

The Family in the Works of Aphra Behn

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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For my mother, father and sister.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the family in Aphra Behn's work by the use of the feminist theory within the historical context and by placing Behn's work in the Restoration theatre activity. Specifically, I argue that Behn manipulates and challenges early modern ideas of the family in her work. By using the feminist theory within the historical context, this thesis demonstrates that Behn exploits the contradictions between different types of primary sources—diaries and memoirs, on the one hand, and conduct books, on the other—and represents the contemporary family as both oppressing to women and vulnerable to change. By the use of the feminist theory within the historical context too, this thesis reveals that Behn brings early modern women's challenge to patriarchal restrictions to the fore in her work. Placing Behn's work in the Restoration theatre activity enables this study to show that Behn was influenced by the Restoration theatre changes and made use of the changes to serve her women's empowerment purposes.

Although there are many studies that discuss feminist issues in Behn's writings, the bulk of these to date have not paid enough attention to her engagement with and challenge to familial relationships; their restrictions, conflicts and dynamics. This thesis is the first full-length study that examines in depth the family theme in a significant number of Behn's works. It explores the interaction of family members with issues of sexuality, as represented in Behn's poems, 'The Disappointment' and 'The Golden Age', and in her plays, *The Rover* (1677) and *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679). It explores the interactions of family members with women's choice of marriage and divorce, as represented in *The Emperor of The Moon* (1687), *The Forced Marriage* (1670) and *The False Count* (1681). Finally, it explores the interactions of family members with issues of money and traditional socioeconomic marriage, as represented in *The Lucky Chance* (1686), *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678) and *The City Heiress* (1682).

In her work, Behn both criticises and challenges the traditional family. She defies the limitation of libertinism to men and imagines libertine women who acknowledge their desire and pursue it, marrying their equals in libertinism. Behn challenges fathers' control over daughters' choice in marriage by validating women's right to choose their husbands. Finally, Behn expands control of financial and economic activities to women, portraying mothers who are aware of the importance of money and help their children to advance financially, and depicting wives as merchants and traders who have financial skills.

By exploring the representation of the family in Behn's works, this thesis contributes to studies of the family in the seventeenth century. In particular, it enriches the field by focusing on women's conceptions of the family. In addition, this research contributes to Behn studies by arguing that there is a shift in Behn's gender discussion: while Behn was less daring in her resistance and attack to patriarchy in her earlier plays, she was more adventurous in representing women who consider wealthy widowhood and independency their goals in life in her later plays.

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Introduction

The family is a rich theme in many Restoration plays. These plays depict the experience of family life in all of its diversity, including representations of forced marriages, courtships, and relationships between widows and their suitors. Yet, in the hands of Aphra Behn, the family theme is uniquely challenged and manipulated. In her depiction of the family, Behn challenges the father-daughter relationship and the absolute authority of the father in the family. She also examines the brother-sister relationship and questions the inequality between the brother and the sister in expressing their sexuality. Finally, her portrayal of the husband-wife relationship censures the inequality between the husband and the wife concerning money and property ownership.

Many scholars note that Aphra Behn is one of the prominent female writers and protofeminists of the seventeenth century and her work is a fruitful site for different critical discussions. In 1929, Virginia Woolf famously wrote:

All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is most scandalously but rather appropriately in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds. It is she – shady and amorous as she was – who makes it not quite fantastic to say to you tonight: Earn five hundred a year by your wits.¹

Behn here is recognised and memorialised by an iconic feminist figure, Virginia Woolf. Woolf draws our attention to Behn because, like Woolf herself, Behn challenged patriarchal obstacles and established herself as a female author. More recently, Jonathan Goldberg

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'A Room of One's Own', in *The Selected Work of Virginia Woolf* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition Limited, 2007), pp. 561-634 (p. 604).

glossed Woolf's idea of public and commercial success, rather than traditional 'feminine' virtues, as the distinguishing feature of Behn's example by noting that 'Behn's writing allows for ways of thinking about gender – and for a feminist politics – that has no need for the legend of good women'.² From Woolf forward, studies have started to focus on Behn's life and emphasise her distinguished writing career. More recent studies, however, have focused on her work for its capacity to promote discussions of the complexity of social and political affairs.

Following Woolf's claim of the significance of Behn's work, early studies of Behn's work engaged in biographical criticism. Among these studies are Vita Sackville-West's *Aphra Behn: The Incomparable Astraea* (1927), George Woodcock's *The Incomparable Aphra: A Study of Mrs Aphra Behn* (1948), Maureen Duffy's *The Passionate Shepherdess* (1977), and Janet Todd's *The Secret Lift of Aphra Behn* (1996). Studies such as these, which focus on analysing and criticising Behn's work in relation to her life, undermine the significance of Behn's work. Margret Ezell notes that early modern women writers, in the first decades of the twentieth century, were treated as 'both worthy of attention yet of comparatively limited abilities'.³ Studies of Aphra Behn, for example, were contextualised 'with a mixture of defiant praise for her life and apologetic dismissal of her works'.⁴ Referring to the studies of John Doran (1864) and Ernest Baker (1905), Ezell notes that even though:

Behn achieved visibility again in Woolf's generation, [...] the critical apparatus applied to her works – the attempt to fit her within an existing

² Jonathan Goldberg, *Desiring Women Writing: English Renaissance Examples* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 72.

³ Margaret J. M. Ezell, 'Invisibility Optics Aphra Behn, Esther Inglis and the Fortunes of Women's Works', in *A History of Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. by Patricia Phillippy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 27-45 (p. 33).

⁴ Ezell, 'Invisibility', p. 40.

model of critical evaluation and her failure in comparison to male canonical writers – established the vocabulary to lessen her significance and even paradoxically to support her erasure.⁵

Moreover, biographical criticism of Behn's work fails to discuss the complexity of Behn's writings. Ezell's survey of the recovery and reception of Behn's work notes that although Virginia Woolf may have wished flowers for Behn's grave in order to acknowledge her as the first professional female writer, 'Woolf and her contemporaries also forged an image of Behn which established a pattern of directing critical attention away from her works and her audience'.⁶ Biographical criticism, then, makes Behn's work appear as trivial and less significant than her contemporary male authors' work.

Late twentieth century scholarship on Behn's writings, however, pays attention to the work of Behn itself, reading it in its context and discussing it in dialogue with other discourses. Ezell discusses the change in scholarship on Behn's writings and other early modern women writers' work:

By changing the frame through which early modern women's texts are read to include the material cultures of manuscript and print practices as well as appreciating how they challenge traditional definitions of genre, recent criticism seeks alternative narratives embracing multiple literary traditions rather than tidy inclusion into a single, dominant pre-existing one.⁷

Ezell stresses the significance of the change and points the direction of future research, including this thesis:

⁵ Ezell, 'Invisibility', p. 41.

⁶ Ezell, 'Invisibility', p. 33.

⁷ Ezell, 'Invisibility', p. 42.

If women's works, from Esther Inglis's unique books for courtiers to Aphra Behn's risqué representations of changing manners for the popular stage and page, are to be kept viable in scholarly conversations and visible in the classroom, it must be because of what we see and value in them: neither their anomalous nature nor their female uniformity, but their sparkling multiplicity; not the way they bulk up traditional lists and gracefully yield to traditional models, but the dazzling ways in which they disrupt both and challenge us to see our own assumptions, aesthetic as well as historical.⁸

Behn's scholarship reflects changes in early modern women's studies more broadly. Patricia Phillippy discusses the 'second wave' recovery of early modern English women writers and their works, noting that 'critics have generally embraced rather than refused the taxonomy [...] emergent from the catalogue tradition which presupposes and dictates the separate history and trajectory of women's writing from men's'.⁹ The methodology of separating women's writing from men's affects early modern women's studies negatively as it results in a unified inclusive history addressing a limited audience.¹⁰ In contrast, contemporary scholarship in the field considers literature as a cultural document. Phillippy writes:

Sharing with cultural materialism an understanding of literature as both a product of and an agent in culture, late twentieth-century criticism stressed the changing historical and material contexts of writing and, responding to the non-traditional forms often employed by women, embraced the view of

⁸ Ezell, 'Invisibility', p. 45.

⁹ Patricia Phillippy, 'Introduction: Sparkling Multiplicity', in *A History of Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. by Patricia Phillippy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1-24 (p. 13).

¹⁰ Phillippy, 'Introduction: Sparkling Multiplicity', p. 13.

literary text as cultural documents.¹¹

Considering literature as a cultural document helps to acknowledge authorship as situated and collaborative. Phillippy comments on the positive effects of collaboration on early modern studies, ‘by acknowledging the collaborative transmission of much of early modern women’s writing need not be an exclusive history, nor need it address an exclusive audience’.¹² Thus, collaboration, as a theoretical frame, offers a more accurate and beneficial view of early modern women’s writing than biographical interpretation.

Collaboration is a condition of Behn’s writing. Behn, as a playwright, is always writing in a collaborative medium, since her scripts are performed by persons other than herself: theatre is never a one-woman production. Also, there are a number of Behn’s plays and poems that are borrowed from other writers, but edited by her for woman-empowering purposes. Examples of these are discussed in this thesis, including ‘The Disappointment’, and *The Feigned Courtesans*. This collaborative nature of Behn’s work means that it needs to be explored in dialogue with other discourses in order to recognise its complexity and engagement with cultural issues of the time.

Late twentieth century scholarship has explored topics in Behn’s works, most often studying Behn’s relationship to racism and slavery in *Oroonoko*. Ramesh Mallipeddi, for instance, compares the position of *Oroonoko* in Africa with his position in slavery in order to argue that Behn criticises slavery: ‘as an honourable prince, *Oroonoko* is in full possession of his royal person. But under slavery, in the wake of his extirpation from Coramantien, he is alienated not only from all claims of birth and lineage, but also most immediately from his

¹¹ Phillippy, ‘Introduction: Sparkling Multiplicity’, p. 4.

¹² Phillippy, ‘Introduction: Sparkling Multiplicity’, p. 14.

own body'.¹³ Similarly, Joanna Lipking notes that *Oroonoko* challenges categorising by comparing the hero of the novel La Calprenede's Oroondates in *Cassandra*.¹⁴

Alternatively, some scholars find Behn's work to be an expression of her political point of view. S. J. Wiseman writes, 'while Behn remains unusual in being a woman in this sphere [...] her texts can be seen as actively participating in the dominant political and literary discourse of her period'.¹⁵ Melinda S. Zook is more specific about Behn's Royalist sympathies:

Her poems, particularly those on state occasions, are a better indicator of Behn's true loyalties. Prior 1685, her political verses focused primarily on the cavalier image. After 1685, the year of both the accession of James II to the throne and the death of the Duke of Monmouth, she dedicated to her political poetry to the cause of the monarchy.¹⁶

This study, however, finds that although Behn supports the patriarchal Royalism, her plays resist objectification of women in marriage and the traditional family.

Most relevant to this research are the many scholars who focus on the feminist discussion sustained in Behn's work. Heidi Hutner argues that Behn criticises patriarchy's construction of female bodies and its devaluation of the female body as 'other'. Hutner writes, 'Behn utilises the construction of the sexualised whore to subvert the ideology of

¹³ Ramesh Mallipeddi, 'Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Sympathy in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 45.4 (2012), 475-496 (p. 476).

¹⁴ Joanna Lipking, 'Others', Slaves, and Colonists in *Oroonoko*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 166-187.

¹⁵ S. J. Wiseman, *Aphra Behn* (Northcote: Writers and their Work, 2007), p.8.

¹⁶ Melinda S. Zook, 'The Political poetry of Aphra Behn', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 46-67 (48).

passive, self-controlled, and commodified womanhood'.¹⁷ Along the same lines, Jane Spencer argues that Behn uses the typical sex comedy to non-conventional and feminist ends. In a number of her plays, Spencer notes, Behn questions women's submission and celebrates their 'deceitful, dissembling actions in pursuit of their desires'.¹⁸ This project, similarly, demonstrates that Behn's work criticises patriarchy in the family. At the same time, Behn's work resists the docile female role by portraying witty, rebellious and autonomous daughters, wives and mothers. This study explores Behn's work, using the feminist theory within the historical context. By using feminist theory within the historical context, this study explores to what extent Behn resists the traditional family and empowers women, points that signify the importance of her work.

Although there are many studies on Behn and her discussion of feminist issues, the bulk of these to date have not paid enough attention to her engagement with and challenge of familial relationships; their restrictions, conflicts and dynamics. This thesis is the first full-length study that examines in depth the family theme in a significant number of Behn's works (eight plays and two poems). My work analyses the family theme in Behn's writings and argues that Behn is one of the few writers who criticises patriarchally-based family relationships in her time. Her work exposes the unequal distribution of power between the husband and wife, and the oppression and harmful effects it has on women. Behn challenges these family dynamics by producing strikingly empowered female characters who deploy wit and scheming to grant themselves their rights within the institution of the family. In destabilising the family, the cornerstone of the patriarchal society, Behn affirms her

¹⁷ Heidi Hutner, 'Revesioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II', in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993), pp. 102-120 (p. 103).

¹⁸ Jane Spencer, "'Deceitm Dissembling, all that's Woman": Comiic Plot and Female Action in *The Feigned Courtesanas*', in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993), pp. 86-102 (p. 100).

eagerness to construct a space for the articulation of female desire; for women's choice as to whether to marry and with whom; and women's abilities to be financially active and independent.

This thesis argues that there is a shift in Behn's discussions of the family, marriage and sexuality in her plays. At the beginning of her career, Behn is less daring in her resistance to patriarchy as she depicts challenging heroines who use plots, gossips and alliances to rebel against their controlling fathers, resist forced marriages and pursue sexual freedom throughout the plays, but she ends the plays with marriages based on mutuality. By marrying their equal lovers, those heroines do not break wholly free from cultural constraints. Towards the end of her career, however, Behn depicts heroines who consider wealthy widowhood and independency their goals in life and not love and marriage. Representing love and marriage as not central to woman's life and advocating for independency show that Behn is more daring in her resistance to patriarchy in her later plays.

Although Behn holds a progressive theory of the family, she holds a conservative view of politics. In other words, while she challenges patriarchy in the households, she supports patriarchal Royalism in the court. Behn is not considered a significant writer for holding contradictory opinions, but her challenge of the traditional family, forced marriage and the traditional role of the mother, support for female sexual freedom and women's independency in her plays are considered fantastic achievements, especially if we take into account that they were discussed hundreds of years before the first feminist movement.

In the following section, I discuss Behn as a female writer in the Restoration period and her challenges in the writing field. This discussion suggests Behn's motives in demanding equality between women and men, especially in the family, and her reasons for sometimes presenting independency as better choice for women than love and marriage.

I. Aphra Behn as a Female Writer

Aphra Behn is one of the leading female writers of her time. Angeline Goreau, agrees with Woolf's view of Behn as 'the first woman to live by her pen'.¹⁹ Behn's commercial success is emphasised in Derek Hughes's observation that Behn is the third fully professional dramatist of her time.²⁰ Being the first English professional female writer and a successful dramatist of her time made Behn the subject of the biographical studies mentioned above; works that distract readers from Behn's writing toward her life story. Unlike women writers of her time, who used pseudonyms or brought their works to press anonymously, Behn wrote using her own name. In the seventeenth century, a woman who published risked an exposure that was considered akin to prostitution: as Laurie Finke explains, a 'woman who lived a public life in the seventeenth century, whether as a publishing writer, a playwright, or an actress, was sexually suspect, as available for hire as any prostitute because she was not the exclusive private property of a man'.²¹ Indeed, writing for theatre was more challenging for Behn than writing poetry, because her plays were performed on the stage and thus exposed her publicly with a directness less mediated than the availability of the printed author to the reader.

Behn establishes herself as a leading female writer and defends her right to authorship in many of the prefaces, prologues and epilogues to her plays. In her self-defence, Behn deploys five strategies. Firstly, she refers to powerful women and mythological figures to legitimise her position as a writer. Behn cleverly invokes Pope Joan who is a major and controversial character in literature. According to the popular legend, Pope Joan was a

¹⁹ Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 115.

²⁰ Derek Hughes, 'Aphra Behn and the Restoration theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 29-45 (p.30).

²¹ Laurie Finke, 'Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary Theory', in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 17-43 (p. 25).

talented and learned Englishwoman who disguised herself as a man and assumed the papacy as John VIII. Giovanni Boccaccio, in his *De mulieribus Claris* (1362), describes Joan as a deceptive and immoral woman because she acted against conventions.²² In contrast, Christine de Pizan knew about Pope Joan and defended women against men's misogynistic literature in her *City Of Ladies*.²³ Two centuries later, Alexander Cooke's *Pope Joane: A Dialogue between a Protestant and a Papist* (1610), proves the existence of Pope Joan.²⁴ Following this tradition, in the Prologue to her play, *Sir Patient Fancy: A Comedy* (1678), Behn uses the figure of Pope Joan but to discuss female authorship:

*And all those Lawrels are in pieces torn,
Which did ere while one sacred Head adorn.
Nay, even the Women now pretend to reign;
Defend us from a Poet [sic] Joan again.*²⁵

By referring to Pope Joan as Poet Joan, Behn is highlighting the struggle to which she herself is subject as a female writer in a male-dominated world. As Todd notes, Pope Joan 'formed a neat analogue to the poet Behn, who had dared to invade the male realm of dramatic poetry'.²⁶ In the Epilogue to *Sir Patient Fancy*, moreover, Behn writes:

We once were fam'd in Story, and cou'd write

²² Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans by Virginia Brown, (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2003). In this book, Brown writes about the early translation of *Famous Women* into English, 'Around 1440 there appeared a Middle English verse translation of twenty-one chapters, along with the Preface and Conclusion [...] There are three more translations from the sixteenth century: Henry Parker's English rendering, dedicated to Henry VIII, of forty-six lives from the *Famous Women*, and the Italian versions of Giuseppe Betussi and Luca Antonio Ridolfi'.

²³ Christine De Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 1405, trans. by Early Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1998).

²⁴ Alexander Cooke, *Pope Joane: A Dialogue Between a Protestant and a Papist* (London: R. Field, 1610).

²⁵ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy: a Comedy*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 6 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Prologue, ll. 13–16), p. 7.

²⁶ Janet Todd, *Aphra Behn: A Secret Life* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 230.

Equall to men; cou'd Govern, nay cou'd Fight.

We still have passive Valour, and can show

Wou'd Custom give us leave the Active too,

Since we no provocations want from you.²⁷

Behn here refers to the myth of the Amazons, which imagines women as able to govern and fight. By referring to the Amazons, Behn is arguing that women are able to take on a male role. She asks why women are not allowed to govern and fight as they used to do, and goes on to answer that if women were allowed to do so, they would show their skills and qualities, such as courage and bravery. By referring to the mythical character of Pope Joan and the myth of the Amazons, Behn argues by analogy that women are also able to take on the typically male role of writing.

Secondly, to legitimise her position as a writer, Behn exposes the motives for criticism that female poets used to face. In the Preface to *The Luckey Chance, or, An Alderman's Bargain* (1686), she suggests that those who criticise her work are indeed jealous of the success of her plays:

The Poets I heartily excuse, since there is a sort of Self-Interest in their Malice, which I shou'd rather call a witty Way they have in this Age, of Railing at everything they find with pain successful, and never to shew good Nature and speak well of anything; but when they are sure 'tis damn'd, then they afford it that worse Scandal, their Pity.²⁸

²⁷ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, (Epilogue, ll. 11–15), p. 79.

²⁸ Aphra Behn, *The Luckey Chance, or, An Alderman's Bargain*, in *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. by Jane Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), (Preface, ll. 4-8).

Because these critics are angry with and jealous of her success, they damn her plays with ‘the old never-failing scandal’.²⁹ By accusing the critics who attacks her of jealousy, Behn highlights her struggle and legitimises her position as a writer.

Thirdly, Behn attacks men by associating them with buffoonery and silliness. In the Epilogue to *Sir Patient Fancy*, she writes:

*For who but we, cou'd your Dull Fopperies bear,
Your Saucy Love, and your brisk Nonsense hear;
Indure your worse then womanish affectation,
Which renders you the Nuisance of the Nation;
Scorn'd even by all the Misses of the Town,
A jest to Vizard Mask, the Pitt-Buffoone;
A Glass by which th' admiring Country Fool
May learn to dress himself en [sic] Ridicule:
Both striving who shall most Ingenious grow
In Lewdness, Foppery, Nonsense, Noise and Show.³⁰*

At the same time, she points out that plays by male writers are boring and she suggests that it is the time for new and interesting plays:

*Your way of writing's out of Fashion grown.
Method, and Rule — you only understand,
Pursue that way of Fooling, and be Damn'd.
Your Learned Cant of Action, Time, and Place,
Must all give way to the unlabour'd farce.³¹*

²⁹ Aphra Behn, *The Luckey Chance*, (Preface, l. 12).

³⁰ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy: a Comedy*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 6 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Epilogue, ll. 14–23), p. 79.

³¹ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy: a Comedy*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 6 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Epilogue, ll. 34–38), p. 79.

‘For her own contemporaries,’ Paul Salzman notes, Behn ‘was a threatening figure who undermined certain assumptions about the masculine realms of letters, drama, politics, intrigue’.³² By attacking men and criticising their literary skills and work, Behn defends her profession as a female writer.

Fourthly, Behn claims that women are more skilful writers than many men. In the Epilogue to *Sir Patient Fancy*, she points out that women are capable of writing plays similar to those written by men, if not better:

*To all the Men of Witt we will subscribe:
But for you half Wits, you unthinking Tribe,
We'll let you see, what e're besides we doe,
How Artfully we Copy some of you:
And if you're drawn to th' life, pray tell me then
Why Women should not write as well as Men.*³³

Similarly, in the Preface to *The Dutch Lover* (1663), she writes, ‘*except our most unimitable Laureat, I dare to say I know of none [male poets] that write at such a formidable rate, but that a woman may well hope to reach their greatest highs [sic]*’.³⁴ In the Epilogue to *Sir Patient Fancy*, Behn directs her speech to men and announces that women not only have the right to participate in drama, but even, possibly, to correct it. She writes, when ‘*Your dancing Tester, Nut-meg and your Cups, I Out-does your Heroes and your Amorous fops*’.³⁵ By

³² Paul Salzman, ‘Introduction’, in *Aphra Behn: Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. by Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. ix-xxiv (ix).

³³ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy: a Comedy*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 6 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Epilogue, ll. 41–46), p. 80.

³⁴ Aphra Behn, *The Dutch Lover*, in *The works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 5 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Preface, ll. 131–132), p. 162.

³⁵ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy: a Comedy*, in *The works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 6 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Prologue, ll. 38–39), pp. 7-8.

presenting herself as both a writer equal to men in writing drama and correcting it, Behn legitimises her position in the literary field.

Fifthly, Behn attempts to legitimise her position as a female writer in the Restoration period by referring to Shakespeare. In the preface to *The Dutch Lover*, Behn aligns herself with Shakespeare, saying that, like him, she composes valuable dramatic works without classic education:

Plays have no great room for that which is mens great advantage over women, that is Learning: We all well know that the immortal Shakespears Playes (who was not guilty of much more of this than often falls to womens share) have better pleas'd the World than Johnsons [sic] works, though by the way 'tis said that Benjamin was no such Rabbi neither, for I am inform 'd his Learning was but Grammar high,³⁶

Like many early modern women writers, Behn argues that she is inspired by nature rather than art, that ‘musty rules of Unity, and God knows what besides, if they meant anything, they are enough intelligible, and as practicable by a woman’.³⁷ By aligning with Shakespeare and claiming that her talent, like his, is natural, Behn, defends her right to write literature.

Not only a leading writer, Aphra Behn is also one of the most prolific writers of her time. She experimented with different genres: prose fiction, poetry, and drama.³⁸ As a fiction writer, Behn is known for her novel *Oroonoko*. However, her *Love Letters* went through ten editions before 1740. As a playwright, Behn gained great success. She wrote seventeen plays in her seventeen-year career, most of which experiment with different dramatic genres, such as comedy, farce, tragedy and tragicomedy. Additionally, she experimented with the use of

³⁶ Aphra Behn, *The Dutch Lover*, in *The works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 5 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Preface, ll. 12–22).

³⁷ Aphra Behn, *The Dutch Lover*, in *The works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 5 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Preface, ll. 118–125), p. 126.

³⁸ Hughes, ‘Aphra Behn and the Restoration theatre’, p. 32.

the space in the theatre and the visual effects of performance. Analysing the effects of the theatrical elements in Behn's plays on her audience, Dawn Lewcock notes that 'she interweaves the staging with the dialogue to provide a visual commentary to the audience'.³⁹ Behn's use of visual effects is unique in the theatre of her era, insofar as she 'uses it to affect the perceptions of the audience,' as Lewcock puts it, 'and change their conception and comprehension of her plots and/or underlying themes'.⁴⁰

Beyond her technical innovations, Behn is one of the most influential writers of her time because her dramatic work takes up daring topics. In many, of which *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans* are probably the best known, Behn celebrates what in her time were considered rebellious ideas, such as female sexual happiness and marriage without family consent. As a result, her plays were generally thought of as immodest. For centuries, Behn's dramatic works were viewed as sinful and distasteful. Eighteenth century clergyman and voluminous social critic, Andrew Kippis, claims that:

The wit of her comedies seems to be generally acknowledged, and it is equally acknowledged that they are very indecent, on which account I have not thought myself under any obligation to peruse them. It would have been an unworthy employment, nicely to estimate a wit which, having been applied to the purposes of impiety and vice, ought not only to be held up in the utmost detestation, but consigned, if possible to eternal oblivion. It is some consolation to reflect that Mrs Behn's works are now little regarded her novels excepted, which, we suppose, have still many readers among that

³⁹ Dawn Lewcock, 'More for Seeing than Hearing: Behn and the Use of Theatre', in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. by Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 66-83 (pp. 66-67).

⁴⁰ Lewcock, 'More for seeing than Hearing', pp. 66-67.

unhappily too numerous a class of people who devour the trash of the circulating libraries.⁴¹

These criticisms were common until Woolf and her contemporaries drew attention to Behn as a professional writer.

As a product of her time, Behn's writing reflects many of the political issues in the period. Behn lived during the execution of Charles I in 1649, the so-called Popish Plot in 1678, the division of Charles II and Parliament, the Rye House plot and the beginnings of colonial imperialism with Britain at the helm. Behn incorporated many of these political issues into her works. Two of her most overtly political plays are *The Roundheads or, The Good Old Cause*, and *The City-Heiress: Or, Sir Timothy Treat-all*. In her dedication of *The City-Heiress* to Henry Howard (1655-1688), Behn announced her support for the Tories clearly by declaring that her play is 'in every part true Tory!'.⁴² In the Epilogue to *The Roundheads* (1681), she attacked the Whigs:

since I cannot fight, I will not faile To exercise my Tallent; that's to raile:
Yee Race of Hypocrites, whose Cloak of Zeal Covers the Knave that cants
for Common Weale, All Laws the Church and State to ruine brings, And
impudently set a Rule on Kings Ruine, destroy, all's good that you decree
By your Infallible Presbitery. Prosperous at first, in ill's you grow so vain,
You thought to Play the Old Game ore again.⁴³

⁴¹ Andrew Kippis, cited in Fidelis Morgan, *The Female Wits: Women Playwrights of the Restoration*, (London: Virago Press Limited, 1981), p. 22-23.

⁴² Aphra Behn, *The City-Heiress*, ed. by Jane Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), (Dedication).

⁴³ Aphra Behn, *The Roundheads*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 6 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Epilogue, ll. 8–11).

Behn, here, satirises the Whigs and depicts their last days in government as a period of chaos. By using her wit and satire, Behn represents the Whigs as a threat and supports the Tories.

As we have seen, Behn is a restless defender of her profession as female writer. Also, she is a skilful writer who experiments with different genres, and a challenging writer who takes on daring topics. Knowing that Behn criticises men's domination over literature helps us understand her criticism of the father's domination over the family. Also, knowing that Behn discusses daring and revolutionary ideas in her works underscores her manipulation and destabilisation of the family in her plays and poetry.

II. Methodology, Structure and Questions of the Thesis

Chapter 1 discusses the methodology of the thesis. The methodology of the thesis is to explore the representation of the family in Aphra Behn's work in the light of feminist theory within the historical context and by placing Behn's work in the Restoration theater activity. Surveying recent studies of early modern England, this thesis provides an overview of historical information about women's life in the seventeenth century, focusing particularly on subjects that Behn discusses in her work such as law, violence, work, gossip and alliance. To provide historical information about the family within the period of 1650s-1680s, this study draws upon primary sources from the period, such as conduct books, diaries and autobiographies. Alongside these primary sources, it uses historical studies in the early modern family by contemporary historians such as Ralph A. Houlbrooke (1984), Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (2007), who, as a group, argue that the family in the seventeenth century did not go through major changes; the stable bases of the family were hierarchy, mutuality and love. To place Behn's work in the Restoration theater activity, this thesis provides a picture of the Restoration theatre, the first professional actresses and Restoration plays. By employing feminist theory within the historical context and placing Behn's work

within the Restoration theatre activity, this thesis offers a reading of Behn's work that demonstrates the seeds of feminism found in it.

The following chapters are structured thematically. Chapter 2 explores the interaction of the family with issues of sexuality, as represented in Behn's poems, 'The Disappointment' and 'The Golden Age', and in her plays, *The Rover* (1677) and *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679). This chapter suggests that the contradiction between conduct books and more private sources, including autobiographies and diaries, allows Behn to destabilise the family's constraints over women's desire. It reveals that the plays criticise the father and the brother who use the emotions of love to possess authority over women and plan their futures as wives or nuns. At the same time, the plays depict daughters who resist the repression of the father and the brother over their desire by being vocal and libertine. Behn's poetry questions the secondary place assigned by men to women in lovemaking, which is one of the bases of marriage relationship.

Chapter 3 discusses the interaction of the family with women's choice of marriage and divorce, as represented in *The Emperor of The Moon* (1687), *The Forced Marriage* (1670) and *The False Count* (1681). This chapter traces the ways Behn exploits the distinction between theory and practice concerning the family and the ways she challenges the traditional roles of the father, the daughter, the husband and the wife concerning women's choice of marriage. The chapter reveals that the plays resist forced marriage by presenting alternatives such as marriage of equals and women's choice of divorce and remarriage. Besides this, the plays criticise heads of household who participate in forced marriages and describe them as unloving and uncaring. Moreover, the plays resist forced marriage by depicting rebellious daughters and wives who bond with other women, gossip and plot to avoid forced marriages and to achieve their ends.

Chapter 4 examines the interaction of the family with traditional socioeconomic marriage and women's relationship with money, as represented in *The Lucky Chance* (1686) and *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678) and *The City Heiress* (1682). This chapter suggests that the differences between didactic literature and diaries and autobiographies allow Behn to question the traditional roles of the father, the mother, the husband and the wife concerning financial matters. It reveals that the plays resist traditional socioeconomic marriage and the way fathers and husbands treat women as items of exchange between them. At the same time, it demonstrates that the plays imagine untraditional mothers who choose to be financially independent and help their children to advance financially. The plays also depict challenging heroines who use marriage as a tool to achieve their goals of wealthy widowhood.

In these chapters, this thesis answers several questions about Behn's representation of family. These questions are: How does Behn's work represent the family? How and why is the family problematic for women? What are the familial issues in the seventeenth century that Behn's work criticises and challenges? How does Behn's work construct a space for the articulation of female desire, choice of marriage and divorce and the ability to be financially active within family? What are the dramatic genres and techniques Behn uses to represent family? What are the poetic genres and techniques Behn uses to represent family?

By exploring the representation of the family in the work of Behn, this thesis contributes to studies of the family in the seventeenth century, particularly enriching the field by focusing on women's conception of the family. In addition, this research contributes to Behn's studies by arguing that there is a change in Behn's resistance to patriarchy. At the beginning of her career she is less daring as she depicts heroines who use plots and alliances to resist patriarchy and achieve their ends which is marrying their equal lovers. At the end of her career, she is more adventurous in her resistance to patriarchy as her heroines consider independency as their goal in life instead of marriage.

Chapter 1: Historical Context of Aphra Behn's Work

This chapter explores early modern women and family from a feminist point of view. It examines discussions of early modern women in recent studies, which show that early modern women's challenge to the oppression of the patriarchal system can be witnessed when we examine areas of struggle such as law and work, and also when we explore how women negotiated their position in the household and found ways to achieve their ends, through forming alliances and gossip circles. In its investigation of early modern family, this chapter brings on family discussions in sources within the period of 1660s-1680s such as conduct books, diaries and autobiographies alongside recent studies in early modern family. The chapter also gives a general overview of the Restoration theatre in terms of theatrical conventions and general trends by exploring Restoration theatre studies and Restoration plays. Exploring early modern women and family from a feminist point of view and giving a general overview of the Restoration theatre allow this study to explore in what ways Aphra Behn discusses, interrogates and questions issues regarding women, marriage and the family in her age.

I. Early Modern Women

In order to provide a rounded picture of women in early modern England, this thesis discusses recent studies that explore different aspects of their lives, focusing specifically on issues that Behn's work engages with, such as law, work, gossip and female alliances. This discussion is beneficial for this thesis because it helps us to understand to what extent Behn challenges the female traditional role and portrays women in powerful and controlling positions. This study supports and expands on contemporary research which illustrates that

although early modern women lived in a patriarchal society, they renegotiated their position and worked within the patriarchal system to gain agency and achieve their ends. That is to say, even though there was no real challenge to the patriarchal order, early modern women did not simply accept it on its own terms.

Before discussing early modern women's refusal to submit to patriarchy, an understanding of the social context is needed. The early modern society was for the most part patriarchal. Women of early modern England, Carole Levin and Joseph Ward note, 'were raised in a culture that assumed that men rightly and naturally governed society'.¹ Traditional gender roles were 'upheld by the law, pulpit, custom, and ale-house jokes'.² Because many men and women believed that traditional gender roles were natural, it is hardly a surprise to know that women did not take the challenge of patriarchy seriously. As Bernard Capp notes:

Most women knew their lives would be dominated by bearing and raising children, which may well have convinced them that gender roles were indeed naturally determined. Most single women were too poor and marginal to make effective use of their freedom. Women lacked the education to equip them for scholarly debate, and had no public forum.³

In addition to this, there were few positive role models for women who wanted to change their position as subordinates to men. Capp notes, 'few biblical figures offered roles that were both positive and appropriate'.⁴ The early modern woman, then, found herself in a patriarchal society that supports the inferiority of her position and naturalises it.

¹ Carole Levin and Joseph Ward, 'Introduction', in *Violence, Politics, and Gender in Early Modern England*, ed. by Joseph Ward, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1-16 (p. 1).

² Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2003), p. 15.

³ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 15.

⁴ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 15.

We cannot say however that patriarchy in the early modern period was formal and stable. Capp observes ‘England in this period was ‘patriarchal’ in the loose sense that its political, social, economic, religious, and cultural life was dominated by men’.⁵ He also notes, ‘if patriarchal values were never seriously threatened, their domination was less than total’.⁶ Similarly, Levin and Ward note, ‘men exerted considerable energy to keep the debates and controversies of the period their exclusive domain but, despite the sweeping claims they might make about their patriarchal power, they had to acknowledge that their authority over women was limited’.⁷ This instability of patriarchy appears in the way men expressed their anxiety about gender relations. Capp notes, ‘while all men believed that male supremacy was necessary and right, many saw their superiority as constantly under threat’.⁸ Masculine anxiety, he notes, appears in literature, ‘satires, sermons, plays, ballads, and jokes,’ reflecting ‘the fear that women did not genuinely accept male authority, dreamed of subverting it, and flouted it at every opportunity’.⁹ He finds that ‘the central theme of numerous pamphlets and verses expos[ed] an alleged female culture of manipulation, in which lessons on how to manage and deceive men were passed down from generation to generation’.¹⁰ Masculine anxiety appeared the most in men’s discussion of the family and the household. Men, Capp explains, expressed their frustration with women who wanted their own will. Inside the house, instructions of religion and law were not religiously followed.¹¹ Patriarchy in early modern England, then, was not as stable as it seems to be. Women had different ways to challenge its order which resulted in men’s anxiety about the stability of their position of power.

⁵ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 1.

⁶ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 16.

⁷ Levin and Ward, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

⁸ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 20.

⁹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 21.

¹⁰ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 22.

¹¹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 25.

Early modern women made use of the instability and informality of patriarchy and attempted to limit its function on their lives. Discussing women's attempt to limit patriarchy, Capp notes, 'the informal nature of patriarchal order could serve women's interests as well as men's, and enabled the resourceful to modify at least their own personal circumstances'.¹² These trials, however, were small and within the framework of patriarchy. They did not present a striking shift in system. Even though a number of women writers defended women's position in society, 'their aims were generally modest, and they argued from within the traditional intellectual framework'.¹³ Early modern women, then, could not break wholly free from cultural oppression, but at the same time, they did not accept it. They found different ways and seized any opportunity through which they could achieve their goals, even if within the system.

Law is one of the main areas of struggle for early modern women. Therefore, the intersection of law and gender in the early modern period is the focus of a number of studies. As with other aspects of life in a patriarchal society, the legal system was dominated by men in the period. One of the most marked examples of discrimination against women in law is the coverture law. Amy Louise Erickson explores women's marital condition and the law and finds that married women were more oppressed than single women because of the coverture law. According to Erickson, 'under the common law fiction of coverture (that a wife's legal identity was covered by her husband), an English woman upon marriage lost the great majority of her property to her husband, something which did not happen anywhere else in Europe'.¹⁴ The problem of coverture law intensifies in divorce cases. As Erickson observes, 'divorce and even separation were extremely problematic under coverture. [...] [in] England, the wife had no property of her own which could be returned to her, unless she had made a

¹² Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 2.

¹³ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Amy Louise Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', *History Workshop Journal*, 59.1 (2005) 1-16 (p. 3).

separate contract for the purpose'.¹⁵ The legal system in early modern period, then, was not helpful when it comes to women in cases of divorce and property.

Besides property and ownership, laws against violence were understood in terms of gendered concepts too. Levin and Ward note that because early modern claims of political authority were often expressed through violence, 'the right to the legitimate use of violence was a possession of most adult men, from the top to the bottom of the social hierarchy'.¹⁶ Simultaneously, Levin and Ward observe that there was a relation between using violence and patriarchy in the household, 'the right to violence had the potential to unite [men] in a shared, common responsibility to care for, and provide discipline to, the women and children in their families'.¹⁷ What is more, while men who used violence did not face serious consequences, Levin and Ward note, women who used violence faced bad consequences. They note that even though men in early modern England engaged in violent crimes more than women, it was not uncommon that they could avoid execution:

If men were found guilty of a capital crime they could claim benefit of clergy, the commonest method of avoiding execution. Benefit of clergy was available to the literate laymen in all cases of murder and felony. Once the claim was made, the prisoner would be asked to read a prescribed passage from a Psalter. Laymen could make this claim only once, after the successful plea a man was branded on the left thumb.¹⁸

When it came to violence against women, the consequences were not serious. Levin and Ward assert, 'many men were not even indicted, much less convicted, for violent crimes against women'.¹⁹ For example, while there were frequent cases of rape throughout the early

¹⁵ Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', p. 4.

¹⁶ Levin and Ward, *Violence, Politics, and Gender*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Levin and Ward, *Violence, Politics, and Gender*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Levin and Ward, *Violence, Politics, and Gender*, p. 4.

¹⁹ Levin and Ward, *Violence, Politics, and Gender*, p. 4.

modern period in England, ‘successful prosecution for rape was not. Only about 1 percent of the indicted felonies were for rape, and even then the conviction rate was notoriously low’.²⁰

In contrast to men, Levin and Ward observe the difficult consequences that women faced when they used violence:

A woman convicted of a capital crime could not make a similar plea [to men]. Her recourse was to plead pregnancy, but this was far harder to prove and had much less reliable results. Though some were reprieved, even a number of women who could move they were pregnant were executed after the birth of the child.²¹

Thus, even when they are in the wrong, men had easy ways to avoid punishment. What this shows is that the law in the early modern period was one of the areas where patriarchal order is expressed.

However, by a variety of means, it was possible for women to circumvent some of these legal restrictions in law, or at least to vary them. Studies that explore the law and its relation to gender illustrate that although men dominated the law in early modern England, women had their ways to empower and liberate themselves against its regulations. In his study of the relationship between women and law in the period, Tim Stretton decides to explore records from the Court of Requests. According to his study, these records are significant because they ‘contribute more than a fuller picture of how the legal system catered for, or failed to cater for, women. [...] in particular the attitudes of litigants, lawyers and judges towards women who came to court’.²² Beside records from the Court of Requests, Stretton supports his findings by exploring literary sources from the period, such as

²⁰ Levin and Ward, *Violence, Politics, and Gender*, p. 4.

²¹ Levin and Ward, *Violence, Politics, and Gender*, p. 4.

²² Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 9.

pamphlets, plays and poems. By exploring different sources, Stretton finds that early modern women refused to be passive victims of the restrictive law system and became 'active plaintiffs or vociferous defendants in a clutch of different law courts'.²³ By focusing on the Court of Requests, he notes that 'among its poor and rich clientele were many women. On average one third of the cases that came before the 'Masters', or judges, of Requests involved a female plaintiff or defendant'.²⁴ The number of women litigants becomes even more significant when we note that Requests was a central court and women had to travel to London from distant locations in order to reach it, and sometimes they had to stay in London for long periods of time waiting for their cases to be heard.²⁵ Stretton comments, 'the resulting image, of women travelling to the capital in numbers to wage law, already challenges long-standing impressions of closeted female domesticity'.²⁶ Not only that, but also in courts, the women's opponents were sometimes their own husbands.²⁷ Early modern women, then, were not passive in front of the legal obstacles. Despite the difficulty and restrictiveness of the law, early modern women were present in courts.

One of the most significant issues that early modern women had to face is the law of money and property ownership. In their collection of essays, Nancy Wright, Andrew Buck and Margaret Ferguson explore narratives about women who challenged the boundaries placed upon them by legal disabilities and find that 'the letter of the law was neither definitive nor irremediable'.²⁸ Because of that, 'both women and men produced a variety of societal constructions that analysed different roles for women and constituted diverse models

²³ Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, p. xii.

²⁴ Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, p. 7.

²⁵ Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, p. 7.

²⁶ Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, p. 7.

²⁷ Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, p. 28.

²⁸ Nancy Wright, Andrew Buck and Margaret Ferguson, 'Introduction', in *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England*, ed. by. Nancy Wright, Andrew Buck and Margaret Ferguson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2004), pp. 3-20 (p. 4).

of property and ownership'.²⁹ They note, however, that even though the agency that women exercised in these roles was 'limited and temporary', it 'requires analysis and explanation if we are to understand the diverse consequences of property law for women in early modern England'.³⁰ Focusing on contemporary narratives of property, they find that some early modern women played the roles of subjects and agents in commercial and domestic economies. In their study, they present several examples of women who 'acted as a subject of property'.³¹ They note that, even though it is believed that early modern women played the roles of objects when it came to finance, 'factual narratives about [women's] lived experiences as businesswomen and heiresses [...] as well as their own and their contemporaries' writings tell different stories about their relationship to property'.³² Focusing specifically on the coverture law and the discussions of women's money and property in marriage, Erickson notes, the coverture was not absolute as assumptions, 'Coverture sounds, and certainly could be, draconian. But in practice many, perhaps most, English families found perfectly legal ways to get around it'.³³ Because there were legal ways around it, 'either through private contracts or through the London-based courts of equity rather than those of common law', coverture law lasted in England until the later nineteenth century.³⁴ For example, early modern families used a variety of complex forms of property transfer in order to ameliorate the effects of coverture. 'These bonds, contracts, settlements, trusts, and so forth,' she notes, 'circumvented common-law coverture in order to provide some financial security for the many different parties interested in a marriage: for women who married, especially in the event of their separation or widowhood'.³⁵ These complex written

²⁹ Wright, 'Introduction', p. 5.

³⁰ Wright, 'Introduction', p. 8.

³¹ Wright, 'Introduction', p. 6.

³² Wright, 'Introduction', p. 7.

³³ Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', p. 13.

³⁴ Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', p. 5.

³⁵ Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', p. 5.

instruments ‘were not, in and of themselves, negotiable financial instruments. But they helped to establish a climate in which the concept of legal security for notional concepts of property became commonplace’.³⁶ Early modern businesswomen, heiresses and married women with the help of their families, then, tried to benefit from the instability in the law to provide themselves financial security and property ownership.

The decision to work was another way by which early modern women challenged patriarchal oppression. Katrina Honeyman and Jordan Goodman note, in early modern England, working women ‘were generally more prone than men to long periods of underemployment and unemployment, and enjoyed few of the security buffers built into men’s work’.³⁷ Michelle Dowd explores the intersection of work and gender in the period and contends that ‘in the ongoing process of imagining work as a specifically gendered category of analysis, the early modern period was one of particular urgency’.³⁸ She finds that although men tried to dominate the work field in early modern England, ‘middling class and even elite women were often directly involved in England’s labour economy at some point in their lives, even if their work was temporary’.³⁹ Women’s work and the understanding of working woman were influenced by the historical changes taking place in the period. According to Dowd, early modern age was a period of remarkable economic change for women who sought employment. To summarise the reasons behind this economic change, she writes:

The population of England was growing exponentially, the country was witnessing substantial expansion in trade and consumerism, and, as the

³⁶ Erickson, ‘Coverture and Capitalism’, p. 35.

³⁷ Katrina Honeyman and Jordan Goodman, ‘Women’s Work, Gender Conflict, and Labour Markets in Europe, 1500-1900’, *Economic History Review*, 44.4 (1991), 608-628.

³⁸ Michelle Dowd, *Women’s Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 4.

³⁹ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 3.

economy shifted gradually from a feudal economy to one more consistently based on wage labor, guild were increasingly being replaced by labor contracts and by more casual economic arrangements.⁴⁰

These changes, she notes, ‘gave way to more varied and informal working arrangements, particularly for female workers’.⁴¹ Several types of work, such as midwifery and wet-nursing, housework, and educational work changed significantly.⁴²

The varied working opportunities that appeared for women ‘both transformed and deeply troubled’ the society in early modern England.⁴³ The fundamental transformation of the nature of England’s workforce, Dowd comments, ‘brought concerns about women’s work and cultural authority to the fore in new and pressing ways’.⁴⁴ The increase of female labourers generated ‘new discursive formulations of women’s economic, political, and religious authority’.⁴⁵ Working women, for example, challenged patriarchy in the household:

[They] could often pose potential challenges to household governance due to their anomalous place within early modern social hierarchy: they were expected to possess and demonstrate a range of skills and forms of cultural authority, and yet they were also subordinate to the master or family for whom they worked.⁴⁶

The challenge they cast can be viewed as ‘a testament to a “crisis” of order and gender relations’.⁴⁷ Narratives about women’s work, Dowd notes, reveal women’s sense of themselves and their authority. Exploring narratives by early modern dramatists that describe

⁴⁰ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 1.

⁴¹ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 3.

⁴² Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 16.

⁴³ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 4.

the lives of working women, she notes that work is a significant subject in discussing the gender relations in any age because it is an important factor in shaping them, ‘work is clearly one of these points, a vexed social and economic issue that has prompted the renegotiation and reformulation of gender relations at various historical moments both well before and well after the early modern period’.⁴⁸ Particularly, she observes, work is a significant subject in discussing the gender relations in the early modern age because it reveals women’s authority. Although early modern women’s work was influenced by the historical changes in the period, early modern women’s work troubled the culture and the society.

Women not only negotiated their positions in the law and the work field, but also negotiated their position in the household and found ways to achieve their ends, through forming alliances and gossip circles. Exploring the varied forms of women’s alliances in early modern England, Susan Frye and Karen Robertson note that female alliances have received less attention than male alliances: ‘the relations among women, whether competitive or supportive, have proved not only less visible but also more difficult to reconstruct, often because women did not formally record their activities or seek memorialization in material structures’.⁴⁹ However, they stress that both men and women of the period interacted with each other as communities, resembling ‘the classical image of the beehive, an image which locates the individual subject within a matrix of interactions’.⁵⁰ Women in particular ‘appropriate the hive and the bee not only to validate the place of women within their own society, but also the connections between women themselves’.⁵¹ Women of the early modern

⁴⁸ Dowd, *Women’s Work*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, ‘Introduction’, in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 3-2 (p. 3).

⁵⁰ Frye and Robertson, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

⁵¹ Frye and Robertson, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

period commonly viewed themselves as residing within groups which could promote their interests.

Frye and Robertson believe that studying women's alliances is important because it allows us 'to gain a sense of women as productive and imaginative, interactive with even the most patriarchal injunctions to silence and domesticity, and, at time, resistant and even transformative of dominant discourses'.⁵² In other words, studying female alliances allows us to understand how women not only defend each other against domestic oppression, but also how they transformed their positions from being helpless to being in control. Women's alliances were formed so that women can help each other and defend themselves against any kind of oppression, including patriarchy. As Frye and Robertson comment, 'women responded to the economic and social pressures of their time not only by conflict with one another, but by association against perceived oppression'.⁵³ Women formed different kinds of alliances for different purposes, such as between friends, relatives or between maidservants and their mistresses. Ann Rosalind Jones believes that many alliances were formed between maidservants and their mistresses in London against predatory employers. She analyses a number of pamphlets that show how maids and mistresses 'define themselves as members of an alliance of women at work [...] maids, mistresses [...] united against an outside other'.⁵⁴ These alliances 'were assembled for purposes of protection, support, education and resistance'.⁵⁵ These associations made women feel and become stronger. They, nevertheless, were not viewed positively by men. Ronda Arab explains, 'because female social networks fostered close ties of trust and affection between women and led to time spent talking and

⁵² Frye and Robertson, 'Introduction', p. 13.

⁵³ Frye and Robertson, 'Introduction', p. 5.

⁵⁴ Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Maid-servants of London: Sisterhoods of Kinship and Labor', in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 21-32 (p. 31).

⁵⁵ Frye and Robertson, 'Introduction', p. 5.

socializing together, male commentators sometimes disapproved of these friendships'.⁵⁶ Not knowing what was being said in these gatherings of women made men feel uneasy about them.

Gossip seems to be similarly threatening to patriarchy and male domination. Gossip, as an activity, was linked to women. Capp notes that the term 'gossip' was originally used to denote 'a godparent of either sex, but came to apply almost exclusively to women, and to denote any close female friend. Women themselves sometimes use it to address or describe their friends'.⁵⁷ Mostly, gossip was linked to home, a domain where a woman 'often shared with her neighbours or gossips'.⁵⁸ Because gossip was shared at home and between women, it was considered a female activity. 'Male commentators', Capp notes, 'condemned women as idle and garrulous and disapproved of such practice'.⁵⁹ The repeated condemnation of gossip by preachers and satirists alike 'reflected a widespread concern that unsupervised female sociability posed a threat to the order and values of patriarchal society'.⁶⁰ To be considered threatening means that gossip has power.

Gossip networks played an important role in many aspects of the women's lives in the early modern period. From a practical point of view, gossip network supported women throughout many stages in their lives. Starting from childbirth, women had supportive networks in the delivery room.⁶¹ Also, gossip network helped women when they faced

⁵⁶ Ronda Arab, 'Between Women: Slanderous Speech and Neighborly Bonds in Henry Porter's *The Two Angry Women of Abington*', in *The Politics of Female Alliance in Early Modern England*, ed. by Christina Luckyj and Niamh J. O'Leary (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), pp. 32-47 (p. 36).

⁵⁷ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 51.

⁵⁸ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 50.

⁵⁹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp. 51-52.

⁶⁰ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 50.

⁶¹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 51.

violence. They offer abused women support and refuge.⁶² Moreover, gossip network helped women when they needed to defend themselves in court:

They might serve as 'compurgators', character witnesses whose support could clear a woman charged in the ecclesiastical courts with some moral offence; better still, their support might persuade the churchwardens not to report the alleged offence, unless the evidence was overwhelming. We can find cases where even serious allegations, such as witchcraft or keeping a bawdy house, were neutralized in court by friends swearing to the good character of the accused.⁶³

In addition, gossip network helped women in death and funeral preparations. As Capp illustrates, 'some of the dying, especially widows or spinsters [...] looked to their friends to ensure a proper funeral'.⁶⁴ Gossip network then, was of great value in the women's lives of the early modern period. From a psychological point of view too, women gossip played a significant role in formulating their identities and providing them with feelings of bonding and belonging. Capp notes, 'if neighbours were willing to share their trivial news and concerns, and listen to her own, a woman knew she was accepted'.⁶⁵ He adds:

Inclusion within a network of friendly neighbours gave the newcomer a social identity and status. It provided too some of security, for she now had friends who would listen to her problems and provide help and support in times of need. Some gossips became intimate and lifelong companions, matching or even substituting for the affective role of a husband.⁶⁶

Gossip offered early modern women the sense of belonging, acceptance and security.

⁶² Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 58.

⁶³ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 51.

⁶⁴ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 58.

⁶⁵ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 57.

⁶⁶ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 58.

Because men were excluded from the gossip networks, they expressed their anxiety about them and how they consider them a threat against their domination at home. Capp explains the main reasons behind men's anxiety about gossip. He notes that 'men's primary concern, of course, lay in what their wives might say or hear about themselves. They suspected that women gathered to criticize their husbands and betray family secrets, flouting the basic principle of confidentiality'.⁶⁷ For example, 'male fears was compounded by the suspicion of women's talk might include the exchange of embarrassing details about their husbands' sexual performance'.⁶⁸ He affirms, however, that women's talk was not different in character from men's, but it was stigmatized as gossip because 'it was perceived as the subversive behaviour of subordinates. Satirists frequently showed women discussing tactics, with older women teaching young wives the arts of manipulation'.⁶⁹ Mostly, men were anxious about 'the more insidious alleged effects of gossip networks: the undermining of control within the household, and the broadcasting of intimate family secrets to the world at large'.⁷⁰ Because husbands claimed that wives seized chances to discuss their sexual performances and teach each other tactics to outwit them, they condemned gossip.

The following chapters show that Behn brings early modern women's resistance of patriarchal constraints to the fore in her work. She presents female characters who object to patriarchal oppression and assert their agency in different ways. The analysis, however, demonstrates that there is a shift in her views concerning women, family and marriage. At the beginning of her career, Behn portrays women who work within the patriarchal framework of marriage and family to gain agency. She imagines challenging wives and daughters who use woman's alliances and women's gossip to outwit their violent husbands and dominating

⁶⁷ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 68.

⁶⁸ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 63.

⁶⁹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 63.

⁷⁰ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 68.

fathers. Moreover, she depicts challenging servants who make use of their work to help their mistresses to achieve their ends. Although Behn portrays challenging female heroines in her earliest plays, she ends the plays by their marriage to their equal partners which shows that she, just like the common trends that women in her age follow, does not represent women who break wholly free from the cultural oppression. At the end of her career, however, Behn depicts some challenging female characters who, at the end of the play, choose to wealthy widowhood over love and marriage, which shows that Behn becomes more daring than the general trends early modern women follow in their resistance to patriarchy.

II. Family Within the Period of 1660s-1680s

In order to explore the characterisation of the family in Aphra Behn's work, this study evaluates her work in the context of society's attitudes toward the family, familial relations and familial roles within the period of 1660s-1680s, during which Behn produced most of her work. Reading Behn's treatment of the family within the context of her time is important because, as Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster claim, 'each generation has produced a history of the family that speaks to its own time and political circumstances'.⁷¹ To understand the period's notions of the family, this chapter relies on the works of family historians such as Raph Houlbrooke, Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, among others, who have provided in depth studies of the family within the period of 1660s-1680s. Besides secondary sources, this chapter uses primary sources, most prominently conduct books, whose importance stems from the fact that they 'enunciate ideologies': that is, they reveal the ideal, rather than actual behaviours of members of the family.⁷² In the words of Kathleen Doty, 'conduct literature is

⁷¹ Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, 'Introduction', in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. by Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. (1-17), p. 4.

⁷² Valerie Wayne, 'Introduction', in *The Flower of Friendship: A Renaissance Dialogue Contesting Marriage*, ed. by Valerie Wayne (London: Cornell University, 1992), pp. 1-12 (p. 3).

important for understanding the historical and cultural eras in which they are written because they provide a clear codification of social mores and idealized expectations of proper behavior'.⁷³ Furthermore, this study consults diaries and autobiographies within the period of 1660s-1680s to give an account of family life in practice. These sources are used to provide an overview of family-related issues that are addressed in the plays analysed in this thesis. As the following chapters show, Behn's plays address three familial relationships and a number of issues related to them. These familial relationships are: the husband-wife relationship, the parent-child relationship and the master-servant relationship. Understanding these familial relationships and roles in early modern English society helps us explore to what extent Behn agrees with the understanding of the family in that period and to what extent she questions and challenges it.

Family is the basic social unit within the period of 1660s-1680s. In 1676, A. B. instructs: 'Marry in God's name; your Ancestors deserve and require it of you, who both by their Virtue rais'd a family worthy to be continued, and by their providence left you an Estate sufficient to continue, nay, to enlarge it'.⁷⁴ Along the same lines, conduct books consider the family as the first building block of an ordered society because it resembles the church and the state in their hierarchal structures. Discussing marriage, which is the first step of having a family, Edward Reyner writes, 'Mariage laies the foundation of cities, countreys, nations: of Lawes and civil government: of Common-wealths and Kingdoms'.⁷⁵ Comparing the family to the church and the state in their order, Thomas Manton writes, 'A family is the seminary of

⁷³ Kathleen Doty, '(Un)Becoming conduct Cotton Mather's *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* and the Salem witchcraft crisis', in *Instructional Writing in English: Studies in honour of Risto Hiltunen*, ed. by Matti Peikola, Janne Skaffari and Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), pp.141-160 (p.141).

⁷⁴ A.B, *A letter of advice concerning marriage*, (London: William Miller, 1676), p.27.

⁷⁵ Edward Reyner, *Considerations Concerning Marriage the Honour, Duties, Benefits, Troubles of It* (London: J. T. for Thomas Newbery, 1657), p.45.

Church and State; and if children be not well principled there, all miscarrieth'.⁷⁶ According to the logic of Restoration society, family is central because of its hierarchal order, principles and heritage.

Definitions of the family vary from one period of time to another. So, a working definition of the concept of family within the period of 1660s-1680s is needed. According to Houlbrooke, social historians have concluded that 'during our period [early modern age] "family" denoted above all the body of persons living in one house or under one head, including children, kinsfolk and servants'.⁷⁷ He notes that there was no major changes in the understanding of the family from 1450 to 1700; as he writes, 'the momentous developments of this period, although certainly affecting family life, brought no fundamental changes in family forms, functions and ideals'.⁷⁸ Family in the Restoration age, then, refers to all those who live in one household, whether connected by blood or not.

A. The Husband-Wife Relationship

Aphra Behn dramatises different aspects of the husband-wife relationship in her plays. As the following chapters demonstrate, through her representation of the husband-wife relationship, Behn raises questions about the following issues: the father/husband's absolute power over the family, the wife's control of money and ownership of goods in the household and the husband's use of domestic violence. The exploration of conduct books, diaries and

⁷⁶ Thomas Manton, 'Mr. Thomas Manton's Epistle to the Reader', in *The 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith*, ed. by C. Matthew McMahon and Therese B. McMahon (Crossville, TN: Puritan Publications 2011), pp. 53-58 (pp. 53-54).

⁷⁷ Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450- 1700* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 19.

⁷⁸ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 15-16. Houlbrooke's argument revises and reassesses the view of older studies of the family in early modern period, most notably by Phillippe Ariès and Lawrence Stone, which argue that patriarchal familial relationships were emotionless at the beginning of the period, but became more loving and 'companionate' by its end.

autobiographies within the period of 1660s-1680s reveals that there are differences between them concerning the husband-wife relationship. Behn, as demonstrated in the following analysis of the plays, makes use of these differences and undermines the traditional roles of the husband and the wife.

The first issue related to the husband-wife relationship addressed in Behn's plays, *The False Count* and *The Lucky Chance*, is giving the father/husband a position of absolute power in the family. The exploration of conduct books' representation of the husband-wife relationship reveals that generally there is an ambivalence about this position of power. On the one hand, the authors of these books describe marriage as a mutual companionship and stress duties of love and care between husband and wife. On the other hand, this loving, caring and companionate relationship is not discussed as establishing spouses as equals. In all matters, the husband has a superior position while the wife has an inferior one.

Conduct books stress that couples should be companions who share love and care for each other. George Swinnock's writings emphasise the concept of companionship within marriage by instructing that husband and wife should be bound together in love:

They are one body, one flesh, and so should have but one soul, one spirit; they have one bed, one board, one house, and therefore should be one in heart. [...] Without the union of hearts, the union of bodies will be no benefit. [...] The husband ought to love his wife, and she him, above [...] all others in the works.⁷⁹

Similarly, Reyner advises that husbands and wives should enjoy each other's company: 'To be companions in joy; the delight one of another in prosperity; the desire of the eyes [...] and

⁷⁹ George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), (1.471-2).

the joy of the heart; to live joyfully and comfortably together'.⁸⁰ For Richard Baxter companionship means that couples should help and support each other:

To help each other to bear their burthens (and not by Impatience to make them greater) in poverty, crosses, sickness, and dangers, to comfort and to support each other, and to be delightful Companions in Holy Love and Heavenly hopes and duties, when all other outward comforts faile.⁸¹

Companionate marriage, according to conduct books, means that the spouses owe each other the duties of love, joy, support and help.

These instructions of love and companionship, however, were undermined by the emphasis on the enhanced authority of the man in the family. A great deal of evidence from conduct books demonstrates that the husband-wife relationship within the period of 1660s-1680s is fundamentally a hierarchal one. In the Restoration family, each member has his or her proper status and the father/husband should be the head of the household. Baxter instructs the father/husband, 'To be chief teacher and governour of the Family'.⁸² The authority of the father/husband is frequently compared to the authority of the king. In *Patriarcha*, Robert Filmer claims that the power of the King and the power of the father/husband are one. 'If we compare the natural duties of a father with those of a king,' he reasons, 'we find them to be all one, without any difference at all but only in the latitude or extent of them'.⁸³ For him, in the same way the King has a supreme power over the state, the father/husband has an absolute control over the household. Filmer stresses the inferiority of other members of the family by saying, 'as kingly power is by the law of God, so it hath no inferior law to limit it.

⁸⁰ Reyner, *Considerations concerning marriage*, p. 41.

⁸¹ Richard Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions for Family Duties* (London: H. Brugis for J. Conyers, 1681).

⁸² Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions for Family Duties*.

⁸³ Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. by. Johann P. Sommerville, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12.

The father of a family governs by no other law than by his own will, not by the laws or wills of his sons or servants'.⁸⁴ In the same way the King has no authority over him in the government, the father/husband has no one governing him in the family.

While the husband should be the head of the household, conduct books prescribe that the wife should be his subject. Referring to the husband, Reyner instructs the wife to '[submit] to his Authority, and to his just and aequal commands'.⁸⁵ For B. D. too, there is no woman to be excepted from submission to her husband:

And there is no Wife, whatever be her Birth, Parts, Portion, Breeding, or any other Priviledge, who is exempted from this tie of *subjection to her own Husband*: The Law of Nature, Gods Ordinance, and her own voluntary Covenant, binds her to it; and there is not any Husband to whom this honour of *subjection* is not due; no personal infirmities, frowardness of nature, no nor error in point of Religion, doth deprive him of it, provided her submission be in those things which are consistent with her love to *Christ*.⁸⁶

The wife's subjection to her husband, Reyner assures us, 'is freely, willingly, reverently, constantly and universally in all things'.⁸⁷ These statements are clear examples of the firm insistence of most conduct books on the hierarchal structure of the family, placing the father/husband at the head and the wife, and everyone else, as subjects to this power.

To maintain the hierarchal order between husband and wife, conduct books list countless instructions for women. Baxter instructs women, 'To govern their Tongues, that their words be few, and grave, and sober. To be contented in every condition, to avoid the

⁸⁴ Filmer, *Patriarcha*, p. 35.

⁸⁵ Reyner, *Considerations concerning marriage the honour*, p.14.

⁸⁶ B. D., *The Honourable State of Matrimony Made Comfortable, or An Antidote Against Discord Betwixt Man and Wife*, (London: Francis Pearse, 1685), p. 53.

⁸⁷ Reyner, *Considerations concerning marriage the honour*, p.14.

Childish vanity of gaudy Apparel, and following of vain fashions of the prouder sort'.⁸⁸

Similarly, Reyner maintains, 'Duty is Chastity of Conversation (which followes from chastity of affection and disposition in the heart) wives must abstain, not onely from all acts, but from all Appearances of lightness, wantonnesse, dalliance or unfaithfulness'.⁸⁹ By instructing wives to be obedient, silent and chaste, conduct books emphasise the subordinate position of the wife to her husband.

We can say, then, however positive the teachings of conduct books about mutual and companionate marriage appear, the insistence on the different positions and statuses of power between husband and wife maintains the idea that this relationship is entrenched and fixed within a patriarchal pattern. Akiko Kusunoki notes, 'The Puritan notion of partnership [...] concealed the repressive aspect of the power relations in patriarchal marriage. Through ingenious rhetorical strategies, Puritan divines persuaded female congregations to accept their subjection in the household'.⁹⁰ She continues, 'because of the stress on the necessity of wives' submission to their husbands' authority, the Puritan view of marriage denied women subjectivity in a true sense'.⁹¹ Similarly, Leland Ryken notes, the ideal of companionate marriage, 'tended to soften the claims of male dominance and to produce an enlightened version of marital hierarchy', but not to refuse it altogether.⁹²

In *The Lucky Chance*, as we will see in chapter 4, Behn refuses the subjection of the wife in marriage and presents a rebel wife who chooses to get divorced and be single rather than to be oppressed by a patriarchal marriage. We cannot say, however, that Behn was the

⁸⁸ Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions for Family Duties*.

⁸⁹ Reyner, *Considerations concerning marriage the honour*, p. 18.

⁹⁰ Akiko Kusunoki, 'Their Testament At Their Apron-Strings', in *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 185-204 (p. 187).

⁹¹ Kusunoki, 'Their Testament At Their Apron-Strings', p. 187.

⁹² Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1986), p. 53.

first to refuse patriarchal patterns in marriage. While patriarchal marriage is the case in theory, the exploration of practice and everyday life within the period of 1660s-1680s proves to complicate the ideal. The control of the father/husband in the house was not as absolute in practice as conduct books suggest. The wife of Stephen Fox, whose husband was a paymaster-general to Charles II, is an example of wives who managed the household and took decisions concerning the home. For example, she ‘made her own plans to rebuild Chiswick House’.⁹³ Commenting on marriage in practice, S. H. Mendelson observes that wives were not passive but exercised authority in the household: ‘in the arena of family politics, women’s informal authority was far greater than we might infer from their official standing in society at large’.⁹⁴ In her plays, as we will see, Behn reflects this flexibility whereby women are not under the absolute control of their husbands.

The second issue related to the husband-wife relationship addressed in Behn’s plays is women’s control over money during marriage. Behn’s *The Lucky Chance* presents a wife who has control over money and keys in the household. This portrayal of the wife does not agree with conduct books which instruct spouses to be united financially under the control of the husband. In *A question deeply concerning married persons and such as intend to marry* (1653), the anonymous author A.L. is asked ‘Whether any Woman (Widow or Maid) intending to Marry, may before her Marriage reserve any of her Goods in her own power, to be disposed by her after she shall be Married without her Husbands direction or consent?’⁹⁵ His answer is no, and he justifies it by saying that it is:

⁹³ Richard Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism: Marriage, Family, and Business in the English-Speaking World, 1580-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 93.

⁹⁴ S. H. Mendelson, *In The Mental world of Stuart Women* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p.187.

⁹⁵ A. L., *A question deeply concerning married persons and such as intend to marry* (London, 1653), p. 1.

a shame to a man of wisdom, that his wife should manifest her self to be so foolish, that she should fear to commit the power and government of her goods to him, whom she boldly took as the fittest of all others to have the power of her body: and the rule of the desires of her soul.⁹⁶

Conduct books are supported by the law of coverture in the seventeenth century which, as discussed above, strips wives from control over money and goods upon marriage. However, practice reveals that there were wives who had control over the goods and money in the household and that the coverture law was not absolute. Amy Erickson observes:

Coverture was—socially at least—a fiction [...] There is considerable evidence of the continuity of women's property through marriage, even apart from formal marriage settlements.[...] It is unlikely that women ceased to regard that property as in some sense theirs for the duration of the marriage.⁹⁷

Similarly, Joanne Bailey notes that, 'there is evidence that wives expected to have control over household resources and retained some sense of possession over moveable goods during marriage, at the same time as willingly putting these goods to familial and household use'.⁹⁸ Financial activity in the family was not a woman-free zone: some wives had sense of goods ownership and had control over their money.

The third issue related to the husband-wife relationship addressed in Behn's plays is domestic violence. Behn's *The Forced Marriage* condemns violence between husband and wife in agreement with conduct books, which encouraged spouses to preserve peace between them and to avoid using violence. In order to stress peace between spouses, B. D. links it with church:

⁹⁶ A. L., A question deeply concerning married persons, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property: In Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 226.

⁹⁸ Joanne Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed? Married Women Property and 'Coverture' in England, 1660-1800', *Continuity and Change*, 17.3 (2002), 352-372, (p.367).

This Exhortation doth concern the peace of Families as well as the peace of the Church, therefore whatever doth necessarily tend to preserve peace between such near Relations as Husband and Wife must be carefully followed, and whatever tends to be get strife and contention between them must be carefully avoided; for such froward Persons as are promoters of discord God hates.⁹⁹

Peace can be preserved between spouses, according to B. D., by avoiding ‘wrath and Discord’.¹⁰⁰ The evil of wrath and discord between husband and wife extends, as B. D. writes, ‘to the whole Family where in that angry person dwells, and all those that do converse with him or her, When the Husband or Wife is angry or froward, O how extremely burdensom is he or she to that Family’.¹⁰¹ While the merit of being a peaceful and forgiving spouse in the house reflects the peace of church, being angry makes the spouse troublesome and burdensome to the family and by extension to the church. One form of being troublesome in the family because of anger is to use domestic violence. William Heale discusses domestic violence, comparing the wife-beaters to monsters and describing them as inhumane:

there are the overgrowne Monsters of Tyranni who proclaime it with their open mouth (for fooles proclaime their owne folly, &c.) that a *husband may beate his wife* much or little according to his own pleasure, and as he sees occasion; nay that he may publiquely shame her, and if he like imprison her too, but these are such men who seeme to have banished all humanity, of an yron heart, of a brasen brouw, and so cankerd with vice (and the dangerous rust of Passion) that vertue can take no impression in them.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ B. D., *The Honourable State of Matrimony*, p. 209.

¹⁰⁰ B. D., *The Honourable State of Matrimony*, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ B. D., *The Honourable State of Matrimony*, p. 31.

¹⁰² William Heale, *The Great advocate and oratour for women, or, The Arraignment, tryall and conviction of all such wicked husbands (or monsters)* (London, 1682), p. 72.

Moreover, he links violent husbands with madness, ‘those tyrannous husbands, who in their excess of rage and madness did so rashly abuse their own flesh and blood’.¹⁰³ He claims that violence against wife is against the law of God, nature, morality, and civil policy. Therefore, he suggests that it is necessary ‘to lopp off such Gangreend members of an unhappy state or Kingdome, least they infect the whole Body with such a fatall Distemper, as will proove mortall and destructive to all humane societies, with whom they shall converse.’¹⁰⁴ The violent husband, then, is not only troublesome to the wife, or the family, but also to the whole society and the kingdom.

Unlike conduct books, however, diaries, autobiographies and legal testimony reveal that domestic violence sometimes was used, more often by men than women. Samuel Pepys writes:

Going to bed betimes last night we waked betimes, [...] I was very angry and begun to find fault with my wife for not commanding her servants as she ought. Thereupon she giving me some cross answer I did strike her over her left eye such a blow as the poor wretch did cry out and was in great pain, but yet her spirit was such as to endeavour to bite and scratch me. But I coying — [stroking or caressing]— with her made her leave crying, and sent for butter and parsley, and friends presently one with another, and I up, vexed at my heart to think what I had done, for she was forced to lay a poultice or something to her eye all day, and is black, and the people of the house observed it.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Heale, *The Great advocate and oratour for women*, p. 29

¹⁰⁴ Heale, *The Great advocate and oratour for women*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰⁵ *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (1660-1669) [diary] 1664 Dec, <<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/pepys/samuel/wheatley/chapter60.html> > [22/6/2019].

Although his wife defended herself, Pepys' use of violence was very severe. More suffering from domestic abuse was Mary Hampson. Jessica Malay has documented the continual abuse Mary Hampson suffered at the hands of her husband:

One cold night in January 1668, after two days of arguments and beatings, a lawyer named Robert Hampson held a pistol to his wife Mary's throat. The man Mary would later describe as a "monster" appeared to be contemplating a permanent end to their marital problems.¹⁰⁶

Domestic violence was not completely exiled from the seventeenth century household because, as Malay explains, there was an acceptable form of violence and an unacceptable one. She writes, 'It was believed that from time to time physical chastisement was an essential corrective to a wayward wife, child, or servant'.¹⁰⁷ However, she continues, 'excessive rather than corrective violence was seen as disruptive and was thus condemned, though the definition of excessive violence was always fluid'.¹⁰⁸ So while conduct books advocate peace in the family, sometimes in practice men used violence in order to keep order in the household. In *The Forced Marriage*, Behn exposes this issue in practice and condemns it.

We note that although diaries and autobiographies available are limited and the discussions of the husband-wife relationship in these sources reveal a variety of practices, these sources are enough to demonstrate that there are more contradictions than similarities between conduct books and reality. Different attitudes are apparent concerning couples' duties in exercising authority over the family. While conduct books stress patriarchal authority over the household, diaries and autobiographies reveal that some women possessed

¹⁰⁶ Jessica Malay, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson: Her Story of Marital Abuse and Defiance in seventeenth-century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Malay, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Malay, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson*, p. 3.

authority over most household affairs. In contrast to conduct books' instructions and the coverture law which strips the wives from having control over their goods and money after marriage, in practise there were wives who owned properties and controlled money in the household. Moreover, while didactic literature instructs both spouses to avoid violence, in practice husbands were effectively licensed, to a degree, to use violence against their wives. As mentioned above, this divergence between the husband-wife relationship in theory and the husband-wife relationship in practice allows Behn to destabilise contemporary notions about the roles of the husband and the wife. She at once exposes the misogyny underlying many of the conduct books restrictions on women's liberty, and shines a harsh light on idealised notions of patriarchal protection and authority as they confront the realities of women's autonomy and license.

B. The Parent-Child Relationship

In her portrayal of the parent-child relationship, Behn challenges the social roles of the father, the daughter and the mother. In her plays, she questions the absolute authority of the father and the obedience of the daughter, and how these positions might lead to the oppression of the daughter. As we will see in the chapters that follow, in front of controlling fathers, Behn's plays present daughters who are autonomous, vocal and rebellious. They seek sexual freedom and base their marriages on their choice. Also, she resists the traditional role of the mother as having limited authority over her children.

The examination of theory and practice within the period of 1660s-1680s reveals that there are differences between them concerning the absolute authority of the father over his children. Conduct books demonstrate that parents have control over almost all aspects of children's lives. Referring to parents, Baxter instructs children: 'To obey them diligently in all lawful things in obedience to God'.¹⁰⁹ However, practice shows that fathers were more

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions for Family Duties*.

flexible concerning exercising absolute authority over their children. For example, ‘Thomas Tryon's father wished Thomas to follow his own trade as a tiler and plasterer, but when the boy found it tedious work allowed him to follow his desire to be a shepherd’.¹¹⁰ Studying the English society within the period of 1580s-1680s, Keith Wrightson concludes that, in practice, ‘parents advised and proposed, rather than dictated’.¹¹¹ Furthermore, conduct books instruct parents to teach their children to avoid sexual activity before marriage. Referring to children, Baxter instructs parents to ‘be sure when they come to years of ripen, that you keep them from opportunity, nearness, or familiarity with tempting Persons of another Sex’.¹¹² Although conduct books do not differentiate between sons and daughters in terms of teaching them to avoid pre-marital sexual activity, in practice, daughters who have sex before marriage were treated differently than were wandering sons. Keith Thomas observes that there was a double standard concerning sexual promiscuity: while it was ‘a matter of utmost gravity’ for a woman, it was if anything, ‘a mild and pardonable’ offense for a man.¹¹³ Laura Gowing summarises, men’s and women’s sexual acts ‘had different contexts, meanings, and results’.¹¹⁴ Thus, practice shows that daughters were more controlled sexually than sons, and part of this control was exercised by the father. In *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans*, as we will see, Behn questions the father’s authority over daughters, examines parental

¹¹⁰ Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 123

¹¹¹ Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680*, p. 124.

¹¹² Similar to the instruction of avoiding pre-marital sexual activity to daughters and sons, conduct books instruct both husband and wife equally to be in control of their own sexuality by having no sexual relationships with any partner other than their spouse. Baxter instructs spouses, ‘To keep continual Chastity and fidelity, and to avoid all unseemly and immodest carriage with any other’. Discussing the negative effects of unfaithfulness, Reyner writes, ‘Husbands and Wives should preserve the Honour of Mariage in their Carriage; and not blemish or stain the Glory of it, Either [...] by unfaithfulness and bodily uncleanness, embracing the bosoms of strangers; for that is a dishonour to the Unity, Purity, Chastity of Mariage’.

¹¹³ Keith Thomas, ‘The Double Standard,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20, (1959), 195-216, (p. 195).

¹¹⁴ Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 3.

restrictions on female sexuality and portrays the different ways women can attain their sexual freedom.

Not only Behn questions the father's absolute authority but also the claims and the reasons that justify it. As discussed in chapter 3, in her representation of the parent-child relationship in *The Emperor of The Moon*, Behn questions the father's absolute authority and the common excuses and claims used to justify it, such as: men are more rational than women, men are privileged by receiving more education and that the intellectual field is exclusive to men. In the play, Behn represents a father who claims that he is a scientist and spends his time doing scientific experiments. At the same time, this father is depicted as using different methods to have control over his daughters' daily lives and their futures, as he imprisons them in the house and interferes and disagrees over their choices of husbands. The play challenges the father's authority and his claim of being a scientist by picturing him as a fool who too easily confuses myth and reality, showing that being a man is not enough to make someone a rationalist. At the same time, the play undermines the father's authority by picturing daughters who have superior intelligence and judgement than their father's that they outwit him and correct him concerning their futures by their wise choices of equal husbands.

Conduct books differentiate between men and women concerning rationality more than education. In his instructions to parents, a mid-seventeenth century author illustrates that boys are more capable of reason than girls, 'Those who seek the comfort of having wise children must endeavour that they be born male; for the female, through the cold and moist of their sex, cannot be endowed with so profound a judgement'.¹¹⁵ Conduct books focus on religious education more than any other field and in their instructions concerning religious education, they do not differentiate between boys and girls. For example, Baxter writes:

¹¹⁵ Cited in Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 69.

Teach them the words of the Covenant, [...] and also the Creed, the Lords Prayer, and the Commandements, and the Catechism, teach them the meaning of them, and the way of practising all labour to possess them with the greatest Reverence of God and the Holy Scriptures: then shew them the Word of God, for all that you would teach them to know or do.¹¹⁶

However, practice shows that most girls received less education than men. In their exploration of gender and childhood, Naomi Miller and Naomi Yavneh note that ‘gender matters to early modern childhood, both explicitly and implicitly’.¹¹⁷ Miller and Yavneh observe that gender division becomes extremely obvious in education:

By seven or eight, a boy would have begun his formal education, preparing for training for a trade, or following his father to help in the field. Although there were exceptions, a girl would usually remain home to receive domestic training from her mother; in Catholic families of certain classes, she might be sent to a convent for education and safe-keeping either until she was married around the age of fourteen or until she took permanent vows.¹¹⁸

Moreover, Helen Jewell notes that most girls had limited access to formal education, ‘one very striking feature of late medieval and early modern formal education is that it was dominated by social class, and almost exclusively male’.¹¹⁹ Also, practice shows that science and intellectual field was dominated by men. In their study, which is a collection of essays, Jo Wallwork and Paul Salzman explore women’s participation in philosophy, science and literature in early modern England. Referring to philosophy, science and literature, they note

¹¹⁶ Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions for Family Duties*.

¹¹⁷ Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, ‘Introduction: Early Modern Children as Subjects: Gender Matters’ in *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, ed. by. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), p. 2.

¹¹⁸ Miller and Yavneh, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Helen M. Jewell, *Education in Early Modern England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 7.

that ‘from the 1650s onwards, there was a rapid increase in the visibility of women’s writing in all the areas just named’.¹²⁰ Despite these participations, the intellectual field in the Restoration age was dominated by men. In one of the essays in the collection which explores Margret Cavendish’s challenges to the scientific field, Wallwork notes that ‘the Royal Society of London’, which is a public space of Restoration science ‘is considered in terms of practices of exclusion’.¹²¹ This exclusion was gendered for male benefits. As we will see in chapter 3, through the characters of Dr. Baliardo, the fool/scientist father, and his witty daughter, Elaria, and his wise niece, Bellemante, Behn demonstrates that rationality and intellect are not restricted to men, and demolishes notions such as men are more rational than women and the intellectual field is more dominated by men as justifications for the father’s absolute authority in the family.

In addition to the role of the father, Behn’s plays investigate the role of the daughter. *The Forced Marriage* questions the obedience of the daughter to her father especially in courtship and marriage. Conduct books teach readers that children owe their parents duties of reverence and obedience. Concerning reverence, Baxter instructs children, ‘To honour [parents] in thought, words, and actions, and to avoid all appearance of slighting, dishonour, and contempt’.¹²² Concerning obedience, Baxter writes, ‘take patiently the reproofs and corrections of their Parents, and [...] confess their faults with humble penitence, and to amend’.¹²³ Particularly, Baxter instructs children to ask for their parents’ consent in marriage. He instructs children, ‘To marry by their Parents choice or consent only’.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Jo Wallworkand and Paul Salzman, ‘Introduction’, in *Early Modern Englishwomen Testing Ideas*, ed. by. Jo Wallworkand and Paul Salzman (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-5 (p.1).

¹²¹ Jo Wallworkand, ‘Disruptive Behaviour in the Making of Science: Cavendish and the Community Seventeenth-Century Science’, in *Early Modern Englishwomen Testing Ideas*, ed. by. Jo Wallworkand and Paul Salzman (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 41-54 (p.34).

¹²² Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions*.

¹²³ Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions*.

¹²⁴ Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions*.

Practice, however, demonstrates that daughters were not always obedient to their parental arrangement of marriage and some of them married based on their free choice. Elizabeth Delaval is an example of a daughter who preferred to marry a man of her choice over accepting her aunt's arrangement of marriage for her. In her diary, Elizabeth discusses love and its importance to her on many pages. Referring to one of her lovers, she writes, 'Euen at the time of my prayer's is my Head filled with thought's of him: and to, too apt am I To omit Deuotions ether Publick, or priuate, rather Then loose an ocation of seeing that youth, who has found The way thus far to gain my heart'.¹²⁵ Because she wanted to marry based on her choice, Elizabeth rejected the marriage her aunt arranged for her from Frances Lord Brudnell. She rejected this arranged marriage because it was not based on similarities. Elizabeth writes, Frances had 'contrary relighon to mine'.¹²⁶ Instead of this marriage, Elizabeth chose to marry James, Lord Annseley, because she fell in love with him. However, her aunt rejected her marriage from James because Elizabeth rejected to marry Frances before. Elizabeth did not submit to her aunt's order and wrote to James asking him to elope together and get married, which reflects the insistence of the daughter to marry based on her choice. Unfortunately, when she sent the letter to James, his father received it and prevented his son from this marriage, which again reflects the authority of the father. After being in conflict with her aunt over the previous two marriages, Elizabeth tried to be an obedient daughter and accepted to marry Robert, the aunt's new choice of husband for her niece, but after long arguments. Elizabeth accepted this marriage under one condition which was to pay her debts, as she writes:

We had a long and firce argument upon this subject [. . .] so apt is the fier that is in great youth sudenly to be kindled that the opinion I had that I was ill

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Delaval, *The Meditations of Lady Elizabeth Delaval*, ed. by Douglas G. Greene (Surtees Society, Gasteshesd 1978), p. 159.

¹²⁶ Delaval, *The Meditations of Lady Elizabeth Delaval*, p. 112.

used by being prest to mary a man I did not love, and to mary also with a weight of debt's upon me, easely lead me into the great fault of speakeing pationate word's to my aunt, my naturall temper being much too violent when ever I thought my selfe injured.¹²⁷

Nevertheless, this marriage was not a success either. Although she tried to be an obedient daughter and married Robert, Elizabeth left him soon afterward and married a younger man than herself. Rejecting her aunt's choices of husbands and pursing love and marriage based on her choice, Elizabeth reveals herself to be a woman who exercised a substantial amount of agency. Sharon Arnoult observes that Elizabeth was an autonomous woman:

In her meditations, Elizabeth never questioned the ideals of godly womanhood or the standards of godly motherhood, by which she judged the older women to her life, but in her failures and formations, and her eventual action to make a happier life for herself, we can see a nascent new sense of a more individual and entitled self, an emerging modern sense of self that would eventually remix and reformulate religious and gender identities.¹²⁸

Similarly, Elizabeth, the daughter of John Evelyn, courted a man in secret and eloped with him at the age of 17. Evelyn comments on the elopement:

I was the more afflicted & <astonish'd> at it, in regard, we had never given this Child the least cause to be thus disobedient, and being now my Eldest, might reasonably have expected a double Blessing: [. . .] But so far it seemes, had her passion for this Young fellow made her forget her duty, and all that

¹²⁷ Delaval, *The Meditations of Lady Elizabeth Delaval*, p. 69.

¹²⁸ Sharon Arnoult, 'The Failure of Godly Womanhood: Religious and Gender Identity in the Life of Lady Elizabeth Delaval', in *Women during the English Reformations: Renegotiating Gender and Religious Identity*, ed. by. Julia Chappell and Kaley Kramer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014), pp. 115-128.

most Indulgent Parents expected from her, as not to consider the
Consequence of her folly & disobedience, 'til it was too late.¹²⁹

By not accepting their parents' choice of husband, marrying based on their choices, or eloping with their lovers, these daughters enjoyed substantial independency and understood the importance of free choice of partner in marriage. Thus, while conduct books instruct children to respect and be obedient to their parents, diaries confirm that some children, despite the orthodox instruction of householder literature, were rebellious. As we will see in chapter 3, Behn presents marvelous examples of daughters who refuse to submit to their fathers' choice of husband and use different techniques of manipulation in order to achieve their ends, which is to marry a man of their choice.

Behn also explores the mother's authority in the family in her dramatisation of the parent-child relationship in *Sir Patient Fancy*, as we will see in chapter 4. She expands the limited role of the mother and portrays a mother who helps and supports her children to marry their lovers, and guides them to advance financially against the patriarchal father. In other words, she depicts a mother who uses her motherhood to challenge patriarchy. This representation of the authority of the mother does not match the instructions of conduct books. Although conduct books instruct both parents to exercise authority over their children, they limit the authority of the mother. Conduct books view mothers as less rational than fathers and as possessing no control over their love towards children. Therefore, they are in need of male guidance and restraint. Fletcher writes:

The Church Fathers explained and elaborated upon a creation story which began with the premise of woman's inferiority. For Augustine, woman had tempted man into the first disastrous act of the abandonment of the will and

¹²⁹ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by. Guy de la Bedoyere (Woodbridge: The Boydell press, 1995), pp. 286-287.

was forever thereafter identified with subjection of mind to body. Her natural subordination to him was a matter of rational control. For Aquinas, Woman's meaning was bound up with reproduction and this fact excluded her from a role in the higher pursuits of the mind.¹³⁰

According to some religious books, then, mother's role is linked more to bodily functions, such as giving birth, than to the mind. Consequently, she should be subordinate to the head of the household, the husband/father, who is more rational.

Richard Allestree discusses the excessive love of the mothers toward their children and its negative consequences. According to Allestree, some mothers love their children too much, to such an extent that they love them more than their God:

God is the only unlimited object of our love, towards all others 'tis easy to become inordinate, and in no instance more the in this of children. The love of a parent is descending, and all things move most violently downwards, so that whereas that of children to their parents commonly needs a spur, this of the parent often needs a bridle, especially that of the Mother, which (by the strength of feminine passion) does usually exceed the love of the Father [...] she is in danger if she suffer that human affection to swell beyond its banks so as to come in any competition with the Divine, this is to make an Idol of her child [...] Accordingly we oft see the effects if his jealousy (God) in this particular, the doting affection of the mother is frequently punished with the untimely death of the Children; or if not with that 'tis many times with a seerer scourge: they live.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 68.

¹³¹ Richard Allestree, *The Gentlemen's Calling* (London: T. Garthwait, 1662), p. 125.

Allestree here warns against the excess of maternal love which competes with the love of God because it might result in the punishment of the mother and the tragedy of the family. He, also, points out that the ‘imprudent excess’ of maternal love could be harmful to the nature of the child.¹³² By linking mothers with excessive and harmful love and, at the same time, with the weakness of rationality, conduct books justify the mother’s subjection to the head of the household and his guidance and limit her authority.

Nevertheless, we cannot say that Behn’s representation of the mother’s authority in the family was shocking for the Restoration audience. While male authors attempted to regulate the mother’s authority, many Restoration mothers were not subordinated and used their motherhood to challenge patriarchy. The relationship between Lady Anne Clifford and her mother, for example, reveals that Lady Anne faced a conflict over inheritance and her mother helped her in this conflict and guided her to regain the inheritance. Before his death, Lady Anne’s father willed all his estates to his brother and provided her only with £15,000. Lady Anne’s mother, Margaret Clifford, did not accept this settlement, complaining that it was ‘a portion that many merchant's daughters have had’ and instructed Lady Anne that ‘your ancient inheritance from your forefathers from a long descent of ancestors is richly worth a hundred thousand pounds’.¹³³ Therefore, Lady Anne’s mother began legal battles against her brother-in-law that took decades, and which were continued by Anne after her mother’s death. Eventually, with the failure of the Clifford male line, Lady Anne inherited her lands and moved to live in them until her death in 1676. Although Margaret Clifford’s challenge to patriarchy did not immediately succeed in regaining her daughter’s estate, both she and her daughter demonstrate the refusal of some women to accept subordination to their male relatives. Thus, although conduct books instruct that the mother’s authority is limited, the

¹³² Allestree, *The Gentlemen’s Calling*, p. 123.

¹³³ Anne Clifford, *Anne Clifford's Autobiographical Writing, 1590-1676*, ed. by. Jessica L. Malay (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 2.

practice demonstrates that there were mothers who possessed authority and used their motherhood to challenge patriarchy and guide their children throughout their lives.

Exploring conduct books, diaries and autobiographies that revolve around the parent-child relationship reveal that there are more differences than similarities between practice and theory. While conduct books instruct fathers to exercise authority over their children, practice shows that fathers were advising their children more than dictating. Although conduct books instruct daughters to be obedient, diaries show that daughters were not always obedient and exercised control over their futures either by eloping with their lovers or marrying based on their choice. Also, while conduct books instruct mothers to have authority over children, they limit this power. In practice, however, mothers used motherhood to help their children gain their inheritance and challenge patriarchy. The contradictions between theory and practice allow Behn to resist the traditional roles of the father, the daughter and the mother as we will see in the following chapters.

C. The Mater-Servant Relationship

Servants play a significant part in complicating the plots in Behn's plays. They corrupt the household order and subvert the patriarchal system. They gossip, plot and form alliances with wives and daughters to help them gain agency. To understand the extent to which Behn's plays expose the role that servants play in helping women challenge family control, we need to examine the master-servant relationship in theory and practice within the period of 1660s-1680s.

The master-servant relationship in the Restoration age is built on hierarchy. Baxter instructs masters to rule their servants but in moderate way:

to rule them with that gentleness as becometh fellow Christians, and yet with such Authority, as that they be not encouraged to contempt. [...] To set them upon meet labours, to keep no idle Serving men, nor yet to over-labour them

to the injury of their Health, nor command them any unlawfull thing.¹³⁴

In return, servants owe their masters respect and obedience. Baxters writes:

to honour and reverence them, and obey them in all lawful things belonging to their places to command, and to avoid all words and carriage, which savour of dishonour, contempt, or disobedience. [...] To perform all labour willingly which they undertake, and is required of them, and that without grudging.¹³⁵

Moreover, Baxter instructs servants to be trustworthy and faithful to their masters:

to be as faithful behind their Masters backs as before their faces. [...] To be trusty in word and deed, and abhor lying and deceit, not to wrong their Masters in buying or selling, or by stealing any thing that is theirs [...] Not to reveale the Secrets of the Family abroad, to Strangers or Neighbours.¹³⁶

While conduct books instruct masters to exercise authority over servants and rule them moderately, they instruct servants to be obedient, trust worthy and faithful.

In practice, the master-servant relationship is not as ordered as in theory. Servants were not always obedient and faithful to their masters. Pepys's diary reveals the nature of the master-servant relationship in practice, as Anthony Fletcher observes, 'as so often, Pepys is our best source for the actual treatment of servants'.¹³⁷ In his diary, Pepys notes that one of the female servants, Hannah, did not follow his order of keeping the house clean, 'Up and was angry with my maid Hannah for keeping the house no better, it being more dirty now-a-days than ever it was while my whole family was together'.¹³⁸ Moreover, Pepys notes that he caught one of his male servants, Will, stealing:

¹³⁴ Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions*.

¹³⁵ Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions*.

¹³⁶ Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions*.

¹³⁷ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800*, p.215

¹³⁸ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

Before I went to the office, my wife and I examined my boy Will about his stealing of things, as we doubted yesterday; but he denied all with the greatest subtlety and confidence in the world [...] Home to dinner; and there I find that my wife hath discovered my boy's theft and a great deal more then we imagined.¹³⁹

In contrast to theory, in practice, servants were not always obedient and faithful to their masters.

Furthermore, although conduct books try to suppress the agency of servants, in practice, servants enjoyed substantial power. They can possess power in the household in different ways. As discussed above, early modern servants resist authority of the master by forming female alliances. In his diary, Peppy notes that his servants tried to unite together for corruption 'At noon dined at home and am vexed to hear my wife tell me how our maid Mary do endeavour to corrupt our cook maid [...] but I am resolved to rid the house of her as soon as I can'.¹⁴⁰ Peppy's behaviour of deciding to get rid of the servant after seeing her trying to unite with another servant for corruption shows that servants alliance was threatening to the authority of the master. Servants, then, had their own ways to gain agency and rebel against their masters. At the same time, the hierarchy between masters and servants existed more in theory than in practice. The differences between theory and practice allow Behn to subvert the master-servant relationship and depict wives and daughters who form alliances with the servants to rebel against their controlling fathers and husbands and to gain freedom, as we will see in chapter 3.

An examination of the theory and practice of the familial relationships makes it clear that the family within the period of 1660s-1680s was not fixed but vulnerable to change.

¹³⁹ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

¹⁴⁰ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

Behn takes advantage of this vulnerability. As we will see in following chapters, the contradictions between the family in theory and in practice allow Behn to destabilise contemporary notions of the family in her work. This study argues that Behn is a staunch advocate of women's rights in courtship and marriage. She portrays daughters, wives, mothers and female servants who are autonomous and not victims or collaborators in the patriarchal order. They gain agency in the family in a variety of ways.

III. Restoration Theatre

In 1642, a time of civil war, official theatrical activity was suspended in England. The closure of theatres affected the career of playwrights and actors. This period did not last long, however, and theatres were reopened at the accession of Charles II. In 1660, two London theatres were opened, the King's Company and the Duke's Company. With the opening of these theatres some changes and developments happened to the Restoration theatre. Behn's plays show that she was a skilled dramatist who participated in the changes and the developments that took place in the theatre after 1660 and made use of the shifts and innovations to discuss her ideas about women.

One of the most popular genres which was developed at the hands of the Restoration dramatists and critics is comedy. Brian Corman comments on the popularity and diversity of comedy in the period, 'the sheer number of comedies performed year after year, and the diversity of those comedies, helps to explain the vitality and popularity of comedy in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'.¹⁴¹ B. A. Kachur also notes, 'of all the dramatic genres, comedy far outpaced the others in popularity, taking the form of farces, burlesques, satires, comedy of humours, and comedy of manners, all of which displayed a marked difference

¹⁴¹ Brian Corman, 'Introduction', in *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, ed. by. Brian Corman, (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2013) p. xi.

from pre-Commonwealth comedies'.¹⁴² Restoration comedy marked and was used for celebrating the end of the Puritan rule.

Notably, comedy genre is preoccupied with gender discussions. Jane Spencer notes that female dramatists use comedy genre to empower their heroines. Referring to Aphra Behn and Susannah Centlivre, Spencer writes 'for these writers, comedy can be the woman's genre, the genre in which women tend to take control of the action, disguise themselves and play tricks on the other characters, and actively pursue their own desires'.¹⁴³ Along the same lines, Misty Anderson observes that female dramatists use comedy genre to portray marriages in which women are not objects but subjects. Referring to the plays of female writers, Misty writes 'comic events establish positions of authority for the negotiating heroines of these plays, while comic closure assures the audience that marriage will survive these negotiations'.¹⁴⁴ These plays, she argues are not about 'resisting marriage, but about negotiating the terms, literal and figurative, under which Restoration and eighteenth-century women existed within the institution'.¹⁴⁵ Because comedy is full of comic events and subversive conventions, such as tricks and disguise, female dramatists use it to empower female characters in pursuing their desires and negotiating the terms of their marriages. Female dramatists, then, shape new theatrical agendas by portraying the heroines playing more prominent and powerful roles in comedy.

The most popular and developed subgenre in Restoration comedy is the comedy of manners which is also known as the comedy of wit. Kachur notes, 'exceeding either humours

¹⁴² B. A. Kachur, *Etherege and Wycherley* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 38.

¹⁴³ Jane Spencer, "Deceit Dissembling, all that's Woman": Comical Plot and Female Action in *The Feigned Courtesans*, in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993), pp. 86-102 (p. 91).

¹⁴⁴ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on The London Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, p. 2.

plays or any other comic genre in popularity [...] [is] comedy of manners'.¹⁴⁶ There are many significant writers who wrote in this genre and participated in its development such as John Dryden, George Etherege, William Wycherley, and Aphra Behn. Corman defines wit comedies as:

comedies written in the tradition of Fletcher brought up to date to please Carolean audiences. These plays are characterized by highly sophisticated protagonists from a polished, patrician society who excel at quick, clever dialogue (repartee) while heaping contempt on the characters unable to emulate their high standards of wit.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, Kachur observes:

manners comedy depicted the coruscant world of London's beau monde, the glamorous, sophisticated and urbane aristocracy whose elegant dress, graceful carriage, keen intellect and witty language provided them with a code of manners that bespoke their eminence, setting them apart from the vulgar classes below them in society's hierarchy and proving the maxim that birth equals worth. The members of this leisure class from the fashionable area of the town, for whom money holds no reverence, devote their endless free time and boundless energy to pleasure-seeking - drinking, theatre going, gossiping, card playing - finding countless diversions, preferably sexual ones, to fill their lives with purpose, excitement and intrigue.¹⁴⁸

Restoration dramatists developed comedy of manners to suit the taste of the audience and to comment on the lifestyle of the upper class with its pleasures, witty conversations, and relationships between men and women.

¹⁴⁶ Kachur, *Etherege and Wycherley*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁷ Corman, 'Introduction', p. xi.

¹⁴⁸ Kachur, *Etherege and Wycherley*, p. 40.

Marriage is a common theme in comedy of manners. Playwrights satirise economic and forced marriage but not marriage itself, as they support courtship and love marriage. As Robert Hume notes, Restoration comedy is ‘quite definitely hostile to marriages of economic convenience, and especially to 'forced' marriages’.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Susan Staves notes in her study of Thomas Otway's *The Atheist*, ‘much of the apparent hostility to marriage in the comedy is essentially moral protest not against marriage itself but against mercenary marriages of convenience’.¹⁵⁰ Behn agrees with her fellow dramatists in resisting forced and traditional socioeconomic marriage, and bases the marriages of her heroines on love, mutuality and equality in *The False Count* and *The Force Marriage* as discussed in chapter 3.

Central to the comedy of wit too is the gay couple. Commenting on the significance of the gay couple in the Restoration theatre, Peter Holland writes, ‘the notion of the 'gay couple', [...], lives at the heart of the conventional concept of Restoration comedy’.¹⁵¹ The gay couple is a pair of lovers who pursue each other by the use of witty repartee. Kachur defines the gay couple as follows:

Fuelled by a pragmatic view of love, the gay couple, though mutually attracted to one another, play out their courtship in a series of witty verbal skirmishes during which both, according to current fashion and custom, conceal their feelings under a mask of indifference and scepticism while trying to nick each other into dropping their facade and thereby gaining the upper-hand over opponent in the battle of the sex.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Robert Hume, *The Rakish Stage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), p. 142.

¹⁵⁰ Susan Staves, *Player's Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 138.

¹⁵¹ Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1979), p. 82.

¹⁵² Kachur, *Ertherege and Wycherley*, p. 40.

In *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1673), John Dryden represents a stereotypical gay couple who pursues each other by the use of witty language. Although dramatists depict this pair of couple as equal in wit, they rarely represent them as equal in sexual freedom. The male character enjoys freedom of sexuality, while the female character does not. Similar to the Restoration dramatists, Behn depicts Galliard and Cornelia in *The Feigned Courtesans* as equal in wit and language skills. In contrast to other Restoration dramatists, however, Behn portrays Laura Lucretia and Julio from the same play as equal in their sexual freedom; both of them attempted to be sexually active in one of the scenes. Thus, Behn utilises the convention of the gay couple to make the female role more prominent in comedy and to question the boundaries of what was considered acceptable behaviour for women.

Another significant characters found in the comedy of manners are the blocking figures versus the witty lovers. Kate Aughterson notes that blocking figures in Restoration comedy is a term that ‘is used to signify those characters (usually fathers, uncles and old husbands) who block, dispute or prevent the satisfactory resolution of the love interests of the young heroes and heroines’.¹⁵³ Similarly, Kachur notes ‘central to manners comedy is the feisty and antagonist courtship between a lively and attractive young couple whose union was typically thwarted by a parent or guardian who had other matrimonial plans for them and threatened disinheritance should they not comply’.¹⁵⁴ Not only obsessed with controlling, the blocking figures always have conservative ideas of the past age and puritan moralities. In contrast to the blocking figures, the witty lovers have ‘new Stuart ethos’; they are against repressive control and always seek freedom. Referring to the witty lovers, Kachur observes ‘they adhered to the current philosophies which challenged all orthodox views and dogmas and which tacitly espoused the impermanence of love, the

¹⁵³ Kate Aughterson, *Aphra Behn the Comedies* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 50

¹⁵⁴ Kachur, Ertherege and Wycherley, p. 41.

unlikelihood of constancy, and the transitoriness of all things human'.¹⁵⁵ Behn utilises the blocking figures versus the witty lovers in many of her plays, but she adds to the young couple's union another female supporter who helps them in their courtship and plots against the old fathers. While the supporter to the young couple is a female servant in *The False Count*, the supporter to the young lovers is a mother in *The Sir Patient Fancy*. By adding a female helper to the witty lovers, Behn challenges the traditional passive role of woman and the limited power of the mother in the family.

Another significant change in the Restoration theatre is the introduction of women on stage. Before this time, women acted occasionally in court privacy. In the Restoration age, however, women were employed as actresses regularly. In 25 April 1662, a patent was written to Thomas Killigrew saying that from now on women should play women's parts:

And for as much as many plays formerly acted do contain several profane, obscene and scurrilous passages, and the women's parts therein have been acted by men in the habit of women, at which some have taken offence, for the preventing of these abuses for the future, we do hereby strictly command and enjoin that from henceforth [...] we do [...] permit and give leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either of the said two companies for the time to come may be performed by women, so long as their recreations, which by reason of the abuses aforesaid were scandalous and offensive, may by such reformation be esteemed not only harmless delight, but useful and instructive representations of human life.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Kachur, Ertherege and Wycherley, p. 41.

¹⁵⁶ Cited in Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actress*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 25-26.

Many actresses seized this opportunity and worked hard to succeed in their acting career. Through their hard work, they not only gained success and fame but also influenced Restoration theatre and inspired many playwrights to create roles that they were good in.

Nell Gwyn, for example, was a talented and influential actress who is famous for her success in comedian roles. In *The Feigned Courtesans*, Behn praises Gwyn for her skills in playing the witty heroine role in comedy:

insomuch that succeeding ages who shall with joy survey your History shall
Envy us [...]; they can only guess She was infinitely fair, witty, and
deserving, but to what Vast degrees in all, they can only Judge who liv'd to
Gaze and Listen; so Natural and so fitted are all your Charms and
Excellencies [...], you never appear but you glad the hearts of all that have
the happy fortune to see you, as if you were made on purpose to put the whole
world into good Humour.¹⁵⁷

Gwyn was also skilful in playing non-traditional and cross-dressing roles. Commenting on her comic role of Florimel in *Secret Love* (1667), Pepys writes, 'so great a performance of a comical part was never, I believe in the world before as Nell do this, both as a mad girle, then most and best of all when she comes in like a young gallant; and hath the motions and carriage of a spark the most that ever I saw any man have. It makes me, I confess, admire her'.¹⁵⁸ Being talented in playing witty heroines and subversive female roles made Gwyn an inspiration for Restoration dramatists. John Loftis notes, 'Dryden and his fellow dramatists, searching for a new style in comedy in that first decade of the professional actress, found in Nell a living model for their quick-witted and saucy heroines, those anti-Platonic coquettes

¹⁵⁷ Aphra Behn, *The Feigned Courtesans*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 6 (London: William Pickering, 1996), ('To Mrs. Ellen Gwin', ll. 17–34), p. 86.

Janet Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn* 6:86

¹⁵⁸ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

who influence if they do not establish the tone of the plays'.¹⁵⁹ Similarly to Restoration dramatists, Behn was influenced by Gwyn's skills and wit. She wrote roles specifically for her such as Cornelia in *The Feigned Courtesans*, in which she plays a role of a witty female libertine. By writing a female libertine role, Behn resists the belief that libertinism is exclusive to men, as will be discussed in chapter 2.

Elizabeth Barry was a skilled and influential actress too who is famous for her success in comedian as well as tragedian roles. Colley Cibber notes that Barry was skilful in the way she used her voice:

A Presence of elevated Dignity, her Mein and Motion superb and gracefully majestick; her Voice full, clear, and strong, so that no Violence of Passion could be too much for her; And when Distress or Tenderness possess'd her, she subsided into the most affecting Melody and Softness. In the Art of exciting Pity she had a Power beyond all the Actresses I have yet seen.¹⁶⁰

Commenting on her gift of playing comedian roles, Gilli Bush-Bailey writes, 'she excelled in comedy and is named as the speaker for numerous prologues and epilogues'.¹⁶¹

Commenting on her skilfulness of playing tragedian roles, Bailey writes that there are, 'reports of her ability to move her audience to tears in tragedy'.¹⁶² Indeed, Barry influenced the tragedy genre itself. Elizabeth Howe notes, 'in 1680s Elizabeth Barry triumphantly created the pathetic role of Monimia in Otway's *The Orphan* and her success in the part clinched the movement away from heroic drama and started the establishment of 'she-

¹⁵⁹ John Loftis, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by. John Loftis, Vol. 9 (Berkeley: The University of California Press. 1966), p. 332.

¹⁶⁰ Colley Cibber, *A Critical Edition of An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Comedian*, (1740), ed. by. John Maurice Evans (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), p. 95.

¹⁶¹ Gilli Bush-Bailey, 'Revolution, legislation and Autonomy', in *The Cambridge Companion to The Actress*, ed. by. Maggie B. Gale and John Stoke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 15-32 (p. 26).

¹⁶² Bailey, 'Revolution, legislation and Autonomy', p. 26.

tragedy' as a popular genre'.¹⁶³ Barry inspired and influenced many dramatists. Referring to Barry, Howe notes 'by the 1680s plays were being written around her'.¹⁶⁴ Behn herself was influenced by Barry's work and wrote for her a series of heroines, mistresses, prostitutes and widows. In *The City-Heiress*, Behn wrote for Barry the role of the widow who considers love and marriage her goals in life. Through her characterisation of the widow, her love relationship and her marriage, Behn shows that love and marriage can sometimes be disappointing, dissatisfying and miserable in patriarchal societies as discussed in chapter 4.

The success of Gwyn and Barry, however, does not mean that there was equality between actors and actresses in the Restoration theatre. There were limitations in the number of actresses in comparison to their male colleagues. Howe notes that in Restoration theatre, women were less than men in numbers:

the theatre was not as exceptional an employer as all that; the generally inferior status of women in the workplace and their exclusion from public power is reflected in the female situation within the companies. Although the number of actresses slowly increased during the two decades after the Restoration, men always outnumbered women by at least two to one. Only very occasionally did the companies apparently employ an unusually high number of women, as in the 1670-1 season when the King's Company contained seventeen players of each sex.¹⁶⁵

Besides their limited number, actresses received less money than actors did. Howe notes, 'the women's wages were significantly lower than the men's. A good experienced actor was usually paid 50s. per week, an equivalent actress only 30s. Even Barry, the most popular of

¹⁶³ Howe, *The First English Actress*, pp. 108-109.

¹⁶⁴ Howe, *The First English Actress*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ Howe, *The First English Actress*, p. 26.

all, was only paid 50s. a week, while her co-star, Thomas Betterton, received £5'.¹⁶⁶ In order to improve her financial wages, the actress needed to increase her commercial success, such as Elizabeth Barry. Howe comments, '[her] popularity had financial consequences sometime during the reign of James II, [...] she was granted a benefit, a performance whose profits was to her alone'.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, Barry improved her financial gain by active participation in the theatre management with Anne Bracegirdle, a younger actress. This partnership helped Bracegirdle improve her financial earnings too. Thus, in order to improve their financial gain and overcome inequities with actors, actresses had to work hard, work on their popularity and find different jobs in theatre.

Moreover, actresses' morals were questioned and they were linked to prostitutes. In his prologue 'to introduce the first Woman that came to Act on the Stage', Thomas Jordan writes:

Do you not twitter Gentlemen ?

I know You will be censuring, do't fairly though;

'Tis possible a vertuous woman may Abhor all sorts of looseness, and yet play;

Play on the Stage, where all eyes are upon her,

Shall we count that a crime France calls an honour?¹⁶⁸

These lines reveal that Restoration audience's first reaction to the new actresses was that they questioned their morals. Similarly, an anonymous lampoon writes about Nell Gwyn:

Hard by Pell-Mell, lives a wench card Nell,

King Charles the second he kept her,

She hath got a trick to handle his ... [prick]

But never lays hands on his Scepter.

¹⁶⁶ Howe, *The First English Actress*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁷ Howe, *The First English Actress*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁶⁸ Cited in Howe, *The First English Actress*, p. 32.

All matters of State, from her Soul she does hate,
And leave[s] to the Pollitick Bitch.,
The Whore's in the right, for 'tis her delight,
To be scratching just where it Itches.¹⁶⁹

Bailey notes that gossips and historical records from that time are filled with equations between actresses and prostitutes:

Seventeenth-century society was enthralled by the actress's craft on stage and simultaneously engrossed by the stories surrounding her sexual liaisons off stage. The elision between her public and private identity, the visual spectacle of her acting body on stage and the availability of her sexually active body off stage, reveals a bifocal perspective that has captured the popular imagination, underpinned biographies and histories of the actress and, [...], fuelled a lucrative trade in gossip for over three hundred years.¹⁷⁰

Bailey believes that there was an equation between actresses and prostitutes in the Restoration era because it was a society of binaries. Bailey writes 'the very public sphere in which her craft was practiced quickly led to parallels with prostitution in a patriarchal society employing the binaries of private/public, virgin/whore as constructs of femininity'.¹⁷¹ Thus, acting was not different than any other patriarchal field in the period and society concerns about the morality of the actresses were not temporary but lasted for centuries.

Another major factor that led to associating actresses with prostitution is that Restoration writers tend to write scenes which sexualise the bodies of actresses to attract the crowds. One of the common scenes in Restoration plays in which women are sexualised is the breeches scene. In *The Rival Ladies* (1664), Dryden depicts two women who disguise as

¹⁶⁹ Cited in Howe, *The First English Actress*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁰ Bailey, 'Revolution, legislation and Autonomy', p. 15.

¹⁷¹ Bailey, 'Revolution, legislation and Autonomy', p. 15.

page boys and fight each other. In the middle of the fight, one of them exclaims, ‘Two swelling Breasts! a Woman, and my Rival’¹⁷², and teared open the costume to reveal her rival’s body. Nevertheless, Behn uses the breeches scene for a political effect. In *the Rover*, she depicts Hellena disguising herself as a boy in order to pursue her lover, enjoy the freedom of speech and move in public. This kind of freedom was not available for women at that period. By the use of the breeches part, Behn allows her heroine to transcend the boundaries of traditional femininity.

As the following chapters show, Behn both made use of the innovations, changes and developments in the Restoration theatre and contributed to shape new theatrical agendas that resist patriarchy in the family and put woman in powerful position. Through her use of the marriage theme, Behn challenged traditional socio-economic and forced marriages. Also, Behn used the gay couple to demonstrate that women are equal to men in wit. Behn participated in the changes of the Restoration theatre by portraying libertine women who enjoy different kinds of freedom. Even though her plays were created along the lines of Restoration drama, she used the innovations and the conventions of the drama to add to the ability of her heroines to be self-determining much more than some of the contemporary playwrights did.

Exploring the historical context of Behn’s work, this chapter establishes that although early modern women lived in a patriarchal society, they worked within this patriarchal society to achieve their ends. Also, the family within the period of 1660s-1680s was not fixed but vulnerable to change. Giving an overview of the Restoration theatre shows that it was full of innovations, changes and developments. The analysis of Behn’s work in the following chapters demonstrate her utilisation of these instances of change, development and irregularity to resist patriarchy in the family and to shape new theatrical

¹⁷² Cited in Howe, *The First English Actress*, p. 56.

agendas in which the woman is represented as a subject. While she sometimes followed the trends in her age to depict challenging mothers, wives and daughters, other times she developed new techniques to resist the traditional family and its hierarchal structure.

Chapter 2: The Family and Female Desire

In the work of Aphra Behn, one of the main issues around which the family and familial relationships revolve is female desire. In *The Rover*, Behn exposes the means by which fathers and brothers try to control the desire and sexual conduct of women. She represents a father's plan for his daughters to be wives or nuns and a brother who does not allow his sisters to court their lovers. At the same time, Behn depicts the various ways by which daughters and wives challenge patriarchal control over their desire. Heroines in *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans* acknowledge their desire, act upon it, pursue it and gain sexual agency. Similarly, in her pastoral poems, 'The Disappointment' and 'The Golden Age', Behn imagines women's freedom to express their sexuality and criticises the secondary place assigned by men to women in lovemaking.

This chapter explores Behn's representation of the family and female desire by focusing on two works in each of these two genres: Behn's pastoral poems, 'The Disappointment' and 'The Golden Age', and her wit comedies, *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans*. This chapter suggests that there is a link between these four works. In each one of them Behn uses subversive conventions, pastoral genre and libertinism together with disguise and carnival, to discuss women's freedom of sexuality. Building on the idea that the pastoral has many purposes beyond rural concerns—most relevant here, the examination of the politics of power inside and outside the household—this chapter argues that Behn uses the pastoral genre to bring the values of the country to the urban domestic sphere. The countryside in the pastoral is distinguished by being a place of freedom of female desire which Behn brings to the urban setting in the two plays under discussion here. In other words, by the use of the pastoral genre, Behn transposes the relatively 'free' sexual behaviour

of country girls in her pastoral poems to the more ‘respectable’ women in her plays. As a counterpart to the pastoral, Behn uses libertinism to challenge family’s repression of women’s sexuality in plays. While the pastoral is a genre of the countryside which can be used to discuss the politics of court and family in a disguise of simplicity, libertinism is an urban concept, veiling political concerns in a disguise of sexuality.

Crucial to this chapter is a discussion of traditional conceptions of sexuality in early modern England as expressed in terms such as honour and virtue. An overview of these ideas is essential to understanding the ways in which Behn challenges these conceptions. In the Restoration age, these ideas—particularly virtue and honour—were highly gendered: for instance, Unhae Park Langis notes that ‘virtue [...] referred to the excellent action of those allowed to participate fully in the public sphere, i.e., male citizens, to the exclusion of women and slaves. Women, subject to patriarchal control, were relegated to a different, passive conduct of virtue’.¹ The meaning of virtue, he argues, ‘had divided along gendered lines to designate female chastity [...] and manly excellence including courage and valor’.² These norms of gendered virtue, according to Langis, permeate early modern literature, including didactic genres such as conduct books.³ Moreover, as Elizabeth Foyster argues, male honour in the seventeenth century depended on men controlling the sexual conduct of their wives and daughters. ‘Fathers,’ she notes, ‘were the guardians of their daughters’ sexual reputations until marriage; their ‘value’ in the marriage market was dependent on their chastity’.⁴ That is to say, the virtue at the core of femininity is chastity. If a woman is not chaste, she and her father face negative consequences. If Restoration women ‘acknowledged their own sexuality

¹ Unhae Park Langis, *Passion, Prudence, and Virtue in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), p. 20.

² Langis, *Passion*, p. 20.

³ Langis, *Passion*, p. 20.

⁴ Elizabeth A Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage*, (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 91.

and acceded to it,' Angeline Goreau argues, 'they violated the essential element of what they have been brought up to believe was their femininity: virtue'.⁵ Foyster explains the rationale behind this safeguarding of chastity: 'If a daughter had sex before marriage she could no longer be her father's exclusive property, and her damaged reputation reflected back on him'.⁶ Honour, in seventeenth century terms, as Carol Barash summarises, 'mean[t], first and foremost, 'chastity,' a woman's status as the sexual property of either her father or her husband'; and 'the loss of one's honor could be a form of social death'.⁷ As we can see, then, while power, government, command and courage constituted male virtue and honour in the Restoration age, chastity was forcefully advocated as the main element of female virtue and honour. Male honour, consequently, is profoundly preoccupied with governing women's chastity and fidelity.

In the works examined in this chapter, Behn criticises the traditional concept of female honour and challenges the traditional role of the virtuous woman. She does so by exposing the idea of feminine honour as a social construction, while further questioning the validity of this concept by portraying it as a waste of women's time and youth. Behn challenges this role by depicting heroines who acknowledge their sexuality and act on their desires. These women are desiring participants and agents in the sex act.

The following section shows that in order to criticise and challenge the urban politics which control women's desire, Behn uses the pastoral genre because it is subversive. The pastoral accommodates woman's 'natural' signs of sexual arousal and views them through a positive lens, thus allowing Behn to criticise urban politics which condemn women's desire

⁵ Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, pp. 179-180.

⁶ Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, p. 91.

⁷ Carol Barash, 'The Political Possibilities of Desire: Teaching the Erotic Poems of Behn', in *Teaching Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Christopher Fox (New York: AMS Press, 1990), pp.169-170.

and seek to control it through shame. Through the artful construction of the golden age, Behn criticises the socially constructed, artificial ideas of women's honour.

I. Poetry

In her pastoral poems 'The Disappointment' and 'The Golden Age', Behn questions her culture's common conceptions of male and female sexuality by making use of the conventional gendering of the pastoral. Critical opinion on the nature of the pastoral genre has been complex and sometimes contradictory in attempting to define the genre: as J. E. Congleton puts it, 'no genre is more difficult to define than the pastoral'.⁸ Paul Alpers agrees: 'it sometimes seems as if there are as many versions of pastoral as there are critics and scholars who write about it'.⁹ However, William Empson's explanation of the pastoral captures its nature very well: pastoral, he states, 'put[s] the complex in the simple'.¹⁰ That is to say, 'the essential trick of [...] pastoral' is 'to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody)'.¹¹ Similarly, Raymond Williams believes that "'Pastoral' means [...] the simple matter in which general truths are embodied or implied".¹² Despite its apparent simplicity, then, the pastoral can express deep and complex meanings and relationships.

Pastoral writing originated in the writings of Theocritus in the third century B.C.E., but, Jeremy Burchardt notes, 'the poet Theocritus is often considered as the original source of the genre, but it was the Roman poet Virgil who had the greatest influence in the development and transmission of the pastoral tradition'.¹³ Pastoral on the model of Virgil's

⁸ J. E. Congleton, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England, 1684-1798* (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1968), p. 4.

⁹ Paul Alpers, 'What Is Pastoral?', *Critical Inquiry*, 8. 3 (1982), 437-460, (p. 437).

¹⁰ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), p. 23.

¹¹ Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 11.

¹² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 21.

¹³ Jeremy Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change Since 1800* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 26.

Eclogues, which were written around 39 B.C.E., experienced a revival in sixteenth century Europe. In England, Edmund Spenser's first published work, *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579), resurrected the Virgilian career model as well as the pastoral genre in anticipating his epic, *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser dedicated his *Calendar* to Sir Philip Sidney, whose pastoral, *Arcadia*, circulated in manuscript during his lifetime and was published after his death as *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1590). In the seventeenth century, Ben Jonson and Aphra Behn tried their hands at the pastoral genre.¹⁴

Early modern pastoral was especially useful to writers in exploring and exposing the politics of power in cultural institutions including the royal court and the family. Sue P. Starke notes that 'pastoral provided an ideal vehicle for an exploration of the politics of the family, and, particularly, the place of the daughter'.¹⁵ At the same time, Louis Montrose, a pioneer of new historicism, notes, 'the "symbolic formation" of pastoral provided an ideal meeting ground for Queen and subjects, a mediation of her greatness and their lowness; it fostered the illusion that she was approachable and knowable, lovable and loving, to lords and peasants, courtiers and citizens alike'.¹⁶ Although apparently a genre of simplicity, pastoral has subversive potential. Montrose argues that 'pastoral literature is ostensibly a discourse of the powerless in dispraise of power'.¹⁷ Montrose considers pastoral a cultural work that participates in the structures of power. Therefore, he suggests that in order to interpret pastoral, the critical question should be changed from 'what pastorals 'are' or what they 'mean'', to 'what pastorals do, and by what operations they perform in their cultural

¹⁴ See Behn Jonson, 'To Sir Robert Wroth' and 'To Penshurst' and Aphra Behn, 'A Voyage to the Isle of Love' and 'On Desire'.

¹⁵ Sue P. Starke, *The Heroines of English Pastoral Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), p. 3.

¹⁶ Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes,'" and the Pastoral of Power', in *Renaissance Historicism: Selections from English Literary Renaissance*, ed. by Arthur F. Kinney and Dan S. Collins (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), pp. 34-63, (p. 61).

¹⁷ Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes,'" p. 43. .

work'.¹⁸ Using pastoral for political ends—for example, to censure courtly values or publish indirect critique of church and state—was a fundamental strategy of Renaissance poets, Spenser and Sidney included.

The use of the pastoral genre for political ends continued into the seventeenth century. Terry Gifford notes that Jonson's 'To Sir Robert Wroth' and his country house poem 'To Penshurst,' both published in 1616, have thinly veiled political agendas. In such poems, Gifford observes:

Pastoral could be used to serve a courtly function in praising a patron by describing his effortless management of the country in his ownership [...] The apparently natural social order of feudal Arcadia becomes, in these texts, the natural social order of a supposedly stable present. There are no shepherds in these texts since in these Arcadian nature provides for the deserving, and the poet certainly is no shepherd but a courtier friend in need of a little natural generosity from the aristocracy himself.¹⁹

Similarly, Heidi Laudien argues that Behn uses the pastoral because of its subversive nature to challenge normative gender relations:

In Behn's hands, this inherently imitative genre assumes interesting dimensions as a host of subversive women's stories emerge, featuring powerful heroines equipped not only with sexual and political, but also authorial power. Behn uses the form of the pastoral for self-exploration, dramatization, and expression, and her pastoral offer a powerful revision of the pastoral in terms of constructing a space for the articulation of female

¹⁸ Louis Adrian Montrose 'Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form', *ELH*, 50 (1983), pp. 415-459.

¹⁹ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 30.

desire and also for their challenges to heteronormativity in the pastoral tradition and in cultural at large.²⁰

Building on the feature of the pastoral genre to deal with more serious social issues—such as the politics of power inside and outside the house—through the disguise of rural simplicity, this chapter argues that Behn uses the pastoral to bring the values of the country to the urban domestic sphere. In her pastoral poems, ‘The Disappointment’ and ‘The Golden Age’, Behn transposes woman’s relatively ‘loose’ sexual behaviour, imagined as appropriate to country girls, to more ‘respectable’ women in her milieu. Behn’s strategy celebrates sexual freedom and challenges inequality in sexual relations between men and women.

A. ‘The Golden Age’

‘The Golden Age’ is a pastoral poem that challenges traditional conceptions of sexuality and celebrates the freedom of sexual desire. In this poem, Behn employs the golden age topos to challenge male poets who employ the same myth. The majority of male poets of the seventeenth century use the golden age myth, which describes an imaginary or lost age, in order to promote male-centred sexuality. As Eugene Cunnar notes, most seventeenth century male poets who employed this topos ‘really did not promise the woman equality nor did they voice any real concerns about woman’s desire’.²¹ Unlike her male contemporaries, however, Behn uses the golden age topos to celebrate equally the sexual desire of men and women and to complicate the traditional concept of female honour.

The poem represents the golden age as potentially having existed in a literal space. In order to do so, it describes every little detail:

Blest age! when ev'ry Purling Stream

²⁰ Heidi Laudien ‘Aphra Behn: pastoral poet’, *Women’s Writing*, 12. 1 (2005), 43-58 (p.43).

²¹ Eugene Cunnar, ‘Fantasizing a Sexual Golden Age in Seventeenth-Century Poetry,’ in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, ed. by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), pp. 179-205. p. 205.

Ran undisturbed and clear,
[...]
When an Eternal Spring drest ev'ry Bough,
And Blossoms fell, by new ones dispossesst;
These their kind shade affording all below,
And those a Bed where all below might rest.²²

In this poem, the golden age is distinguished by its peacefulness and calmness. '[S]tream', 'Spring', 'blossoms' and creatures are in peace and easiness with one another. Nature, itself, is in harmony with the gods:

To beautifie and shade the Grove
Where the young wanton Gods of Love
Offer their Noblest Sacrifice of Blissess. (14-16)

The poem argues that the ease and harmony of nature is a result of being untouched by man:

The stubborn Plough had then,
Made no rude Rapes upon the Virgin Earth;
Who yielded of her own accord her plentious Birth;
Without the Aids of men. (31-34)

Although this is an imaginary peaceful age, Behn's precise description seems to cause the scene to come to life.

In Behn's golden age, moreover, men's and women's sexual desires are equally celebrated. Both sexes are free to express and enjoy their desires:

The Lovers, thus uncontroul'd did meet,
Thus all their Joyes and Vows of Love repeat:

²² Aphra Behn, 'The Golden Age A paraphrase on a Translation out of French', in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 1 (London: William Pickering, 1992), p.30, (1-8). "Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically."

Joyes which were everlasting, ever new

And every Vow inviolably true. (105-108)

Men and women alike here enjoy their sexual relationships, both verbally and physically.

Elizabeth V. Young notes that in this poem, Behn ‘presents an ideal, lost age where men and women loved equally and freely’.²³ Furthermore, this golden age approves desire by showing that male sexual drive is non-threatening:

Beneath who's boughs the Snakes securely dwelt,

Not doing harm, nor harm from others felt;

With whom the Nymphs did Innocently play,

No spiteful Venom in the wantons lay;

But to the touch were Soft, and to the sight were Gay. (44-48)

‘Snakes’, here, represent male sexuality, which is described as ‘Not doing harm’. Young notes that Behn uses the snake image in an unconventional way. It is usually used as ‘a sign of the wily and dangerous nature of masculine power, which seduces women to reveal themselves and render their social and sexual authority for the false promise of pleasure and gratification’.²⁴ Not only male sexual desire, but female sexual desire also is seen as non-threatening. As we see in this verse, ‘Snakes [...] With whom the Nymphs did Innocently play’, women and men play in a positive way, suggesting that female sexuality is not regarded with distrust. By portraying both men and women enjoying sexual desire peacefully and equally without any danger or threat, the poem celebrates and accepts the sexuality of both sexes.

Desire, in the pastoral landscape of ‘The Golden Age,’ is not restricted by the controlling ideologies and institutions which represent masculine power in the city. In Stanza

²³ Elizabeth V. Young, ‘Aphra Behn, Gender, and Pastoral’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 33, 3 (1993), 523-543, (p. 541).

²⁴ Young, ‘Aphra Behn, Gender, and Pastoral’, p. 536.

4, the golden age is described as having no monarchs, rulers or laws: ‘Monarchs were uncreated then,/ Those Arbitrary Rulers over men;/ Kings that made Laws, first broke 'em, and the Gods’ (51-53). Behn’s golden age, moreover, is an age without religion, where relationships are not controlled by faith: ‘Not kept in fear of Gods, no fond Religious cause,/ Nor in Obedience to the duller laws’ (111-112). While the golden age is conventionally depicted as being without property, Behn’s usage of this convention invokes the economic institution of the household and its control of sexuality as absent in the pastoral setting:

Right and Property were words since made,
When Power taught Mankind to invade:
When Pride and Avarice became a Trade;
Carri'd on by discord, noise and wars,
For which they barter'd wounds and scars;
And to Inhaunce the Merchandize, miscall'd it, Fame. (65-70)

The poem argues that in order to enjoy sexual desire freely, the world needs to be free from the limitations of law, religion and commerce. Behn not only destabilises political, ecclesiastical and social institutions, but also the ideology that supports them. Thus, desire in ‘The Golden Age’ is not subject to the oppressive concepts of honour and shame:

The Nymphs were free, no nice, no coy disdain,
Deny'd their Joys, or gave the Lover pain;
The yielding Maid but kind Resistance makes;
Trembling and blushing are not marks of shame,
But the Effect of kindling Flame. (97-101)

Women in the golden age follow their desires and enjoy them freely. The only resistance women show is in ‘kind’. The signs of their arousal—‘blushing’ and ‘trembling’—are so

delicate as to transmute shame into licensed desire.²⁵ Thus, Behn uses the artful construction of the golden world to approve women's "natural" signs of sexual arousal, unlike the urban context where woman's desire is condemned and shamed by law, religion and morality.

'The Golden Age' proceeds to offer different reasons why desire should not be restricted by honour. First, the poem shows that honour is an artificial construction: 'Honour, the Error and the Cheat/ Of the Ill-natur'd Bus'ey Great,/ Nonsense, invented by the Proud' (74-76). Second, honour restricts and represses desire: 'Honour! that robb'st us of our Gust, / Honour! that hindered mankind first' (119-120). Finally, honour has negative effects on women and female sexuality by aligning women with sin, 'Oh cursed Honour! thou who first didst damn,/ A woman to the Sin of shame' (117-118). As Young comments, 'the poem becomes a denunciation of the concept of honour as Behn argues that honour represses natural feeling, particularly in women'.²⁶ By showing women in the golden age as naturally enjoying their desire, without taking into consideration honour or shame, Behn artfully distinguishes between the natural desire of the golden age and the socially constructed, artificial concept of honour in the real world beyond the poem.

Through the use of the pastoral genre and the topos of the golden age, Behn celebrates the sexual desire of men and women as equal, and criticises social, political and religious restrictions on woman's sexual conduct. The poem accepts equally the sexual desire of men and women by representing men and women expressing and enjoying their sexual desire in peace. Relying on an artfully crafted idea of nature, including women's nature, Behn interrogates the restrictions on woman's sexual conduct and challenges the institutions which prioritise male power and promote the concept of female honour.

²⁵ On blushing, see Jessica Munns, "But to the touch were soft": pleasure, power, and impotence in 'The Disappointment' and 'The Golden Age', in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. by Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), pp. 178-198, (p.186).

²⁶ E. Young, 'Aphra Behn, Gender, and Pastoral', p.539.

B. 'The Disappointment'

'The Disappointment' is a pastoral poem that defies cultural conceptions of sexuality and gender roles in the sexual act by the use of the 'Imperfect Enjoyment' sub-genre. The poem is a translation and revision of Jean Bénédict de Cantenac's 'L'Occasion Perdue', which describes a premature ejaculation during intercourse between a young man named Lysander and his maid Cloris. However, 'The Disappointment' views the incident through a protofeminist lens. In her rewriting of the original, Behn destabilises traditional discourses that instruct women to be sexually passive and to reserve power and sexual freedom for men.

In order to explore the extent to which Behn deconstructs traditional conceptions of sexuality and gender, a discussion of the imperfect enjoyment sub-genre is needed. With Behn, the most familiar example of English writers who tried their hands at this sub-genre are George Etherege and Earl of Rochester. Defining the imperfect enjoyment sub-genre, John O'Neill writes it is, 'a font of dramatic narrative in which an interrupted sexual episode is narrated and discussed'.²⁷ Poems belonging to this sub-genre, according to O'Neill, 'explain the circumstances leading to the lovers' misfortune (a sudden loss of potency, usually the result of a premature ejaculation) and, in a second section, reflect upon it'.²⁸ Most commonly, the 'impotency poem,' as Hannah Lavery calls it, focuses on the male lover's experience more than the female's.²⁹ In the first part of the poem, the causes and the meaning of the premature ejaculation from the man's point of view are discussed, while in the second part, the male lover recovers the lost opportunity. The imperfect enjoyment sub-genre, then, is gendered as it narrates the man's failure to perform the sexual act from the man's view.

²⁷ John O'Neill, 'An Unpublished "Imperfect Enjoyment" Poem', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 13. 2 (1977), 197-202, (p. 198).

²⁸ O'Neill, 'An Unpublished "Imperfect Enjoyment" Poem', p.198.

²⁹ Hannah Lavery, *The Impotency Poem from Ancient Latin to Restoration English Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 2.

However, the imperfect enjoyment sub-genre has subversive potential. Lavery notes that the moments of sexual failure in the impotency poems ‘allow for the often humorous exploration of principles underlying gender identity and social relationships from the time of writing’.³⁰ Thus, the impotency poem is characterised by ‘its capacity for political critique’, since ‘sexual failure in the poem, metaphorically comments upon the relationship implied between master and servant, or figures of authority or subjugation’.³¹

In Behn’s hands, the sub-genre’s usefulness as political critique is apparent. ‘The Disappointment’ unconventionally focuses on woman’s desire, depicting the female speaker as a desiring participant in the sex act and relocating her at the centre of the experience. Behn subverts the sub-genre by reversing the traditional gender roles in intercourse, in which the man is the active and desiring participant and the woman is passive and silent. Also, she disrupts the conventions of the sub-genre by changing the focus from the man and his sexual experience to the woman and hers. The transgressive sexual politics of the poem, as we will see, will usefully transferred into the domestic sphere in Behn’s comedies, where the gendered power structures of the household are inverted.

‘The Disappointment’ challenges the traditional male role and traditional conceptions of sexuality which reserve power in the sex act to men. Stanza 1 describes Lysander as an ‘*Amarous*’ person who is moved by ‘an impatient passion’ towards Cloris.³² When he sees her, unable to control his desire, he takes action. In order to ridicule Lysander’s sexual prowess, the poem compares him to Jupiter. Borrowing Jupiter’s mythical chariot, he comes to Cloris in ‘his gay Chariot drawn by Fire’(7), and like Jupiter, Lysander attempts to control ‘All things’, so they ‘did with his Love conspire’ (5). Comparing Lysander to Jupiter is, from

³⁰ Lavery, *The Impotency Poem*, p. 2.

³¹ Lavery, *The Impotency Poem*, p. 2.

³² Aphra Behn, ‘The Disappointment’, in *Oroonoko, The Rover And Other Works*, ed. by Janet Todd, (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p.331, l. 2. Subsequent citations are to line numbers in this edition and are included parenthetically.”

the start, a humorous exaggeration, since Lysander is a simple shepherd from the pastoral world and Jupiter is the supreme Roman god.

To emphasize Lysander's failure, Behn continues in subsequent stanzas to compare him to figures from classical mythology. Stanza 5 compares Lysander to Alpheus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. By describing Cloris as 'That Fountain' (49), Stanza 5 compares Cloris to Arethusa, the fountain nymph in *Metamorphoses*. Just like Alpheus, who pursues Arethusa and fails to conquer her in the myth, Lysander attempts and fails to please Cloris. Similarly, stanza 11 compares Lysander's penis to that of Priapus, the 'Greek fertility god, whose symbol was the phallus'³³:

Her timorous Hand she gently laid

(Or guided by Design or Chance)

Upon that Fabulous *Priapas*,

That potent God, as poets feign. (103-106)

Comparing Lysander's penis to Priapus's is ironic, since there is no man whose sexual prowess is equal to that of Priapus. The poem exploits this irony further with the following line, 'That potent god, as poets feign'. By suggesting that poets lie ('feign'), the poem negates the idea that Lysander's penis is like Priapus's. In fact, many critics note Behn's mocking of Lysander's sexual inadequacy, and that of men generally, by introducing the idea of feigning. Judith Kegan Gardiner notes Behn's sarcastic tone in this stanza, observing that the 'internal rhyme makes the "Fabulous Priapus" already comic, and the alliterations of "that potent god, as poets feign" link male poetry, lying and the myths or fables that govern society'.³⁴ Thus, Behn's use of the elements of poetic craft (internal rhyme, alliteration and so

³³ Stephen Greenblatt, et al, eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), p.1457.

³⁴ Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Utopian Longings in Behn's Lyric Poetry', in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 273-300, (p. 184).

on), and her subversion of the genre's gendering emphasise the ridiculousness of personifying Lysander's penis as Priapus.

Behn's playful mythological comparisons continue in stanza 13, which criticises Lysander and his imagined prowess by calling upon the story of Venus and Adonis: following Adonis's death, '*Venus*, when her *love* was slain,/ With Fear and Haste flew o'er the Fatal Plain' (129-130). These lines compare Cloris to Venus; both run with high speed because their lovers are lost. However, while the poem compares Lysander to Adonis because both of them lose their power, Adonis loses his life and Lysander loses his ability to perform sexually. Comically, then, Lysander is compared to four mythological figures—Jupiter, Alpheus, Priapus and Adonis—all of which reflect not his power but his failure. By implication, Behn's comparison of Lysander's impotence with myth suggests that reserving power for men—sexual power as well as power in other forms and spheres—is itself a myth.

The poem subverts the sub-genre of imperfect enjoyment by not describing the woman in misogynistic terms or referring to her as the reason behind Lysander's impotence, both of which are commonly the case in the sub-genre. As Carol Barash notes, 'in the men's poems about impotence, the male author watches the objectification of the male speaker and suggests that women's sexual desire and sexual forwardness—as well as men's fantasies about their own sexual performance—cause the man's sexual failure'.³⁵ Deborah Uman agrees that many early modern examples 'blame the woman's sexual desire for the man's impotence and the speakers of these poems display a conspicuous, even violent hatred toward the female sex'.³⁶ One significant aspect of the imperfect enjoyment sub-genre, then, is its insistence on blaming the woman for the man's impotency, which presents female sexuality

³⁵ Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 118.

³⁶ Deborah Uman, *Women as Translators in Early Modern England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), p. 111.

in negative light. Behn, however, subverts the sub-genre by associating Lysander's failure to his viewing of Cloris through a religious lens:

He seeks the Objects of his Vows;
(His Love no Modesty allows)
By swift degrees advancing - where
His daring hand that altar seiz'd,
Where Gods of Love do sacrifice.
That Awful Throne, that Paradise
Where Rage is calm'd, and anger pleas'd,
That Fountain where Delight still flows,
And gives the Universal World Repose. (42-50)

As we see, Lysander's regard for Cloris is a form of devotion. Cloris's genitalia are referred to as 'Objects of his Vows', 'altar', 'throne' and 'paradise'. Idolising Cloris's body becomes a barrier between his desire and its fulfilment. As Barash suggests, 'Lysander finds it impossible to consummate his love for a woman who offers herself because he has read her as divine'.³⁷ The combination of Cloris's desire and Lysander's modesty, 'the complete inversion of the opposition between female modesty and male forwardness with which the poem begins,' as Barash argues, 'leaves the relationship unconsummated'.³⁸ The female, then, is not blamed here, but the unrealistic and quasi-religious terms which men assign to them. Describing the vagina in religious terms, Munns notes, is a subversion of the 'imperfect enjoyment' sub-genre, which characteristically represents it in misogynist terms.

Furthermore, Munns writes, 'Behn reverses the usual centre of the genre from the penis to the vagina, for her Cloris does not just possess a convenient orifice but a luscious vagina

³⁷ Barash, *English Women's Poetry*, p. 121.

³⁸ Barash, *English Women's Poetry*, p. 122.

described in (clichéd) religious terms as an “altar” and a “paradise” as well as “[f]ountain where delight still flows”³⁹. Behn, then, does not blame individual men or women for the failure of the sex act; rather, as Barash notes, ‘Behn blames the codes in which [...] love is imagined and enacted’.⁴⁰ Furthermore, by relocating female desire in the centre of the poem, Behn defends the woman’s role as a desiring participant in intercourse.

In ‘The Disappointment,’ the woman has sexual agency, conveyed in the way she plays multiple roles, all based on her own wishes. On the one hand, she conforms to the traditional role of the female in intercourse, while on the other, she participates in it as an active and powerful partner. The passive role that Cloris plays is clear in stanza 2, which presents a romantic scene between her and Lysander, ‘In alone Thicket, made for Love’ (11), a place distinguished by its peaceful atmosphere, ‘Silent as yielding Maids Consent’ (12). In this scene, Cloris ‘with a Charming Languishment/ Permits his Force’ (13-14). Cloris’s ‘Languishment’ shows her as weak and powerless. Similarly, in the following stanza, Cloris conforms to a conservative role as she experiences shame: ‘Her Bright Eyes sweat [*sic*], and yet severe,/ Where Love and Shame confus'dly strive’ (21-22). Also, when Cloris calls for help, the poem mentions the threat of her loss of ‘honour’ in this encounter. ‘Cease, cease — your vain Desire,’ she threatens, ‘or I’ll call out’ (25-26). By taking into consideration ‘shame’ and ‘Honour’, instructing Lysander to withdraw and threatening to scream, Cloris conforms to the traditional female role, which is to be innocent and chaste.

Although she acts virtuously, however, Cloris contradicts this role by being a desiring participant and by controlling the sex act. The opening description of Cloris’s eyes exposes her desire when she sees Lysander, ‘no Light to guide the World,/ But what from *Cloris* Brighter Eyes was hurld’ (9-10). The word ‘guide’ here suggests that Cloris is not only

³⁹ Munns, ‘But to the touch were soft’, p.183.

⁴⁰ Barash, *English Women's Poetry*, p. 123.

expressing her desire but that she is also the one who controls this encounter. Lisa Zeitz and Peter Thoms note that Cloris in this line is not passive or weak, since ‘the verb "hurld" assumes agency’.⁴¹ Moreover, they comment on the word ‘permits’ here as suggesting that Cloris is the one who has the ‘power to permit or to prohibit’.⁴²

Similarly, stanza 2 represents Cloris as an active participant who encourages Lysander in the act of intercourse:

Her Hands his Bosom softly meet,
But not to put him back design'd,
Rather to draw'em on inclin'd:
[...]
Resistance 'tis in vain to show;
She wants the pow'r to say — *Ah! what d' ye do?* (15-20)

Cloris's encouragement of Lysander abandons social rules. In the following stanza, too, Cloris acts as if she is resisting Lysander, while she in fact is encouraging him:

I'll call out — What would you do ?
My dearer Honour ev'n to you,
I cannot — *must not give* — *Retire,*
Or take that Life whose chiefest part
I gave you with the Conquest of my Heart. (26-30)

While mentioning honour, here, Cloris is breathless; a body language that shows desire. Her body language, then, contradicts her words and encourages Lysander rather than asking him to stop. Moreover, stanza 7 reveals clearly Cloris's refusal to be controlled by social constraints:

⁴¹ Lisa Zeitz and Peter Thoms, ‘Power, Gender, and Identity in Aphra Behn's ‘The Disappointment’, *Studies in English Literature*, 37. 3 (1997), p. 502.

⁴² Zeitz and Thoms, ‘Power, Gender, and Identity’, p. 503.

Abandon'd by her Pride and Shame,
She does her softest Joy dispence,
Offring her Virgin-Innocence
A Victim to Loves Sacred Flame (65-68).

‘Pride and shame’ do not guide Cloris’s behaviours. Instead, desire controls her actions.

Cloris’s contradictory behaviour exposes her agency in the intercourse. Acting as an honourable woman, then, is Cloris’s tool for encouraging Lysander to fulfil her desire. By showing the female’s genuine desire for men, Behn reveals both ‘the intricate negotiations between personal desire and adherence to the social code that women must enact’; as Zeitz and Thoms put it, and ‘the social forces that lie behind the conventions and make such acts of negotiation essential for women’.⁴³ Unlike men who express their sexuality freely, women need to use social codes of chastity in order to cover their sexuality. Being in control of this act, however, and utilising it to her benefit gives Cloris agency in her sexual relationship with Lysander. As Uman suggests, ‘Behn's poetry resists even the satirical objectification of the female body [...] Through various types of translation, Behn fashions a space in which the female subject is both visible and audible’.⁴⁴

As it comes to a close, ‘The Disappointment’ subverts the imperfect enjoyment sub-genre by focusing on female desire and not on the man’s recovery from his sexual failure. After Lysander fails in his first attempt, he does not succeed in his second trial to perform:

Nature's Support, (without whose Aid
She can no Humane Being give)
It self now wants the Art to live;

⁴³ Zeitz and Thoms, ‘Power, Gender, and Identity’, p. 504.

⁴⁴ Uman, *Women as Translators*, p. 111.

Faintness its slack'ned Nerves invade:
In vain th' intraged Youth essay'd
To call its fleeting Vigor back,
No motion 'twill from Motion take;
Excess of Love his Love betray'd:
In vain he Toils, in vain Commands;
The Insensible fell weeping in his Hand. (81-90)

These lines show that, no matter how much he tries, Lysander remains impotent. Instead of focusing on Lysander, the poem describes Cloris's emotional reaction to Lysander's sexual failure: she feels disappointed. The poem does not state this explicitly, but the description of Lysander's limp penis from Cloris's point of view exposes Cloris's disappointment: 'Finding that God of her Desires/ Disarm'd of all his Awful Fires,/ And Cold as Flow'rs bath'd in Morning-Dew' (112-114). Comparing her expectations against her findings conveys the deep disappointment of Cloris. Where she expects to find the 'God of her Desires', what Cloris finds is something 'Disarm'd' and 'cold'. Therefore, when she touches his genitals, Cloris withdraws 'her fair hand'. Stanza 12, however, describes Cloris's feelings towards Lysander's sexual inadequacy explicitly: Cloris feels 'disdain and shame' (128). Munns comments that Cloris feels 'disdain presumably for her lover's incapacity, and shame at having participated in this fiasco'.⁴⁵ The poem, then, describes the woman's feelings implicitly and explicitly and focuses attention on Cloris's emotional reaction to the man's impotency. Cloris's feelings include disappointment, shame and rage.

Stanza 12 moves the focus from Cloris's emotions to the description of her physical reaction towards Lysander's impotency. Upon finding Lysander's penis limp, 'The Blood forsook the hinder Place,/ And strew'd with Blushes all her Face' (116-117). For Munns,

⁴⁵ Munns, 'But to the touch were soft', p. 183.

Behn's treatment of the woman's physical reaction to male impotency can be considered feminist because it focuses on female desire: 'Cloris's vagina is also sensitive and responds to her emotions. [...] when her lover fails her, she undergoes an immediate cessation of desire which Behn describes with anatomical precision'.⁴⁶ Cloris's physical reaction to Lysander's impotency does not stop at that. Cloris decides to leave. In Stanza 12, we learn that '[...] from *Lysander's* arms she fled,/ Leaving him fainting on the Gloomy Bed' (119-120). Taking the decision to leave and acting upon it captures the degree of Cloris's autonomy. Not only that, but Cloris also takes this action with speed and determination. In the following stanza, we're told, 'Like Lightning through the Grove she hies' (121). To show determination, Behn compares Cloris to the mythological nymph Daphne who flees from Apollo: 'Or *Daphne* from the *Delphic God*' (122). While Daphne is turned into a laurel tree to be saved from Apollo, Cloris leaves Lysander to save herself from shame. To show both her speed and determination, Stanza 13 describes Cloris's leaving as, 'The Wind that wanton'd in her Hair, /And with her Ruffled Garments plaid,/ Discover'd in the Flying Maid/ All that the Gods e'er made, [o]f Fair' (125-128). By representing Cloris's taking the decision to leave and acting upon it with speed and determination, the poem focuses our attention on a woman's physical reaction to a man's impotence.

Many critics note that Cloris's sexual desire is at the centre of 'The Disappointment'. Barash writes, in contrast to 'other 'imperfect enjoyment' poems' where 'male sexual subjectivity and women's objectification' are 'foregrounded', 'The Disappointment' describes Cloris's 'sexual desire'.⁴⁷ Similarly, Munns notes, 'In place of the male poems' emphasis on the male anatomy and sperm as virtual capital—unfortunately wasted, gratuitously expended in 'clammy joys', and a debt not paid— Behn's poem shifts the

⁴⁶ Munns, 'But to the touch were soft', p. 183.

⁴⁷ Barash, 'The Political Possibilities of Desire', p.169.

emphasis to the failure to respond and exchange pleasure for pleasure'.⁴⁸ Along the same lines, Zeitz and Thoms argue that the poem is an artful creation to discuss the 'nature' of desire and 'depicts female sexual desire in a way that leaves no doubt that Nature—the power of natural desire—operates equally in men and women'.⁴⁹ Behn, then, artfully discusses the 'nature' of desire and insists that pleasure should be enjoyed mutually between man and woman.

However, 'The Disappointment' ends with the narrator sympathizing with Cloris: 'The *Nymph's* Resentments none but I / Can well Imagine or Condole,' (131-132). She shows sympathy for Cloris, but not for Lysander, dismissing him simply, 'none can guess *Lysander's* Soul, / But those who sway'd his Destiny' (133-134). By representing Cloris's emotional and physical reaction to Lysander's failure and ending the poem with the narrator sympathizing with Cloris, 'The Disappointment' subverts the sub-genre of the imperfect enjoyment.

The above discussion shows how Behn manipulates the pastoral to bring to the fore the genre's capacity to subvert conventional ideas of female sexual desire. She artfully crafts a 'natural world' to discuss the "nature" of women and the "nature" of desire. These two pastoral poems challenge the traditional female role by showing the woman as a desiring participant and agent in the sex act. Behn responds to the sexual license afforded to women in the pastoral genre in order to overturn traditional conceptions of sexuality which privilege the male over the female in sexual relationships. Leaving the pastoral world behind and re-entering the confines of the urban household, the following section explores how Behn transposes women's sexual license from country to city, with equally subversive results.

II. The Plays

⁴⁸ Munns, 'But to the touch were soft', pp.183-184.

⁴⁹ Zeitz and Thoms, 'Power, Gender, and Identity', p. 503.

The Rover and *The Feigned Courtesans* both challenge seventeenth century conceptions of sexuality and the politics of desire in the family through the use of carnival, disguise and libertinism. In order to appreciate Behn's use of carnival and disguise, it should be noted that the cultural and critical inversions produced by these strategies are akin to the social inversions produced by the pastoral genre. Through the use of carnival and disguise, Behn confronts and challenges the limitations on women's sexual freedom in the urban household in terms that parallel and mirror her deployments of the pastoral for similar ends. Moreover, Behn draws a link between the pastoral motifs of recreation and veiling and the libertinism in *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans*. While pastoral is a rural strategy which can be used to discuss the politics of the city in a disguise of simplicity, libertinism is an urban concept which can be used to discuss the politics of the court in a disguise of sexuality. Moreover, as she had shifted the gendered terms of the pastoral and the imperfect enjoyment sub-genre to focus on women's sexuality rather than men's, Behn also expands the role of the libertine to include not only men but also women. The female libertines in Behn's plays are urban counterparts to the sexually free milkmaids of Behn's pastoral world.

Before exploring the plays, a brief discussion of libertinism, carnival and disguise is needed. Libertinism is difficult to define because libertines both exist in real life as the court wits and are also represented in literature as imagined characters. This difficulty and complexity of libertinism made it a fertile field for studies. Because of the huge number of studies in libertinism, this chapter cannot cover them all. It gives a brief overview of libertines and liberalism that helps in understanding Behn's representation of libertine characters.

King Charles II and the court wits were the most prominent libertines in the Restoration age. Commenting on King Charles II's embrace of libertinism, James Webster notes, 'during the 1660s, the king was intimately involved in the libertines' activities,

occasionally accompanying [the court wits] to brothels, drinking with them in private houses, and protecting them from some of the consequences of their behavior'.⁵⁰ The most prominent libertine court men are John Wilmot who is the Earl of Rochester, George Villiers who is the Duke of Buckingham, Sir Charles Sedley, Sir George Etherege and William Wycherley.⁵¹ However, this group was not permanent. Webster notes, 'the constitution of the group would change as political and artistic differences arose between members of the fraternity. These differences would result in the complete disintegration of the group by 1680'.⁵² Although libertinism was embraced by elite circle of men, this circle was changeable.

Libertines are distinguished by certain characteristics and the Earl of Rochester is an appropriate model to show these characteristics. In his study, Warren Chernaik notes that there is a link between libertinism and sexual freedom, '[n]early all accounts of libertinism as an ideology stress restlessness, dissatisfaction or a sense of incompleteness as its defining characteristic. No one woman, no one conquest, can ever satisfy'.⁵³ Similarly, Webster notes, 'The libertine was a familiar figure as a sexual adventurer'.⁵⁴ He adds, 'these libertines were public performers of private pursuits'.⁵⁵ Earl of Rochester is a typical libertine who embraces sexual freedom in poems. In his poem 'Against Constancy', he writes 'Then bring my bath, and strew my bed, / As each kind night returns: / I'll change a mistress till I'm dead, / And

⁵⁰ Jeremy W Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court: Politics, Drama, Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 11.

⁵¹ Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, p. 2.

⁵² Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, p. 12.

⁵³ Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 2.

⁵⁴ Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature*, p. 2

fate change me to worms'.⁵⁶ Moreover, Earl of Rochester embraces sexual freedom in real life. Martha Mackenzie notes, 'He was a smoker, a drinker, [and] a ladies' man'.⁵⁷

Moreover, Earl of Rochester is known for his wit and skilfulness of using language. Referring to Earl Rochester, Burnet Gillbert, a Restoration philosopher and historian, writes:

his Conversation was easie and obliging. He had a strange Vivacity of thought, and vigour of expression: His Wit had a subtilty and sublimity both, that were scarce imitable. His Style was clear and strong: When he used Figures they were very lively, and yet far enough out of the Common Road: he had made himself Master of the Ancient and Modern Wit, and of the Modern *French* and *Italian* as well as the *English*. [...] No wonder a young man so made, and so improved was very acceptable in a Court.⁵⁸

By being graceful in witty conversations, among other merits, Earl of Rochester was able to connect with the king. Norman Milne notes that Earl of Rochester was 'the most fertile man of wit and what's more the most prolific and perhaps rhetoric libertine'.⁵⁹ Libertines, then, are distinguished by their witty conversations.

Another activity that Earl of Rochester and his libertine friends were famous for is their use of libertinism for political effects. Because of this activity, libertines' relationship with the court was complicated. While the court gave them privileges and authority that served their interests in wealth and property, it limited their participation in government. Commenting on the marginalisation of the court wits in the government in the early period of

⁵⁶ Cited in R.E. Pritchard, *Passion For Living: John Wilmot Earl of Rochester* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012) , p. 100.

⁵⁷ Martha Mackenzie, 'Sexual Desires Interpreted into Power', *The Lehigh Review*, 13 (2005), pp. 161-167, (p. 166).

⁵⁸ Burnet Gilbert, *Some Passages of The Life and Death of The Right Honourable John, Earl of Rochester who died the 26th of July, 1680* (Bristol: Bristol Public Libraries: 1680), pp.8 -9.

⁵⁹ Norman Milne, *Libertines and Harlots From 1600-1836* (Rothersthorpe: Paragon Publishing, 2014), p. 9.

the Restoration age, Webster notes ‘In the early 1660s, their role was purely decorative’.⁶⁰ However, libertines’ political influence changed some years later. Webster writes, ‘By the mid – 1660s, at least one member of the group-Buckingham- aspired to greater political influence, and briefly became one of Charles’s advisors’.⁶¹ Although the libertines’ political influence on the court was limited, it changed from one period to another.

Because libertines’ political influence on the court was limited, the court wits used literature to promote their political ideas. The court wits wrote mainly poetry that revolves around libertinism and drama that depicts libertine characters who resemble them in their characteristics, behaviours and activities. The main political ideas the court wits’ literature revolve around are the challenge of all forms of power and the resistance of the traditional sexual roles. Webster notes:

by challenging Stuart ideology’s vision of marriage, the family, and government, these libertines worked to fashion a new model for English culture based on their own views of individual liberty, which included more permissive notions of sexual behaviour and individual conscience. This agenda is embodied in the libertine protagonists of their plays in the 1670s.⁶²

In addition, Webster notes, ‘libertinism’s blurring of public and private acts [...] expanded the possible sexual roles and identities available to late-seventeenth century men and women’.⁶³ Libertine writers’ political views, however, were not similar. Commenting on the changes and the differences between writers regarding political views, Webster writes ‘in 1670s, the wits’ political aspirations were dashed, and the theatrical group slowly split into two factions: the aristocrats (Buckingham, Sedley, and Rochester) who joined the opposition

⁶⁰ Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, p. 30.

⁶¹ Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, p. 30.

⁶² Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, pp. 31-32.

⁶³ Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, p. 3.

party in the Parliament, and the gentlemen (Etherege and Wycherley) who continued to support king's agenda'.⁶⁴ Libertine writers also develop their libertine characters with each work they write. Webster notes:

Each of their plays reiterates the libertine identity, but each subsequent play also contributes new attributes to that identity that previous plays did not. Wycherley's Horner, Etherege's Dorimant, Rochester's Valentinian, and Sedley's Antony all share basic libertine characteristics, but each of these characters is also different from the others. On the surface, these additions are merely fine tunings of the libertine personae, small alterations that help to keep the character interesting. More importantly, however, these differences signal changes in the group's view, relationships, and resolutions to the social and behavioural practices in the cultural outside the theatre.⁶⁵

The challenge of politics in literature through libertine characters, then, is complicated and has no single direction or style.

These court wits not only used literature to criticise culture and society but also influenced other playwrights to include libertine characters in their work. Commenting on the popularity of the rake who is a libertine character, Harold Weber writes 'the rake was one of the most popular of stock theatrical types, surely the most notorious both during the Restoration and after'.⁶⁶ In *Marriage à la Mode*, John Dryden dedicates the play to Rochester and says frankly that he and his friends are influenced by the court wits in writing their libertine characters:

And not only I, who pretend not to this way, but the best comic writers of our

⁶⁴ Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court*, p. 31.

⁶⁶ Harold Weber, *The Restoration rake-hero: transformations in sexual understanding in seventeenth-century England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 6

age, will join with me to acknowledge, that they have copied the gallantries of courts, the delicacy of expression, and the decencies of behaviour, from your lordship, with more success, than if they had taken their models from the court of France.⁶⁷

The influence of the court wits on literature, then, appears both in characters in drama and in the declaration of the writers themselves. If the pastoral was not only (or truly) a genre of the countryside, but veiled political, courtly motives in a disguise of simplicity, libertinism is its urban counterpart, veiling political concerns in a disguise of freedom of sexuality.

Many studies view libertinism as gendered. Chernaik stresses the gendered nature of libertinism by saying that ‘any frank discussion of Restoration-era sexuality must adequately address the issue of the libertine ethos as a troubling political and cultural posture that privileged gender inequity and stratification all in the name of pleasure’.⁶⁸ Similarly, Susan Staves notes that libertinism ‘was hostile to marriage or any other long-term commitment, typically figured women as provided by nature for men's pleasure, and sometimes did not scruple to resort to violence to gratify male desire’.⁶⁹ That is to say, libertinism privileges male sexuality over female sexuality. ‘Inheriting from courtly love the idea that passion flourished only outside of marriage,’ Staves argues, ‘libertinism regarded marriage as a betrayal of the good. In glorifying present sexual pleasure, it countenanced sexual practices that had fewer problematic consequences for men than for women’.⁷⁰ Thus, the double standard that permeated libertine ideology imposed far greater troubles for women who had

⁶⁷ Cited in Kathleen Martha Lynch, *The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy* (New York: Biblio and Tannen Booksellers and Publishers, 1965), p.139.

⁶⁸ Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 75.

⁶⁹ Susan Staves, ‘Behn, women, and society’, in *Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp 12-28, (p. 21).

⁷⁰ Staves, ‘Behn, women, and society’, p. 21.

sex outside marriage than for men.

Although it is usually thought that libertinism was a masculine-based ideology, the features delineated above arguably made it an option for women. Weber's *The Restoration Rake* raises the possibility of uncovering female libertines in Restoration literature. He explores female libertinism in male writers' works and finds that these sexually daring female characters are responsive to men's sexual anxieties.⁷¹ Similarly Laura Linker argues that many writers in the seventeenth century create female libertine characters in their works, citing specifically Dryden's *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1671), which 'features characters resembling Charles II's most powerful court mistress during the 1660s'.⁷² She continues, 'Though Dryden's play denounces the mistresses' influence, it ironically gives characters modeled after them an important role on the stage. Not only do the female libertines appear witty, stylish, and malicious, one of them openly expresses her sexual desires in the first scene'.⁷³

Significantly, Linker not only studies female libertines in the works of male Restoration writers, but also argues that Behn created female libertine characters in a number of works, including Julia in *The Lucky Chance* and Isabella in *The History of the Nun*. Linker asserts, however, that although these two characters are sexually free, they face loss at the end of the play. Similarly, Ros Ballaster notes, 'It is not new to see Behn as an advocate of libertine notions of desire and a simultaneous critic of the "hidden" truth of its violence and masculinism'.⁷⁴ Following the lead of critics such as Linker, Ballaster and Weber, this study shows that Behn advocates freedom of sexuality and depicts libertinism as a possible choice

⁷¹ Weber, *The Restoration Rake-Hero*.

⁷² Laura Linker, *Dangerous Women, Libertine Epicures, and the Rise of Sensibility, 1670–1730* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 11.

⁷³ Linker, *Dangerous Women*, p. 11.

⁷⁴ Ros Ballaster, 'Taking Liberties: Revisiting Behn's Libertinism', *Women's Writing*, 19.2 (2012), pp. 165–76, (p. 166).

for women. Unlike Linker, however, this study argues that in *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans*, Behn represents female characters who acknowledge or act on their sexual desire without losing or being punished at the end of the plays. Understanding the concept of libertinism in real life and in literature allows us to comprehend the extent to which Behn challenges and criticises its ideology for its negative consequences for women, while at the same time allowing her female characters to obtain libertine values as a way to liberate women's sexual desire.

In their libertine practices, Behn's female libertines make use of the devices of carnival and disguise to subvert the ordinary boundaries of social control and to expand their freedom. In other words, the recreational and veiled features of the pastoral world that enable the genre to function as social and political critique—and, in Behn's hands, a critique of conventional gender roles—have their equivalents in the carnivalesque and disguise features of libertinism. Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the carnivalesque as allowing a freeplay of socially subversive energies which are subdued when the carnival ends is given a gendered deployment by Behn whose female heroines enjoy temporary freedom of sexuality during the carnival, but their freedom is curtailed when the carnival ends and the women return to the status quo of marriage. At the same time, though, Behn's carnival is different from Bakhtin's subversion-containment model, in that some permanent changes persist after the carnival period is over. Most prominently, the heroines overturn patriarchal control by achieving their goals of marrying their equals. Thus, Behn's use of carnival is similar to her use of pastoral: we stay in the imaginary golden world for a while, but at the end we return to the 'real' world. The pastoral allows women freedom of sexuality that real world does not—yet Behn's exposure of the limitations of the real world persists beyond our exile from the golden world.

Mikhail Bakhtin is a prominent scholar in carnival studies and his works are the most widely cited of all in carnival discussions. In his works, Bakhtin discusses the powerful

impact of the carnival on the late medieval and early modern culture and society. He claims that in the carnival ‘the laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended’.⁷⁵ He continues ‘what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety and etiquette connected with it — that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age)’.⁷⁶ Carnival, then, exists in opposition to the structured and ordered society.

Bakhtin notes that carnival is a mode of interrelationships between people. He claims that the suspension of hierarchical structure during carnival results in ‘*free and familiar contact among people*’.⁷⁷ According to Bakhtin, during carnival celebrations, everyone participates; there are no performers and spectators. ‘In carnival’, he notes, ‘everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act’.⁷⁸ Carnival ‘brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid’.⁷⁹ Carnival, then, is a space where all categories of society mingle together.

Moreover, Bakhtin notes that carnival is subversive to the official, church and state and all hierarchal ranks. He claims, ‘Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed’.⁸⁰ Bakhtin adds that carnival represents, ‘the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals,

⁷⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.122.

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 122.

⁷⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 123.

⁷⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 122.

⁷⁹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 122.

⁸⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helen Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), p. 10.

counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life'.⁸¹ As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have noted, 'the main importance of [Bakhtin's] study is its broad development of the 'carnavalesque' into a potent, populist, critical inversion of all official words and hierarchies'.⁸² However, the inversion has no threat when the carnival ends. Bakhtin notes that 'The feast was a temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers. For a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of Utopian freedom'.⁸³ According to Bakhtin, carnival transposes, inverts and subverts but with no threat to the real life.

However, later studies view carnival as having two functions: it can be a subversion to the real life and it can be a containment. In his study, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie notes that carnival can threaten the real life by showing that the Mardi Gras carnival in Romans, a town in France, led to a revolution against oppression and increasing taxation in 1580.⁸⁴ In his discussion of carnival, Chris Humphrey claims that carnival/misrule has no one social or political meaning that 'either misrule works like a safety-valve, and the status quo is restored after a period of temporary inversion, or it is seen as the expression of class antagonism or gender politics'.⁸⁵ Similar to Bakhtin's subversion-containment model, the female heroines in *The Rover* enjoy temporary freedom of sexuality during the carnival, but this freedom is stopped when the carnival ends and they return to marriage status. Yet, in agreement with later studies in carnival, the female heroines in *The Rover* enjoy some permanent changes

⁸¹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 123.

⁸² Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 7.

⁸³ Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 89.

⁸⁴ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans: De la Chandeleur au mercredi des Cendres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

⁸⁵ Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester: Palgrave, 2001), p. 20.

after the end of the carnival when they resist their father's control by marrying their lovers who are their equals.

Furthermore, in her plays, Behn makes a generous use of disguise, which is one form of the carnival. According to Jennifer Vaught, carnival in early modern England includes 'temporary misrule, role reversals, and disguises [...] Masks that featured long, phallic noses; crossdressing; and elaborate, hybrid costumes of wild men or women and animals'.⁸⁶ Disguise, which includes wearing costumes and masks, is an integral component of both the carnival and the pastoral: in both contexts, it allows for the manipulation of hierarchical powers. On the one hand, disguise deconstructs the power structure. As Paola Pugliatti notes, 'disguise is an eminently social infraction, one that characteristically threatens the social order and, consequently, political stability'.⁸⁷ On the other hand, disguise allows for the reconstruction of power. As Rozaliya Yaneva demonstrates, 'through the wearing of particular clothing one can construct different worlds, feign alternative realities and suggest truths and untruths'.⁸⁸ She adds, 'through the wearing of certain clothing or disguises fantasies of self-advancement are unleashed, the overturning of fixed social order and proper identities are released and theatrical transvestism is encouraged'.⁸⁹ Thus, disguise can be used as a tool not only to deconstruct power but also to construct it.

Moreover, disguise and mask wearing are powerful tools that help in concealing the self from others. Francoise Ghillebaert notes '*Disguise, mask and masquerade* [...] convey the notion of concealment and pretense without necessarily involving any accessories'.⁹⁰

⁸⁶Jennifer Vaught, *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), p. 4.

⁸⁷Paola Pugliatti, *Beggary and Theatre in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 65.

⁸⁸Rozaliya Yaneva, *Misrule and reversals: carnivalesque performances in Christopher Marlowe's plays* (München: Utz, 2013), p. 297.

⁸⁹Yaneva, *Misrule*, p. 297.

⁹⁰Francoise Ghillebaert, *Disguise in George Sand's Novels* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), p. 23.

According to Rozaliya Yaneva, disguise can be used as a tool for concealing ‘in the sense of misrepresenting and the employment of false statements about the wearer as perceived through the gaze of the observers’.⁹¹ However, she states:

at the same time through the acts of subversive and deliberate covering masquerade costumes and clothing play with the dialect of concealing and revealing, they reveal statements about nature, truth and identity, the relationship between the essence of a person and its outward appearances.⁹²

The mask and disguise, then, have the power to re-inscribe identity. They enable the person to reveal or conceal the self from others. In my discussion of *The Feigned Courtesans*, I show how, through disguise, Behn enables her female characters to conceal and reveal their identities, which, in turn, allows them to fulfil and express their sexuality.

A. *The Rover*

The Rover challenges patriarchal conceptions of sexuality and empowers women. Critics note that *The Rover* is a revision of Thomas Killigrew’s play *Thomaso, or The Wanderer* (1662), however, it is rewritten for empowering women purposes. Jones De Ritter, for instance, argues that Behn’s revision of *Thomaso, or The Wanderer* shows hostility to the sexual politics in Killigrew’s play.⁹³ Following this school of thought, this chapter explores *The Rover* through a feminist lens and argues that the play shows both the ways in which patriarchy objectifies women and the strategies women employ to challenge patriarchy, specifically by adapting a female libertinism which uses disguise, and which enables them to attain their sexual freedom and agency.

⁹¹ Yaneva, *Misrule and reversals*, pp. 209-210.

⁹² Yaneva, *Misrule and reversals*, pp. 209-210.

⁹³ Jones De Ritter, ‘The Gypsy, The Rover, and the Wanderer: Aphra Behn’s Revision of Thomas Killigrew’, *Restoration*, 10 (1986), pp.82-92.

To show the ways through which patriarchy objectifies women in marriage, the play begins with the drafting of the father's will, which orders Florinda, his elder daughter, to marry Don Vincentio and Hellena, his younger daughter, to join a convent. The father writes these orders in his will and gives it to Pedro, his son. Thus from its earliest moments, *The Rover* displays the patriarchal objectification of women, insofar as the father decides and attempts to control his daughters' futures without their consent. As the scene progresses, Pedro, like his father, treats Florinda as an object of exchange by ordering her to marry Don Antonio, his friend, instead of Don Vincentio:

PEDRO [...] As for you, Florinda, I've only try'd you all this while, and urg'd my Father's Will; but mine is, that you would love Antonio, he is brave and young, and all that can compleat the Happiness of a gallant Maid -- This Absence of my Father will give us opportunity to free you from Vincentio, by marrying here, which you must do to morrow.

FLORINDA To morrow!

PEDRO To morrow, or 'twill be too late -- 'tis not my Friendship to Antonio, which makes me urge this, but Love to thee, and Hatred to Vincentio -- therefore resolve upon't to morrow.

FLORINDA Sir, I shall strive to do, as shall become your Sister.⁹⁴

To pressure his sister into marrying his friend Antonio, Pedro reminds her of his love for her since, he maintains, Don Antonio is a more suitable husband for her than Don Vincentio. At the same time, he pushes her to follow his order by not giving her time to think, nor asking for her consent. As we can see, both the father and the brother pressure Florinda into an

⁹⁴ Aphra Behn, *The Rover or The Banished Cavaliers*, in *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. by Jane Spencer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), (1.1.145-156). "Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically."

arranged marriage by claiming that they are acting out of love, as it is clearly stated by the brother. In fact, this love is not real, but is a form of disguise which veils their imposition of authority on subjugated women.

The play defies the family's constraints over women's sexuality and women's objectification by representing two defiant daughters, but in contrasted ways. While Florinda's defiance is represented in her vocal resistance and her criticism of forced marriage only, Hellena's is represented in choosing to be a libertine. Despite their different forms of resistance, the two sisters succeed at the end of the play in achieving their ends.

Florinda rejects the forced marriage in her conversation with her sister: 'how near soever my Father thinks I am to marrying that hated Object,' she insists, 'I shall let him see I understand better what's due to my beauty Birth and Fortune, and more to my Soul, than to obey those unjust Commands' (1.1.20-23). Florinda, here, has a clear understanding of what she is 'due' and what is 'unjust'. Florinda repeats her resistance to forced marriage in her conversation with her brother too:

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 --
Stephano, my things --

[Puts on his Masquing Habit.]

FLORENDA 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?
(1.1.58-74)

Even though Florinda seems hesitant in expressing her love for Belvile, since she does not confess it until her brother initiates and hints at it, she still rejects her father's order of marrying Don Vincentio and calls this marriage an enslavement.

Hellena manages a stronger resistance than her sister's by adopting the role of the libertine. She defends woman's desire by criticising her father's order to her to be a nun. Hellena rejects her father's command by laughing at it and saying to Florinda, 'And dost thou think that ever I'll be a Nun? [...] Faith no, Sister' (1.1.31-32). Moreover, Hellena defends feminine desire frankly in her conversation with her brother. When Pedro orders Florinda to marry Don Vincentio and consider his wealth, Hellena objects to this marriage because according to her it is based on a mismatch of sexual powers: Florinda is young and Don Vincentio is older. Referring to Don Vincentio, Hellena says:

being a frugal and a Jealus Coxcornb, instead of a Valet to uncase his feeble
Carcase, he desires you to do that Office-Signs of Favour I'll assure you [...]
That Honour being past, the Gyant stretches itself; yawns and sighs a Belch or
two loud as a Musket, throws himself into Bed, and expects you in his foul
sheets. (1.1.109-116)

Hellena also refers to Don Vincentio's sexual inadequacy by saying to her brother, '[b]etter than to believe Vincentio deserves Value from any woman -- He may perhaps encrease her Bags, but not her Family' (1.1.86-87). Hellena evaluates this marriage as worse than imprisonment. She tells her brother, 'Is't not enough you make a Nun of me, but you must

cast my Sister away too, exposing her to a worse confinement than a religious Life?’ (1.1.90-92). Both enclosure in the convent and forced marriage, for Hellena, represent imprisonment, as both repress female sexuality. Hellena not only defends her sister’s sexual desire, but also defends her own openly. When her brother tells her that she should be a nun, she rejects his order, ‘Shall I so? you may chance to be mistaken in my way of Devotion -- A Nun! yes I am like to make a fine Nun! I have an excellent Humour for a Grate’(1.1.141-144). Hellena criticises her father’s order of sending her to a nunnery because it is inappropriate for her character, a criticism that implicitly blames her male governors for disregarding traits specific to this woman by generalising about the nature of all women. Kate Aughterson describes Hellena’s rhythm of speech as ‘lively—often indicated by the use of exclamatory phrases, and questions at the end of sentences, which engage her companions in her ideas’.⁹⁵ Besides her lively rhythm of speech, Hellena uses declarative statements to ‘assert her own views, rather than reflecting or responding to those of others’.⁹⁶ These modes of speech, Aughterson notes, ‘create a character who is self-aware, active, attractive, witty and who can pull the audience to her side’.⁹⁷ Behn employs this lively and witty character to boldly defend her sexuality as well as that of other women in her life.

Indeed, comparing Hellena’s language to her brother’s clarifies her outspokenness and cleverness. While she defends and asserts her point of view about female desire throughout their conversations, Pedro does not argue with her. Instead, he attacks her on a personal level ‘Why how now! Has your Nunnery-breeding taught you to understand the Value of Hearts and Eyes? [...]This is fine -- Go up to your Devotion, you are not design'd for the Conversation of Lovers’(1.1.84-89). He tries to silence her by replying with ‘Very well’, and repeatedly asks, ‘Have you done yet?’(1.1.106). Furthermore, he ends the conversation with

⁹⁵ Aughterson, *Aphra Behn*, p. 86.

⁹⁶ Aughterson, *Aphra Behn*, p. 86.

⁹⁷ Aughterson, *Aphra Behn*, p. 86.

an attempt at physical punishment. He orders Callis, the servant, to imprison her: 'Callis, take her hence, and lock her up all this Carnival, and at Lent she shall begin her everlasting Penance in a Monastery [...] make it your Business to watch this wild Cat' (1.1.136-145).

Unable to match his sister in her wit, Pedro reduces her to confinement and dehumanises her. The conversations between Hellena and her brother, then, show that while Pedro can overpower her physically, Hellena can overpower him mentally. Thus the play exposes and challenges gendered power in patriarchal society. As a powerful woman, Hellena chooses to defend women's right to determine their own future and to express their sexuality.

Moreover, Hellena, as a libertine, both acknowledges her sexuality and encourages her sister to acknowledge hers too. The reason she 'long[s] to know' more about Belville, she admits, is:

because I hope he has some mad Companion or other, that will spoil my Devotion; nay I'm resolv'd to provide my self this Carnival, if there be e'er a handsom Fellow of my Humour above Ground, tho I ask first. (1.1.32-37)

She continues:

Prithee tell me, what dost thou see about me that is unfit for Love -- have not I a world of Youth? a Humor gay? a Beauty passable? a Vigour desirable? well shap'd? clean limb'd? sweet breath'd? and Sense enough to know how all these ought to be employ'd to the best Advantage: yes, I do and will. (1.1.40-44)

In these lines, Hellena expresses her interest in exploring her sexuality by saying that she looks for a man 'that will spoil [her] Devotion' and by seeing herself as fit for relationships with men. Hellena is not only interested in exploring her sexuality but she is determined too, as she says 'I'm resolved to provide myself', and 'Yes, I do, and will'. At the same time, Hellena encourages Florinda to be rebellious, 'Now hang me, if I don't love thee for that dear Disobedience' (1.1.24-25). Florinda and Hellena, then, are different; while the former is

secretive and shy about female desire, the latter is daring and open. Being shy and cautious does not prevent Florinda from resisting her family orders as she rejects them in her own way. Behn deliberately differentiates between the two sisters to show the various routes of attack women can take in their assault on patriarchy.

Hellena's libertinism, furthermore, prompts her to seize the opportunity to attend the carnival and to disguise herself in order to pursue her desire and find a lover. As Heidi Hutner notes 'Behn significantly highlights the heroine's self-assertiveness by making Hellena's refusal of the nunnery, masquerade, and pursuit of love the very first events in *The Rover*'.⁹⁸ Hellena says to Callis, the servant, 'I'll be indebted a World of Prayers to you, if you let me now see, what I never did, the Divertisements of a Carnival'(1.1.168-170). She, also, encourages her sister to do the same thing. Referring to the carnival, she tells Florinda:

That which all the World does, as I am told, be as mad as the rest, and take all innocent Freedom -- Sister, you'll go too, will you not? come prithee be not sad -- We'll out-wit twenty Brothers, if you'll be ruled by me -- Come put off this dull Humour with your Clothes, and assume one as gay, and as fantastick as the Dress my Cousin Valeria and I have provided, and let's ramble (1.1.173-178).

Hellena's description of the carnival, where she can be 'mad' and 'take all innocent Freedom', indicates that, for her, it is a space of subversive possibilities. As discussed above, through the use of carnival, Behn delivers the possibility of subversion to the hands of her female characters. When Hellena and Florinda go to the carnival, they are able to enjoy the freedom of moving between the domestic sphere and the social world beyond. Moreover, they enjoy the freedom of mingling with men and communicating with their potential

⁹⁸ Heidi Hutner, 'Revesioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II', in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993), pp. 102-120, (p. 106).

husbands: at the carnival, Florinda finds Belvile and Hellena finds Willmore. The sisters experience the freedom of disguise: as Hunter notes, 'Hellena's donning of the mask is a form of resistance to the repression of feminine desire'.⁹⁹ Experiencing the alternative world of the carnival, and its suspension of the social order, Hellena acts against her father and brother's orders and asserts her right to pursue her desire.

Hellena's libertinism is further represented in her use of the language of libertinism as she engages with her lover, Willmore, in witty conversations that are brimming with sexual metaphors. For example, in a manner similar to Willmore, she uses religious metaphors to refer to sex. When Hellena tells Willmore that she is destined to join a nunnery, he answers her: 'A Nun! Oh how I love thee for't! there's no Sinner like a young Saint -- Nay, now there's no denying me: the old Law had no Curse (to a Woman) like dying a Maid; witness Jephtha's Daughter'(1.2.170-173). Willmore, here, tries to seduce Hellena by recalling the story of Jephtha, who promises God that he will kill the first creature he sees on his way home if God delivers the Ammonites into his hands in the war. After he is granted victory, his daughter is the first one he meets. To fulfil his promise, he asks her to go into the mountains to lament that she is going to die a virgin.¹⁰⁰ Willmore refers to this biblical narrative to warn Hellena against the fate of dying a virgin. Yet Willmore's use of religion is deeply self-interested: he deploys the story in the service of seduction. As Jane Spencer comments:

Willmore, of course, is a devil quoting scripture for his own purposes; offering a libertine gloss on the biblical text, he makes the curse of virginity serve his turn as an argument for seduction. That he can use it in this way suggests, in the context of Restoration comedy with its stories of successful seduction, that

⁹⁹ Hunter, 'Revisioning The Female Body', p. 106.

¹⁰⁰ (Judges II: 37-40).

the apparently lawless rake with his free-love philosophy is in reality upheld by the old law.¹⁰¹

In return, Hellena reveals her understanding of Willmore's strategy when she makes use of the same religious story to refer to sex: '[a] very good Text this, if well handled' (1.2.174). Hellena here agrees with Willmore that she should not die a virgin; however, she objects to his use of the text to justify a sexual relationship on his terms. For her, as will be discussed later, sex is admissible but on her own terms: to marry her and then bed her. In this scene, both Willmore and Hellena talk about sex under the guise of religion, and Hellena, in doing so, proves that she recognises Willmore's libertinism and shares it.

Hellena's and Willmore's witty use of metaphors continues in their use of food metaphors to discuss sexual relationships. In act 3, scene 1, Hellena learns that Willmore, who has promised her not to sleep with other women, has broken the vow and slept with Angelica, a prostitute. Willmore, however, denies that he has broken the promise. When he meets Hellena, he complains about suffering from loneliness and tries to pressure her to sleep with him. Hellena goes along with this and pretends that she does not know that he has broken his vow. She teases him, 'I'm afraid, my small Acquaintance, you have been staying that swinging stomach you boasted of this morning; I remember then my little Collation would have gone down with you, without the Sauce of a handsom Face -- Is your Stomach so quesny now?' (3.1.146-150). He plays along and answers her using similar terms: 'Faith long fasting, Child, spoils a Man's Appetite -- yet if you durst treat, I could so lay about me still' (3.1.151-152). In this scene too, Hellena's dexterous use of metaphor shows the extent of her wit and her knowledge of libertinism, not only as a linguistic tool but as a means toward expressing her sexual freedom.

¹⁰¹ Jane Spencer, "Deceit, Dissembling, all that's Woman": Comic Plot and Female Action in *The Feigned Courtesans* in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p. 87.

In fact, as she has done in conversations with her brother, Hellena outwits Willmore as they discuss the way they will consummate their relationship. In these conversations, she rejects Willmore's condition, which is to have sex without official commitment, and convinces him to accept her condition, which is to marry before the relationship is consummated. Willmore invites Hellena to his room, saying, 'retire to my Chamber, and if ever thou wert treated with such Savory Love!—come—my beds prepar'd for such a guest all clean and Sweet as thy fair self, I love to steal a Dish and a Bottle with a Friend, and hate long Graces— come let's retire and fall to' (5.1.436-440). Hellena accepts, but only if 'old Gaffer *Himen* and his Priest, say amen to't' (5.1.442). Hellena's success in using language to her advantage appears clearly when, by the end of the play, Willmore accepts her condition and marries her:

Nay if we part so, let me dye like a bird upon a bough, at the Sheriffs charge,
by Heaven both the *Indies*, shall not buy thee from me. I adore thy Humour
and will marry thee, and we are so of one Humour, it must be a bargain—
give me thy hand.— And now let the blind ones (Love and Fortune) do their
worst. (5.1.469-470)

By outwitting Willmore in their conversations, Hellena shows that she meets and surpasses him in libertinism.

Hellena, then, demonstrates that she is a female libertine during most of the play. First, she acknowledges feminine desire and defends it in her conversation with her sister and brother. Second, she acts on her desire by going to the carnival and pursuing the man of her choice, Willmore. Third, she engages with Willmore in witty conversations in which they express their desire for each other. By representing libertinism as a realistic option for women, Behn challenges traditional sexual politics and the policing of sexuality within the family.

Although Hellana shows that she is a libertine during most of the play, she gets married at the end to her match in libertinism, Willmore. Hellena comments to Willmore about their shared understanding of desire:

O' my Conscience, that will be our Destiny, because we are both of one humour; I am as inconstant as you, for I have consider'd, Captain, that a handsome Woman has a great deal to do whilst her Face is good, for then is our Harvest-time to gather Friends; and should I in these dayes of my Youth, catch a fit of foolish Constancy, I were undone; tis loitering by day-light in our great Journey: therefore I declare, I'll allow but one year for Love, one year for indifference, and one year for hate—and then—go hang yourself—for I profess my self the gay, the kind, and the Inconstant—the Devil's in't if this won't please you. (3.1.172-181)

Because they are both 'inconstant,' she suggests, she and Willmore can be faithful to each other for only three years, but after that, they would be free to part and do as they please.

Elizabeth Kraft comments that the relationship between Hellena and Willmore is 'a chiasmus of double desire, an erotic union founded not on possession but on respect for Otherness'.¹⁰²

According to Kraft, the engagement of the two characters in witty conversation and their discovery of their common qualities and shared 'humour' show that there is a mutuality of desire in which Hellena and Willmore are both subjects. By depicting Hellena as marrying a man who can match her own libertinism, rather than control or quell these tendencies, Behn shows that libertinism is a viable option for women.

The above discussion reveals that *The Rover* both criticises and challenges the repression of the family over women and their desire. It criticises the father and the brother

¹⁰² Elizabeth Kraft, 'Ethics, Politics, and Heterosexual Desire in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*', *EiTET*, 19, 2 (2001), 111-25, (p.119).

who objectify women in marriage and constrain women's sexual freedom. It resists the family repression of women's desire by the use of disguise, carnival and libertinism. Similar to the subversive pastoral veil that is deployed in 'The Golden Age' and 'The Disappointment', Behn uses strategies of disguise and carnival to cast libertinism as the urban counterpart to the pastoral—both able to invert hierarchies and reveal social restrictions on sexuality as constructions and distortions. Florinda and Hellena go to carnival and use disguise to enjoy temporary sexual freedom, and, at the same time, to achieve their ends. Moreover, Hellena, defies the family's attempts to control women—both verbally and physically—and shows that libertinism is an option for women.

B. *The Feigned Courtesans*

The Feigned Courtesans discusses female desire and female sexual conduct from a different angle. It portrays libertine women who subvert women's traditional sexual role, explicitly showing how women can pursue their desires and enjoy sexual relations without marriage. In order to pursue their desire, these women use masks and disguises, a practice which implies two important points about the individual who dons a mask and the surrounding social audience where this occurs. Women wear masks to pursue their ends without being constrained by society: the assumption of another identity, as in the pastoral, enables a freedom of action and expression that would otherwise not be available. At the same time, a woman's donning of the mask reveals the masker's oppression by a patriarchy that requires her to resort to disguise. The play, then, questions and criticises patriarchal conceptions of female virtue and honour. Moreover, in *The Feigned Courtesans*, Behn employs the libertine lifestyle to liberate her female characters sexually, while at the same time, criticise the libertine's objectification of women.

The Feigned Courtesans revolves around three libertine female characters: the sisters, Marcella and Cornelia, and their cousin, Laura. As in *The Rover*, the father orders

Marcella and Cornelia to marry Octavio and to join a convent, respectively. Laura is ordered by her father to marry Julio, without knowing him or seeing what he looks like.

Consequently, the three women scheme to reject their fathers' orders and resist the social expectation for women to remain chaste. Assuming the role of the female libertine, they are empowered to acknowledge and act on their sexual impulses both verbally and physically.

Marcella uses mask and disguise to protect herself from society and to pursue her desire. In her case, mask and disguise play double roles. On the one hand, they conceal her libertine identity and protect her from the consequences of her actions. At the beginning of the play, Marcella wears a mask when she discusses her desire with her sister. This mask, however, is not a literal accessory but an abstract mask of virtue which conceals her libertine identity. In her conversation with her sister, she talks as a virtuous woman: 'A too forward Maid *Cornelia*, hurts her own fame, and that of all her sex' and she continues, 'there's such charms, in wealth and Honour too!'¹⁰³ Stressing the importance of reputation and describing 'honour' in good terms, Marcella's virtuous attitude is an abstract mask that prefigures the literal masks donned by the women later in the play. The ability to conceal one's real self through deception rather than disguise appears clearly in a later seduction scene, when Marcella says to her lover, 'Come leave this Mask of foolish modesty' (4.1.63). Wearing the abstract mask of virtue both helps Marcella to conceal her libertine identity and to protect herself. At the same time, this deception is clearly a response to the oppressive requirements that women be virginal and docile.

On the other hand, however, mask and disguise enable Marcella to pursue her desire and reveal her libertine identity. After Marcella listens to her sister Cornelia speaks openly

¹⁰³ Aphra Behn, *The Feigned Courtesans*, in *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. by Jane Spencer, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), (2.1.52-53). "Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically."

about her desire, she trusts her, removes the abstract mask and agrees to participate in her plan to escape the future lives their father has planned for them. Cornelia suggests that they disguise themselves as courtesans and pursue their lovers. Disguised as the courtesan Euphemia —trading the abstract mask of virtue for a literal mask—Marcella, is able to act on her desire and pursue her lover, Fillamour. She invites Fillamour to her house and dresses ‘richly and loosly’ to seduce him. She greets him as a courtesan and initiates the conversation:

What on your guard my lovely Cavalier? / lyes there a danger In this Face and
Eyes, / that needs that rough resistance? / —Hide hide that mark of anger
from my sight, / And if thou woud'st be absolute conqueror here, / Put on soft
looks with Eyes all languishing, / Words tender, gentle sighs, and kind
desires. (4.1.15-21)

‘Come leave this Mask of foolish modesty,’ she insists, ‘And let us hast where Love and Musick call's; / Musick, that heightens Love! and makes the soul, / Ready for soft impressions!’ (4.1.63-66). The contrast between Marcella’s behaviours in this scene and her behaviours in the earlier scenes of the play are striking. While she acts as a virtuous woman at the beginning, now—when disguised—she expresses her sexual desire freely in the way she dresses, talks and acts. She, as we can see, reveals her libertine identity.

Despite showing libertine qualities, however, Marcella gets married at the play’s conclusion. This indeed is not the contradiction that it might at first seem since, as was also the case in *The Rover*, the husband she chooses, Fillamoure, matches her in his libertinism and shares her ‘humour’. Fillamoure’s libertine identity appears when, throughout the play, he mingles with his overtly libertine friend, Galliard, and goes with him to the brothel where he arranges a meeting with the supposed courtesan, Marcella/ Euphemia. Indeed, at first, he chooses the courtesan over Marcella. When Marcella disguises herself as a pageboy and

gives him a letter that asks him to come to Marcella, he chooses to meet her alter-ego Euphemia instead:

MARCELLA I have a letter for you—from *Vitterbo*, and your *Marcella* Sir.

[gives it him]

FILLAMOUR Hah—*Vitterbo!* and *Marcella!*

It shocks me like the Ghost of some forsaken Mistress,

That met me in the way to happiness,

With some new long'd for Beauty!

[Opens it, reads.

[...]

FILLAMOUR I have no power to go—where this—invites me—

Which I prove, 'tis no encrease of flame that warms my heart,

a new fire just kindled from those—eyes—

Whose rayes I sinde more piercing then *Marcella's*. (3.1.238-249)

An equal match for Fillamoure, Marcella demonstrates that she is a witty, challenging and libertine character during most of the play. Her rebellion against her father's instructions in order to avoid marrying Octavio, her escape to Rome and her adoption of the disguise of a courtesan all allow her freedom of sexuality and ability to pursue her desired object, Fillamoure.

Similarly, Cornelia is a witty, defiant and libertine character. She escapes her father's plan to be a nun and pursues her lover, Galliard. She plans with her sister to disguise themselves as courtesans. Maria Berca notes that disguise in this play is subversive, 'Both identities adopted by these women—the crossdresser and the courtesan—are performances

that subvert and undermine the power structures within the play'.¹⁰⁴ Once she disguises herself as the courtesan Silvianetta, Cornelia pursues Galliard by using the witty and sexually charged language of libertinism. In her conversation, she demonstrates her ability to use metaphoric language gracefully. Talking with 'Silvianetta', Galliard proposes a meeting to sleep together in religious terms:

GALLIARD I hope a Man may have leave to make his Devotions by you, at least, without danger or offence?

CORNELIA I know not that, I have reason to fear your devotion may be ominous, like a Blazing Star, it comes but seldom,—but ever threaens mischief,—Pray Heaven I snare not in the calamity:

GALLIARD Whe I confess Madam, my fit of zeal does not take me often, but when it does, 'tis very harmlesse and wondrous hearty.—

CORNELIA You may begin then, I shall not be so wicked as to disturb your Orisons.

GALLIARD Wou'd I cou'd be well assur'd of that, for mine's devotion of great necessity, and the blessing I pray infinitely for, conserves me; therefore in Christian Charity keep down your eyes, and do not ruine a young mans good intentions, unlesse they wou'd agree to send kinde looks, and save me the expence of prayer.

CORNELIA Which wou'd be better laid out you think upon some other blessing.

¹⁰⁴ Maria Barca, 'Aphra Behn's Courtesans and Crossdressing Women: An Analysis of Gender and Power in 17th Century Literature', *Locus: The Seton Hall Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 1. 2. (2018), pp. 1-8, p. (2).

GALLIARD Whe faith 'tis good, to have a little bank upon occasion, though I hope I shall have no great need hereafter,—if the charming *Silvianetta* be but kinde, 'tis all I ask of Heaven. (2.1.206-224)

As we can see, Cornelia converses with Galliard with wit characteristic of a professional courtesan liaising with her customer. Her professionalism appears when Galliard asks her to save him the ‘expense’ and she refuses to sleep with him without money. By engaging with the libertine hero in a witty, graceful and metaphoric conversation, Cornelia demonstrates that she, like her sister, has wit and flexibility sufficient to match her partner.

Cornelia’s use of the libertine wit continues in the chamber scene, where its subversive potential becomes clear. She uses the libertine language to gain the upper hand in her conversation with Galliard. In the chamber scene, Galliard talks with her as a desired object that men compete over. When Galliard goes to her chamber to sleep with Cornelia as *Silvianetta*, he finds a fop in the room whom he considers his competition over Cornelia/*Silvianetta*. Subsequently, he attacks her, ‘Where have you hid this fool, this lucky fool? / He whom blinde chance, and more ill-judging woman / Has rais'd to that degree of happinesse / That witty men must sigh and toyl in vain for’ (4.2.49-52). He adds, ‘Cease cunning false one to excuse thy self, / See here the Trophees of your shameful choice, / And of my ruine, cruel—fair—deceiver!’ (4. 2.54-56). Through Cornelia’s reaction to Galliard, however, Behn subverts the conventional expectations involved in presenting women as desired objects and men as competitors for these objects. Cornelia is portrayed as an active agent who attacks Galliard with libertine wit: ‘in what despairing minute did I swear to be a constant Mistress? to what dull whining Lover did I vow and had the heart to break it’(4.2.57-59). She suggests that, as a professional, she does not concern herself with a client’s feelings. She is conducting business as usual. She adds:

A fool[?] what indiscretion have you seen in me, shou'd make ye think I wou'd choose a witty man for a lover, who perhaps loves out his moneth in pure good husbandry, and in that time does more mischief then a hundred fools[?] ye conquer without resistance, ye treat without pity, and triumph without mercy; and when you're gone, the world crys—she had not wit enough to keep him, when indeed you are not fool enough to be kept! thus we forfeit both our Liberties and discretion with you villainous witty men; for wisdom is but good success in things and those that fail are fools! (4.2.70-79)

Cornelia here attacks the libertine male for his unfair treatment of women. She sees clearly that the courtesan should be practical with her libertine male clients by not falling in love with them because they will not keep their word. Libertinism for Cornelia, then, does not mean only women's freedom of sexuality; but a strategy for objectifying women. Aughterson comments on her character, 'Cornelia's more philosophical outlook establishes her character as open and adventurous, and demonstrates her ability to voice trenchant criticisms of the social and political sates quo'.¹⁰⁵ As a libertine, she asserts her subjectivity and agency in the sexual act.

Cornelia uses her witty conversation to convince Galliard to continue the relationship on her own terms, which is to get married, even though he expresses that he is against marriage. At the beginning, when she asks him to promise to marry her, he rejects her request, 'Gad I thank ye for that,—I hope you'l ask my leave first, I'me finely drawn in efaith!—have *I* been dreaming all this Night, of the possession of a new gotten Mistress, to wake and finde my self nooz'd to a dull wise in the morning' (5.4.146-149). However, when Cornelia suggests that they will base their marriage relationship on desire and sexual satisfaction, he accepts:

¹⁰⁵ Aughterson, *Aphra Behn The Comedies*, p. 90.

CORNELIA And to encourage a young setter up, *I* do here promise to be the most Mistriss likewise,—you know Signior *I* have learnt the trade, though *I* had not stock to practice, and will be as expensive, Insolent, vain Extravagant, and Inconstant, as if you only had the keeping part, and another the Amorous Asignations, what think ye Sir.

[...]

GALLIARD She speaks Reason! and I'me resolv'd to trust good Nature!—
give me thy dear hand. (5.4.153-161)

By the exhibition of her wit and sexual power, Cornelia outwits Galliard and, consequently, he agrees to marry her. Being a female libertine, Cornelia acts on her sexual impulse by disguising herself as a courtesan and employing witty language in her conversations. She marries her match in libertinism in the end.

Another female character in *The Feigned Courtesans*, Laura Lucretia, is perhaps the most defiant one. This female libertine challenges social constraints that demand women to remain chaste. She acknowledges and acts on her sexual impulses. Unlike Marcella and Cornelia, who rebel against their family and pursue their lovers only verbally, Laura Lucretia attempts to pursue Galliard physically: she attempts to have sexual relationship with the man of her choice without marriage.

The name Laura Lucretia is significant because it alludes to Lucretia [Lucrece], the classical Roman heroine whose story was retold in William Shakespeare's narrative poem, 'The Rape of Lucrece'.¹⁰⁶ In this story, Tarquin and Collatine, leaders of the Roman army, meet at Ardea, where the Romans are fighting. Collatine boasts about the virtue of his wife, Lucrece, and this arouses Tarquin's passions. The next day, Tarquin travels to Collatium and

¹⁰⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 3rd edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997)

rapes Lucrece. Her violation causes her to commit suicide, but not before she names Tarquin as her rapist. While alluding to the extreme virtue and chastity of Lucrece, Behn's Laura Lucretia rejects the female role of the passive victim. Claiming the identity of a courtesan who nonetheless carries the name of a virtuous wife, her pursuit of her own desires exposes the violence of masculine oppression of women and challenges the patriarchal power that insists upon self-destructive chastity.

Throughout the play, Laura acts as a libertine and expresses her rejection of traditional female virtue. In her conversation with Silvio, her servant, she refuses the control of her family over her. When her servant reminds her of her brother's efforts to control her actions, she answers, '*Octavio!* Oh Nature has set his Soul and mine at odds, And I can know no fear, but where I Love!' (2.1.174-176). For Laura, no one has control over her behaviour but she herself.

Laura acts on her desire by disguising herself twice and employing libertine wit to pursue Galliard. In the two acts of disguise by Laura, there are gestures toward Shakespeare's heroines in the comedies. Firstly, Laura dons the disguise of Count Sans Coeur, a male friend. Her conversation with Silvio shows her marvellous cunning and skill in disguising herself as a man:

LAURA [...] call me—Count—*San's Gaeure*;—and tell me *Silvio*, How is it I appear!

How dost thou like my shape—my face and dress?

My Mien and Equipage, may I not pass for man?

Looks it *en I rince*, and Masculine,

SILVIO Now as I live you look all over what you wish; and such, as will

beget a reverance and Envy in the men, and Passion in the women. (2.1.134-

143)

Similarly, Cornelia comments on Laura's skilfulness at deceit: 'A Devil on her, she has robb'd the Sex of all their Arts of Cunning'(5.2.108-109). Her ability to master other characters in cunning suggests the subversive nature of libertinism in a woman's hands.

Through her disguise as Count Sans Coeur, Laura employs a libertine language to match Galliard's wit. When Galliard suggests to Fillamoure that they go to the house of courtesans, Laura/Count Sans Coeur matches him in a frank discussion of sexual experience:

GALLIARD Come lay by all sullen unresolves! for now the hour of the Berjeare approaches, Night, that was made for Lovers!—Hah! my dear *Sans Coeur*? my life! my soul! my joy! Thou art of my opinion!

LAURA I'm sure I am what'ere it be!

GALLIARD Why my Friend here, and I have sent and paid our Fine for a small Tenement of pleasure, and I'm for taking present possession;—but hold —if you shou'd be a Rivall after all!

LAURA Not in your *Silvianetta*! My Love has a Nice appetite, And must be fed with high uncommon delicates, I have a Mistress Sir, of quality! Fair! as imagination, paints young Angells! Wanton and gay as was the first *Corina* That charm'd our best of Poets, Young as the Spring, and cheerfull as the Birds That wellcome in the day! Witty as fancy makes the Revelling Gods, And equally as bounteous when she blesses! (3.1.116-132)

Again, perhaps echoing Enobarbus's famous description of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Behn allows the cross-dressed Laura to invent an imagined courtesan with the sexuality of the Egyptian queen to compete with Galliard in boasting of sexual experience.¹⁰⁷ Leah Lowe notes:

¹⁰⁷ William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 3rd edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997). (2. 2. 195-224).

[t]hroughout the play's liminal phase Laura is the most sexually daring of the play's women. She displays an enthusiasm for the pursuit of love and sexual pleasure that resembles Galliard's, and she is repeatedly associated with masculinity in ways that the play's other women are not.¹⁰⁸

By speaking like men about male desire, without constraints and in competition with them, Laura presents herself as a libertine character who acknowledges her sexual desire; an acknowledgment that only her androgynous identity allows.

In a second act of disguise, Laura borrows Cornelia's role of La Silvanetta in order to sleep with Galliard without marriage. She expresses her desire to seek momentary pleasure with Galliard in her conversation with Silvio. When Silvio asks her about the reason for her disguise, she answers him, 'Love! Love! Dull boy, cou'dst thou not guess 'twas Love? that dear Englese I must enjoy my *Silvio*' (2.1.144-145). Unlike Cornelia, Laura seeks to 'enjoy' sexual pleasure with Galliard, despite her awareness that Galliard is courting Cornelia:

That very he, my window joyns to hers, and 'twas with charms
Which he'ad prepar'd for her, he took this heart,
Which met the wellcome Arrows in their flight.
And sav'd her from their dangers,
Oft I've returnd the vows he'as made to her
And sent him pleas'd away;
When through the Errours of the Night, and distance
He has mistook me for that happy wanton,
And gave me Language of so soft a Power,
As ne're was breath'd in vain to listening Maids. (2.1.147-157)

¹⁰⁸ Leah Lowe, 'Gender and (Im)morality in Restoration Comedy: Aphra Behn's *The Feigned Courtesans*', *Theatre Symposium*, 15 (2007), pp. 92-106, (p. 101).

Prompted by her desire for momentary sexual pleasure, Laura continues to pursue Galliard despite his involvement with Cornelia. She willingly assumes the disguise of her rival to achieve her goal.

Disguise helps Laura/Silvianetta to take action and attempt to seduce Galliard. Again in a gesture that resembles the 'bed trick' used by Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well*, Laura/Silvianetta mistakes Julio for Galliard in the dark and asks him to come to her house.¹⁰⁹ When Laura and Julio are about to sleep together, Octavio interrupts them and nothing happens. In act 5, scene 2, although Laura knows of her mistake with Julio, she insists on having sex with Galliard again. She says to Silvio, '*Silvio*, see the Rooms Be fill'd with lights! whilst I prepare my self to entertain him' (5.1.12-13).

Unfortunately, when Galliard comes and they are about to sleep together, Cornelia interrupts them and they do nothing. Although Laura does not sleep with Galliard in the play, she attempts to do so twice. Laura is a great example to show Behn's support of female sexual freedom, especially if we take into account Behn's culture. Eliane Hobby comments on Behn's writing and the double standard concerning sexuality in Restoration society,

Behn was writing from and for a culture in which women's identities were defined by their ability to restrain their naturally voracious sexual appetites and maintain a reputation for chastity. They were supposed to be maids (virgins), then faithful wives. To fail at either point was to become a whore. Men, on the other hand, were positively encouraged by the king's own example to develop sexual relationships with several women at once.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 3rd edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997). (5. 1. 508-532)

¹¹⁰ Eliane Hobby, 'No stolen object, but her own: Aphra Behn's Rover and Thomas Killigrew's Thomaso', *Women's writing*, 6.1 (2006), pp. 113-127, (p.115).

Commenting on Laura's free sexual behaviour, Lowe writes, 'Laura plays the games of courtship and love like a man and is willing to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage'.¹¹¹ As 'an active lover,' as Aughterson describes her, Laura willingly appropriates 'masculine erotic discourses and points of view and [is] prepared to lose her virginity'.¹¹² Although Laura is the most defiant woman in the play, she does not evade the solution of marriage that Behn employs, in her earlier career, to squelch the subversive potential of female libertinism. Although Laura is an extreme version of libertinism who pursues men verbally and physically, unlike Hellena, Marcella and Cornelia, she is not punished at the end of the play; rather, she marries her equal in libertinism, Julio. After she sees him and discovers his witty character throughout the play, she accepts to marry him. Her marriage, then, is based on her acceptance of someone she considers her equal.

Although they are subdued—if not silenced—by marriage, the female libertines of *The Feigned Courtesans* challenge patriarchal conceptions of female virtue and honour. Throughout the play, conceptions of female virtue and honour are discussed among characters. In one telling moment, Laura complains, 'Honour, That hated Idoll, even by those / That set it up to worship: No, / I have a Soul my Boy, and that's all Love! / And I'll be the Tallent which Heaven lent improve?' (2.1.178-181). Inherent in this reference to honour as an 'Idoll' is the claim that this trait, often assumed to be an essential quality, is in fact a social construction. Moreover, Marcella says of virtue, 'Virtue itself's a dream of so slight force, / The very fluttering of Love's wings destroys it, / Ambition, or the meaner hope of interest, / wakes it to nothing, In men a feeble Beauty, / shakes the dull slumber off,—' (4.1.41-46). If honour is merely affirmed by consensus, virtue is an impossible 'dream', unrealistic and easily destroyed.

¹¹¹ Lowe, 'Gender and (Im)morality', p. 102

¹¹² Aughterson, *Aphra Behn The Comedies*, p. 157.

Besides challenging conventional understandings of women's honour and virtue, the play also exposes their negative consequences for women. As Cornelia tells Marcella, 'Faith Sister, if twere but as easy to satisfy the nice scruples of Religion, and Honour, I should finde no great difficulty in the rest—' (2.1.105-107). Moreover, the play suggests that women's attempts to satisfy these 'nice scruples' are a waste of time and beauty. Marcella exclaims, 'Unconscionable! constant at my years? / —Oh t'were to cheat a thousand! / Who between this and my dull Age of Constancy, / Expect the distribution of my Beauty' (4.1.89-92). She adds, 'Was all this Beauty given, for one poor petty Conquest; —I might have made a hundred hearts my slaves, In this lost time of bringing one to Reason.—Farewell thou dull Philosopher in Love; When Age has made me wise,—I'll send for you again'(4.1.108-112). By representing patriarchal conceptions of female virtue and honour as a waste of women's time and youth, Behn profoundly questions the validity of these categories.

In this play, Behn depicts three dominant female characters who are libertines during most of the play and marry their matches at the end without punishment. By doing so, Behn pushes the acceptable bounds of women's sexual liberty—then pulls them back again. Employing this technique is significant. On the one hand, ending the play with 'the marriage solution', such as that so often applied by Shakespeare in his comedies—and applied in the difficult conclusion of *Measure for Measure*, where its shortcomings are exposed in the forced marriage of Isabella to the Duke—makes it acceptable to the audience.¹¹³ On the other hand, portraying female libertine characters empowers women and shows that the female role is not fixed, and that feminine sexuality should not be constrained. Moreover, the libertinism of the play's three heroines presents a serious criticism of the patriarchal family and its repression of female desire.

¹¹³ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by. Stephen Greenblatt et. al., 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2008).

III. Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter reveals that Behn both criticises and challenges the repression of the family over women's sexuality and desire. She attacks the father and brother who manipulate love to wield authority over women, force women into arranged marriages or plan their future enclosure within religious houses. At the same time, she imagines daughters who challenge the repression of the family over women's desire by being outspoken and libertine.

Behn overturns the traditional conception of sexuality and the politics of desire in the family by the use of libertinism, carnival, disguise and pastoral license. Behn uses the libertinism to discuss the politics of the family and the court in a disguise of sexuality. In her plays, Behn portrays daughters who are libertines and who pursue their desire verbally and attempt to pursue it physically. Although they are sexually daring and challenging, these daughters—and, finally, these wives—do not, face punishment. This representation of sexually free daughters redefines feminine honour, defying the traditional notion that a daughter's sexual transgression has negative consequences for her and for her father.

Similarly, Behn uses the pastoral genre to discuss the politics of the family and the court in a disguise of simplicity. In her pastoral, she artfully portrays the natural desire of the golden age and distinguishes it from the socially constructed artificial concept of honour. In her pastoral, also, she resists the secondary place assigned by men to women in lovemaking which is one of the bases of husband-wife relationship. By using the pastoral genre, Behn brings the freedom of sexuality of the country girl in her poems to the more 'respectable' women in her plays. As urban counterparts to the pastoral, Behn deploys disguise and carnival in *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans* to subvert social and sexual hierarchies in ways that easily align with the subversive nature of pastoral. Through the use of these techniques, Behn allows her heroines temporary sexual freedom and, at the same time,

enables them to achieve their ends in the final acts of her plays, which is to marry their equal lovers. By ending her earlier plays with marriage and squelching the subversive potential of female libertinism, Behn appears as less daring in her resistance of traditional gender roles than in her later plays.

Chapter 3: Women's choice of marriage and Divorce

Speaking about the woman in patriarchal marriage, Virginia Woolf writes:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily [...] She was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.¹

The woman's role in patriarchal marriage, as Woolf's words show, is self-sacrificial. In fact, this type of critique of the wife's role in patriarchal marriage does not emerge with Woolf, but two centuries before. Aphra Behn takes a comparable stand against patriarchal marriage. Indeed, in most of her plays, Behn undermines forced marriage and validates women's free choice of marriage. Unlike early modern divorce which was difficult to obtain, Behn makes divorce and remarriage easy and available options for women in her plays. Behn is an active voice which questions the traditional understanding of women's place within the family in seventeenth century England.

The following discussion explores Behn's treatment of the choice of marriage and divorce in her plays and shows that she exploits of the differences between theory and practice in seventeenth century formulations of the family. In order to resist forced marriages and validate free choice of marriage and makes divorce and remarriage easy and available options for women, Behn employs the conventions of farce, exploiting its subversive possibilities in *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687) and *The False Count* (1681), and she once again calls upon the subversive nature of disguise in *The Forced Marriage* (1670). These

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women,' in Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing* ed. by Michele Barrett (Orlando, FL: Harvest Books, 1980), pp. 57-63, (p.59).

plays resist forced marriage and advocate for marriage based on equality between partners. The plays resist forced marriages by presenting rebellious and powerful daughters and wives. These powerful women adopt different methods to reject patriarchal control, including plotting, vocal resistance, bonding with other women and gossiping. Moreover, the plays criticise fathers and husbands who arrange or participate in forced marriages by presenting the former as dominant and not caring and the latter as ridiculous. By representing the ways in which daughters and wives challenge heads of household and by criticising the strategies patriarchal figures use to control women, Behn deconstructs the gendered hierarchy in the family.

In order to explore Behn's feminist representation of marriage and divorce, I begin by providing a brief overview of marriage in the early modern period. Marriage was the dominant social institution of the early modern period. David Cressy claims, '90 per cent of those reaching adulthood in the sixteenth century would marry, and more than 80 per cent in the seventeenth century'.² From the beginning of the early modern period, there were arguments against marriage as a religious sacrament. Jessica Malay notes:

Much of [the] sixteenth-century debate was concerned with jurisdictional matters and attempts to reconstruct a view and practice of marriage that emphasized Protestant values and conceptions of marriage as companionate and human, as opposed to Roman Catholic insistence on the sacramental and spiritual nature of marriage.³

At the end of the period, marriage became a civil contract in practice, as Malay notes:

The 1653 "Act touching Marriages and the Registering thereof; and also

² David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 258.

³ Jessica Malay, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson: Her Story of Marital Abuse and Defiance in seventeenth-century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 119.

touching Births and Burials” removed the performance of marriages from the church authorities. Rather than a marriage being solemnized through a religious ceremony, it was now agreed, or contracted.⁴

Marriage, then, gradually shifted away from the spiritual toward the secular.

Two kinds of marriage were most prevalent: marriage based on parental arrangement and marriage based on personal choice of partner. Lawrence Stone claims that familial arrangement in marriages was more common in the Renaissance than in the Restoration.⁵ Basing his analysis on the passage of property among different classes, he claims that practical marriages were commonly arranged among upper classes, while love marriages were more usual among middle classes.⁶ Stephanie Coontz explores diaries and court records in seventeenth century England and notes that there were some parents who were indulgent and did not intervene in their daughters’ and sons’ marriages.⁷ At the same time, however, there were parents who did not indulge their children, nor did they respect their ‘personal preferences’ in marriage.⁸ One of the most common ways that parents intervened in the marriages of their daughters and sons was to use the right of veto over unsuitable suitors. As Coontz comments, ‘even as the abstract celebration of married love increased, the enhanced right of parents and authorities to veto or invalidate marriages set limits on the number of love matches’.⁹ The more the parents were involved in their children’s marriage decision, the more they would offer help and support to their children during their marriage life. Elizabeth Foyster notes:

⁴ Malay, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson*, p. 120.

⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage, 1500-1800*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp.127-129.

⁶Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p.182.

⁷ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 2006), p. 132

⁸ Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, p. 135.

⁹ Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, p. 136.

But the degree of parental involvement in initial marriage negotiations could act as a predictor of the extent to which parents would play a part in the subsequent marriage relationship. [...] Certainly, when parents had not been involved in the choice of marriage partners children might expect to bear the burden of marital misfortune on their own.¹⁰

Despite the rise of the ideal of ‘companionate marriage,’ then, marriage in the seventeenth century was rarely based on personal choice; parents intervened in their sons’—and particularly in their daughters’—choices in marriage.

There were two main motives for marriage in seventeenth century England. Although love was one motivation, it was not always the most compelling or convenient justification. Indeed, as Coontz states, ‘marriage based too much on love were cause for comment’.¹¹ She adds, ‘People valued love in its proper place. But it is remarkable how many people still considered it a dreadful inconvenience’.¹² An alternative motive for marriage, of course, was financial gain: indeed, E. J. Graff claims that ‘marriage is always about money’ in the seventeenth century.¹³ As Ralph Houlbrooke writes, ‘the chances of marriage depended to a large extent upon the availability of suitable partners and the prospects of future employment’.¹⁴ Thus, though love was valued, people often considered financial gain as being just as important a motive for marriage.

Although there was a reformation of marriage—it became a civil contract rather than a religious sacrament—there was no provision made for divorce. Similar to the previous period, divorce was difficult in the seventeenth century. Frances E. Dolan notes, ‘In

¹⁰ Elizabeth Foyster, ‘Parenting Was for Life, Not Just for Childhood: The Role of Parents in the Married Lives of their Children in Early Modern England’, *History*, 86. 283 (2001), 313-327 (pp. 317-318).

¹¹ Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, p. 137.

¹² Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, p. 137.

¹³ E.J. Graff, *What is Marriage For?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), p. 2.

¹⁴ Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450- 1700* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 67.

England until the nineteenth century, divorce was harder to obtain than in any other Protestant country'.¹⁵ Referring to annulments, Stretton writes, 'few applications were successful'.¹⁶ Divorce, then, was limited and difficult to obtain.

Although in the seventeenth century England 'the term 'divorce' was routinely used to refer to marital separation'¹⁷, divorce in this period is different than divorce as we know it today. Tim Stretton describes divorce in the modern sense as, 'a legal dissolution of marriage allowing either or both parties to remarry'.¹⁸ Instead of this form of divorce, there were two forms of marital dissolution in early modern period. One of these forms was annulment. Stretton explains that annulments means 'declarations that marriages had never amounted to valid union under ecclesiastical rules'.¹⁹ In order to gain annulments, there were certain conditions. Stretton explains the conditions, 'Unhappy couples could approach ecclesiastical authorities to gain 'divorce a *vinculo matromoni*', (from the bond of marriage) on such grounds as bigamy, pre-contract, consanguinity or affinity or impotence'.²⁰ Also, couples could gain separation. Explaining separation, Stretton writes, 'Where marriages were valid, the best that most spouses could hope for was a separation ('divorce a *mensa et thoro*', from bed and board)'.²¹ He adds, 'a separation *a mensa et thoro* would allow a husband and wife to live apart, but not to remarry while their estranged spouse remained alive'.²² Separation can be obtained under certain conditions: 'on the grounds of cruelty or adultery'.²³ However,

¹⁵ Frances E. Dolan, *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 52.

¹⁶ Tim Stretton, *Marriage Litigation in The Court of Requests 1542-1642* (Cambridge: the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2008), p. 4.

¹⁷ Eleanor Kathryn Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 9.

¹⁸ Tim Stretton, *Marriage Litigation in The Court of Requests 1542-1642* (Cambridge: the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2008), p. 3.

¹⁹ Stretton, *Marriage Litigation in The Court of Requests*, p. 4.

²⁰ Stretton, *Marriage Litigation in The Court of Requests*, pp. 3-4.

²¹ Stretton, *Marriage Litigation in The Court of Requests*, p. 4.

²² Stretton, *Marriage Litigation in The Court of Requests*, p. 4.

²³ Stretton, *Marriage Litigation in The Court of Requests*, p. 4.

there was double standards in practice of separation. Separation for a wife's adultery was more accepted than for a husband's. Stretton notes, 'In practice, a sexual double standard usually applied, so that husbands could separate on the grounds of adultery alone, while wives had to prove cruelty'.²⁴ Although separation could be granted, neither husband nor wife was allowed to remarry.

However, there were calls to reform divorce. John Milton wrote in favour of legalising divorce on grounds other than adultery. Sharon Achinstein notes, 'John Milton wrote four tracts seeking to make divorce legal on grounds of incompatibility in the years 1643-1645'.²⁵ Milton also supported permission of divorce/separation with the right to remarry. Malay notes:

Milton accused those who would not consider the idea of divorce, with the right to remarriage, of hypocrisy, [...] they ignored the fact that by barring a separated couple from remarrying and finding marital harmony, men (and sometimes women) would enter into sexual liaisons.²⁶

These arguments were not accepted by most of Milton's contemporaries. He was attacked for these views even after his death.²⁷ Milton's call for divorce reformation, while failing in his time, was eventually accepted by Parliament and the Divorce Reform Act (1969-73) was assigned.²⁸ Only in the twentieth century did divorce and remarriage become acceptable for unhappy couples, in recognition of the positive influence of happy marriage on the

²⁴ Stretton, *Marriage Litigation in The Court of Requests 1542-1642*, p. 4.

²⁵ Sharon Achinstein, 'Early Modern Marriage in a Secular Age Beyond the sexual Contract' in *Milton in the Long Restoration*, ed. by Blair Hoxby and Ann Baynes Coiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.364.

²⁶ Malay, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson*, p. 118.

²⁷ Sara J. van den Berg and W. Scott Howard, 'Introduction: Milton's Divorce Tracts and the Temper of the Times,' in *The Divorce Tracts of John Milton: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Sara J. van den Berg and W. Scott Howard (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2012), pp. 1-38 (p. 1).

²⁸ Berg and Howard, 'Introduction: Milton's Divorce Tracts', p. 2.

individual's life and social wellbeing.

However, commonly held ideas of courtship, marriage and divorce were discussed and questioned by feminist writers of the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries.

Mary Astell attacks courtship as a form or an act of deception:

She must be a Fool with a witness, who can believe a Man, Proud and Vain as he is, will lay his boasted Authority, the Dignity and Prerogative of his Sex, one Moment at her Feet, but in prospect of taking it up again to more advantage; he may call himself her Slave a few days, but it is only in order to make her his all the rest of his life.²⁹

Astell warns women against men's false flattery and considers its biggest danger to be women's willingness to fly 'to some dishonourable Match as her last, tho' much mistaken Refuge, to the disgrace of her Family and her own Irreparable Ruin'.³⁰ Men's deception may lead to women's ruin.

Instead, Astell advocates for a single life for women. She describes marriages based either on choice or on love as leading to disappointment, and further dismisses marriage based on altruistic motives:

For she who marries purely to do good, to educate souls for heaven, who can be so truly mortified as to lay aside her own will and desires, to pay such an entire submission for life, to one whom she cannot be sure will always deserve it, does certainly perform a more heroic action than all the famous masculine heroes can boast of, she suffers a continual martyrdom to bring glory to God and benefit to man-kind.³¹

²⁹ Mary Astell, *Reflection upon Marriage*, in *Astell: Political Writings*, ed. by Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 44.

³⁰ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II*, ed. by Patricia Springborg (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 108.

³¹ Astell, *Reflections Upon Marriage*, p. 78.

Choosing to marry in order to 'do good', women find themselves trapped in a life of suffering. For Astell, marriage based on love also does not guarantee lasting happiness. She laments for the woman who chooses a husband based on love, 'Her ruin is commonly too far advanc'd to be prevented'.³² Moreover, she sees marriage based on force or economic considerations as especially miserable:

To be yok'd for Life to a disagreeable Person and Temper, to have Folly and Ignorance tyrannize over Wit and Sense; to be contradicted in everything one does or says, and bore down not by Reason but Authority; to be denied ones most innocent desires, for no other cause but the Will and Pleasure of an absolute Lord and master, whose Follies a Woman will all her Prudence cannot hide, and whose Commands she cannot but despise at the same time she obeys them; is a misery none can have a just Idea of, but those who have felt it.³³

Forced marriage, according to Astell, denies a woman her desires and intellectual pursuits; she is entirely submissive to the authority of her husband. Marriage which is based on money leads husbands to disdain their wives and the institution of marriage: 'when [men] Marry with an indifferency, to please their Friends or encrease their Fortune, the indifferency proceeds to an aversion'.³⁴ A man who marries for financial gain, she emphasises, 'must expect no other satisfaction than that can bring him,' which leads him to look for satisfaction elsewhere.³⁵ Given the grim prospects for women regardless of her motives for marriage, Astell advises women to remain single:

Again, it may be said, if a wife's case be as his here represented, it is not good

³² Astell, *Reflection upon Marriage*, p. 68.

³³ Astell, *Reflection upon Marriage*, pp. 38-39.

³⁴ Astell, *Reflection upon Marriage*, p. 38.

³⁵ Astell, *Reflection upon Marriage*, p. 38.

for a woman to marry, and so there's an end of [the] human race. But this is no fair consequence, for all that can justly be inferr'd from hence, is that a woman has no mighty obligation to the man who makes love to her, she has no reason to be fond of being a wife, or to reckon it a piece of preferment when she is taken to be a man's upper servant.³⁶

For Astell, then, marriage—whether based on choice, love, force or money—is a disappointing and miserable institution for women.

Nearly a half century earlier, Margaret Cavendish also warned women of the false hope of happiness in marriage. In *Convent of Pleasure* (1668), Lady Happy is a young heiress who rejects the enslavement of marriage: ‘But those Women, where Fortune, Nature, and the gods are joined to make them happy, were mad to live with Men, who make the Female sex their slave, but I will not be so inslaved, but will retire from their company’.³⁷ Instead of marriage, Lady Happy suggests that women should find happiness by enjoying pleasures together without men. Refusing marriage, she uses her wealth to convert her home to a convent restricted to women only. In this convent, women enjoy pleasures without men. She says, ‘My Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint, but a place for freedom, not to vex the Senses but to please them’.³⁸ She adds, ‘the gods are bountiful, and give all that’s good, and bid us freely please ourselves in that which is best for us’.³⁹ Cavendish, in the character of Lady Happy, urges women to remain single and encourages them ‘to take pleasure in our own Beauties, whilst they are fresh and young’.⁴⁰ Women are happiest in the company of each other.

³⁶ Astell, *Reflection upon Marriage*, pp. 77-78.

³⁷ Margaret Cavendish, ‘The Convent of Pleasure’ (1668), in *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578-1799*, ed. by Moira Ferguson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 84-101, (p. 89).

³⁸ Margret Cavendish, *Convent of Pleasure* (1668), p. 89.

³⁹ Margret Cavendish, *Convent of Pleasure* (1668), p. 89.

⁴⁰ Margret Cavendish, *Convent of Pleasure* (1668), p. 91.

Like Astell and Cavendish, Behn contributes to the feminist discussion of marriage and divorce in the seventeenth century. Behn's works resist forced marriage, validate free choice of marriage and makes divorce and remarriage easy and available choices for women by means of her subversive handling of disguise and farce. As discussed in chapter 2, disguise has the capacity to deconstruct patriarchal limitations on women's sexuality and desires. The genre of farce, similarly, undermines the gendered hierarchy in the family by reshaping power structures in the household. Peter Holland states that farce is, 'a drama of witty servants outwitting dull masters'.⁴¹ He continues, it 'is recurrently concerned with sequences in which, in the interests of their young masters, servants extract money or permission to marry from their old masters or simply fool them and delay them through tricks played while disguised'.⁴² Thus, farce is a useful genre for Behn's empowering women agenda because of the subversion it presents to power structures, including patriarchy. The subordinates who outwit their masters in Behn's farces are most often wives and daughters.

From the Renaissance to the Restoration, the accepted hierarchy of literary kinds categorised tragedy as an elevated genre while comedy, and particularly farce, were devalued.⁴³ As Holland explains:

the naming of a work as a tragedy is construed as a label of dignity, an attempt to lay claim to an elevated cultural position and a network of weighty cultural resonances within which the work demands to be deemed worthy of a place; the naming of a work as a farce is more likely to be accompanied by

⁴¹ Peter Holland, 'Farce', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. by D. Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 107-126, (p.119).

⁴² Holland, 'Farce', p. 105.

⁴³ Sir Philip Sidney, 'Defense of Poesie,' Renaissance Editions, ed. by Risa S. Bear, Luminarium, (1995). < <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/defence.html>> [accessed 28 November 2018]

an apology.⁴⁴

He adds, '[a]gain and again, [...] Restoration dramatists sought carefully to define their own work as not being farce, a scrupulous resistance to the triviality that they assumed to be inherent in the form'.⁴⁵ Playwrights restrained themselves from categorising their work as farce in fear that it would not be appreciated by audience and critics. John Dryden, one of the main opponents of the farce in the Restoration, attacks the genre as consisting of 'forc'd humours and unnatural events'.⁴⁶ The prevailing popularity of the farce derives from its catering to a lower class audience:

The taste of the age is wretchedly deprav'd, in all sorts of poetry, nothing almost but what is abominably bad can please [...] there is scarce a man or woman of God's making in all their Farces: yet they raise an unnatural sort of laugh, the common effect of Buffoonery; and the Rabble which takes this for Wit, will endure no better, because 'tis above their Understanding.⁴⁷

Wit, for Dryden, is a gentleman's trait; the skill of libertines.

Although farce was viewed as a lowly genre in the Restoration, Behn, nevertheless, both employs the genre and defends it in the dedicatory epistles of several published works. Dedicating *The Emperor of the Moon* to Charles Somerset, Marquess of Worcester, she argues that farce is suitable for even 'the most Elevated.' She flatters Worcester - 'there are but very few in whom an Illustrious Birth and equal Parts compleat the Hero; but among those, your Lordship bears the first Rank'—but furthermore claims that she 'calculated' the play 'for His late majesty of Sacred Memory, that Great Patron of Noble Poetry, and the

⁴⁴ Holland, 'Farce', p. 107.

⁴⁵ Holland, 'Farce', p. 108.

⁴⁶ John Dryden, *An Evening's Love* (London: Henry Herringman, 1671), (Preface).

⁴⁷ John Dryden, *The Husband His Own Cuckold a Comedy* (London: J. Tonson, 1696), (Preface).

Stage', Charles II.⁴⁸ She defends the content of the genre of farce based on its suitability for a noble audience:

I am sensible, my Lord, how far the Word Farce might have offended some [...], as too debas'd and vulgar to entertain a Man of Quality; but I am secure from this Censure, when your Lordship shall be its Judge, whose refin'd Sence, and Delicacy of Judgment, will, thro' all the humble Actions and trivialness of Business, find Nature there, and that Diversion which was not meant for the Numbers, who comprehend nothing beyond the Show and Buffoonry.⁴⁹

Even though the genre of farce includes, 'humble Actions and trivialness of Business' Behn argues, the 'Intent, Character, or Nature of the thing' are of value.⁵⁰ Unlike ordinary people who enjoy the show at face value, those who have 'refin'd Sence, and Delicacy of Judgment' will understand its value.⁵¹

Although *The Emperor of the Moon* casts itself as a work in line with the values and sensibilities of elite men, Behn recognises the subversive potential of the genre of farce and makes use of it for this play and for many others. By using the license for subversion which is the central feature of the farce, Behn asks the audience whether there is such license – to resist forced marriage, to validate women's free choice of marriage and to make divorce and remarriage easy options for women – in the real world.

I. *The Emperor of the Moon*

The Emperor of the Moon is a play that undermines the father's absolute authority and the common excuses used to justify this authority, which indicates that reason and rational

⁴⁸Behn, *The Emperor of The Moon*, (Epistle directory, 49-51).

⁴⁹Behn, *The Emperor of The Moon*, (Epistle directory, 32-40).

⁵⁰ Behn, *The Emperor of The Moon*, (Epistle directory, 41-46).

⁵¹ Behn, *The Emperor of The Moon*, (Epistle directory, 45).

thinking are exclusive for men. As discussed in chapter 1, there were claims that men are more rational than women, formal education in the seventeenth century was available only to men and science was exclusive to men. In order to challenge men's domination over family and intellectual fields, the play depicts a controlling father, Doctor Baliardo, who imprisons his daughter, Elaria, and his niece, Bellemante, in the house and interferes in their choices of husbands. At the same time, this father claims that he is a scientist and spends his time doing scientific experiments. By the use of the farce, the play undermines the father's authority and his claim of being an intellectual person by depicting him as a fool who confuses myth and reality. Moreover, he is easily outwitted by his daughter and niece.

This play, also, mirrors one of the ways by which seventeenth century women resisted men's control: that is, by correcting them. Accordingly, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell, Bathsua Makin and Aphra Behn all resist restricting education and the intellectual fields to men. All three encourage women to participate in scientific research and to approach questions intelligently and logically. In Behn's works, witty daughters correct their fathers' flawed reasoning in their choices of marriage partners by plotting against him and demonstrating superior intelligence and judgment in choosing husbands who are their equals.

Certainly, a number of seventeenth century women protested against limiting formal education to men and called for education for women as well. Margaret Cavendish, for instance, insisted that 'all braines work naturally, and incessantly, in some kinde or other', including those of women.⁵² She saw women as having rational capacities identical to those of men, though men were 'thinking it impossible we [women] should have either learning or

⁵² Margaret Cavendish (1653), *Poems and Fancie*, (London: Printed for T.R. for J. Martin, and J Allestrye, 1653).

understanding, wit or judgment, as if we had not rational souls as well as men'.⁵³ Therefore, she supports women's formal education. Women have, she writes:

become like worms that onely live in the dull earth of ignorance, winding
ourselves sometimes out, by the help of some refreshing rain of good
educations which seldom is given us; for we are kept like birds in cages to
hop up and down in our houses, not sufferd to fly abroad to see the several
changes of fortune, and the various humors, ordained and created by nature.⁵⁴

By stressing that women are not less rational than men and that they should have the opportunity to enjoy formal education, Cavendish questions gendering intellectual culture in the seventeenth century.

Mary Astell also argues that women are not weaker than men rationally: 'For since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them?'⁵⁵ If men were restricted in education as women are, she points out, they 'wou'd be so far from surpassing those whom they now dispise, that they themselves wou'd sink into the greatest stupidity and brutality'.⁵⁶ Moreover, Astell condemns custom for the exclusion of women from formal education: 'Tis Custom therefore, that Tyrant Custom, which is the grand motive to all those irrational choices which we daily see made in the World, so very contrary to our *present* interest and pleasure, as well as to our Future'.⁵⁷

Protests like Astell's against the customary exclusion of women from formal education began to make modest headway by the end of the seventeenth century. In the later half of the century, Bathsua Makin published her *Essay To Revive the Antient Education OF*

⁵³ Margaret Cavendish (1653), *Poems and Fancie*, (London: Printed for T.R. for J. Martin, and J Allestrye at the Bell in Saint Pauls Church Yard, 1653).

⁵⁴ Margaret Cavendish, quoted in *Early Modern Women on Metaphysics*, ed. by Emily Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge Univesity, 2018), p. 204.

⁵⁵ Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II*, p. 80.

⁵⁶ Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II*, p. 57.

⁵⁷ Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II*, pp. 67-68.

Gentlewomen (1673), and founded a school in Tottenham High Cross for upper class girls. In her book, Makin criticises the tradition that views women as less intellectual than men:

Custom when it is inveterate, hath a mighty influence: it hath the force of nature itself. The barbarous custom to breed women low, is grown general amongst us, and hash prevailed so far, that it is verily believed (especially among a sort of debauched sots) that women are not endued with such reason, as men; nor capable of improvement by education, as they are.⁵⁸

In addition, she advocates women's humanist education:

My meaning is, persons that God hath blessed with the things of this world, that have competent natural parts, ought to be educated in knowledge; that is, it is much better they should spend the time of their youth to be competently instructed in those things usually taught to gentlewomen at schools, and the overplus of their time to be spent in gaining arts, and tongues, and useful knowledge, rather than to trifle away so many precious minutes merely to polish their hands and feet, to curl their locks, to dress and trim their bodies; and in the meantime to neglect their souls, and not at all, or very little to endeavour to know God, Jesus Christ, themselves, and the things of nature, arts and tongues, subservient to these.⁵⁹

In order to defend women's humanist education, she compares contemporary women to women of earlier centuries. 'I verily think women were formerly educated,' she writes, 'in the knowledge of arts and tongues, and by their education many did rise to a great height in learning. Were women thus educated now, I am confident the advantage would be very great:

⁵⁸ Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education OF Gentlewomen* (London: J.D., 1673), p. 3.

⁵⁹ Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education*, p. 22.

the women would have the honour and pleasure, their relations profit, and the whole nation advantage'.⁶⁰ Bringing the ideas in her book into action, Makin's school taught girls Latin, French, Greek, Hebrew, Italian and Spanish besides dancing, music, singing, writing and keeping accounts. Women's efforts to support women's education lead to improvements, though, these accomplishments were limited. What is significant in these efforts, however, is that women allied with each other to provide themselves access to education. As Gerda Lerner observes, 'The pioneers of women's education had laid a theoretical foundation for their enterprise and set up a few models, but they had not been able to go much further'.⁶¹

Women's exclusion from educational opportunities was most pervasively felt in the limitation of studies in the natural sciences to men, as discussed in chapter 1. One of the main opponents to men's domination of science in the seventeenth century is Aphra Behn, who attacks this attitude from two perspectives. First, she claims women's abilities to take part in scientific knowledge were equal to men's. She starts with herself as a case in point, as the editor of Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la Pluralite des Mondes* (1686). This book includes conversations between a gallant philosopher and a marquise about the plurality of the worlds. Second, Behn claims that not all men pursue science in a logical way. Referring to Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la Pluralite des Mondes* (1686), Behn states:

The Design of the Author is to treat of this part a Natural Philosophy in a more familiar Way than any other hath done, and to make every body understand him: For this End he introduceth a Woman of Quality as one of the Speakers in these five Discourses, whom he feigns never to have heard of any such thing as Philosophy before. How well he hath performed his Undertaking you will best judge when you have perused the Book: But if you

⁶⁰ Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education*, pp. 3-4.

⁶¹ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 209,

would know for endeavouring to render this part of Natural Philosophy familiar, he hath turned it into Ridicule; he hath pursued his wild Notion of the Plurality of Worlds to that height of Extravagancy that he most certainly will confound those Readers.⁶²

Behn, here finds Fontenelle's 'Notion of the Plurality of Worlds' not logical nor convincing. Therefore, she argues that being a man is not qualification enough to make one a good scientist. Instead of gendering science, Behn insists that all those who pursue science should have the capability to do so logically. As such, her translation, published as *A Discovery of New Worlds* (1688), seeks to correct her source. This observation that men sometimes pursue science foolishly or illogically underlies the plot of *Emperor of the Moon*. As Judy Hayden argues, 'Behn employs farce and *commedia dell'arte* in the *Emperor of the Moon* to deride the still contentious notion of the plurality of worlds'.⁶³

As we can see, Behn not only gave herself access to the world of science, but also gave herself the right to correct it. In the same way, in *The Emperor of the Moon*, she gives daughters the right to correct their foolish scientist father's choice of husbands for them. In order to emphasise Doctor Baliardo's foolishness, Behn portrays him using scientific strategies for illogical purposes. The following conversation illustrates his method of research:

DOCTOR SET down the Telescope.—Let me see, what Hour is it?

SCARAMOUCH About six a Clock, Sir.

DOCTOR Then 'tis about the Hour, that the great Monarch of the upper

⁶²M. de Fontenelle, *A Discovery of New Worlds*, trans. Aphra Behn (London, 1688), The Translator's Preface, A7 verso – A8.

⁶³Judy A. Hayden, 'Harlequin Science: Aphra Behn's Emperor Of The Moon And The Plurality Of Worlds', *English*, 64, 246 (2015), 167-82.

World enters into his Closet; Mount, mount the Telescope.

SCARAMOUCHE What to do, Sir?

DOCTOR I understand, of certain moments Critical, one may be snatch'd of such a mighty consequence to let the sight into the secret Closet.

SCARAMOUCHE How, Sir, Peep into the Kings Closet; under favour, Sir, that will be something uncivil.

DOCTOR Uncivil, it were flat Treason if it shou'd be known, but thus unseen, and as wise Politicians shou'd, I take Survey of all: This is the Statesman's peeping-hole, thorow sic which he Steals the secrets of his King, and seems to wink at distance.⁶⁴

These lines reveal that Doctor Baliardo uses the instruments of science: 'SET down the Telescope', 'Let me see, what Hour is it' and 'I take Survey of all'. His instruments complement his library which is full of books on the subject of the moon. However, Doctor Baliardo goes to all of this effort and uses all of these scientific tools not to enhance human knowledge but to serve his mythical belief. Elaria and Scaramouch both observe:

SCARAMOUCHE You must know, madam, your father, (my master, the doctor,) is a little whimsical, romantic, or Don Quick-sottish, or so.—

ELARIA Or rather mad.

SCARAMOUCHE That were uncivil to be supposed by me; but lunatic we may call him without breaking the decorum of good manners; for he is always travelling to the Moon.

ELARIA And so religiously believes there is a world there, that he discourses

⁶⁴ Aphra Behn, *The Emperor of The Moon*, in *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. by Jane Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), (1.2.1-14). Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically.

as gravely of the people, their government, institutions, laws, manners, religion and constitution, as if he had been bred a *Machiavel* there. (1.1. 83-93)

Through the character of Doctor Baliardo, then, Behn presents an example of a man who is incapable of scientific research; that is to say, not all men are logical in their pursuit of science. Katherine Mannheimer notes that ‘the play’s central satiric target, the astronomer-manqué Doctor Baliardo’.⁶⁵ By deconstructing the normative categories of men as logical and women as illogical beings, Behn poses the question of why men are granted control over the choices of women who are not only the intellectual equals of men, but also, at times, superior.

This foolish man employs many strategies to deny his daughter and niece their choices in marriage; strategies which, consequently, appear as foolish as their creator. First, he prevents his daughter and niece from courting by imprisoning them at home and not allowing anyone to come near them except the servants. When he goes out, he orders Scaramouch, the servant, ‘let not a Door be open'd till my Return’ (1.3.85). Not only does Doctor Baliardo guard his daughter and niece strictly, but he also resorts to violence to enforce his government of the household, beating his servant with a cane, for example, when he suspects disobedience.

In return, however, Elaria and Bellemante are witty women who do not submit to this controlling patriarch. In order to marry their lovers, Cinthio and Charmante, they take advantage of his tendency to believe in myth, and join with the lovers in plotting against him. They agree to trick Doctor Baliardo into believing that there are suitors from the moon who

⁶⁵ Katherine Mannheimer, “Celestial Bodies: Readerly Rapture as Theatrical Spectacle in Aphra Behn’s “Emperor of the Moon”, *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 35.1 (2011), pp. 39-60, (p. 41).

have come to their house to court them. When the Doctor comes to their bedroom, Bellemante pretends that she is asleep and speaks in “her sleep”,

Ah, prince— [...]

How little faith I give to all your courtship, who leaves our orb so soon. [...]

But since you are of a celestial race,

And easily can penetrate

Into the utmost limits of the thought,

Why should I fear to tell you of your conquest?

—And thus implore your aid. [...]

Ah, Prince Divine, take pity on a mortal— [...]

And take me with you to the world above. (II.4.4-17)

Elaria, too, claims she has had a similar dream: ‘[o]h, why have you waked me from the softest dream that ever maid was blest with? [...] Methought I entertained a demi-god, one of the gay inhabitants of the moon’ (II.4.23-27). This ruse succeeds in tricking Doctor Baliardo into believing that immortals can communicate with, court and marry mortals. Accordingly, Cinthio and Charmante disguise themselves in strange clothes and claim that they are suitors from the moon: Cinthio is the Emperor of the Moon who wants to marry Elaria and Charmante is the Prince of Thunderland who wants to marry Bellemante. Obsessed with life on the moon, the father, of course, agrees to these marriages.

By portraying the active role women can play in order to pursue their lovers, *The Emperor of the Moon* subverts the patriarchal control. Even though Elaria and Bellemante are imprisoned by the controlling Doctor Baliardo, they believe that they have the right to court and love. In the first song in the play, Elaria sings:

A Curse upon that faithless maid

Who first her sex's liberty betray'd;

*Born free as man to love and range,
Till nobler nature did to custom change,
Custom, that dull excuse for fools,
Who think all virtue to consist in rules. (I.1.1-6)*

Elaria here claims that women and men are born equal in their freedom 'to love and range'. Because of foolish customs disguised as virtue, women's freedom becomes restricted and unequal to men's. As Elaria's song continues, she admits that although there are restrictions on love, these restrictions are social conventions and, as such, should be resisted:

*Then she that constancy professed
Then she that constancy professed
Was but a well dissembler at the best;
And that imaginary sway
She feigned to give, in seeming to obey,
Was but the height of prudent art,
To deal with greater liberty her heart. (I.1.13-18)*

For Elaria, women who follow rules deceive themselves. By rejecting custom, Elaria grants herself freedom to love and court as men do.

Although the play stresses the importance of courtship, it challenges its traditional roles and portrays a woman who chooses and pursues her partner and not the opposite. Thus for Elaria, a visit to church is less a spiritual than a sexual enterprise:

Elaria. Thy eyes are always laughing, *Bellemante*.

Bellemante. And so would yours had they been so well employed as mine, this morning. I have been at the chapel, and seen so many beaux, such a Number of *plumes*, I could not tell which I should look on most, sometimes my heart was charmed with the gay blonding, then with the melancholy *noir*, anon the

amiable brunet, sometimes the bashful, then again the bold; the little now, anon the lovely tall! In fine, my dear, I was embarrassed on all sides, I did nothing but deal my heart *tout autour*.

Elaria. Oh there was then no danger, cousin.

Bellemante. No, but abundance of pleasure. (I.1.130-140)

Not merely passive observers, the women in this play actively pursue their lovers, Elaria sends Cinthio a love letter and, with the help of Scaramouch, she arranges for herself and her cousin to meet secretly with their lovers. In a direct opposition to the submissive role played by women in patriarchal societies, moreover, Bellemante announces that if Charmante does not treat her well, she will replace him with another:

BELLEMATE what shall I do? who can no more imagine who should write those boremes, than who I shall love next, if I break off with Charmante?

FLORINDA If he be a man of honour, cousin, when a maid protests her innocence—

BELLEMATE Ay, but he's a man of wit too, cousin, and knows when women protest most, they likely lie most.

ELARIA Most commonly, for truth needs no asseveration.

BELLEMATE That's according to the disposition of your lover, for some believe you most, when you most abuse and cheat 'em; some are so obstinate, they would damn a woman with protesting, before she can convince 'em.

ELARIA Such a one is not worth convincing, I would not make the world wise at the expense of a virtue.

BELLEMATE Nay, he shall e'en remain as heaven made him for me,
since there are men enough for all uses. (II.3.7-22)

Furious that Charmante accuses her of cheating with another man, Bellemante is already considering her 'next' lover. Should Charmante not believe that she is innocent and breaks off with her, she will move on and not submit to his accusations, 'since there are men enough for all uses'. By depicting Bellemante as willing to consider other choices of love object, the play validates woman's free choice in changing one's partner and refusing to submit to ill treatment.

The above discussion reveals that *The Emperor of The Moon* is a play that questions the authority of the father over the daughter, particularly in her choice of marriage. In order to do so, Behn uses the farce genre and portrays the patriarch as an imbecile who uses foolish rules to prevent his daughter and niece from courtship. He claims that he possesses superior knowledge and he threatens physical abuse. By showing the father as a fool and his instructions as foolish, the play challenges the authority-obedience relationship between the father and the daughter.

Moreover, the play deconstructs the casting of men and women as logical and illogical beings by creating daughters who outwit their father and resist his illogical control over their choices of marriage. The daughters plot with their lovers against the father to marry them. In the same way Behn gives herself access to men's "exclusive" world of science and corrects it, she gives these daughters the permission to correct their father's choice of husbands.

Furthermore, by making the daughters rebel against their father's control, the play exploits the distinction between theory and practice in seventeenth century discourses of the family, reaffirming that the structure of the family is vulnerable to change. The play validates women's free choice to pursue their lovers through courtship by comparing them to men; that

is, they are born with equal rights to love and court. This validation, in turn, subverts the conventional criteria governing a woman's choice in marriage.

II. *The Forced Marriage*

The Forced Marriage is a play that resists both marriages arranged by fathers and domestic violence practiced by husbands. In recent years, *The Forced Marriage* has begun to attract considerable critical attention due to its primary focus on gender. Derek Hughes notes that, '*The Forc'd Marriage* [...] is clearly influenced by several earlier plays, all (inevitably) by men [...], Behn appropriates and transforms male texts for her own distinctive woman's agenda'.⁶⁶ Besides correcting scientific treatises written by men, Behn also manipulates literary works by men in order to serve her purposes of women's empowerment. In a later essay, Hughes and Todd argue for the same point. *The Forced Marriage*, they write that the play:

trace[s] male supremacies to its origins in warrior communities whose values are dictated by strength and soldierly prowess: a simple feudal world of aristocracy, male bonding, oaths, and romance. While portraying the glamour of this world, Behn criticizes it and its warrior cult as fierce and inimical to women, who are reduced to objects of ritual exchange.⁶⁷

In this chapter, I extend Hughes's and Todd's argument, agreeing that the play resists forced marriage, and furthermore noting that it criticises domestic violence practiced by husbands as a mean to makes divorce and remarriage easy to obtain.

The Forced Marriage revolves around two marriages. The first is Erminia's, a marriage based on parental intervention. In a gathering at the court, with the king, the prince and the warriors present, Orgulious arranges a marriage for his daughter without hearing her

⁶⁶ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave), p. 30.

⁶⁷ Derek Hughes and Janet Todd, 'Tragedy and tragicomedy' in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 83-97, (p. 83).

opinion. When Alcippus, the warrior, asks to marry Erminia as a reward for his courage in battle, Orgulious accepts immediately. This forced marriage, however, contradicts Erminia's wish to marry Phillander, the prince, with whom she is in love. Phillander describes this marriage, in a later scene, as a rape, '[a]nd must she now be ravish't from my Arms; / Will you Erminia suffer such a rape [?]'.⁶⁸ In contrast to Erminia's marriage which is based on force, Aminta's marriage to Alcander is based on equality.

The play resists forced marriage by criticising the father's role. The father attempts to force Ermina to marry Alcippus by patronising her and undermining her ability to think independently. For example, when Erminia rejects Alcippus as a husband, the father replies:

[a]way, away, you are a foolish Girl, / And look with too much pride upon your
Beauty; / Which like a gawdy flower that springs too soon, / Withers e're fully
blown. / Your very tears already have betray'd / Its weak inconstant nature; /
Alcippus, should he look upon thee now, / Would swear thou wert not that fine
thing he lov'd. (1.3.2-9)

Besides calling her 'foolish', the words he uses to describe her suggests fragility, such as 'flower' and 'weak'. Similarly, when Erminia reveals that she chooses Phillander as a husband instead of Alcippus, the father replies, '[y]our love from folly, not from vertue, grew' (I.3.49). From Orgulious' point of view, Erminia is foolish because of her inability to understand that Alcippus is a more suitable choice of husband. Referring to Alcippus, the father says mockingly, '[t]is strange to me you should despise this fortune', (1.3.12) and 'Erminia, thou art young and canst not see / Th' advantage of the fortune offer'd thee' (1.3.23-24). Therefore, the father advises his daughter to use her mind and accept Alcippus as a

⁶⁸ Aphra Behn, *The Forced Marriage*, cited in ed. by Janet Todd, *The Works The works of Aphra Behn*, 5 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (1.4.9-10). Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically.

husband:

Cease then this fruitless passion and incline / Your will and reason to agree
with mine. / Alcippus I dispos'd you to before, / And now I am inclin'd to it
much more. / Some days I had design'd t' ve given thee / To have prepar'd for
this solemnity; / But now my second thoughts beleeeve it fit, / You should this
night to my desires submit. (1.3.55-62)

In addition, when Erminia expresses that she chooses Phillander as a husband, the father threatens to cut off his relationship with her: '[d]estroy it, or expect to hear of me'(1.2.38), and '[g]aining the Prince you may a Father lose' (1.2.76). According to the father, because Erminia is a commoner and Phillander is a royal, the king will not accept Erminia's marriage to Phillander and will consider it an inappropriate attempt to raise Erminia above her own social position.

However, it transpires that the one who lacks good judgement is the father: he is mistaken in considering Alcippus a suitable husband for Erminia. Alcippus proves to be an evil, greedy and disloyal man. He asks for Erminia's hand despite knowing that she is his prince's beloved. Janet Todd points out, 'Alcippus is blustery and rude to his prince, a man whom he has thoroughly wronged'.⁶⁹ Later in the play, Alcippus proves his evil and criminal inclinations when he attempts to kill Erminia. Todd sees Alcippus as 'bullying male force, which his friend Pisaro constantly begs him to control, as if he were a mad bear who would destroy himself if let loose'.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Orgulious is mistaken in claiming that the king will reject the marriage between Erminia and Phillander. When the king knows about the love relationship between them, he decides that Erminia's common birth will not affect his acceptance of her marriage to Phillander. 'Had I known the passion of my son,' he states,

⁶⁹ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: Pandora, 2000), p.140.

⁷⁰ Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, p.140.

‘And how essential 'twas to his content, I willingly had granted my consent, Her worth and beauty had sufficient been, To've raised her to the title of a Queen’ (4.7.80-84). For Behn, then, class difference is not an obstacle to marriage between lovers: the bride’s ‘worth’ and the ‘beauty’ can compensate for her low birth. Behn’s portrayal of the father as lacking good judgement in his choice of a husband for his daughter, which leads her into a horrible marriage, undermines the absolute authority of fathers over their daughters in the traditional family.

If the play resists forced marriage by showing that not all the fathers have good judgment in choosing husbands for their daughters, it does so, too, by depicting a daughter who insists on her free choice to marry the man she wants and subverts the traditional role of the submissive daughter. In front of this patriarchal father who reduces his daughter to an object of exchange stands a self-determined and challenging daughter, Erminia. Phillander describes her as a powerful woman. When Alcippus sees Phillander at Erminia’s chamber and fights with him, Erminia tries to stop them by asking Phillander to leave. Phillander accepts her request because he is confident of ‘her power’: he tells Alcippus, ‘I will, but not for fear of thee or death, / But from th' assurance that her power's sufficient / To allay this unbecoming fury in thee, / And bring thee to repentance’ (4.6.64-67). Erminia’s powerful character is evident in the way she handles her father’s attempt to force her to marry Alcippus. When she gets the news that her father has arranged a marriage for her, she swears, ‘[b]ut if I must th'unsuit *Alcippus* wed, I vow he ne're shall come into my Bed’ (1.2.115-116). The play portrays a daughter who does not accept her father’s arrangement for her marriage, nor does she accept being treated as a prize for a warrior.

To resist forced marriage, Erminia speaks her mind frankly in front of her father. After learning about her arranged marriage, Erminia initiates a conversation with her father, declaring: ‘Sir, does your fatal resolution hold?’ (1.3.1). Then, she criticises his choice of

Alcippus as a husband for her by revealing her feelings toward the suitor, ‘[w]hat to Alcippus you did love believe, / Was such a friendship as might well deceive; / 'Twas what kind Sisters do to Brothers pay; / Alcippus I can love no other way. / Sir, lay the interest of a Father by, / And give me leave this Lover to deny’ (1.3.17-22). In other words, Erminia states that she cannot look at Alcippus but as a friend or a brother. Moreover, Erminia daringly expresses that she indeed loves Phillander: ‘[a]las, Sir, there is something yet behind / [...] it is no crime, or if it be, / Let Prince Phillander make the peace for me; / He 'twas that taught the sin, (if love be such.)’ (1.3.25-32). Hearing his daughter explicitly telling him about her choice of marriage, the father finds a powerful provocative nature in her voice. He comments, ‘Erminia, you are wondrous daring grown; / Where got you courage to admit his love, / Before the King or I did it approve?’ (1.3.40-42). By initiating the conversation with her father, criticising his choice of suitor and confessing her love, Erminia controls the conversation.

Erminia demonstrates the same power before Alcippus, boldly refusing marriage. Should they be married against her will, Erminia sets rules of the relationship. First, she states clearly that she will not sleep with him on the wedding night. Second, she expresses that she will treat him as a friend. She states: ‘[a] friendship, Sir, I can on you bestow, / But that will hardly into passion grow; / And 'twill an Act below your vertue prove, / To force an heart you know can never love’ (56-59). Besides setting the rules, she informs him that she loves Phillander: ‘[m]y heart before you ask't it, was his prize’ (2.3.44). Additionally, Erminia defends her choice of Phillander as a lover. When Alcippus threatens to kill her with his dagger, she says:

'Tis true, I love, and do confess it too: / Which if a crime, I might have hid from you; / But such a passion 'tis, as does despise, / Whatever rage you threaten from your eyes. / -Yes- you may disapprove this flame in me, / But cannot

hinder what the Gods decree; / -Search here this truth; Alas, I cannot fear, / Your steel shall find a welcom entrance here (2.3.72-79).

By confronting 'man's dagger' with woman's voice, the play shows that the speech of a woman can be equal in power to the weapon of a man. By setting the rules of her relationship with Alcippus, informing him that she chooses Phillander as a lover and defending her choice of love, Erminia resists forced marriage through the power of her voice.

Besides vocal resistance, Erminia also resists forced marriage through disguise. Disguise plays an important role in subverting power structures in her relationship with her husband. A comparison between the death scene and the disguise scene clarifies this change. In the death scene, Alcippus attempts to kill Erminia, after he finds Phillander in her chamber. In this scene, Erminia appears submissive and Alcippus dominant. The language presents Alcippus as wielding power over Erminia,

ERMINIA Alcippus, what do you mean?

ALCIPPUS To know where 'twas you learn'd this impudence?

Which you'r too cunning in,

Not to have been a stale practitioner.

ERMINIA Alass, what will you do?

ALCIPPUS Preserve thy soul if thou hast any sense

Of future joys, after this damned action.

ERMINIA Ah, what have I done?

ALCIPPUS That which if I should let thee live, *Erminia*,

Would never suffer thee to look abroad again.

-Thou'st made thy self and me-

-Oh, I dare not name the Monsters-

But Ile destroy them whilst the Gods look down,

And smile upon my justice.

He strangles her with a Garter, which he snatches from his Leg, or smothers her with a Pillow.

ERMINIA Hold, hold, and hear my vows of innocence.

ALCIPPUS Let me be damn'd as thou art if I do;

Throws her on a bed, he sits down in a Chair (4.6.68-89).

We see in this conversation that, on the one hand, Erminia speaks few lines and when she tries to articulate her 'vows of innocence', she cannot do so. On the other hand, Alcippus dominates throughout the conversation. His language is brimming with offensive words, such as 'impudence', 'cunning' and 'a stale practitioner'. Moreover, the body language in the scene shows that Alcippus is the one who has control. He is active while Erminia is passive. He sits on a chair, while she lays, seemingly dead, on the bed. The words exchanged and the body language in the death scene presents Erminia as weaker than Alcippus.

In contrast, Erminia becomes dominant and Alcippus subordinate in the disguise scene. The disguise scene happens after Isilia finds Erminia laying semi-dead in bed and rescues her. Erminia disguises herself to end her marriage from Alcippus, convinces Alcippus to marry Gallatea and divorces her. She disguises herself as an angel: she transforms her body by wearing a veil, and her voice by speaking in strange tenor, 'a tone like a spirit' (5.2). She goes to Alcippus's room to scare him. Looking at the mirror, he sees a strange creature looking over his shoulder. He says '[h]a-What do's this Glass present me? / What art thou? - speak,-What art thou?/ [...] -Sure I am fixt, what shall the Devil fright me?' (5.2.56-58). The mirror, here, plays an important role in revealing that Erminia is not Alcippus's subject and

she has autonomy now. Referring to this scene, Derek Hughes suggests that '[Erminia's] reflection appears alongside his, claiming that women have a separate and autonomous significance'.⁷¹

Comparing Erminia's words and actions illuminates that, unlike the action of the death scene, now, she has power over Alcippus. For example, she points at a chair and instructs Alcippus, '[s]it down and hear me-' (5.2.64). She, also, threatens him that if he disobeys her instructions, he will be punished. His punishment is '[t]o live in endless torments, but ne're die' (5.2.66). Then, she instructs him to marry Gallatea. Referring to Gallatea, Erminia state, '*Be still; 'tis she you must possess, 'Tis she must make your happiness; 'Tis she must lead you on to find Those blessings Heaven has design'd, 'Tis she'll conduct you where you'll prove The perfect joys of grateful love*' (5.2.98-103). After that, she clarifies to him that Erminia was never his wife and will never be:

*For if Erminia still were here, / Still subject to the toyles of life, / She never
could have been thy wife. / Whereby the laws of men and Heaven / Was to
another's bosom given, / And what injustice thou hast done, / Was only to thy
Prince alone, / But he has mercy, can redeem, / Those ills which thou hast
done to him. (5.2.109-117)*

As we see, the power dynamics in this scene are reversed, Erminia is the one who stands and speaks, gives orders, while Alcippus is the one who sits and hears. Even though the disguise empowers Ermenia only temporarily, it enables her to resist forced marriage.

Moreover, the play undermines forced marriage by supporting marriage based on equality. Aminta chooses to marry Alcander because they are equals in wit and humour. Alcander describes Aminta as witty when he expresses his love to her:

⁷¹ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 36.

Ah Madam do not wrong me so, Till now I never knew the joys and sorrows
That do attend a soul in love like mine, My passion only fits the object now, I
hate to tell you so, 'tis a poor low means To gain a Mistress by, of so much
wit, Aminta you're above that common rate Of being won. Mean beauties
should be flatter'd into praise, Whilst you need only sighs from every lover
To tell you who you conquer, and not how, Nor to instruct you what attracts
you have. (4.1.36-47)

Similarly, Alcander possesses a powerful intellect. His wit is evident when Falatius, his rival to Aminta's heart, comes to Aminta with two patches on his face and tells her about his courage at war; Alcander points at him, calls him a liar and declares that his means of courtship lacks wit:

ALCANDER That's most proper for your wit *Falatius*.

FALLATIUS Why so angry?

ALCANDER Away, thou art deceav'd. (2.2 90-92)

In addition, Alcander's character is associated with humour. Aminta describes him to his sister:

Yes Olinda, and you shall know its meaning, I love Alcander and am not
asham'd o'th' secret, But prithee do not tell him what I say. Oh he's a man
made up of those perfections, Which I have often lik't in several men; And
wish't united to compleat some one, Whom I might have the glory to
o'recome His Mean and Person, but 'bove all his Humour, That surly Pride,
though even to me address, Do strangely well become him. (2.2.46-55)

Like Alcander, Aminta is associated with humour. Her brother informs Alcander that they are suited for each other because of their sense of humour: 'you'r the fittest for her fickle

humour'(1. 1.211). Similarly, Aminta, herself, tells Alcander, 'If I be so, I'me the fitter for your humour' (4. 1.74). Because they are equal in wit and humour, Aminta chooses to marry Alcander over Falatius.

In *The Forced Marriage*, Behn criticises husbands' use of domestic violence to subordinate wives. As discussed in chapter 1, although domestic violence was condemned by conduct books, in practice an accepted form of violence was recognised and endorsed. Behn is more influenced by the theory in her criticism of Alcippus' use of domestic violence against Erminia. In order to condemn domestic violence, Behn links Alcippus' use of force with horror and death. Also, the play resists the husband's use of domestic violence against his wife by making divorce and remarriage easy and available choices for women. Behn's depiction of divorce and remarriage is different than the early modern law in which divorce and remarriage were limited and difficult. Also, Behn's depiction of divorce is different than divorce discussions in other plays by Restoration dramatists. In *Tyrannick Love, or the Royal Martyr*, John Dryden describes marriage as a contract that cannot be dissolved. In the play, Berenice expresses the impossibility of divorce:

I hate this Tyrant, and his bed I loath;
But, once submitting, I am ty'd to both;
Ty'd to that Honour, which all Women owe,
Though not their Husbands person, yet their vow.
Something so sacred in that bond there is,
That none should think there could be ought amiss:
If there be, we should in silence hide

Those faults, which blame our choice when they are spy'd.⁷²

Unlike Dryden, Thomas Shadwell's *The Humourists* views marriage as a contract that can be dissolved. Sir Richard Loveyouth is able to estrange himself from Lady Loveyouth. Although he is able to do so, he cannot remarry again. Making the issue of divorce more flexible, *The Forced Marriage* treats marriage as a contract that can be dissolved and both men and women can remarry freely. At the end of the play, Alcippus obeys Erminia's instruction: he leaves her and marries Gallatea. When he asks to marry Gallatea, the king says to him, '[t]ake Gallatea, since her passion merits thee, / As do thy Vertues her' (5.5.216-217). At the same time, Erminia leaves Alcippus and marries the man she chooses, Phillander. When Phillander asks to marry Erminia, Orgulious accepts the marriage and says to Phillander: '[t]o you, Sir, I resign her, with as much joy' (5.5.205). Phillander bows, takes her hand and says: '[a]nd I with greater joy receive your gift' (5.5.208). By depicting Erminia obtaining divorce from Alcippus and marrying Phillander, the play portrays divorce in a flexible way in which both men and women can remarry again. By treating divorce as an option for the abused wife, Behn subverts the hierarchal relationship between the husband and wife.

The above discussion reveals that *The Forced Marriage* is a play that resists marriages arranged by fathers. The play criticises forced marriage by showing that not all the fathers have good judgment in choosing husbands for their daughters. The play, further, portrays daughters who challenge forced marriages through their voices and actions, including the innovative donning of disguise. Rather, the play endorses marriage based on equality between the spouses in traits such as wit and humour.

At the same time, the play questions the husband's use of domestic violence against

⁷²John Dryden, 'Tyrannick Love; or, The Royal Martyr', in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. By Vinton A. Dearing (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), (3.1.294-301).

his wife and challenges traditional choices to end marriage. The play undermines the husband's use of domestic violence against his wife by linking the violent husband with horror, and validating divorce and remarriage as choices mandated for women abused by their husbands. By criticising men's use of domestic violence, Behn undermines the relationship between the husband and the wife as one of authority and obedience.

III. *The False Count*

The False Count resists forced marriage through scenes of women's gossip, women's alliances and women's plotting. The play revolves around two daughters who are forced into marriage by their father. Mr. Baltazer forces his daughter Julia to marry Don Francisco, while she loves Don Carlos. He, also, forces his other daughter Clara to marry Don Carlos, while she loves Antonio. In return, Julia and Clara, refuse these forced marriages and marry their lovers. Somewhat surprisingly, Hughes argues that the daughters in this play are passive: '*The False Count* is a play in which women have very little initiative, and in which successful suitors are (once again) confidence tricksters'.⁷³ He adds, 'in no other recent Behn play had women been such pawns. If the sense that boundaries can be crossed, invented, and dissolved attempts a being exorcism of factionalism, the chief beneficiaries in Behn's political vision are – as always – men'.⁷⁴ I would argue, however, if we explore the play in relation to women's alliances, gossip and plotting, women appear as active, both resisting forced marriage and granting themselves the choice of divorce and remarriage. From the perspective which views daughters and wives as co-operative agents, Behn's understanding of the balance of power within families as flexible and vulnerable to change comes into full view. With it, women's freedom of choice in deciding their amorous futures becomes clear.

Julia resists forced marriages by gossiping with Jacinta, her servant. Behn depicts her

⁷³ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 135.

⁷⁴ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 139.

female characters gossiping because gossip is a powerful tool that threatens patriarchy, as discussed in chapter 1. In act 1, scene 2, we see Jacinta and Julia confide in each other. Jacinta tries to understand the reason behind Julia's sadness so she comments, 'Lord, Madam, you are as melancholy as a sick Parrot'.⁷⁵ When Jacinta highlights to Julia the way that she looks, Julia is pushed to open her heart. Julia says:

And can you blame me, *Jacinta*, have I not many Reasons to be sad; sirst,
have I not lost the onely man on earth in *Don Carlos*, that I cou'd love? and
worse than that, am married to a Thing, fit onely for his Tombe; a Brute, who
wanting sense to Value me, treats me more like a Prisoner than a Wife,—and
his Pretence is, because I should not see, nor hear from *Don Carlos*. (1.2.2-7)

Julia, here, not only expresses her problem to Jacinta, but also evaluates Francisco as an sexually inactive and decrepit husband. Through gossiping, Julia receives support from Jacinta, at the same time, becomes empowered to evaluate her husband and not be a silent and submissive wife.

Francisco, however, is aware of the subversive power of the female gossip: he views it as threatening and dangerous. He says to Julia and Jacinta when he finds them talking together:

FRANCISCO So—you two are damnable Close together, 'tis for no
goodness I'll warrant, you have your trade betimes.

JACINTA Meaning me, Sir?

FRANCISCO Yes you, one of my Wives evil Counsellors,—go, get you up
both to your respective Chambers, go—. (1.2.37-41)

⁷⁵ Aphra Behn, *The False Count*, in *The works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 5 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (1.4.9-10). Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically, (1.2.1). "Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically."

For Francisco, women's gathering and talking are of an evil nature. Therefore, he warns Jacinta and Julia against their discourse and insists on separating them, asking them to go to their respective bedrooms. Similarly, Francisco expresses his worries regarding female gathering and gossiping when he finds Jacinta, Julia and Clara talking, 'So; together Consulting and Contriving' (2.1.51). For Francisco, when women consult one another, it means that they are conniving. Thus, because Francisco considers female gossiping is threatening, he tries to undermine it. Elaine Hobby comments on Behn's use of gossip in *The Lucky Chance*:

the reference to "christenings and gossipings" occasions when power centred in the midwife who attended the mother during birth, and might then accompany her and her baby to church for the christening gestures across to the kinds of knowledge, and laughter, that women could have when in one another's company, apart from men.⁷⁶

Behn, then, uses gossip to subvert patriarchy in a number of her plays.

Julia and Clara, furthermore, resist their father's control over their choice of marriage by establishing networks with the women around them. Behn uses female alliance because it is subverts to patriarchy, as discussed in chapter 1. In a conversation with Clara, Jacinta comments on the importance of women supporting each other: 'why shou'd we young Women pine and Languish for what our own Natural invention may procure us; let us three lay our heads together, and if *Machavil*, with all his Politicks, can out-witt us, 'tis pity but we all lead Apes in Hell, and dy'd without the *Jewish* blessing of consolation'(2.1. 46-59). Jacinta encourages Clara to confide in her and promises her that if the three of them unite,

⁷⁶ Elaine Hobby, "World Was Never Without Some Mad Men": Aphra Behn, Jane Shap and The Body', *Women's Writing*, 19:2 (2012), 177-191, (p.180).

they can solve their problems. Bonding between the sisters and Jacinta appears when they give each other snippets of advice. To help Julia challenge her forced marriage, Jacinta advises her to have a sexual relationship with Carlos and divorce Francisco:

JACINTA Wou'd I were in your room, Madam, I'd cut [Francisco] out work enough I'd warrant him; and if he durst impose on me, i'faith I'd transform both his Shape and his manners; in short, I'd try what Woman-hood cou'd doe. And indeed, the revenge wou'd be so pleasant, I wou'd not be without a jealous Husband for all the world, and really, Madam, Don *Carlos* is so sweet a Gentleman.

JULIA Ay, but the Sin, *Jacinta!*

JACINTA A' my Conscience Heav'n wou'd forgive it, for this match of yours, with old *Francisco*, was never made there.

JULIA Then if I wou'd, alas what oportunities have I, for I confess since his first Vows made him mine.—

JACINTA—right—that lying with old *Francisco* is flat Adultery. (1.2.8-19)

In this conversation, Jacinta and Julia reach this conclusion: not to lie with Francisco, and end this marriage. At the same time, they agree that Julia should defend her choice of suitor, Carlos, by continuing to court him and have an intimate relationship with him. Similarly, Julia supports her sister Clara by discussing the problem of the men their father has chosen for them and giving advice. Clara says to Julia, ‘we are both unhappy to be matcht to those we cannot love; *Carlos*, though young, gay, handsome, witty, rich; I hate as much as you the old *Francisco*; for since I cannot Marry my *Antonio*’ (2.1.22-24). Julia advises Clara to tell Carlos that she does not want to marry him, ‘Wou'd *Carlos* knew your heart, sure he'd decline, for he has too much Honor, to compell a Maid to yeild that loves him not’ (2.1.27-28). Through their conversations, the sisters bond and give advice to each other in order to

stand against their oppressive father.

Bonding between the female characters in *The False Count* does not only appear in the advice they give to each other in conversations, but also in facilitating each other's courtship of their chosen lovers. They help each other in courtship in two major ways. First, Jacinta helps Julia to exchange letters with Carlos. He calls her the messenger of love, 'what news my dearest messenger of Love? what may I hope?—' (2.1.48-49). When it gets difficult to meet Julia, he waits for Jacinta to bring him her letters, 'I'll stay a little—perhaps *Jacinta* may return again, for any thing belonging to my *Julia* is dear, even to my Soul' (2.1.251-252). Besides delivering letters between Julia and Carlos, Jacinta discusses the content of these love letters with Julia:

JACINTA WELL, Madam, have you writ to Don *Carlos*? [...]—but what said the Lovely Cavalier?

JULIA All that a man inspir'd with Love cou'd say, All that was soft and Charming.

JACINTA Nay, I believe his Art.

JULIA Judge then what my Heart Feels, who, like a fire but lightly cover'd o're with the cold Ashes of Despair, with the least blast, breaks out into a flame; I burn, I burn, *Jacinta*, and onely Charming *Carlos* can alay my Pain—but how, Ay there's the question?

JACINTA Some way I will contrive to speak with him, for he has lost his old wont if he traverse not the street where you live, but see Dona *Clara*. (2.1.1-17)

By discussing the content of Carlos's love letter, Jacinta reveals her frank opinion to Julia and expresses her doubts about Carlos's love. Therefore, she offers to help Julia by asking Carlos about the truth of his feelings towards her. When Jacinta helps Julia to exchange letters with

her lover and clarifies for her the better option she has, they undermine patriarchy.

Second, Jacinta helps Julia and Clara to meet their lovers. For example, Carlos says to her, ‘[a]nd prethee, dear *Jacinta*, let me have one word with *Julia* more, she need not fear surprise; just at the dore let me but kiss her hand’ (2.1.211-212). Also, referring to Antonio, Jacinta tells Clara, ‘I have appointed him this night to wait, and, if possible, I wou’d get him a Minutes time with you’ (2.1.24-43). When Jacinta arranges a meeting between the sisters and their lovers, she stays at the door to make sure that she can warn them if Francisco comes home. For example, when Francisco returns suddenly, Jacinta runs to Julia and alerts her. Referring to Francisco, she says, ‘[h]e has seen Don *Carlos*, and they have been in great discourse together, I cou’d not hear one word, but you’ll have it at both ears anon, I’ll warrant you. / Ha, he’s coming.—’. (2.1.203-206) Also, when Clara meets Antonio and Francisco comes suddenly Jacinta helps in hiding Antonio, ‘[h]ere, step in to *Clara’s* Bed-chamber.—’ (2.1.208). Moreover, when Francisco locks the doors of the house and goes to bed, Jacinta goes to Clara and Antonio, who is visiting her in secret, and tells them about the news,

Ah! Madam, the saddest news— [...] / Poor Gentle-man, I pity you of all things in the world,—you must be forc’d—how can I utter it,—to the most lamentable torment that ever Lover endur’d—to remain all night in your Mistress’s Chamber. / [...] Ha, ha, ha, how I am griev’d to think on’t; ha, ha, ha, that you shou’d both be so hardly put to’t; ha, ha, ha, for the old Gentle man has lockt all the dores, and took the keys to bed to him,—go get you in,—ha, ha, ha,—. (2.1.261-372)

Jacinta, here, is ironical when she says ‘saddest news,’ because it is the happiest news for the couple to stay the night together. On the next morning, Jacinta tells Clara that she and Julia watched over her and Antonio all the night, at the same time, they helped Antonio to escape at the early morning. Referring to Antonio, Jacinta tells Clara:

Nay I know he wou'd be Civil, Madam, or I wou'd have born you company,
but neither my Mistress nor I, Cou'd sleep one wink all night, for fear of a
Discovery in the Morning, and, to save the poor Gentleman a tumbling Cast
from the window, my Mistress, just at day break, fain'd her self wondrous
sick,—I was call'd, desir'd to goe to Seignior *Spadillio's* the Apothecary's, at
Next door, for a Cordial; and so he slipt out. (3.2.1-7)

Thus, Jacinta helps Julia and Clara to meet their lovers and watches over them. Her help for them is a form of women's interactivity and resistance against patriarchy.

In order to free herself and her sister from forced marriages, Julia plots with Carlos to have an intimate relationship, to cuckold Francisco and push him to divorce Julia. The plot is that Carlos disguises himself as a Turkish sultan who captures Francisco and Julia as slaves. In order to free himself and his wife, Francisco has to accept the sultan's request, which is to sleep with his wife. After Francisco accepts the request, the sultan and Julia have an intimate relationship and the sultan reveals that he is Carlos, Francisco realizes that he has been tricked: 'The Governor!' he exclaims, 'the worst Great Turk of all; so I am cozened, - most rarely cheated; why what a horrid Plot's here carried on, to bring in heretical Cuckoldom?' (5.1.307-309). After Francisco realized that he has been tricked, he divorced Julia. At the end of the play, Julia get married to Carlos. This plot helps Clara to resist forced marriage and marry her lover. When Carlos leaves Clara for Julia, Clara becomes free to marry Antonio. By bonding together, gossiping and plotting against patriarchal figures, Julia and Clara challenge forced marriage. Unlike early modern divorce which is difficult to obtain, divorce and remarriage are available and easy choices for Julia and Clara.

Besides portraying challenging female characters, the play criticises forced marriage and shows that in this kind of marriage women are treated as objects. By ridiculing heads of households who participate in this type of marriage, the play advocates instead marriage

based on mutuality and equality. Objectification of Julia starts with her father who treats her as an object of exchange between him and Francisco. Francisco's treatment of Julia as an object continues even after their marriage. When Francisco talks with her, he calls her 'duckling' (1.2.94) and 'chicken' (1.2.99). This outlook, also, appears when Francisco discovers Carlos and Julia's plot, and tells Julia's father that he does not want to be with her anymore:

Not at all, Father mine, she's my Wife, my Lumber now, and, I hope, I may dispose of my Goods and Chattels:—if he takes her we are upon equal terms, for he makes himself my Cuckold, as he has already made me his;— for, if my memory fail me not, we did once upon a time consummate, as my Daughter has it. (5.1.223-227)

Describing his wife as 'Lumber', 'Goods' and 'Chattels' indicates that Francisco considers his wife an object and a possession.

Moreover, the play ridicules heads of households who participate in forced marriage by depicting them as anxious and jealous. Francisco continually wants to prove his sexual virility, calling himself, 'a good Tenant that payes once a quarter' (1.2.224) in sexual relationships. At the same time, Francisco is jealous and always keeps an eye on Julia to make sure no man comes near her. Carlos describes the way Francisco treats Julia, 'he keeps her as close as a Relict, jealous as Age and Impotence can make him' (1.1.41-42). Whenever Francisco leaves Julia alone, he hurries back to her. He says to her father, 'so I'll to my Wife, whom I have left too long alone, evil thoughts will grow upon her—Wife, Love—Duckling—' (1.2.93-94). When he leaves house, he comes back quickly suspecting that Julia is meeting her lover. He says, '[h]ow fain she'd have me gone now; ah, subtle Serpent! is not this plain demonstration,—I shall murder her, I find the Devil great with me' (2.1.228-230). He tells her:

Oh thou Monster of Ingratitude, have I caught thee? You'd have me gone,
wou'd ye? ay, to Heaven, I believe, like a wicked Woman as you are, so you
were rid of me. Go,—and be satisfied of my eternal love —ah, Gipsej,—no,
Gentlewoman, I am a tuff bit, and will hold you tugging till your heart ake.
(2.1.234-239)

‘Only to cuckold me a little,’ he adds, ‘—get you in,—where I will swear thee by Bell, Book and Candle,—get you in, I say,—go, go,—I’ll watch for your Lover, and tell him how unkind he was to stay so long, I will’ (2.1.245-248). In addition, he instructs his wife that she ‘should never returns any Compliments to Men’ (1.2.167-168). By portrying Francisco as anxious to prove his sexual prowess, jealous and always keeping an eye on his wife, the play ridicules him for marrying a young wife.

It should be noted that this play mirrors one of the ways by which women in real life in the seventeenth century resisted men’s control, which is through female bonding. As discussed above, for example, in order to challenge the exclusion of women from the scientific fields Makin opened a school for women. Women, in other words, allied with each other in order to gain access to education. In the same way, *The False Count* resists forced marriage through female bonding. Also, Jacinta and Clara resist forced marriage by gossiping and plotting against patriarchal figures.

Besides portrying powerful heroines, the play criticises forced marriage by showing that it results in the objectification of women. Moreover, it ridicules old men who marry young women by showing them as perpetually jealous and anxious. Unlike early modern divorce which was limited, the play depicts divorce and remarriage as available and easy choices.

IV. Conclusion

In her representation of marriages and divorces in the plays above, Behn questions the roles of the father and the husband. Behn attacks fathers who arrange forced marriages for their daughters and threaten to abuse them verbally, emotionally and physically if they do not follow their orders. Moreover, Behn questions the common excuses and claims that are used to justify the father's absolute authority such as that reason and rationality are exclusive to men. *The Emperor of the Moon* challenges the father's authority and his claim of being a scientist by depicting him as a fool who confuses science with myth and showing that being a man is not enough to make someone a rationalist. Similarly, Behn attacks old husbands who participate in forced marriages and portray them as worried and anxious to prove their sexual prowess. Along the same lines, Behn condemns husbands' use of domestic violence against wives and associates the abusive husband with death.

In return, Behn presents daughters and wives who try different methods in order to resist forced marriage, such as confrontation, gossiping, female bonding, and plotting. Moreover, Behn uses the farce genre and the disguise to picture challenging daughters and wives who achieve their goals at the end of the plays. By using the license for subversion in the farce genre and the disguise, Behn asks the audience whether there is such license in the real world for women to resist patriarchal force and have a free choice of marriage. By representing daughters and wives challenge heads of household, Behn deconstructs the obedient and virtuous roles of the wives and the daughters.

This chapter reveals that Behn makes use of the contradictions between theory and practice concerning the Restoration family to resist forced marriage and to make divorce and remarriage easy options for women. The plays resist forced marriages by depicting marriages based on mutual consent and equality. Unlike early modern divorce which was difficult to obtain, the play depicts divorce and remarriage as available choices.

Chapter 4: Family, Traditional Socioeconomic Marriage and Women's Relationship with Money

Two of the main familial issues that Aphra Behn discusses in her plays are traditional socioeconomic marriage and women's relationship with money. This chapter demonstrates that Behn portrays wives who exercise power over money and valuables in the household and resist traditional socioeconomic marriage in *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman's Bargain* (1686). Furthermore, she depicts mothers who challenge patriarchy to help their children advance financially and wives who get divorce and take with them money and valuables in *Sir Patient Fancy: A Comedy* (1678). Finally, this study argues that although in *The City-Heiress; or, Sir Timothy Treat-all* (1682) Behn supports Royalism, she portrays women who resist discrimination in work and trade and challenge traditional socioeconomic marriage, at the same time, she underestimates the centrality of love and marriage in women's life.

Crucial to this study is the discussion of traditional socioeconomic marriage which was common in the Restoration period. Ralph Houlbrooke, in his discussion of marriages in the seventeenth century, mentions four main criteria governing the choice of spouses. One of them is the advancement of family.¹ Traditional socioeconomic marriage was a more serious matter among upper classes than lower classes in this period. As Houlbrooke notes, 'the wealthier the parties to a marriage, the more prominent in general was the place occupied in the marriage agreement by property arrangements'.² For the lower classes of society, families usually negotiated verbally in order to confirm the economic resources and prospects of the couple and what each of them is going to bring to this marriage.³ For the upper classes, however:

¹ Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450- 1700* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 73.

² Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 83.

³ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 83.

marriages were the occasion for the making of carefully worded treaties or settlements, which grew more elaborate as time went by. It was of course essential to sort out these property arrangements before an irrevocable contract had been exchanged or solemnisation had taken place.⁴

However, feminists note that traditional socioeconomic marriage is arranged for men's financial gain and not women's. Susan Staves notes that women were considered as commodities to be exchanged between families in the economic system of Restoration marriage:

From the theological perspective, marriage was a spiritual union and a fundamental unit of God's plan for the social order. But the ease with which the Church permitted couples to contract marriage simply by the exchange of vows in the present tense conflicted with a more worldly economic and legal ideology that understood women as instruments for the transmission and increase of family property.⁵

In 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', Gayle Rubin illustrates why traditional socioeconomic marriage puts women in an economically helpless position: 'if it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it [...] The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation'.⁶ We can say, then, that traditional socioeconomic marriage in the Restoration age benefits the father and the husband more than the wife as it reduces her to an

⁴ Houlbrooke, *The English Family 0*, p. 83.

⁵ Susan Staves, 'Behn, women, and society', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp 12-28, (p. 15).

⁶ Gayle Rubin 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy' of Sex' in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. by Linda J Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 27-62 (p. 37).

object of exchange between men and does not allow her to realise the benefits of this exchange.

Moreover, an overview of women's relationship with money in the Restoration period is needed. Women used to face restrictions in the law of property and money in the seventeenth century. As discussed in chapter 1, the coverture law prevented women from property and money ownership when they get married. Also, the coverture law was problematic to women when they want to end their marriages. As there was no divorce as we know it today, women could choose annulment and separation to end their marriages but with these options women were still under the restrictions of the coverture law. Moreover, seventeenth century women faced discrimination in the work field. As discussed in chapter 1, women faced underemployment and unemployment more than men.

Along the same lines, there is a tendency in the seventeenth century literary texts to portray women's financial capacity and skills with scepticism. In '*The Alewives Invitation to Married-Men, and Batchelors*' (1675), the anonymous author warns good husbands about alewives because he views them as the reason for men's poverty:

Therefore take my Counsel, and Ale-Wives don't trust,
For when you have wasted and spent all you have,
Then out of Doors she will you headlong Thrust,
Calling you Rascal and shirking Knave.
But so long as you have money, come early or late,
You shall have her at command, or else her maid Kate.⁷

⁷ Cited in Steven Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 25.

Moreover, literary texts criticise women and their management of work. In ‘*To a delicate northern tune, A womans work is never done, or, The beds making*’ (1660), an anonymous author writes:

*Here is a Song for Maids to sing,
Both in the Winter and the Spring;
It is Such a pretty conceited thing,
Which will much pleasure to them bring.
Maids may sit still, go, or run,
But a womans work is never done.*⁸

By linking women to men’s financial ruin and representing their management of work as never accomplished, a number of literary texts represent women’s relation to money from a negative perspective.

However, seventeenth century women demonstrated that they had financial skills, they pursued any chance to gain money and get employed, at the same time, they found their own ways around the coverture law. Concerning work, as discussed in chapter 1, although men tried to dominate the work field in early modern England, women of upper class and middle class participated in the work field, even if their jobs were temporary.⁹ Women worked in different fields such as midwifery, wet-nursing and education. Moreover, single women played prominent role in the early modern English financial marketplace. Laura Going notes that ‘single women’s economic activity transformed the English financial marketplace: it substantially increased the degree of economic activity, in particular,

⁸ Anonymous, ‘*A womans work is never done, or, The beds making*’ (London: John Andrews, 1660).

⁹ Michelle Dowd, *Women’s Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

investments'.¹⁰ Concerning coverture law, as discussed in chapter 1, it was not absolute as there were wives who held properties and had sense of goods ownership during marriage. Also, women together with their families found ways to get around the law of coverture, such as through private contracts, in case of divorce.

The following examination of Behn's plays challenge traditional socioeconomic marriage by depicting wives basing their marriages on equal exchange between man and woman in which both realise the benefits. Also, Behn's plays portray mothers who support their children in their choice of marriage and help them to advance financially. In addition, Behn's plays resist the coverture law by depicting wives who have sense of money and valuables ownership during marriage and women who own money and lands after divorce.

In order to empower her heroines to resist traditional socioeconomic marriages and to avoid men's treatment of them as items of exchange, Behn uses the genre of comedy. In *The Lucky Chance*, Behn uses mockery, exaggeration and comic deflation to expose and censure men who participate in traditional socioeconomic marriage. In *Sir Patient Fancy*, Behn uses contrasted characters—the blocking figure versus the wit—to ridicule elderly fathers who arrange socioeconomic marriages for their children and to undermine the conventional maternal role, expanding it to demonstrate how a mother supports her children's choices in marriage and helps them to advance financially.

I. *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman's Bargain*

The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman's Bargain resists traditional socioeconomic marriage, the legal restrictions of coverture law on women during marriage and scepticism of women's financial skills. Critics disagree in their interpretations of women and marriage in *The Lucky Chance*. On the one hand, Jacqueline Pearson notes that Julia, Lady Fulbank, the

¹⁰ Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 46.

main female character, belongs to the group of ‘women as passive victims,’ those ‘needing clever lovers to help them to avoid victimization rather than escaping by their own wit and nerve, so passive that they cannot even choose what man they sleep with’.¹¹ On the other hand, Robert A. Erickson argues that Behn creates powerful female characters, one of whom is Lady Fulbank. For Erickson, she is the most important character in Behn’s corpus. In the play, Lady Fulbank is forced to marry old Sir Cautious Fulbank. Nevertheless, she manages to achieve autonomy in this marriage. As Erickson observes, she has her own space in the house, which includes ‘a suite of rooms including her own bedroom’.¹² Furthermore, he points out:

she has access to her husband's considerable wealth; she has her own servants; and she has freedom to act out her own self-chosen roles and to direct her own cast of characters in a play she has written for her own special purposes, one that will affirm the ‘Poets Dream’ of both Eros and Virtue as a reality.¹³

Most importantly, Erickson argues, Lady Fulbank has the upper hand in her love relationship with Gayman. He asserts that Lady Fulbank ‘is Gayman's author-within-the-play’.¹⁴ She ‘enacts and performs him out of his written words. She utters him and is thus his living fate; she speaks him into birth and is thus his dramatic mother’.¹⁵ While this authoritative (and authorial) role is usually played by libertine male heroes, Behn chooses a female heroine, reversing, as Erickson argues, ‘the normal pattern of male-authored plays, which tend to

¹¹ Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostitute Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists 1642-1737* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), p. 167.

¹² Robert Erickson, ‘Lady Fulbank and the Poet’s Dream’, in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 89-112 (p. 91).

¹³ Erickson, ‘Lady Fulbank and the Poet’s Dream’, p. 91.

¹⁴ Erickson, ‘Lady Fulbank and the Poet’s Dream’, p. 93.

¹⁵ Erickson, ‘Lady Fulbank and the Poet’s Dream’, p. 93.

introduce the leading female character through accounts by the male protagonist or his close male associates'.¹⁶ Lady Fulbank's powerful position in the play thus appears in part in her introduction of Gayman, rather than being introduced by him.

This discussion argues that *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman's Bargain* subverts traditional socioeconomic marriage in which men reduce women to objects of exchange between them by depicting two powerful female characters, and at the same time, by the use of the comic convention of mockery. The play begins with Leticia and Julia (Lady Fulbank) being treated as commodities exchanged between fathers and husbands in their marriages. Leticia is forced to marry Sir Feeble while she is in love with Belmour. Lady Fulbank is forced to marry Sir Cautious Fulbank although she loves Gayman. Leticia objects to her marriage to Sir Feeble by sending him a message expressing her dissatisfaction '[T]ell him I wish him luck in everything, / But in his love to me'.¹⁷ At the end of the play, Leticia has the final say about her marriage to Sir Feeble and she gets divorced from him to marry her lover, Belmour.

Similarly, Lady Fulbank objects to her traditional socioeconomic marriage in two conversations with Sir Cautious, in which she defeats him with logical arguments. The first conversation takes place when Sir Cautious asks Lady Fulbank to sleep with him in the dark, which is part of his plot with Gayman against her, and she expresses her surprise at his request, as he suffers from sexual impotency,

LADY FULBANK But why tonight? Indeed, you're wondrous kind,
methinks.

¹⁶ Erickson, 'Lady Fulbank and the Poet's Dream', p. 93.

¹⁷ Aphra Behn, *The Lucky Chance*, in *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. by Jane sprncer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), (2.2.5-9). Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically.

SIR CAUTIOUS Why, I don't know: a wedding is a sort of an alarm to love;
it calls up every man's courage.

LADY FULBANK Aye, but will it come when 'tis called?

SIR CAUTIOUS (*Aside*) I doubt you'll find it, to my grief. [*To Lady Fulbank*] But I think 'tis all one to thee, thou car'st not for my complement;
no, thou'dst rather have a young fellow.

LADY FULBANK I am not used to flatter much; if forty years were taken
from your age, 'twould render you something more agreeable to my bed, I
must confess. (5.4.1-11)

Lady Fulbank here criticises her marriage to Sir Cautious by showing that it is based on mismatched sexual desire and competency. The second conversation takes place when Sir Cautious asks Lady Fulbank about her faithfulness to him:

SIR CAUTIOUS How, would; what, cuckold me?

LADY FULBANK Yes, if it pleased me better than virtue, sir. But I'll not
change my freedom and my humour, To purchase the dull fame of being
honest.

SIR CAUTIOUS Aye, but the world, the world—

LADY FULBANK I value not the censures of the crowd.

SIR CAUTIOUS But I am old.

LADY FULBANK That's your fault, sir, not mine.

SIR CAUTIOUS But being so, if I should be good-natured, and give thee
leave to love discreetly—?

LADY FULBANK I'd do't without your leave, sir.

SIR CAUTIOUS Do't: what, cuckold me?

LADY FULBANK No; love discreetly, sir, love as I ought, love honestly.

SIR CAUTIOUS What in Love with anybody, but your own husband?

LADY FULBANK Yes. (5.4.24-39)

In these lines, Lady Fulbank does not deny that she would love or sleep with another man other than her husband if it pleased her. Misty Anderson interprets this passage and the play more broadly as affirming women's rightful sexual desires, 'without which there is no comic ending'.¹⁸ By criticising her marriage to her husband and confessing that she would not be faithful to him, Lady Fulbank declares her rejection of her socioeconomic marriage to Sir Cautious.

In the final scene of the play, furthermore, Lady Fulbank resists being treated as an object of exchange between men, either in marriage or in wagering, by asking for separations from both her husband and her lover. When she discovers that Sir Cautious and Gayman have gambled over her body, she accuses them of treating her as a prostitute. 'And must my honour be the price of it?', she complains, 'What, make me a base prostitute, a foul adulteress?' (5.7.20-22). '[B]y all things just and sacred,' she states, her desire is 'To separate for ever from his [Sir Cautious's] bed' (5.7.63-64). For Kate Aughterson, Lady Fulbank's decision to separate from her husband is empowering, since 'Lady Fulbank asserts her own separate identity from her husband's, and disputes the idea that women are the property of men'.¹⁹ Having asserted her autonomy, Lady Fulbank further tells Gayman that she does not want to see him again, reprimanding him that 'A canvas bag of wooden ladles were a better bed-fellow' (5.7.185-186). 'What is remarkable about this play,' Aughterson concludes, 'is the extent to which women's choices in marriage dominate the resolution'.²⁰ By asking for a

¹⁸ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on The London Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 108.

¹⁹ Kate Aughterson, *Aphra Behn The Comedies* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 51.

²⁰ Aughterson, *Aphra Behn The Comedies*, p. 51.

separation from both her husband and her lover, Lady Fulbank gains autonomy, and Behn defends women's rights to resist and refuse marriages which work to their disadvantage.

Throughout *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman's Bargain*, Behn poses a challenge to traditional socioeconomic marriage by the use of mockery. Catherine Gallagher comments on the comic action in the play and relates it to the treatment of women as property: Leticia and Julia, she writes, are 'both property and occasions for the exchange of property [...] It is very easy, then, to make the point that the treatment of women as property is the problem that the play's comic action will set out to solve'.²¹ The play mocks traditional socioeconomic marriage by exaggerating its disadvantages for women. For example, it depicts Gayman disgracefully convincing Sir Cautious to gamble over Lady Fulbank's body. If Sir Cautious wins he will receive £3,000 and if he loses, Gayman will win the prize of sleeping with his wife:

SIR CAUTIOUS [...] Sir, I wish I had anything but ready money to stake.

Three hundred Pound: a fine sum!

GAYMAN You have moveables sir, goods; commodities—

SIR CAUTIOUS. That's all one, sir; that's money's worth, sir; but if I had anything that were worth nothing—

GAYMAN —You would venture it, I thank you, sir. I would your Lady were worth nothing.

SIR CAUTIOUS Why so, sir?

GAYMAN Then I would set all this against that nothing.

SIR CAUTIOUS What, set it against my wife?

GAYMAN Wife, sir; aye, your Wife—

²¹ Catherine Gallagher, 'Who Was That Masked Woman?', in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993), pp. 65-85 (p. 74).

SIR CAUTIOUS Hum, my wife against three hundred pounds? What, all my wife, sir?

GAYMAN All your wife? Why, sir, some part of her would serve my turn.

(4.1.376-340)

While both men treat Lady Fulbank as an object of exchange, they value (and devalue) her in different ways. For Gayman, she is an object that he could buy with money. Worse, for Sir Cautious, she is nothing and costs him nothing—thus there is no risk involved in gambling over her. Anita Pacheco notes that Sir Cautious's 'offence is to undervalue his wife's chastity [...] to reduce a possession that is by implication invaluable to its financial equivalent'.²²

Clearly, the fact that Sir Cautious and Gayman do not seek Lady Fulbank's consent for gambling over her body exaggerates their devaluation of her from subject to object. In the play, Sir Cautious and Gayman begin the wager in front of Lady Fulbank, without informing her of what they are playing for:

SIR CAUTIOUS He that comes first to one and thirty wins

They throw and count. [Lady Fulbank approaches Sir Cautious]

LADY FULBANK. What are you playing for?

SIR FEEBLE Nothing, nothing but a trial of skill between an old man and a young; and your ladyship is to be judge.

LADY FULBANK I shall be partial, sir (4.1.435-439).

In the middle of the game, also, they keep her clueless:

LADY FULBANK How now? what's the matter? you look so like an ass:

what have you lost?

²² Anita Pacheco, 'Consent And Female Honor in *The Luckey Chance*', in *Aphra Behn (1640-1689) Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity*, ed. by Mary Ann O'Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq and Guyonne Leduc, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 145-152, (p. 145).

SIR CAUTIOUS A bauble a bauble: 'tis not for what I've lost but because I have not won.

[...]

LADY FULBANK What has my husband lost?

SIR CAUTIOUS Only a small parcel of ware that lay dead upon my hands, sweetheart. (4.1.450-458)

Not answering her question, trying to silence her by saying that they play 'nothing' and telling her that they lost 'a bauble' and 'only a small parcel' illustrate the way in which Sir Cautious and Gayman feel justified in denying Lady Fulbank's will, desire or consent. Their dismissive responses to Lady Fulbank herself shine a harsh light on their exaggerated devaluation of her as she is reduced from subject to object.

Behn's construction of the scene embellishes Sir Cautious's and Gayman's reduction of Lady Fulbank to an object by using the language of finance and economy as they gamble for possession of her body:

GAYMAN Well, I find you are not for the bargain, and so I put up.

SIR CAUTIOUS Hold, sir, why so hasty? My wife? No: put up your money, sir; what lose my Wife, for three hundred pounds!

GAYMAN Lose her, sir! Why, she shall be never the worse for my wearing, sir. [*Aside*] The old covetous rogue is considering on't I think. [*To Sir Cautious*] What say you to a night? I'll set it to a night. There's none need know it, sir.

SIR CAUTIOUS Hum, a night! Three hundred pounds for a night! Why, what a lavish whore-master's this: we take money to marry our wives, but very seldom part with 'em, and by the bargain get money. [*To Gayman*] For a

night, say you? (*Aside*) Gad, if I should take the rogue at his word, 'twould be a pure jest.

[...]

GAYMAN And for non-performance, you shall pay me three hundred pounds, I'll forfeit as much it I tell.

SIR CAUTIOUS Tell? Why, make your three hundred pounds six hundred, and let it be put into the Gazette, if you will, man; but is't a bargain?—

GAYMAN Done—Sir *Feeble* shall be witness—and there stands my Hat.

(4.1.394-434)

Using terms such as ‘bargain’, ‘money’, ‘lose’, ‘three hundred pounds’, ‘pay’ and ‘witness’, Behn exploits the literary tradition of the wager over a woman’s body—perhaps most immediately illustrated by Posthumus’s wager on Innogen’s chastity in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*.²³ The scene brings this literary tradition into the contemporary marketplace, on the one hand, and rewrites the conventionally disastrous outcomes for the male gamblers, on the other, as Behn takes the occasion to empower the woman as subject rather than object of exchange.²⁴ Behn’s wager scene exaggerates men’s devaluation and objectification of women in order to mock traditional socioeconomic marriage and, furthermore, to emphasise the point that the treatment of women as objects is not restricted to marriage only, but occurs in love relationships as well.

If *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman’s Bargain* mocks traditional socioeconomic marriage by the use of exaggeration, it also does so through comic deflation, by simplifying and reducing marriage between families to merely an exchange of sex for money. The sex

²³ William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, in in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 3rd edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

²⁴ William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* in in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 3rd edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

trade this time is between Lady Fullbank and Gayman. To highlight woman's role in this exchange of money for sex, Behn reverses gender roles. She pictures Lady Fulbank plotting with her servants to give Gayman money and bring him secretly to her house to sleep with him. While Lady Fulbank is an economic provider and conductor of business, Gayman is an economic dependent.

In the discussion of the plot, the servants inform Lady Fulbank that Gayman has lost his fortune and is in need to repair it, at the same time, Lady Fulbank shows that she is a wife who has control over the households' money and valuables. This representation of wife's control is a challenge to the coverture law:

LADY FULBANK How much redeems it?

BREDWELL Madam, five hundred pounds.

LADY FULBANK Enough; you shall in some disguise convey this money to him, as from an unknown hand: I would not have him think it comes from me, for all the world; that nicety and virtue I've professed, I am resolved to keep.

PERT If I were your ladyship, I would make use of sir Cautious his cash: pay him in his own coin.

BREDWELL Your ladyship would make no scruple of it, if you knew how this poor gentleman has been used by my unmerciful master.

LADY FULBANK I have a key already to his counting-house; it being lost, he had another made, and this I found and kept. (1.2.103-116)

Possessing a key to the counting-house, deciding to use it without hesitation and considering her husband's wealth her own show that Lady Fulbank is a wife who exercises power over the valuables of the household. By portraying women using their husbands' cash without

their consent and with no hesitation, Behn challenges the traditional coverture law which instructs that by marriage woman loses control over her money and properties.

In conducting her business of the exchange of sex for money, Lady Fulbank, sets the terms and conditions of this deal, thereby ensuring that the transaction works to her advantage:

GAYMAN But I may ask how 'tis I ought to pay for this great Bounty.

BREDWELL Sir all the Pay is secrecy

GAYMAN And is this all that is required Sir?

BREDWELL No, you're invited to the shades below. [...]

Then I'll conduct thee to the banks of bliss [...]

Just when the day is vanished into night,

And only twinkling stars inform the world,

Near to the corner of the silent wall

In fields of Lincolns Inn, thy spirit shall meet thee. (2.1.159-176)

This 'sex trade' stands in sharp contrast to and overturns traditional socioeconomic marriage, in which the woman is reduced to being an object of exchange between men. In this transaction, instead, both man and woman are partners in the deal. Both give their consent to it and realise the benefits of the exchange. Gayman's comment on Bredwell's business offer reveals that it is received in a positive light:

No, I am for things possible and natural:

Some female devil old, and damned to ugliness,

And past all hopes of courtship and address,

Full of another devil called desire,

Has seen this face this shape this youth

And thinks it worth her hire. It must be so.

It must moil on in the damned dirty road,
And sure such pay will make the journey easy;
And for the price of the dull drudging night,
All day I'll purchase new and fresh delight. (2.2.185-194)

Although Gayman interprets the mysterious woman who invites him to her bed as an old woman, he nonetheless agrees to exchange money for sex and gives his consent. Lady Fulbank and Gayman gain equally in this business deal: while she gets the sex she wants, he gains the money he needs.

By the close of *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman's Bargain*, Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble become the objects of mockery for their participation in arranged marriage for men's financial gain. Their humiliation appears in the final scene, when they comment on their situation after Leticia has left her husband and gone with Belmour and Lady Fulbank has asked for divorce from her husband:

LADY FULBANK. [...] Heavens, are you frantic, sir?

SIR FEEBLE. (*weeps*) No; but for want of rest, I shall ere morning.

She's gone, she's gone, she's gone. (*He weeps*)

SIR CAUTIOUS. Aye, aye, she's gone, she's gone indeed.

Sir Cautious weeps.

SIR FEEBLE. But let her go, so I may never see that dreadful vision.

Hark'ee sir, a word in your ear: have a care of marrying a young wife.

SIR CAUTIOUS. (*weeping*) Aye, but I have married one already.

SIR FEEBLE. Hast thou? Divorce her, fly her; quick, depart, be gone: she'll cuckold thee and still she'll cuckold thee.

[...]

for I shall sleep now, I shall lie alone. (*Weeps*) Ah fool, old dull besotted
fool, to think she'd love me. (5.7.106-122)

Both Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble here weep because they have lost their wives, and although they were not able to benefit from their own advice, they warn each other of the risks in traditional socioeconomic marriage. They find that they did not gain anything from their marriages but wives who do not love them or find pleasure with them. Their excessive weeping, lamenting too late the loss of their wives and warning each other about the negative consequences of marriage all establish the pair as the butt of a joke. The joke, moreover, targets Sir Cautious's and Sir Feeble's age and impotence in a slightly cruel but inevitable advancement of youth over age. As Sir Cautious recognises:

I find, Sir Feeble, we were a couple of old fools indeed, to think
at our age to cozen two lusty young fellows of their mistresses; 'tis no
wonder that both the men and the women have been too hard for us; we are
not fit matches for either, that's the truth on't.

That warrior needs must to his rival yield,
Who comes with blunted weapons to the field. (5.7.203-209)

Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble are defeated not only by Gayman and Belmore, but also by Lady Fulbank and Leticia. Aughterson argues that the parallels between Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble serve a comic purpose: 'by making these two men similar, in economic status, in their marriage to young wives who love another, and in their blind and selfish characters, Behn intensifies her warning message'.²⁵ Moreover, the contrast between the old fools and the young lovers heightens the comedy of final scene of *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman's Bargain*. As Aughterson observes:

²⁵ Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies*, p.50.

By making [Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble] comic (their repeated refrain, ‘she’s gone, she’s gone, she’s gone’), [Behn] ensures we are distanced from the plight: they are caricatures of rich, greedy city types, not three-dimensional characters. This throws our sympathies onto the lovers and their desires, despite the fact that we thereby approve of divorce.²⁶

By ending her play with the image of two comic old men overpowered by the young characters, Behn rejects women’s treatment by men as items of exchange in the marriage market. The humiliation of the old men at the end *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman’s Bargain*, then, is not only for a comic purpose but also to convey a warning against and criticism of these kinds of marriages.

The above discussion reveals that *The Lucky Chance, Or, the Alderman’s Bargain* questions the economic and financial issues within the family and, at the same time, resists traditional economic and financial ideas. The play criticises both traditional socioeconomic marriage and love relationships in which women are treated as items of exchange between men, insofar as women, in these cases, do not realise the benefit of the exchange. It mocks traditional socioeconomic marriage by the use of exaggeration in the gambling scene and the comic deflation in the sex trade scene. Also, it mocks men who participate in this type of exploitative marriage by ridiculing them in the last scene and depicting them as weeping and lamenting their own bad ‘luck’. At the same time, the play undermines traditional socioeconomic marriage with a sex trade authored by the female partner in which man and woman exchange bodies for money and both of them realise the benefit of the trade. Moreover, the play challenges the coverture law by portraying wives considering the wealth of their husbands their owns and using it without taking consent from them.

II. *Sir Patient Fancy*

²⁶Aughterson, *Aphra Behn: The Comedies*, p.50.

Sir Patient Fancy is a play that challenges traditional socioeconomic marriage, the legal restrictions of coverture law on women after divorce and the traditional role of the mother. Behn bases *Sir Patient Fancy* on two works by Molière, but she revises them for feminist purposes. She acknowledges her adaptation and defends herself in the play's preface by saying that she had taken 'but a very bare hint from [...] the *Malad Imagenere*'.²⁷ The two main characters she borrows from Molière's work are Sir Patient and Lady Knowell. Sir Patient Fancy is based on Argan from *Le Malade imaginaire*, and Lady Knowell, a learned woman who courts a young man, is based on Belise from *Les Femmes savants*. Sir Patient Fancy is an old man who is abnormally anxious about his health. He discovers his wife's true feelings towards him when he feels that his death is approaching.

A number of critics note that *Sir Patient Fancy* serves feminist purposes. Comparing *Sir Patient Fancy* to *Le Malade imaginaire* and *Les Femmes savants*, Derek Hughes notes that Behn develops the viewpoint of her female characters:

Argan's wife [in Molière] is simply a scheming hypocrite, whereas Lady Fancy is portrayed with the sympathy Behn always reserved for women in a loveless marriage. Molière's learned ladies are caricatures, observed without any sympathy. Lady Knowell is, sometimes in a single moment, scatty, moving and humane; and she has a passion for literature (though only literature in foreign tongues).²⁸

Susan Wiseman sees Lady Fancy as challenging in ways similar to the female protagonists of Behn's later plays. These women, she asserts, 'become social, political, and economic double agents, who through their many-layered intercourse with both the nonconformist alderman

²⁷ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy: a Comedy*, in *The works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 6 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (Preface, ll. 8–10), Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically.

²⁸ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 79.

and the aristocratic gallants are able to make their sexual activities profitable and secure their own situation'.²⁹ This study pushes these feminist readings of the play further by arguing that Behn undermines both seventeenth century assumptions about maternity and the period's scepticism about women's financial capacity and skills.

Advancing the argument that *Sir Patient Fancy* has a feminist potential, this section demonstrates that the play subverts the economic and financial issues in the family through the use of the comedic convention of the blocking figure versus the wit, which is discussed chapter 1. On the one hand, the play ridicules the blocking figures for participating in traditional socioeconomic marriages and blocking the young lovers from pursuing their love relationships. On the other hand, the play celebrates the successes of witty young lovers and challenging witty mothers, one a stepmother and the other a biological mother, who resist traditional socioeconomic marriages. Through the use of the blocking figures set in opposition to the wits, Behn inverts patriarchal ideology and reveals its absurdity.

Before discussing the play, it is useful to note that Behn names her characters by punning. The name Sir Patient Fancy puns on the character's hypochondria. Also, the name of Lady Knowell puns on the character's interest in education by implying that she does 'know well' what she is doing and how to achieve her ends. The audience are encouraged to see Lady Knowell as a powerful woman of wit who uses her wit to challenge patriarchy. Similarly, Wittmore refers to a witty man, while Fain-love is a feigned lover. In contrast, the name of Lucretia refers to the chaste Roman maid and Isabella refers to the chaste heroine of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*.

However, Sir Patient Fancy is depicted as a blocking figure in the play because he is a proponent of traditional socioeconomic marriage and blocks his daughter and nephew from marrying their lovers. Sir Patient Fancy arranges for Isabella, his daughter, who is in love

²⁹ Susan Wiseman, *Aphra Behn* (Devon: Northcote British Council, 2007), p. 38.

with Lodwick, to marry Mr. Fain-love. When Mr. Fain-love comes visiting, Sir Patient Fancy says to him: ‘Ah—Sir, I crave your Patience for a moment, for I design you shall see my Daughter, I'll not make long work on't Sir, alas I would dispose of her before I die, Ah,—I'll bring her to you Sir, Ah, Ah.—’ (1.1.46-47). Words such as ‘design’, ‘dispose’ and ‘bring her’ suggest Sir Patient Fancy’s assumption that he has absolute control over his daughter and her marriage decision. After Sir Patient Fancy brings his daughter to Sir Fain-Love, he says:

Here's my Daughter *Isabella*, Mr. *Fain-love*: she'll serve for a Wife, Sir, as times goe; but I hope you are none of those,—Sweet-heart— this Gentleman I have design'd you, he's rich and young, and I am old and sickly, and just going out of the world, and would gladly see thee in safe hands. [...]

Therefore I command you to receive the tenders of his Affection. (1.1.52-57)

Sir Patient Fancy deprives his daughter of choice in marriage by pressuring her with his sickness and impending death and commanding her to marry Mr. Fain-love, whose wealth makes him a good candidate. However, he discovers that Mr. Fain-love, in fact, is Wittmore in disguise, at the end of the play. Despite his insistence that his motives are to ensure the safe and comfortable future of his daughter after his death, Sir Patient Fancy’s greed makes him vulnerable to being both deceived and defied.

Similarly, Sir Patient Fancy rejects the marriage of Leander, his nephew, from Lucritia, his lover. Sir Patient Fancy’s rejection of Leander’s marriage from Lucritia is represented in his conversation with Lady Knowell. When Lady Knowell asks Sir Patient to accept the marriage of Leander from Lucretia, he rejects her request, telling her that his nephew is not suitable. He protests, ‘he's the lewdest Hector in the Town, he has all the Vices of youth, Whoring, Swearing, Drinking, Damning, Fighting,—and a Thousand more, numberless and nameless’ (5.1.117-119). When she tells him, ‘Time Sir may make him more

abstemious' (5.1.120), he replies, 'Oh never Madam! 'tis in's Nature, he was born with it, he's given over to Reprobation, 'tis bred i'th' bone,—he's lost' (5.1.121-122). Sir Patient Fancy's insistence that Leander's vices are 'in's Nature' suggests the extremity of his rejection of the match. Instead of marriage based on love, Sir Patient Fancy arranges for Leander to marry Lady Knowell, their wealthy widow neighbour and the mother of Lodwick and Lucretia. However, he discovers at the end of the play that Lady Knowell fakes her acceptance of this marriage in order to trick him and get some money from him as will be discussed later. Despite his effort to benefit financially from the marriage arrangement for Leander from Lady Knowell, Sir Patient Fancy doesn't succeed and is punished in the end.

The play juxtaposes Sir Patient Fancy, with the witty young lovers—Leander and Lucretia, and Lodwick and Isabella—and the witty mother, Lady Knowell, who together challenge him and his orders. From the beginning of the play the lovers reveal their ideological disagreement with traditional socioeconomic marriage, as the conversation between Lucritia and Isabella demonstrates:

ISABELLA Custom is unkind to our Sex, not to allow us free choice, but we above all Creatures must be forced to endure the formal recommendations of a Parent; and the more insupportable Addresses of an Odious Foppe, whilst the Obedient Daughter stands—thus— with her Hands pinn'd before her, a set look, few words, and a meine that cries— come marry me; out upon't.

LUCRETIA I perceive then what-ever your Father designs, you are resolv'd to love your own way.

ISABELLA Thou maist lay thy Maiden-head upon't, and be sure of the misfortune to win.

These lines reveal that the two daughters refer to the socioeconomic marriage with disdain, while they support marriage based on love. They, also, reveal that they will do anything in

order to marry the man they choose. With the help of Lady Knowell, the young lovers plot against Sir Patient Fancy and marry based on their choice. Lady Knowell and Lodwick plan to convince Sir Patient Fancy that he is sick and in need to stay in bed to allow time for the young couples to go to the church and get married. In order to do so, Lady Knowell made an appointment with two doctors to come to Sir Patient Fancy's house and convince him that he is sick. Lodwick participates in the plot too by asking Sir Credulous to disguise himself as a physician and teaching him how to act as a professional physician. By tricking Sir Patient Fancy, with the help of the mother, the young couples undermine his authority and his idea of traditional socioeconomic marriage.

Similar to the challenging and witty young lovers, Lady Knowell is a challenging and witty mother. Besides helping the young lovers marry based on their choice, Lady Knowell plots against Sir Patient Fancy to help her children advance financially. In order to secure a financial settlement from Sir Patient Fancy for Lucretia and Leander, she pretends to agree to marrying Leander, a relationship that Sir Patient Fancy approves of. This pushes Sir Patient Fancy to promise money and valuables to Leander:

Well Madam, he is onely fit for your excellent Ladship, he is the prettiest
civillest Lad!—well go thy ways; I shall never see the like of thee, no—
Ingeniously the Boy's made for ever, Two thousand Pounds a year besides
Money, Plate, and Jewels, made for ever.— Well Madam, the satisfaction I
take in this Alliance, has made me resolve to give him immediately my
Writings of all my Land in *Berkshire* , Five hundred Pounds a year Madam,
and I wou'd have you Married this morning with my Daughter, so one Dinner
and one Rejoycing will serve both [...] Well I'll fetch the Writings. (5.1.136-
156)

Sir Patient Fancy promises money and land to Leander because he finds in his marriage to Lady Knowell a chance to have control over her money. Moreover, Lady Knowell asks Leander and Lucretia to participate with her in the plot until they get the writings from Sir Patient Fancy, as she instructs them to ‘keep still that mask of Love we first put on, till you have gain'd the Writings, for I have no joy beyond cheating that filthy Uncle of thine,—*Lucretia* wipe your eyes, and prepare for *Hymen*, the hour draws near. *Thalessio, Thalessio!* as the *Romans* cry'd’ (5.1.183-187). By picturing Lady Knowell using her motherhood and wit to secure the young couple financially, Behn challenges the traditional limited role of the mother.

Lady Knowell’s wit appears in her skilfulness of using language and her knowledge of a foreign language too. In her discussion with Sir Patient Fancy regarding Isabella’s marriage from Ludwick, Lady Knowell shows that she is skilful in using language:

LADY KNOWELL Hark ye Sir, and do you intend to doe this horrible thing?—

SIR PATIENT What thing, my Lady *Knowell*?

LADY KNOWELL Why to marry your Daughter Sir.

SIR PATIENT Yes Madam.

LADY KNOWELL To a beastly town Fool? *Monstrum horrendum!*

SIR PATIENT To any Fool, except a Fool of your Race, of your Generation.

(2.1.399-406)

Using different styles of language such as declarative sentences, interrogative and exclamatory phrases shows that Lady Knowell is skillfulness in using language. Moreover, Lady Knowell shows that she has a knowledge of Latin as she uses a scattering of Latin phrases in her discussion of her son’s marriage with Sir Patient Fancy:

LADY KNOWELL How! a Fool of my Race, my Generation! I know thou meanest my son, thou contumelious Knight, who let me tell thee, shall marry

thy Daughter *invito te*, that is, (to inform thy obtuse understanding) in spite of thee, yes shall marry her, though she inherits nothing but thy dull

Enthusiasmes, which had she been legitimate she had been possest with.

SIR PATIENT Oh abominable! you had best say, she is none of my Daughter, and that I was a Cuckold.—

LADY KNOWELL If I should Sir, it would not amount to *Scandalum*

Magnatum, I'll tell thee more; thy whole Pedigree,—And yet for all this

Lodwick shall marry your Daughter, and yet I'll have none of your Nephew.

(2.1.407-418)

The portrayal of Lady Knowell, then, challenges the traditional view of mothers as less rational than fathers.

Like Lady Knowell, Lady Fancy is a witty woman who resists traditional socioeconomic marriage. Lady Fancy's marriage from Sir Patient Fancy is arranged for her men's financial gain. She resists traditional socioeconomic marriage by refusing this marriage and getting involved in a love relationship with Wittmore. When Sir Patient Fancy informs Lady Fancy that he intends to go out of town and to take her with him, which will deprive her from seeing Wittmore in secret, she plots with her servants, Maundy and Roger, to convince Sir Patient that he is sick. Roger helps Lady Fancy in convincing Sir Patient that he looks sick:

LADY FANCY [...] alas Sir,—what ails your Face? good Heav'n—look Roger.

[...]

ROGER Are you not very sick Sir?

LADY FANCY Sick! oh heavens forbid—how does my dearest Love?

SIR PATIENT Me thinks I feel my self not well o'th' suddain—ah— a kind of shivering seizes all my Limbs,—and am I so much chang'd. (2.1.463-475)

Maundy brings some clothes to Sir Patient to convince him that he looks sick and his body has swollen:

MAUNDY Good Heav'n what ailes you Sir?

SIR PATIENT Oh—oh—'tis so.

MAUNDY Lord how he's swoln? see how his Stomach struts?

SIR PATIENT Ah 'tis true, though I perceive it not.

MAUNDY Not perceive it Sir! put on your Cloaths and be convinc't—try'em Sir.

She pulls off his Gown and puts on his Doublet and Coat, which come not nearly a handfull or more. (2.1.492-497)

Sir Patient is easily fooled: 'Oh, oh,—I'm a dead man,' he concludes, 'have me to bed, I die away, undress me instantly, send for my Physicians, I'me Poyson'd, my Bowels burn, I have within an Ætna; My Brains run round, Nature within me reels' (2.1.505-508). By making use of Sir Patient's hypochondria and uniting with the servants, Lady Fancy succeeds in arranging a secret meeting with her lover.

Moreover, Lady Fancy resists traditional socioeconomic marriage by plotting to secure money and land from her husband before ending her marriage. In her conversation with Sir Patient Fancy, Lady Fancy encourages him to write for her a land and give her money:

SIR PATIENT Ah, what a blessing I possess in so excellent a Wife! and in regard I am every day descending to my Grave,—ah— I will no longer hide from thee the provision I have made for thee, in case I die.—

LADY PATIENT This is the Musick that I long'd to hear.—Die!—Oh that fatal word will kill me—*[Weeps.]* Name it no more if you'd preserve my life.—

SIR PATIENT Hah,—now cannot I refrain joyning with her in affectionate tears— no but do not weep for me my excellent Lady —for I have made a pretty competent Estate for thee, Eight thousand Pounds, which I have conceal'd in my Study behind the Wainscot on the left hand as you come in.

LADY PATIENT Oh tell not me of transitory wealth, for I'me resolv'd not to survive thee, Eight thousand Pounds say you?—Oh I cannot indure the thoughts on't.

[Weeps.]

SIR PATIENT Eight thousand Pounds just, my dearest Lady.

LADY PATIENT Oh you'l make me desperate in naming it,—is it in Gold or Silver?

SIR PATIENT In Gold my Dearest the most-part, the rest in Silver.

LADY PATIENT Good Heavens! why shou'd you take such pleasure in afflicting me. *[Weeps.]*—Behind the Wainscot say you?

SIR PATIENT Behind the Wainscot, prethee be pacifi'd,—thou makest me lose my greatest vertue, Moderation, to see thee thus, alas we're all born to die. (4.2.68-90)

By faking love to her husband, and showing sympathy and sorrow about the idea that he is about to die, Lady Fancy encourages her husband to give her a land and money. Though she is a figure of fun here, she is not duped at the end of the play when she gets what she wants.

After Lady Fancy secures the money and the land, she ends her marriage from her husband. She refers to her old husband and says to Maundy: 'I now having no more to doe, but to bury the stinking Corps of my quondam Cuckold, dismiss his Daughters, and give thee quiet possession of all' (5.1.665-667). Duffy comments that Lady Fancy 'is the victor over

Sir Patient because she keeps the money and land he has settled on her'.³⁰ Behn, then, suggests that the patriarchy deserves to be defeated because it reserves financial benefits for men. Lady Fancy is a witty woman who resists the legal restrictions of coverture law on women after divorce. After she secured the £8,000 and the land, she runs away with her lover.

The above discussion reveals that by the use of the comic convention of wits versus blocking figures *Sir Patient Fancy* is a play that resists traditional socioeconomic marriage, the legal restrictions of coverture law on women after divorce and the traditional role of the mother. The play undermines traditional socioeconomic marriage by ridiculing the blocking figures for participating in it and showing that their greediness and selfishness lead not to gain but to loss. Also, the play subverts traditional socioeconomic marriages by portraying witty mothers who challenge them as triumphant. Moreover, the play questions conventional conduct literature's view of maternity by expanding the duties of the mother not only to rearing children to gaining competence in financial management in order to support their children's choices in marriage and help them advance financially.

III. *The City-Heiress; or, Sir Timothy Treat-all*

The City-Heiress is one of the most cynical and ambiguous plays by Aphra Behn. The play is cynical because it depicts men who are motivated by self-interest and seek money in every way possible. It is ambiguous because it incorporates two contradicted views: conservative thinking concerning politics and progressive thinking concerning women. The conservative view of politics is represented in supporting Royalism, which is a patriarchal political system. The progressive view of women is represented in depicting women as traders and money seekers who equip themselves with financial knowledge and financial skills. This knowledge and skill enable women to be good at financial management. Money

³⁰ Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess*, p.171.

together with financial knowledge and financial skills enable women to achieve their goals and protect themselves in patriarchal societies. Unlike her earlier plays, Behn's confidence about love and marriage has faded in this play.

In order to discuss the support for Royalism in the play, we need to compare between two conventional character types of Restoration comedy which are the Whig citizen and the Tory gentleman. Each one of these characters accrues a cluster of attitudes. Whigs are defined by their antipathy to Toryism and the monarchy, and they are conventionally merchants. Discussing the political division in the Restoration age between the Tories and the Whigs, Susan J. Owen notes that, 'the Whigs really did draw more support from the merchant citizen class and the lower classes in the city than the Tories did'.³¹ Whigs are stereotypically religious and puritan. In his study of the seventeenth century texts, Christopher Hill explores the link between puritanism and politics, noting that the word puritan, 'had wide and ill-defined meanings, which were at least as much political as religious'.³²

In Behn's comedies, Whigs are habitually depicted as old, cuckolds and the butt of the joke. Robert D. Hume notes that cuckolding is always linked with old men in Restoration comedy: 'by the standards of comedies written after about 1670 old husbands with young wives are fair game for horning, especially if the wife entered the marriage under duress. Cuckoldom is punishment, and dramatists often mete it out with gusto'.³³ This conventional representation of the Whig was sometimes criticised in the period itself. The anonymous author of *Universal Journal*, 4 July 1724, writes:

But of all the Characters generally drawn in our modern Comedies, we find
none more falsly represented than that of the Citizens. People that know

³¹ Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 11.

³² Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Harper Collins, 1969), p. 2.

³³ Robert D. Hume, *The Rakish Stage* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), p. 152.

nothing more of 'em than what they see in Plays, think that of Course an Alderman must be an old, lecherous, griping Usurer, or a doting Cuckold. Tell such as these of a generous and honest Citizen, they'll laugh at you, and look upon you as an ignorant Fellow, that knows nothing of the World; or be affronted with you, thinking you intend to impose upon them by giving'em an Account of People who never had a Being.³⁴

Whigs, then, are routinely portrayed as merchants, anti-royalists, puritans, old men, cuckolds and apt for ridicule.

Tories are also attributed distinctive features and attitudes in Restoration comedies. Tory gentlemen are known for their libertinism and their pursuit of pleasure. Defining gentleman's behaviour, Lawrence Stone quotes Viscount Conway as writing summarily, 'we eat and drink and rise up to play and this is to live like a gentleman; for what is a gentleman but his pleasure?'.³⁵ In the preface to *The Gentleman's Calling* (1660), Richard Allestree writes 'a Gentleman is now supposed to be only a thing of pleasure, a creature sent into the world [. . .] to take his pastime therein'.³⁶ Besides their attitudes to life, Tories are contrasted to Whigs by class distinction. In the 1692 edition of *Angliae notitia*, Edward Chamberlayne complained about gentlemen working in shops and trades, as it does not suit them:

And yet to the shame of our nation, we have seen of late not only the sons of baronets, knights, and gentlemen sitting in the shops, sometimes of peddling trades [...] but also an earl of this kingdom subjecting his son to an apprenticeship and trade [...] these young gentlemen more noble and active

³⁴ Quoted in John Loftis, *Essays On the Theatre From Eighteenth-century Periodicals*, Augustan Reprints Series, 45, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 25.

³⁵ Viscount Conway, quoted in Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 27.

³⁶ Richard Allstreet, quoted in David Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites: The Gentry of South-west Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1 Jan 1986), p. 7.

spirits could not brook such dull slavish lives, and being thereby unfitted for other employments have generally taken to debauched courses.³⁷

Tory gentlemen, then, are portrayed as people who pursue pleasures in life by spending their time whoring, drinking and living the wild life, at the same time, have natural rights to money and property.

While Whigs are associated in Restoration comedy with deception and loss, Tories are associated with wit and victory. Robert Markley notes that in most comedies, with the help of friends and witty servants, young gentlemen ‘outwit an older generation of parents, guardians, or other killjoy authority figures’.³⁸ On stage, he adds, ‘young wits can triumph sexually over a doddering, impotent generation of fools, even if their incomes, lodgings, and opportunities for advancement suffer by comparison’.³⁹ In *The False Count*, discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis, Behn portrays a libertine gentleman as opposed to an old man, but in *The City-Heiress* both the Tory gentleman and the Whig citizen are main characters, possessing almost all the distinctive features of their archetypal categories. The household comedy is overtly politicised in its support for Royalist ideology and censure of Whiggish government.

The play supports Royalism by depicting Sir Timothy Treat-all, the Whig uncle, as the butt of the joke and the one who loses at the end of the play and Sir Tom Wilding, the Tory nephew, as the witty character who wins at the end of the play. Sir Timothy is a stereotypical Whig because he supports the Whiggish government and he is a hypocrite as his conversation with Sir Charles demonstrates:

³⁷ Edward Chamberlayne, cited in Helen Sard Hughes, ‘The Middle-Class Reader and the English Novel’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 25. 3 (1926), 362-378, (367).

³⁸ Markley, ‘Behn and the Unstable Traditions of Social Comedy,’ p. 99.

³⁹ Markley, ‘Behn and the Unstable Traditions of Social Comedy,’ p. 99.

SIR TIMOTHY Well fare, I say, the days of old *Oliver*; he by a wholesome Act, made it death to boast; so that then a man might whore his heart out and no body the wiser.

SIR CHARLES Right, Sir, and then the men pass'd for sober religious persons, and the women for as demure Saints---

SIR TIMOTHY Aye, then there was no scandal; but now they do not onely boast what they do, but what they do not.⁴⁰

Sir Timothy pines for the lost rule of Oliver Cromwell, the general who led the armies against King Charles I during the Civil War, not because people were moral but because people used to hide their immoral actions. In contrast, Sir Wilding is a classic Tory character as he lives a wild lifestyle. Sir Timothy attacks him, saying, ‘my Fop in Fashion here why, with what Face, Conscience, or Religion, can they be leud and vitious, keep their Wenches, Coaches, rich Liveries, and so forth, who live upon Charity, and the Sins of the Nation?’ (1.1.44-47). By spending his time behaving wildly, Sir Wilding exhibits the stereotypical behaviour of the Tory gallant.

However, both Sir Timothy and Sir Wilding compete over money, which is a tool to possess power. Sir Timothy confesses that he has political motives for his competition with Wilding, ‘I have six thousand Pound a Year, and value no Man: Neither do I speak so much for your particular, as for the Company you keep, such Tarmagant Tories as these’ (1.1.31-33). Not only political motives, Sir Timothy has self-interest motives for his competition with Wilding as he says to him, ‘I Sir Timothy Treat-all, Knight and Alderman, do think my self young enough to marry, d'ye see, and will wipe your Nose with a Son and Heir of my own

⁴⁰ Behn, Aphra, *The City-Heiress; or, Sir Timothy Treat-all*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. by Janet Todd, 7 (London: William Pickering, 1996), (1.1.75-81). Subsequent citations are to this edition and are included parenthetically.

begetting, and so forth'. (1.1. 97-103) Moreover, Sir Timothy plans to marry a wealthy woman in order to increase his wealth. Sir Timothy sets a wealthy widow, Lady Galliard, as his target to marry because of her merits, including her wealth. Referring to Lady Galliard, Sir Anthony says, 'But is this Lady young and handsom?' (1.1. 241-241) and Sir Timothy replies, 'Ay, and rich too, Sir'(1.1.243). Also, Sir Timothy considers the city-heiress, Charlot, as another potential wife, again for her wealth. Similarly, Sir Wilding has self-interest motives and plans to gain money by marrying a wealthy woman. Wilding wants to court Lady Galliard because of her merit, but most importantly because she is rich. He describes her to Sir Charles, 'my Mistress [...] is a Widow, [...] young, rich, and beautiful' (1.1.144-145). Besides Lady Galliard, Sir Wilding considers Charlot as another potential wife, again for her wealth as he confesses to Sir Charles, 'I having many and hopeful Intrigues now depending, especially those of my charming Widow, and my City-Heiress'.(2.2.29-28)

Although Sir Timothy competes with Sir Wilding over money, he is tricked twice by the witty Sir Wilding and loses the competition at the end of the play. In the first instance, the disguised Sir Wilding visits him at his house and offers him the throne of Poland. During the same visit, Sir Wilding and his friends disguise themselves as burglars and steal inheritance papers, gold and valuables. Sir Timothy gets tricked the second time when Sir Wilding convinces Diana to disguise herself as Charlot and to seduce Sir Timothy, who falls for the trick and marries 'Charlot'/Diana. At the end of the play, Sir Timothy discovers that the 'heiress' he has married is Sir Wilding's mistress. Also, he discovers that his valuables have been stolen and he is left with no throne. Therefore, he threatens to try to get Sir Wilding, 'hang'd, nay, drawn and quarter'd'. (5.5. 106) Sir Timothy's losses and gullibility certainly brand him as a fool by the end of the play. Representing Sir Timothy as a fool, it should be noted, emphasises the foolishness of his Whiggish politics; folly which is certainly intended to be generalised to, and criticised in, men beyond the limits of the stage. By representing Sir

Wilding as the one who possesses the money which is a powerful tool, Behn links Royalism with power and control.

Besides supporting Royalism, the play shows that Behn's confidence about love and marriage has faded. Through the character of Lady Galliard, Behn represents love—the base of marriage—as disappointing and marriage as dissatisfying and miserable. Lady Galliard is a woman who believes in love and marriage. She falls in love with Sir Wilding and pursues him to get married to him. However, she is deceived in her love relationship. Imagining that Sir Wilding is in love with her, she sleeps with him. Sir Wilding, on the other hand, leaves her and marry Charlot. Love in this play, then, is linked with deceit and disappointment.

Although she is deceived in her love relationship, Lady Galliard still considers love and marriage her goals in life. Referring to Wilding, after he leaves her, she says to her servant, 'If any honest Lover come, admit him ; I will forget this Devil'. (2.3. 41) The first suitor who comes to her house and her servant admits him is Sir Charles, Sir Wilding's friend. When Sir Charles courts her and asks her to marry him, she accepts. However, she is depicted not as a happy wife at the end of the play because she married a man she does not love. Robert Markley comments on the ironical situation that Lady Galliard finds herself in at the end of the play, 'While the heroine is confronted by a dilemma that, in late seventeenth-century tragedy, typically ends in suicide or life-long penitence, the punishment she suffers is the fate usually reserved for comic butts: she must marry someone she does not love'.⁴¹ By depicting Lady Galliard as a woman who gets disappointed by love and dissatisfied by marriage, Behn shows that love and marriage are not always beneficial and advantageous for women. Lady Galliard focuses on the less advantageous, love and marriage, rather than the

⁴¹ Robert Markley, 'Aphra Behn's "The City Heiress": Feminism and the Dynamics of Popular Success on the Late Seventeenth-Century Stage', *Comparative Drama*, 41. 2 (2007), pp. 141-166 (p.159).

more beneficial for her and in her situation which is money and the knowledge of how to use it.

Rather than love and marriage, Behn makes money together with financial knowledge and financial skills central to her play. Not only men are involved with financial activities, Charlot who is the city-heiress knows the importance of money, has financial thinking and uses financial language, as her conversation with Foppington reveals:

CHARLOT [...] Has Wilding then no Fortune?

FOPPINGTON Yes, Faith, Madam, pretty well; so, so, as the Dice run; and now and then he lights upon a Squire, or so, and between fair and foul Play, he makes a shift to pick a pretty Livelihood up.

CHARLOT How! does his Uncle allow him no present Maintenance?

FOPPINGTON No, nor future Hopes neither.

[...]

CHARLOT If I find all this true you tell me, I shall know how to value my self. (4. 1. ll.89-95)

Using words such as 'Fortune', 'Maintenance' and 'value' shows that Charlot is skilful in using financial language. Spending her time discussing money, and agreeing with Foppington that if Sir Wilding has no money it means that there is no future for her with him, show that Charlot has financial thinking.

Moreover, Charlot is good at financial management because she puts possessing money as a condition in order to accept marrying Sir Wilding. After hearing the news that Sir Wilding has no fortune, she goes to him and informs him that if he wants to marry her, he should possess a great deal of money:

CHARLOT Make it appear you are your Uncle's Heir, I'll marry ye to

morrow. [...]

SIR TOM WILDING Hum! to night! [...]

SIR TOM WILDING I'm resolv'd to keep my Credit with her — Here's my Hand; This Night, Charlot, I'll let you see the Writings. (4. 3. ll.207-219)

Putting inheritance papers as a condition to getting married to Sir Wilding and asking him to show the inheritance papers that very night present Charlot as a woman who is equipped with knowledge of how to manage money. Depicting Charlot as having financial thinking and knowing how to manage her money make it difficult for us to imagine that after marriage she would allow Sir Wilding to have control over her money or act as a passive wife. It is more likely that she would continue seeking control over her money and protecting it.

Similarly, Diana is a poor mistress to Sir Wilding who knows the importance of money and uses financial language. In her conversation with Sir Wilding, Diana uses financial language:

DIANA Oh, las, you are too much taken up with your rich City–Heiress.

SIR TOM WILDING That's no cause of quarrel between you and I, Diana: you were wont to be as impatient for my marrying, as I for the Death of my Uncle; for your rich Wife ever obliges her Husband's Mistress; and Women of your sort, Diana, ever thrive better by Adultery than Fornication.

DIANA Do, try to appease the easy Fool with these fine Expectations — No, I have been too often flatter'd with the hopes of your marrying a rich Wife, and then I was to have a Settlement; but instead of that, things go backward with me, my Coach is vanish'd, my Servants dwindled into one necessary Woman and a Boy, which to save Charges, is too small for any

Service; my twenty Guineas a Week, into forty Shillings; a hopeful
Reformation!

SIR TOM WILDING Patience, Diana, things will mend in time.

DIANA When, I wonder? Summer's come, yet I am still in my embroider'd
Manteau, when I'm drest, lin'd with Velvet; 'twould give one a Fever but to
look at me: yet still I am flamm'd off with hopes of a rich Wife, whose
Fortune I am to lavish. — But I see you have neither Conscience nor
Religion in you; I wonder what a Devil will become of your Soul for thus
deluding me! (2. 3. ll.203-218)

In these lines Diana calculates the fortune she would gain from her relationship with Sir Wilding: 'Coach', 'Servants' and 'twenty Guineas'. Furthermore, she calculates the time until she would gain wealth. By calculating fortune and time, Diana demonstrates her skilfulness in using financial language and her awareness of the importance of money. Margarete Rubik notes that Behn in this play depicts financial field as available for both men and women. Referring to Behn, she writes, 'her personal distaste for the rise of the Whig commercial ethos certainly did not blind her to the need for both men and women to adapt to the new economic system and, of necessity, play along with its rules'.⁴² By representing Diana as skillful in using financial language, Behn challenges suspicions about women's financial skills.

Moreover, Diana is a woman who seizes any opportunity to gain money. At the beginning of the play, Diana chooses money over love as she accepts to be Sir Wilding's mistress instead of being his only lover under one condition, which is that he spends on her

⁴² Margarete Rubik, 'Lover's Merchandise: Metaphors of Trade and Commerce in The Plays of Aphra Behn', *Women's Writing*, 19.2, (2012) pp. 222-237, (p. 233).

from the fortune of Charlot, the woman whom Sir Wilding intends to marry. Rubik notes that love is not of great importance to Diana, 'Wilding's mistress Diana rejects the idealist ethos of love as an end in itself'.⁴³ At the end of the play, however, Diana progresses in her pursuit of money. She changes her mind from being a mistress to Sir Wilding to being a merchant who exchanges her body for later money by marrying the old and wealthy Sir Timothy. In her conversation with her maid, Diana compares between her marriage to Sir Timothy and her relationship to Sir Wilding:

DIANA Ay, but to be oblig'd to lie with such a Beast; ay, there's the Devil,
Betty. Ah, when I find the difference of their Embraces,

The soft dear Arms of Wilding round my Neck. From those cold feeble ones
of this old Dotard; When I shall meet, instead of Tom's warm kisses, A
hollow Pair of thin blue wither'd Lips, Trembling with Palsy, stinking with
Disease,

By Age and Nature barricado'd up With a kind Nose and Chin; What Fancy
or what Thought can make my Hours supportable?

BETTY What? why six thousand Pounds a Year, Mistress. He'll quickly die,
and leave you rich, and then do what you please.(4. 1. ll.234-239)

According to Betty's logic, money, Sir Timothy's 'quick death', and being a free widow make marrying Sir Timothy a better choice than a hopeless relationship with Sir Wilding even with similarity in age. This logic resembles Ludowicke Muggleton's 1660 description of the economic situation of the widow: 'You, that is now a freed woman, a widow, that hath full power as any lord in the land, over your husband's estate, for the good of your children; you

⁴³ Rubik, 'Lover's Merchandise', p.230.

are the lady of all, and hath the possession of all, as your husband had'.⁴⁴ In other words, the widow is a woman of power because she has both independency and money. Thus, money, in the Restoration society is linked with power.

Through the depiction of Diana's high expectations in her pursuit of money, Behn challenges the discrimination against women in work and trade. Diana's marriage to Sir Timothy is also a challenge to traditional socioeconomic marriage as it is based on exchange of body for later money, in which both man and woman realise the benefits. Thus, Diana is the merchant and Sir Timothy is the buyer. Instead of focusing on love, and unlike Lady Galliard, Diana focuses on what is more advantageous in her situation: money and financial knowledge and skills. Instead of considering marriage a goal, Diana considers it a tool to gain wealth.

The above discussion shows that although *The City Heiress* is a play that reflects both Behn's protofeminism and Royalism, it also presents Behn as a significant writer who serves women empowerment agenda in many ways. In this play, Behn undermines scepticism about woman's financial skills by portraying women who know the importance of money, use financial language and pursue financial gain. Moreover, Behn challenges the discrimination against women in work and trade by depicting a wife as merchant who considers her marriage a trade.

This play shows that Behn underestimates the centrality of love and marriage in woman's life. She depicts how love and marriage can sometimes be disappointing, dissatisfying and miserable in patriarchal societies. Alternatively, Behn emphasises the power of money together with financial thinking and financial skills. By possessing money together with financial thinking and financial skills a woman can make the best out of her situation.

⁴⁴ (Qtd. in Kreis-Schinck). Annette Kreis-Schinck Women, *Writing and the Theatre in the Early Modern Period: The Plays of Aphra Behn and Suzanne Centlivre* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), p.109.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter makes use of the similarities and the differences between theory and practice concerning the family structure and home economics to demonstrate Behn's subversion of the economic and financial issues in the family and her interrogation of gendered and political forms of women's oppression. This chapter argues that three plays examined here undermine the economic and financial assumptions governing the family by resisting socioeconomic marriages and displaying defiant mothers. The plays resist traditional socioeconomic marriage by ridiculing men who arrange it and depicting that their greediness and selfishness lead not to gain but to loss. In addition, the plays depict witty mothers who challenge patriarchy to help their children advance financially. By portraying women in this way, Behn challenges limiting mother's authority in the traditional family.

Besides challenging the mother traditional roles, these three plays reimagine the traditional roles of the wife. They depict wives who exercise power over money and valuables in the household and wives who get divorce and take with them money and valuables. By portraying wives in this way, Behn challenges coverture law which strips women from ownership of money and property upon marriage, as well as, after divorce. Along the same lines, the plays challenges discriminations against women in work and trade by creating merchant wives who consider marriage a trade.

Besides challenging the traditional roles of the mother and the wife, Behn underrates the centrality of love and marriage in woman's life. In contrast, Behn emphasizes the power of money together with financial thinking and financial skills. For her, the woman who has money and these skills and thinking is able to make the best out of her situation.

In order to subvert traditional Restoration economical and financial ideas within the family, Behn uses the genre of comedy and its conventions. In *The Lucky Chance*, Behn uses exaggeration and comic deflation in order to resist traditional socioeconomic marriage. In *Sir*

Patient Fancy, Behn uses the comic convention of the blocking figure versus the wit to criticise the traditional role of the father who arranges and takes part in traditional socioeconomic marriage.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Behn manipulates and challenges the traditional family in her work. In order to understand Behn's challenge of patriarchy in the family, this study has explored Behn's work by the use of the feminist theory within the historical context and by placing Behn's work in the Restoration theatre activity. By using the feminist theory within the historical context, this thesis has demonstrated that Behn exploits the contradictions between the theory and the practice concerning the family in the Restoration age and imagines the contemporary family as both oppressing to women and as vulnerable to change. By using the feminist theory within the historical context too, this thesis has shown, also, that Behn's work brings to the fore and directs attention to early modern women's challenge to patriarchal restrictions. Moreover, by placing Behn's work in the Restoration theatre activity, this study has demonstrated that Behn is influenced by the developments of the Restoration theatre, at the same time, she contributes to these changes by making use of them to serve her women's empowerment agenda.

Behn's protofeminist discussion of the family interacts with the female desire. Behn both criticises and undermines the repression of the family over women's desire in her work. In her poems, Behn discusses the core of marriage and family which is the sexual relationship between man and woman and criticises the way men treat women as sexual objects or sexual tools. Also, she criticises men's sexual power by showing that men sometimes fail to perform the sexual act. In plays, Behn censures fathers who exercise authority over their daughters and constrain their desire by preventing them from courtship and planning their futures as either nuns or wives. By highlighting the occasions when fathers use authority over their daughters, Behn undermines the hierarchy in parent-child relationship.

At the same time, Behn deconstructs the traditional concept of honour and challenges the traditional virtuous female role. Behn subverts the traditional concept of honour by depicting it as a constructed concept. She links traditional honour with negativity and exposes it as a reason to regard female sexuality with distrust. Behn challenges the traditional virtuous female role in the sexual relationship by portraying women as desiring participants and agents in sexual acts. By picturing wives as verbally and physically active in the sexual relationship, Behn questions conventional gender roles in the sexual relations between husbands and wives.

Moreover, Behn's profeminist discussion of the family interacts with women's choice of marriage and divorce. Unlike early modern divorce which was difficult to be granted, Behn depicts divorce and remarriage in two plays, *The Forced Marriage and The False Count*, as available options and easy to obtain. Behn's plays resist forced marriage by imagining marriage based on equality and mutual love between the spouses. Besides this, the plays question the absolute authority of the father over the daughter and criticises the father who forces his daughter into arranged marriage and presents him as dominant and not caring. In *The Emperor of The Moon*, Behn undermines the common claims that justify the absolute authority of the father which suggest that reason and rational thinking are exclusive to men. She depicts the scientist father in the play as a fool who confuses myth and reality to show that being a man is not enough to make someone a rationalist or possessing absolute authority.

Similarly, the plays ridicule old husbands who participate in forced marriages in order to prove their sexual power. Through the discussion of forced marriages, the plays question the husband's use of domestic violence against his wife and link his behaviour to rape and

death. By criticising the husband's use of domestic violence, Behn undermines the authority-obedient relationship between husband and wife.

In addition, Behn's profeminist discussion of the family interacts with traditional socioeconomic marriage and women's relationship with money. The plays portray challenging mothers who support and help their children advance financially and reject socioeconomic marriages arranged by fathers. By expanding the duties of the mother not only to rearing children but also to gaining competence in financial management, Behn resists the limited role of the mother in the traditional family. In addition, Behn depicts wives who know the importance of money and pursue money in different ways. She portrays wives as merchants who consider marriage a business deal in which both man and woman realizes its benefits. By depicting women pursuing any opportunity to gain money, Behn undermines scepticism about women's financial skills. Moreover, Behn challenges coverture law, which strips married women from money and property ownership, by depicting wives who have control over money during marriage and women who decide to take money and property after divorce. Although money and property ownership after divorce was difficult in reality, Behn depicts it as possible in her imaginary world.

By comparing Behn's work to challenging activities of women in the early modern period, this thesis has demonstrated that there is a shift in Behn's resistance to patriarchy. In her earlier plays, Behn's attack of patriarchal values is, similar to challenging activities of women in her age, less daring. However, her later plays show that she becomes more adventurous in her resistance to patriarchy than the common trends that women in her age follow. In her earlier plays, we find challenging heroines who use gossip and alliances to rebel against controlling fathers and violent husbands. Nevertheless, these heroines marry their equal lovers at the end of the plays, which shows that they do not break wholly free from cultural constraints.

Behn changes her technique in her discussion of the family towards the end of her career as she becomes more daring in her resistance to patriarchy. In her later plays, Behn portrays heroines who consider independency and wealthy widowhood as their goals in life instead of marriage. Portraying heroines using marriage as a tool to achieve their goals of independency and wealthy widowhood shows that Behn becomes more adventurous than early modern women in her resistance to patriarchy.

There is another shift in Behn's work. In her earlier plays, Behn focuses on marriage based on mutual love and her heroes and heroines are lovers. In her later plays, Behn underestimates the centrality of love and marriage in women's life. Instead of love and marriage, Behn's later plays focus on money and financial activities and depict heroines who are traders and money seekers. For Behn, a woman who possesses money together with financial thinking and financial skills can make the best out of her situation.

By placing Behn's work in the Restoration theatre activity, this study has shown that Behn is influenced by the changes in the Restoration theatre and makes use of them to serve her women empowerment purposes. Similar to the Restoration playwrights, Behn employs comedy, with its two subgenres: farce and comedy of manners, in her work. Behn is influenced by the farce genre and uses it because of its subversive potential which enables her to undermine the power structure in the family. In *The Emperor of the Moon*, Behn portrays witty daughters, Elaria and Bellemante, who plot to outwit their controlling father, Doctor Baliardo. While Doctor Baliardo controls Elaria and Bellemante throughout the play and denies them the freedom to go outside the house or court their lovers, Elaria and Bellemante trick Doctor Baliardo at the end of the play and marry their lovers. In *The False Count*, Behn depicts the witty wife, Julia, who outwits her controlling husband, Francisco, and runs away with her lover, Carlos.

Behn is influenced by the comic techniques of exaggeration and deflation and uses them to resist socioeconomic marriage arranged by families and men's treatment of women as objects of exchange between them. *The City Heiress* mocks traditional socioeconomic marriage by exaggerating it, involving Gayman and Sir Cautious in a wager over Lady Fulbank's body. *The City Heiress* mocks traditional socioeconomic marriage by the use of comic deflation: it simplifies and reduces traditional socioeconomic marriage arranged by families to merely an exchange of sex for money between Lady Fulbank and her lover. By the use of comic exaggeration and comic deflation, Behn ridicules traditional socioeconomic marriage.

Behn makes use of the comedy of manners and its conventions in order to subvert power structure in the family. In *Sir Patient Fancy*, Behn uses contrasted characters of the blocking figures versus the witty lovers to ridicule elderly fathers who are conservative and controlling, and at the same time, to depict the witty young lovers, who are against repressive control and have progressive values, as winners. In her use of this comedy of manners convention, Behn adds to the young couple's union a mother who helps them in their plots. By adding a female assistant to the young lovers, Behn emphasises the social role of woman and the authority of the mother.

Moreover, Behn makes use of the comedy of manner convention of gay couple to empower women. In *The Feigned Courtesans*, Behn depicts Laura Lucretia and Galliard as gay couple who are equal in wit and language skills. In her use of this comedy of manners convention, Behn adds to the gay couple by depicting both Lura Lucretia and Julio as libertine and equal in their freedom of sexuality. By portraying both the man and the woman in the gay couple as sexually free and libertine, Behn undermines that libertinism is exclusive to men.

In contrast to playwrights of her time who use disguise scenes to sexualise the bodies of actresses and attract the audience, Behn uses disguise scenes in her comedy of manners to grant her heroines a substantial amount of freedom. Crossdressing allows Hellena, in *The Rover*, the freedom to move in public spaces, mingle with men and court her lover. By the use of crossdressing, Behn empowers her heroines and resists the traditional acceptable behaviours of women.

Besides using comedy and its conventions, Behn uses the pastoral genre in her poetry and moves beyond discussing nature to subvert traditional sexual practices. She undermines limiting sexual pleasure to men in sex act. At the same time, her adoption of the genre of 'imperfect enjoyment' in 'The Disappointment' allows Behn to discuss and celebrate female desire. She redirects the conventions of the imperfect enjoyment towards an unconventional end, by discussing a man's failure to perform the sexual act from the point of view of the woman's feelings and reactions towards this event.

Although Behn resists patriarchy in the family, she supports the monarchy, which is a patriarchal system, and rejects the Whig government in her work. She supports the monarchy by depicting Tory gentlemen as winners and participating in the happy endings of her plays when they marry their equal witty heroines. Conversely, she portrays Whig citizens, Tory gentlemen's opponents, as defeated, cuckold and divorced from their witty wives.

Behn's achievement is not a result of holding contradictory opinions—a progressive theory of the family and a conservative theory of politics—but because she challenges the traditional family, arranged marriages and the traditional mother role, supports women's independency and female sexual freedom and undermines scepticism about women's financial skills. These achievements can be considered incredible if we take into consideration that they were discussed hundreds of years before the first feminist movement.

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