
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 13:11 November 2013
ISSN 1930-2940

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“Passion is Above My Friendship”
A Fact that is Found in Behn’s *The Forced Marriage*

Mohammed Sagheer Ahmed Al-fasly, Ph.D. Scholar

Abstract

The theme of friendship is remarkably discussed in Behn’s play, *The Forced Marriage*. Behn had many friends, yet her friendship was mostly linked to those who were notorious like John Hoyle (Zimmerman 99). She also formed friendships with many important politicians either to have sexual relationship or to seek confidential information and then report it to the Stuart Monarchy. Because Behn had failed in her marriage, she commenced to discuss the importance of friendship in a way that serves, to some extent, the issues of love and marriage. The friendship

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

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between Philander and Alcippus in *The Forced Marriage* is an example. Philander and Alcippus are friends, colleagues and officers in the same army, but their friendship turns into real enmity at the time when Alcippus marries Erminia, Philander's lover. When Philander gets Erminia back, they regain their friendship. From this point, it can be said that Behn stresses on the importance of friendship that does not contradict love and marriage; when friendship becomes an obstacle, it should be ended, even abruptly. Thus, friendship is presented in the play as a preliminary factor in the success of marriage.

Keywords: Behn, Friendship, Love, Marriage



Mr^s Aphra Behn
from the portrait by Sir Peter Lely

Aphra Ben: Courtesy: www.gutenberg.org

Introduction

This article attempts to discuss friendship from the viewpoint of Aphra Behn and in the light of her play *The Forced Marriage*. Friendship is significantly present in the play though Behn does not focus on this theme as she focuses on the theme of the forced marriage. However, the article does not provide an in-depth and historical study of Behn's friendship, but it aims at

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giving an example of how Behn has discussed this theme in her play, which, in turn, helps us understand Behn's friendship orientation.

The Forced Marriage or *The Jealous Bridegroom* was Behn's debut play. It was produced by the Duke's Company in 1670 and was well received by audiences, so its success encouraged Behn to write her other plays. The play is an interesting romantic tragicomedy in spite of its redundancy. It is overloaded with dull and confusing exposition, endless characters, and many unnecessary activities. One of its redundancies is the story of the ghost which is actually absurd and uninteresting. Janet Todd writes about the play:

The story of *The Forc'd Marriage* was not complicated but, like other dramas of the time, it had multiple pairings. There were mistakes and night encounters but little intrigue in the play, which was rather lacking in tension. Yet the sex struggle was there in embryo and a shrewd reader might have discerned Behn's future preoccupation. (139)

Interpreting Friendship

At any rate, friendship is a bond which is beyond any description. It is based on mutual understanding, sacrifice, love, trust and care. Friendship is a fore-grounded theme in English drama. It ranks in competition with love. To be friends, it means to have "voluntary relations, the content and future of the bond being always at the discretion of each party" (Fischer 114). So, friendship which is formed with the intention mainly of getting one's personal interests satisfied, is surely unworthy and its results are sometimes destructive on personal relationships.

Friendship is a simple word, but has a lot of significance. It is priceless, it cannot be measured by scales, but it is, in fact, a sublime human relation. A person might find it hard to live alone without a friend and in isolation from the others. He ultimately needs help from a

friend and wants to interact either positively or negatively, with those around him. A positive interaction with a true friend gives a sense of warmth, love and comfort in life, especially, if both friends live in complete understanding of each other. On the contrary, lack of friendship may cause depression, stress and psychological disorders, so “a good marriage can compensate for a lack of friendships” (Linsley 232).

“Friendship’s too near a kin to love” as Alcippus says (3.1.2). Thus, it is difficult to live without a friend. Friends can share their sorrows, joys and various problems of life. Friends can also exchange advice, share sufferings and hardships, and engage in mutually beneficent behaviour. There are many secrets that cannot be revealed to a family, but they can be revealed to a friend either to seek advice, or at least, to alleviate distress. True friends are like mirrors in which they reflect faults of one another. Even as friendship is necessary, it is sometimes difficult to find that true friend. When it happens, true friends do not disappear at the time of need and crisis. Therefore, a friend has to learn how to fraternize well with a friend and how to keep him in his heart if he wants friendship to continue to the end.

In general, it is noticed that true friendship in most plays of the Restoration period is based on parity. If friendship happens among different social classes, it is not true. Friendships between superiors and inferiors or between educated and uneducated people are not true. This kind of friendship is regarded as a kind of respect, duty or obedience. Hence, true friendship can be found between equals.

An Analytical Reading of Some Characters of the Play

In *The Forced Marriage*, a young brave warrior Alcippus returns victorious from a military mission in which he was the commander of twenty thousand warriors. The old King decides to promote him to be the General instead of his son Philander. Hence, Alcippus feels free

to become betrothed to Erminia, the daughter of the former General. Philander gets angry because he and Erminia are in love. Stubbornly, her father forces her to marry Alcippus which can be referred to as the turning point in the conflict between Philander and Alcippus. Meanwhile, Gallatea, the daughter of the king and the sister of Prince Philander, loves Alcippus, but Alcippus does not know that she loves him. Pisaro once loved Gallatea, but felt ashamed to love the one who was in love with his close friend, Alcippus. However, Pisaro is a close friend to Alcippus and Alcander is a close friend to Philander. Though the four members are colleagues in the same army, Pisaro remains a loyal friend and a strong supporter to Alcippus as does Alcander to Philander.

According to Behn, a friend must not think to love or marry his friend's lover; otherwise, they would turn into enemies. In this regard, Philander and Alcippus are close friends, but when Alcippus marries Philander's lover, they become enemies. As a kind of rite of honour, Philander attempts to get back Erminia. Alcippus also attempts to keep her as a permanent wife; if he fails, it would be regarded as a kind of dishonor. Colin Richmond asserts, "Men of honor could (and did) lie, cheat, deceive, plot, treason, seduce, and commit adultery, without incurring dishonor" (199), but they are not allowed to violate the sanctity of their marriage. Diane Jacobs-Malina also states, "Honor is the positive value of a person in his or her own eyes plus the positive appreciation of that person in the eyes of his or her social group" (25–26).

However, Behn presents friendship in this play in brilliant images. It is when friends either support or confront each other even if it leads them to transgress the norms of society, that friendship shines through. In the play, princess Gallatea and Erminia are close friends. They share ideas, consult each other and discuss their joys and sorrows, but their friendship would surely end if they fell in love with the same person. Gallatea values love as more important than

friendship. She tells her brother, “The highest love no reason will admit, / And passion is above my friendship yet” (2.1.84-85). Gallatea in times suspects Erminia of getting Alcippus. But when Erminia tells her that she does not love Alcippus, but she loves Philander, Gallatea is overjoyed. At this time, Gallatea considers Erminia as her best friend forever, “But I, as well as you, can weep and die” (1.2.70). It is worth mentioning that Erminia does not consider herself as a wife for Alcippus, rather, she considers him a friend. She tells him, “A friendship, Sir, I can on you bestow” (2.3.56). She again affirms her friendship to Alcippus. She tells him, “We might as friends, and not as Lovers greet” (3.3.165). By this, she intends to tell him that her presence with him is just like a friend staying with a friend. Friendship is a kind of respect, help and reciprocal feelings, while the relationship between lovers is often extended to sex. Hence, she is not ready to share his bed, since she is in love with Philander.

Male friends also sacrifice their friendship for the sake of love and marriage. Philander and Alcippus appear as close friends, but they forget their friendship and turn into enemies when Alcippus marries Erminia. Philander does not only intend to break his friendship with Alcippus, but also decides to kill him. He determines, “Thou wouldst the sacred blood of friendship spill. / I kill a man that has undone my Fame, / Ravisht my Mystress, and contemn’d my Name” (2.1.75-77). Their friendship breaks when both fall in love with Erminia. Even if there is a kind of friendship between them, it is only a friendship of convenience. Their friendship can be seen at the beginning of the play when Philander supports Alcippus to be the General, and at the end of the play, when he surrenders his sister Gallatea to Alcippus.

At the very end, Philander is about to embrace Alcippus as a sign of forgiveness for their dispute and to stress their friendship. Alcippus hesitates to embrace Philander since he is ashamed of his marrying Erminia. Philander wonders and asks him, “Why dost receive me

coldly? I'm in earnest; / As I love Honour, and esteem thee Generous, / I mean thee nothing but a perfect amity" (5.5.233-35). It is strange to hear Philander talking about "perfect amity", since they have been rivals during the major part of the play. In fact, they are not perfect friends, but Philander intends to keep Alcippus loyal by his talk about their friendship. Philander will soon be the King, so he has to win the heart of General Alcippus.

If Philander and Alcippus were close friends, Alcippus would have never married Erminia. We see that loyalty in Alcippus friend Pisaro's behavior. Pisaro stops thinking about Gallatea as a wife when he comes to know that she loves his friend Alcippus. He sarcastically remarks, "'tis my friend too that's become my Rival" (2.5.30). Indeed, Pisaro is a loyal friend to Alcippus. He stands firm with him in his adversities. Therefore, he antagonizes his prince Philander but is not worried of it, since he believes that his duty is only to support Alcippus.

Certainly, there are many actions which crown his friendship with Alcippus. For example, Pisaro remains the custodian of Alcippus's home, whether Alcippus is at home or outside of it. Once when Philander, Alcander and a pageboy go to the door of Alcippus to sing a song about the absurdity of love in order to attract Erminia, Pisaro tries to prevent them. Philander is surprised to see Pisaro's act, so he asks him, "What makest thou here then, when the whole World's asleep? / Be gone, there lies thy way, / Where e'er thy business be" (2.6.36-38). Pisaro replies that it is his business to protect Alcippus. Pisaro and Philander commence a duel. The close friend of Philander, Alcander, intervenes and takes the role of fighting Pisaro. Pisaro and Alcander start fighting each other despite being close friends; they are also officers in the same army, and Alcander is in love with Pisaro's sister.

Pisaro is wounded, but he keeps it secret from Alcippus. Because they are friends, Alcippus feels that Pisaro is hiding something. Alcippus tells him, "Friendship's too near a kin to

love Pisaro, / To leave me any peace, whilst in your eyes / I read Reserves, which 'tis not kind to hide" (3.1.2-4). Anyway, Pisaro reveals the fight, but he does not reveal anything regarding the case of Erminia and Philander in order to protect his feelings. Alcippus is not so stupid a man that cannot understand what is going on around him; hence he tells Pisaro, "Oh friend, I saw what thou canst ne'er conceal" (3.1.21).

Suspicion of Unfaithfulness

Moreover, Alcippus once decides to come back home rather than continue in his military mission, because he suspects Erminia of having an affair with Philander in his absence. So, he decides to check the matter himself to remove all doubts. Pisaro is afraid that Alcippus may meet Philander there, so he makes him promise not to get excited since such an act may destroy his future. Pisaro advises him, "Alcippus this will ruin you forever, / Nor is it all the power you think you have / Can save you, if he once be disoblig'd" (4.2.65-67). Pisaro is experienced in the field of love and friendship. He describes himself, "This night I'm wiser grown by observation, / My Love and Friendship taught me jealousy, / Which like a cunning Spy brought in intelligence" (2.5.21-23). Thus, he is able to analyze facial expressions. He understands the love looks of Gallatea towards Alcippus. Once when all the characters are celebrating, he observes that Gallatea loves Alcippus deeply since she does not move her eyes away from him. He also notices the indescribable love between Philander and Erminia. He does not only observe the love, but also the hatred between Philander and Alcippus. Alcippus hates Philander for the very reason that his wife Erminia loves him. Philander is full of anger since Alcippus has taken his lover. So, the expression on Philander's face, as it is read by Pisaro, reveals Philander's intention to kill Alcippus.

Further, he considers Alcander to be an appropriate husband for his sister. It is seldom one finds a brother seeking an appropriate husband for his sister in Behn's plays, yet it happens in *The Forced Marriage* with the secondary characters. The main characters are suffering in their marriages, but this matter does not always happen with the secondary characters. The best example of this desirable phenomenon is the act of Pisaro. Pisaro stands against Alcander to defend his friend Alcippus. At the same time, he encourages Alcander to marry his sister Aminta. In turn, Alcander suspects Aminta's love. Thus, he complains to him of her negligence, but Pisaro reassures him, "You'll bring her to't, she must be overcome, / And you're the fittest for her fickle humour" (1.1.211-12). In fact, Pisaro considers Alcander a good man who is worthy to marry his sister. Meanwhile, he advises his sister to keep her love for Alcander. He tells her:

Alcander is a worthy youth and brave,
I wish you would esteem him so;
'Tis true, there's now some difference between us,
Our interest are dispos'd to several ways,
But time and management will join us all. (3.2.155-59)

As Pisaro is an honest friend to Alcippus, Alcander completely supports his friend Philander. Both Alcander and Pisaro are ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of pleasing Philander and Alcippus. As Pisaro prevents Philander from entering Alcippus's house, Alcander guards Alcippus's house once when Philander is inside with Erminia. He prevents Alcippus from entering the house lest he finds Philander inside. Further, as Pisaro advises Alcippus not to be angry if he finds Philander with Erminia, Alcander advises Philander to get Erminia back from Alcippus, because she is waiting for him to save her. According to Alcander's advice, Philander should not be worried about the sin of taking away another man's wife for the reason that

Alcippus is the one who should be held responsible for taking a woman who does not love him. Also, Alcander advises Philander to use force if necessary to regain Erminia, "...you have both power and justice on your side; / And there be times to exercise 'em both" (2.7.81-82).

From the beginning of the play till the end, Alcander supports his friends Philander and stands against Alcippus. At the same time, Alcander feels humiliated when he is not promoted to the rank of the General instead of Alcippus. He feels that he should get the position of the General, or at least, should be given promotion like Alcippus. He considers himself equal to Alcippus in everything, but Alcippus is promoted while he is not. Alcander reveals to Pisaro and Falatius his dissatisfaction about Alcippus's promotion, "Why the devil should I rejoice? / Because I see another rais'd above me; / Let him be great, and damn'd with all his greatness" (1.1.137-39). Then he adds:

What is't that thou cal'st merit?

He fought, it's true, so did you, and I,

And gain'd as much as he o'th' victory,

But he in the Triumphal Chariot rode,

Whilst we ador'd him like a Demi-God. (1.1.141-45)

Moreover, Alcander believes that his close friend Philander is not wise in his decision to let Alcippus mount to the top position in the army. By doing so, Philander commits a mistake because the army would then be under the control of Alcippus. As a quick negative result of this promotion, Philander loses Erminia. According to Alcander, the indifference of this sensitive position will bring Philander under the mercy of Alcippus or else would cost him his life. Alcander states, "And he [Philander] has most unluckily disarm'd himself, / And put the Sword into his Rivalls hand, / Who will return it to his grateful bosom" (1.1.174-76). At the end when

Philander marries Erminia and Alcippus marries Gallatea, all the four characters, Philander, Alcander, Alcippus and Pisaro regain their friendships. So, it can be said that friendship is one way to ensure the success of a marriage.

Behn is able to adjust the progress of the play at the proper time to favour the desires of the men and women characters. Therefore, she makes Erminia take up her role in earnest to resolve the matter. *The Forced Marriage* is a kind of conflict of the will of honour between Erminia's supposed husband Alcippus and her lover Philander. Their conflict cannot be resolved easily, since Erminia felt divided in her loyalty between the two men. Indeed, Erminia is torn between love and honour, between her love for Philander and her duty to her husband and father. She wants to behave according to the honourable codes of her society, but she is passionately in love with Philander. To keep her love for Philander, she finds herself going against the norms of the society where the girl is not allowed to disobey her father and refuse the order of the King. In order to keep her honour within the society, it might mean the loss of her lover, and then she would also have to remain an obedient wife to a husband whom she does not love. However, she is able to maintain her honour and love at the same time. Because she is a woman of honour, Erminia is able to do her marital duty towards her husband in a proper way; she meanwhile remains loyal to Philander by keeping her virginity. It is worth mentioning that many women and men attempt to satisfy their sexual desires out of wedlock. Erminia does not allow even her husband to have an affair with her since she is in an emotional attachment with Philander.

On the other hand, Philander himself is in a similar condition. He feels torn between duty, love and honour. His duties towards his father the King, General Alcippus and the norms of society are in conflict with his love for Erminia. People also hold him in contempt for seeking a married woman. Yet, he cannot leave Erminia because they are in love like twin flames as he

complains to Alcander, “Our Souls then met, and so grew up together, Like sympathizing Twins” (1.4.7-8). Further, he feels as if he is betrayed and dishonoured by the act of Alcippus. Nevertheless, Erminia and Philander choose love instead of duty. They preserve their honour, and then they get the consent and respect of all. Thus, they can be regarded as victors in the field of love and honour. At the end of the play, friendship and love, and duty and desire are reconciled and harmony is therefore restored.

To conclude, friendship in the play serves in one way or another, the issue of love and then marriage. In other words, the value of friendship is presented in a way, where friendship strengthens love between lovers and helps in overcoming the difficulties which stand in the way of marriage. Close friends may love the same woman, but one of them will stop his love at the time of discovering that his friend and the woman are in love with each other. However, the main factor for the success of marriage is love; when there is genuine love, the lovers will get married whatever obstacles might be there. It is right that some ulterior motive such as friendship may hinder marriage for a while, but it will be ineffective when there is real strong love.

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