Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene in the Restoration Theatre

Dawn Lewcock

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*Includes several rare photographs
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Description

Usually recognised as the first professional woman writer, Aphra Behn (1640–1689) has become a popular subject for academic study. Most scholars have concentrated on her poetry, her short stories, and her one full-length novel, finding fuel for arguments that suggest she was an early feminist or a proponent of anti-racism. Although there have been examinations of individual plays, the prefaces and epistles, as well as studies, none examine her plays against aspects of the cultural context of the time and the political background, which have usually been used as examples supporting a particular argument, in relation to certain events of the time. No one has considered her simply as a dramatist, or as one of the most prolific and popular amongst her contemporaries working in the theatre at a particular time in theatrical history, nor has anyone discussed how her plays reflect and use the changing staging methods to convey their themes. Moreover, because of her comparatively enormous output and her exceptionally detailed stage directions, Behn can be considered as an exemplar of the changes that occurred in the ways of staging on the Restoration stage. This is not something which has been done before.
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Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre

Description (Continued)

The study considers the ways in which Behn has constructed her plays and used their staging to ensure the perceptions and apprehensions she wants from that audience. It considers the ways in which her use of the scenic stage developed from contemporary staging, acting styles, and changing stage conventions and how she used these to contribute to the reception and understanding of her plays by the audience. This book thus considers the theatrical impact on the audience in the use of painted settings, discoveries and disclosure, disguises and dark scenes. The audience’s reactions to events on stage are as much part of the theatrical experience as the dialogue and actions of the players, and are based on their implicit understanding of the relationship of their own life experiences to those shown on stage. And in almost all her plays Aphra Behn was showing the restoration audience their own lives and behaviour writ large.

This is an important book for those in theatre, literature, and women’s studies.

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About the Author

Dawn Lewcock recently retired from teaching the history of theatre and drama for Cambridge University, Institute of Continuing Education. She gained a teaching diploma in Speech and Drama from the London Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 1976, a BEd (Hons Cantab) in 1982, as a mature student, followed by a PhD in 1987. She contributed to Aphra Behn Studies (CUP 1996), acted as an adviser, provided six entries for the Continuum Encyclopaedia of British Literature (2003), and wrote on English Pantomime for Audience Participation (Praeger 2003) She has published in Theatre Notebook, Speech and Drama, as well as the online journals, Participations and Literary Encyclopedia, published by the University of East Anglia.