, he and Philip become prisoners and their lives and honours become under the mercy of Abdelazer. Philip remarks to this bitter reality when he feels that he will be executed. He remarks, “Oh all ye cruel Powers! Is’t not enough / I am depriv’d of Empire, and of Honour!” (141).

Ferdinand also misunderstands Abdelazer’s real character that is why he nullifies the decision of Philip and Mendoza. He thinks if he supports Abdelazer, it is a kind of honour because he will preserve his father’s benevolence for Abdelazer. He tells him:

Abdelazer, I have heard with much surprize
Oth’ injuries y’ave receiv’d, and mean to right you:
My Father lov’d you well, made you his General,
I think you worthy of that Honour still. (25)

In this regard, Abdelazer sneers and mocks Ferdinand’s forgiveness because he thinks he forgives him neither for his loyalties nor as a kind of sympathy and respect but to obtain Florella’s approbation. Hence, Abdelazer states Ferdinand’s purpose beyond supporting him as “That he loves my Wife so well” (26).

In his turn, Philip exploits the relation between his brother Ferdinand and Florella to wound Abdelazer’s honour. Philip openly degrades Abdelazer and calls him a man without honour for leaving his wife indulging in love affair with the King: “Thy wife! thy wife! proud Moor, whom thou’rt content / To sell (for Honour) to eternal Infamy. / Does’t make thee snarle! bite on, whilst thou shalt see” (30). Abdelazer gets angry to hear Philip’s contempt, while in fact; he perniciously takes advantage of the love affair between his wife and the King to get rid of both. Really, he is a man without honour because he is ready to sacrifice his wife in order to maintain his life and honour. He asserts, “Then my own life or Honour; and I’ve a way / To save that too” (60). Thence, he reminds his wife of her honour and instructs her to kill the King if he enters her lodging: “Be sure you do’t. ’tis for thy Honours safety” (64). Florella is really the victim of his conspiracy. When the King visits her in her lodging, she diametrically preserves her honor. She reminds him of his responsibility as a King who should safeguard his subjects not enslaves them: “You would preserve my Honour...” (70). Diametrically, Ferdinand, the King, does not intend to rape her, but he tries to convince her to marry him. When she is stabbed to death by his mother, he tells her brother, “I offer’d her to be my Queen, Alonzo!” (76).

The whole role of Florella ranks her as a woman of sagacity. She preserves her honour, and she does not commit any adultery despite the attacker is the King, her former lover. Indeed, she behaves as a sober-minded woman with the King when he tries to convince her to be his queen. She is an outspoken lady that she states the illegality and immorality of his behavior, then she states that she never sacrifices her honour for transient lust: “And Sir, how little she were worth your care, / Cou’d part with all her honourable fame, / For an inglorious life, short and

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despis'd" (72). It is rare to find a woman like Florella for the reason that she does not surrender to the desire of the King; on the other hand, the Queen mother sacrifices her honour, reputation and family by committing adultery with the Moor.

Actually, Abdelazer does not give any respect to the honours of others. He furtively talks about the honour of his wife, but when he becomes the de facto ruler of the Kingdom, he tries to rape Leonora. Leonora defends herself and exclaims, "Oh take my life, and spare my dearer Honour!" (137). She prefers to die instead of robbing her honour, while Abdelazer is ready to sacrifice his honour in order to get her, he requests her, "command my life, my soul, my honour!" (140). In fact, he has lost his honour at the time when he uses his wife as the decoy to assassinate the King.

Abdelazer's Attitude towards His Wife

Love in *Abdelazer* has not taken the same importance as it is in Behn's comedies. If there is love among characters, it is of course eccentric and tragic, and it is discussed in a way that intensifies its negative meanings. However, the main theme in *Abdelazer* is not love, but it is revenge and ambition.

Diametrically, Abdelazer does not love his wife Florella; by pretending to love her, he intends to use her as a tool to achieve his wicked ambition. He states:

Florella must to thee a Victim fall:
Revenge, to thee a Cardinal and Prince:
And to my Love and Jealousie, a King,
More yet, my mighty Deities, I'll do,
None that you e're inspir'd like me shall act. (26-27)

In one of his conversation with Queen Isabella, he concedes that the succeeding King Ferdinand is in love with his wife. He says, "The King! / He loves my wife Florella" (36). This statement is a proof that the one who really loves Florella is the King. It also implies that Abdelazer does not love his wife. However, Abdelazer confesses in a soliloquy that he inspires to be the King even if it is on the life of Florella. His soliloquy is regarded as a reply to Isabella's innuendo when she tells him that Florella is an obstacle in their way of marriage. So, he replies and addresses the audience in a way that shows his indifference for his wife. He says:

Florella! Oh I cou'd gnaw my Chains,
That humble me so low as to adore her:
But the fond blaze must out, whilst I erect
A nobler fire more fit for my Ambition.
Florella, dies, a Victim to your will.
I will not let you lose one single wish,
For a poor life, or two;
Though I must see my Glories made a prey,

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And not demand 'em from the Ravisher,
Nor yet complain, because he is my King! (38)

It is worthwhile to note that Ferdinand uses the expression “my Florella” more than her husband Abdelazer. Ferdinand uses this phrase around fifteen times while her husband uses it only around seven times and once he calls her “my dear Florella” (64) because he is in need for her help to kill the King. His seven uses of “my Florella” are simply regarded as hoax to mislead others of his love for her.

In fact, Abdelazer has married her under the command of the former King. The former King commanded the marriage of Florella to Abdelazer although she was in love with his son Ferdinand, but he intended by this marriage to consolidate a strong political relation with Abdelazer. By marrying him a Spanish woman, he ensures the loyalty of Abdelazer for Spain. On the other hand, he tries to compensate Abdelazer for losing his kingship. Unfortunately, this does not happen and Abdelazer turns a wild enemy because he believes that “Spain gave me Education, though not Birth, / Which has intitl'd it my Native home” (85). However, it is Ferdinand who clarifies why his father commanded Florella to marry Abdelazer. He feels that this marriage is a kind of convenience, and her marriage was against her will. So, he decides to infringe their marriage by trying to convince Florella to marry him. Yet, Alonzo, Florella's brother, reminds him that “She's now a virtuous woman” (44).

At her chamber, Florella threatens to commit suicide instead of killing the King if he insists to have his own way with her. Nevertheless, the King reacts, “Hold! I command thee hold thy impious hand, / My heart dwels there, and if you strike I dye” (74). Allegorically, he reminds her that his heart is with her, and if she kills herself, he will die too. This is what really happens even if it is by another device; the King's mother stabs Florella to death and Abdelazer immediately kills the King. This indicates to the mutual and sincere love between the King and Florella. Also, his true love for Florella can be felt at the time when he sobs at her feet and says:

She cou'd not dye; that noble generous heart,
That arm'd with love and honour, did rebate
All the fierce sieges of my Amorous flame,
Might sure defend itself against those wounds. (77)

When he himself has been murdered, his last words are about his love for her. He does not talk about his country affair, his family or his death, but he talks about his love for Florella. He murmurs:

Florella! Florella! is thy soul fled so far
It cannot answer me, and call me on?
And yet like dying Ecchoes in my Ears,
I hear thee cry, my Love! I come I come, fair Soul!
Thus at thy feet my heart shall bleeding lye,
Who since it liv'd for thee, for thee will dye. (79)

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In short, Florella dies as a chaste heroine. The King memorializes her by narrating publically some of her morals: “by all the Gods she was as chaste as Vestals! / As Saints translated to Divine abodes” (76), while Queen Isabella dies in shame and disgrace as a criminal, and she is not memorialized even by her children Philip and Leonora.

Conflict of interest between Abdelazer and Leonora

To compare Leonora and Florella, they are surely similar in their actions and behaviour. They are friends as well as women of virtue and honour. Both of them defend their spouses. Florella has done her best to save Abdelazer’s life, and she remains faithful for him until her murder. Leonora has also done her best to save Alonzo and to release him from the prison. She remains completely loyal to him despite the heavy attack of Abdelazer.

Leonora is really in true love with Alonzo. She resists the seduction of Abdelazer by all available means. She confidently reminds Abdelazer many times that she should keep her honour, and he should respect her virtue. Unfortunately, Abdelazer does not listen to her because he wants to satisfy his lust and ambition. Ann Marie Stewart observes that “Abdelazer commodifies both Spain and Lenora as Objects he should rightfully possess as a conqueror in a political war” (69). Therefore, she strongly refuses his offer of marrying him because she is a woman of “honour” (88). She frankly tells him she is in love with Alonzo, so she will never infringe her vows with him. She says, “Which never can be yours! that and my vows, / Are to Alonzo given; which he lays claim to” (89). Unfortunately, Abdelazer does not listen to the entreaty of Leonora. Yet, he puts a condition that she has to marry him if she wants Alonzo to be released. Then, he enjoys boasting about his achievements in front of her. He also speaks with her in a harsh way and reminds her that he is the one who nominates her to be the Queen. Meanwhile, he does not even give any consideration to the meaning of the word ‘queen’ that is why he forces her to carry out his orders. Really, he is an oddball. When she refuses to marry him, he tries to rape her. Ann Marie Stewart comments, “The near rape scene between Abdelazer and Leonora clarifies the difference in their class, race, and ideological perceptions of love and sex” (68). However, he exploits his positions in a wrong way. He has three powers: he is the General in army, he makes himself the Cardinal of Spain, and he is the only authorized one who can give orders. His first position has given to him by the former King, but the last two positions are being usurped. Diametrically, Leonora bravely faces the arrogance of Abdelazer, and she is the one who defeats him.

Leonora takes advantage of the conflict between Abdelazer and Osmin, his Moorish soldier. She convinces Osmin to go to jail where her lover Alonzo, her brother Philip and the Cardinal Mendozo are confined and set them free. Then, Abdelazer finds himself among his enemies. He tries to defend himself, yet he kills Osmin and he himself is killed. Indeed, the play ends in favour for Philip and his people because of Leonora’s cleverness and help.

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Abdelazer's ambition versus Queen Isabella's lust

Abdelazer is busy of how to revenge and to uproot the rulers of Spain from his way that he does not enjoy the melody song at the beginning of the play. Music is the food of soul, but Abdelazer "hates all softness," and calls it "ungrateful noise" (3-4). Meanwhile, the Queen enjoys the music and considers it "sweetest Notes, such as inspire" (3); it is because she lives in a period of adoration. Noteworthy, the play opens with a song while Abdelazer appears in a melancholic mood. This paradox gives us a remark for the next gloomy action. At this time, Abdelazer does not respect the feeling of his mad passionate lover Isabella and her love for the song. He orders the musicians to stop singing because he is absent-minded in planning of how to start the first step of the revenge. Therefore, he reproaches his men Osmin and Zarrack for leaving Queen Isabella coming in: "Oh, are you there? Ye Dogs, how came she in? / Did I not charge you on your lives to watch, / That none disturb my privacy?" (3).

Diametrically, Isabella's role in the play is silly and unbearable. Her role is huge, it is designed very strangely, it is added to the weirdness of the plot and it gives a negative impression about the value of the motherhood in general. In short, Behn is able to present her as a beautiful Queen but a suffering wife who her act is almost good for Abdelazer.

Abdelazer with a political tact accuses Queen Isabella of spoiling his youth and destroying his future although it is he who ruins her life. He strongly reproaches her "Decay'd my Youth, only to feed thy Lust! / And wou'dst thou still pursue me to my Grave?" (5). Because the Queen is blindly subjected to him, she does not refute his claim, but she replies in a way suggests as if she is responsible of destroying him; it is when she exclaims, "All this to me, my Abdelazer!" (5). The reality can be seen in the opposite; it is he who ruins her life in order to achieve his wicked ambition. Unfortunately, his desire for crime matches with a stupid lecherous woman who only thinks of how to satisfy her lust. In this regard, Abdelazer is able to change the reality upside down for his favour. It seems that Queen Isabella loves him for his strong personality, so he intentionally and repeatedly shows her some of his dogmatism to ignite her longing for him.

Actually, Abdelazer's love for Isabella is a kind of pseudo-love while Queen Isabella's love for him is a kind of unrequited love. He only pretends to love her to be able to use her as he likes. Melinda Alliker Rabb states, "Behn insists on the exploitation of female desire by the Moor Abdelazer, who feels nothing for the Queen (who passionately loves him) and only wishes to use her to gain political power" (143). In fact, love has no meaning in his life, but Isabella thinks that he loves her. Her blind love affects her mind from understanding Abdelazer's order at the beginning of the play. He orders her, "Away, fond woman ... Away, away, be gone" (4). Joyce Green MacDonald mentions the reason beyond Abdelazer's hatred for Isabella:

This distaste for Isabella's sexual appetite is further underlined by Abdelazer's assertion that it has made them both deviate from their socially proper roles. Recall that Abdelazer, a prince in his own country, humiliatingly believes that

others will see him as having been reduced to the status of the queen's "Minion" by his sexual subjection. (154)

Isabella's love for Abdelazer receives different interpretations from both. Abdelazer boldly calls her love for him a kind of lust while she regards it a kind of true love. He states in different circumstances, "And thou shalt see the balls of both those eyes / Burning with fire of Lust Decay'd my Youth, only to feed thy Lust! ... This many-headed-beast your Lust has arm'd" (5-6). She grimly replies, "How dare you, Sir, upbraid me with my Love?" (6). However, Janet Todd confirms that Isabella's lust is the reason of Abdelazer's hatred. She states:

she is not fitting as his sexual object; he is bored by her demands, for the woman he will desire sexually will not display her sexuality. The Queen killed Abdelazer's desire when she revealed her won, so becoming for him the ultimate whore and threatening an effeminizing in himself. His most satisfying act in the play is her murder when she expects sex. It is how men deal with female passion. (*The Secret Life* 188)

Abdelazer openly tells the Queen that he is not ready to pass his "hours in idleness and Love" (6). According to him, love is useless for the reason that he is busy with something more valuable; it is how to revenge against the Spaniard by crowning himself King. He frankly reminds her, "Love and ambition are the same to me" (37). Maja-Lisa von Sneidern believes that "... Abdelazer sacrifices "love and pleasure" to his ambition to regain his crown and avenge himself on his tormentors" (109). However, she does not understand the deep meaning of his response because she is obsessed in his love. If she thinks a while of his comparison between "love" and "ambition," she can discover the bitter reality that the ambition has no limitation. The man who pretends of love to fulfill his ambition cannot be trusted because when he gets something, he will surely seek for something else. This is what really happens in the play. Abdelazer facilitates the murder of his wife to get the throne and the Queen, when he nearly gets the throne, he orders Roderigo to murder the Queen to get her daughter. Then he himself murders Roderigo to conceal his crime. Ann Marie Stewart also clarifies:

The Moor Abdelazer is duplicitous, ambitious, and full of rage. His goals, which he pursues without conscience, are to regain the Spanish throne that was taken from his father by King Philip, then win the heart of Lenora the Spanish Princess. (68)

He clearly states his wicked intention of using both Queen Isabella and Roderigo as instruments when he is looking to the corpse of Queen Isabella. He murmurs:

Farewell my greatest Plague
Thou wert a most impolitique loving thing,
And having done my bus'ness which thou wert born for,
'Twas time thou shou'dst retire,
And leave me free to Love, and Reign alone. (125)

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Love is constructive, but lust is destructive. Queen Isabella oddly sacrifices everything to please Abdelazer. No one can believe that her love for Abdelazer leads her to poison her husband, to share in one way or another in killing her son Ferdinand, to murder Florella, and to conspire against her son Philip. She forgets that she is the Queen mother of three. In addition, she does not care of all the problems that are going on around her, but she cares about her lover Abdelazer. In short, the kingdom is about to be collapsed; it is because of her lust. Impulsively, she has committed wicked and ominous acts in order to appease Abdelazer. Her first heinous crimes is her conspiracy against her husband. She frankly tells Abdelazer:

Have I for this abus'd the best of men?
My noble Husband!
Depriving him of all the joys of Love,
To bring them all intirely to thy bed;
Neglected all my vows, and sworn 'em here a new,
Here, on thy lips (6)

Janet Todd mocks Queen Isabella's behaviour. She states:

The Queen in her play, a kind of mother to the court, must prove her love to Abdelazer alone by killing husband and sons. She becomes then a mother only for the Moor, who wishes to placate her because she still has power at court. (*The Secret Life* 188)

When the Queen threatens Abdelazer of revenge if he does not show her fervent love after her great sacrifice, he subserviently comes to her to apologize of his harsh words. He tries to sweet-talk her into his love:

My Queen, My Goddess, Oh raise your lovely eyes
I have dissembled coldness all this while;
And that deceit was but to try thy Faith
Look up, by Heav'n 'twas Jealousie,
Pardon your Slave, pardon your poor Adorer. (7)

Actually, when he sees her become angry for his dereliction, he shows her such love and numbs her with his fake speech: "Call back the frighted blood into thy Cheeks, /And I'll obey the dictates of my Love, /And smile, and kiss, and dwell for ever here" (8). He tickles her feeling with his sweet words which are fake, so she at once forgives him. She is affectionately affected by his words, and this proves the prevailing idea that a woman can be fooled through her ears. It is true that Abdelazer does not win Queen Isabella by force but by sweet words. By force, a man can kill a woman, rape her, get her property, oblige her to do something wrong, but he cannot obtain her heart and mind except by sweet words. Abdelazer is able to use bombastic words in the appropriate time; that is why he is able to adapt her lustful temperament to be commensurate with his desires and ambition. He knows well that he cannot go forwards in his revenge if she does not stand by him. So, all his successes and progresses are undoubtedly credited to her

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support and his wonderful policy. Indeed, Abdelazer is not shy about exploiting Isabella. He states his wicked intention to the audience:

That this same Queen, this easie Spanish Dame
May be bewicht and dote upon me still:
Whilst I make use of the Insatiate flame
To set all Spain on fire. (12)

Certainly, Isabella's excessive love for Abdelazer makes him looking forwards to fulfill his wicked aims. He professes: "The influence of this must raise my glory high" (12).

In contrast, Queen Isabella expects from Abdelazer to exchange her the same fervent love that she shows him. She rebukes him, "Why dost thou answer with that cold Reserve? / Is that a look, an action for a Lover?" (34). At this moment, Abdelazer intends to expose her to the core, so he asks her of the reason of poisoning her husband, the King. Her reply is unexpected. She states, "To make thy way more easie to my arms" (35). In fact, Abdelazer benefits from her libido. So, he frankly tells her: "Not marry me, unless I were a King" (35). To make him a king, she is ready to kill her son Ferdinand, the succeeding King. She asks Abdelazer to give her a permission to kill him: "Thou wouldst not have me kill him" (36). Derek Hughes and Janet M. Todd confirm:

She dies wishing she had more sons to kill for Abdelazer and just as she is expecting sex with her lover, a fitting end to a career which has mixed extravagant savagery with farce. (90)

In fact, Abdelazer does not like to kill the King without an acceptable excuse lest the Spanish people may revolt against him. So, he insincerely reminds her of the Christian religion: "Oh by no means, not for my wretched life! / What, kill a King! forbid it Heav'n! / Angels stand like his Guards, about his Person" (36). By refusing to be implicated in this crime, he adds with too much irony: "The King! / He loves my wife Florella, shou'd he dye / I know none else durst love her" (36). In fact, he is preparing a plan to kill him in the appropriate time. When the appropriate time comes, she murders Florella, and he murders Ferdinand. Before murdering her son, she advises him to be patient: "Patience! Dear Abdelazer!" (78). She adds, "Oh stay your fury, generous Abdelazer!" (78). Then she deliberately leaves the crime scene to enable him to kill her son. Abdelazer does not care of his wife because her murder is not important; the most important task is to get rid of the King. When he kills the King, she comes back murmuring: "Oh Heav'ns! my Son the King! the King is kill'd! / *Yet I must save his Murderer: Fly, my Moor*" (79). It is really unexpected to see her trying her best to save the murderer of her son.

Actually, Isabella's love for Abdelazer is not normal; it is only a kind of a mighty sexual rut. Her increased libido has been presented in a way where there is no parallel for it in Behn's other plays. It is because she has been changed into a wild animal that preys on her dearest relatives. Melinda Alliker Rabb points out that "The Spanish monarchy is weakened by the royal family's sexual incontinence" (143).

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It is acceptable by some if she has a sexual relation with Abdelazer without the knowledge of others, and this happens most usual, but it is not acceptable to destroy her family and her country in the sake of sex. Therefore, Behn deliberately exposes her although Behn advocates women's rights in having sex with the desired men in her comedies. One can argue that the reason of such a crime like this in the time of Behn was because the women did not marry the men they love, so they turned to sacrifice their families in the sake of acquiring lovers. Women of the era of Behn were of course different from the women in these days. In today's society, women have been empowered more than the women in Behn's time; at least, they are able to marry their lovers. Also, such works have been done by women today had been done by only men in Behn's time. Yet, the moral standards of both societies remain nearly equal with noting that this time is more receptive for women's activity.

Unimaginably, the Queen supports Abdelazer with all her power to fulfill his wicked ambition. As a result, she falls in the same snare; she has been murdered on the command of Abdelazer. She realizes the sin of her passive passion with Abdelazer too late when Roderigo stabs her. Therefore, her murder takes her to a moment of gloomy introspection. She sorrowfully murmurs, "Thou hast well reveng'd me on my sins of Love; / But shall I die thus tamely unreveng'd?" (123). This statement proves that she actually becomes a victim of her lust and Abdelazer's ambition. Yet she does not get sympathy, she can only get it if he does not commit those heinous crimes. However, Behn is intelligent enough to make Abdelazer murdering her. If she is killed by her son Philip, or by Mendoza, she can get some sympathy, and she will be considered a woman who struggles in life to get her lover. Yet, her murder by her lover is deliberately enrolled by Behn to prove her unforgettable mistakes. What is strange is her behavior towards Abdelazer at the time of her death. As soon as she hears the voice of Abdelazer, she longs for his love. She gargles:

And whilst I hear thy voice thus breathing Love,
It hovers still about the gratefull sound.
My Eyes have took an everlasting leave
Of all that blest their sight... (125)

Oddly, when Philip, Mendoza, and Alonzo surround Abdelazer at the end of the play, and he feels there is no way to live more, he pours his wrath on Queen Isabella. He starts exposing her and narrating her relation with him without any sanctity for her death and respect for her love. He narrates his story with her in detail, but here are some selected texts:

Know Prince, I made thy amorous Mother
Proclaim thee Bastard...
.....
I made her too, betray the credulous Cardinal,
And having then no farther use of her,
Satiated with her Lust,
I set Roderigo on to murder her:
Thy death had next succeeded; and thy Crown

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I wou'd have laid at Leonora's feet (148)

His revelation remarks to his wicked personality, and it presents him as a man who does not revenge to retrieve his kingship as he claims, but he revenges on Queen Isabella. Hence, his flagrant speech is regarded a reward for her negative passion.

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