

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

Faculty of arts

Department of English and Literary Studies

AN ASSIGNMENT TO BE SUBMITTED IN TOTAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE COURSE (ELS214)

ENGLISH LITERATURE; THE NEO CLASSICAL PERIOD

Topic;

Compare and contrast John Webster's 'The Duchess of Malfi' and
Aphra Ben's 'The Rover' as a Jacobean revenge tragedy and
restoration comedy respectively

BY

EZEJA, MARTHA CHINONSO

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LECTURER; MR. ODOH ONYEKA

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Comparing John Websters The Duchess of Malfi and Aphra Bens The Rover

A Jacobean Revenge Tragedy is a play that expresses dark mood, full of revenge, trauma, oppressions, torture, insanity and always death at the end. Restoration comedy is a play that centers on beauty/sexual attractions, selfish desire, it doesn't say what is right but criticizes the good in order to bring out the truth/good work. There are lots of similarities between the two plays The Duchess of Malfi and The Rover, Ferdinand and his brother Cardinal in The Duchess of Malfi, they have so much interest on their sister's fortune, they want to use their sister to acquire more wealth. They protect their royal interest. They punish their sister because she failed to marry a wealthy man. Also in The Rover, Florinda's father also pushes her to marry an old rich man just for him to acquire more wealth; he is just doing it for his love for money and other expensive things. He doesn't care about his daughters feelings, all he want is money. This is called Machiavellian principle where you use what you have and get what you want by all means.

Deceit and Disguise is also seen in the two plays, The Rover took place at carnival time and brims with masks and disguises, from the gypsy costumes that Helena, Florinda, and Valeria wear to Don Antonio and Don Pedro's comedy of mistaken identities to Lucetta's robbery of Blunt. The play does not take a moral stance on disguise, since it is used used by moral and immoral characters alike. In the Duchess of Malfi, a false front is an obvious symbol of Bosola. The distinction between what he say and how he acts is so vast that even the audience who is given access to his private thoughts through soliloquies and asides has trouble understanding his motivations. He is a spy, constantly disguising his motives and his true feelings. The two plays centers on people of noble birth. Ferdinand, Cardinal and the Duchess are of royal birth that's why Ferdinand thinks Antonio's class is not worthy match for the Duchess. Also in The Rover, we see people of quality and noble birth. The two plays started as a love story.

Contrast John Websters The Duchess of Malfi and Aphra Bens The Rover

In Rover, prostitution is rampant to their ladies, they have sex at their convenient time and anywhere they like, yet it is not seen as an immoral act. Lucceta and Angelica are prostitutes yet they are not treated as sinners. Nobody questions them. But in Revenge tragedy, it is very difficult to get such women with such attitudes. The Duchess was killed just because she married a man of her choice. Also insanity in revenge tragedy when Fedinard lost his mind and is afflicted with lycanthropia, he believes he is a wolf. There is no such behavior in restoration comedy.

In revenge tragedy, there is trauma, Duchess is tortured, and she undergoes trauma because of love, they showed her the dead body of her family and when they realized she is not feeling the pains. In The Rover, there is no torture, and no trauma. There is no punishment and maltreatment.

Lucceta in The Rover, is a prostitute, sexually attracts Blunt in order to make a way with his money. It is among the features of restoration comedy, where beauty/sexual attractions is means to acquire wealth. Such is not also seen in Revenge tragedy.

In The Rover, Blunt also sees love as a game, most of the characters in restoration comedy sees love as a game in which few is likely to win. But in Jacobean revenge tragedy, love is seen as passion not a game.

