

Synopsis of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, adapted by Josh Costello

The scene is the bedroom of two teenage girls – Hellena is perhaps 13, and her older sister might be 15 (though they will likely be played by older actresses). The room is dominated by a largish loft bunkbed. The room isn't cluttered exactly, but it is filled with the detritus of girlhood: stuffed animals, old Barbie dolls, diaries, posters, and a large number of books – the girls are clearly readers. A Shakespeare collection figures prominently.

At rise, the older sister and her two friends have hung a sheet across the bottom bunk, creating a makeshift fort; their shadows play against the sheet, cast by flashlights from inside the fort. Hellena is on the top bunk, reading a book by moonlight through a window and eavesdropping on the older girls' conversation.

Hellena attempts to horn in on her sister's clique in various ways; she tries to engage her sister in a game involving Shakespeare quotes, and eventually pulls down the sheet entirely. The older girls have been talking about their crushes, and Hellena gets them to tell her how they each feel about love – the older sister is somewhat innocent, one of the friends is adventurous but says that men shouldn't be trusted, and the other friend says that women should take control.

In asking about love, the irrepressible Hellena begins to use lines from Shakespeare and from the opening scene of Aphra Behn's 17th-century play, *The Rover*. The older sister, reluctant at first to let her friends see how much she enjoys this, winds up playing along in this game of language. Hellena draws the other two girls into the game as well – they take on other characters from *The Rover* and begin acting out the story, using props and costumes from a toychest, as if making it up as they go along. Hellena and her sister play the sisters Hellena and Florinda, matching their real-life relationship. The adventurous girl plays Willmore, the titular Rover, a man who falls in love with every woman he sees – by playing this role, the girl is trying to show the other girls that this is how men behave. The other friend is tricked into taking on the role of Angelica, a courtesan – but she then uses this role to show a powerful woman who uses her beauty and wit to control men.

Aphra Behn's *The Rover* is a story about the power of imagination. Hellena, the heroine, escapes her fate and wins her love by dressing up in various Carnival costumes and disguises. Over the course of this play, the four girls use their imaginations – as well as dress-up costumes scavenged from around the bedroom – to deal with their own relationships and to explore their questions about love and growing up.

As the game progresses, the girls get more and more caught up in their characters and the story. At one point, caught up in a romantic moment, the girl playing Angelica kisses the girl playing Willmore full on the mouth; this moment opens her up for teasing from her friend, and also serves to mirror and support Angelica's reluctant infatuation with Willmore in Aphra Behn's play. Every moment in the play works on both levels – Aphra Behn's story serves as a way for the girls to further their own agendas with each other, and the girls' agendas mirror and support the underlying themes of Aphra Behn's play. Sometimes this is humorous, especially in scenes involving peripheral characters played by stuffed animals and Barbie dolls. Other times it is much more serious: in proving her point about men, the girl playing Willmore has him attack Florinda, along with other deeds that threaten to force the other girls to drop out of the game to stop her.

Towards the end of the play, Angelica threatens Willmore with a pistol. In the game, the girl playing Angelica pulls a can of pepper spray from her backpack and seems to be about to use it on her friend. The girls use Aphra Behn's words to work through this crisis. The play ends with a pair of marriages, representing for the girls a reconciliation which they have achieved through the power of their imaginations. In the final moments, the sheet is hung over the lower bunk once again, and this time Hellena is allowed to join her sister and their friends. Just as Aphra Behn's Hellena uses her imagination to win her love and change her situation, our Hellena uses imagination to win the approval of her sister and her friends.