



The Rover: a two-part play

Aphra Behn's play, 'The Rover' was first performed in 1677 and follows the story of a group of English gentlemen (Cavaliers) in Naples, Italy, during Carnival time. There are several different characters and plotlines - the play involves lots of romance and comedy - with its central character being Willmore, as the "rover" mentioned in the title. During the play he becomes involved with a young Spanish noblewoman, Hellena, who is about to join a convent. Troubles arise when another woman, Angella, also falls in love with Willmore. Meanwhile, Hellena's sister, Florinda, tries to escape an arranged marriage by her father and brother and plans to marry her true love, Colonel Belvile, instead. Another plotline involves an Englishman called Blunt who believes a girl called Lucetta has fallen in love with him. Although there are many confusing and dramatic storylines and events in the play, it has a fairly happy ending: Florinda and Belvile are married, and Willmore and Hellena also express vows of love.

Read the following extracts from Act 1 of the play, in which Pedro (Florinda's brother) speaks to her about the arranged marriage:

Pedro Good morrow, Sister. Pray, when saw you your Lover Don Vincentio?

Florinda I know not, Sir - Callis, when was he here? for I consider it so little, I know not when it was.

Pedro I have a Command from my Father here to tell you, you ought not to despise him, a Man of so vast a Fortune, and such a Passion for you.

Florinda A Passion for me! 'tis more than e'er I saw, or had a desire should be shown - I hate Vincentio, and I would not have a Man so dear to me as my Brother follow the ill Customs of our Country, and make a Slave of his Sister - And Sir, my Father's Will, I'm sure, you may divert.

Pedro I know not how dear I am to you, but I wish only to be rank'd in your Esteem, equal with the English Colonel Belvile. Why do you frown and blush? Is there any Guilt belongs to the Name of that Cavalier?

Florinda I'll not deny I value Belvile: when I was expos'd to such Dangers as the licens'd Lust of common Soldiers threatned, when Rage and Conquest flew thro the City - then Belvile, this Criminal for my sake, threw himself into all Dangers to save my Honour, and will you not allow him my Esteem?

Pedro Yes, pay him what you will in Honour - but you must consider Don Vincentio's Fortune, and the Jointure he'll make you.

Florinda Let him consider my Youth, Beauty and Fortune; which ought not to be thrown away on his Age and Jointure.

Activities

Arranged marriages are part of many cultures and traditions to this day, and can be just as successful as other forms of marriage/partnership. **Discuss with a partner/in small groups the advantages and disadvantages of arranged marriages.** What might be the benefits to this form of relationship (for individuals and families)? What are the problems?

In pairs, act out an improvised scene between Florinda and her father, Florinda and Hellena, or Florinda's father and Colonel Belville in which one person argues for the arranged marriage and the other argues against it.

(Ext.) Imagine you are a close friend of Florinda and write a letter advising her what to do. Should she speak to her father and brother about how she feels? How could she approach the situation? Help her to understand both sides of the argument.

Key terms and definitions

- Cavalier** - a supporter of King Charles I in the English Civil War
- rover** - a person who spends their time wandering
- convent** - a Christian community of nuns living together
- arranged marriage** - a marriage planned and agreed by the families or guardians of the couple concerned]

