The Free Woman: A Feminist Study of the Turbulent Life of Aphra Behn and her Heroines

Thesis submitted to the
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by

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DECLARATION

I, **Prathibha P**., hereby declare that the thesis entitled "**The Free Woman: A Feminist Study of the Turbulent Life of Aphra Behn and her Heroines**" submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr Sajitha M.A**., Assistant Professor of English, Farook College, Calicut and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

Calicut

04-09-2019 **PRATHIBHA P.**

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**The Free Woman: A Feminist Study of the Turbulent Life of Aphra Behn and her Heroines**" submitted by Ms. Prathibha P. to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by her under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations

DV	*THE DUMB VIRGIN*
UB	*THE UNFORTUNATE BRIDE*
ROV	*ROVER 2*
HN	*THE HISTORY OF THE NUN*
FJ	*THE FAIR JILT*
RV	*THE ROVER*
WR	*THE WIDOW RANTER*
AP	*THE AMOROUS PRINCE*
FC	*THE FEIGNED COURTEZANS*
DL	*THE DUTCH LOVER*
TF	*THE TOWN FOP*
FM	*THE FORCED MARRIAGE*
LC	*THE LUCKY CHANCE*
LM	*THE LUCKY MISTAKE*

Introduction

The Restoration literature (1660-1688) encompasses the grand imagination and poetic expression of Milton's *Paradise Lost,* the moral wisdom of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the striking satire of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*. Literary societies during the Restoration age attest how women were restricted by gender limitations and barred from joining, making it almost impossible for a woman author to be commonly published and read. The very few women who could manage to enter into this masculine realm as contributors to the creation of culture did so under extreme scrutiny. Majority of them withdrew, bogged by the intense opposition they had to face. One woman who combated hostility and rose as an influential presence during the seventeenth century was Aphra Behn. Heralded as the first professional woman writer in Britain, she gave the readers a different perception of culture, something that had previously not been seen or acknowledged by women. With authors like Aphra Behn turning the tide, women, who had once been enforced by society into a state of submissiveness began to enter the zeitgeist as contributors of culture.

The feminist perspective of various themes touched upon in separate chapters of this thesis offer an affirmative about the contemporary value of Behn's works. This study reinvents Behn as a protofeminist and analyses her works using the hawk eye of feminism in order to contextualise her revealing writing style in the patriarchal society of Restoration England when women had neither a place nor a voice. A study of her eventful and turbulent life would convince every modern

reader, especially one with a feminist bend of mind, to voluntarily take up the role of her lawyer to defend her from the charges against her and try to nullify all the accusations and criticism against Behn. By briefly analysing the themes that she employs in her writings, like disability, cross-dressing, scheming villainesses, forced marriages and subordination of women, this thesis investigates her personal views about women's empowerment. The bold heroines appear to the close reader as "both authorial 'signature' and 'social hieroglyphic', signs of a buried life whose careful decoding opens up new possibilities for critique and contestation" (Diamond 537).

Aphra Behn was a playwright, poet, translator and fiction writer who soon became synonymous with Restoration liberty and license. Behn rapidly built repute for sharp wit, thorough knowledge of political timelines and social criticism about the cultural limitations placed on women. Slowly and steadily, she paved her literary way in the prominent time of famous male playwrights like Etherege, Farquhar, Wycherley and Congreve. Her female contemporaries included Katherine Philips who owns the honour of being the first Englishwoman to have a play publically staged, Frances Boothby, Margaret Cavendish, and Elizabeth Polwhele. The longevity and breadth of her literary output makes Behn exceptional in the restoration group. Her career as a playwright rivalled even the most distinguished of her male contemporaries, like John Dryden and Thomas Shadwell. Besides that, her works cover multiple genres: lyric, poetry, drama, short story, letters and novel.

Her life turns out to be a turbulent and tumultuous journey. Behn's notoriety was altogether different in various sorts. A staunch and loyal Tory, she was employed as a spy in Antwerp by King Charles II to gather information about Dutch

military and political activity which eventually led her to the debtors' prison. She was popular as the woman who dared to write and produce literature in a literary circle that boasted of stalwarts and an author who could claim around sixty works to her credit(including anonymous publications) which amounts to "nearly one-tenth of the works published by women in England during her lifetime" ("Women", *Wordpress*). Her life was rather a rollercoaster ride; hence it is not a matter of wonder that even after three centuries, the works of Aphra Behn receive serious literary and scholarly interest.

Aphra Behn was known by varied names: Astrea , Agent 160, Mrs.Bean, Sappho, Ann Behn. Her life is no less than a thrilling Elizabethan drama with its own share of anagnorises and peripeteias and so are the characters which appear in the nineteen plays, four novels, five short stories and two poetry collections she has authored. Studies on Aphra Behn elaborate on the mysterious woman and reveal her to be a figure of intrigue. Her explosive personality evokes one's curiosity. Her life and her works were fascinating and notorious at the same time. She "has a lethal combination of obscurity, secrecy and staginess which makes her an uneasy fit for any narrative, speculative or factual. She is not so much a woman to be unmasked as an unending combination of masks" (*The Secret* 1).

Behn was a pioneer in amatory fiction. The general themes explored by amatory fiction are gender inversion, issues of power, gender identity, social convention and reputation, female centred stories, use of masquerade and disguises. There were many instances when women writers of earlier days focused on sexual love and romance in order to get an opening to enter public discourse. She is a

representative of the condition of women in the seventeenth century and utilised her writings to comment on women's roles in society and how they were being treated.

The Restoration circle preferred only writings by men. "The other's negation and annihilation was primary bedrock for the affirmation of the male self. Denying the other, reducing it to an object/abject was necessary to be able to dominate it, becoming what the anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and the philosopher Michael Foucault have called the *direct locus of social control*"*(*Febronia 94). Behn's works expressed a woman's need and desire for freedom. She often used sexual subjects in her writing and was vehemently criticised for it. She can be termed as a female writer who wrote without a filter.

In her book, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660 – 1790*, Laura Runge notes that Restoration femininity was typically characterised by "being soft, smooth, regular, pleasing, soothing, sweet-sounding, loving, [and] simple" (26). This definition was adhered to by her contemporaries, but these are exactly the sort of characteristics Behn's heroines lacked. Moreover, Runge's idea of the "perceived need for female chastity" (69) translates into an expectation of female modesty that precludes outspokenness in women, especially when relating to men. This was the yardstick that Behn's female characters had to wrestle with.

The rational qualities of wit and intelligence were hitherto assigned solely to the male sex, but Aphra Behn proclaims that women with courage can acquire these assets as well, the best illustration of this claim is herself. She presents truthful images of women and her experience through a body of literature which specifically focuses on women. Her works sought to crumple the traditional presentation of

woman as the unnamed and invisible being. Behn's heroines question the concept of gender as a performative activity and the "fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler 417).The way they perceive gender clash with their culturally imposed female gender role. She was one of the handful writers who did sense and resist the habitual tricks employed by patriarchs to silence the opposition.

Behn disturbs the established order and presents before the audience a wide variety of female characters- both conventional and unconventional: strong, independent women, viragoes, transvestites, courtesans- characters who are not whining and do not play the victim. Behn's women "prove they are capable of being logical, consistent, disinterested, they prove they are able to be the new powerful subjects of their own discourse" (Febronia 72). Her heroines are not passive or subservient. Instead they write their own destiny and are completely aware of the social agenda that restricts them from progress. They thrive on being the outsider.

The motifs that recur in Behn's fiction are metaphoric of a revolt against dominant sexual politics. Her heroines play an active role in carrying forward the development of the events of the play. They break the rigid dichotomies of the patriarchal thought by overturning the concept of powerlessness prescribed to women. How Behn deals with such sensitive content with so much elan and how she could contextualise the social issue is the impetus of this thesis.

One question that boggles the mind of a researcher of Aphra Behn is the ambiguity in her life and works, " the paradox of being both caught inside a symbolic code and deeply opposed to it"(89). She lived in credence with her

conservative royalist politics, providing complete solidarity to the king's authority but ironically, her female characters are revolutionaries who challenge the social order and question their position. Laurence Stone in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 – 1800* has rightly stated:

> She was a woman who moved uncertainly between two worlds: the one, in which she had been brought up and in which she was to live out her last decades, was based on female subordination to men, and marriage for interest not attraction; the other, which boiled of excitement, glamour, intrigues, love and feminine independence, literacy and responsibility. (307)

The de facto cause and result of such a huge contradiction has been explored in this study. How Behn deconstructed the image of women using the liminal space of the stage, constructed her own perspective of the libertine ideology, and strategically mocked and flattered male supremacy is quite a matter of intrigue.

Aphra Behn is significant as a very early example of a proto feminist, a forerunner of the feminist movement .The term proto feminist is applied to a person in a philosophical tradition who anticipates modern feminist concepts, but who lives in an era when the term feminist was unknown, before the twentieth century. Some of the proto feminists are Abigail Adams, the wife of President Adams who famously beseeched him in a 1776 letter to " remember the ladies" while drafting the US Constitution ; Moderata Fonte, the sixteenth century Italian poet; Olympe de Gouges , the sixteenth century French playwright and political activist who wrote proto feminist tracts before being executed in the French Revolution

and Margaret Cavendish, a prolific writer, playwright, poet and essayist of the seventeenth century. Behn's works and her portrayal of characters convince the reader at once that she is a feminist, who writes from a new feminist perspective. She portrays how inside every woman there is a soul that wants to be free. Behn's feminism is embedded in her assertion of women's rights, presentation of active, intelligent and powerful women characters, and her demonstration of the extent of patriarchal control over women's lives through the works. This study attempts to navigate how Behn came to be recognised as an important participant in the development of the concept of feminism. She can be termed the first practitioner of feminism owing to her great piece of feminist undertone writings. Her argument was for education, emancipation and for an increased female contribution to society. Her life and works are evidence of the maturity of her feminist scholarship and made the first ripples of what later became the tidal wave of the women's rights movement.

Her heroines shatter the traditional image of how a woman ought to be as it had hitherto appeared in the works of male authors. Behn is regarded as an important predecessor for female writers. Virginia Woolf has rightly said*:* "All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds…" (*Room* 65).

The main objective of this thesis titled "The Free Woman: A Feminist Study of the Turbulent Life of Aphra Behn and her Heroines" is an analytical dissection and interpretation of Behn's works using the hawk eye of feminism. It seeks to explore and decode the life of Aphra Behn and her heroines who loved making and breaking codes. A scrutiny of Behn's eventful personal life has been made, which

has aided in explaining the reason for the ambiguities in her works. The use of various themes like cross-dressing, disability, forced marriages and villainy has greater significance in her works than what meets the eye. This study strives to unravel these themes by associating it with the historical background of the restoration era and investigate it through analysing the cultural context. An attempt has been made to dwell deeper into the psyche of two significant women characters using the theory of psychoanalysis.

Twentieth-century feminist writers played a significant role in rehabilitating women writers who had been neglected for centuries. Aphra Behn, the eclectic woman, an important watershed who challenged the set patriarchal boundaries and broke stereotypes, centuries before the feminist uprising, was no exception. Despite her prolific writings, she remained excluded from English Literature anthologies until the 1990's. Her figure was remodelled in the twentieth century, when an interest in the women writers started developing and the sexual standards were comparatively relaxed.

Montague Summers who is an author of scholarly works of English drama in the seventeenth century, published a collection of Behn's works which ran into six volumes, in 1915.

Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf have an important role in the resurrection of Behn. But their focus was mainly on the biographical aspects so that they could introduce Behn to the world as a compelling and powerful woman. They emphasised on projecting Behn as "a feminist *ante-litteram*" (Febronia 3). In 1927, Vita Sackville-West published a brief biography of Behn titled *Aphra Behn: The*

Incomparable Astrea. As Karyn Sproles has commented, West's biography "reinvents Behn, disrupting facts" (112). Sackville-West rejects "the traditional polarisation of women into saints or whores, rewriting Behn's story in a different voice, a voice characterised by self-conscious multiplicity of subject, biographer, and history instead of unified authority" (qtd. in Febronia 112). In *A Room of One's Own*, which came out in 1929, Virginia Woolf pays tribute to Behn, but dealt only with her role as a professional woman writer and excluded any discussion about her works.

Behn's first full-length biography by George Woodcock came out in 1948 and was entitled *The Incomparable Aphra.* Woodcock portrayed Behn as a campaigner for social and moral freedom, a committed revolutionary, who was a radical during those days. A chronological and biographical delineation of Behn's theatrical career has been effected in Maureen Duffy's *The Passionate Shepherdess* (1977). It provided the fullest and most detailed account of Aphra Behn, ever published.

In *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn (*1980), Angeline Goreau portrays Behn as a representative of the feminist school of thought which arose in the 1980s. This work analyses the historical events that would have affected Behn and her works - the Civil War, the Restoration, the Great Plague, the fire of London, the Popish plot and the distressing condition of women in the late 1600s. It also analyses Behn's poem "The Golden Age" praising it as a critique on injustice and oppression of civilisation.

In 1996, Janet Todd published *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* which is a comprehensively researched biography of Behn, details Behn's unique exploration of race, gender and sexual agency. Todd gave great emphasis to Behn's life as a spy and her connections to the Tory networks. Todd was committed to 'historicising' Behn; therefore she was concerned with the political aspects of Behn's works.

The common strain in these biographies was that all of it dealt with the bewildering personality of Aphra Behn who went on to become a major figure in Restoration theatre. This approach forgot to recognise the woman author. This took away the focus from Behn's dramatic skill and wit. Nevertheless, these works contributed in projecting Aphra as a key English playwright.

After being acknowledged as an influential author in the history of literature, there emerged a lot of critical studies based on Behn's writings. *Re-reading Aphra Behn; History, Theory and Criticism* by Heidi Hutner in 1993 and *Aphra Behn Studies* by Janet Todd in 1996 were the most significant of these. Heidi Hutner in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism* 1993 demonstrate through her essays that Behn's writings cannot be understood without recognising the ideological complexities and ambiguities in her works. This work is a collection of essays written by some of the most prominent feminist scholars of the seventeenth century like Ellen Pollak, Jane Spencer, and Susan Green. This is a more theoretical and critical study which includes the work of critics mainly from North American. The essays in Janet Todd's collection are mostly by British academics that tend to position the works in their theatrical and historical milieu, highlighting Behn's use

of the contemporary politics and theatrical devices. These works created new avenues of approaching Behn's literary output.

In George Woodcock's 1989 book, Aphra *Behn: The English Sappho,* he analyses each of Behn's plays and novels. He also deals with the politics of the English Restoration and how it affected the literature of the times.

Aphra Behn's English Feminism: Wit and Satire (1999) by Dolors Altaba-Artal and Naphtali Lau-Lavie is largely concerned with Behn's interest in incorporating Spanish texts in her plays and her narrative prose. This book is divided into ten short chapters in which Artal discusses Behn's plays and novels. This project gives the reader a sense of the richness of Behn's works, the complexity of Behn's intellectual contexts, and the volatility of this period in British literary history.

The most recent and complete critical study on Behn was published in 2004- *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* with Derek Hughes and Janet Todd as editors. This volume discusses and introduces her writings in all the fields and presents Behn as inevitably the fruit of her time and society. It incorporates an elaborate chronological narration of facts about her life and a compilation of articles based on Behn's works. It studies Behn in connection to the Restoration era and all its political intrigues. This book is an accurate guide to discover who the writer actually is. It explores Behn's plays from "political, feminist, and post-colonial perspectives, with a special regard to women, not only as playwrights but also managers, actresses and audience" (Febronia 176).

A review of literature on Behn provides affirmation to the fact that Aphra Behn can aptly be called the first practitioner of feminism even though feminism as a theory had not even started taking its baby steps during her age. In the article "Early Feminism," Stephanie Hodgson-Wright notes that: “Aphra Behn was the only woman who achieved any sustained success in this arena during the 1670s and 1680s, and as such is rightly hailed as a feminist heroine” (12). Melinda Zook describes Behn as a “thorough-going feminist, a libertine and an opponent of the domestic tyranny of patriarchy . . . with a strong political vision” (“Contextualizing Aphra Behn” 75). Zook adds, “This is particularly surprising for a rare female voice in the loud political cacophony of the 1680's. No other woman writer was as public, vocal, or prolific as Aphra Behn in the pre-Revolution era” (76). Jacqueline Pearson shares Zook's view and observes that Behn is a “feminist . . . with a unique vision” (167). As with the general works of Kate Aughterson, Jane Spencer, Susan Owen, Susan Staves, Mary Ann O’Donnell; these studies deal with an overview of Behn's life and career.

Patriarchy is a social system in which rules are administered and executed to suit its figures of male authority. The society rebuffs the idea of regarding women as an independent being, capable of her own desires and interests. Women have generally been viewed as an auxiliary piece of the family and society. She was seldom an identity in her very own right. In all social orders, man is viewed as the greater power and rules have been coordinated to his convenience. This has been conditioned into women’s subconscious from time immemorial, which gradually led it to be accepted without any questioning.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the efforts for equal rights for women coalesced into an identifiable and self-conscious movement, or the beginning of a series of movements. Feminism is a collection of ideologies, political and social movements that advocate women's rights and aim at raising consciousness about sexism and patriarchy. Feminists attack the injustice towards women in the social status quo.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* were two seminal works that stimulated the feminist ideology. Beauvoir in the 1940s put forth the concept of women being perceived as the 'other' in the patriarchal society. In *The Second Sex* (1949), she elaborates on how a male-centered ideology had become the accepted norm and the fact that women being capable of menstruating, getting pregnant, lactating, is in no way an explanation to sideline them as the "second sex". Betty Friedan was a key player in second-wave feminism. Her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) criticised the idea that women could find fulfillment only through childrearing and homemaking. Friedan hypothesises that women are victims of the false belief of adjusting to a "private sphere" which required them to find identity in their lives through husbands and children. This causes women to lose their own identities in their family. Many women who possessed skills, knowledge, and aspired to be a part of the public sphere had difficulty accepting such an idea and "the feminine mystique" described this discontent.

Feminist literary theory kindled a renewed interest in the writings of women and in particular writers like Behn. Till then, women who ventured into writing were

sneered at and satirised as the "blue stockings with an itch for scribbling" (Woolf, *A Room* 63). Elaine Showalter opined in this regard that women writers disappear more easily from literary history, leaving their sisters bereft and struggling to reconstruct the fractured tradition ("Towards a Feminist Poetics"). Literary history has always been based on notions of patrilineal succession, so it was difficult to recognise and compartmentalise the generative work of women's text among male writings. Feminism maintains that there is a significant tradition of female writings to be uncovered and speaks about the relentless silencing of women. The search for women writers has indeed constituted an important political challenge and aroused the questions- Why only a very few women produced literature during the earlier centuries? What has inhibited their writing? How has critics responded to their work? Such a probe introduces one to the determinant of gender and renders literary tradition as a construct.

> The key interest of feminist criticism has been a desire to rediscover the lost work of women writers, a wish to manifest what it is to be female, to declare the till now unheard experiences and perceptions. Since critical attention focused mostly on male writings, feminist critics demanded a status and recognition for women authors. Their aim was not just to fit women into a male dominated tradition, but they also wanted to write the history of a tradition among women themselves. (Eagleton 86)

Thus the feminist theory was the apt methodology that could be employed for the analysis of the works of an iconoclastic writer like Aphra Behn. A feminist approach

to the study of restoration literature is significant because the area has been dominated by paternalistic, male dominant modes of consciousness since the first writings in this age. This thesis utilises the basic concept advocated by the feminist ideology that becomes the connecting thread of all waves of the feminist movement. The arguments, concepts and ideals put forward by Simone De Beauvoiur, Virginia Woolf, Betty Freidan, Kate Millet, Mary Wollstonecaft, Helene Cixous and Elaine Showalter have been employed to interpret Behn's works through a feminist lens.

The society has always characterised women as ideally chaste, submissive, dependent, and gentle and expected them to live inside certain boundaries. Women were depicted in the works of her contemporaries as innocent, weak and wretched beings, but Behn gives her women characters a striking degree of power and independence. Her heroines take initiative with great boldness and energy. Behn holds up as an ideal, a sexual equality between men and women where women had the capacity to change the social norms with their individual thoughts. She advocates the hidden potential and strength within women. Such a stance led to attacks against the author. Any woman wanting to defend her sex had to tackle powerfully negative scriptural images of women: Delilah was treacherous, Jezebel murderous, while Eve was directly responsible for the fall of the human race: 'the woman tempted him and he did eat'. "Saint Paul was regularly invoked against any woman who spoke out, or asked awkward questions about the church's attitude to women: 'Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted to them to speak', he instructed the Corinthians" **(**Walters 9**).** The implication here, being that writing in itself was a heroic activity; and for any woman of Behn's generation, it probably was dangerous

heroism. The extent of society's stringent attitude towards women is reflected in the lines by Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea who bursts out in indignation:

> Alas! A woman that attemts the pen,
> The fault can by no virtue be redeemed
> ……
> Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play,
> Are the accomplishments we should desire;
> To write, or read, or think, or to enquire,
> Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,
> And interrupt the conquests of our prime. (qtd. in Woolf, *A Room* 57)

Re-reading the restoration and resurrecting a writer like Aphra Behn in particular involves far more than feminist criticism could encompass since this is an analytical and expository study. Behn's works amend the prevalent models of the literary canon, and it is engaged in a number of complex ways in the socio-economic discourses of the restoration. So there is multiplicity in the interpretive strategies used in this thesis: historical, theoretical and critical. In addition to the discussion about biography, the thesis probes the ideological complexities in her writings and scrutinises how the discourses on gender permeate her works.

New historicism, the literary theory which aims at comprehending literature through its cultural context is an important tool used in this study. The political activities of those days itself was turbulent and it cannot be ripped or separated from the author's life since she was an integral part of the political tumult of restoration. Stephen Greenblatt who coined the term 'new historicism', suggested looking at the

text as an immediate social, political and cultural condition of its production and interpretation. A significant case provided by Greenblatt to summate the connection between historical contexts and literary texts was the iconography of portraits, which display the gender specific qualities prescribed during the period through visual devices. The ideological features which portrayed masculinity were symbols of authority and power, the most important characteristic attributed to feminity was beauty which represented the concepts of purity, virtue and modesty. Based on the literary criticism of Stephen Greenblatt and influenced by the philosophy of Michel Foucault, new historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times, circumstances and practices of society but that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs and prejudices. A new historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times, in turn recognising that current cultural contexts colour the critic's conclusions. Thus the works of Behn must be judged based on the context in which it was written because as Geertz says, "there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" (2). The seventeenth century cultural history-distribution of power and marginalisation of social classes are exposed in Behn's works. As new historicists rightly state, studying the history reveals more about the text and studying the text reveals more about the history. New historicism acknowledges and embraces the idea that, as times change, so will the readers' understanding of great literature.

"A new historicist interpretation of a text begins with identifying the literary and non- literary texts available and accessible to the public, at the time of its production, followed by reading and interpreting the text in the light of its co-text…Thus the text and the context are perceived as expressions of the same historical moment"(Mambrol). The texts which were analysed and read side by side with the works of Behn are Basil Willey's *The Seventeenth Century*, John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) , Mary Astell's *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), *Hic Mulier Tract* (1620), G.M.Trevelyan's *English Social History Chaucer to Queen Victoria*, Phillip Stubbes' *Anatomy of the Abuses in England (*1583), David Ogg's *England in the Reign of Charles II-Volume 1* and Lawrence Stone's *The Crisis of Aristocracy*, and *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800.*

In the sixteenth century, new questions surrounding the nature of identity and power heavily influenced literature. "Literature functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behaviour of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (Greenblatt, *Renaissance* 4).The interpretive practice that has been applied in this thesis to comprehend the works of Aphra Behn, concerns itself with all of these functions.

The seventeenth century perception, reflected in reliable historical writings, devalued women's social value and purpose. In a discussion about gender roles, the views of Socrates cannot be omitted. He had "said that he tolerated his first wife Xanthippe, because she bore him sons, in the same way one tolerated the noise

of geese because they produce eggs and chicks."("Protofeminism", *Wikimedia*). This analogy is what perpetuated in the later ages, the concept that a woman's single duty in life was reproduction. Plato's teachings are antithetical to Socrates'. *The Republic* Book 5 states: "Are dogs divided into hes and shes, or do they both share equally in hunting and in keeping watch and in the other duties of dogs? Or do we entrust to the males the entire and exclusive care of the flocks, while we leave the females at home, under the idea that the bearing and suckling their puppies is labour enough for them?" (ibid.). Plato's ideal state visualised equal rights and education for women.

Throughout societies, the patriarchal power was the overriding force that decided a woman's destiny. The society built the institution of gender and manipulated it in such a way that women would always remain subordinate to men's control. This process produced and encouraged the inequality between sexes. The concept of femininity in the Restoration period England was in a state of flux, evolving from the early modern insistence on women's impurities to a transition in the eighteenth century which focused on domestic femininity. Russell West-Pavlov notes, the conception of female sexuality moved to one defined as "benevolent [and] lust-less" (39).There was no fluidity in the concept of gender, and society and it's so called social values still dictated the limits of appropriateness and femininity.

During the Restoration, approaches to sex and marriage too placed women at social disadvantage. Marriage defined a woman: she was whom she married.

> There was not much space in this worldview for a female sexual identity, which runs directly counter to the ambitions of the feminists of later centuries. Critics have tended to ascribe this to a historical

> context: when there is no precedent for a woman's sexuality except as the most destructive imaginable vice, the very idea of a woman as a sexual being would fog and, shortly, destroy the argument for her rights…in politics and public life, men must govern because they are the only ones who can comprehend rational thought; in sex and private life, it is masculine to have animal urges, and feminine to resist them. (Williams xi-xii)

The *Hic Mulier* tract, a pamphlet published in 1620 in England that condemned transvestitism presents the kinds of repression cross dressing elicited. The narration of the tract is from a single viewpoint- the man's. Cross-dressed women are accused in the tract of excessive sexual appetite and such women are branded as a threat to the collapse of the entire class system. Predictably, what is evoked at the end is the authority of the state and of the patriarch within the family to suppress a woman's unruliness. The author wants the "powerfull Statute of apparell [to] lift his Battle-Axe, and crush the offenders in pieces, so as euery one may bee knowne by the true badge of their bloud, or Fortune" (Cv). According to the tract, a woman's punishment was effected not only chastisement by her husband, but also the repressive apparatuses devised by the State: whipping, pilloried, and imprisonment.

A significant quantity of history texts during and about the seventeenth century Britian deals with a perception of sexual inequalities in society. Restoration drama dealt mainly with manipulations in gender, sexuality and marriage in order to "achieve personal goals, to consolidate families, to re-establish social order, to

restore political stability, and to secure cultural cohesion.…In comic fashion, the plays broach and endeavour to resolve serious cultural concerns, such as the definition of gender roles, the regulation of sexual behaviour, the characteristics of class, and the compatibility of marriage partners" (Gill 191). Restoration theatre was still governed by the idea of provoking and satisfying male sexual pleasure and it was within this arena that actresses had to function. It is possible to say that the actress with her claim to public notice and professional participation in a male-dominated public sphere was much more empowered than women in the general society. But the representation of sexuality onstage carried serious social and political implications. The sociopolitical stability was dependent on patrilineal control of female sexuality and women on stage threatened the hierarchical system. So the patriarchal hierarchy created the perfect storm by equating actresses with prostitution. Jean Marsden's description of the inevitability of female sexuality as a paramount social issue is the most succinct: "with the preservation of property and privilege dependent on male control of female sexuality, unrestrained women represented the potential for complete social disintegration" (13). This was the gamble the Restoration actresses had to take, and the motivation for the patriarchal society to keep them in line.

In the words of Greenblatt,

> If interpretation limits itself to the behaviour of the author, it becomes literary biography and risks losing a sense of the larger networks of meaning in which both the author and his works participate. If, alternatively, literature is viewed exclusively as the expression of

> social rules and instructions, it risks being absorbed entirely into an ideological superstructure....Finally, if literature is seen only as a detached reflection upon the prevailing behavioural codes...(it will) shrink into an obligatory "historical background" that adds little to our understanding. (*Renaissance* 4)

So a new historicist reading of Behn's works is employed to elevate the readers' awareness of the author, the Restoration society and its literature.

The methodology of psychoanalysis has been contrived in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The Freudian school of psychology is termed psychoanalysis and some of its techniques are employed to interpret the activities of the women characters in two works of Behn. The fundamental concept of psychoanalysis is the division of the mind into three basic components-ego, id and superego. Ego represents ongoing conscious experience while the id and superego represent the unconscious and conscience. The unconscious element of the mind has a strong influence on the vast majority of a person's thoughts and actions. This Freudian model of the mind, Freud's views on male and female sexuality and the concept of Eros and Thanatos helps to identify and analyse the unconscious psyche of the characters. The theory of psychoanalysis is utilised to decipher the switch between the good and bad, the Ego and Id exhibited by Behn's heroines. Behn's heroines are women who are involved in activities that are not traditionally 'feminine' and this helps in the speedy dissolution of rigid sex roles. Patriarchy ordained that a woman's place is her home, her role as a wife and mother or an obedient, submissive being is quite often synonymous with her total human existence. This is where Behn and her heroines

stand out, strikingly different- a far cry from the “coy mistresses” and “damsels in distress”. The peripheral reading of a literary work may yield to the social demands, but the covert meaning discloses the author’s unconscious mind. Behn’s heroines are the author’s alter-ego and reflect the writer’s sense of freedom, resistance and free spirit. They are composed, detached and unruffled beings who break the conventions of a hallowed tradition. Many characters enact the suppressed desires of the author. It is Behn's own mind which confronts the reader in most of her heroines and they are, just like the author, women who are “self actualising, whose identities are not dependent on men” (Martin 33).

Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* advises women to speak out, tell their own life stories, articulate their feelings, acknowledge both their own hopes and their sense of being cheated and wronged**.** True to this concept, Aphra Behn’s heroines are women who articulate their mind fearlessly. Her heroines become symbols of the dilemma of women in the personal and public sphere; socially and economically during the late seventeenth century. The basic undertone in Behn’s writing is her insight of gender as a social construction, a powerful structural mechanism that controls collective life, a hierarchical ideology shaped and imposed by the dominant group on social and individual levels since the beginning of history.

The term ‘free woman’ in the title of this thesis is inspired from a British feminist journal, *The Freewoman*, which was published between 1911 and 1912. A lot of parallels could be drawn between *The Freewoman* and Behn’s works, since both earned notoriety for the radical feminist ideals and frank discussions of

sexuality, morality, marriage and society. This term has been employed as a significant part of the title because, what Behn projected through her characters is the ‘new’ and ‘free’ woman, women who demanded independence and an uninhibited entrance into the public sphere which became a figure of grave concern in the Restoration society which deemed all such luxuries, as singularly masculine pursuits.

Due to the massive volume of Behn’s literary oeuvre and the roadblock of limited sources encountered by every Restoration scholar, it was not viable to deal with each of the works chosen for this thesis, in detail. So the thesis is organised thematically in the order of significance in a wider societal perspective and the extent of the motif of ‘turbulence’. Chapter division is devised based on the thematic concerns of this project.

The first chapter of this thesis is titled *Aphra Behn: The ‘Free’ Woman* and provides the framework for this thesis. It is about the author, her personal life, professional life and the author as the narrator in her works. A chronological study of the turbulence in her personal life is made and her notoriety as a writer: poet, dramatist, novelist is discussed. This chapter demonstrates how responses to her life and writings eventually turned into a critical part in the making of the English literary canon. It attempts a feminist analysis of the literary, personal and social impact made by Behn. The content of this chapter is organised into: introduction, early life, controversies and affairs, marriage, phase of widowhood, life as a spy, life in Debtor’s prison, beginning of her literary career, the historical and political

background of that time, her later life, suffering and death. The chapter also analyses the vehement criticism she endured and her response to critics.

The second chapter titled *A Study of Psyche: The Scheming, Villainous Heroines or the 'Femme Fatales'* focuses on two scheming villainous women characters: Miranda and Isabella in *The Fair Jilt* and *The History of the Nun or The Fair Vow Breaker* respectively. They appear respectable and sincere but it is just a facade. They are manipulative women who play the victim and go to any extent to attain what they want. This chapter makes a careful perusal of the complicated psychology of the characters Isabella and Miranda. An attempt has been made to examine their villainous activities using the psychoanalytic and feminist theories in order to deconstruct each character and probe the conformity- resistance or the Id - Ego clash exhibited by the characters.

The basis of the third chapter is the portrayal of women's sexual identity and is titled *Cross-Dressing and Disguises: The 'Masked' Women*. Behn uses the image of the cross-dressed woman to defy expectations about female nature and to object the injustices caused by the sex-gender- system. Each of the plays discussed in this chapter feature women characters who are on a path towards what female agency entails, revealing in the process that this is not an easily definable or finite concept. Hellena in *The Rover*, Widow Ranter in *The Widow Ranter*, Cloris in *The Amorous Prince,* Marcella in *The Feigned Courtesans,* Hyppolita in *The Dutch Lover* and Celinda *in The Town Fop* are the heroines analysed. The methods women use to empower themselves, develops over the course of each play, expanding and altering the conceptualisation of agency. The works discussed in this chapter provide varied

examples of a woman's use of cross-dressing in response to society's patriarchal constraints and comment on the weaknesses and even the frivolity of such a patriarchal setup.

The fourth chapter titled *An Indictment against Forced Marriages and Marital Servitude: The 'Heroic' Women* dissects the works of Behn which deal with the patterns of marriage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in English society from a feministic and historiographical perspective. The women characters in The *Forced Marriage or The Jealous Bridegroom, The Amorous Prince, The Dutch Lover, The Rover or The Banished Cavaliers, The Feign'd Courtezans or A Night's Intrigue, The Second Part of The Rover, The Lucky Chance or An Alderman's Bargain* and *The Lucky Mistake* are studied. The cultural customs of the institution of marriage, the diverging gender roles established for men and women within a matrimonial union, the power relations it implies for husband and wife and the paternal participation in the process are expounded in detail. These works partake of the social protest against disparaging traditions followed in marriages during the patriarchal Restoration era and women's position within such marriages.

The fifth chapter titled *Deconstruction of the Physiognomic View: Heroines with Strange Bodies or the 'Other' Women* focuses on representation of disability**.** Physiognomy is a practice of assessing a person's character or personality from their outer appearance. It is often linked to racial and sexual stereotyping. The disabled characters: Belvideera, Maria, Celesia and the Jewish sisters in *The Dumb Virgin or The Force of Imagination, The Unfortunate Bride or The Blind Lady a Beauty* and *The Rover Part Two or The Banish'd Cavaliers* are discussed. This chapter

examines Behn's deconstruction of the seventeenth century patriarchal ideology by using female characters with deviant characteristics and disabilities.

The main aim of this study is to fathom the importance of the stupendous change initiated by an author like Aphra Behn and how strategically she used the patriarchal stage and writing methods to modify the depiction of the 'female' in the guise of promoting Tory politics. All the twenty three heroines of the fourteen works (nine plays and five short stories) discussed in this thesis, attempt to and succeed in rejecting the patriarchal ideological values advocated by the restoration society. The themes discussed in these chapters show elements of contiguity with the present day world although what is relevant for the audience of 2019 will not be the same as what it was for the audience in the seventeenth century. Even within contemporary times, it is tough not to be entangled in cultural restraints and bogged down by biases based on ones gender. It is no wonder then, that writers like Aphra Behn are being hailed now, for the cultural contributions and revolutionary spirit exhibited during the stifling early modern period of Europe. Eventually, "that which is conquered, conquers at the same time" (Merian 3).

Chapter 1

Aphra Behn: The 'Free' Woman

Hailed as England's first professional female playwright, Aphra Behn was a powerful feminist role model for later generations of women writers. Her effect on eighteenth-century writing was extensive. This chapter attempts a feminist analysis of the literary, personal and social impact made by Behn. The chapter analyses the turbulence in her personal life and her notoriety as a writer: poet; dramatist; novelist, and demonstrates how responses to her life and writings eventually turned into a critical part in the making of the English literary canon.

Behn was popular during her days for her various literary works but was conveniently forgotten in the next two centuries when critics continually vilified her name, stressed on her disreputable image, assailed her with vehement satire and used it as an excuse to ignore her works. It is through academic courses such as Women's Literature and the advent of Women's Studies in the late 1980's that scholars and students got a chance to rediscover Behn's literature which was deliberately tarnished and made to fall off a literary canon that privileged only male playwrights. Behn preferred a provocative presentation in her writings which were majorly confrontational. Her works were radical in its times since they challenged the hitherto accepted notions of male and female behaviour. The feminist scholars of the twentieth century have taken great efforts to shed light on the eventful life of this author and her spectacular literature. Gradually, she has caught the attention of all

critics and regained her fame largely as a result of the work of feminist literary scholars.

In the seventeenth century, England suffered repeated spells of political upheaval. Aphra was born during the tensions of the English Civil War. It was a gruelling period when the King and Parliament were invariably divided in opinions over affairs and in constant conflict. In her life, Behn saw a greater number of connections and situations for interactions with legislators than most everyday citizens at any point longed for. She utilised her political astute and literary aptitude to explore a world which mostly was hostile and unwelcoming to a female. Her works were in short a combination of sex, gender and power. Her political philosophy saw a downfall towards the end of her life because the power of the Stuart kings crumbled and the tradition of divine kingship fell out of favour. "Behn's career demonstrates the influence a common woman could have in legislative issues and politics" ("Women", *Wordpress*) through her endeavours as an artist craftsman, she stands tall as the strongest and earliest female authors in England.

Behn's literary works: plays, prose and poems reflect her personal views and perspective on gender, religion, politics, relationships and numerous other issues. But information regarding her early years is scant. What can safely be said is that researchers have found it hard to sort the experiences out of Behn who was a significant figure in the Restoration age. Facts about her personal life remain scarce and difficult to confirm. This is particularly valid for the occasions of her adolescence and her family ancestry. Any scholar is left with the option to confide in

the works of Janet Todd and Montague Summers who are two trusted scholars, especially of the Restoration era. Todd gives an exhaustive and reliable record of the facts of Behn's life in the biographical works, *Aphra Behn Studies* and *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* which has been extensively used in this chapter to decode Aphra Behn. In these works, Todd centers around Behn's life, travels and profession, rather than focusing on the nature of her literary works. Being one of the premier researchers of Aphra Behn's life and artistic works, Janet Todd's point of view was largely utilised while contextualising the works and the author's turbulent life.

In the preface to Volume I of Behn's works, the editor Montague Summers notes:

> It is perhaps not altogether easy to appreciate the multiplicity of difficulties with which the first editor of Mrs. Behn has to cope….In fine there seems no point connected with our first professional authoress which did not call for the nicest investigation and the most incontrovertible proof before it could be accepted without suspicion or reserve. (xiii)

In the preface and introduction to Behn's works, Summers makes a quick expedition through the strangely mysterious and obscure life of Mrs. Behn.

The personal history of Aphra Behn arouses much curiosity because it is a bizarre and unusual one and is laborious to relate and unravel. Behn was the product of a turbulent age and this turbulence reflects in her personal life. Deciphering the rollercoaster life of an explosive personality like Behn necessitated a detailed

chronology of Behn's background and personal life which was available from the works of these reliable biographers of Behn.

The constant speculation and confusion regarding the birthplace of Aphra Behn has been strategically resolved in the preface to the collection of Behn's works by Montague Summers.

> Ayfara, or Aphara (Aphra), Amis or Amies, the daughter of John and Amy Amis or Amies, was baptised together with her brother Peter in the Parish Church of SS. Gregory and Martin, Wye, 10 July, 1640, presumably by Ambrose Richmore, curate of Wye at that date. Up to this time Aphra's maiden name has been stated to be Johnson, and she is asserted to have been the daughter of a barber, John Johnson…. Mr. Gosse, in a most valuable article *Athenæum*, 6 September, 1884, was the first to correct the statement repeatedly made that Mrs. Behn came from 'the City of Canterbury in Kent'. He tells how he acquired a folio volume containing the MS. poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea, 'copied about 1695 under her eye and with innumerable notes and corrections in her autograph'. In a certain poem entitled *The Circuit of Apollo* the following lines occur :
>
> And standing where sadly he now might descry
> From the banks of the Stowre the desolate Wye,
> He lamented for Behn, o'er that place of her birth,
> And said amongst Women there was not on the earth,

> Her superior in fancy, in language, or witt,
> Yet own'd that a little too loosely she writt.
>
> To these is appended this note: 'Mrs. Behn was Daughter to a Barber, who liv'd formerly in Wye, a little Market Town (now much decay'd) in Kent. (xvii-xviii)

A reading of her works would generate the idea that she was the daughter of a gentleman, but it was more likely that Behn was of common birth. "Aphra Behn's lifelong faith in the aristocratic principle might imply a connection to nobility; no such connection has ever been proven" ("Women", *Wordpress*). An assimilation of all the research conducted on her early life by Behn's biographers can be concluded thus: Aphra Amis aka Eaffry or Afra Johnson then, is believed to have been born early in July, 1640, at Wye, Kent to John Amis /Bartholomew Johnson who was a barber in Canterbury, and his wife Elizabeth Denham who worked as a wet-nurse.

Her father, in addition to his work as a barber, became involved with town politics, acting as a government liaison between the townspeople and immigrants settling or travelling through. Though the position was not particularly honourable or important, it ensured that he often met and conducted business with many itinerant immigrants, mostly members of religious orders and often from France and from the Netherlands (Todd, *Aphra Behn* 16). Thus, without ever leaving home, a young Behn garnered knowledge and education of other cultures, comprising of contemporary linguistics, music, and art to make up for what she lacked in the way of a formal humanist education which, later, in her adult years, she yearned for.

Janet Todd's study reveals that Behn was a young woman during the years of the Interregnum, and she may already have had a connection to known royalist agent Thomas Killigrew. Behn's memoirs disclose that, in 1663, she travelled to Surinam with her family since her father was promised a post of some importance there during the first Dutch war. Behn's father died during this journey, but the wife and children seems to have continued their journey. Behn became acquainted with quite a few important figures in the colony at Surinam and it is presumed that William Byam, one of these friends who gave her the name 'Astrea', which she used sporadically when working as a spy and a writer. The name Astrea is ironic in that according to ancient Greek mythology, Astrea means the virgin goddess of justice, innocence, purity and precision. Innocence, softspokenness or subordination are concepts which can never be associated with a scandalous writer like Aphra. The genius artistic bent in her had shown itself during her time in Surinam. She had maintained a journal of her experiences there and immersed herself in the romances fashionable during that time. Summers opines that it was perhaps from the reading of *La Calprenède* and *Mlle de Scudéri,* Behn gained that intimate knowledge of French which served her well during her literary life; at any rate she seems early to have realised her dramatic genius and to have begun a play drawn from one of the most interesting episodes in *Cléopatre*, the love story of the Scythian King Alcamène, which was later developed into the play, *The Young King* (xix).

Behn has more than once claimed that her life was entirely dedicated to pleasure and poetry. It is noteworthy that she had attained the acquaintance and friendship of some of the most sensible men of her age. Studies on the life of Behn

make references and speculations of various amours. There are allusions of sensational love affairs woven into her memoirs especially during her sojourn at Antwerp. Though dubious about the real picture, Mrs.Behn, being the unconventional, unhampered and free woman she was, has given romantic pseudonyms for many of her lovers: Philaster, Alexis,Lycidas, Amintas and Lysander, but attempts to fathom and identify who they were in real has been till this date fruitless. Vander Albert of Utrecht was presumed to be her ardent lover, from whom she used to obtain political secrets to be used to the English advantage; another Van Bruin, an admirer; and a certain Catalina. Another name which floated around in literary circles during that time was that of John Hoyle. In *Love-Letters to a Gentleman*, Behn addressed John Hoyle as her lover, "Your articles I have read over, and do not like them; you have broke one, even before you have sworn or sealed them; that is, they are writ with reserves. I must have a better account of your heart tomorrow, when you come. I grow desperate fond of you, and would fain be used well; if not, I will march off. But I will believe you mean to keep your word, as I will forever do mine" (Todd, *Oroonoko* 150). Her literature certainly proves that she seemed to have favoured and fantacised about sentimental romantic relationships, but all speculations of the various affairs seem pure fiction designed by her to be developed into novellas or to cover up the unpleasant and agonising reality of her Dutch mission.

Probably, owing to the Restoration of Charles II and the productive changes , Behn's family returned to England about the close of 1663 .They seemed to have settled in London, where Aphra, met a merchant of Dutch extraction by the name of

Behn who was so captivated by her and the courtship led to marriage. It is presumed that she lived a life of affluence during her married life, appeared at the Court, drawing the notice of and impressing even the King by her clever repartees and anecdotes. By around 1664 her marriage was over, though by death of Mr.Behn or separation is not known. Research suggests that very little is known about the authenticity of Behn's marriage. Todd proposes that Mr. Behn was "a necessary invention to provide widowed respectability" (*Oroonoko* 5). This possibility does hold credence since the pretence of widowhood could facilitate Behn control over possessions and finances without any probe over propriety.

After her husband's death, funds and friends gradually waned and in her distress she applied for assistance to the Court of Charles and "owing to her cosmopolitan experience and still more to the fact that her name was Dutch, and that she had been by her husband brought into close contact with the Dutch, she was selected as a meet political agent to visit Holland and there be employed in various secret and semi-official capacities" (Summers xxi). In the words of Hannah Sikes: "Through the assumption of a widowed identity, Behn would have been able to enter public spheres, such as the political realm and the theatre, which would have been considered improper for an unmarried woman. She could not avoid controversy, but she could mitigate its effects. By 1666, the supposedly widowed Behn was able to travel of her own volition" (Sikes). She travelled to Antwerp at the bidding of Charles II's government, during the second Dutch war. The chief aim of her espionage in the service of England was to intimate the activities of the exiles who were maintaining association with traitors at home and corresponding plots against

the King, by joining hands with the Dutch enemies to harm their native land. For this, she invented a code in which her communications were written. Behn's primary plot was to establish an intimacy with William Scott.

> Aphra then, taking with her some forty pounds in cash, all she had, set sail with Sir Anthony Desmarces either at the latter end of July or early in August, 1666, and on 16 August she writes from Antwerp to say she has had an interview with William Scott (dubbed in her correspondence Celadon), even having gone so far as to take coach and ride a day's journey to see him secretly. Though at first diffident, he is very ready to undertake the service, only it will be necessary for her to enter Holland itself and reside on the spot, not in Flanders, as Colonel Bampfield, who was looked upon as head of the exiled English at the Hague, watched Scott with most jealous care and a growing suspicion. Aphra, whose letters give a vivid picture of the spy's life with its risks and impecuniosity, addresses herself to two correspondents, Tom Killigrew and James Halsall, cupbearer to the King. (Summers xxiii)

During this period Behn used the name of Astrea as a cipher to communicate with William Scot. Though this name was set up initially as a political code, years later it was recognised throughout the literary world. She is said to have sent back reports to Charles II, written in invisible ink. She recounted being trusted with this mission as "unusual with my sex, or to my years" (qtd. in Todd, *Oroonoko* 6). "The circumstance that her position and work could never be openly recognised nor

acknowledged by the English government was shortly to involve her in manifold difficulties, pecuniary and otherwise, which eventually led to her perforce abandoning so unstable and unsatisfactory a commission"(Summers xxi). Memoirs deal with the difficult circumstances Behn underwent while employed as a spy. Due to lack of funds, she was forced to pawn her ring to pay messengers, to disburse Scott's expenses and pay up her personal debts. All her repeated pleadings to Halsall and Killigrew that creditors needed to be paid off and her lodger Carney needed to be silenced if she was to continue her work satisfactorily, seemed to yield no outcome. No money, however, was forthcoming from England. Capable and indeed ardent agent as she was, Aphra continued loyally sending home naval information and political news despite being forsaken.

Summers describes the negligence Behn underwent in empathetic terms:

> Silence was her only answer…there can be no excuse for her shameful, nay, criminal, neglect at the hands of the government she was serving so faithfully and well. Her information seems to have been received with inattention and disregard…. In any case on 3 November she sends a truly piteous letter to Lord Arlington, Secretary of State, and informs him she is suffering the extremest want and penury. All her goods are pawned, Scott is in prison for debt, and she herself seems on the point of going to the common gaol. The day after Christmas, Aphra wrote to Lord Arlington for the last time. She asks for a round £100 as delays have naturally doubled her expenses and she has had to obtain credit….Even this final appeal

> obtained no response, and at length—well nigh desperate—Mrs. Behn negotiated in England, from a certain Edward Butler, a private loan of some £150 which enabled her to settle her affairs and start for home in January, 1667. (xxiv-xxvi)

A major turning point in her life was being sent to the debtor's prison. Her superiors in the government were reluctant to help her, which forced her to take out this loan which she could not pay off due to negligence by the same government for whom she worked as a dedicated agent. On being threatened with a debtor's prison by Edward Butler, she prays for an order to the officials of Charles II, to satisfy Butler, who threatened to stop at nothing if he is not paid immediately and a desperate Aphra sends a letter to Killigrew too, not claiming for free bucks, but what was her due, the payment for work done on their demand. In this letter she pleads for help from her impending doom.

Dejectedly complaining of two years' bitter sufferings, Behn mustered courage to implore directly to the Charles II. She wrote, "I have cried myself dead and could find in my heart to break through all and get to the king and never rise till he were pleased to pay this, but I am sick and weak and unfit for that or a prison" ("Women", *Wordpress*). Even such a pathetic plea received no response. Despite her apparently bleak situation Behn declared to herself, "I will not starve" (Sikes). Her troubles with finance never seemed to have an end. Debt was the dead weight that persisted. Her salary which was long overdue was never paid after all the weary begging and pleadings. Butler, the money lender became so impatient with his debtor that he resorted to drastic means and got her flung into a debtor's prison in

1668. She was left to suffer in the gaol by her employers. However, according to studies her imprisonment was not for long. It could never be confirmed conclusively as to how Behn's debts were paid. The possibilities are ample: Killigrew, finally moved might have made efforts and paid off her debts; help might have come directly from the king, or, publishers might have paid off debts in return for plays promised. But all this is uncertain. In any case the debt was duly compensated and the hardships she had to undergo came to an end. After being saved from such difficulties, Behn took to writing confidently so as to ensure that such a situation should never repeat in her life and to insure that her finances lay in her power. Her swift rise in the literary field in 1670 indicates that she was probably writing professionally by the late 1660s, and this is again potential evidence that her authorial skills came to her rescue during hard times and she paid off her own debts by writing books.

Charles II gave orders for English theatres to be reopened in 1660 after they were closed in 1642 during the reign of Charles I. This advance increased the number of women becoming associated with the theatre and generated a setting where a female playwright could strive (Todd, *Oroonoko* 8-9). She now moved towards building up a secure career and started working as a scribe for the the Duke's Company and the King's Company. Behn obtained a strong footing in the theatrical realm during 1670, when her first play *The Forc'd Marriage; or, the Jealous Bridegroom*, was performed at the Duke's Theatre. In 1671, *The Amorous Prince* was staged and was a success. In 1673 *The Dutch Lover* a comedy was released which earned applause for its skilful technique. After this, Behn had a three

year break in her career, the reason for which is still anonymous. After this temporary lull, her writings were majorly comic works which attained great success. It is notable that this period is known for the literary dominance of a writer like Dryden and the fact that Behn could mark a place for herself in such an epoch speaks volumes about her calibre.

In September, 1676, *The Town Fop* was acted with applause. *The Debauchee*, which was brought in 1677, was published anonymously. Both *Abdelazer* and *The Town Fop* attained success due to the degree of artistry. In 1677, *The Rover (I)* appeared in print. It turned out to be the most popular of Aphra Behn's plays with much bustle and humour. Adding on to this success, in 1678, *Sir Patient Fancy* was received with great applause. The success of *The Feign'd Courtezans* (1679) proved her literary prowess again. In 1681 *The Second Part of The Rover* came out as a surprisingly good sequel.

Around that time, political turmoil got in the way of her livelihood, reducing public interest in the theatre. She was forced to move on to writing prose and poetry in the 1680s. Behn knew both French and Latin, so she made a living then by "translating works from French and writing poetry based on Latin works. Her erotic poetry also became steadily more explicit during this time period, perhaps as an attempt to escape from the troubled political reality" ("Women", *Wordpress)*. Behn continued her staunch support of the Stuarts even during times of distress. Her poem "The Golden Age" reflects the political upheaval of that time. By the mid of 1680's her health began to decline. It can be said that her descent was aggravated by the unabating financial difficulties.

Restoration playwrights like Katherine Philips, Frances Boothby and Elizabeth Polwhele were her female contemporaries, but only the name and fame of Behn endured even in this twenty-first century. One of the reasons being that she churned out almost twenty successful plays throughout her career, a copious number compared to other playwrights of the period. Behn also associated with the widow Lady Henrietta Maria Davenant who was the only female production company owner at the time. Weisner-Hanks points out that, "Female playwrights were more likely to include female characters in their works and to address and complicate issues that were important to women, such as marriage and sexual violence, and Behn and her contemporaries did so with relish" ("Women" 193-194) Behn's plays were noted not only for their notoriety for lewdness, but they gained her political attention since majority of the works that came from this loyal Tory were explicitly political in nature. Through the guise of comedy she was seen reprimanding the Whig party and whoever opposed the royal family had to bear her wrath. Indeed, even her erotic poetry made direct and indirect references to the political sphere and raised hope for an idealised political age which would uphold personal and sexual freedom. Her prologues and epilogues convey her solidarity to the Stuart kings and Charles II, even though there was an open abhorrence for their Catholic leanings among the public. Behn strongly believed in the divine right of kings, endorsed the Stuarts and political allegory features prominently in her works.

The period between 1678 and 1683 were notorious for the controversial political extremism and fanatic activities: the treacherous pursuits of Gates and his co conspirators, the knavish ambition of Shaftesbury, the roguery of Monmouth, and

the traitorous politics of the Whig party, all these pointed to an imminent revolution. Naturally, the literature of the times reflected this social crisis and being a Tory, Behn's works were infused with party feelings aimed at deriding adversaries. In 1682, her two political plays came out: *The Roundheads* pictures the Puritans in the most repulsive colours and *The City Heiress* parodies Shaftesbury and his followers in exquisite caricature. It should be noted that the wit and humour Behn uses in these works never slide at any point in the play to silly lampoons or sheer tirade. *The False Count*, the third play of this year, was a brilliant and entertaining work. The plays apparently earned the malice of the Whigs for its sardonic tone and they waited for an opportunity for vendetta which was shortly found. Behn had contributed both 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue' to the play *Romulus and Hersilia; or, The Sabine War* which was anonymously staged at the Duke's Theatre on 10 August, 1682. The Epilogue included certain lines which made sordid remarks against the Duke of Monmouth. Even though the major turbulence in her life can be attributed to her unflinching admiration for Stuarts, she was let down many a time by the Stuart government. Charles II, who retained fondness for the Duke, had her arrested for criticising his son; she was shortly released.

It was probably between 1683-84; *The King of Bantam, The Adventure of the Black Lady* and *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* were written. In 1684 *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* was published. This work attained extraordinary popularity and a third edition was called for in 1707. The death of Charles in 1685 evoked Behn's *Pindarick on the Death of Charles II*. *Poem on the Happy Coronation of His Sacred Majesty* was written to welcome the new monarch,

James II. In 1686 another play of merit, *The Lucky Chance* surfaced. A Whig faction who were unable to target her in any other way and raised uproar to deride this play, but it fizzled out. Next appeared translations of De Bonnecorse's French works, which were titled *The Lady's Looking-Glass* and *The Lover's Watch*. Shortly afterwards, her health had begun to trouble her. She had spared neither mind nor bodily strength in writing, publishing and producing and this had taken a toll on her health. Graver symptoms started appearing but yet she strenuously employed herself in translations.

In 1687, *The Unfortunate Bride*, *The Unhappy Mistake*, *The Dumb Virgin* and *The Wandering Beauty* were released. She was function ceaselessly, completing one work after the other and in 1688; *The Fair Jilt*, Oroonoko, *Agnes de Castro*, *The Lucky Mistake* and *The History of the Nun; or, The Fair Vow Breaker* were published. Her misery and exhaustion became more apparent but financial circumstances compelled her to write and she bravely buckled on to her work. The *Widow Ranter; or, The History of Bacon in Virginia* which was written in 1688 is supposed to be her last written play. *The Widow Ranter* (1690) *and The Younger Brother* (1696*)* were posthumous publications.

Mrs. Behn was busy seeing her plays and poems through the press since it was the only way she could make a living. In May 1836, the *Gentleman's Magazine* published a letter from Behn, to her publisher Jacob Tonson which affords ample evidence that at this juncture, in spite of her diligence and incessant toil; she was far from being in easy circumstances. Behn implores for a settlement of five pounds extra for her work. Excerpts from the letter:

> As for y^{e} verses of mine, I shou'd really have thought 'em worth thirty pound; and I hope you will find it worth 25*l*; not that I shou'd dispute at any other time for 5 pound wher I am so obleeged; but you can not think w^{t} a preety thing y^{e} Island will be, and w^{t} a deal of labor I shall have yet with it: and if that pleases, I will do the 2nd Voyage, w^{ch} will compose a little book as big as a novel by it self. But pray speake to yor Bro^{r} to advance the price to one 5lb more, 'twill at this time be more then given me, and I vow I wou'd not aske it if I did not really believe it worth more…good deare Mr. Tonson, let it be 5lb more, for I may safly swere I have lost y^{e} getting of 50lb by it, tho that's nothing to you, or my satisfaction and humour: but I have been wthout getting so long y^{t} I am just on y^{e} poynt of breaking, espesiall since a body has no creditt at y^{e} Playhouse for money as we usd to have, fifty or 60 deepe, or more; I want extreamly or I wo'd not urge this. (qtd. in Summers xlv-xlvi)

The historical background at that time added to the turbulence. The downfall of the house of Stuarts had commenced. Mary of Modena, King James II's wife, gave birth to a son, James Francis Edward, Prince of Wales, on 10 June 1688 igniting public unease about the continuation of a Catholic line of kings. Behn had written poems for Queen Mary of Modena congratulating her on the birth of the future king. But the Protestants had other plans; they invited William of Orange and James II's daughter Mary II to invade on their behalf, which they accepted. The

Glorious Revolution ultimately led James II and his family to retreat and the ideology of the divine right of kings came crashing down. On the request of Gilbert Burnet, a former champion of the Stuarts who had shifted allegiance, Behn did write "A Pindaric Poem to the Reverend Doctor Burnet" conceding victory to the new king William, but cheekily refusing support. Though she remained defiant, Behn seemed to have resigned herself to the change of events, which reflected in the lines: "Tho' I the wondrous change deplore, /That makes me useless and forlorn, /Yet I the great design adore, /Though ruined in the universal turn" (qtd.in Todd, *Oroonoko* 350). Through these lines, Behn simultaneously expresses her dismay and accepts the change in government as God's will.

Subdued by the continual strain, despondency, overwork and taxed by financial crunches, she was weary, ill, depressed and in constant pain. Summers describes the last days of Behn in the introduction to the first edition: "An agonising complication of disorders now gave scant hope of recovery. During her last sickness Dr. Burnet, a figure of no little importance at that moment, kindly enquired after the dying woman. The Pindaric in which she thanks him, and which was printed March, 1689, proved the last poem she herself saw through the press" (liii).

William and Mary were crowned on April 11, 1689. Behn lived for five more days before dying on April 16, 1689 ("Women", *Wordpress*) the end hastened by emotional desperation and physical toil. Behn remained a loyal to James II till her death, "having written just before her death, of Mary as possessing characteristics which she found admirable in James" (ibid.). She is buried in the east cloisters of Westminster Abbey albeit her tomb is not located in the Poet's Corner. A black

marble slab graven ‘Mrs. Aphra Behn Dyed April, 16, A.D. 1689’ marks the spot. Her epitaph read: “Here lies a Proof that Wit can never be/ Defence enough against Mortality” (“Aphra Behn”, *Encyclopedia*). It is presumed that John Hoyle, Behn’s paramour, may have written this.

Sherry Ortner has suggested that, “women have everywhere been devalued in relation to men and such devaluation is linked to a universal association of women with inferior ‘nature’ in contrast to the association of men with superior ‘culture’ ” (9). Ortner’s words appear true to the core when applied to the struggle that Behn had to go through as a woman writer.

Wiesner-Hanks in a brief section in her book *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* contextualises Behn as a female playwright who received mixed reactions. Behn had become a black sheep for having distinguished herself as a libertine writer who often wrote about taboo topics which were reckoned improper for women to speak on. Todd notes that Behn’s plays were rejected by critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the reason that they contain sexual issues. “The combination in her work of much condemned Restoration excess and femaleness ensured that she became a bye-word for lewdness and dissipation”(Todd, *Aphra Behn Studies* 1).

Her persistence in writing for the theatre and earning a living out of it was precisely why her critics condemned her. The muckraking satirist Robert Gould, in a short piece *Satyrical Epistle* castigates her precisely on the ground of the public nature of her occupation that concluded with this couplet: “For Punk and Poetess agree so Pat, / You cannot be This and not be That”(Todd, *Secret* 208). No woman

had dared to venture into the Restoration theatre with such consistency and triumph as Behn did. Aspiring for exposure itself was seen as a monstrous violation of women's sphere and she had embarked on female authorship. "In her case, however, the status of professional writer indicated immodesty: the author, like her texts, became a commodity….As a woman writer in need of money, Behn was vulnerable to accusations of immodesty; to write meant to expose herself, to put herself into circulation" (Diamond 520-536).

Throughout the years there has been a tendency prevalent, to confound and judge an author based on the type of characters created by them. More than terming this as an error, such bad criticism can actually be called evilish or malicious nonsense. Aphra Behn has not been spared. Summers sketches the existence of a caucus which seems painfully true:

> Some have superficially argued from the careless levity of her heroes: the Rover, Cayman, Wittmore, Wilding, Frederick; and again from the delightful insouciance of Lady Fancy, Queen Lucy, and the genteel coquette Mirtilla, or the torrid passions of Angelica Bianca, Miranda and la Nuche; that Aphra herself was little better, in fact a great deal worse, than a common prostitute, and that her works are undiluted pornography.
>
> In her own day, probably for reasons purely political, a noisy clique assailed her on the score of impropriety…and the attack was reinforced by an anecdote of Sir Walter Scott and some female relative who, after having insisted upon the great novelist lending her

> Mrs. Behn, found the *Novels* and *Plays* too loose for her perusal, albeit in the heyday of the lady's youth they had been popular enough. As one might expect, Miss Julia Kavanagh, in the mid-Victorian era (*English Women of Letters* 1863), is sad and sorry at having to mention Mrs. Behn: Even if her life remained pure, it is amply evident her mind was "tainted to the very core. Grossness was congenial to her.... Mrs. Behn's indelicacy was useless and worse than useless, the superfluous addition of a corrupt mind and vitiated taste". (xxviii-xxx)

One can afford to be oblivious to such tolerable criticism, but it is nauseating to read the virulent attack made by a critic like Dr. Doran. In Doran's view, Aphra Behn was corrupted and corrupting, so that he argued:

> The most shameless woman who ever took pen in hand, to corrupt the public […] she might have been an honour to womanhood – she was its disgrace. She might have gained the glory by her labour – but she chose to reap infamy… To all other male writers of her day she served as a provocation and an apology. Intellectually, she was qualified to lead them through pure and bright ways; but she was a mere harlot, who danced through uncleanness, and dare them to follow. Remonstrance was useless with this wanton hussy. (qtd. in Febronia 132)

Discussing women's need for sex was accused as a disguise for an attempt to satiate her own lust and that is precisely why Behn had to receive insults as a

prostitute. Ironically, research suggests that most of her actual sexual activity is only a matter of conjecture. Most of the leading writers of her age had plots centred around sexual adventures, real or imagined. But Behn was the only writer who received vicious attacks even during her pathetic later years. *An Epistle to Julian* (c. 1686-7), paints her as ill, feeble, dying:

> Doth that lewd Harlot, that Poetick Quean,
> Fam'd through *White Fryars*, you know who I mean,
> Mend for reproof, others set up in spight,
> To flux, take glisters, vomits, purge and write.
> Long with a Sciatica she's beside lame,
> Her limbs distortur'd, Nerves shrunk up with pain,
> And therefore I'll all sharp reflections shun,
> Poverty, Poetry, Pox, are plagues enough for one.(qtd. in Summers lvii)

She was charged with spreading pornographic texts in her plays. It is only Behn who had to face such an accusation compared to her contemporary male dramatists. The reason seems to be very clear that in the restoration or for instance in early societies, it was taboo for a woman to speak openly about her secret sexual desires and Behn had dared to do something that her contemporaries,especially men did not fancy much. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies state: "It was not, then, the nature of the writing, whether 'political' or 'spiritual', 'public' or 'private', that determined this response. It was the very existence of writing by women that offended men - not only because it broke the bounds of modesty and silence, but

also because even the most 'private' of texts had overtly 'public' and didactic ends" (207). Behn was the first professional woman writer who dared to openly discuss sexual politics, reveal the secret sufferings of women and depict them in her literary works in passionate terms.

"Behn was often placed in a binary with Katherine Philips, whose representations of chaste, respectable womanhood contrasted sharply with Behn's body of work" ("Women", *Wordpress*) but she was not one to get dispirited or disheartened by this. On the contrary it seemed to give her more power and agency and made her stonger. After quite a few years in the business, satiated by the carping critics , she commented about the outcry against her works in the 1678 play *Sir Patient Fancy*, "That it was bawdy, the least and most excusable fault in the men writers, but from a woman it was unnatural" (7).

The success of her plays brought her money and reputation. She had launched herself as a substantial figure in the literary circle as a wit and a writer. This bought with it a lot of envious attacks to damn her plays and tittle- tattle out of spite. As Jane Spencer opines, "the most extreme male reaction was to deny women's ability to write" (6). Behn had to face charges of plagiarism as well. When her plays succeeded her persistent critics spread an accusation that Aphra Behn was aided in writing plays by the popular dramatist, Edward Ravenscroft and John Hoyle, another wit. There is no solid evidence to warrant this oft repeated statement and it can be ascribed to the unwillingness of the society to acknowledge a woman's talent.

‘The Apotheosis of Milton’ in the Gentleman's magazine of 1738 imagined a fiery eyed and bare breasted Aphra who had tried to join the male poets being told that “none of her sex has any right to a seat there” (Behn, *Oroonoko* 1-2). To make a career out of writing was not an easy task in the seventeenth century for a woman and Behn was frequently set up for attack and ridicule. Behn’s critics without a second thought cast her as the woman who dared to break the custom of ‘silence’ which was prescribed for a female and to go public: the prostitute, a punishment for encroaching on the privilege of men—artistry, poesy and a public voice. Unable to tolerate her freedom and success, a condemnatory practice had begun to encrustate around Aphra. “She was condemned in no small still voice as immoral, loose, scandalous; and writer after writer, leaving her unread, reiterated the charge till it passed into a byword of criticism, and her works were practically taboo in literature, a type and summary of all that was worst and foulest in Restoration days. The absurdities and falsity or this extreme are of course patent now, and it was inevitable the recoil should come” (Summers lx).

Critics and readers have felt that Behn had the tendency to portray a lewd, lascivious rakish figure of women in her works and this consecutively resulted in tarnishing the virtuous and ethical features associated with theatre and literature and thereby interrogating the moral values upheld by society. Contrary to her personal beliefs which upheld women’s freedom and rights, was the society she lived in- a culture where it was mandatory for women to adopt a masculine system of values if her works were to be published and read. Earlier in her career she had to defend herself as just an opportunist, writing to live. The overcomplicated relationships and

plot in her earlier works shows the complications deep down inside her. She projected herself as if in a no-man's land: neither feminist, nor patriarchal-confused loyalties.There was a sort of unwillingness to take a side in the "battle of the sexes" that she staged in the initial years of her career. But "keeping in mind, the patriarchal society in which Aphra Behn lived and the masculine dominated literary world into which she was attempting to forge her way, she couldn't shout overtly pronouncements of female oppression or her plays never would have seen the light of the day. Therefore, she had to maintain a balance between the strictures of patriarchal society and the social commentary of feminist dictum" (Todd, *Oroonoko* 11).

Critics have always disagreed on the nature of Behn's stance on the role of women: "her texts' notoriously ambivalent rendering of female characters makes any firm assessment of Behn's "feminist" sympathies difficult to achieve"(Mintz 3). Anita Pacheco takes up this topic in her essay, "Rape and the Female Subject in *The Rover"*, that "ultimately Behn has only a limited capacity to imagine a distinctly female subjectivity since she ends the play conventionally, making the final impact of the play feeble" (160). The answer to this argument can be found in Jim Lacey's article 'Commodification of Women in *The Rover'* where he suggests: "the bawdiness of her plays kept the male-dominated society laughing, allowing Behn to take her playwriting further into the realm of social commentary, addressing themes that examined the plight that was enslaving women"(qtd. in Baweja). While Behn was clearly uncomfortable with the prevailing and conflicting gender ideologies of her period, the treatment of female characters in her texts suggest that

the readers ought to read between the lines of her misogynist constructions of womanhood in order to understand what actually lies beneath. She engages in the patriarchal ideology and simultaneously demonstrates the inherent defect in this theory, for which she herself and her female characters are proof.

After being a seasoned author, she fiercely fought to make her pursuits in art and politics socially acceptable. She challenged and shattered all roadblocks gradually through her writings by investigating and interrogating women's limited agency in social roles and women's objectification in her later plays such as *The Second Part of The Rover* (1681), *The City Heiress* (1682), and *The Widow Ranter* (1688). She questioned the notions of a typical Restoration play and jolts the traditional structures associated with Restoration stage. Her life was noted for its ambiguity and one could always discover something new in every new reading of Behn: be it the ambiguous social, political and religious interests she held or her interest in women's issues like sexual freedom. Her commercial successes, especially on the stage, exhibit her ability as a writer and her talent to sense precisely the inclination of her audience.

She was not silenced by abuse, neglect or disgust. Nothing could deter her from writing. Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate* (1971) argues that the most fundamentally oppressed people are hence potentially the most revolutionary and this is true in the case of Behn. She was not one to budge to the vehement criticism, she wrote more and more provocative and scandalous drama to enrage her critics and challenge the societal construction and the depraved image gifted to her by them. Behn often bounced back at her haters who judged her based on gender "by

arguing that she wrote to keep herself fed, and "was not ashamed to own it, and consequently ought to write to please (if she can)"" (qtd. in "Women", *Wordpress*). Adding on, in her poem "Epilogue Spoken by Mrs. Gwin", she retaliated:

> To all the men of wit we will subscribe:
> But for you half wits, you unthinking tribe,
> We'll let you see, what e'er besides we do,
> 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. (*Oroonoko* 329)

Through these lines, Behn asserts her stand that playwriting was a trivial business and as long as she produced works that were enjoyable, her gender should not matter. She maintained this as her standard line of defense till the end of her life. The attacks and accusations against her seemed to have continued without fail. Ten years later in the preface to *The Lucky Chance*; she fended off charges of lewdness:

> Had the plays I have writ come forth under any man's name, and never known to have been mine; I appeal to all unbiased judges of sense, if they had not said that person had made as many good comedies, as any one man that has writ in our age; but a devil on't the woman damns the poet. . . . All I ask, is the privilege for my masculine part, the poet in me (if any such you will allow me), to tread in those successful paths my predecessors have so long thrived in …I value fame as much as if I had been born a hero; and if you rob

> me of that, I can retire from the ungrateful world, and scorn its fickle favors. (LC 165)

Behn seems to have aggressively trained her senses to be dominated by masculine capacities. In her article, "'I By a DoubleRight Thy Bounties Claim': Aphra Behn and Sexual Space," Jessica Munns claims that Behn's masculinity is clear when she "gives her females energies, powers, and possibilities that were only allowed to men," and presents "images of women released from the constraints of a male-inscribed femininity" which "elevate womanhood in terms of its conventional attributes: domesticity, softness, chastity, modesty and fidelity" (205). Helene Cixous acutely remarks that,

> Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away – that's how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak – even just open her mouth – in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine. ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 351)

It can be rightly said that the alter ego of male that she tries to display is a strategy employed by the author to overcome the female limits prescribed by society. She was Astrea, muse of a lost golden age who could combine "Female Sweetness and a Mainly Grace."(Febronia 67)

Fighting for survival and aggressively defending herself from charges of plagiarism and lewdness became a sort of daily routine for Aphra. Though *The Rover was* founded on Killigrew, with rare skill she had put new wine into an old bottle. The critics pounced on her and began to attack her on this point. Ultimately satiated with all the venom, she took up cudgels to defend her play from charges of being a mere alteration of Killigre's *Thomaso*, in the form of a letter to her friend, Mrs. Emily Price. Behn seemed to have realised her value as a writer and publicly regarded her work to have merit. In the letter she writes:

> My Dear,
>
> In your last, you inform'd me, that the World treated me as a *Plagiery*, and, I must confess, not with Injustice: But that Mr. *Otway* shou'd say, my Sex wou'd not prevent my being pull'd to Pieces by the Criticks, is something odd, since whatever Mr. *Otway* now declares, he may very well remember when last I saw him, I receiv'd more than ordinary Encomiums on my *Abdelazer*, But every one knows Mr. *Otway's* good Nature, which will not permit him to shock any one of our Sex to their Faces. But let that pass: For being impeach'd of murdering my *Moor*, I am thankful, since, when I shall let the World know, whenever I take the Pains next to appear in Print, of the mighty Theft I have been guilty of; But however for your own Satisfaction, I have sent you the Garden from whence I gather'd, and I hope you will not think me vain, if I say, I have weeded and

> improv'd it. I hope to prevail on the Printer to reprint *The Lust's Dominion*, &c., that my theft may be the more publick. But I detain you. I believe I sha'n't have the Happiness of seeing my dear *Amillia* 'till the middle of *September*: But be assur'd I shall always remain as I am,
>
> Yours, A. Behn. (qtd. in Summers xxxvii-xxxviii)

Nicole Stodard in her *wordpress* article tries decoding the strange salutation "Good, Sweet, Honey, Sugar-candied READER", in the prefatory epistle in Behn's play, *The Dutch Lover:*

> This cloying example by Behn highlights the posture and exposes the author's real resentment and sarcasm. There were several reasons for Behn's tone here…. For one, she objects to the idea that playwrights with a formal education penned better plays; or rather that formal education was necessary for playwriting. For another, she challenges the persisting idea, dating back to Horace, that plays were meant to 'instruct and delight,' arguing instead that they were meant for entertainment purposes only. For a third, she complains about discrimination against female authors…to evince this, Behn comically describes a "phlegmatick, white, ill-favour'd, wretched Fop" whom she encountered one night at the theatre, who announced "They were to expect a woful Play…for it was a womans". (Stodard)

A review of the works of Behn's male contemporaries leads to the judgement that wanton and bawdy scenes were not at all rare in the works of Dryden, Vanbrugh, Otway, Ravenscroft, Wycherley or Shadwell and in some cases were far more boorish and daring than what was found in Behn. This disparity in judgement can be explained as the biased stratification system based on gender. In her preface to *The Lucky Chance*, Behn touches upon the hypocrisy of gendering writing as a masculine profession: "I would sum up all your Beloved Plays, and all the things in them that are past with such Silence by; because written by Men: such Masculine Strokes in me, must not be allow'd" (397). Behn's plea to 'thrive' writing for the stage acknowledges the "limits" a potential professional female author had to face. Simone De Beauvoir unfolds her philosophical theory about the 'Other' in *The Second Sex* (1949) which bears on this stratification of genders. The woman is sidelined as the passive object, inferior and subordinate who lacks the qualities that Man, the dominant one exhibit. Such a social pattern confers legitimacy to those in power (men) and this mostly remains unchallenged because only they have the privilege to alter those structures. This explains why Behn was consistently attacked whereas male writers were glorified and put on a pedestal. So, if the reader is fair enough in analysing the accusations against Behn's literary output by comparing it with the theatre of her age, one can easily give her a clean chit for one can never locate any vulgarity that the critics till date has lead us to anticipate and deplore. In short, it was not her salaciousness that irked critics, but her success, free spirit and carefree attitude.

One could say that in order to avoid all the censure she received during her times, Behn could have considered the social situation or the preferences of her contemporary authors. But she chose to make bold discussions about the pertaining issues like women's rights as per her own comprehension of life. She could not have cared less whether anybody liked or appreciated her works. She infringed all the set standards by composing works regardless of the heavy criticism and attack from fellow writers like Alexander Pope who mocked her in his poem 'Imitations of Horace,':"The stage how loosely does Astrea tread, / Who fairly puts all characters to bed!"(290-91). She paid no heed to the hatred campaign staged against her by her peers and continued forward with all vitality, overcoming all hurdles and churning out one work after the other till her last breath. She was an iron lady in that, anyone, especially a woman in the seventeenth century could easily be bogged down by the volume of negativity she had to tackle throughout her literary life, yet she managed to cling on. She shielded and defended her profession with great elan.

> She can be compared to the warrior woman described by Simon Shepherd: She is a woman who, like the warrior, can insist on the sexual duel; she can insist on equal conditions of battle, whether physical or intellectual. To do this revalues the woman. But such equal battles are too often denied by the male world. Males assume a dominance that is physical, intellectual and sexual; they assume that they are the norm, that their value judgments are correct. It is rare that the male assumptions are put to the trial of strength. (Febronia 82)

Mrs. Montague Summers describes Behn as

> one of the most social and convivial of women, a thorough Tory… warm helper and ally of every struggling writer….She was of a generous and open Temper, something passionate, very serviceable to her Friends in all that was in her Power; and could sooner forgive an Injury, than do one. She had Wit, Honour, Good-Humour, and Judgment….A graceful, comely woman, merry and buxom, with brown hair and bright eyes, candid, sincere, a brilliant conversationalist in days when conversation was no mere slipshod gabble of slang but cut and thrust of poignant epigram and repartee; warm-hearted, perhaps too warm-hearted, and ready to lend a helping hand even to the most undeserving, a quality which gathered all Grub Street round her door. (lii-liv)

For almost two centuries after Behn's death, history was keen on burying an artistic genius like Aphra Behn. Her work did survive for some years after she died. "But as the eighteenth century ushered in ideals of extreme feminine modesty and delicacy, Behn came to be regarded as even lewder than she had been in her lifetime" ("Women", *Wordpress*). The "general distaste for the rakish Restoration" (ibid.) that developed in the nineteenth century led to the omission of Behn's works altogether from literature, stating raunchiness. However, during the early twentieth century, there developed a repulse against the conservatism of the Victorian age, and a new interest in Behn's works was noticed. Gradually, after the onset of the Second Wave of feminism, Behn became one of the important Restoration writers being taught about, "a political writer of stature, whose work revealed a growing sense of

the power of art to influence politics and national culture" (Todd *Oxford*). Janet Todd asserts that, "She was seen as woman of letters, a huge influence on the Restoration theatre, from whose history she had largely been omitted by earlier critics, as well as a major force in the development of the early British novel" (ibid.).

Behn's life was a continuous battle against overpowering hardships, misfortunes and incessant hard work. One cannot ignore the resolve of this woman, who struggled every phase of her life and was courageous enough to be a one-woman army fighting against a sea of troubles and a never ending, persistent battalion of attackers. She not only stands tall even in this twenty-first century as the first woman in England to turn to writing as a profession, but also as the first woman to emerge amongst all hardships to an apogee in the world of English literature. Her name was a word to conjure with for the booksellers of her times and now her popularity is so enormous that her name is a word to conjure with for all lovers of literature.

Fielding, Sir Walter Scott and Macaulay has admired and warmly acknowledged and praised the reach of Aphra Behn. Modern literary circle views her works as a landmark in the history of fiction. Ranked with the greatest dramatists of her day, Behn's lyrics are praised for its mystifying beauty and her fiction for its skilled and expert technique. Traduced and shirked for the longest time, in this modern century, she has vindicated for herself. She has attained an honourable and high place in the history of our glorious literature which is her rightful claim.

In this context, one cannot avoid Claire Hansen's description of the performance of *The Rover*, directed by Eamon Flack at Belvoir Theatre in Sydney

on 1 July, 2017. According to Hansen, Flack deftly presents Behn's work in a relevant and clever way.

> It starts unexpectedly, with long-dead 17th-century playwright Aphra Behn walking onstage – staring down the audience in a gaudy gold gown, beverage in hand, vivacious and unapologetic. She challenges us to accept a play by a female playwright: "Men are but Bunglers, when they wou'd express/ The sweets of Love, the dying tenderness; /But Women, by their own abundance, measure,/And when they write, have deeper sense of Pleasure*".* She then exhorts those in the audience who do not like the prospect of a female playwright to, in her words, "fuck off". When nobody chooses to do so, Behn allows the play to start. (Hansen)

This irreverent and hilarious tactic is utterly reminiscent of and pays homage to a fiery personality like Behn. "It is a rare case where the drama of a playwright's biography competes with the drama of the play" (ibid.).

Virginia Woolf rightly said in her *A Room of One's Own*: "And with Mrs. Behn we turn a very important corner on the road….for here begins the freedom of the mind, or rather the possibility that in the course of time the mind will be free to write what it likes"(62). "Behn alone did not break this barrier for women, but she certainly exerted her agency in a way that few women could or would at the time….She nearly always engaged with power in some form, and-true to form for such a complex figure-constantly complicated ideas of gender and politics in her works"("Women", *Wordpress*).

Chapter 2

A Study of Psyche: The Scheming, Villainous Heroines or the 'Femme Fatales'

The double standards in judging and categorising women have existed for centuries. The good-bad dichotomy promoted by this double standard encourages the notion that female sexuality should be controlled at any cost, that a woman's worth is defined according to her sexual virtue. Women who give in to emotions are branded as 'loose' and 'promiscuous' which serves as a justification for scorning, despising and dismissing them. This idea is beautifully blended into the narrative of many of Aphra Behn's works without discussing it formally. This chapter focuses on two such works: *The Fair Jilt (1688)* and *The History of the Nun or The Fair Vow Breaker* (1689*)* and the portrayal of scheming villainous women characters in these two stories. They appear respectable and sincere but often it is just a facade. They are women who go to any extent to attain what they want.

The chapter attempts a feminist examination of the complicated psychology of Isabella and Miranda. The heroines, Miranda in *The Fair Jilt* and Isabella in *The History of the Nun or The Fair Vow Breaker* are manipulative people who play the victim. They can be passive, aggressive or pleasant one minute and standoffish the next and vicious the next. They are relentless in the pursuit of what they want and have no regard for whoever gets hurt along the way. They believe that their way of handling a situation is the only way because it means that their needs are being met, and that is all that matters. Ultimately in all situations and relationships they think

only about themselves, and the consequences of their actions on others really does not matter. They usually hide behind a veneer of what appears to be socially acceptable behavior. The heroines in these works are not identifiable with the seventeenth century women; rather they serve as a contrast. These women do not indulge in any persistent battle or decisive war, but in the end they emerge as winners: lovable in spite of their odious past, determined and resolute. The characters lead their lives according to their own will but are grief stricken and disillusioned towards the end of the work. The common strain in these two works arise where the characters who formerly led an unrestrained life, repent their sinful past, and even go to the extent of giving empowered speeches which conquer everyone's heart. Negative stereotypes are rewritten in these literary productions. Redefining female villainy as a form of victimisation, portraying how the actions of 'wicked' women are often the end result of their confinement and suffocation within male-dominated ideologies form the crux of this chapter.

The Freudian school of psychology states that the unconscious controls the vast majority of a person's behaviour. This Freudian model of the mind, Freud's views on male and female sexuality and the concept of Eros and Thanatos helps to identify and analyse the unconscious psyche .The psychoanalytic conception of the mind, and of the drama of human development allows us to understand the ways in which the stories and characters we read and study map on to broader human experience and processes and to find solutions to the conflicts that are part of all human communities. This theory of psychoanalysis is used to decipher the two heroines, Isabella and Miranda. A careful perusal of Isabella and Miranda is made in

order to deconstruct each character and probe the conformity- resistance or the Id - Ego clash exhibited by the characters.

Aphra Behn published the novella, *The History of the Nun, or The Fair Vow Breaker* in 1689, and it comes under the genre of amatory fiction. It is the story of Isabella, her desire to uphold society's expectation of being a virtuous woman, her love and passion towards Henault for whom she breaks her vows as a nun, her scheming self trying to maintain her reputation and get away with the murder of two husbands and finally her imminent downfall. This story depicts the transformation of a simple, pious young woman into a despicable, almost soulless murderer. Isabella was brought up in a nunnery which gave her a perspective of life through the eyes of religion. But as a grown up, the outside world begins to exert its influence on her. She is changed and her fall is into the dark abyss of her own guilt. "*The History of the Nun* is a rather wry rumination upon the distance between the image of the ideal woman as envisaged by society and the flawed reality stemming from a very human nature" ("The History", *Wordpress*).

Isabella is sent to a nunnery by her father Count Herrick de Vallary, with a provision that she can decide for herself whether she wants to become a nun or not when she turns thirteen. Isabella has such beauty, piety and genius that win her many suitors including the eighteen year old Villenoy, all of whom she turns down. Instead of opting for a lavish lifestyle, she hands off all her inheritance to the nunnery and chooses to be a nun.

After some time, Isabella falls for Bernardo Henault, brother of a nun called Katteriena who is Isabella's bed companion and dearest friend. She makes a decision

to break her vows and flee the nunnery with Henault. The one who is trusted with the keys to the convent also steals from the nunnery. As a result both of them are disowned by their families, and they struggle to make a living by farming, failing at which, times get hard and the couple are struck by poverty. Isabella secures pardon from her aunt, Lady Abbess but Henault's father is furious with him for he has led a woman to break her vows to god. In order to win the favour of his father and thereby his fortune and inheritance, Henault joins the army according to his father's counsel, where he meets Villenoy. Villenoy is the same man who "…fell at last into a Feaver; and 'twas the whole Discourse of the Town, That Villenoys was dying for the Fair Isabella" (HN 271).

Henault is presumed dead in the war. This tragedy restores Isabella's public reputation relinquished by her elopement from the nunnery. Villenoy returns to console Isabella, whom he still loves exceedingly. Isabella lived in a culture which encouraged the material dependence of noble and genteel women upon fathers, husbands, brothers. Deprived of her husband, impoverished and unwilling to return to the nunnery, Isabella realistically has no choice but to marry Villenoy. He wins her hand and Isabella agrees for marriage after three years of grieving for her dead husband. Villenoy who was the "most indulgent and indearing Man in the World" (308) pleads to be with her in her period of mourning and they eventually marry and live a life of happiness and luxury. Isabella dedicates herself to devotion and charity:

> She had no Discontent, but because she was not bless'd with a Child; but she submits to the pleasure of Heaven, and endeavour'd, by her good Works, and her Charity, to make the Poor her Children, and was

> ever doing Acts of Virtue, to make the Proverb good, That more are the Children of the Barren, than the Fruitful Woman. (310)

Seven years later, Henault who was presumed dead in the war, returns after escaping from his enslavement and visits Isabella at their old home bringing with him their wedding ring " with Isabella's name and hair in it"(HN 311) in case she didn't recognise him. He explains what he had endured being taken as a slave, after the war. Isabella is shocked to see him. She offers him a bed to sleep and makes plans to get rid of him without any reminiscence of the love filled past times they spent together. She decides to "strangle him, or smother him with a Pillow" (316) fearing public scrutiny and shaming for committing bigamy. She suffocates him with a pillow while he sleeps tiredly. Before she gets time to hide her crime, Villenoy who was supposed to be out of town for a week returns unexpectedly. Isabella tells him about Henault's return and lies that he died of grief after discovering that she had remarried. She hysterically pleads with Villenoy. Out of love for Isabella and to save her from societal censure, Villenoy decides to throw Henault's body into the river himself. But Isabella has other plans. She stages the death of Villenoy to save herself from any of his future reproach:

> …fill'd with Thoughts all Black and Hellish, she ponder'd within, while the Fond and Passionate Villenoys was endeavouring to hide her Shame, and to make this an absolute Secret: She imagin'd, that could she live after a Deed so black, Villenoys would be eternal reproaching her, if not with his Tongue, at least with his Heart, and embolden'd by one Wickedness, she was the readier for another …

> When he had the Sack on his Back, and ready to go with it, she cry'd, "Stay, my Dear, some of his Clothes hang out, which I will put in; and with that, taking the Pack-needle with the Thread, sew'd the Sack, with several strong Stitches, to the Collar of Villenoy's Coat, without his perceiving it, and bid him go now; and when you come to the Bridge, (said she) and that you are throwing him over the Rail, (which is not above Breast high) be sure you give him a good swing….(HN 318)

Isabella sews Villenoy's collar into the canvas bag in which Henaults body was placed, so that he will be dragged along with the body when he throws it into the river. Her plot works and both of them die. Villenoy, doing what his wife asked of him, not only throws Henault's body off the bridge, but himself as well. Authorities identify a dead body as Villenoy and the other is assumed as an unknown stranger. Isabella is popular for her pious reputation and so nobody suspects her. She maintains her innocence in the eyes of the community.

The whole thing would have remained her secret, but for the arrival of a French man who knew Henault from the war and identifies his corpse. Upon this, authorities question Isabella, who confesses immediately without any fuss, of having murdered two husbands in a night and is convicted for execution.

> The whole World stood amaz'd at this; who knew her Life a Holy and Charitable Life, and how dearly and well she had liv'd with her Husbands, and every one bewail'd her Misfortune, and she alone was the only Person, that was not afflicted for her self….While she was in

> Prison, she was always at Prayers, and very Chearful and Easie, distributing all she had amongst, and for the Use of, the Poor of the Town, especially to the Poor Widows; exhorting daily, the Young, and the Fair, that came perpetually to visit her, never to break a Vow: for that was first the Ruine of her, and she never since prosper'd, do whatever other good Deeds she could…. (323)

Before she dies she gives an admirable, eloquent and empowered speech about the importance of keeping one's vows, after which "she was generally Lamented, and Honourably Bury'd" (HN 324). Even after her cunning treacherous deeds, she conquers everyone with her words of wisdom at the end and wins martyrdom. In this way, she keeps her beauty undiminished from the audience mind, and they cry and mourn for her.

Though the novel comes across as a sad, cautionary morality tale on the importance of vows, there are other ways to read it. The novel which seems to be a heavy-handed morality tale on a superficial level, essentially explores the contradictions in a woman's life. Isabella is the virtuous near-perfect girl, "who had no equals" (267) whom her father raises for the nunnery. She proves to be a prodigy and a beauty during her youth. She is the most coveted woman in town and all men sob and sigh when she takes oath to become a nun. She is devoutly dedicated to the church, but winds up in the end involved in a double murder and is condemned to be beheaded. The story also analyses the victimhood of the titular nun as she overlooks her personal motivations in an effort to maintain social expectations. The crime committed by Isabella can be interpreted as her rebellion against the men in her life

(her father, Henault, Henault's father, Villenoy) who have controlled and influenced her and those who may do so throughout her life. It is her subconscious way of gaining complete freedom from all those who may manipulate her in future. Considering the historical events and age in which Behn lived, "this criminal protagonist is said to be a social critique on the denial of women's freedom of emotions, their position in society and perhaps even represent British subjects in the monarchy" ("The History", *Wikispaces*). Every step that Isabella takes is horrific and extreme due to a social order that allows women no freedom of choice over their own lives.

Isabella murders Henault out of fear of being shamed for bigamy. "Shame and Confusion fill'd her Soul….She finds, by his Return, she is not only expos'd to all the Shame imaginable; to all the Upbraiding, on his part, when he shall know she is marry'd to another; but all the Fury and Rage of Villenoys, and the Scorn of the Town, who will look on her as an Adulteress…" (HN 312). 'Shame' is a huge social construct. Isabella would have been able to embrace her changing values and desires if she could live off the tangent of societal expectations, but in the face of this conflict between her own values and the rules set by social institutions, the conflict proves too much to allow Isabella to think logically. An article in *literaryramblings* rightly states:

> The work reads as an example of proto-feminism as it is the female form that is idealised and praised, and it is not until it is suffocated in social constructs of patriarchal institutions like the church or marriage that this innate beauty is destroyed…it becomes clear that Behn is

> framing feminine nature as an entity to be prized, but one that is instead corrupted by patriarchal constructs that suffocate the virtue inherent in feminine nature, and thereby destroying it. (Horn)

In short, it is the ironic story of a woman so desperate to maintain her respectability and reputation that she resorts to murder.

Isabella is presented as a person whose wit and talents have no equals. It was not uncommon for such a compliment to be paid to a woman, but normally gender specific comparisons are made that specified that a woman had no equals 'among women', but Behn does not add this. She simply states that Isabella had no equals. Her aunt, the Lady Abbess, recognises Isabella's prodigious potential, and "omitted nothing that might adorn her Mind" (HN 267). This kind of priority given to a woman's mind, and not simply her beauty or her clichéd leisurely hobbies such as drawing, singing or painting which women indulged in, suggests that Isabella's mind was deserving of access to academia. Such education was not common for women and by suggesting this; Behn is positioning women as intellectually equal to men. It was not just the female intellect that Behn advocates was equal to or greater than the male counterpart. She also boldly writes that "Women are by Nature more Constant and Just, than Men" (263). This statement places the nature of women as fairer than that of their male counterpart. This is reinforced when the narrator states that she "must leave the Young Nuns inclos'd to their best Endeavours, of making a Virtue of Necessity; and the young Wives, to make the best of a bad Market" (265). This phrase suggests the pool of aristocratic men who comprise what amounts to a 'bad market' for their female counterparts, again framing the men as inferior, and

the women who are forced to keep their virtue since they have to enter a nunnery out of necessity. Behn clearly sees the male population as a corrupting-force that is inferior to the female population in terms of constancy of emotions, justness and virtue, perhaps a little ironic considering how this specific narrative ends. Even before the reader discovers the fall of Isabella, Behn frames this change as the result of her interactions with men as she states that the women who change, do so because " their first Lovers teach them the trick of Change"(263). The novel reveals the means by which a woman of unusual piety, generosity and virtue becomes a vow breaker, a bigamist and a murderess. Behn attributes Isabella's downfall to social circumstance.

Jaqueline Pearson makes an interesting observation about this in the book *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*:

> … this simple moralising is repeatedly contained and subverted, so that the novella's whole significance is altered. This begins as early as the dedication to Hortense Mancini, Duchess of Mazarin. Victim of an arranged marriage to a cruel, jealous, autocratic husband… (she) fled to England and became one of Charles II's mistresses.The dedication with its convincing respect for Mancini, gives a different stance to a tale ostensibly about broken vows, suggesting that subjection to the church or to a husband need not necessarily be a virtue and that what the world calls female guilt may be understood in completely different ways. Behn's dedication to Mancini …who has flamboyantly abandoned her husband and yet retains the

> admiration of the writer suggests unconventional ways of reading the tale's female bigamist…. (Pearson 244-245)

Pearson too takes up for discussion Behn's authoritative introduction in which male example provides an alibi for female broken vows. "What Man that does not boast of the Numbers he has…Ruin'd…? Nay. What Woman, almost, has not a pleasure in Deceiving, taught, perhaps, at first, by some dear false one…? Here Behn does not exemplify female vice, but defends women by attacking male infidelity. In the novel, the reader can sense a strong undercurrent that justifies and sympathises with female infidelity. Women are identified with a specific female nature of compassion and benevolence, and apparent flaws are attributed to patriarchy…" (264).

Gender asymmetry or double standards in judging morality is discussed by Tonya Howe as 'Behn's appropriation of Augustine?'

> This Augustine who had made love to women and perhaps to men, who could not control his own sexual problems, who was constantly torn between lust and frustration, who could in all sincerity pray: 'Give me chastity . . . . , but not yet!', who only became devout after he had ravished whores to his heart's content, when his weakness for women, as so often happens to older men in later life, turned into the opposite . . . this Augustine created the classic patristic doctrine on sin, a morality in which especially sexual desire was condemned. Augustine has influenced Christian morality decisively, as well as the sexual frustrations of millions of Europeans unto our own day. (qtd. in Howe)

But the same society which upheld Augustine, staunchly believed that a woman's honour was so fragile that once broken, it could never be regained. One cannot resist quoting Mary Wollstonecraft here:

> …the grand source of female depravity, namely the impossibility of regaining respectability by a return to virtue, although men preserve theirs during the indulgence of vice. This made it natural for women to try to preserve something that when lost can never be regained, namely reputation for chastity; this became the one thing needed by the female sex, and the concern for it swallowed up every other concern. (72)

The History of the Nun is a sort of discourse upon the unrealistic expectations placed by society upon women in order to achieve the end goal of being termed "good". Isabella's craving to present herself as a woman of immaculateness and religious dedication propels her to appalling crimes."It is hard to comprehend what message Behn wanted the reader to take away from this unreasonably amusing weird story. Certainly it is difficult to believe that she intended it to be taken seriously as a warning against the perils of vow-breaking" ("The History", *Wordpress*).

This work which can be termed 'Behn's fictional laboratory of social conformity' (Horn) showcases how human constructs (mostly patriarchal, in this case) often counteract human nature which creates unnecessary conflicts that would otherwise be so easily resolved. Behn argues that such human constructs cause more harm than good and calls into question the value of these constructs.

An important symbol used in the novel is that of 'needle work'. Traditionally, sewing connotes meekness and domesticity. During her married life to Villenoy, whenever he went hunting, Isabella used to shut herself up in her room and engage in "innocent diversions of fine Work at which she was Excellent" (HN 311). Hereby, Behn presents Isabella as meek, chaste, unquestioning and subdued – a conventional wife, perfectly in sync with her domestic life. Little does a reader expect it to be fraught with irony when she uses needlework as a weapon to murder her second husband. Fate is seen as a sewing woman like Isabella in the lines "…when Fate begins to afflict, she goes through stitch with her Black Work" (318). Pearson says: "…needlework, conventionally an image of female subordination, becomes a locus of female power. Such paradoxes emphasise Isabella's ambiguous status as virtuous murderess, innocent adulteress" (248).

At the outset itself Behn states: "I could wish, for the prevention of abundance of Mischiefs and Miseries, that Nunneries and Marriages were not to be enter'd into, till the Maid, so destin'd, were of a mature Age to make her own Choice; and that parents would not make use of their justly assum'd authority to compel their children, neither to the one or the other…" (HN 265). The novel demonstrates how children at the age of thirteen are ill-equipped to make life-long vows, even when they are as exceptional as Isabella. At the age of thirteen, she is asked to take a decision that would guide her life forever. It is when she meets the handsome Henault that she realises that she had made a wrong decision. She gives in to love and elopes with him. After marrying him, she feels that their love is sinful. This

leads to her hardships, bigamy and homicide and she loses complete control of her destiny.

Guilt heaps up- about the betrayal of vows, stealing, breaking the trust of her family and she tries to repress it. This makes her a woman who has no control over her senses, cannot take sensible decisions and she undertakes the most loathsome path-from one sin to another, from one heinous crime to another. The reader shockingly witnesses Isabella planning the murder of Henault, executing the crime, attaching his dead body to Villenoys with cruel cunning, and her foolproof plan of concealing the truth to the society and even the maids in her home. She fools even Maria who she is so close to, and witnesses half of the events. Ridden with guilt and fear of public infamy, Isabella single-handedly sets both the murders into motion.

Guilt can either paralyse or catalyse a person into action. Isabella's guilt on breaking her vows to god was always exerting persistent pressure on her from which she sought an outlet in some form. So she found solace in acts of charity after her marriage to Villenoy. Towards the end of the novel, the same guilt paralyses her sensibility leading her to commit murder. The guilt in her subconscious mind makes her believe that fate is the reason she commits such horrendous premeditated crimes against the men who loved her more than themselves. Her tragedy is ascribed to Fate, by Isabella: "what fate, what destiny is mine? Under what cursed planet was I born, that Heaven itself could not divert my ruin?" (HN 320). Regardless of her motive, 'fate' can never be termed as a cause for her deeds because all her deeds are consciously committed ones. Till the tragic comedown, Isabella is seen as a lady of virtue. She constantly questions her own morals and concepts of sin. In believing

fate to be the influence for her crimes, her mind absolves herself of guilt. She yearns to maintain her innocence in the eyes of the community. She perceives herself as blameless and her conscious mind does not acknowledge the guilt. She tries to free herself from taking responsibility for the actions and she tries to picture herself as a victim of fate, instead of recognising her sin. Blaming herself would shatter the identity she has created for herself- of being a saintly, pious and innocent woman. When all the other aspects of her life can be attributed to people who guided her and influenced the decisions that she made, the murders are solely her choice by freewill and therefore wholly her responsibility since she has elaborately planned the crimes herself .

With Henault's return, Isabella is terrified at two possible prospects. First is of societal reproach and second is of losing Villenoy's love, her comfortable lifestyle and public reputation. " She sees Henault poor, and knew, she must fall from all the Glory and Tranquility she had for five happy Years triumph'd in…"(312). So she decides that "the only means of removing all Obstacles to her future Happiness" (315) is to smother Henault. She plans Villenoy's murder because she is terrified that his reproach would be a block in her future happiness. But her mind needs the excuse of fate in order to commit the odious crimes so that her conscience remains unscarred.

Pleasure and pain are blended in every scene of Isabella's life. Isabella is perplexed in almost every important situation: when she starts her affair with Henault; when Villenoy proposes for marriage; when Henault returns and Villenoy unexpectedly turns up at home just after she murders Henault. "Behn's heroine is

extremely fickle, ‘directs a capacity for violence outwards’, and ‘is frantic with conflicting emotions’. In spite of being an excellent, virtuous, generous girl, Isabella stubbornly follows her changing inclinations” (Artal 156).There is a constant struggle between the mind and heart. The torment that results from following one’s heart over doing what is politically correct causes tremendous suffering to Isabella. This struggle turns a passionate young girl, a devout woman into committing dreadful crimes of passion. This conundrum is a result of the cultural stunting that women underwent at that time. Isabella comes across as a woman who makes free, rational choices, in the beginning of this novel. But what follows gives us a picture of an Isabella who suffers trying to conform to conventional gender role conceptions and is baffled and overwhelmed by incapacitating emotions. Finally she rejects the attempts made by religious, educational, legal and societal authorities to make her conform to a morality she found impossible to live by anymore.

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and method which contain important concepts and ideas about socialisation into gender roles and about sexuality comes handy in decoding a woman like Isabella.

> Psychoanalysis puts into question the modernist idea of the individual ‘self’ as a coherent agent. In its place is a sense of the ‘self’ as in a state of inner conflict, as split, as confused and not in full control….The Freudian notion of the unconscious introduces a new conception of the ‘self’ as disjointed, not in full control of its own desires or actions. (Bocock xii)

Isabella is raised among the nuns and this may be a reason for her denying a preference for worldly pleasures because she is so naive and inexperienced at the time when she decides to take the vows. Two years she devotes to the demands of her order and then she repents having chosen a religious life, when she meets Henault. Isabella tries to defy her sexuality, but her unconscious mind craves the ecstasy it brings. So, she ends up suffering in her resistance. The tragic turn of events shows how dangerous it is to pressurise young girls who are immature and inexperienced to take life changing decisions without being aware of the temptations that the world holds for them.

Isabella has spent her whole life without a proper family system or parental love. Problems for children who grow without parents are evident not only on an individual level, but reflect and manifest themselves in a social and community context. They have no stable role models to advise them and whom they can look up to, which makes it more difficult for adolescents to develop a stable personality, and in Isabella's case, the authority or the head of the family, her father, had dodged from a father's responsibilities and duties .

> …the model of the "only child", being isolated and closed to the social world, is associated with a delay in the transition to adulthood. Adolescence becomes longer, and a new phase of the life cycle emerges: the phase of the young adult. It stands between adolescence and maturity, which includes the assumption of responsibility at both a working and emotional level, making the whole process even more complex. (Mangeli)

It is at this complex stage that Isabella takes a big step in her life, to be a nun, and it was bound to fail and end up a blunder. She is a child who has lived in an environment devoid of resources for physical and psycho-emotional well-being that supports the formation of personality and potential to be expressive. Such situations develop depressive, psychosomatic disorders, phobias, distrust of adults, regressive behaviour, inability in the regulation and control of emotions, inability to socialise and deviant and delinquent aspects in teenagers (ibid.) and this becomes true in Isabella's case when she suffers diminished self-concept, and compromised physical and emotional security.

Parental involvement is critical to children's well-being. Children consistently report feeling abandoned when their parents are not involved in their lives, struggling with their emotions and episodic bouts of self-loathing and behavioural problems. In an attempt to disguise her underlying fears, resentments, anxieties and unhappiness, Isabella projects herself as an introvert and never really opened up to others. She always carried the feeling that she was damaged or unwanted. That might be the reason why Isabella goes out of the way to conform to society-even if it meant killing people and maintain her reputation, just to be accepted since she feared standing out alone.

Life plays out really tricky when paternal protection, support and resources are missing from her life.

> A fatherless daughter can experience several layers of loss, rendering them trauma survivors from a young age. The impact of the trauma affects her at every major developmental phase of her life. Fatherless

> daughters were shown to miss out on gaining a sense of security in life, as they missed out on having him in the home as their protector. They also reported missing out on learning positive masculine behaviours, specific social skills and a comfort with male-female relationships because their fathers were not there to teach them…one major experience that sets fatherless women apart from their fathered counterparts: their loss caused emotions that were too difficult to handle and thus, were pushed underground, not being adequately dealt with at the time of the loss. As the daughter grows into a woman, these repressed emotions tend to bubble to the surface as a result of another significant trauma, loss or abandonment. This lack of understanding of her current emotional reaction -- often seen as *over-reaction* to others -- can leave her feeling guilty, isolated, misunderstood, and sometimes out of control.(Babul)

Isabella's tragic life experiences can be post-traumatic triggers that unearth pain hidden since she was a child.

In this context, Tonya Howe discusses an important symbol used in the novel which is 'folding in the arms':

> This could have a double meaning in this story. It could mean both a friendly gesture and sexual desire. When Katteriena embraces Isabella (mentioned in several passages) she may have had the intentions of a lover. Katteriena is the only person with which she has some intimacy. Isabella had lost her mother when she was just 2

> years old, and her father withdrew to a religious life after that. She grew up in a nunnery and was totally unaware of the passions of love, concern, care etc which she gets only through the bonding with Katteriena and gradually Henault. Henault may be seen as Katteriena's alter ego in the eyes of Isabella, someone who could provide the warmth of the relationship that she enjoyed with Katteriena and could take her to the next level of a relationship. Isabella was always unaware about the intensity of emotional bondings and relationship and may be just like a plant grows to the direction in which it gets sunlight; she was lured and tempted to Henault. Isabella - The character herself is symbolic of suffering itself as a source of power, 17th century feminism, or a mechanism of social critique. (Howe)

Behn's narrative offers a great deal of insight into the concept of 'childhood' in an era before it was understood as it is, today. Isabella loses her mother when she was just a toddler and at the age of two her father sends her to the nunnery because he wants to evade the responsibility of raising a child and goes off to join the Jesuits. At the age of thirteen, being just a teen, she is pressurised to decide whether to take her vows as a nun, or pursue marriage. From the contemporary perspective, she is just a child and giving her such a huge responsibility is itself absurd. Science has demonstrated that cognitive functions are not fully developed until the twenties and experience to take life's decisions can take even longer. Behn shows how in her era,

no such lenience was made and in most cases life affecting decisions was made before puberty had passed.

At a very young age her piety, beauty and oratory skills makes Isabella a celebrity and she is praised as a 'mistress of the arts' (HN 267). This garners a lot of attention from young men whose parents aspired to make Isabella their daughter-in-law. The description of less than thirteen year old Isabella is also of a sexual nature : " …with the finest shape that Fancy can create, with all the adornment of a perfect brown hair'd beauty, eyes black and lovely, Complexion fair, to a miracle, all her features of the Rarest proportion…she had a thousand Persons fighting for love of her…."(HN 269). So many men (read boys) had taken an interest-both marital and sexual - in Isabella and this is disconcerting because she hadn't even reached puberty. Back then it was a normal practice, but in today's world it would have been seen as pedophilia or child molestation and booked under POSCO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act).

Another interesting fact is how her father encourages her to marry, but his concept of marriage has nothing to do with something compassionate or romantic. Instead of speaking about the virtues of a prospective husband, he speaks to "her of the Pleasures of the World, telling her, how much happier she would think herself, to be the Wife of some gallant young Cavalier, and to have Coaches and Equipages; to see the World, to behold a thousand Rarities she had nevere seen, to live in Splendour, to eat high, and wear magnificient Clothes" (268). Isabella's father seems to be framing marriage as a symbolic institution signifying luxury when he advises his daughter to marry based on wealth. He encourages vice, greed and pride

here when he tells her to marry for expensive clothes and be prepared to “be bow’d to as she pass’d” people, “have a thousand Adorers” and have a “pretty offspring” (HN 268). His words remind one of Satan’s tempting of eve but this eve survives, nevertheless for a greater tragedy.

Isabella yearns for protection when life gets tough, safe male affection and a parental presence at life’s milestone events. Lack of parental love, care and concern is what gravitates her towards a relationship with Henault, because of a deep need to be loved and accepted.

This story is in fact a case study of Isabella- her wishes and desires; her experience of piety, love, hate, shame, fear, guilt- and how she handles these powerful emotions. Isabella’s mind swings between id, ego and superego. Even though human behaviour is created by the combined work of all three, the various phases in Isabella’s life shows how her mind is conquered by any one of the three in specific cases and this makes her inner conflict inevitable. When she has to decide her life plan and till she meets Henault she is guided just by her superego. The superego according to Freud operates on the morality principle and thus Isabella is motivated to ensure moral standards and behave in a socially responsible and acceptable manner. Afterwards the Id takes over her mind and she steals and elopes from the nunnery for gratifying and satisfying her desire. After the death of Henault, it is ego that dominates: she decides to marry Villenoy because that is the most sensible decision she can make at that point in life. She gets a reality check, marries Villenoy and carries forward her work of charity and devotion. Needlework and works of charity are Isabella’s means of sublimation. The moment Henault

reappears, the greedy Id which creates the demands attains prominence and what follows reminds us of Lady Macbeth planning, plotting and executing King Duncan's murder. Isabella commits double murders but she doesn't become frantic or mad like Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth* Act V Scene 1). On the contrary, she is calm and composed till her crime is exposed. The real character of Isabella lies veiled in impenetrable darkness. She is exactly what Freud describes about the structure of the human mind: the tip of the iceberg. The most significant part of her is what one cannot see and sense. Isabella is evidence to the Freudian theory that the unconscious mind governs behaviour to a greater degree than people suspect.

In the early stages of the novel, the reader is impressed by her resolution and determination. Villenoy persists on trying to change her mind, but it only reiterates her decision. Villenoy plunges into a dangerous fever. His despairing relatives plead with Isabella to concede and save his life. Her response is not quite what they hoped:

> She believ'd, it was for her Sins of Curiosity, and going beyond the Walls of the Monastery, to wander after the Vanities of the foolish World, that had occasion'd this Misfortune to the young Count of Villenoys, and she would put a severe Penance on her Body, for the Mischiefs her Eyes had done him; she fears she might, by something in her looks, have intic'd his Heart, for she own'd she saw him, with wonder at his Beauty, and much more she admir'd him, when she found the Beauties of his Mind; she confess'd, she had given him hope, by answering his Letters; and that when she found her Heart grow a little more than usually tender, when she thought on him, she

> believ'd it a Crime, that ought to be check'd by a Virtue, such as she pretended to profess, and hop'd she should ever carry to her Grave; and she desired his Relations to implore him, in her Name, to rest contented, in knowing he was the first, and should be the last, that should ever make an impression on her Heart….(HN 272-73)

Isabella is determined to take the vows and be a nun. Later, when she falls in love with Henault, she is obstinate to start a life with him. At a point when Henault hesitates at how enormous a step it is to lure a nun from her vows and elope with her, it is Isabella who convinces him about the necessity and talks him into action:

> I thought of living in some loanly Cottage, far from the noise of crowded busie Cities, to walk with thee in Groves, and silent Shades, where I might hear no Voice but thine; and when we had been tir'd, to sit us done by some cool murmuring Rivulet, and be to each a World, my Monarch thou, and I thy Sovereign Queen, while Wreaths of Flowers shall crown our happy Heads, some fragrant Bank our Throne, and Heaven our Canopy: Thus we might laugh at Fortune…(HN 298).

This gives the reader an insight into how staunch a character Isabella is.

The kind of intense devotion she displays is also quite noteworthy:

> …there was never seen any one, who led so Austere and Pious a Life, as this young Votress; she was a Saint in the Chapel, and an Angel at the Grate: She there laid by all her severe Looks, and mortify'd

> Discourse, and being at perfect peace and tranquility within, she was outwardly all gay, sprightly, and entertaining, being satisfy'd, no Sights, no Freedoms, could give any temptations to worldly desires… But however Diverting she was at the Grate, she was most exemplary Devout in the Cloister, doing more Penance, and imposing a more rigid Severity and Task on her self, than was requir'd, giving such rare Examples to all the Nuns that were less Devout, that her Life was a Proverb, and a President, and when they would express a very Holy Woman indeed, they would say, "She was a very ISABELLA. (273-74)

Isabella's character traits like determination, resolution and devotion are so intensely portrayed and stamped on the reader's mind and this is when the significance of Behn's statement: "Customs of Countries change even Nature herself…."(HN 263) comes as a blow to the reader. The rigid hold of customs, religion and their associated morals on the human mind has the power to transform virtue into vice and this is proven true in Isabella's case. At a very inexperienced age, she does reject the world of passion and sex, but once she is mature in body and mind, her ability to conform to the societal concept of chastity disappears and she gives in to the enticement of physical attraction. She is aware that her love for Henault is luring her to forsake her holy veil. Isabella is in a state of dilemma as to what choice she should make because what is at stake is her devotion to god and her public reputation. In her own words: "But all my Prayers are vain…he gives me a thousand Thoughts, that ought not to enter into a Soul dedicated to Heaven; he ruins

all the Glory I have achiev'd, even above my Sex, for Piety of Life, and the Observation of all Virtues" (280).

However hard she tries to battle her urges, it only leads to further conflict:

> She had try'd Fasting long, Praying fervently, rigid Penances and Pains, severe Disciplines, all the Mortification, almost to the destruction of Life itself, to conquer the unruly Flame; but still it burnt and rag'd but the more; so, at last… She…was resolv'd to conclude the Matter, between her Heart, and her Vow of Devotion….This was the Debate; she brings Reason on both sides: Against the first, she sets the Shame of a Violated Vow, and considers, where she shall shew her Face after such an Action; to the Vow, she argues, that she was born in Sin, and could not live without it; that she was Human, and no Angel, and that, possibly, that Sin might be as soon forgiven, as another…after a whole Night's Debate, Love was strongest, and gain'd the Victory…. (HN 294-95)

All her prayers and mortifications she puts herself through does not yield effect and she fails in conquering her feelings. The reader shockingly witnesses how she creeps near the grate to see Henault, stealthily hears Katteriena's conversation with Henault and succeeds in deceiving Katteriena and prevaricates about her feelings for Henault. The revelation that she is being loved back by the man she loves, gives her the power to embrace her forbidden passion. Finally, Isabella enflamed by her desires states that "there are a thousand ways to escape a place so

rigid [as the nunnery], as denies us that Happiness; and denies the fairest Maid in the World, the privilege of her Creation" (282).

Freud was skeptical about human happiness. " We do not become happy, but we can live with our unhappiness in a more fruitful and less miserable way, with the events and circumstances of our lives as they are rather than as we wish them to be"(Slade 7). This appears apt when we read about Isabella's life after the news of Henault's death.

During the seventeenth and early centuries, civilisation

> required more sublimation and repression of desires, both sexual and destructive aggressive desires than most people were capable of maintaining for long periods without either physical, or psychological , illnesses developing…too much renunciation of the release of instinctual desires…so that many people became…ill and discomforted, or, as, Freud came to articulate it, ' discontented'. (Bocock xiv)

Libido, the reservoir of sexual appetite and hunger is consciously repressed by Isabella. She does try to conceal her most coveted wish of starting a love life with Henault. "The superego manifests itself in criticism of the ego, which results in the person feeling guilty…the superego uses energy from the death instincts to turn on the ego with its criticisms of the inadequacies of the person…the superego manifests itself essentially as a sense of guilt…"(Bocock 78). The desire she had for Henault was branded as sinful and wrong according to religious and social morals. Isabella

did not dare to express that in actions and even suffered guilt to acknowledge to herself her passion for him.

Sigmund Freud along with Joseph Breuer, a Viennese clinician developed what they called ‘the cathartic method’ which was also termed as ‘the talking cure’ in the case studies of the famous painter Bertha Pappenheim alias Anna O. The purpose of the treatment was to purge the mind of thoughts and convictions that bound the patient to her suffering. It involved talking about the internal conflict of the patient. The aim of this method was to achieve the discharge of intellectual and physical energy so as to reduce the persistence of mind boggling thoughts (Slade 5). Talk can cure- is the basic conviction of the cathartic method. Isabella is a ‘patient’ who can sense her own conflicts. Her conversation with Katteriena is in fact her mind’s way of catharsis. Later her inner monologues with her soul and soliloquies is her own take on the talk and cure method. This is what sails her through the difficult times with great ease and later enables her to take heads on, the tragedy that befalls her with a brave face.

The case studies and treatments of hysterics conducted by Freud and Breuer led them to believe that memory played a significant role in hysterical symptoms. “‘Hysterics,’ they wrote, ‘suffer mainly from reminiscences’ (SE 11 7). Hysterical memory is not made up of ordinary memories that fade as time passes. ‘The memories which have become the determinants of hysterical phenomena persist for a long time with astonishing freshness and with the whole of their affective coloring’ (SE 11 9). Hysterical memory differs from ordinary memory in its intensity of emotional appeal” (Slade 6). Hysterical symptoms include paralysis, inability to

speak, epileptic fits and fainting that is not explained by physiological causes. In *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), Freud proposed that physical symptoms are often the surface manifestations of deeply repressed conflicts. Isabella's insecurity at losing Henault's love forever and the guilt that lies deep in her unconscious explains her fainting and subsequent miscarriage. Irony lies in the fact that the one who collapses and suffers a miscarriage at the thought of parting from Henault is the same woman who executes the cold blooded murder of Henault. Isabella's fainting fits and subsequent miscarriage proves that she is a hysteric who suffers from her memory. The prospect of Henault leaving, takes her back to her recollections of how her mother left her after death, and her father relinquished her in the cloister to seek after his own religious objectives. The bitter memories in the unconscious re-emerge as if it were always present there fresh. Women who grow up without parental protection and love have been documented to experience lower levels of well-being, isolation, loneliness, feelings of unworthiness and negative coping mechanisms. Higher levels of depression, emotional difficulty in intimate relationships and a disabling fear of abandonment is also observed .Henault is all she has now and the thought of losing him threatens her. These feelings controlled consciously in the unconscious mind breaks loose and manifest itself in the form of fainting and a miscarriage. It is a symptom of her fear at being alone, which could not be expressed either in words or deeds.

Behn in *The History of the Nun* seeks to explain the social and psychological origins of what is conventionally read as female wickedness and advocates the need to allow a woman to satisfy her own desires and live a free, non-judgemental life

without necessarily being seen as evil. Behn raises an important question: To be accepted by culture as a virtuous woman (to be acknowledged as writers-the crisis that Behn faced) what ideologies must they subscribe to and what behaviours, beliefs or customs must they adopt? Behn uses the metaphor of the nun as a means of communicating her own dilemma as a woman writer. This explains the writer's "unconventional sympathy for the guilty Isabella, whose transgressive desire to escape from confinement finds sympathetic echoes in the woman writer" (Pearson 246).

The Fair Jilt(1688) is said to be based on real events and charts the moral disintegration of women of " … 'false but snowy arms' who give in to what is originally an authentic sexual passion but which is soon superseded by passion for power and money pursued through sexual manipulation" (FJ 18). The depiction of the switch between the feigned morality and wanton lust in the femme fatale Miranda, the antagonist heroine of Aphra Behn's short story, *The Fair Jilt* displays Behn's journal observations of individuals and events. Her stay in Antwerp is what furnished material for allegedly factual fictions such as *Oroonoko* and *The Fair Jilt*. The latter is "a romantic and terrible essay on the power of love to lead men into actions which are completely contrary to their reasons, consciences and character" (Woodcock 119). Behn who plays an important female narrative voice in the literary field, makes a controversial and challenging treatment of the subjects of sexuality and desire in this work. *The Fair Jilt* focuses on a woman who is duplicit, flawed and a defiling power on those around her. Miranda is a 'temporary' nun, who has taken a vow of nunship for a short timeframe. Temporary nuns turn out to be more

alluring to the men folk because of their supposed difficulty in access and especially an enchanting young beauty like Miranda "was universally adored" (FJ 33) because "she had an air, though gay as so much youth could inspire, yet so modest, so nobly reserved….She sang delicately, and danced well, and played on the lute to a miracle. She spoke several languages naturally…co-heiress to so great a fortune" that "there was not a man of any quality that came to Antwerp, or passed through the city, but made it his business to see the lovely Miranda…"(32-33).

The novel delineates a conflict between inborn desires and human constructs. Miranda first falls in love with Henrick who has his own tragic history and sob story. He decides to take a vow of chastity after having lost the love of his life in a melodramatic form. Miranda has other plans for him and is explicit in her interest, sending love letters and gifts. He is taken by her striking beauty when he first sees her, but rebuffs her citing his vows. She refers to this as "a little hypocritical devotion" (46) and states that he resolves "to lose the greatest blessings of life and to sacrifice me (Miranda) to your (his) religious pride and vanity…" (46). This framing of the situation is especially telling of the dissent between society and individuals. Concepts of vanity, chastity and pride are societal and religious constructs and there is an inherent human desire to act against such societal constructs which are viewed as sin, especially by religion. Miranda is the 'femme fatale' who acts according to her intrinsic desires. In fact her unconstrained and unconcerned quest for romance and pleasure endangers the lives of others. The contrast between and the conflation of virtuous nobility and wanton lust is the crux of the moral lesson unintentedely passed on through the unwinding of the story. There is a sharp contrast between the

characters of Henrick and Miranda. Miranda values natural impulses over socially constructed ethics and Henrick, vice versa.

Miranda wants to possess Henrick as soon as she sees him. Her enthusiasm is enflamed further by learning of his royal birth. Her initial approaches are oblique and mellow: "She now missed no day of being at that little church, where she had the happiness, or rather the misfortune (so Love ordained) to see this ravisher of her heart and soul; and every day she took new fire from his lovely eyes" (FJ 41). Gradually this gives way to overt presentations of love and declarations of adoration as her desire grows uncontrollable.

> …she ceased not to pursue him with letters, varying her style; sometimes all wanton, loose and raving; sometimes feigning a virgin modesty all over, accusing herself, blaming her conduct, and sighing her destiny, as one compelled to the shameful discovery by the austerity of his vow and habit, asking his pity and forgiveness; urging him in charity to use his fatherly care to persuade and reason with her wild desires…. (43)

What Miranda has for Henrick is sheer lust. She is a woman who is possessed by a significant number of men and strangers who were all enchanted by her. Her fruitless effort to possess Henrick by "recourse to presents, rings of great price, and jewels" (43) makes her more and more stubborn in the pursuit. As a last effort, Miranda is wily enough to get Henrick alone, in the pretense of church confession. It is here that she reveals herself as his adorer, pours out her passion and pleads him to break his vows and acknowledge her: "Nothing opposes our

happiness, or makes my love a vice, but you-'tis you deny me life! 'Tis you that forbids my flame! 'Tis you will have me die, and seek my remedy in my grave when I complain of tortures, wounds and flames. O cruel charmer, 'tis for you I languish; and here, at your feet, implore that pity which all my addresses have failed of procuring me"(FJ 45).

Henrick rejects her again. Denied, refused and defeated, Miranda makes a fiery response. She casts herself upon him in an attempt to seduce. As a matter of fact, she attempts to rape him: "…and snatching him in her arms, he could not defend himself from receiving a thousand kisses… after which, she ran herself, and in an instant put out the candles" (46-47).The young friar withstands this with full force and this final dismissal fills Miranda with murderous hate and deadly rage.

> …but throwing herself, in that instant into the confessing chair and violently pulling the young friar into her lap, she elevated her voice to such a degree, in crying out, ' Help, help! A rape! Help, help,' that she was heard all over the church…'Tis easily to be imagined, in what condition our young friar was, at this last devilish stratagem of his wicked mistress. He stove to break from those arms that held him so fast; and his bustling to get away, and hers to retain him, disordered her hair and her habit to such a degree, as gave the more credit to her false accusation. (47)

Spurred by furious vengeance at the rejection, she accuses Henrick of rape. "With that a shower of tears burst from her fair dissembling eyes , and sobs so naturally acted, and so well managed, as left no doubt upon the good men, but all she had

spoken was truth" (FJ 48). This feigned sorrow leads to Henrick's conviction and trail where he is condemned to death.

Once Henrick is punished for rejecting her, Miranda is cured of her passion and triumphing in her revenge, resumes her routine life of making new conquests with all mirth and giving the world a thousand suspicions of her prostitution and lewdness. Prince Tarquin appears in town to end up Miranda's next prey. She sets her ambitious eyes upon him and resolves to "be the Lucretia, that tis young Tarquin should ravish" (51) and he in turn is wholly enchanted and bewitched by her. Miranda is significantly keener in his position and wealth than in him, yet she stops her sexual adventures once she is married. She lives with opulence and luxury and exhausts her fortune. This is when she invites Alcidiana to move in with her so that she can pilfer from her sister's fortune for her own extravagance. Alcidiana was sufficiently sensible to perceive her sister's real intention and leaves the house. Miranda schemes a thousand strategies to make the fortune all her own and at last pitches upon murdering Alcidiana. Van Brune, Miranda's young page, suffers from a strong desire for Miranda. Sensing this, she deftly lures him to the point of sexual frenzy and talks him into performing the murder for her: "…she treated him more like a lover, than like a servant; till at last the ravished youth, wholly transported out of himself, fell at her feet, and impatiently implored to receive her commands quickly…" (55). The reward is what he desires. She tactfully promises Van Brune, sex in exchange for murder, but she never truly intends to pay up. He is so dazed and dazzled by his muse that he concurs without hesitation.

After the job fizzles out, Miranda sets to work again with all her histrionic powers and Tarquin is her next pawn:

> And therefore, without ceasing, she wept, and cried out; she could not live, unless Alcidiana died. …Then throwing her false , but snowy, charming arms about the neck of her heart –breaking lord, and lover, who lay sighing and listening by her side, he was charmed and bewitched into saying all things that appeased her. And lastly, told her, Alcidiana should be no longer an obstacle to her repose…. (FJ 61)

Again the plot fails and Miranda is jailed and Tarquin is given a death sentence. Tarquin miraculously escapes the death sentence and obtains pardons for himself and his lady love. Both leave to Holland and start a new life. The last glimpse of Miranda that the reader has is of being penitent for her past life, "and gives Heaven the glory for having given her these afflictions, that have reclaimed her, and brought her to as perfect a state of happiness as this troublesome world can afford" (72). There ends her career of deceit, sex and murder.

> *The Fair Jilt* is often dismissed as the story of the sexual adventures of a woman and merely a piece of vulgar amatory fiction. This in fact is a complete misreading and underestimation of a text which aims at is an ironic meditation upon the psyche: deception, vengeance, greed and appalling things done in the name of love and blind passion. This story is a treatise on the mortally evil influence of lust and greed on the human psyche. (Prathibha 195)

Miranda is a woman who encourages the attention of men whenever possible, yet slyly keeping up a public image of modesty. One "would have imagined her soul the twin angel of her body"(FJ 32) but the events chart the moral disintegration of the woman who engrosses herself in shallow flirtations and knows how to utilise sex as a weapon and does so without any remorse. As a 'nun', she is supposed to be pure and chaste but on the contrary she is a wild and wicked character. All the men who have proximity to her are punished/ jailed/ruined. She is the charmer serpent who pushes them into an abyss of ruin. The chaste Henrick is put behind bars, Van Brune is executed, and the noble, gullible Prince Tarquin is brought down by this woman. The novel presents essentially good men fooled and subdued by lesser individuals. The fair jilt: Miranda, "plays to her advantage the conventional stage role of victimised woman when she is in fact the sexual aggressor" (FJ 20). There is no justification for the character of Miranda. She goes from being an innocent woman, to a woman who can go to any limits to satisfy her selfish motives without any compunction. She is flattered but unmoved by her impassioned suitors as is evident from the narrative: "She loved nothing so much as to behold sighing slaves at her feet, of the greatest quality; and treated them all with an affability that gave them hope.…She was naturally amorous, but extremely inconstant… could not suffer itself to be confined to one man…" (33).

Manipulative people are really not interested in anybody else except as a means to allow them to gain control so that the men become an unwilling participant in their plans. This is what Tarquin and Van Brune are for Miranda- mere vehicles to carry out her schemes. She manipulates them according to her will, as she pleases.

She distorts the truth, and resorts to lying because it serves her end. In the words of Abigail Brenner,

> It's not that manipulative people don't understand what responsibility is. They do; a manipulative person just sees nothing wrong with refusing to take responsibility for their actions….Manipulative people prey on our sensibilities, emotional sensitivity, and especially conscientiousness. They know they have a good chance of hooking you into a relationship because you are a kind, feeling, caring person, and, of course, because you want to help. They may cater to your goodness and kindness at first, often praising you for the wonderful person you are. But over time, praise of these qualities will be minimised because you are being used in the service of someone who really doesn't care about you. They really just care about what you can do for them. (Brenner)

Miranda is a classic example.

The work seems to have deeper undertones. In the disguise of self depreciating misogyny Behn might be making implicit the oppression she had to undergo in the patriarchal society of the restoration age in which she lived. In a patriarchal society, women find themselves at a disposition to men, but in this work Miranda uses patriarchal values to her own ends. The ongoing subordination of women to men in social, political, economic, intellectual and domestic life is totally reversed in the character of Miranda who asserts female autonomy. It has been rightly stated that "The Fair Jilt; or, The History of Prince Tarquin and Miranda" that

the novel is “nothing less than a gender reversed rogue’s biography, with its protagonist cutting an unmoved swathe through anyone unfortunate enough to get between her and her desires, at last emerging not just unscathed but triumphant from a lifetime of immoral adventuring, and even undergoing a thoroughly unconvincing, last scene repentance” (“A History”, *Wordpress*).

According to the traditional structure, it was modesty, not passion that emerged dominant in the struggle inside a woman’s mind. This struggle is what prevented women from indulging in their desires. Mrs. Taylor in Behn’s *Miscellany* of 1685 wrote: “Ye virgin powers defend my heart/from amorous looks and smiles….” (qtd in Behn 69).The reader is left with little doubt that virtue has not been compromised in her case and that ‘ladies’ ought to take recourse to honour in circumstances of temptation: “ …if through passion I grow blind/ Let honor be my guide…”(70). Angelina Goreau’s observation is along similar lines: “Modesty and the rules of decency observed among us, not permitting to us the liberty of declaring our sentiments to those we love, as men may; we dare not indulge a wanton fancy or rambling inclination, which must be stifled in our own breasts, and could only give us a hopeless anxiety….” (181). Freudian studies point out that a girl becomes a woman by repressing what is masculine about her- her active relation to the objects of her sexual desire- and through repression she becomes passive and feminine. Feminity therefore amounts to using repression as a defense mechanism. It is in this scenario that Behn places a character like Miranda who lives according to her own rules and wishes. Her defense mechanism is ‘denial’. She blocks herself from the

awareness that whatever she resorts to, to get things done is immoral, unscrupulous and deceitful.

A basic insight of psychoanalysis is that human thought, feeling and behaviour do not belong completely to our conscious mind. The unconscious processes of the oblivious mind exceed our ability to control our thoughts consciously. Freud's method of psychoanalysis is a path of research into the workings of the human mind. In an interview with Ramin Jahanbegloo, the eminent Indian psychologist Sudhir Kakar points out the significance of Freud's basic assumptions like "the importance of the unconscious part of the mind in our thought, behaviour and action, and the vital significance of early childhood experiences for later life, the importance of Eros in human motivation, the dynamic interplay, including conflict between the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind" (qtd. in Jahanbegloo 30).These studies made by Freud are helpful in unravelling a mysterious and complicated character like Miranda. According to him, while the unconscious makes wishes and seeks to satisfy them, the demands of reality militate against clear and complete satisfaction. Rather than making us endure the pain of deprivation of these wishes, the process of repression intervenes on our wishes and makes us renounce these wishes. Repression is a process by which our mind protects us from satisfying wishes and desires that would get us punished by an external authority (in reality), or lead to a guilt feeling if committed since they are unethical. Repression aligns with the demands of the reality to conceal the wishes that we pine for. It shields us from the perilous wishes of the unconscious in the context of the demands of social and cultural reality. The forbidden desires, traumatic experiences

and unresolved conflicts of the mind are forced out of the conscious realm to the unconscious through the problematic process called repression.

Interestingly, such a process that governs ninety- nine percent of humans is deficient in the case of Miranda. She acts on her own strong sexual instinctive drives and figures out how to deal with the potential objection and disapproval of the society. There is no external authority that she fears and no religious structure which could make her conform to a moral code. Unlike Isabella, who goes to the extent of murder to preserve her reputation, Miranda has a 'damn- the –world' attitude. The whole city regarded her as an "author of mischief" and saw her as "the meanest criminal" (FJ 58) especially after Van Brune's confession and execution. Miranda's only concern is to settle her scores with people, who escape from her poisonous web and to satiate her yearnings, be it for wealth, luxury, lust or power . The tag of being "a bad woman" and an "infamous creature" (70) affects her least. She has lost her parents very early in life. Lack of parental control and immense inheritances received from the deceased family leaves her with a large amount of personal control. Her freedom from parental control has a heavy influence on her courtships and eventual marriage and even her wayward lifestyle.

Miranda displays a kind of neurosis; a mental defence against a reality that is either too dangerous to encounter directly or a psychological response to an imagined deprivation. She shows obsessive behaviour but without a loss of touch with reality. She wants to possess Henrick in whatever manner possible; she wants to acquire the royal name that Tarquin has; she wants to put an end to Alcidiana and is prepared to go to the extent of murder. She yearns for things and tries to attain it

by hook or by crook. She is a neurotic and aggressive person. As Andrew Slade points out:

> …the primary condition of the human being is frailty, vulnerability, helpless in its beginnings….The unconscious tries to overcome the frailty of human existence and its deprivations through wishing….In the psychoanalytic sense, neurosis is the effect of too much escape from a reality that presses too closely to us, that cuts us too much to the quick, that intrudes in the ease and comfort we desire. (11)

Miranda wishes to be Henrick's lady love. The rejection and repulse that Miranda suffers from Henrick totally devastates her and whatever decision she takes afterwards is a result of the neurosis. She is not loved and recognised as lovable by the man she wants to be with. The injury of rejection refuses to yield and pulverises Miranda. She cannot come to terms with the fact that "a universally adored beauty like her" (FJ 33) who charmed all her beholders could not enchant the man she longed for. What follows is ample proof that humans could so easily be mobilised to tear down civilised ways of conducting life if the costs to them of maintaining civilised conduct became too great. The humiliation she feels from the rejection fills her with scorn and rage. The attention that she gets from Tarquin later serves to gratify her ego and she accepts his marriage proposal not because she loves him. For Miranda, marriage to Tarquin is a kind of 'sublimation'. "Sublimation is a process of transforming sexual energy or libido from a sexual to a non –sexual goal" (Slade 90). In sublimation, the sexual or erotic drive is diverted from its sexual goal and

attains, instead some other, socially valued goal or individual accomplishment. She attains fulfillment (sublimation) by getting entry to a ‘royal’ family.

In Chapter 7 of the book *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud examines the possibility of human happiness and satisfaction. Everywhere we are required to renounce the actions and objects that would satisfy our desires, by the social ties that bind us together, bonds of tenderness and love. Miranda is devoid of such familial and social ties. Tenderness is the last thing that anyone would associate with a turbulent woman like Miranda. She has no regard for family and is driven only by her desire for quality. Freud writes about the struggle that humans engage in with their own aggressions against each other and he comes to the conclusion that we are stuck in a bind that only a few can escape. Miranda is one among the few. Miranda uses her aggressive impulses to gain what she wants rather than mitigating her inner conflicts.

Sigmund Freud emphasised the importance of the unconscious mind or the Id, a cauldron of our wishes and impulses. According to the Freudian theory, the Id comprises two types of biological instincts which he called Eros and Thanatos. Eros or life instincts help the individual to survive. Thanatos or death instincts are a set of destructive forces present in all human beings. Its outward expression is violence and aggression. In contrast to the Id, Ego follows the reality principle and the Superego ensures that moral standards are followed. The Id seeks a free discharge of human wishes whereas the Ego inhibits it and acts as a censoring power. The conflict in the inner mind is inevitable in any human being and in majority of people, Ego is stronger than Id and Eros governs Thanatos, thus enabling people to

survive rather than self destruct. But as far as Miranda is concerned, it is the Id and Thanatos which seem to govern her and this explains the violence, fraudulence and aggression she resorts to.

Traditional archaic heritage on the psychology of women, assigns roles appropriate to men and women. Men are physically more aggressive than women; they fight more than women; women are more rational than men; women care for others, especially children, siblings, the aged more than men; men are more inclined to be promiscuous sexually than are women. Such components of traditional western understandings are completely shattered and reversed in the character sketch of Miranda. “People who break taboos themselves become taboo because they have done what others have a desire to do” (Bocock 84). Miranda persists in her original desire to do what is prohibited because she has nothing repressing her from disregarding and violating rules. Everybody has an unconscious desire to do the forbidden act and her psyche allows her the freedom to do precisely what she wants. Miranda is a far cry from the heroines who are exemplary, commendable models of virtue, chastity and goodness, Miranda is a woman who smashes and tears apart all clichés; a woman who knows what she wants and will do anything to attain it, including murder. She is a ‘femme fatale’ who is solid, strong, independent and intelligent.

Aphra Behn is no ordinary restoration woman. She has been successful in breaking stereotypes and has even set an example through her personal life. The villainy in her heroines’ shatters the traditional image of how a woman ought to be as prescribed by the patriarchal society and how it had hitherto appeared in the

works of male authors. If Hamlet with all his timid on/ off behaviour is kept on a pedestal and Macbeth with all tragic flaws is considered a hero, so should an Isabella or Miranda be. Through these works the reader gets a slice of Behn's empowering authorial image. She portrays feminine erotic potency, celebration of erotic freedom and sexual libertinism in the restoration era fearlessly and with great audacity. She is unapologetic about discussing something which was largely brushed under the carpet- women's sexuality.

Chapter 3

Cross-dressing and Disguises: The 'Masked' Women

Cross-dressing is a literary motif which is often associated with sexuality and nonconformity to prevailing practices rather than gender identity. The phenomenon of cross-dressing in literature ranges from the Renaissance to high modernism. Lesley Ferris opines about the controversies in cross-dressing:

> …cross-dressing becomes in Bruce Smith's words, a particularly volatile symbol of liminality, a relaxation of the social rules that hold Man's animal passions in check. This very sense of playing with thresholds has been a source of controversy since the very beginnings of western theatre. From Plato's condemnation of playing the other (a fear that mimetic freedom was formative, men might tend to become the women they imitate on stage) to the Puritanical anti-theatrical tracts of the English Renaissance, the human body has been a site for repression and possession. Theatrical cross-dressing has provided one way of playing with liminality and its multiple possibilities and extending that sense of the possible to the spectator/ reader; a way of play, that while often reinforcing the social mores and status quo, carries with it the possibility for exposing that liminal moment, that threshold of questioning, that slippery sense of a mutable self. (8)

Female characters in literature, which cross-dress as men are frequently portrayed as having done so to attain a higher social or economic position, a phenomenon known as the social progress narrative (Boag). Feigning a male identity allowed them to travel anywhere anytime with safety and pursue jobs which were traditionally only available to men. Such women characters are generally described as heroic and courageous. Craft-Fairchild (1998) opines that the motif of female-to-male cross-dressing symbolises women's discontent with their relegation to the domestic sphere of society. However, the discovery of the characters' assigned sex is often met with disapproval, indicating the endurance of traditional expectations of femininity ("Cross-Dressing" 174).

Various manifestations of cross-dressing suggest aspects of class and gender struggle, analysis of gender relations, opposition to certain forms of patriarchal domination, resistance, and subversive masquerade during the period. Cross-dressing (female to male) in the Renaissance, Elizabethan and Jacobean periods caused controversy based on the assumption that by wearing men's clothing, they tresspssed into the male realm. But the power of patriarchal structures to contain or recuperate threats to their authority cannot be underestimated. In the earlier periods, starting from the Renaissance onwards, there were attacks on women who dressed mannishly. To contravene the codes governing dress was supposed to disturb the unofficial rule of the social order. By examining records from Bridewell and the Aldermen's Court between 1565 and 1605, it has been found that the general trend was to accuse women who apprehended in men's clothing of prostitution. In 1575, the Aldermen's Court records reported that a spinster named Dorothy Clayton,

"contrary to all honesty and womanhood commonly goes about the City appareled in man's attire. She has abused her body with sundry persons and lived an incontinent life. On Friday she is to stand on the pillory for two hours in men's apparel and then to be sent to Bridewell until further order" (No. 19, p. 93). Of Margaret Wakeley in 1601, the Bridewell records read: "[She] had a bastard child and went in man's apparell" (Bridewell Court Minute Book 4, p. 207). Of other women, it was simply said that they were apprehended dressed as men, though clearly, the assumption was that any woman so apprehended probably led a loose life. Another case was of Johanna Goodman, who was whipped and sent to Bridewell in 1569 simply for dressing as a male servant so that she could accompany her soldier husband to war (No. 16, p. 522). Some may have worn male clothing for protection during travel; some may have done it to make a living; some may have been driven to prostitution by economic obligations, with their cross-dressed apparel becoming an invitation of their enforced sexual availability. This leads to the speculation that if married women of the Jacobean period assumed men's clothes as a sign of their wealth and independence, lower-class women may well have assumed them from a sense of vulnerability.

Social commentators such as William Harrison in his book *The Description of England* regularly railed against the decline of modesty and decorum in dress, and Harrison ends his diatribe against improperly dressed women by remarking that "I have met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it hath passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women" (147). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "trull" as "a low prostitute, or concubine; a drab, strumpet,

trollop." Harrison's diction links the mannish woman with prostitution, and there were strong discursive linkages throughout the period between female cross-dressing and the threat of female sexual incontinence. The *Hic Mulier* tract of 1620 presents most clearly this particular construction of the cross-dressed woman and the kinds of repression it elicited. Predictably, cross-dressed women were accused in the tract, of excessive sexual appetite. With their short waists and French doublets, "all unbutton'd to entice," (A4) they have given over modesty, silence, and chastity. Moreover, such women signal the breakdown not only of the hierarchical gender system, but of the class system as well. The author of the tract addresses them as "but ragges of Gentry," "the adulterate branches of rich Stocks," "all base, all barbarous" (B). Explicitly, what made adopting the dress of the other sex so transgressive that cros-dressed women were put in a pillory, tortured and whipped is something to be pondered upon.

Phillip Stubbes opines that, when women dress as men and when men dress effeminately, distinctions between sexual 'kinds' are also obliterated. The stability of the social order depends on maintaining absolute distinctions as much between male and female as between aristocrat and yeoman. He states: "Our Apparell was given us as a signe distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex, and therefore one to weare the Apparel of another sex, is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the veritie of his owne kinde" (F5v). In *Hic Mulier* the cross-dressed woman is enjoined to "Remember how your Maker made for our first Parents coates, not one coat, but a coat for the man, and a coat for the woman; coates of seuerall fashions, seuerall formes, and for seuerall uses; the mans coat fit for his labour, the womans

fit for her modestie" (B2v–B3). So the tagline is that going against these rules means to undo the work of God.

Stephen Greenblatt states that modern notions of sexual difference started off later than the Renaissance and that in at least some Renaissance discourses there appears to be only one sex, women being but imperfectly formed or incomplete men. Greenblatt goes on to argue that a transvestite theatre was a natural, indeed, almost an inevitable, product of such a culture (*Shakesperean* 88).

To snub this concept put forward by Greenblatt, the Bible provided authority for a two-sex gender system, aggressively cited by Stubbes and many others: "Male and female created He them" (Genesis 1:27). The agenda being that, the Renaissance needed the idea of two genders, one subordinate to the other, to validate the hierarchical view of the social order and gendered division of labour. In short, gender difference and hierarchy had to be produced and maintained even through force if necessary because if women were not invariably depicted as anatomically different from men in an essential way, they could still be seen as different merely by virtue of their lack of masculine perfection (softer, weaker, less hot), and their subordination could be justified on those grounds. "Then, as now, gender relations, however, eroticised, were relations of power, produced and held in place through enormous cultural labour in the interests of the dominant gender. In the early modern period, the regulation of dress was part of this apparatus for producing and marking gender difference…" (Howard 23).

In literature women who cross-dressed were accused of sexual incontinence, of being whores. Howard discusses this in her essay:

> This was in part because the discursive construction of woman in the Renaissance involved seeing her as a creature of strong sexual appetites needing strict regulation. Her sexual desire was both a mark of her inferiority and a justification for her control by men….As Edmund Tilney asserted in a piece of advice that quickly became a Renaissance commonplace, the best way for a woman to keep a good name was for her never to leave her house. When women took men's clothes, they symbolically left their subordinate positions. They became master-less women, and this threatened overthrow of hierarchy was discursively read as the eruption of uncontrolled sexuality. (24)

These various methods of control devised to contain the threat she constituted are signs of considerable instability in the gender system. The disciplining of women increased during this period, and this led to intensified pressure on women and a strengthening of patriarchal authority in the family and the state, which in turn produced resistance and possibilities of new powers for women. In such a period of social displacement in which the gender system was one of the major sites of angst and unease, female cross-dressing had enormous symbolic significance. It raised fears about women wearing the breeches and challenging the hierarchical social order and undermining masculine authority. It was seen as the psychological apparatus devised by women for trespassing gender boundaries.

Marjorie Garber puts forth her view about this in her book *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety:*

> The very existence of transvestite theatres, from Shakespeare's cross-dressed "heroines" to the contemporary drag show, testifies to the primacy of cross-dressing as spectacle….Cross-dressing is about gender confusion. Cross-dressing is about the phallus as constitutively veiled. Cross-dressing is about the anxiety of economic or cultural dislocation, the anticipation or recognition of "otherness" as loss. All true, all partial truths, all powerful metaphors. (389-390)

Cross-dressing was recurrently used in sixteenth and seventeenth century literature. *Belle-Belle ou Le Chevalier Fortuné* (1698) is a fairy tale by Madame d'Aulnoy in which the female protagonist, Belle-Belle, disguises herself as a male knight to help the ruler of her kingdom defeat an emperor. In Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queene" (1590) there is a long section about Britomart, who dons male armor, falls in love with a woman, and has many adventures as a man. William Shakespeare's works frequently used the motif of cross-dressing : *The Merchant of Venice* (1657) in which Portia dresses as a man in order to defend Antonio against Shylock's suit for a 'pound of flesh' ;*Cymbeline* (1611) in which Cymbeline's daughter Imogen dresses as a page and calls herself "Fidele"; *The Twelfth Night(1601)* where Viola disguises herself as a man in order to obtain a job with the Duke of Illyria. Not all of these women characters who dress as men have comparable motivations. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica disguises to escape. Viola dons male disguise which facilitates both employment and time enough to orient herself in an unfamiliar territory.

Shakespeare's cross-dressed female characters are definitely complex and rich, but are heavily gender coded and portrayed as stereotypes. Cross-dressing in Shakespeare functions as a means to explore gender roles and illuminate the Elizabethan society in which men enjoyed a prominent status based only on gender, to which women are clearly outsiders. This is particularly evident in the depiction of newfound freedom and an immediate elevation in social standing when female characters take on male personas. In these works, the change in gender is used as a joke if read on a superficial level, but the idea goes much deeper. They are strong female characters, but must 'become' men to protect themselves and ultimately solve the problem of the play. In these plays, the characters are able to change from female to male by putting on different clothes driving home the idea that gender is not about whom a person really is, but rather how others perceive you. The women are treated differently when they are dressed as men. But she also must go back to her correct female role once everything is settled and abandon the male attitude she took on. The moment she removes her disguise she is supposed to give up the strength it symbolises.

Howard rightly states: "Shakespeare's cross-dressed heroines, marks one of the points of emergence of the feminine subject of the bourgeois era: a woman whose limited freedom is premised on the interiorisation of gender difference and the "willing" acceptance of differential access to power and to cultural and economic assets" (31).

After the restoration of Charles II in 1660 after twenty years of Civil War, he sanctioned something that had previously been socially and legally frowned upon-

the casting of women on the public stage .This significant change brought about enormous effects on the world of English theatre especially the development of Restoration Theatre. Women allowed on the English stage, undoubtedly meant that they were given a public voice as performers and a potential power to uproot social gender norms. But in a society that was so dominated by patriarchal norms, transforming gender roles was a mountainous task and the early English actresses were unable to bring about a change. Males ruled over females in domestic, ecclesiastical and civil life, so a woman's only real response tended to be obedience to the patriarchal system. Woman's most intimate space – her soul – was regulated by the "ecclesiastical male hierarchy" (Otten 11-15). As Charlotte Otten states: "It was assumed by the patriarchy that strategies had to be devised to suppress women and to keep them powerless" (15). Titillation at the subjugation of women showed on stage gratified the specific male desires of the bawdy audience.

In fact, actresses on the Restoration stage were highly sexualised, in both straight and cross-dressed roles, by playwrights and audiences - ultimately propagating the patriarchal gender norms. They were much-overlooked and under-appreciated by historians of gender and of theatre. This was because they posed a threat to the patriarchal hierarchy due to their access to a feminine public which was a source of empowerment for them. The general male strategy was to subjugate them and prevent social disorder before they transgressed traditional patriarchal norms.

Writers before and during the Restoration were forthright about man's proper domination of women. Discourses of gender in the Restoration were

overwhelmingly hierarchical, with men and women described, respectively, as dominant and subservient, perfect and imperfect, fit for rule and unfit for rule. A female character on stage was a potential device for objectification and confinement to the stereotypical roles that emphasise the cultural prescriptions devised to govern female behaviour in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were assertions of man's lordship over capacities to reason and to control passion. Securing that hierarchy in place was an ongoing struggle; gender clashes were in part played out on the terrain of dress. The issue was of control. A woman who disobeys the accepted conventions governing female dress and behaviour was being oblivious of her assigned place in society. Such women who were thought to cultivate a rapacious aspiration to be beyond male control were sneered at.

Behn's works created a small sexual revolution in the Restoration theatre which had till that time remained a contained workshop of the commodification of women. The attempts of the patriarchal hegemony to subjugate women onstage manifested in the over-sexualisation of female roles, the association of the actress with prostitution, the isolation within the sub cultural world of Restoration Theatre, and the ultimate satisfaction of the male 'gaze' that ultimately reinforced degradation and sexual exploitation.The achievement of Aphra Behn is significant especially in this realm because "she made woman an unstoppable presence on stage, and created a foundation on which the succeeding generations could build, and upon which they are still building" (Larson 41). Her characters were able to subvert and contravene traditional restrictions of gender roles and sexuality through the display of a freedom of sexuality onstage and transgressing societal norms by

flaunting breeches roles which created a threat to the patriarchal hierarchy. Behn's cross dressed characters were introduced at a time when heroines were not expected to do more than pose on stage in order to be leered at and desired by both the male characters in the play and the male spectators.

The cross-dressed actresses in Behn seem to constitute a "historical possibility for pleasure in sexual and gender ambiguities" (Straub 127). As such, cross-dressed actresses represented a transgression and posed a social threat to the staunch belief in the binary nature of gender. This transgression was positively empowering for actresses who grabbed the opportunity to violate sexual roles and embraced sexual freedom before an audience. Cross-dressing threatened the strictly normative social patriarchal hierarchy, and by displaying it on stage through the increasingly popular travesty roles it was visible to a degree in public society. The conventional patriarchal impetus of the seventeenth-century sexuality is largely explored in the works of Behn.

Behn works with crossed dressed heroines turned the tide for the early novel's allegiance in portraying and constructing, a domestic ideal of woman. Catherine Craft-Fairchild rightly states: "… the phenomenon of female cross-dressing captured the public imagination: factual accounts of women's adventures in men's clothing appeared in newspapers, chapbooks, and memoirs, while ballads, plays, and novels offered fictional renderings"("Cross-Dressing" 171) celebrating the adventures of women who went to war as soldiers or sailors or the heroine's disguised pursuit of a sweetheart in the military, her activities on land or sea, tests of

her bravery during battle, squabbles involving her manly gallantry and the eventual reunion with her lover.

Cross-dressing in Behn's works encapsulates what it meant to be a man and woman in the sixteenth century. Roles assigned to each gender were set on stone, and no one could cross over in any circumstance. During those times women were hardly allowed to be a part of the stage even. Behn utilises these plays to display the hypocrisy of the status quo that held people from expressing themselves. Her crossed-dressed heroines elicit and challenge the inconsistencies of gender barriers and question stereotypes which were dominant in the society whilst enjoying their 'male' roles. Disguises donned by these women carry the potential for commentary on the patriarchal society that governed the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration age, for the theatre provided a terrain where changing gender definitions could be presented, deplored, and enforced. Although Shakespeare's plays contained female characters who cross-dressed, these roles were performed by men or boys because it was thought quite subversive in the sixteenth and seventeenth century for a woman not only to perform female parts on stage, but also to wear pants, expose her ankles, and play the part of a man. A boy playing the part of a girl who disguises herself as a boy definitely does not carry the same kind of historical significance as what was happening on Behn's stage.

Jean Howard makes a statement in her article about theatre in early modern England: "Actresses were depicted as anatomically different from men and their lack of 'masculine perfection' justified their subordination to the male figure" (24). In most cases, however, especially male authored plays of female cross-dressing

were not a strong site of resistance to the period's patriarchal sex-gender system. In such works "ironically, rather than blurring gender difference or challenging male domination and exploitation of women, female cross-dressing often strengthens notions of difference by stressing what the disguised woman *cannot* do, or by stressing those feelings held to constitute a 'true' female subjectivity" (Howard 38).

Contrary to this, the heroines of each of Behn's plays work toward gaining agency for themselves , and in order to achieve this goal, they often abandon cultural norms of femininity and trespass into the masculine world. Behn lived in a society which perceived and gendered writing as an arena where only males tread. She was the odd one, the woman author who violated the expectations of society's norms of femininity. In her endeavour as a writer, Behn herself struggled with negative critique on her work that was grounded in her gender and not in the merit of her writing, but, she was not a woman to be cowed. She suffered much frustration due to the discrimination based on gender and often vented her resentment in her writings. She scathingly addresses detractors and ascribes the aggressive criticism to the male critic's frustration over her usurping of their dominion. This resulted in her assuming a role of masculinity that allowed her to be a woman writer. Behn gave some of her female characters the same masculine role that she assumed, in order to gain agency. The use of transvestism and sword wielding in her works can be ascribed to the gender-biased, bogus and unfair assessment that Behn faced from those who were threatened by her ability to exercise agency in the form of free public voice through her writings.

The Restoration woman was ‘owned’ by her husband, not only by body, but also by mind and this practice confined her to the domestic ambit and familial structures. This social situation was due to a constant historical oppression that “stemmed from, and was replicated by, the personalised and institutionalised domination of men over women in patriarchal society” (Barker-Chalus 4). Behn’s writings are “overwhelmingly concerned with questions of gender identity, sexuality, and women’s oppression, to a degree and depth not seen in a comparably popular form of entertainment before or since” (Quinsey 1). Her heroines set a new way of seeing the female gender by doing things the audience were not previously accustomed to and asking new feminist questions about gender roles.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: incorporating consideration of both textual and theatrical strategies in Behn's works dealing with cross dressed heroines. It attempts at exploring these plays individually and investigates the ways in which Behn selected and manipulated common features, feminine character types, and the presence of heroines of psychological substance who suggest images of female empowerment. The chapter also studies the ways in which Behn's plays render an accurate picture of the perverse limitations placed upon women by the socio-economic conditions, ideologies and generic conventions operating in the milieu of Restoration England. She uses the image of the cross-dressed woman to defy expectations about female nature and to object the injustices caused by the sex-gender- system. The gender implications of cross-dressing allow Behn to examine her heroines’ needs. Each of the plays discussed in this chapter feature heroines: Hellena in *The Rover*, Widow Ranter in *The Widow Ranter*, Cloris in *The Amorous*

Prince, Marcella in *The Feigned Courtesans*, Hyppolita in *The Dutch Lover* and *Celinda in The Town Fop* who are on a path towards what female agency entails, revealing in the process that this is not an easily definable or finite concept. The methods women use to obtain power develops over the course of each play, expanding and altering the concept of agency. The works discussed in this chapter provide varied examples of a woman's use of cross-dressing in response to society's patriarchal constraints and comment on the weaknesses and even the frivolity of such a patriarchal setup. These works are pre-feminist texts that empower its protagonists, the women "… to 'conquer' by investing her with the ability … to cross class lines" (Brooks 1) and challenge the assumption that men hold more power than women do. Behn subtly hints that the power men possess are superficial when the heroines of her plays, one after the other disguise themselves as men. Masculinity is proven to be merely a costume that can be donned or doffed at will; therefore its associated power can be removed and redistributed as well. In these works, the nature of disguise, i.e., cross-dressing (from female to male) allows for dynamic possibilities. The chapter analyses the skilled unmasking of the problems of gender relations and the discourse of patriarchy, despite the restrictions that the dictates of the Restoration Stage imposed on Aphra Behn.

Cross-dressing is a significant theme in *The Rover (1676)*, which is set during a masquerade carnival. The disguise allows the two sisters, Florinda and Hellena the freedom to defy patriarchal authority, in their case, their brother's dictatorial behaviour. Donning fake identities, the sisters roam around the city attempting to enjoy the new found freedom while protecting the reputation of their

undisguised selves. This is advantageous for Hellena in particular, since according to Todd, "in masquerade, Hellena can flirt and make sexual overtures to a man she does not know, since the disguise allows the rare pleasure of seeing rather than simply being seen" (*The Critical* 218). Donning a disguise allows Hellena to move and speak more freely and actively pursue Willmore. Among the numerous masks, physical guises and identities that Hellena and Florinda adopt, each take on the breeches part just prior to settling their marriages. By taking on "the habit . . . of one of her pages" (RV 233), in order to flee from her brother's house, Florinda is finally able to marry Belvile. However, this instance of the breeches part is not so significant but is limited to aiding Florinda in marrying the person she loves. Apparently, it helps in portraying a contrast between Florinda and Hellena. Florinda's cross-dressing is momentary and is used only to aid in setting up marriage to her lover, limiting her well within the traditional power relations of patriarchy. She can be seen as 'the model of feminine propriety' (Anderson 13), an epitome for the social rule that women are subordinated to men. Thus, this instance of transvestism occurs on a smaller scale than that of Hellena, who uses her boyish disguise in a much robust manner, for an active pursuit of her desires.

Hellena uses the mask of male identity to transgress gender boundaries and gain independence and implement her own will. In the words of Haley D. Anderson,

> Hellena must maintain a delicate balance between defiance and adherence to social norms in order to avoid the complete condemnation of society. The breeches part helps her in her balancing act, because cross-dressing allows Hellena to take on the role of a

> man thus stepping away from the expectation that a woman be soft, passive, and modest. Thus, she is able to employ a freedom of speech, movement and behaviour typically denied women without being condemned for behaviour unacceptable in a woman. Navigating outside these boundaries in turn permits Hellena the agency to work independent of patriarchal authority and to negotiate her marriage according to her own needs and wants…. Here the masculine is used as a tool to gain Hellena the agency necessary to be self-determining as a woman. (16)

Hellena's cross-dressing is as a page boy, and this guise allows her to be her own agent, to seek Willmore out and thwart his interactions with the courtesan, Angellica Bianca. Disguise as a page boy translates into the ability to move and speak freely in public. She utilises her masculine role to break off all positive relations between him and Angellica. Masked in breeches, her identity remains concealed as she negotiates her marriage with Willmore.

> Hellena's ability to occupy the feminine and the masculine at once (like Cixous's concept of bisexual womanhood) allows her the public agency afforded by the masculine mobility and freedom of voice while avoiding the appearance of being inappropriate, thus protecting her feminine reputation and ability to marry. Cross-dressing gives Hellena the power to leave behind the demure, passivity of the appropriately modest lady and instead make more forthright demands of Willmore for the continuance of their relationship. (Anderson 17)

First, Hellena boldly declares her sexual interest in Willmore: “Faith none, captain: – why, ‘twill be the greater charity to take me for thy mistress. I am a lone child, a kind of orphan lover, and why I should die a maid, and in a captain’s hands too, I do not understand” (RV 241). According to the standards of feminity appropriated to chaste and modest women, Hellena could never express a desire to lose her virginity and not “die a maid” and certainly could not articulate a desire to do so with a haste to “lose no time” (RV 242). The freedom of voice permitted by Hellena’s masculine guise does enchant Willmore, but he hesitates to promise marriage to which Hellena outrightly protests, “What shall I get? A cradle full of noise and mischief, with a pack of repentance at my back?” (ibid).The freedom granted from masculine appearance aids her in arranging her marriage according to her own plan. If she had restricted herself to the bounds of female gender expectations, and played the role of the soft-spoken, naive, upper class lady, Willmore would have taken advantage of her which is evident from the near rape of the passive Florinda. To attain and execute power, Hellena had to cross the boundary of the feminine into the transvestism of the breeches.

Hellena desires to marry on her own terms and sets out to choose and negotiate her own marriage. However, feminine norms of the period thwart the freedom of voice and mobility necessary to achieve this goal. Women were not free to operate in the public sphere as this was assumed to be inappropriate and, given the rape attempt on Florinda, hazardous. It is indispensable for Hellena to move in this sphere in order to eventually fulfill her goals. Hellena must be able to navigate the streets of Venice and Willmore’s presence safely and freely. So Hellena

intentionally departs from traditional norms of femininity in order to oppose patriarchal hegemony in form of the control the men in her life exercised over her. The character empowerment in Hellena begins when she removes herself from the authority of her brother. In her path to development, she insists on her own independence and right to make decisions in life. It is the freedom of movement that cross-dressing permits, the voice and behaviour that a masculine mask brings along that enflames in her the desire for self-determination. She develops this gradually through the course of the play until she is finally able to achieve her goal. The act of cross-dressing allows Hellena to achieve emancipation. As a male, she has the freedom to speak her mind and take action which is denied to her as a woman.

In a discussion of literary cross-dressing in her book *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women*, Catherine Craft-Fairchild claims that "at most, transvestite masquerade offers a temporary escape" (172) for the characters in the role of the breeches part. Gender roles were socially defined and the belief since ages was that "men and women were 'naturally' different, and that these differences not only shaped their characters but suited each sex to specific activities and roles in society" (Barker-Chalus 1). Some writers depicted the figure of the female as 'a static image of an idealised femininity – modest, chaste, pious and passively domestic' (2). Katherine M Quinsey rightly states that "the late seventeenth century is a pivotal period in women's social history and feminist awareness" (1).The notions about feminity were definitely at the verge of a transition during the restoration period, with writers like Behn being in the forefront. Behn's heroines like Hellena were some of the few

women who could overcome the narrow parameters of what was thought acceptable in a patriarchal society in contrast to the female characters of her contemporaries, which were dramatically stereotyped, demeaned and misrepresented: the typical, virtuous but suffering female protagonist. Her women characters on stage "reshaped dramatic form at a time when theatre was the most public and debated literary venue," though not by bringing a "feminine delicacy" or "compassion" as was initially anticipated (Styan 89-126).

The carnival setting plays a very important role in *The Rover*. The carnival setting 'serves as a metaphor for Behn's deconstruction of patriarchal privilege, effecting such chaos through liberative disguise in the form of carnivalesque circumstance' (Quinsey 54). The carnival setting symbolises the inversion of established social manners which could be compared to the sisters in *The Rover* disguising as men. Furthermore, while masquerading, they become freer and more equal, and since everyone is masked there are no differences between them. If we incorporate insights from feminist psychoanalytic theory, even the masquerade has a specific symbolic strategy. "The virgins' masquerade takes on added significance, or rather this discourse helps us decode what is already implied-namely, that in an economy in which women are dependent on male keepers and traders, female desire is always already a masquerade, a play of false representations that covers over and simultaneously expresses the lack the woman exhibits-lack of the male organ and, concomitantly, lack of access to phallic privileges-to material and institu- tional power" (Montrelay 153). Behn's virgins re-"design" this custom and yearn to change their plot. Ultimately they emerge as coherent female identities.

According to Mary Flynn, Hellena appears to have the greatest success for a woman within the play and fits the mould of a new genre of heroine. Cross-dressing allows her to be free and to avoid being seen as inappropriate. Flynn opines that "Hellena suggests another facet of the Restoration woman's struggle: an internalised masculine-feminine dichotomy." She represents the Restoration woman's desire to have the same rights as a man and live in equality and rise from the social oppression of that time. This might be what Behn felt too, as a writer and Hellena becomes the author's mouthpiece.

In *The Widow Ranter* (1690), Ranter and the Indian Queen wear breeches for attaining their individual goals. The Queen is dressed as an Indian warrior in order to escape from Bacon's camp. Her breeches role serves more as a plot device than a mode of empowerment and like in *The Rover, a* means to contrast her with the strong willed Ranter. Even during the breeches part, the Queen is a typical, patriarchal model of passive feminity: "I have no Amazonian fire about me, all my artillery is sighs and tears" (WR 317) and so a direct and sharp contrast to Ranter. "The Queen does not stray from the behavioural norms of her sex with her disguise and is instead, like Florinda, the typical model of femininity, adhering to the expectation of chaste virtue throughout the play rather than gaining agency as Ranter does"(Anderson 19). She is conflicted about her desires, torn between honouring her husband and giving in to her love for Bacon. In the end, the Queen is simply sacrificed to achieve the tragic part of Behn's tragicomedy. The Queen's male disguise lacks a goal to achieve and lasts long enough for her to be wounded in the battle and face death.

Contrary to this, Ranter has a wild ‘inappropriate’ behaviour shoving away and repulsing men. She is seen openly questioning authority and patriarchy. So her transgression is more unintentional. Ranter has immense financial independence which gives her a lot of control over her life but she faces obstacles on a battlefield. To meet this need, instead of losing heart, she resorts to the breeches part, disguising as a man. Widow Ranter already possesses many aspects of agency: freedom of movement, voice, and behaviour. In her case, it is these abilities that prohibit her from exercising her own will and blocks her from the goal. This leads her to transvestism, which makes her behaviour more appropriate and allows her to marry the one she loves. For Ranter cross-dressing resolves her pre-existing breech of femininity. “Ranter’s boisterous and raucous behaviour separates her from her feminine propriety long before she actually disguises herself as a man” (20). The widow Ranter is a heroine far removed from the expectations of feminine gender roles. She smokes and drinks all day, and is no soft delicate heroine the sixteenth century was used to seeing and applauding. It is not surprising that she is first described by Friendly to Hazard as “a great gallant” (WR 255), a usage typically associated with masculinity. She further departs from feminine norms when she establishes, “I bar love-making within my territories” (276). Such an open forbidding of romance and mushiness which was characterised as an important aspect of feminine nature highlights the fact that she comes across as a more masculinised type of femininity, a woman who dictates. Ranter herself playfully acknowledges that the chances of a man approaching a woman like her with romantic intentions would be “a miracle” (266).She knows that her forward attitude and free behaviour repulses the figures of patriarchal authority around her. Todd

brilliantly summarises Ranter's character: "Ranter is a roistering woman. As such, she lives high, giving gargantuan banquets to anyone of a jolly disposition, smoking and drinking in the morning, downing pints of punch through the day, riding like a man in the evening, and roundly abusing her servants like a lord"(*Secret* 416).

Ranter seems least concerned by the effects of her behaviour, but she becomes upset that Daring, the object of her passion, is attracted to the soft, quiet natured, demure Chrisante who epitomises a traditional model of femininity. Even though Ranter is liked by all as a "good-natured and generous" (WR 255) person, her less than-feminine, outspoken nature creates a stark contrast with the delicate, modest Chrisante who impresses Daring even in her rejection of him :"…she denies me so obligingly she keeps my love still in its humble calm" (307).

Ranter is not the sort of woman who would accept failure so soon and spend her life sighing and waiting as expected of a chaste female model. She knows she cannot compete with Chrisante in the realm of the feminine. So Ranter decides instead to take action: "Pox on it, no; why should I sigh and whine, and make myself an ass, and [Daring] conceited? No, instead of snivelling I'm resolved . . . . Gad, to beat the rascal, and bring off Chrisante" (WR 307). She dons the guise of a man, which enables Ranter to take action which as a woman she could not. She places herself as an opponent to Daring, the "male" Ranter, so that Chrisante has to choose between Daring and the cross-dressed Ranter. Ranter is aware that Chrisante has no feelings for Daring and she uses it to her advantage to force Daring out of his pursuit of Chrisante. Ultimately she uses her wit to trick Daring into marrying her.

Admiring the "pains" Ranter took to gain Daring's love, he gives in. Daring's response to the proposal is hilarious:

> Ranter – gad, I'd sooner marry a she bear, unless for a penance for some horrid sin; we should be eternally challenging one another to the field, and ten to one she beats me there; or if I should escape there, she would kill me with drinking. . . . Then such a tongue – she'll rail and smoke till she choke again, then six gallons of punch hardly recovers her, and never but then is she good-natured. (309 – 310)

Daring's words display all of Ranter's masculine characteristics that are unseemly in a woman and even at times make her more manly than real men. Daring believes that she could outshine him in the field and ultimately decides to marry her. He prefers to see Ranter in the garb of a man: "Nay, prithee, take me in the humour, while thy breeches are on – for I never liked thee half so well in petticoats" (310). Like Hellena in *The Rover*, Ranter too achieves her goal of marriage through cross-dressing. But in this case, the guise of masculinity puts her unfeminine character attributes in a more appropriate situation. *The Widowranter*'s eponymous heroine does not appear in cross dress until she enters the theatre of war in search of her beloved Daring. Cross dressed or not, her demeanor and speech patterns always echo masculine conventions. Ranter fights bravely in the battle even after her true sex is exposed. Daring tries putting her back but in vain and concludes that "now I find you can bear the brunt of a Campaign you are a fit Wife for a Soldier" (5.1.360-362).

Behn/Widow Ranter as a Restoration author/heroine voices the arrival of early feminism. Behn's heroines are evolved to the point that they are able to speak their wants. They become the personification of early feminism. Ranter's cross-dressing serves the purpose of literalising her manly ambitions and mannerisms. Ranter comes to Virginia as a servant, but becomes wealthy by marrying her late master. She swears, smokes, and drinks like a man, and pursues and wins a second husband while disguised as a boy. In addition, cross-dressing is employed as a way to make the two women in this play, mirrors of each other, and to question issues of gender normativity, race, class, and imperialism. Behn sets up these two women as foils to one another just like the heroines in *The Rover*.

Behn's works reveal interesting tensions between her female characters and the roles they play in the male-dominated narratives. "Composed for the notoriously sexual Restoration stage, Behn's plays deal with licentious rakes and knowing women embroiled in narratives thick with intrigue" (Lowe 92). She challenges conventional morality through celebration of sexual license. Like those of her male counterparts, Behn's comedies featured rakish heroes intent on sexual conquest and indulgence regardless of social consequences. Subsequently, she created heroines like Ranter, who display wit, intelligence, and sexual desire of their own, thereby smashing the social norms and standards by which male and female sexual behaviours were judged during those times. "Behn's female characters, while of their own particular historical moment and subject to its significant restrictions, trouble the sexual politics of the worlds they inhabit by demonstrating a sexuality

that is responsive to their own desire, as well as to the strict social constraints that bind it"(Lowe 93).

Cloris in *The Amorous Prince (1671)* is Behn's first cross-dressed, stage heroine. Behn opens this play with a charged scene that shows the mercurial young gallant, Prince Frederick quite literally living up to the title of the play. He is infamous for his sexual drive and ability to manipulate ladies by his position of power. Emerging in a state of dishabille from his lover's bedchamber, Fredrick, the prince insists that he must depart at once, while Cloris, the woman he has only just seduced, protests. Fredrick has made "vows" to Cloris, which suggest a betrothal, but Fredrick's hurried exit reveals him to be an unrepentant libertine and Cloris to be a victim of his experienced seduction. Under a solemn promise of marriage, he debauches Cloris. She is described as "The sweetest innocent that ever Nature made" (AP 170); a girl who had led a secluded country life. Her simplicity and ignorance of the mean world around her is illustrated when she says: "I know not what it is to dwell in Courts/But sure it must be fine, since you are there/Yet I could wish you were an humble Shepherd/ And knew no other palace than this cottage/Where I would weave you crowns, of Pinks and Daisies/ And you should be a Monarch every May" (125). The play begins at a critical point, depicting Cloris' reaction and response to Fredrick's use and abandonment of her. As the action of the drama proceeds, Behn portrays Cloris as a woman who exerts great agency and control of her sexuality even though she is still emotionally vulnerable. Instead of feeling miserable and withdrawing into a shell, she moves across the realms of court and country which epitomises patriarchal modes of control. An innocent country

lass, Cloris enters the public, masculine domain, which is a terrain denied to females, so that her lover Frederick can be pursued.

Behn uses the breeches part to varying degrees in her plays. “While it would be difficult to argue for a consistently feminist agenda under-pinning each occasion on which Behn puts an actress in cross-dress, on more than one occasion Behn’s use of the breeches part both disturbs the male spectator and transcends the objectification of the actress” (Hodgson-Wright 165). She planned cross dressed heroines as vehicles for assuming power and showcase women successfully wielding male power and male authority. Unlike the stereotype heroines who faint at the sight of blood and get petrified at the sight of a sword, heroines like Cloris dismantle the sex-gender system invariably arguing that masculine privileges are based on custom, not nature, since a woman can successfully assume masculine positions of authority and in most cases in an even better manner than males. Her women transgress the physical/symbolic boundaries of a woman’s domestic containment.

Cloris’confidante, Guilliam rightly says that it is ‘love’ that has made Cloris so valiant and determined and it’s a miracle that a village girl like her had “…rambled about these Woods all night without either Bottle or Wallet…” (AP 167). Indeed, she travels to court cross-dressed in order to assure her safety on the open road. Later her cross-dressing creates the opportunity for her to serve Fredrick, which is reminiscent of Viola in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. Disguised as a page boy under the name of Philibert, Cloris attaches herself to Frederick, first succoring him when he is wounded in a duel by Curtius. Access to her lover in this guise

exposes his character within a matrix of political and social relations. Frederick is concerned only for his own pleasure and true to his rakish nature, has lost interest in Cloris. She observes his desire for and pursuit of her brother's fiancée, Laura, and his obvious betrayal of the vows he made to her. Cloris is anxious about Frederick's wellbeing even after his true colours are revealed to her. Cloris/ Philibert is caught in a bizarre situation when the Prince asks her to witness him choosing beauties for his sexual adventures. Her aside: "Not know me yet? Cannot this Face inform him? /My Sighs, nor Eyes, my Accent, nor my Tale? …This gives me Wounds, painful as those of Love/ From so much grief as I have…" (AP 187) reveals the innocent and vulnerable facet of Cloris. Yet she is determined to grab the reins into her hands and deal with every circumstance. What follows is a confrontation with Laura to divulge the details of her enticement and seduction by Frederick and aborting Curtius' plot to avenge his wrongs and thereby saving Frederick's life. Thus, when all the disguises come off at the end, the plot is resolved happily. Cloris teaches Frederick a salutary lesson when in the appearance of Philibert she talks about her concept of love. He is reformed so much by this experience that the repentant prince takes Cloris to be his bride. Their union now has greater equality. She has lost the innocence that prompted her to fall prey and submit to his seduction at the beginning. Now she joins him in marriage as an equal, one well aware of and totally in control of the ways of the world.

The play contrasts rural innocence with urban corruption and conveys the story of a woman who goes all out to achieve what she covets and wins her battle singlehandedly. *The Amorous Prince* contains themes of women's negotiation of

space, place, and position within a sexual economy. It is interesting to note that Prince Frederick's inappropriate conduct and sexual callousness is perceived as virile, instead of being criticised just by the concession of being a man: "…But his youth and quality will excuse him;/ And 'twill be called gallantry in him…" (2.1.78-83) whereas going by the records, it would have been termed as 'ill nature and inconstancy' in a female, leading her being branded as a 'whore'. The discourses about and depiction of women's social roles as wives, daughters, widows, and mistresses in this play aid the author in interrogating their objectification, and restricted agency. *The Amorous Prince* (1671) is preoccupied with the collision of rampant male sexuality and women's virtue.

Behn introduces an endless stream of characters and disguises in her 1679 play, *The Feigned Courtesans* which is overloaded with confusing exposition. A reading of Behn's *The Feigned Courtesans; or, A Night's Intrigue* offers ample opportunity to delve into Behn's representations of gender disparities in social judgement, to prevailing moral codes within the generic framework of the Restoration comedy. The main plot follows the adventures of two virtuous, aristocratic Italian sisters, Marcella and Cornelia, as they outwit their aged guardian, Count Morosini, and escape an arranged marriage and a celibate life in a convent respectively. Marcella has been promised to Octavio for marriage, but has fallen in love with Sir Henry Fillamour. Cornelia is bound for the convent. The socially respectable and attractive young women run away to Rome, where they disguise themselves as courtesans named Euphemia and Silvianetta who pursue, and are ultimately betrothed to, two dashing young British cavaliers of their own choice.

They have run away from the chains of patriarchy (the staunch uncle and an adamant brother) so that they may be free to control their own future.

When Fillamour and Galliard arrive in Rome, they notice the beautiful Marcella and Cornelia disguised as the courtesans Euphemia and Silvianetta. Galliard is taken by Silvianetta's beauty, and Fillamour is struck by Euphemia's resemblance to Marcella. He becomes conflicted, desiring to stay constant in his love for Marcella, but unable to resist Euphemia. An elaborately tangled confusion of identity characterises the play's action.

An important secondary plot focuses on a third rich and beautiful virgin, Laura Lucretia, the sister of Octavio (Marcella's betrothed) who has fallen in love with Galliard. Knowing that he favours the courtesan named Silvianetta, Laura Lucretia disguises herself as Cornelia's alter ego so as to secure Galliard's affections. Having learned of Marcella's adoration for Fillamour, Octavio pledges revenge against him. To keep Fillamour safe, Marcella disguises herself as a pageboy and attempts to divert him from going to meet Euphemia at a place where Octavio and his men are lying in wait.

The play is ultimately resolved by the unions typical of romantic comedy which tends to follow a familiar three-part narrative pattern. Northrop Frye observes that an initial oppressive situation is altered through the course of a topsy-turvy phase of the story in which identities are often disguised, social statuses reversed, rules broken, and social standards challenged. He argues that "the typical romantic comedy is ultimately resolved through the establishment of a transformed society, usually symbolised by a marriage, in which social control passes from the father or

paternal figure to the son, who, finally united with a female partner, is ready to create a new family" (Lowe 94). Both Marcella and Cornelia are promised to the appropriate cavalier, Laura Lucretia does not win the man of her dreams, and comes to terms with her arranged marriage to Julio. Female characters play crucial roles in this play. Because they are generally assumed to be of lower social status in the patriarchal worlds they inhabit, their attainment of prominence is through activities and adventures until then unimaginable for a woman. Agency when denied is snatched from society and the heroines' metamorphosis is commendable.

The manner in which Behn employs cross-dressing as a main technique to aid the marriage-plot is hilarious as well as complicated. Laura Lucretia who loves Galliard, disguises herself in male attire and takes a house next door to the supposed courtesans so that she can keep track of what is going on between Cornelia and Galliard. When Silvio comments that in her male attire, she could "…beget a Reverence and Envy in the Men, and Passion in the Women", Laura replies that the transformation is to get into Galliard's acquaintance and for "Love! Love! dull boy, cou'dst thou not guess 'twas Love?"(FC 317).

Marcella, in boy's attire gives Fillamour a letter from herself, signed under the name of Euphemia, making an appointment for that night. She uses male equipage to test Fillamour's virtue and loyalty towards 'Marcella'. She cross dresses the second time in order to secure themselves from Crapine, her uncle's valet who has seen and recognised the sisters in Rome. Marcella is again seen in male attire, disguised as the courtesan's servant in Act 3, Scene 1 where she takes sides with Fillamour and Galliard and wields the sword bravely against Octavio and Julio. In

the course of the play, the audiences get to see Marcella, again dressed as Julio to avenge Fillamour's betrayal and breach of trust to Marcella, neglecting her for a whore.

Cornelia is portrayed as a quick-witted and sharp woman who even though desires to yield to Galliard, does not intend to "…debauch (me) into that dull slave call'd a Wife" (FC 361). She cross dresses as Julio's page, follows Galliard and delivers Fillamour a challenge as from Marcella's brother, Julio. She utilises the disguise to inquire into the exchange between Laura and Galliard and tactfully complicate things between them. Major portion of the play has Marcella and Cornelia cross dressed to escape their brother and to pursue their lovers.

Various segments from Galliard and Fillamour's banter offer glimpses into the double standards in moral judgments during that era.

> GAL. Lawful Enjoyment! Prithee what's lawful Enjoyment, but to enjoy 'em according to the generous Indulgent Law of Nature; enjoy 'em as we do Meat, Drink, Air and Light, nd all the rest of her common Blessings? Therefore prithee, dear Knight, let me govern thee but for a Day, and I will show thee such a Signiora, such a beauty, another manner of piece than your so admired Viterboan, Donna Marcella, of whom you boast so much.
>
> FIL. And yet this rare piece is but a Curtezan, in coarse plain English a very Whore-who filthily exposes all her Beauties to him can give her most, not love her best. (301)

The two men, who are regulars at whore houses to seek pleasure, do not even spare a second thought into themselves. Behn points at the hypocrisy of the patriarchal mindset which sees lewdness as machismo in men and inappropriate in women.

The Dutch Lover (1673), Behn's third play is set in Madrid and features an international cast of characters, not only from Spain but also from Belgium and the Netherlands. The title of the play refers to both the Dutch fop, Hance Van Ezel, who is contracted to marry Euphemia, one of the central female figures in the play and to the Flemish Colonel Alonzo, who falls in love with Euphemia and briefly borrows Hance's identity midway through the play. The plot of this play is overcomplicated. The play is a complex mesh of an incest plot, forced marriages, revenge, double standards in moral judgements and objectification of women. Like most comedies, things progress from disorder to order and all ends well in the world of this play.

Marcel, Silvio, Hippolyta, and Cleonte are presumed siblings at the start of the play. Sister and brother, Cleonte and Silvio, reveal their love for each other at which Marcel is outraged. Meanwhile, Hippolyta who is contracted to marry Alonso elopes with Antonio. Their father Ambrosio steps in at the end and clarifies that Silvio is, in fact, a foster son, removing the incest prohibition and allowing for a conventional happy ending for Cleonte and Silvio. The arranged marriages are supplanted by compassionate ones. Hippolyta ultimately weds Antonio whom she loves. Similarly, Euphemia marries her true love Alonzo, and the unknown Dutchman, Haunce, to whom she was contracted, ends up paired with Olinda, one of Euphemia's maids.

The male and female characters in the play run the gamut, from fearless sword wielding women to fearful and tearful men. Cross dressing figures centrally in the play, both as a plot device and as an instrument for exploring the construction and flexibility of gender roles. Even other characters, either consciously or unintentionally ends up wearing additional attire that moves the plot along, leading to mistaken identities and final revelations. It is Hippolyta who dons the 'breeches' in *The Dutch Lover*. She is in a highly compromised position; she has eloped with Antonio who has now refused to marry her and parades her as a courtesan. To avenge betrayed love, she contemplates murder and tactfully waits for the apt moment.

In Act 4, Scene 2, she appears 'drest like a man,' a disguise meant to supersede her 'womanish passions' and aid her in revenging Antonio, whose love of her is in question. Hipploya cross dresses to avenge the wrong-doings against her and comes across as a resolute, controlled woman who is not one to take things lying down. She has decided to fight and kill Antonio who has used her to take revenge on her brother Marcel. She dresses like a man and "makes her soul a man's too" (DL 293), "where dwells no Tenderness, no womanish passions" (294) and is determined to redeem

> All the lost credit of our family
> To kill, or to be kill'd, I care not which
> So, one or both expire; be strong, my Soul
> And let no feeble Woman dwell about thee
> Hence fears and pity, such poor things as these

Cannot the Storms of my Revenge appease
Those showers must from his treacherous Heart proceed
If I can live and see Antonio bleed (299).

She stands as a stark contrast to the cowardly fop, Haunce Van Ezel, who loves fashion, hates physical fights, and can cry at the drop of a hat.

The misogynist remarks in *The Dutch Lover* take objectification of women and double standards of society to a totally different level. A case in point is when Silvio recalls his visit to "One of the houses where love and Pleasure Are sold at dearest rates", "…where after seeing many faces which pleas'd me not, I would have took my leave; but the Matron of the House, a kind obliging lady, seeing me so nice, and of Quality, told me she had a beauty…would have purchased at any rate. I grew impatient to see this fine thing…." (DL 235).He belittles women as a commodity for sale. Silvio threatening Cleonte of rape in his "cold fit" (283) and asking her to leave if she wants to save her honour is another instance. In a later scene, Silvio brands Cleonte as a bad woman when she finally consents to his wishes out of her love for him. Silvio says: "I find there is no Safety in thy sex/ No trusting to Thy innocence/That being counterfeit, thy beauty's gone/Dropt like a rose o'er-blown/ and left thee nothing but a wither'd root/That never more can bloom" (317).The code of morals applies a severe standard of sexual behaviour to women, whereas the same conduct is treated as chivalric in men. Furthermore there is Alonso who himself is inconstant in love and has his eyes wandering everywhere, but is quick to generalise that "All women-kind are false" (245). Interestingly, it comes from a man who is irked because he has tried to persuade and seduce Clarinda, but she doesn't

yield or "bite at t'other bait" and "…stands still on her honourable terms" (260). He pursues every woman he meets and is confused as to which one is good enough for him. He proudly speaks about his "inclinations to Libertinism" (262) which repulse him from the thought of marriage, but is ever ready and willing for amorous adventures. Haunce van Ezel, who proclaims that "I'll manage her that must be my Wife, as I please, or I'll beat her into Fashion" (DL 272) is another flag bearer of male chauvinism.

The Dutch Lover has an intricate plot - full of mistaken identities, misdirected passions, high comedy, low tricks, distortion of traditional gender roles, and unexpected poignancy. Even with the intrigue of multiple disguises and mistaken identities, the various strands of plot mesh agreeably. Behn's fondness for such comedies with intricate plots which emphasised a lot of action and incorporated the element of spectacle was an abiding one. The play contains a strong female lead who disguises themselves as males. Here, imitation of another gender is done out of necessity and for revenge. One of the most important aspects of cross dressing here is the way in which it offers a challenge to the constructedness of gender categories (Stodard).

A diverse perspective of this theory is found in *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* by Kirsten Pullen who opines that the breeches role is traditionally assumed to be symptomatic of male sexual domination. According to her, cross-dressing actually underscores the sexual exploitation of the actresses by the male spectator who sees sexual titillation. "Cross dressing provocatively highlights the hips, buttocks and legs as the breeches part of the restoration was

introduced first for the youthful actress to display as much of the female anatomy below the waist as a man's dress would allow…"(48).

Elizabeth Howe too opines along similar lines: " The breeches part, as this trope has come to be known, allowed the shapely figure of the actress to be displayed, particularly her legs which were revealed by the style of men's dress and considered to be tantalizing" (56). She sees the breeches as provocative; a sensational way to display as much of the female anatomy as possible; a state of dress which was as erotic as the state of undress, titillating both by "mere fact of a woman's being boldly and indecorously dressed male costume and, of course, by the costume suggestively outlining the actress's hips, buttocks and legs…." (56).This was considered an easy way to entertain the audience.

But this accusation of promiscuity does not hold water in the case of the dramatis personae discussed in this chapter, because it is not conventional passive characters that are portrayed in Behn's cross dressed heroines. The concept of female pleasure and identification should not be foreclosed in the case of her women characters who made bold choices and enjoyed masculine privilege. If the interpretive lens is shifted away from the conventional explanation of the male gaze, cross-dressing in Behn is a demonstration of sexual liberty. Behn has transformed the whore stigma attached to actresses into a place from which to speak about female experience and sexuality**.**

In *The Town Fop (*1676), Sir Timothy Tawdrey, a Fop knight has designed to marry Celinda who is in love with Bellmour. Lord Plotwell, Bellmour's uncle theatens to deprive him of his estate if he refuses to marry Plotwell's daughter Diana

and Bellmour gives in to this demand. Friendlove, brother to Celinda, who himself is enamoured by Diana appears in disguise to observe the traitor. He is followed by Celinda, cross dressed as a boy. Sir Timothy serenades the newlyweds and is threatened by Bellmour, whilst Celinda who has been watching the house, attacks the fop and his fiddlers. Bellamour has been forced to marry Diana but refuses to consummate their marriage. The devastated and vengeful Diana quits the house, only to see the transvestised Celinda engaged in a sword fight. Diana asks her for protection. Diana who is attracted to the cross dressed Celinda, leads her into the house and shortly makes advances of love. Celinda deliberately encourages her affections: "She's fond of me, and I must blow that flame/Do anything to hate my Bellmour" (TF 50).The purpose of her disguise is to oust Bellamour from the marriage. Ultimately, Diana divorces Bellmour who reveals his love for Celinda, Celinda unmasks and they are contrated to marriage. Friendlove is rewarded with Diana's hand and Sir Timothy marries Phillis, Bellmour's sister.

Celinda is the model of endurance and exceptional courage. She is deeply in love with Bellmour and is shattered to read the letter send by him, and even contemplates suicide: "I have took in the Poison which you sent, in those few fatal Words. " Forgive me, my Celinda, I am married"- 'Twas thus you said-And I have only Life left to return. Forgive me my sweet Bellmour. I am dead" (37). But she regains her senses immediately and resolves not to die, but to secure him back somehow. Disguised as a boy, she tracks him down but feels "wretched" and disheartened to see him with Diana," that fair splendid Thing"(38). Celinda's love for Bellmour knows no bounds even after his breach of trust and betrayal. She

rushes to his aid fearing harm from Friendlove. “And hither he’s come in Masquerade/I know with some design against my Bellmour/Whom though he kill me, I must still preserve/Whilst I lost in despair,thus as a Boy/ Will seek a death from any welcome Hand/Since I want courage to welcome the Sacrifice(39).Celinda deserves applause as a true lover who is just concerned about her lover being happy and wilfully withdraws thinking that her efforts to bring him back to her might harm him: “ Oh, how he melts my Soul! I cannot stay, Lest Grief, my Sex, my bus’ness shou’d betray-Farewell, Sir-May you be happy in the Maid you love” (41). She articulates her grief when she says: “Why came off I alive, that fatal Place/Where I beheld my Bellmour, in th’embrace/Of my extremely fair, and lovely Rival?” (TF 45). She saves Bellmour’s life twice from his enemies and tactfully entraps Diana to get details about Bellmour. It is after Diana’s revelation that Bellmour is disinterested in her; Celinda expresses a ray of hope and resolves to reclaim her love. Celinda who does not lose heart after multiple attempts possesses great grit and resolution. She is an absolute contrast to her ineffectual lover who easily gives in to his uncle’s matrimonial schemes. She is the lion heart and Bellmour the weakling.

Despite the fact that women were considered inferior to men during those times, Behn decided to create feminine characters whose stance was to challenge the patriarchal rules that had been imposed on them by the society of that time. Her plays have a lot of feminist thoughts and subvert the entire theatrical establishment which was based on patriarchal hegemony. The first feminist – or pre-feminist – characters can be found in these Restoration plays authored by Behn. To quote Christopher K. Brooks, these works validate the “virtual axiom of feminist thought

that patriarchal men must be re-educated and that women must assume the role of educators" (4).

Like a number of Behn's cross dressed female characters, a venture into the masculine activity of sword fighting is shared by Celinda too. For example, Celinda comes to the aid of her lover in a street brawl just like Marcella in *The Feigned Courtesans* and Hippolyta in *The Dutch Lover*, who wield the sword and performs a duty which none of her male relations has undertaken, in order to revenge the marred family reputation. These heroines possess commendable fortitude and are fearless to deal with any kind of danger.

The employment of breeches discussed in each of these plays is an escalation in the violation of expected behaviour in women. Through disguise, they successfully obtain the object of their desire in life, marriage and warfront, contrary to what the patriarchal structures in these plays would dictate to them as appropriate. The breeches part allows these women to stray from the appropriate models of feminine behaviour in a socially acceptable way. Cross dressing itself, as well as the masculinity it allows, helps the characters achieve this acceptability. Thus, these heroines are allowed to be outspoken and pursue their desires and goals openly without the threat of social censure – a luxury Behn herself had yearned to enjoy.

In the words of Haley D. Anderson:

> For the purpose of the heroines of these plays, "power" takes the form of being able to act independently and exert control in their lives. But this gives, at best, a simplistic picture of what agency can

> mean for women, since as we will see through the plays being examined, agency varies and can encompass many different versions. French feminist Helene Cixous offers an interesting interpretation of femininity that can help us understand how the women in these plays gain agency. In her essay "The Newly Born Woman," Cixous claims that women have long been cast in a role of passivity and kept there by patriarchal society. She goes on to assert that "newly born" woman is bisexual, encompassing elements both masculine and feminine. This, she argues, allows woman more freedom of self. This could account for why the heroines encroach on what society deems masculine as a part of their agencies. While men, according to Cixous, restrict themselves entirely to the masculine, women contain elements of both sexualities. This opens us up to the possibility that the women in these plays can draw from the masculine to gain agency while still remaining women…. (Anderson 4-5)

Behn's utilisation of the possessive pronoun "my" *i*n her preface to *The Lucky Chance:* "All I ask, is the Privilege for my Masculine Part the Poet in me . . . to tread in those successful Paths my Predecessors have so long thriv'd in" (398) suggests that masculinity is already an inherent part of Behn's being: in line with Cixous's theory, both the masculine and feminine make up Behn's womanhood. She uses masculinity as a tool to craft a place for herself that allows her to be both writer and woman. "It becomes acceptable for Behn to participate in that masculine world because claiming an amount of masculinity makes Behn a part of that world rather

than a female usurper. Much as the breeches part does for her heroines, Behn's masculine mask allows her to appropriately interact with men when she achieves her goal of being a writer" (Anderson 10-11).

In her essay in the book titled *Women and Dramatic Production: 1550-1700*, Stephanie Hodgson –Wright says:

> The Indian queen aside, however Behn's cross dressed heroines are feisty creatures when compared with their equivalents in Shakespeare's plays. At the prospect of dueling with a man(or indeed getting into a full-scale skirmish with a group of men) they do not remind the audience how much they 'lack of a man', as Viola does in The Twelfth Night(3.4.69), but throw off their coats and get on with it…. Behn exploits both the presence of the actress and the licence allowed by the comic mode to create powerfully vocal, mobile and resourceful women characters….Behn goes further to create a vision of, perhaps even set a precedent for, women acting beyond the culturally imposed limitations upon their sex and to offer the disturbing vision that every woman in the audience could potentially be something other than she appeared. (175-176)

Behn seizes female presence on stage as an opportunity to 'create a theatrical discourse that highlights the politicisation of feminine appearance foregrounding the categorisation, containment and misrecognition of women's diversity' (Hart 8). Behn's cross-generic use of the scenes is both significant as a theatrical phenomenon in itself and is also a metonym for greater cross-generic activity. Arguably, by using

such a technique, Behn was indicating to her audience a more serious agenda than the genre and subject matter might otherwise imply (Hodgson-Wright 155).

A collapse of the binary gender categories is necessary for the characters examined in this chapter, because they cannot attain their personal agency by following the social norms typically prescribed for women. Taking on a male appearance allows the heroines a freedom of speech and behaviour not available to them as females and this in turn allows them to attain their motives. “Behn created a series of transgressive women (who) fight an inevitable struggle against man and his conventions, using new means: masculine language and masculine imitative behaviour” (Febronia 145).

Behn’s works reveal a continued interest in redefining some significant feminine types, such as the woman as sacrificial victim, as goddess, villainess, virgin or whore. Sexual stereotyping of women and the pejorative associations engendered thereby are meticulously interrogated in these plays of Aphra Behn. The heroines of Behn’s plays enter into traditionally male-dominated spheres at a time of fluctuating gender norms and subvert gender. Behn’s heroines paved the way for later constructions of the ‘New Woman’ and this is exactly her relation to the feminist movement. The female characters strive for the right to govern their own lives and this yearning for power is reflected in the cross dressing and sword wielding ‘free women’ in Behn. In particular, the heroines of her works seek and ultimately gain agency through actions that encroach on the realm reserved for the masculine. These characters can make the agency shift and develop in the society.

In arguing for the emergence of feminist theatre post 1968, Loren Kruger states: “There is a saying that women have always made spectacles of themselves. However, it has only been recently, and intermittently, that women have made spectacles themselves. On this difference turns the ambiguous identity of feminist theatre”(27).While accepting the importance of 1968 as a turning point in feminist consciousness, it cannot in anyway be said that, in earlier periods, women's involvement in dramatic production simply took the form of ‘making spectacles of themselves’. There are a select number of women, who took an active part in controlling dramatic self-representation and succeeded at making the spectacle themselves, Aphra Behn being a forerunner. Behn, in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries shaped dramatic production as a writer and performer. According to Kruger’s definition, this makes the Restoration theatre ‘feminist’ before its time. Such a label seems “anomalous, anachronistic in a period governed by an ideology of female subservience” (Findlay 1) but Behn presents female performers who rehearse anti patriarchal and feminist arguments; women taking the stage in order to foreground interests particular to her sex.

In *A Room of One’s Own,* Virginia Woolf says: “Women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do …” (67-68**).** Behn’s heroines too are not confined to the generic conventions, “…they are not reduced to the polarised objects of speculation, e.g., the wronged paragon of chastity or the spectre of female evil…” (Hodgson-Wright 153). Her women characters “are not merely offered as objects of desire for the audience’s consumption” (154) but

women who articulate their heart's desires and plan to pursue them. As Julie Nash argues in relation to *The Rover*, "Behn introduces women who resist the passive realm to which they would seem to be destined; in doing so, she provides other possibilities for the female spectator and subverts the limited binary opposition of active/male and passive/female" (ibid.).

Our notion of what agency/power means for women should not influence the analysis of these heroines' actions. One should detach from the current scenario and espouse a historical vantage point about women's independence. Modern women enjoy freedom and independence on a scale radically higher than women of the previous eras. Each of the women protagonist discussed in this chapter attain an agency that was revolutionary for her period, even though for modern readers it might seem miniscule compared to what women enjoy today. An examination of the plays leads to the conclusion that agency for a woman is not something which is easily definable, and is instead an ever growing concept that develops for each heroine as the plays progress. Each character brings something new to the definition of power, altering it and allowing the concept to expand. Aphra Behn frequently utilises transvestism in her plays for more complex purposes like asserting women to be a part of that world instead of a female outsider. Susan Owen rightly attributes this usage to a political, almost proto-feminist effect (174).

Chapter 4

An Indictment against Forced Marriages and Marital Servitude: The 'Heroic' Women

In *Paradise Lost,* Book 1V, *John* Milton sums up the role of women within the patriarchal society as follows: "Hee for God only, Shee for God in him" (299). In 1871, the political philosopher Thomas Caryle remarked that, "the true destiny of a woman…is to wed a man she can love and esteem and to lead noiselessly, under his protection, with all the wisdom, grace and heroism that is in her, the life presented in consequence" (qtd. in Walters 70). The patriarchal authority echoed in these lines was the outcome of a complicated gender hierarchy developed through the centuries, which hails that a man's patriarchal role as the governor of his family and household has been instituted by God and nature. The family was seen as the secure foundation of society and the patriarch's role as ultimate and equivalent to that of God in the universe and the King in his empire. A significant quantity of Aphra Behn's literature deal with an awareness of sexual inequalities in society, taking small steps in the direction of social progress in the concept of gender. Her works that deal with the theme of forced marriages are noteworthy for this specific ground.

During the Restoration, Charles II managed to reinforce the patriarchal authority, which was diminished by the assassination of Charles I. It was probably during the Restoration that gender identity, sexuality, and women's oppression became an overwhelming concern (Quinsey 1). These issues were central in society,

literature and theatre. So an agenda which was given great importance under Charles II's reign was to recast the patriarchal tradition and to downsize women's role in society. In the words of Lawrence Stone, "Woman's role and her position in society were redesigned again, and the relationship between men and women acquired a modified form: the father and/or the husband were the woman's and children's only master. Paternity was conceived as an extension of the law of property" (*The Family* 179). Subsequently, the chores assigned for women were only to nurse and educate children or, administer medicines to their family.

> Sociologists like Judith Lorber argue that gender as a social construction not only manifests itself in an individual's gender identity and his or her socially determined gender role, but equally functions as a social institution, i.e. as a process, a stratification system and a structure.... Depending on your gender, society maps out different job markets, status, wages, properties, music tastes, household chores, responsibilities for children, occupations and values. (Rottiers 10)

Foucault states in his work *Discipline and Punish*: "We are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, a mode of enacting and re-enacting received gender norms , which surface as so many styles of the flesh"(65).

Society constructs, imparts, and articulates a role, a position and even consistency to the woman that she has to maintain and uphold.

> Representation is always a process of signification, of semiosis, of meaning making, but, like the sign, representations (which in fact are signs) can be taken as referring to something else, something 'real', outside signification, something which was not made but is. This is how a process of construction, of making meaning, comes to be interpreted as reference, referring to something that already exists. It is how representations come to be taken for realities. (Threadgold 2)

Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) argues that such linguistic connotations are deliberately steered by the dominant category which ordains social hierarchical structures and manipulates the conceptions of a reality. Such an institution dictates norms and designs attributes for male and female, gradually establishing it as rhetoric of normality. As delineated by this dominant group, female virtue entails chastity, modesty and virginity (36-37).

Simone De Beauvoir's theory of the 'Other' in *The Second Sex* bears on this unequal hierarchy of genders. "She theorises an underlying social structure of the self versus the other, privileging man as the subject who defines his active selfhood in contrast with the female, passive object. The 'Other' has always been regarded inferior and subordinate to the dominant, normal self like women are supposed to "lack the valuable qualities the dominants exhibit"(Rottiers 11). Such an unequal ranking of the sexes was practised in the realm of matrimony, since time immemorial, which equals to conferring legitimacy to those in power (read men). This apparently led to a constraint and encroachment on women's sexuality and emotional needs.

Studies on the institution of marriage in the English society during the sixteenth and seventeenth century points at the commodification and commercialisation of women in the marriage market. Since paternal consent was a necessary pre requisite in all communities for concluding marriage, patriarchal authority was supremely manifested by the father figure who directed and mostly forced his wards into the marriage market.

The notion of patriarchy as a hierarchical organisation is crucial to comprehending the rules of marriage and the dynamics between the sexes in marital relationships. A background study of the ways of marriage during Restoration period reveals that the practice of marriage was subjected to economic, social, political and religious considerations. During the Restoration period, finding a husband equated to finding a source of sustenance. Women's education was neglected, they were not allowed to work, and when they worked, their work was demeaned and viewed as drudgery. Despite the fact that forced marriages were significantly less in the late seventeenth century than it was in the beginning of the century or the centuries that preceded, it was spreading in England. It was a time when marriages were often arranged by parents while their children were still very young. Marriage was allowed in a very early age, when the girl was twelve years old and when the boy was fourteen years old. They were also allowed by law to get engaged at the age of seven (Stone, *Road to* 652).

"A marriageable virgin had to acknowledge her status as "property" in an exchange market, in which her value was not only determined by her capacity to produce a legal heir, but also by her portion" (Rottiers 38). Furthermore, women

were considered as “retailers of fortunes” (Diamond 528), who could determine a man’s future. Thus in such a patriarchal society, the father, brother and husband considered the women in his household as his property, which led to enforced marriages where love was rarely considered as a criteria or necessary aspect of marriage. A girl who belonged to the higher class had to marry according to the wishes of her parents and male relatives especially when she had inheritance or when her parents intended to bestow her and her husband some property.

Dowry determined women’s value in the marriage market. “A woman’s father was usually intimately involved in the negotiations about the marriage contract, since his daughter often brought a considerable dowry to the family-in-law and he desired to guarantee his future grandchildren’s rights to inherit their father’s estate” (Rottiers 25). A woman did not have the right to choose her husband and had to marry according to her parent's wishes; most often, the marriage was for economic or political reasons, and she did not have any say or any right to object.

> Considering the financial stake in marriage, it becomes clear that other impetuses than affection can lead to this union. In the upper classes, the marriage engagement allows to climb the social ladder or just maintain one’s social status and wealth. Parental pressure was especially high in these classes. By acquiring his bride’s portion, a husband often entered ... business, stabilised an existing concern, paid debts and, in some cases, made his fortune.

> Although love relationships occasionally led to marriage, “which makes a mighty Noise in the World, partly because of its Rarity, and

> partly in regard of its Extravagancy", practical and financial considerations played a larger role in the decision-making. (Rottiers 27)

A woman became the property of her husband after marriage; husband and wife became one (legal) person. According to the law of coverture she lost her legal identity after marriage and no longer had any say on her properties. This reinforced patriarchal control over marriages to a large extent and led to an underpinning of the wife's duty to be subservient to her husband and the husband right to govern his wife and the whole household. The father was ordained the head of the family and he assumed full authority in the household. Astell sums up a woman's agony thus:

> And if a Woman Marrys Prudently, according to the Opinion of the World, what can she expect who is Sold, or any otherwise betray'd into mercenary Hands. He wants one to manage his Family, a House-keeper, an upper Servant….One who may breed his Children, taking all the care and trouble of their Education, to preserve his Name and Family. One whose Beauty, Wit, or good Humour and agreeable Conversation, will entertain him at Home when he has been contradicted and disappointed abroad… whose Duty, Submission and Observance will heal those Wounds other Peoples opposition or neglect have given him. In a Word, one whom he can intirely Govern and consequently may form her to his will and liking, who must be his for Life, and therefore cannot quit his Service let him treat her how he will. (37-38)

As Stone notes in *The Road to Divorce*, "A married woman was the nearest approximation in a free society to a slave. Her person, her property both real and personal, her earnings and her children all passed on marriage into the absolute control of her husband" (13).

The traditional concept of patriarchy about the unequal rankings in gender was founded on the Christian faith in Adam being subordinate to God and Eve as subordinate to Adam .This belief rationalised a patriarchal heirarchy. The faithful still observed such untold precepts in the scripture because patriarchal pressures were difficult to evade. The Christian conviction of Man as the embodiment of reason creates a separation between the sexes regarding their activities and assigned political affairs to men and domestic affairs to women. A woman was expected to honour the virtues of her sex: chastity, obedience, modesty and sensitivity. Furthermore, the rule of thumb stated that wives are designed to rear children, instruct servants and stand by their husbands .If she fails in this or allow her temper to prevail, she "accomplish[es the] ... Ruin" her husband initiated (Astell 8). "Nevertheless, a husband's misconduct and tyranny towards his wife can become "a very great Blessing to her," (27) since it gives her the "Opportunity to exercise her Vertue"" (28). Male vices, be it violence, lust, pride, promiscuity or sexual assertiveness, were seen as a sign of machismo.

In his work *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), "Locke implicitly challenges the custom of marriage as a hierarchical contract pre-established by a higher, divine order, since he defines all political institutions as secular and modifiable relationships. Therefore, the partners' capacities and flaws ought to

determine the power balance within marriage, which, in Locke's view, continues to incline to the husband's side" (qtd. in Rottiers 22). Mary Astell who is regarded as one of England's first proto-feminists retaliated by questioning Locke's idea: "When patriarchy can be largely dismissed in the government of the state to make place for a fraternal parliament, this ideology still remains present in the household as "a Kingdom that cannot be mov'd, an incorruptible Crown of Glory"(119). She exposes Locke's arguments that "Woman is *said* to be the weaker Vessel" (62) and "man is superior in strength and mind" (120) to be prejudices.

The husband's domination over his wife during those times was akin to the reign of the King over his subjects. In *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, Astell sums up the life of a wife thus:

> A Wife must never dispute with her Husband; his Reasons are now no doubt on't better than hers…. For Covenants between Husband and Wife, like Laws in an Arbitrary Government, are of little Force, the Will of the Sovereign is all in all…the Husband is too wise to be Advis'd, too good to be Reform'd, she must follow all his Paces, and tread in all his unreasonable steps, or there is no Peace, no Quiet for her, she must obey with the greatest exactness, 'tis in vain to expect any manner of Compliance on his side…. but Patience and Submission are the only Comforts that are left to a poor People, who groan under ...Tyranny, unless they are Strong enough to break the Yoke, to Depose and Abdicate, which I doubt wou'd not be allow'd of here. (29-60)

In short a woman was expected to make her husband “her Head” and have no ‘head’ and mind of her own.

Such notions of femininity changed drastically when writers like Behn started to produce new texts relating to the place of women in social and familial structures .Like many other literary writings, Behn’s works too dealt with the social dilemma of forced marriages which translated to loveless marriages. Despite the fact that women were considered and expected to be inferior to men during those times, she decided to create feminine characters with mettle, who challenge the patriarchal rules that had been imposed on them by the society of that time. Her characters ‘conquer’ the marital laws established by the patriarchal society, and represent the Restoration woman’s desire to have the same rights as a man and live in equality. These characters represent the heroic women who managed to rise from the social oppression of that time. The Restoration period was indeed transitional and remains crucial for changing the hitherto ‘figure’ of the woman in the marriage market.

The oppressive patriarchal system feared that a woman is a potential resource of ambition and power that has to be kept on a leash, otherwise their bedrock of power and profit would be at stake. Aphra Behn herself was prey to such an attitude. Consequently, she employs her literary works to denounce the manipulative and over-controlled system which perceives women as a docile body and a property. Showing solidarity to the words of Wollstonecraft, Behn persuades “women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are

only the objects of pity, and that kind of love which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt" (Wollstonecraft 4). The male dominant figures in her works manifest Dollimore's opinion according to which "[i]dentity is clearly constituted by the structures of power, of position, of allegiance, and service; any disturbance within or of identity could be dangerous to that order as to the individual subject" (54). So they are diligent on making women follow men's instructions and live by his rules. Even Behn, who revealed the sufferings of women in her plays, suffered in her marriage; her marriage did not last long. In her introduction to *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, Janet Todd refers to Behn as a scapegoat of the patriarchal system of marriage (2-3). Behn's failed marriage was possibly the reason behind her open discussion of women's freedom in love, marriage and sex. Behn instigated women to search for fitting husbands and marry them even if it took them to get married against the wishes of their parents. She did not prefer secret marriages but the declared ones and opines that if necessary, a woman had to elope to marry for choice.

In the words of Elin Diamond,

> The commodification of women in the marriage market is Aphra Behn's most persistent theme. Beginning appropriately enough with *The Forced Marriage; or The Jealous Bridegroom* (1670), all of Behn's seventeen known plays deal to some extent with women backed by dowries or portions who are forced by their fathers into marriage in exchange for jointure, an agreed-upon income to be settled on the wife should she be widowed. There was a lived context

> for this perspective. The dowry system among propertied classes had been in place since the sixteenth century, but at the end of the seventeenth century there were thirteen women to every ten men, and cash portions had to grow to attract worthy suitors. As the value of women fell by almost fifty percent, marriage for love, marriage by choice, became almost unthinkable. Women through marriage had evident exchange value; that is, the virgin became a commodity not only for her use-value as breeder of the legal heir but for her portion, which, through exchange, generated capital. If, as Marx writes, exchange converts commodities into fetishes or "social hieroglyphics," signs whose histories and qualitative differences can no longer be read, women in the seventeenth-century marriage market took on the phantasmagoric destiny of fetishised commodities; they seemed no more than objects or things. (524-525)

Behn concentrated on exposing such a kind of exploitation of women in the exchange economy, besides making a vivid discourse on the oppressions they faced in marriage.

In her article, "Masking the Drama: A Space for Revolution in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Courtezans",* Arena Tiziana Febronia rightly states that in order to understand Restoration and Aphra Behn's plays, it is fundamental to inspect the phallocentric context upon which and through which all pivotal concepts were built up and supported (53). She refers to the biblical concepts that sided with patriarchal notions of feminity: Because "… woman is not created in God's divine

image, but in man's imperfect one. Thus, woman is placed in a submissive position, she obeys man's desires, and she helps him in his tasks. There is no equal position, Eve exists only in relation to someone else, Adam, and thus she is his reflection. Eve is generated through Adam's body" (57). The paper then goes on to examine the Aristotelian reception in the Judeo-Christian context which is re-formulated in Saint Paul's teachings:

> Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.
>
> But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.
>
> For Adam was first formed, then Eve.
>
> And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.
>
> Unmarried virgins and wives were to maintain silence in the public sphere and give unstinting obedience to father and husband…. (59)

Behn, through her works reveals how such discourses are perpetuated and constructed to women's detriment. She is fully aware that it is a world by and for men. The patriarchal order had already stamped women as imperfect copies of men. Behn attempts to project an autonomous and freer vision of woman. She revels in deconstructing the patriarchally established social construction of gender which dictated that women were allowed to live their own private lives only in the shadows of their domestic worlds. Behn fights and resists such a world. Her female characters are daring enough to take control over their own lives. It is the women who act as

important agents and take the reins into their hands: to avenge their enemies and to seduce their desired lovers and break the observation made by Margaret Cavendish that "sons bear the family name but Daughters are to be accounted but as Movable Goods or Furnitures that wear out"(qtd. in Diamond 525). Behn had infringed the negative norms that were prevailing in the seventeenth century society by calling out women to craft their future by themselves according to their desire and not fall prey to the whims and fancies of the men around them.

This chapter dissects the works of Behn which deal with patterns of marriage in the seventeenth century English society from a feministic and historiographical perspective. The works examined are *The Forced Marriage or The Jealous Bridegroom*(1670), *The Amorous Prince*(1671), *The Dutch Lover*(1673),*The Rover or The Banished Cavaliers*(1677), *The Feign'd Courtezans or A Night's Intrigue*(1679), *The Second Part of The Rover*(1681)*The Lucky Chance or An Alderman's Bargain*(1686) and *The Lucky Mistake*(1689). She expounds the cultural customs of the institution of marriage, the diverging gender roles established for husband and wife within a matrimonial union, the power relations it entails and the paternal involvement in the process. The heroines in these works partake of the social protest against disparaging traditions followed in Renaissance patriarchal marriage and women's position within such marriages. It speaks against the tendency to construct 'Her' as an eccentric "exception" (Howard 38). The issue of marriage arises repeatedly in these plays, reflecting the male dominance over Restoration women.

The works deal with heroines who adopt their own dynamics to fulfil their goal of attaining freedom and autonomy in a world where men establish dominant positions. The chapter analyses and exposes relationships based on power. The societal set up down ages has perpetuated gender inequality and tried to establish that men are intended to be dominant and women to be subordinate. "This ideology also contributed to exalt 'masculine' characteristics [as] prized, and 'feminine' characteristics [as] less valued [so that] the existing power distribution is sustained" (Beckman 7). It can be noted that all the patriarchal figures in these works try to establish their mastery over the females through commands, coercions and obligations. They dictate total obedience to the women and expect women to remain silent about their desires and let the fathers, brothers and male relatives decide about suitable husbands for their daughters, sisters and wards. According to Lorber,

> the social institution of gender has produced the inequality between the sexes ...and is produced and maintained by identifiable social processes and built into the general social structure and individual identities deliberately and purposefully.Therefore, Lorber argues that the *raison d'être* of the social institution of gender is to consistently subordinate women to men's power. (qtd. in Rottiers 10)

True to this theory, the patriarchal prototypes in the works discussed in this chapter reinforce the fixed power relations for the sexes. They are the dominant group who possess the power to decide women's fate. The male characters try to act as the sovereign power. But such an attempt fails miserably, since the women deny a subordinate position. Instead of being submissive and surrendering to the male

commands, Behn presents women who rebel and subvert the patriarchal stance. Instead of accepting and subjecting themselves to the power of institutions; they espouse strategies to overthrow gender prejudices.

The chapter concerns with the theme of forced marriages and elopement from nunneries and examines the plays to demonstrate that marriage should be based on mutual love and not on ambition, or financial prospects. The heroines are spokeswomen for Behn's critique of enforced marriages and present the predicament of a woman who is forced to enrol into a nunnery, not because of a spiritual calling, but due to the patriarchal pressures of keeping female desire private and silent. Behn primarily examines the challenging traditional boundaries between gender roles for men and women specifically in the matter of matrimony. She exposes and questions gender as an institutionalised ideology utilised for conferring unequal power to the sexes. The women in these plays are bent to escape the sexual politics of representation and patriarchal exchange economy prevalent in their age.

Behn also takes up the politics of prostitution as a secondary plot in these works. Being an era when virginity was placed on a pedestal, it is ironic that prostitution flourished in the seventeenth century. It seemed therefore, that virginity's worth was limited exclusively to the area of marriage and only to women.

The big bad world in which Aphra Behn lived, and her heroines inhabit, was a male-oriented and patriarchal one. She presents as the backdrop, a world where male characters always prevail and female characters are expected to act as powerless puppets in the hands of men. In the works discussed here, the heroines are forced to marry the men appointed by their respective patriarchs, but they are

adamant in their resolution to not obey unjust commands. Still others are reserved for a convent life against their wishes but are outspoken about their sexual needs and disagreement in spending life in a nunnery. Here, Behn analyses love and marriage from a woman's point of view. "Drama almost always arises from conflict and in this instance the conflict is between the young women, who want freedom to marry for love, and patriarchal authority…which insists that marriage is a financial transaction arranged by men in which women have no say"(Owens 151). Instead of waiting passively for destiny to set things right, these women are prepared to take the initiative in seeking what they actually want.

Behn criticises the arranged and forced marriages in her debut play *The Forced Marriage.* Angeline Goreau notes that *The Forced Marriage* ". . . evokes the violence that the custom of arranged marriage wrought on the lives of Behn's contemporaries and demonstrates the terrible effects of the interest of a father on his daughter's fate" *(*128). Similarly, Elaine Hobby asserts that *The Forced Marriage* ". . .initiates what was to be the dominant theme in Behn's plays: the actual meaning of courtship and marriage for women, and the fact that male power is an inescapable component in such relationships and has to be negotiated with" (120).

This play explores the freedom of choice that the two heroines Galatea and Erminia dare to demand. Princess Galatea wants to marry the young general Alcippus, who is not her social equal. Prince Philander hopes to marry Erminia, but she is below his class. Both women believe strongly that they have the right to pick their mates, just as much right, the men have. The play has as its theme, a woman's right to choose her husband. Their decision is so strong that it outweighs their sense

of obedience to society. Erminia who is thrown between love and honour uses her wit to control her destiny. The theme pursued here is how marriages arranged by families without taking into account an individual's feelings tend to be unhappy and loveless.

The marriage of Erminia to Alcippus is a forced marriage. Erminia pleads to her father to allow her to marry the man she loves and not compel her to marry Alcippus. She declares that she considers Alcippus as a brother and a friend, and not a lover, but General Orgilius forces her to marry Alcippus in spite of her intense love for Philander. Orgilius is least affected by Erminia's denial to marry Alcippus because he is just concerned about the fortune, the marriage would bring Erminia. He threatens her into the marriage: "If I did believe/ Thou could'st to such a thought a credit give / I would the interest of a father Quit…Gaining the prince, you may a father lose" (2. 5).Orgilius commands her to submit to his desire, and help him preserve his word and credit to the king and Alcippus even if it equates to his daughter's life and future being ruined.

Erminia is well aware of the negative consequences and disastrous results of a forced marriage and refuses to budge to Orgilius' orders: "Alas Sir, I can be content to die, / But cannot suffer this severity" *(*1. 3. 27). She derives her power from her fervent love for Philander as she tells her father, "I borrow'd Courage from my Innocence, / and my own Virtue, Sir, was my defence. / Philander never spoke but from a Soul" (1.3.26). Unfortunately, her father neither heeds to her appeal nor feels her anguish but prefers to keep his prior arrangement with the King and

Alcippus. He is ready to destroy the life of his daughter to prove his subordination to the King.

In fact, Ermenia is 'rewarded' to Alcippus for his bravery, and Erminia bares her soul before Alcippus regarding the reason for her marrying him: "T'obey a King and cruel Father too/ A Friendship Sir, I can on you bestow/ But that will hardly into passion grow/And t'will an act below your virtue prove/To force a heart you know you can never love" (2.3). Erminia tries her best to convince Alcippus as well, and reveals to him that she is in love with Philander and hopes to get married soon. Unfortunately, Alcippus is least affected that Ermenia can never love him, he is "the eagle who will not part so with his prey" (1. 1). Philander's words for Erminia sums up how women were treated in those times: "vain peevish creatures" (2.7) who are "tyrannised to that degree, that nothing but (their) death will set free" (2. 3).

Finally Erminia has no choice but to surrender, "Ungrateful duty, whose uncivil Pride/by reason is not to be statisfy'd/Who even loves Almighty Power o'erthrows/Or does on it too rigorous Laws impose" (2.3). She is unable to prevent the marriage, but finally is adamant on not letting the marriage consummate. She decides to resist Alcippus from having sex with her. She tells Gallatea, "But if I must th'unsuit Alcippus wed, / I vow he ne're shall come into my Bed" (1.2. 22). She openly confesses, "T' obey a King and cruel father too, / ... / To force an heart you know can never love" (2.3.45).Through sheer dogged determination she ultimately gains what she wants and gets united to Philander with everyone's blessings.

Alcippus who was reluctant to leave Erminia despite knowing about her love for Philander finally frees her in order to marry Gallatea. The extent of economical calculations becomes evident here. To marry Gallatea means that Alcippus will get half of the kingdom and he foresees the glory he will acquire if he marries Princess Gallatea . Pisaro advises Alcippus:

> Set Galatea's charms before your eyes,
> Think of the glory to divide a Kingdom.
> And do not waste your Noble youth and time,
> Upon a peevish heart you cannot gain. (3.1.71)

Ultimately, "Pride, Honour, Glory, and Ambition strive" (4.5.107) and Alcippus determines to renounce Erminia and marry Gallatea.

Robert Hume rightly claims that Restoration comedies are not hostile to the institution of marriage, but they are ". . . quite definitely hostile to marriage of economic convenience, and especially to 'forced' marriage. Both were serious problems in upper-class seventeenth- century society" *(The Rakish Stage 142*). Behn debuts the theme of forced marriage in this play and proposes solutions for it in her next plays like *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans.* In the works published after *The Forced Marriage,* women become more empowered, decide to violate rules, reject forced and arranged marriages, disguise themselves, fight alongside men, attend carnivals and search for suitable husbands. As it is stated in *The Feigned Courtesans,* Susan Owen summarises the role of women in avoiding the arranged marriage by ". . . plotting to take control of their lives, civilising rakes and winning marriage choice and freedom of sexual manoeuvre" ("Sexual Politics" 161).

In *The Rover*, Behn alters the established definition of 'masculine' and 'feminine' in her contemporary culture. According to the patronising patriarchs of the family, Hellena the younger sister is "designed for a nun", whereas Florinda the elder one is "designed for a husband" (1.1.29, 18). Florinda and Hellena are the scapegoats of the patriarchal system ready to be sacrificed at its altar. In the opening scene of *The Rover* their brother Don Pedro conveyes his father's message: "I have a Command from my Father here to tell you, you ought not to despise him, a man of so vast a Fortune" (RV 67-69) and to "consider Don Vincentio's fortune and the jointure he'll make [her]" (76). Pedro acts as a deputy for his and he warns Hellena that their father will never agree for Florinda's marriage with Belville because it is disadvantageous. The striking feature of this opening scene is the sheer ferocity of the onslaught on the whole institution of arranged marriages. There is no doubt that her father and brother regard Florinda as an object for sale. Florinda retorts that her "youth, beauty and fortune ... ought not to be thrown away on his age and jointure" (77-8) mocking the age difference between her and Vincentio. In response, Pedro discredits his sister, downsizing her position, reducing her to a simple label- 'girl'. Pedro remains indifferent and emotionless towards his sisters' pleas. He shows a stubborn attitude and asks his sister twice: "Have u done yet?"(128) in order to declare his final verdict about Florinda's future: "For all your Character of Don Vincentio, she is as likely to marry him as she was before" (128). Pedro declares Hellena's verdict too: "Do not fear the blessing of that choice. You shall be a nun" (148). He exercises stolidly his power upon his sisters. The woman's body is established as an attribute or a property of men, as demonstrated by Pedro. But Hellena foils him with her witty rejoinder: "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!" (148). Her deriding question and sarcastic acknowledgement of her intended role belie the fact that Hellena has no intention of entering a convent.

For each reprimand from Pedro , Hellena supplies a clever repartee; her response to this initial impugn from her brother is spoken in an aside in which she proclaims that she does not think herself suited to discussion about saints either. She grows increasingly intense and bold in defying her brother's patriarchal authority over her. Eventually, Pedro feels worn out of Hellena's contending with him over his choice of mate for her sister. So he orders her to be bolted away until the time when she must join the nunnery, to which she retorts: "I care not, I had rather be a nun, than be obliged to marry as you would have me, if I were designed for it" (RV 162 –163). Her assertion is made with a flippant dismissal of his punishment while she pretends not to care about being sent to a monastery. In doing so, Hellena disintegrates her brother's authority over her; he cannot effectively exercise his control over her if she is so indifferent to his power. Moreover, Hellena's statement mocks Pedro's ability to choose a marriage partner, thus undermining and ridiculing his authority by implying that he is unfit to perform the duties of a patriarch.

Pedro seems to be fixated by his role of surrogate father. He interrogates and tries to dominate his sisters. He accuses them of falsity, perfidy, deception and debauchery. "He refuses to recognise his sister as equal so he uses a patronising tone and manner opposed to Hellena's self-confidence and natural equality that force the audience to reflect on the female condition"(Aughterson 35-36). Hellena scorns and questions his decisions and totally diffuses his authority. She ridicules Don Vincetio,

referring to him as a dehumanised man and an old monster: “The Giant stretches itself, yawns and sighs a Belch or two as loud as a Musket…throws himself into Bed, and expects you in his foul Sheets”(RV 1.2.118-123). The sarcasm finds its end in the final question: “And are not these fine Blessings to a young Lady?” (RV 121-122). In an impassioned, but also very funny, exchange with her brother, she declares that it would be preferable to be an adulterer than to have to submit to sex with an ugly, unloved husband, and she makes a direct comparison between the lot of such a wife and that of a slave (Owens 151-152). Hellena uses her outspokenness to confront her brother’s masculine authority over her. She is the modern heroine who manifests her dissent and projects Florinda’s inevitable miserable future described thus: “And this man you must kiss, nay you must kiss none but him too—and nuzle through his beard to find his lips—and this you must submit to for threescore Years, and all for a Jointure”(RV 1.2.125-128). She goes against the figure of the patriarchal authority that her brother represents, as he tries to dictate what she must do with her life. Her character demonstrates that female roles were starting to change in the restoration theatre.

Her siblings repeatedly label Hellena as “wild,” as her wit does not suit the softness expected of women; then, her refusal of her brother’s demands violates the expectations of female deference to masculine authority that a customary female figure would take after. By departing from the norm, growing independent and working towards her own goal of self-determination, Hellena is the bold, witty character who grabs an agency for herself that hauls her out of those patriarchal structures and demands of appropriate female behaviour. In due course, Pedro’s

authority over his sisters is totally frustrated when both of them manage to go amiss from the paths Pedro attempts to lay out for them. Florinda and Hellena don a masquerade to dodge the patriarchal disposition of law and jointure lay down by their father and legislated by their brother Pedro. These heroines refuse to be victimised by subjugation into the existing institution of matrimony and succeed in escaping the fortune determined to them by others.

Don Pedro epitomises patriarchal power, the power that, as Foucault states, is constantly wielded upon docile bodies (138). This policy of coercions, Foucault says, manipulates elements, gestures, and behaviours (149).

> This is a "political anatomy," or a "technology of gender," which defines how one may have a hold over others' bodies. It is the product of various social technologies, such as institutionalised discourses, social relations as well as practices of daily life. This "technology of gender" produces subjected docile bodies, those who do not try to subvert the male dominant position but behave in obedience to the imposed standards. (Febronia 80)

Owen points out that during the Restoration, "patriarchal family ideology . . . [was] an ideal under threat" (162). This fear of losing 'power' is the catalyst for Pedro who immediately takes over the role of patriarch, and usurps the male centric authority in his father's absence. Hellena's aim is to get away from the expectations of appropriate feminine, lady like conduct to which she must conform .Moreover, her brother's verdict that she is "not designed for the conversation of lovers," because she has been intended and bred for the nunnery (RV 161) infuriates her. In order to

attain her desire, Hellena must particularly battle against the patriarchal authority in the form of her brother, who endeavours to dictate the direction her life will take. As Runge observes, there has been a history of "the consistent subordination of women to men in patriarchal cultures" (11), which makes Hellena's actions all the more interesting. Szilagyi argues that the siblings have "equal agency" in their parallel revolts against their father's authority (438 – 439). It is against Pedro's routine endeavours to reinforce his authority to decide the course of their life that his two sisters rebel, thus allowing for a more noticeable undermining of masculine rule.

The opening dialogue of *The Rover* is also implicitly "gestic," raising questions about women's material destiny in life:

> FLORINDA. What an impertinent thing is a young girl bred in a nunnery! How full of questions! Prithee no more, Hellena; I have told thee more than thou understand'st already.
>
> HELLENA. The more's my grief. I would fain know as much as you, which makes me so inquisitive. (RV 159)

Given the context of Restoration, Helena conjectures that, to have a lover, means to "sigh, and sing, and blush, and wish, and dream and wish, and long and wish to see the man" (Flecknoe 96). Helena dons masquerade because she desires not a particular lover but a wider knowledge. Her wish to know "more than" she already understands can be troped as a woman's wish for intellectual independence and access to institutions of knowledge. "Aphra Behn's Hellena seeks knowledge "more than" or beyond the gender script provided for her. She rejects not only her brother's

decision to place her in a nunnery, but also the cultural narrative of portion, jointure, and legal dependency in which she is written not as subject but as object of exchange"(Diamond 527).

Florinda is adamant in her resolution to not obey her father's unjust commands to marry Don Vincentio but at the same time, she is presented as a model of feminine propriety. Through such a character sketch, Behn offers a means of measuring Hellena's deviation from the norms of femininity through contrasting behaviour. Florinda keeps to the feminine expectations by chastely cherishing Belvile from afar and never admitting her love. Hellena, on the other hand, deviates from soft female modesty and instead "plans a direct assault," expecting to find a spouse for herself through Florinda's connection to Belvile (Szilagyi 439). Again, she is outspoken about her disagreement in spending life in a nunnery. Although she has never been in love, she fantasises about the concept of romantic love. She declares that when the right man for her comes along, true love will be recognised immediately. Instead of waiting passively for destiny to make it happen, she is prepared to take the initiative in seeking her man and is confident on using her physical charms to the best advantage.

In *The Rover,* Behn makes an attempt to curtail 'forced marriages' through the character of Florinda and Hellena who are able to break free the barriers that "design" their future and manage to marry men of their choice. Florinda evades the unwanted destiny of arranged marriage instructed by her father and brother for their personal economic benefits. Similarly, Hellena who seems to have no proclivity for a life in the nunnery manoeuvres to evade her unwanted destiny of enforced

seclusion. She is forced to become a nun, because of the usual strategies of the families which wanted to save the dowry. In Act II, Scene II, she equates the system of dowry with the price that a prostitute demands for her services, thereby revealing the "essentially commercial nature of the sexual unions sanctioned by marriage, which gets subsumed by rhetoric of love" (Dasgupta).

> The women become objectified as their body is commercialised and marketed in marriage. Like prostitutes, their body will be sold, since it represents their dowry, and consumed. Angellica hangs out her picture to attract customers.... This prostitute is fully aware of the commercialisation of women's bodies as she advertises herself....Even though Angellica expects payment in exchange of her body, virgins like Hellena and Florinda also enter this economic realm as objects of which the value is determined by the dowry they can bring to their future husband. As such, women serve as containers of male desire. They are no subject in marriage, but subjected to men's objectification of their sex. (Rottiers 43)

Behn questions this lack of esteem for the woman as an individual and the ruling belief that marriage is an arrangement that follows the logic of a market deal.

Derek Hughes in his article titled "The Restoration Theatre" suggests, "Boundaries for women in the play become places of great danger" (39). In *The Rover*, Angellica makes a great deal of money as a highly sought-after courtesan but is not considered worthy in the eyes of men and society because she is solely a commodity and not a viable prospect for marriage or love. When she makes an

attempt for the first time to cross the boundary line of her profession she does not succeed in her quest for true love but finds betrayal and disillusionment. The hero Willmore, who is endowed with the patriarchal authority of king and court, appropriating her portrait before even seeing the woman, symbolises the commodification of the Restoration woman. He reduces Angellica to an enticing, fetishised object for male consumption. But ironically, when Florinda tries to elope with her lover Belvile, she is approached by Willmore, who tries to rape her. She escapes that and passes through an open door into Blunt's house who has just been cozened by a prostitute and so has vowed to "beat" and "kiss" and "bang" the next woman he sees to avenge his insult at the hands of a woman. The extent of misogyny is illustrated in Blunt trying to demonstrate his potent virility somewhere else. He locks Florinda behind an interior door metonymically reducing her to a commodity status or that of a male-owned-object. In due course most of the male cast clamour outside to "partake" of Florinda. Men can assault, force down doors and show misogynous rage which is decreed as machismo. The patriarchal mindset on the concept of compliance and conquest is used to reveal the dynamics between the genders within relationships and in terms of struggles for power.

Hellena endeavours to have Willmore acknowledge that they are on equal terms regarding their acumen and eloquence when she says, "Our business as well as our humours are alike: yours to cozen as many maids as will trust you and I as many men as have faith" (3.1.185-187). This libertine utterance functions as an enfranchisement of equality with men. Furthermore, Hellena steps up to Willmore and takes the first step in their game of enticing. Florinda hands over a letter to

Belvile to change her lot. Even a prostitute, Lucetta, ensnares Blunt by seducing him in the first place. The overall principle entails that it is the women who initiate action and takes the narrative forward. Navigating outside the boundaries permits the women, the agency to work independent of patriarchal authority and to negotiate their marriage according to their own needs.

In majority of Behn's works, the way the relationship between lovers develops into one of commitment, "envisages the possibility of a relationship between men and women not based on ownership or domination. These so called "free unions of equals" contrast with the bargaining nature of forced marriages in the plays. The last scene between Hellena and Willmore even suggests a reversal of their (constructed) masculine and feminine sexual identities; the rover calls himself "Robert the constant" whereas she is named "Hellena the inconstant"" (Rottiers 46). Hellena tries her best, jeopardises herself and challenges all those around her in order to win over Willmore. She confidently declares her intention to prevail in that even if that takes a long time, "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 myself the gay, the kind, and the inconstant - the devil's in't if this won't please you" (3.1.175-78). Hellena makes him "kneel – and swear" (251) and "kiss the book" (255). Hellena firmly reacts against the illicit desires and waywardness of men. She makes the marriage contract in the guise of a man, and here the masculine is used as a tool to gain Hellena the agency necessary to be self-determining as a woman. Through cross-dressing, she grabs the power to leave behind the demure, passivity of the appropriately modest lady and instead make more forthright

demands to Willmore for the blooming of their relationship into marriage. The rover responds subserviently to all her orders and promises to be loyal to her, which signals Helena's triumph in her plot. Not too long after making the promise, he attempts to coax her into sharing his bed: "let's retire to my chamber.... Come - my bed's prepared for such a guest, all clean and sweet as thy fair self" (5.1.418-421). She refuses him outright as if adhering to the idea put forward by Wollstonecraft: "Passions are spurs to action, and open the mind; but they sink into mere appetites, become a personal and momentary gratification when the object is gained, and the satisfied mind rests in enjoyment. The man who had some virtue whilst he was struggling for a crown, often becomes a voluptuous tyrant when it graces his brow" (22-23). If Hellena had submitted herself to his desire; he would never marry her as it happens with Angellica.

In *The Rover,* Behn presents how, for men, it was a glory if they call on prostitutes to get sexually satisfied and "like cheerful birds, sing in all groves, and perch on every bough" (5.1.301-302), as Willmore says. But women were derided even if they engaged in a conversation about sex. Sexual freedom and lust in a woman was irrevocably associated with prostitution. Ironically, men had the right to hunt for prostitutes, whereas women are not allowed to search for good husbands. A man's "appetites" (Fletcher 429) were celebrated and was a measure of his masculinity whereas a woman's sexuality had to be repressed and hidden away. Such double standards operated within a patriarchal framework. The pursuit of sexual pleasure should have been equal for both sexes, but even the rakes deem it as a privilege reserved for men alone. Behn's heroines oppose this patronising attitude

towards female sexuality. Hellena is presented by Behn as "a 'female rover', a person who's in search of gaiety and pleasurable affairs.... both departing from and reinforcing her social script"(Baweja 2).

Kate Aughterson aptly remarks, "the Restoration was influenced by the idea that the Civil War brought about a crisis of a particular model of masculinity: the courtly Cavalier, whose sexual prowess matched the unassailed political power, had literally been defeated. Despite the revival of the Cavalier rake in Charles II himself, his rakishness was […] equally followed and reviled" (234). The English Civil War had destroyed their securities, so they tried to re-build their world in a different philosophical climate. Hence, they discredited femininity and built their philosophy on the exaltation of the self and male desire. Their Hedonistic credo was woman, wine and song; their only goal was the gratification of their own senses (Wilson 18).

"In a society where patriarchal norms proclaim female chastity and misogyny is endemic, the female sexual appetite was disregarded and its nature was obscure. This lead to insecurity in men, whose sense of power derived partially from their sexual potency and domination over women" (Rottiers 49).This sexual hypocrisy can clearly be drawn from the numerous exchanges between Pedro and Willmore.

Willmore only envisages his rights in the relationship, while carefully ignoring the possibility of rights for the female party in marriage. This denial of a female eroticism stems from a man's recognition that its strength could damage the traditionally constructed image of the masculine self. Nevertheless, Behn insists on equality between the two sexes and exposes the constructed and unopposed common

opinion according to which man was free to rove from an adventure to another only in the name of desire, as all male characters do in both parts of *The Rover*. Behn says it without saying that when the heroines are criticised for lewdness, fingers are never pointed at the heroes who are equally responsible and should receive equal flak.

The play discusses the very limited choices open to women in the corrupt, materialistic society of the seventeenth century and portrays through the character of Hellena and Florinda, how women who were destined to be bought and sold into marriage could gain agency over their lives. Hellena persists in winning Willmore as a husband whereas he only wants to have sex with her. But this does not discourage Helena, who stresses, "I don't intend every he that likes me shall have me, but he that I like" (3.1.37*).* Hellena is adamant on winning Willmore and she uses her intelligence and wit with full force so as to hold Wilmore's mind. Because of her continuous effort, she wins him finally. Anannya Dasgupta denotes their relation, "What Willmore does to Angellica, Hellena does to Willmore. She arouses and frustrates his desire, leads him on with the promise of one thing and lands him in a situation quite beyond his bargain" (148). Dasgupta further notes that there is a match between Willmore and Hellena, "Willmore can put the blame of his unruly sexual appetite on nature and carry on considering every woman a whore, till of course he meets his match in Hellena who makes equal claims to sexual liberty and inconstancy" (147). Angellica's accusation of Willmore being mercenary is suggestive and thought provoking. She aptly says that if he were looking for a wife he would be more concerned with her fortune than with her beauty or virtue. He disarmingly concurs and offers no defense of this 'barbarous custom'.

The title leads the audience to expect focus on a man. It is noteworthy that Behn chooses to open *The Rover* with women holding centre stage, voicing their concerns and initiating the action. In her book *The Prostituted Muse* (1988), Jacqueline Pearson has shown that in this period, women dramatists were much more likely than men to open plays with women characters. This is of some significance in a culture that allowed women no public voice, and ceaselessly enjoined them to be silent and submissive. As Pearson puts it, by giving women the first word, the reader is introduced to the dramatic world through their eyes, and they are defined not as object but a subject, not as the "Other" but as human beings who can set the standard for their society (64). In an age when one could not imagine an utter parity between the sexes, Behn dismantles the model of manhood to reveal its fallacies.

In the sequel to *The Rover* titled *The Second Part of the Rover* which takes place in Madrid which is noted for its notorious Spanish catholic background, Behn makes a strong statement against the pre established patriarchal traditional values in society. In this play she intensifies her criticism of monetary discourse concerning marriage by portraying the venture of Blunt and Fetherfool to dupe the Jewish sisters into a loveless marriage just for their own economic interest. The two have no love or regard for the women and call them “Lady Monsters,” “She Garigantua” (ROV 2.1.21, 3.1.33), “Monster as big as the Whore of Babylon” (3.1.33). The men only eye their fortune and the “Neck with that delicious row of Pearls about it” (5.4.75). The woman recognises the guileful endeavours of these men and resolves to snub them. Owen opines that “the ‘Lady Monsters’ demonstrate the monstrousness of the

libertine ideology, which not only downgrades the woman to a commodity, but even slights her personal qualities" (qtd, in Rottiers 51). The men are controlled by the persuasion of money. Money seems to render all other qualities in women redundant. The repetitions of "interest," "credit," and "value" that circulate throughout the play are illustrations of misogyny and commodification of women.

The institution of marriage focused solely on the families' financial interest during those times. During the tiff between Ariadne and Beaumond, he refers to marriage as the business of parents. Ariadne is not impressed by this argument and condemns such a marriage as "Tyranny" and "slavery". She panics at the thought of her future with a "Drinking Whoring Husband" (2.2.31). "La Nuche and Willmore's match discloses Behn's sharpened criticism on the institution of marriage, since she portrays the possibility of an "utopian future of unwedded bliss". Like Astell, Behn could hardly conceive of a woman's happiness as a wife and questions the foundations for the unequal relationship within marriage for the sexes..." (Rottiers 58).

Another scene that occurs in *The Second Part of the Rover* which signifies the concept of women as 'commodity'is when Willmore addresses the "City Wives" as a "Shop [of] Commodities" (3.1.48). Besides that, Willmore and Frederick regard marriage as a 'bargain.' Such discussions signal Behn's view of forced marriage as a practice that commodifies women, which the author substantiates by the use of the mercenary terms used throughout the play.

The courtesan, Angellica refutes Willmore's disparaging views on women by boldly stating that it is men who 'sell' themselves to the highest female bidder in

marriage. They are more controlled by financial concerns than love: “When a lady is proposed to you for a wife/ you never ask how fair, discreet, or virtuous she is/ but what’s her fortune: which if but small, / you cry ‘she will not do my business’/ and basely leave her, though she languish for you/ Say, is not this as poor? (ROV 2.2.89-94). This critique on the male stance regarding marriage, prostitution and fortune is echoed in the *The Second Part of The Rover*.

These assertions made by the heroines, denouncing marriages for money and forced servitude in marriages are echoed in Astell’s *Reflections upon Marriage* (1730): “Wife and servant are the same / But differ only in the name” (qtd.in Diamond 525). Ariadne is in consensus to Astell’s view: “who wou’d marry, who wou’d be chaffer’d thus and sold to slavery” (2.2.31). The issue arises repeatedly in plays and verse of the period: not only are marriages loveless, but once married, women lose both independent identity and control of their fortunes. Ariadne says: “You have a Mistress, Sir, that has your Heart, and all your softer Hours: I know’t, and if I were so wretched as to marry thee, must see my Fortune lavisht out on her; her Coaches, Dress, and Equipage exceed mine by far: Possess she all the day thy Hours of Mirth, good Humour and Expence, thy Smiles, thy Kisses, and thy Charms of Wit” (1:152). Ariadne’s sentiments receive astute articulation in Astell's *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*: The money motive for marriage produces in the man contempt and “Indifferency” which “proceeds to an aversion, and perhaps even the Kindness and Complaisance of the poor abused'd Wife, shall only serve to increase it.” Ultimately, the powerless wife ends up “mak[ing] court to [her husband] for a little sorry Alimony out of her own Estate” (133-135). Two centuries later, when

Engels merely restates these comments in his observation that forced marriages "turn into the crassest prostitution-sometimes of both partners, but far more commonly of the woman, who only differs from the ordinary courtesan in that she does not [hire] out her body on piecework as a wage worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery" (qtd. in Diamond 525), it can undoubtedly be said that Behn's sensibility has survived the ages.

The marriage-plot comedy was Behn's most successful theatrical model in the competitive literary arena of the restoration age. In most of her works, she challenges the conventional patriarchal social mores of marriage throwing into sharp contrast the different social standards by which male and female sexual behaviours were judged. "A reading of Behn's *The Feigned Courtesans; or, A Night's Intrigue* (1679) offers ample opportunity to explore Behn's representations of gender differences in relationship to prevailing moral codes within the generic outlines of the Restoration marriage-plot comedy" (Lowe 92). The main plot centres on the adventures of two attractive aristocratic Italian sisters, Marcella and Cornelia, as they outwit their aged guardian, Count Morosini, and escape an arranged marriage (in Marcella's case) and a celibate life in a convent (in Cornelia's). Marcella is bethrothed to Octavio, but is in love with Fillamour. Marcella feels that "'tis better to die than fall into the hands of Octavio" (FC 3.1). The sisters are seen as a burden to be disposed off which is evident from Count Morosini's words: "…sure my ancestors committed some horrid crime against Nature, that she sent this Pest of Woman-kind into our family-two nieces for my share-by Heaven, a proportion sufficient to undo six Generations"(FC 3.1). He refers to Cornelia as "the

young baggage" (ibid.), who he conveniently sends off to the nunnery, to be bred, against her wishes. Cornelia herself yearns for liberty because she feels like a 'slave' being trapped in a monastery.

Cornelia empathises with Marcella's dilemma and mocks at the institution of arranged marriages when she talks about "so shameful a purchase as such a Bedfellow for life as Octavio" and says that it was better to be a courtesan who could "buy a better Fortune" (2.1) than being a noble woman. This perspective echoes Astell's words on marriage: "To be yoak'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…is a misery none can have a just Idea of, but those who have felt it"(5).

The young women flee to Rome from their home in Viterbo posing as courtesans named Euphemia and Silvianetta, so that they may be free to control their future and pursue men of their choice. Disguises, reversal of roles and cross dressing follow and in the end the ladies administer power to settle everything in a manner they intended. In the end Count Morosini and Octavio, Marcella's fiance, relent and withdraw their objections to the unions of Marcella and Cornelia with their respective cavaliers. The play is ultimately resolved by the unions typical of romantic comedy and both Marcella and Cornelia get betrothed to two dashing young British cavaliers of their own choice. Marcella convinces Octavio that she can never be his, because she belongs to Fillamour: "That I was yours, Sir, was against my will…my soul was Fillamour's e'er …" (FC 3.3) and Octavio is forced to 'give back his claim'. Cornelia's quick wit and intellect transforms Galliard, who's quite

the whoremonger. He realises that she is a woman of substance and wins her love. The marriage-plot is structured around an oppressive situation in which social control is embedded in paternal figures like fathers and sons. Female characters challenge the social standards and play crucial roles in shattering the prominence of the patriarchal worlds they inhabit.

An important secondary plot in this play focuses on a third rich and beautiful virgin, Laura Lucretia , who also disguises herself as a courtesan and adopts the name La Silvianetta in order to avoid an arranged marriage and win Galliard's love, further complicating the elaborately tangled confusion of identity that characterises the play's action.

The women in these plays swing into action in order to escape unhappy circumstances like an arranged marriage and being bound to convent life forever. They seek out ways and execute strategies to crush the indisputable maxim that the patriarch "must govern absolutely and intirely, and that she has nothing else to do but to Please and Obey. She must not attempt to divide his Authority, or so much as dispute it, to struggle with her Yoke will only make it gall the more, but must believe him Wise and Good and in all respects the best…"(Astell 60).

In Behn's days, the institution of marriage indeed created rather large disparities for the sexes. The upper classes who possessed properties tried to secure their estates within their own league and daughters became scapegoats in such negotiations. Hippolyta and Euphemia in Behn's *The Dutch Lover* are used by their brother and father to satisfy mercenary motives.

Euphemia wants to get married to Alonzo, her brother Lovis's friend, but is already contracted to the Dutch boor Haunce van Ezel by her father Don Carlo who somehow wants to cast her away with a man who has some fortune even if he is a fool or an old drag. Euphemia is least interested in this prospect: "I am contracted to a Man, I never saw, nor I am sure shall not like when I do see, he having more Vice and Folly than his Fortune will excuse, tho a great one; and I had rather die than marry him"(DL 240). But her father's response to her plea is obnoxious: "…look upon his wealth Euphemia, and you will find those Advantages there which are wanting in his Person; but I think the Man's well" (267).

Hippolyta shares a similar dilemma. Marcel promises his sister Hippolyta in marriage to his friend Alonzo. Alonzo has not even seen her, but takes it up immediately as he desires to ally himself with so ancient and powerful a family as Ambrosios. To avoid marrying against her wishes, Hippolyta flees from her house to pursue Antonio, whom she loves. The men's response to this is terrible. Marcel brands her sister as a traitor who has brought disgrace to the family and wants to put an end to her: "By sacrificing that false Woman's heart/That has undone its Fame" (244).

The women are fearless and intelligent enough to leave no stone unturned to change their destiny of getting "dispos'd off" (310). Hippolyta assumes the habit of a Venetian courtesan first and then disguises herself in a man's attire. It is Euphemia who develops and implements the plan of presenting Alonzo as Haunce van Ezel before her father and equips him with the letters intercepted from her father to the

Dutchman. The arranged marriages that characters find themselves in at the beginning of the play are all replaced by companionate ones, by the end of the play.

The seventeenth century was acquainted with women who obeyed the patriarchal figure no matter what; women who were mortified since she had no voice in any matter; women who were silent victims of arranged marriages. However plays like *The Dutch Lover* had another story to tell. This play has a lot of feminist thoughts. Hippolyta is presented by Behn as "an updated Restoration heroine voicing the success of early feminism … [She] is evolved to the point that she is able to speak her wants … She, in fact, becomes the personification of much 'early feminism' (Almodovar 1).

Susan Moller Okin in her work *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* elucidates how women are badgered into complying with a patriarchal establishment. She rightly says:

> Gender roles are most importantly established in the domestic sphere or in family life. Patriarchal cultural values are predominantly "practised" in the private sphere to which the woman is confined. To preserve female subordination, the patriarchal values are mostly concerned with these "personal, sexual and reproductive" aspects of life, sustaining women's position as dominated by men. This accounts for the significance attached to a woman's reputation as a virtuous virgin or as a faithful wife. (qtd. in Rottiers 23)

In her novel, *The Lucky Mistake,* Behn depicts how the desires of the female descendants are curbed by the needless significance pinned to honour and family respectability. Count De Pais was a man of great birth and he had two daughters, Atlante and Charlot, but he did not possess the wealth to get them married according to their class. He feels that it is better to see them laid in their graves than consent to marry below quality. Count Vernole, a man of forty six is enamoured by the youth, wit and beauty of Atlante, who is just fifteen. He wants to get married to her when she comes of age. Count De Pais brings up his daughters in a rigid nature, because in his opinion allowing freedom to women was "the ruiner of all Virtue and Honour in Womankind" (LM 356). Atlante was "kept within like a vow'd Nun, or with the Severity of a Spaniard" (359). De Pais puts Charlot, his youngest daughter in a monastery against her wishes at a very young age, to save the dowry he would have to spend on her marriage. She plaintively reveals how she is forced to live a "life absolutely contrary to (her) humour…" (396).

When De Pais comes to know of Vernole's interest in Atlante, he is happy to have a man of "illustrious blood ally'd to monarchs" (384) and conveniently brushes aside the fact that he is thirty years older than Atlante. He is happy that his family will rise again in glory. When Atlante protests, her father's response is that he was marrying her off not to a Man, but to Glory and fortune and that "a woman ought to look no further" (ibid.). Atlante who was resolved "to die a thousand Deaths rather than break her solemn vows to Rinaldo, or to marry the Count" (386), cast about how she could avoid it with least hazard of her father's rage:

> … and therefore bursting forth into Tears, she throws herself at his Feet, imploring him not to use the Authority of a Father, to force her to a thing so contrary to her Inclination assuring him, she could not consent to any such thing, and that she would rather die than yield. She urged many Arguments for this her Disobedience, but none would pass for current with the old gentleman, whose prie had flatter'd him with Hopes of so considerable a Son-in –law. He was very much surpris'd of Atlante's refusing what he believ'd she would receive with joy; and finding that no arguments on his side could draw hers to an obedient Consent, he grew to such a rage, as very rarerly possess him vowing, if she did not conform her Will to his, he would abandon her to all the Cruelty of Contempt and Poverty; so that at last she was forced to return him this answer. (LM 385-386)

Her constant refusal in spite of his opposition drives De Pais furious and he ultimately draws his sword to kill Atlante because she would not budge. Since he could not keep his word to Vernole, De Pais decides that the best punishment he could give Atlante is "an eternal Inclosure in a monastery" (389), so that she can never lead a married life with Rinaldo. "He carries Atlante, under pretext of visiting her sister to the Monastery, where she was no sooner come, but she was led into the Inclosure" (390). Her father had rather sacrifice his daughter, than allow her a marriage of her choice.

Nonetheless, Atlante resolves not to have a life without Rinaldo and keeps herself reserved for her lover. Charlot hatches a plan and elopes from the nunnery

with Vernole, taking the first opportunity that came her way to escape convent life. In the end, De Pais has to budge before his daughters' obstinacy and the happy union of the lovers is agreed upon.

Heroines like Atlante and Charlot outrun the restrictions and inequalities imposed on them by the privileged patriarchal group. Rising against the normative conduct, Behn's women rebel and display their ability to decide for themselves.The traditional role attributed to women: of being silent and submissive, is subverted. This attitude destabilises the patriarchal system which maintained that silence represented the value of a woman of quality.

Behn envisaged marriage as a love relationship between two hermaphrodites, an idealised couple, who match each other in status, wit and humour and decried forced marriages. The plot and characters in the play, *The Lucky Chance* are an antithesis to this concept. Old Sir Feeble Fainwood 'purchases' his bride young Leticia Bredwell and Sir Cautious Fulbank 'purchases' Julia. Both women are in love with other younger, poorer men: Leticia with Bellmour and Julia with Gayman. Sir Feeble Fainwood devices a ploy whereby Leticia is made to believe that Bellmour is executed. He then plies his suit with such ardour that Leticia, induced with poverty and wretchedness is left with no other option, but to marry him. Julia too was forced into marriage with old Fulbank, because of his fortune. Julia regrets it every moment of her life: "Oh! How fatal are forc'd marriages/How many Ruins one such Match pulls on/had I but kept my sacred vows to Gayman/How happy had I been- how prosperous he/Whilst now I Languish in loath'd embrace/Pine out my life with Age-Consumptions, Coughs"(LC.1.2). Leticia refers to Old Fainwood as

"a nauseous thing" (1.3). The women determine to end the tradition of marital servitude before Feeble's daughter Diana becomes the next victim. She is also promised to Sir Fulbank's nephew Bearjest whom she does not love. She is in love with Bredwel. The story is based on the real travesties of the seventeenth century marriage market in London.

Sir Feeble is jealous and anxious that his young wife would become the talk of the town with her youth and beauty and so he restricts her movement even to the church. He fiercely guards her from other men: "…that tricking and dressing, and prinking and patching, is not your Devotion to Heaven, but to the Young knaves that are lick'd and comb'd and are minding you more than the Parson" (1.3). A wife is seen as the husband's property which he can put to use as he pleases. Julia is 'pawned' to Gayman by Sir Cautious for a rate of three hundred pounds for a night which Gayman drools at, as a great "bargain" (LC 4.1). He stakes his wife for gambling and talks about her as if she were a 'commodity'.

Finally the ladies are reunited with their lovers and they make the old fools realise the base means through which they gained young wives and how they were "not fit Matches for either" (5.7). The female characters in this work are dynamic, intelligent and headstrong, at odds with the patriarchal social customs prevalent during that time, which restrain women's self-fulfilment. Exploring the theme of marriage, this play too unveils the biased and mercenary nature of this institution.

Mary Astell, the feminist writer and rhetorician reflects on mercenary marriages: "For pray, what do Men propose to themselves in Marriage? What Qualifications do they look after in a Spouse? What will she bring is the first

enquiry? How many Acres? Or how much ready Coin?" (14). Likewise, in *The Amorous Prince*, Frederick makes vows, but changes his word because he believes Cloris to be socially beneath him and cannot bring him any fortune. In contemporary ideology, marriage is envisaged as a bond of romantic love between husband and wife- a contract between two individuals whereas the matrimonial institution in the seventeenth century disregarded motives like mutual affection, romantic love or sexual attraction.

Parents exercised their veto immensely. The patriarchal figures directed the matrimonial contract and had the right to defy a couple's intention to marry. There are passages in this play which clearly reveal how Laura Lucretia is kept "confin'd" (AP 4. 2) under the clutches of her brother Lorenzo and cruel father Salvator. Pietro, the page describes Laura as a "prisoner of her father" (ibid.).

The Amorous Prince is a powerful social satire. It offers serious criticism of seventeenth century social and sexual conventions. Behn opens up the whole question of the sexual 'double standard' by which 'rakish' behaviour in men seems to be put up with, and is certainly no bar to their marrying well, whereas for women to seek a partner themselves or engage in love or sex outside marriage is to wreck irretrievably any chance of a respectable marriage. Finally Lorenzo realises his mistakes and snubs the man-woman disparity when he says:

> And why the devil should I expect my sister should
> Have more virtue than myself? She's the same flesh and blood: or why, because
> She's the weaker vessel,

> Should all the unreasonable burden of the Honour
> Of our house, as they call it,
> Be laid on her shoulders, whilst we may commit
> A thousand Villanies? (AP.4. 1)

He helps Laura to escape by keeping the father busy in a dispute. Laura disguises herself as a courtesan and adopts the name La Silvianetta in order to avoid an arranged marriage. An important theme of this play is 'women's wit', because female characters go toe to toe with the men and exercise considerable agency. Behn utilised this play much like all her previous works, to further develop the themes that characterised her career, examining how contemporary approaches to sex and marriage always placed women at social disadvantage.

Women in the seventeenth century England were ideally supposed to belong to the area of the sentiment, away from anything intellectual or antagonistic. During those days, the role of woman in a society had received many interpretations, but woman's sexual identity was ignored, and theorists upheld women's role in society as merely domestic roles like child care, cooking, dressmaking, brewing beer, making butter, housekeeping and bartending. Men's responsibities included sophisticated arena like politics, military service, priesthood, secretarial work, fishing, hunting, and any hard labour. Opposing this ideological framework, Aphra Behn strikingly became the first successful woman playwright to examine the relations between men and women and setting a new way of seeing the female gender by asking new feminist questions about gender roles, especially marriage. She questioned numerous restoration ideologies and conventional beliefs operating

in the world of literature which were branded as the Man's domain. In these works, Behn discusses the depiction of female sexuality, women's rights and liberty as the most important social problems of her era.

The works discussed in this chapter, explore how marriage enshrines unequal gender roles. Gender is conceived as a sphere in which power is exercised through social and cultural constructs. Social conditioning regarding gender roles and symbols associated with masculinity and femininity acts as a powerful mechanism especially within the realm of marriage. Husband and wife are not portrayed as affectionate partners united in marriage, or soul-mates becoming one in the realm of marriage, but Behn portrays less harmonious examples and enforced patriarchal marriages since that is what she witnessed during the seventeenth century. She exposes how the misogynist practices altered the definition of marriage into an advantageous, economic system of exchange to procure financial stability, where a woman's value was considered monetary.

Behn's portrayal of female potency renders an equal partnership between the sexes as a realistic possibility.

> Behn attributes to woman a new centrality and shows a new sensibility where women reject the roles assigned them by their fathers and both express their determination to disobey these paternal commands and follow their own desires. Behn also begins her assault on traditional distinctions within and across gender lines … by giving these young women the bawdy, witty lines that were reserved for the

> courtesans or for the male cavalier characters in Killigrew's play. (Burke 122)

The women characters discussed in this study realise that the notion of providing patriarchal 'protection' is a form of control over women. Women are constantly reduced to be nothing but an object of man's pleasure and Behn's heroines know this, so that Cornelia comments: "Good Lord, what a damnable wicked thing is a Virgin" (FC 2. l. 34). "In Behn's epoch, not only did the dominant perspective create an aristocratic masculine identity through the repetition of libertine gestures, acts and attitudes, but it also tried to wreck the "other" identity" (Febronia 82). But these unyielding women believe that the bare name of Man does not confer sense, and the mere being in authority does not infallibly qualify him for controlling others' lives. Many a times, she is compelled to submit to the Head's power, not so much out of reason but because of necessity. Women are not "objects of men's ambitions and desires, but rather independent characters and active desiring participators in the development of the events of the play. Woman challenges the male convictions, affirming herself as Subject. She affirms her difference, obliging man to recognise her agency. Woman acts as master of herself: female characters act as male characters do" (Febronia 95).

The plays discuss the destabilisation of gender roles and attempts at blurring of gender boundaries. Behn's depiction of female virtue in her characters challenges patriarchal ideals. "In *The Rover,* she challenges the definitions of the most divergent sexual choices for women: virgin and prostitute. She exposes the practice of commodification of women to be present in marriage as well as in prostitution"

(Rottiers 36). Behn's heroines endeavour to combat institutionalised beliefs by subverting their constructed gender role and successfully asserting their female sexuality. The prostitute in *The Rover* and *The Rover 2*, represent a wife's repressed alter ego; a wife's doppelganger, one who non hesitantly articulates female desires and indulges in them.

In the unravelling of the intrigue plots of the works discussed in this chapter, Aphra Behn not only thematises the mercenary commodification of women in matrimony, the denouncement of forced marriages and the marketing of women in prostitution, but demonstrates in its gestic moments the ideological contradictions of the apparatus which Behn inherited and the society for which she wrote.

Kate Aughterson points out that Behn, in her comedies, focuses on two issues: The first is female empowerment and the social and economic constraints working against such empowerment, such as arranged marriages and the intersection of patriarchal family arrangements with those of a wider society. Secondly, she clearly places masculinity, rather than femininity, under critical scrutiny: most particularly the philosophy and actions of the cavalier rake (217). The rakes in the works discussed in this chapter symbolise men who consider sexual triumphs as gallantry. Such an image warrants the idea that men's self-esteem is mostly based on his sexual capacity to conquer a woman and subordinate her. This practice was consciously and subconsciously followed in matrimony too.

Behn aggressively rebels against such customary boundaries between genders by arbitrarily bestowing masculine and feminine characteristics to both genders. She mingles traditionally labelled male and female qualities in her female

characters. She presents unorthodox, impulsive and spontaneous heroines like Hellena, Charlot, Laura and Hippolyta who valiantly seek to attain what they desire. Behn presents women with courage who possess wit and humour just like or even more than men do.

A lion hearted woman like Behn could never envisage the institution of marriage as enforcement by the patriarchal standards. In an age when women were not allowed to have souls; were conditioned to think that marriage should be their only preference and final ambition; her only endeavour should be to settle as a family and make her husband and kids happy and this signified the completion of all her dreams, Behn presents women who "thought steddily to a greater distance" (Astell 55). Though the term 'feminism' was unborn during those days, the attempts of the heroines to thwart the patriarchal conventions of marriage, are indeed 'feminist' in the modern sense because of their, being aware of "the unjust ways in which women as a group are treated, wanting to remedy this injustice, and holding out the vision of a society that allows women as well as men a degree of autonomy and self determination" (Pearson 153). These works might be described as 'feminist' since it portrays women characters in a strong and positive light where they initiate action and fearlessly articulate issues of concern to women. Through these heroines, Behn presents the female perspective which is highly critical towards male dominance. They oppose their destiny; revolution comes from within, transforming female roles repressed by male convictions and trying "to repossess her body which had been confiscated from her" (Febronia 94). Her female characters invert the negative stereotypes attached to being 'feminine': passivity and alienation.

Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) conjures up an image of the independent woman who "…wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The modern woman …prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating on the same terms as man" (qtd. in Walters 98). This is what we perceive in Behn's heroines. They attempt and succeed in subverting the stable male dominant society in which they lived. They are not speechless and powerless individuals. On the contrary they create a space of possibilities and face the masculine world with elan.

Thus it can undoubtedly be proclaimed that the heroines discussed in this chapter are women, who

> … by a Wiser Conduct have brought themselves to such a reach of Thought, to such exactness of Judgment, such clearness and strength of Reasoning, such purity and elevation of Mind, such Command of their Passions, such regularity of Will and Affection, and in a word to such a pitch of Perfection as the Human Soul is capable of attaining even in this Life by the Grace of GOD, such true Wisdom, such real Greatness, as tho' it does not qualifie them to make a Noise in this World, to found or overturn Empires, yet it qualifies them for what is infinitely better, a Kingdom that cannot be mov'd, an incorruptible Crown of Glory. (Astell 91)

It has to be noted that even in the present day, marriages for financial purposes has still not completely fallen out of use .Throughout ages, marriage has remained a social structure which is founded on gender-inscribed actions and it

creates a social hierarchy with allotment of different rights and duties for men and women. “Consequently, feminist revolts in the twentieth century have facilitated women’s access to leadership positions and mitigated the yoke of domesticity, while men have started entering the traditionally female realms of child care and household chores. Although the interpretation of female and male gender roles has altered, their unequal statuses have remained intact” (Rottiers 98).

Chapter 5

Deconstruction of the Physiognomic View: Heroines with Strange Bodies or the 'Other' Women

In ancient Sparta, children born with defects supposedly signalled divine vexation and were subjected to infanticide. During the Restoration age in which Aphra Behn lived, the prevalent medical practice was to isolate and sequestrate the mentally disabled, the indigent and marginalised by producing asylums for these groups. The misogynist tradition of the seventeenth century viewed the female sexual difference itself as defective and monstrous. In such a restrictive age, being born a woman itself was considered a deformity; women already faced specific barriers to equality and full participation due to discriminatory factors and being a physically handicapped woman was like a double disability. When normal healthy women were considered to be 'defective' beings lacking physical and mental qualities and therefore sidelined, women with disabilities were largely neglected when it came to any societal policies and issues. This reality was especially true of women with disabilities in the restoration culture where the role of wife and mother was considered any female's primary one.

It is in this light that a reader finds the characters of Behn: Belvideera, Maria, Celesia and the Jewish sisters - all disabled in their own manner. Behn in her works: *The Dumb Virgin or The Force of Imagination, The Unfortunate Bride or The Blind Lady a Beauty* and *The Rover Part Two or The Banish'd Cavaliers* " deconstructs a seventeenth century patriarchal ideology that belittles women's social roles and

accomplishments as marginal, tainted and defective" (Nussbaum 39) by using female characters with deviant characteristics and disabilities. This chapter focuses on the representation of disability within these three specific texts.

Behn's characters challenge the negative stereotypical depiction of disabled women's position within society. The works are written with a view to deconstruct such negative images and not to campaign or advocate the issues faced by disabled women. But one needs to understand and absorb the history of the disability movement, especially the background of the female disability movement in order to interpret these three works of Aphra Behn. Those historical and cultural contexts assist in placing these texts into an analytical framework.

Disabled people were always segregated from the rest of the society. It was a common practice to put them away in institutions on the ground that it was better for them and for the society. They were regarded as second class citizens and given little respect. Devoid of any individual identity, they were denied choice, dignity and autonomy. Most of the institutions for disabled were establishments with rudimentary conditions and tough discipline which made them places of torture. According to the resident references, special schools and care homes were more of a traumatic experience with harsh living conditions. Disabled patients were used for horrific medical experiments and to conduct research which sometimes led to permanent brain damage, paralysis and even death. 90 % of the disabled persons were consigned to living in such institutions and not allowed to live independently or with families because it was believed that their physical disability might offend or frighten able-bodied people. The law prohibited the appearance of people who were

"diseased, maimed, mutilated or in any way deformed so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object or improper person…in or on the public ways or other public places"(Brignell). So they were left with no option but to stay in care homes and endure the institutional abuse.

Society was even more hostile towards deaf people and sign language. There are accounts about how "from the 1860's onwards, there was a concerted campaign to banish sign language from classrooms and replace it with lip-reading and speech only" (ibid.). Such an oralist philosophy condemned sign language and its users.

There were many instances of disabled people being used as a source of entertainment in fairs, circuses and carnivals - abused and neglected. Academic research and testimonies of disabled people themselves provide plentiful evidence of inhumane practices and violations of basic human rights.

Discrimation on the basis of disability could be read along the same lines as racism, where the normal able bodied considered themselves 'whites' and the disabled 'black'. "Our world is a place of compulsory able-bodiedness that insidiously excludes, stigmatises and devalues difference" (Hobgood 3). The disabled were deemed 'insufficient' and 'inappropriate' on the basis of their impairment. During the middle ages, disability was characterised by the important role in a system of spiritual exchange which was the only source of making a living for the disabled. As Row-Heyveld observes:

> …able bodied Christians gave them alms…and in return,
> experienced an encounter with the divine facilitated by the disabled

> person…commonly and ironically called "the limbs of God". This type of charity was not a one-sided act but a mutual exchange- salvation for alms, alms for salvation- with disability as the crux on which this commerce balanced." (15-16)

But the English reformation transformed the categories of "sensory, somatic and mental non normativity" (Hobgood 15). After the reformation in England,

> …prayers could no longer be purchased formally… and, therefore, disabled persons had no services to offer in exchange to the aid given to them. Without this tradition of spiritual commerce to frame an important mutuality between able –bodied and disabled Christians, their relationship quickly became solely hierarchical….The goods and services that had been traded in exchange for prayers and affirmations of salvation now simply became charity. (Row-Heyveld 15-16)

Thus the medieval empathetic attitude to disability was foreclosed by the English Reformation and this incited new complexities, challenges and stigma around disability and disabled individuals.

Therefore, the ultimate factors defining disability in any particular society were systemic social barriers, negative attitudes and social exclusion. Tobi Siebers rightly states: "…the disabled body provides insight into the fact that all bodies are socially constructed- that social attitudes and institutions determine far greater than biological fact the representation of the body's reality" (737). Even in the twenty

first century disabled people suffer lack of opportunities, poverty and discrimination but they are at least now able to participate in society to a degree that previous generations could only have dreamed about.

Margaret Cavendish in her book *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*(1655), complains that: " we are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses, not suffered to fly abroad…we are shut out of all power and authority, by reason we are never employed either in civil or martial affairs, our counsels are despised and laughed at, the best of our actions are trodden down with scorn, by the overweening conceit men have of themselves and through despisement of us" (qtd. in Walters 21) **.** Now, considering female disability ; in such an era where women's role was seen as only within the home and domestic sphere, disabled women were nearly an invisible element and their issues were treated as not of real relevance- only a sideline and not worthwhile .The disability movement was always seen through the male lens. Tom Shakespeare, a British activist suggests that this male bias has various rationales: "Looking at some of the macho politics of disabled direct action…gives some clues as to why relationships and intimacy and child rearing may not have been on the agenda" (167) of any disability movement. Disabled women were neither expected to be married nor are they visualised earning a living for themselves. They are regarded as potential burdens and often grow up with low self esteem and a negative self image. In addition to these, they get very less opportunities to come into contact with agencies of socialisation. Their families in fact remain the sole, primary socialising agent. Usually for disabled girls, it is a case of "double discrimination and cultural deprivation" (Ghosh).

Disabled women's participation in community life was and still is very meagre due to various cultural reasons. The families tend to be overprotective about them and this hampers and stifles them. Disabled women are regarded as inauspicious in many superstitious cultures. Such a negative social attitude leads to feelings of loneliness and isolation in women with disabilities. Families often fail to provide the required emotional support. So they remain neglected in a society which gives hierarchy to men's needs; considers women's education and well being as unnecessary luxury; and judges her solely by her physical appearance .The society does not expect her to get out of the four walls of her house and socialise . She is under-represented and 'found' wanting in appearance in comparison to the conventional stereotypes of beauty in her culture. As a result, many disabled women come to consider themselves as " non persons, with no rights or privileges to claim, no duties or functions to perform, no aim in life to achieve, no aptitudes to consult or fulfil" (Shah 28).

In the year 2011, author Janet Price wrote:

> Disabled women have in general been silenced within society, denied their rights and equal economic and social opportunities due to prejudice, stigma and poverty….The fear, anxiety, vulnerability and ignorance people experience on encountering disability are translated into societal restrictions on disabled women's access to educational opportunities and to health care and limits to their employment options, where they tend to be restricted to poorly paid and low status jobs.… And when and if they challenge all this, they are met with

> incomprehension and despite the new UN Convention (on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007), a marked lack of social and legal rights. (1-2)

Additionally, there were also misconceptions about her disability being inherited by her children. It was believed that a woman's womb and mind were intrinsically linked, mainly because females were considered to be deviant both in body and intellect. Helen Meekosha in her article on political activism and identity making states: "The sphere of reproduction has been even more tightly regulated by society, where disabled women have been controlled in relation to their sexual desire, their sexuality, their right to motherhood, and their right to care for their children"(5). She points at the tendency of mass sterilisation of disabled women without their knowledge or consent which was a prevalent practice till the 1970's. Because of her disability and restrictions in mobility, society often considers disabled women as ill- suited to perform the role of a home-maker and mother because they are unable to perform their tasks independently.

Disabled women did not find a place in the feminist movement too. Feminism around the globe has viewed disabled women's status as the 'other'. Even in the beginning of feminist awareness, disabled women have always been relegated to the lowest rungs of the feminist movement. There was a reluctance to accept them as sisters in the struggle and unwillingness to see the discrimination and prejudice against them. Disabled women have been excluded from most women's movements. Impairments like blindness, deafness, physical deformities etc were seen as individual tragedies. They were excluded from disability movements because they

were women and feminist movements because they were disabled. The feminist movement wanted to project a picture of capable, strong, in-control women and the disabled woman's image of victims with childlike helplessness, dependence and vulnerability was a let down to this. Disabled women were considered as charity cases, disowned by God and damned by fate. The UN ESCAP report, 'Hidden Sisters' describing the lives of disabled women, stated: "…the combined effect of barriers is the extreme deprivation and marginalisation of women with disabilities" (United Nations). To quote Umoh E., founder of FACICP (Family Centered Initiative for Challenged Persons) which is an NGO to promote the rights of women and girls with disabilities:

> The issue of women with disabilities is excluded in two areas; there is a great oversight of disabled women's issues within the women's movement, they think it is a matter for disability movement, while the disability movement thinks it is a matter for women's movement. So, we are at crossroad and sometimes I am almost tempted to think that we are beginning to lose our gender because of a disability. (qtd. in Price 5)

So there was no movement addressing their needs or realised that their interests were not being served and that they were not in control of their lives.

Women with disability struggled to move through a world strewn with physical and attitudinal barriers, poverty and non-literacy and fought to manage their difficulties, pain and discomfort that accompanied many disabilities. Women's movements which have always worked towards equipping and empowering women

to fight for equality remained oblivious to the needs of women with disabilities. They were left at the periphery with the view that they do not have a part to play in the society. From the earliest days of modern feminism, feminist theory has deemed the body as a significant point of analysis. This in turn led to the development of the theory about the role of female bodies in structuring their place in society, culture and politics. This mode of identity politics helped feminists to see the body not as a natural entity but rather as a 'constructed' idea. Even this insight did not lead to feminism embracing disability within their contours. But this argument was taken up by disabled feminists in addressing the place of impairments in disability theory and gradually through centuries of labour, there is a growing recognition of women's disability as an important focus of analysis. Janet Price rightly says: " Within the aspects of identity that so frequently appear in feminist writing- gender, race, class, age etc- disability is at last emerging from the 'etc' and is taking its own place in the list"(12).

Intersectionality Theory is a feminist sociological theory first highlighted by Kimberlee Crenshaw in 1989. The central issue for this theory is the understanding that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. To elaborate: while all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are, nevertheless, differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements and disability is one significant among these ("Intersectionality"). This theory grew out of feminists' growing awareness of how race, class, age and disability are interwoven into gender discrimination and produce specific patterns of privilege and exclusion. A reading of: *The Dumb Virgin or The*

Force of Imagination, The Unfortunate Bride or The Blind Lady a Beauty and *The Rover Part Two or The Banish'd Cavaliers* is evidence in itself that Behn was far ahead of her times because a glimpse of the crux of the Intersectionality Theory is clearly visible in these works. Behn deals with the outlook that women with disabilities are vulnerable to abuse in many forms- physical, sexual, emotional and psychological, but, the main aspect of empowerment for disabled women lies in the acceptance of their limitations and disabilities. This acceptance is what helps the disabled characters of Behn to develop self image and self confidence. They have found their own outlets to express their sexuality and claimed their freedom of expression. That too, in an age where they were largely regarded as asexual and rarely considered as human. The atmosphere of anxiety, embarrassment, fear and discomfort normally associated with disabled women are substituted with confidence, power, intelligence and eloquence by the author. A reader would have expected Behn to discuss the plight of women with disabilities through these works. On the contrary, she shows how they emerge players out of that situation. In these works, we have out of the box characters who challenge the conventions laid down by the so called 'normal' able bodied.

Behn smashes to smithereens the historical and social contexts and presentations of non-normative minds and bodies. Her depiction of disability is a complete contrast to the insight people have about the material experiences of disabled individuals. She allusively "allows readers to create a broader picture of the period's attitudes and constructs regarding disability and the ways in which these impacted the lived experiences of disabled people" (Southgate). The disabled

women characters in Behn are ones who have identified inequality in the way they are being treated and are fully equipped to stand against any oppression. They are women who arm themselves to overcome any barriers to communication, to movement, to contact with others or any limits to interaction. The comprehension of 'disabled' as ' differently abled' may be a twentieth century jargon, but it was practically proved and explored by Behn as early as in the seventeenth century. Belvideera, Maria, Celesia and the Jewish sisters are women who are unperturbed by the pressure of social stigma. Generally the term disabled brings to mind, a person who is in need of support from others to manage their daily life, their home and their future and how these impairments excludes them from participation in mainstream societal activities. But Behn encourages diversity and celebrates 'difference' through these characters. They have firmly fixed identities and are fully embodied women-vulnerable and strong at the same time.

What Behn does is advocacy and awareness-raising about 'strong' disabled women. She wipes off the negative perceptions about disabled women and portrays their potential for participation and opportunities for empowerment. The characters advocate building self esteem, leadership and capacity without the supportive structure of any organisation or movement behind them. They metaphorically open the doors on a fresh change and perception.

Emily Bowles in her essay "Maternal Culpability in Fetal Defects: Aphra Behn's Satiric Interrogations of Medical Models" re-reads the stigmatised early modern body through an exploration of Aphra Behn's fascination with the intersection of sexuality and disability. Drawing on Aristotelian and Galenic models

of human sexuality, organs and gendered traits, Bowles shows how Behn literalises the relationship between defect and femaleness by satirising contemporary social and scientific discourses that showcase "her awareness of the limitations that her contemporaries' understanding of gender, sex and sexuality placed on women's bodies via representation of the slippages between desirability and disability" (Hobgood 16).

This chapter analyses the representation of physically defective characters. It aims to analyse and interpret the significance of the physical handicaps in these female characters- disfigurement, blindness and muteness.

> The recurring spectacle of freakish female bodies in Behn's fiction and plays – "dwarf" and "giant" sisters, sisters mute and deformed, a blind cousin- registers Behn's peculiar anxiety about the negotiation of desire. Most obviously, such unnaturally sized and dysfunctional forms represent the binaries of body and mind, sexual and physical availability, poverty and wealth that Behn sought to critique. (Mintz 1)

Through her disabled characters Behn deconstructs the corporeal or physiognomic view of women in which the body is represented as totally detached from the mind or spirit and the character or personality of a woman is assessed and interpreted solely from her outer appearance and physical features. Instead, it portrays the body and mind as distinct entities which combine to make a person's 'whole' human existence. In the words of Snyder and Mitchel, "Behn's use of females with deviant characteristics provides an example of how characters with a

disability can serve an author as a narrative device harbouring both broad and particular metaphors"(62). Susannah B. Mintz has rightly said: "Behn's representation of disability subverts expectations in provocative ways" (2).

Does a woman lose her value and become undesirable and ugly because she is deformed? This is exactly the question Behn raises and answers in *The Dumb Virgin or The Force of Imagination* (1700). This work uses one of Behn's most frequent metaphors for feminity, ie, disability, in the dumbness of Maria and deformity of Belvideera. This representation itself is simultaneously thematised as Maria is presented as beautiful and tempting in her own way. Her stigmatising deformity cannot lessen her desirability. Maria is not only herself a "wondrous piece of Art"(DV 425) but also a great proficient in painting who appropriates and perfects the male gaze by successfully completing a portrait which is abandoned by a painter who is dazzled by her beauty. The deformed sister, Belvideera is presented as a liberated woman – equalling and surpassing men in language and intelligence. The beautiful but speechless Maria, for example along with her misshapen but witty sister Belvideera in *The Dumb Virgin*, depict a starkly dichotomised view of the cultural positions women could occupy in a patriarchal world. "Sexually desirable as bodies, unmarriageable as minds, either vulnerable to the aggressions of male desire or outspoken and alone" (Mintz 1).

In the beginning of the narrative itself the birth of dysfunctional children are ascribed to the mother's state of mind during the gestation. Behn sardonically suggests the currency of superstitious beliefs about women's bodies and the mysterious relationship between their cognitive process and reproductive functions:

> twas a Daughter, its Limbs were distorted, its Back bent, and tho' the face was the freest from deformity, yet had it no beauty to Recompense the Dis-symetry of the other Parts… derived the Cause from the Frights and dismal Apprehensions of the Mother….She conceiv'd again… the most beautiful Daughter…but naturally and unfortunately Dumb which defect the learn'd attributed to the Silence and Melancholy of the Mother as the Deformity of the other was to the Extravagance of her Frights. (DV 424)

In the words of Katherine Park, "a woman's imagination could impress all manner of strange delineations upon a developing fetus, and the resulting corporeal failures of her offspring would cast obvious blame on the ungoverned operations of the mother's mind" (20). Belief in the correlation between maternal morality and birth defects is critiqued by Aphra Behn. She attacks this construction. Emily Bowles points out how " Belvideera and Maria's inverted and complementary traits (the former witty and deformed, the latter beautiful and mute) both implicate their mother through their defects , while also speaking to the (imagined) power that medical discourses can have in constructing disabilities, feminity and female sexuality" (qtd. in Southgate). The medical notion of female defectiveness and the role alleged of female imagination in the consumption of physically impaired children (how a woman's mental instability could instigate deformed fetuses) is turned to satire in the hands of a writer like Behn. The link between gender and disability is satirically handled in *The Dumb Virgin* which deals with "the ways in which women's creative and discursive potential is both accounted for and stalled in

patriarchal society…a culture that suppresses women' s imaginative force and justifies that coercion by attributing to female imagination an excessive and insidious power" (Mintz 18-19).

Disability denies both personhood and gender to Belvideera as a kid. In the initial pages of the story, she is referred to as "it" because of her strange form. The early part of the narrative may seem to capitulate and advocate the attribution of physical defect to the management of a woman's mind. But as the narrative progresses, the limelight falls on Belvideera and Maria who counter the word 'disabled'. A durable and witty Belvideera represents an alternative code of values for women, a code that gives priority to intelligence and minimises the social fixation of associating a woman's identity with the male attention and affection she can procure. In a culture in which female desire is perceived as disruptive and unlawful, Behn created a character like Belvideera who even in her deformed limbs and monstrous body, has the confidence to approach and hit upon a man who she finds charming and handsome: "…Belvideera , who moving towards him, with a gallant air, slaps him on the shoulder with a fan…she made such ingenious and smart Repartees …that he was entirely captivated with her Wit, insomuch, that he cou'd not refrain making protestations of his Passion…"(DV 427).

Behn uses a customary manner of splitting wit and beauty, each sister embodying each of these. Belvideera is portrayed as ugly but with great intelligence and verbal dexterity. Maria is an extraordinary beauty but is dumb. One is beautiful but silent; the other is vocal but deformed. Disability and defect ironises the societal decree of muting female speech, authorship and independence. It challenges the

mechanism which places and attaches meaningful human significance to the body. The exercise of intellect is what adds sex appeal to Belvideera. She

> …was indefatigably addicted to study, which she had improv'd so far, that by the Sixteenth Year of her Age, she understood all the European Languages, and cou'd speak most of em, but was particularly pleas'd with the English…besides the piercing Wit, and depth of Understanding peculiar to herself, she delivered her Sentiments with that easiness and grace of Speech, that it charm'd all her Hearers. (424)

Maria on the other hand was unsurpassingly beautiful: "…the majesty and Softness of her Face at once wrought Love and Veneration; the Language of her Eyes sufficiently paid the Loss of her Tongue, and there was something so Commanding in her Look, that it struck every Beholder as dumb as herself…."(ibid.) She was a great proficient in painting and when the most famous painter in Italy is so enchanted by the "vivacity of her look" that he could not complete a portrait of Maria because it was "impossible to draw that which he cou'd not look upon", Maria grows impatient with his artistic impotence and "finished it herself" (DV 424). Maria has also, mastered and perfected "the significative way of Discourse by the Fingers", an invented sign language through which "she was understood…as if she had spoke". In this way Behn arms her to transgress against the kind of assumptions embodied in the term 'dumb'.

Though the sisters are radically different, they comprise a hybrid whole- "one's body subordinated to the mind, the other's discourse sacrificed to her beauty"

(Mintz 10). Both these disabled women produce art and language. Belvideera commands applause for her grace and intelligence and Maria for her artistic skill and exquisite language. This categorical difference is particularly why Dangerfield, the rakish soldier, desires both of them: "… engag'd him in a Passion for two Mistresses…he found hard to Determine: his love was divided between the Beauty of one Lady and Wit of another…" (DV 431).

In the beginning, a reader might get the impression that what Behn implies through her extensive description of Belvideera is that, it is perhaps better to be beautiful and silent than being vocal and deformed, but towards the end we see that it is Maria's beauty and ' silence' that leads to her tragic death. This symbolises the voicelessness of a woman because of her complicated social status in a man's world. Maria's muteness makes her vulnerable to Dangerfield's sexual aggression. He exploits her disability for "the critical Minute of his Happiness" because "he knew…she cou'd not tell" (440). Through the character Maria, Behn tries to suggest that women who can 'say nothing' when it comes to the deadly opportunism displayed by men, meet with such a denouement.

At the end of *The Dumb Virgin*, it is not the exceptionally beautiful Maria who survives, but the deformed Belvideera. Belvideers survives the "bloody tableau" (Mintz 11) and decides "to maintain her a Recluse all the rest of her Life" (DV 444). This isolation in fact ignites a hopeful and positive remark about solitary women determining their own rules and material, standing up for themselves and leading intellectual lives. Belvideera who frees herself from the patriarchal grip is an unexpectedly delineated alternative to the ideological perversity of the society which

believes that beauty and normalcy are more essential to survive, than intelligence and aptitude.

Behn's sarcasm about the restoration idea of 'manliness' is obvious when she makes a dig at the leniency of Rinaldo who could not 'control or command' his beautiful and virtuous wife's stubbornness to visit the Adriatick Sea Island: "…he yielded to her desires, his love not permitting him the least shew of command, and so thro its extent, conspiring its own destruction" (421). The tragedy in part is attributed as the failure of the father or 'Man' to keep his wife under a leash which was considered as 'macho' according to the patriarchal perspective. The father Rinaldo becomes Behn's mouthpiece when he "illuminates how normativity requires and rewards the repression or forgetting of disability difference" (Hobgood 3). Left with two disabled daughters to raise, after the death of his wife, he strives and succeeds in providing them with the best possible education and treats his daughters with humanism, thereby leading them to recognise their defects as a part of being human and no less than other humans:

> Rinaldo, waving all Intentions of a second Marriage, directs his Thoughts to the Care of his Children, their Defects not lessening his Inclination, but stirring up his Endeavours in supplying the Defaults of Nature by the Industry of Art. He accordingly makes the greatest Provision for their Breeding and Education which prov'd so effectual in a little time, that their progress was a greater Prodigy then themselves.(DV 424)

Education and family support is a powerful tool of empowerment and it is made accessible to the girls by Rinaldo. He did not cloister his daughters, instead he nurtured their strengths. Physically deformed Belvideera was encouraged to develop a keen wit and mastery over languages. The mute Maria was developed into an extraordinary painter and skilled sign language user. In her muteness, she is encouraged to develop a language because "speechlessness would have been associated with lack of language development and, therefore, with intellectual impairment" (Kavanaugh).

The message Behn sends across through *The Dumb Virgin* is that, if deformity means the lack of proportion or a discomfiting dissymmetry of things, a woman's disruptive mind could make her a disabled, not just an out of balance body. This particular text "utilises disabled characters not only to add spectacular intrigue, but also to disrupt a sexual ideology that marginalised women as weak and defective" (ibid.).

The Unfortunate Bride; or The Blind Lady a Beauty, a novel was published in the year 1700. The blind Celesia in *The Unfortunate Bride; or The Blind Lady a Beauty* is a woman, "charming to a wonder" (UB 405) and heiress to fifty thousand pounds in money and some estate in land. Though she is blind, she is able to see more "clearly in her Mind" (405) than her sighted friends. It is Celesia's ability of perception even in disability that makes her significant to the romantic plot of this work. Her blindness is the mark of her insight when she says "…I believe it is but a sickly Soul which cannot nourish its Offspring of Desires without preying upon the Body" (405). This text explores what determines the value of a woman, and how

disability can in fact benefit the person. In the words Susannah B. Mintz: "Blindness precisely because it guards Celesia from the "Tricks" of vision to which ordinary lovers fall prey, is understood to grant her a kind of compensatory moral wisdom that comes from being innocent of worldly obsessions, and she is thus called upon as the natural arbiter of prosaic romantic dispute" (5). Because of her inability to see, she has a unique insight into desire based on an awareness that is free of the worldly indulgences of visual recognising. Even though she is heiress to a large fortune she is unmoved by her wealth. This humility and intuition stems from her blindness which disables her from recognising the advantages of wealth or vision.

Celesia is indeed a source of interest to Frankwit who is madly in love with Belvira. She is not the kind of woman who can gratify Frankwit's desire because of her "insufficient eyes that neither command nor receives the missives of love" (UB 406) but Frankwit finds her blind eyes' glances as stimulating: "This is indeed a charming Blindness; … Strange! That there should be such Glances even in blindness? " (ibid.) Frankwit vouches on Celesia's insight in blindness more than the truth in their own physical vision: "…and the Fancy of your Sight excels the certainty of ours". She turns out to be an exotic object to Frankwit's curious eyes because however hard he tries, he couldn't comprehend her imaginative insight: "You fair maid, require not Eyes to conquer, if your Night has such Stars, what Sunshine would your Day of Sight have, if ever you should see?" (ibid.). Belvira, the normal, exquisitely beautiful woman loses her sparkle in Celesia's presence.

Behn was of the view that sexual desire was an integral part of the patriarchal design that disabled women from social and professional fulfillment, thus something to be acted upon with caution. Celesia becomes her mouthpiece when she advises Belvira about how marriage changes the nature of a relationship and sexual consummation detracts the lovers from the earnest nature of love:

> Women enjoy'd, are like Romances read, or Raree-shows once seen, meer Tricks of the slight of Hand, which, when found out, you only wonder at yourselves for wondering so before at them.'Tis expectation endears the Blessing; Heaven would not be Heaven, could we tell what 'tis. When the Plot's out, you have done with the Play, and when the last Act's done, you see the Curtain dawn with great indifferency. (UB 407)

Celesia's views are the oracle of guidance to her cousin Belvira which steers her through the courtship.

The blind Celesia from *The Unfortunate Bride* is employed as an example to exemplify women's positions as objects of a male gaze. But Behn uses her blindness as an indictment of the way in which gender roles are analysed and not as a mark of frailty. As a matter of fact, the restoration of eye sight or 'normal' vision takes away the halo from Celesia. She falls from her pedestal of extra ordinary 'vision' and 'uncanny wisdom' (Kavanaugh) into being just an exaggerated version of Belvira. As soon as the "Cloud of Blindness" (UB 410) was broke, her eyes profusely "flow", "shine" and "flash" (ibid.) as she reads Belvira's love letter to Frankwit. Regaining sight is associated with disempowerment in Celesia's case because the

story turns tragically tangled when normalcy is restored in bodily attributes. "'Looking', as the final scene insists, can produce deathly results: when at last Frankwit has Belvira in his arms, Wildvill misunderstands what he sees, and fatally penetrates his beloved with his sword" (Mintz 8). The story ends thus: "Poor Celesia now bemoan'd her unhappiness of sight and wish'd she again were blind" (UB 414). Celesia's miraculous recovery aided by "an aged matron by Charms unknown" (409) is from 'powerful' to 'powerless'. Behn has employed this disabled character for her symbolic potential. The metaphor of disability is used in unconventional ways to critique the status of women, women's struggle and as a radical subversion to shun and challenge the male gaze.

A blind Celesia's charm intrigues Frankwit, but her gained sight leads her to be married under a miserable situation where there is no love, desire or romance. Belvira's final wish is for Frankwit to marry Celesia: "With tears and wondrous sorrow, he promis'd to obey her Will, and in some months after her interment, he perform'd his promise" (414).The marriage takes place just to fulfil a dead woman's last wish. Celesia meets with a miserable outcome, once she is 'normalised'. Blindness had made her exceptional, but once she regains eyesight, or achieves normalcy, she is marginalised. "As a blind woman, Celesia is sought after for her virtue, wisdom and foresight, but as a sighted woman, her role diminishes to that of wife" (Kavanaugh).

In the most complicate manipulation, blindness in a range of senses becomes a leading metaphor in *The Unfortunate Bride; or The Blind Lady a Beauty*. Like the twin images of physical deformity and muteness in *The Dumb Virgin*, Behn uses

blindness here as a symbol for the 'lack of social power accorded to women'. There is a 'complex…play with images of sight'(Ballaster 201-203) with words like 'sight', 'view', 'gazed', 'blind', 'eyes' and 'blindness' echoing throughout the text. In a tale about 'masculine specularity and narcissism' (199-200), Behn becomes successful in validating blindness as a metaphor for 'vision'.

In the play, *The Rover Part Two or The Banish'd Cavaliers,* Behn offers two fabulously rich Jewish sisters from Mexico, referred to as 'monsters' since one is a giant and the other a dwarf. The most significant point is that both of them do not have a proper name assigned to them even once throughout the course of the play. These women's bodies are found frightening and repelling by men. But both these women are worth 100,000 pounds each and so four male characters make a scheme to pursue, court and marry them. The women's bodily characters are shadowed and disappear behind the enticement of their enormous wealth.

The seventeenth century connotation of unusual physical form or disability as 'lusus naturae' which means 'nature's joke' is evoked from the various references to the sisters as "the strangest news", " mistakes in Nature", "she Gargantua"(which means elephantine), " Centaure"(a creature with the head, arms and torso of a man and the body and legs of a horse), "a little diminutive Mistriss", " a thing of Horror", an " ill-favour'd Baboon", " Monsters arriv'd from Mexico", "Lady Monsters" throughout the text. The sisters are treated as a travelling freak show which propels in them for a short time though, a desire to be " restor'd to moderate sizes"(ROV 1.1.201) because the world treats them as immoderate and deems them inhuman.

Blunt even fears that propagation with the Dwarf sister will" dwindle" his family "into Pigmies or Fayries" (3.1.115).

Nevertheless, Blunt and Featherfool chase the wealthy but monstrous Jewish women, who they hope to marry for their large fortunes: "…money speaks sense in a language that all nations understand" (ROV 3.1.162). The repellant physical forms of the sisters are made tolerable because of their immense wealth. Behn tries to shed some light on the monetary value accorded to women; and society's fixation with wealth by showing how men compete to court "these Lady Monsters" (1.1.223) in order to augment their own financial status. Their affluence erases their exaggerated sizes and transforms them into 'desirable' ladies. Derek Hughes rightly states: "…jewels take the place of personal identity and essence" (129) and "(the body) is associatively identified with non-signifying objects, to the point of being completely secondary to them. The objects do not signify the body; they take its place" (128).

The giant and dwarf sisters are objectified and valued like any other women character in the works of Behn. They stand testimony to the fact that their 'otherness' in strange sizes do not matter to the society which is obsessed with their wealth. Though disproportionate in body, the disproportionate size of their wealth salvages them, like Willmore puts it: "…these things of horror have beauties too,…beauties that will not fade: Diamonds to supply the lustre of their eyes, and Gold the brightness of their hair, a well got Million to atone for shape, and Orient Pearls, more white, more plump and smooth, than that fair body men so languish for" (ROV 3.1.324-328).

As Wataru Fukusi suggests, “the sisters have fully realised interiors, and are differentiated from each other and other women not simply by bodily uniqueness but by thought and desire, which they openly articulate” (11). For instance, when the Giant says: “ I’le marry none whose Person and Courage shall not bear some proportion to mine. …not that I would change this Noble frame of mine, cou’d I but meet my Match, and keep up the first Race of Man intire ;but since this scanty world affords none such, I to be happy, must be new Created”(ROV 3.1.70-71,82-85) it turns out to be a confident declaration from a woman’s point of view endorsing gender equality.

Behn concerned herself with the life and fate of women in the seventeenth century. In these works she doesn’t make an analysis of the dilemmas faced by ‘helpless’ disabled women from the sympathetic point of view of the majority world. Leaving behind such images is not seen in literature down centuries and not even in this twenty first century. Disability has always been stereotypically used in literature where the disabled were often subjected to humiliating scrutiny. David M. Turner, citing sixteenth and seventeenth century jest books points out that, “humour was traditionally used to denigrate or ostracise disabled people by exaggerating their ‘otherness’”(Southgate). This statement brings to one’s mind the image of the court dwarves in Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and how their ‘outsider’ and grotesque status is marked by the stigmatising emotional response from society. Another instance is the deformed Caliban in *The Tempest* who is described by Trinculo as “Legged like a man, and his fins/ like arms” (2.2.31-32), a “monster of the isle with four legs” (62) and a “moon-calf” (100). Trinculo also allude to the

wealth and fame that Caliban's exploitation might offer, back in England: "Were I in England now, / as I once was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday-fool/ there but would give me a piece of silver. There woud this mon-/ster make a man" (26-29). In modern literature too, Laura, the crippled character in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) is presented as a subdued, intimidated young woman who is painfully shy and has very low self esteem. She wears a brace on her leg and walks with a limp. She is largely withdrawn from the outside world and devotes herself to old records of music and her large collection of glass figurines which cannot mock, degrade or look down upon her like the rest of the society did. Unlike all these typecast characters, who were presented as a drag upon the society because they were less productive, Behn presents women with disabilities who have emerged from their secluded state to organise their minds and lives. Behn's asymmetrical and impaired bodies do not go through the kind of representational fate that a reader might expect, given the conventional literary image of disability. They are not isolated or anonymous women, but women who have overcome prejudices and negative societal attitudes to become role models for others. Her works not only challenge the objectification of women but uses disability "as a narrative tool that subverts and disrupts the characteristics of normalcy of dominant ideologies" (Mitchell 51).

In earlier times, disability was viewed largely as a visual sign of deserved divine punishment for wrong doings and moral failings. But in the case of Belvideera, Maria, Celesia and the Jewish sisters it is " a vehicle to a proof of inner worth, an obstacle to be heroically conquered by a randomly afflicted individual"(

Hayden 69). Their disabled bodies become invisible. Behn's heroines retain the feminity of their disabled bodies and as a matter of fact they possess feminity in excess due to their fragility. At times Behn surely does treat disability and deformity in a conventional way, using body irregularity as something that invites ridicule and curiosity or as a problem which stands in the way of women being ' restored' to normal marital or sexual arrangements. But major parts of the text focus on how the disfigured and impaired body becomes meaningful due to the embodied self or persona of the heroines who challenge societal paradigms. Hence Behn invites "a reconsideration …of the operations of patriarchal ideology in women's embodied selves…" (Mintz 3). So it can ideally be said that she places herself at the locus of two different perspectives of disability: the older model which viewed anomaly in bodies as signs of god's displeasure and cosmic intervention, and the new model which explains disability as bodily error or deviance.

Felicity Nussbaum notes that in both *The Dumb Virgin* and *The Unfortunate Bride*, disability, be it deafness or blindness respectively, can enhance the desirability of the central female characters. "Defects need not render desire untenable although visual bodily difference is quite different" (Hayden 68). The sibling of the deaf and dumb Maria is a highly intelligent but physically deformed Belvideera whose disruptive effects on visual perception lead her to end her life in "reclusive virginity" (DV 444). The bodies no longer matter in these works- whether blind, dumb, deformed or gigantic. Bodies become inconsequential before money in the case of the Jewish sisters, wit in the case of Belvideera, insight in Celesia and artistic skills in Maria.

'Restoration' to normalcy in *The Dumb Virgin* and *The Unfortunate Bride* is a harbinger of tragedy. Maria regains her voice to cry out in shock and disgust: "Incest, Incest" (ibid.). She is destroyed by the force of an unlawful sexual affair and perishes after the realisation of her crime. A blind Celesia was not disempowered, but was rather a revolutionary. But once she regains sight, she has to witness horrendous murder. Maria condemns normalcy as 'tragic' and longs for the protection of blindness. Behn deconstructs the hitherto believed ideology that it is normalcy that favours the female gender. Rather she believed (and practiced) that a deviance from the norm is what allowed a woman to exist in her own terms. To quote Nan Kavanaugh's view on this point: "Deviance allows a woman to be admired but not possessed, to be valued for something intrinsic, rather than to be reduced to what the male gaze and its reciprocation can absorb"(Kavanaugh).

The three works discussed in this chapter construct a concept of female autonomy in which the female body cannot be sequestrated. The heroines are powerful women whose bodies cannot be appropriated and dominated. Hutner asserts that Behn "promotes the expression of female desire and overturns the masculinist ideology that attempts to erase difference…" (117). Behn upholds that bodies do matter to one's individuality and personality and not simply for circulation in the marriage market or to satisfy male desire. The message that she shouts out loud to a society that treated women as some disposable commodity is that the nature of a woman is not restricted or cannot be predicted by the capacity or configuration of their bodies, it is the internal essence and not the external accoutrements that matter. These deformed characters do not yearn for a socially

imposed corporeal reformation; the difference is only in the way in which their bodies are interpreted in a world that invariably views a self determining woman as whorish or as monstrously perverse.

These heroines represent and share kinship with every woman who is either idealised or denigrated by the patriarchal conventions. Susannah B. Mintz quotes: "…the disability serves as an index of how a woman is severed from herself by gender inequities" (16). Reading the textual details on a superficial level, Behn's deformed and disabled women appear to be "a deployment of strange embodiment to articulate all that goes wrong in a society governed by mutually exclusive and compromising narratives of identity" (2). The spectacle of Blunt climbing a ladder to kiss his betrothed Giant (in *The Rover Part 2 or The Banish'd Cavaliers)*, or in the 'tragic' muteness of Maria which leads to her downfall- all these situations from the text may seem a disheartening metaphor for the "cultural disenfranchisement" (Mintz 2) of women, but in fact it is a disguise for what actually lies within. It goes beyond merely being an epitome for marginality, lack, disempowerment or helplessness. Behn has redefined the threshold of female identity which has been bound to the corporeal concept since ages in a tenable fashion.

These works by Behn raise a challenge to the inequality that affects disabled girls and women all around the world. Just like her other writings, it surprises the reader by producing 'bold prose experiments' and 'astonishing innovations' (Hammond 110).One should recall that Behn wrote during a time when female authors were regarded as unnatural and "female authorship was a monstrous violation of the 'woman's sphere'" (Diamond 33). Just as she has paved the way for

women writers, her disabled characters look forward to a time of widespread recognition of the place of disabled women in the normal man's world, a new-world where everyone may potentially flourish.

> Through her unnaturally "spaced" female bodies- bodies too big or too small, blind and mute bodies that interrogate relationships between gender, sexual agency, authorship, and class- Behn suggests that to carve out spheres of influence unrelegated to domesticity or sexual objectification, women must and do exceed the parameters of physical , and thus also ideological, space.(Mintz 2)

In today's world, the internet has helped overcome at least some of the challenges faced by disabled women. They are making strides in connecting with each other through the web. Today there is a growing network of disabled women's groups. The characteristics they hold in common seem to be that they maintain a clear political identity as women and as disabled- which is exactly what Behn visualised almost four hundred years back.

Conclusion

The Pakistani author Sadat Hasan Manto, in his book *Why I Write* states: "A man remains a man no matter how poor his conduct. A woman, even if she were to deviate for one instance, from the role given to her by men, is branded a whore. She is viewed with lust and contempt. Society closes on her doors it leaves ajar for a man stained by the same ink. If both are equal, why are our barbs reserved for the women?"(162). Prejudices based on gender have been a practice in all communities, in all times. Throughout the history of patriarchal structures, women have occupied a secondary position in relation to men. Sexism is thought to be rampant in all fields; especially the literary field. Women had little opportunity to voice their perspectives or opinion even about matters concerning their own lives. Moreover, from time immemorial, society keeps reminding women, the importance of shame, humility and subordination. Through discourse and history, women are equated with patience, suffering and pain. Etiquette on how a woman should behave and conduct herself is embedded in the cultural fabric and is difficult to change.

"Those who make us believe that anything is possible and fire our imagination over the long haul, are often the ones who have survived the bleakest of circumstances" (210), writes Paul Rogat Leob in his book *The Impossible will take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in the Time of Fear.* In the context of Behn, this is particularly true, because it takes great courage to speak out, when the whole society pelts abuses and try to curb one's voice. She wrote as a woman, who had forgotten that she was a woman, so that her works were full of a sexual quality

which comes when one is unconscious of the restrictions on one's sex. She was the one who could neglect that "there was a fence beyond that and a fence beyond that" (Woolf, *A Room* 92). She is the tornado that laid patriarchy bare. She was a lone voice that eventually led to an avalanche of testimonies of subjugation and suppression and lay the founding stone for the feminist movement which has become an annihilating force today. She decided to stand up, and raise her voice against the patriarchal traditions, to break the silence and tell her story, the story of every woman who lived in the sixteenth century. Her works voiced her frustration at the systemic failure to protect the rights of women. Starting with her first work which was a gentle ripple, it spread to a crackling, wild bonfire of vanities. Behn's courage to speak out became a rallying cry, a baton that women writers were taking from one, carrying for a bit and then handing over to another.

Aphra Behn contradicts the societal fabric which was quite conservative. She wished for action in a woman's life like that of a man. It agitated her that the skyline was ever a women's limit and the glass ceiling restricted her growth. She longed for power of vision that would overpass it. Behn lights a torch where nobody has yet been, exploring a place "unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex" (Walters 96). She was the one woman who could overcome the feminine role of the 'object', the 'Other'. She was a far cry from the women who were forced to lead restricted lives and gradually lapsed into an unwilling and depressed acceptance of that restriction. She turns out to be a very vivid restless captive who yearned to sour cloud high. Her heroines are strong, manipulative, sexual beings. Her works are marked by its sexual explicitiveness and moral subversion, a huge

departure from the literature of earlier decades. Heroines with utter confidence and indifference who spell rebellion in the society inhabit the space of her works. The men hated her because she represented a threat to their carefully organised machismo domain. The male territory of authorship and theatre were invaded by her, which naturally provoked the chauvinist lot who openly displayed their disapproval. Her fearless writing scared the men whose fragile masculine identity was built on power and the art of manipulation. This led to a deep sense of chaos and the instinctive response was to push her back, to label her as a whore and silence her. This was and still is, the strategy recruited to divide and destroy any movement that challenges traditional power structures and privileges. This backlash was a pre-emptive strike to stop her long before she could achieve what she wished for-empowerment. But she emerged as a powerful woman, with a strong sense of self, who has chronicled a history of male domination and women's struggle against the unequal power dynamics. Behn served as a point of reference for young female writers, her successors who could emerge from the confines of domesticity.

This thesis has critically looked at fourteen works: nine plays and five short stories of Aphra Behn, placing them in their historical milieu and analysed them by using the contemporary feminist perspective. These works portray female agency as a possible entity even in the face of all hurdles. Having inspected and studied twenty three of her female characters, one must conclude that Behn deserves applause for the remarkable results in portraying gender as "a liberating expression of how all identity can be moulded and manipulated at will"(Febronia 189). A new model of a liberated, free woman is offered to the audience. Behn offers a new perspective

about the female body. 'Her' body is no longer something to be hidden, but it would speak sensibly to her, and she would understand its needs and secrets, which enables her to have control over her senses and her destiny. Behn's women are on a journey towards their rational self, rather than being overpowered by passions that lead to a loss of self.

Aphra Behn is extolled by Flynn as the dramatist who used theatre as a 'window to independence', as she wanted to establish a new female identity 'against the backdrop of patriarchal dominance'. Behn's resistance to patriarchy is articulated through the heroines who tried to modify the sexual identity that society and religion had constructed for them. Behn's tactfulness is visible in her works where she engages her heroines in peeling off the programmed selves created by culture and provides them strong, witty and direct voices. Behn sketches and develops a variety of women characters: intelligent, active, outspoken, witty and fierce ladies who uproot the conventions of the patriarchal society. There are no docile, subservient characters. Her characters are like "fire and ice": heroines who are personifications of the moral respectable and others who are flauntingly immodest. The highlights are Helena, Angellica, Florinda , Widowranter as libertines, Maria, Belvideera, Celesia as elevated souls, La Nuche and Widowranter as mercenary negotiators ,Miranda and Isabella as femme fatales who turn their persuasive charms to the manipulation of others and Cloris and Celinda as driven by love instead of ambition. All these ladies compete in terms of wit, determination, clarity of thought, willpower and strong disposition. Her dialogues have a wide variety of range and present the audience, with a variety of voices, which reminds one of Bakhtinian

'Dialogism' which advocates the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. Behn weaves an individual and different reality for each and every character. Her women could take control of their own situation, have power over their bodies, and display fearlessly their sexual habits, thereby subverting man's belief that women cannot obtain power and sexual satisfaction without the man.

Men have always denied even a remote possibility of the existence of women as subjects. They refused to consider women as some thinking agency. Aphra Behn has shattered the established order and recreated a new dimension, where woman is on the same plane as man, where she is the subject, not a subsidiary. She created an active and clever subject who had the power to deconstruct the fixed male conception of subjectivity. "Behn's women are not speechless and powerless but they are often active viragoes, transvestites and courtesans" (Pearson, *Prostituted Muse* 168). She effortlessly mingles women of quality and whores who share and adopt similar goals in the pursuit of their ambition. Her women refused to be alienated. Through depiction of strong female personalities, Behn suggests the potential of early British women to act confidently on sexual feelings, thus "demasculinising desire" and "subverting the construction of woman as a self-policing and passive commodity" (Hutner 104).

What emerges in Behn's plays is that both men and women are governed by desire; the most compelling desire is for power. Her heroines struggle to find a sense of authority in the male-dominated world which is reminiscent of Behn's own struggles. "Dominant power, transgression and rebellion walk together. Rebellion is another face of power… it is an instrument through which power is reproduced and

extended" (Khaoula 179). Behn sparked rebellion by subverting the patriarchal cliche of passive women with complex tales of female cleverness and power.

Behn is without doubt a revolutionary writer for her times. A study of her life and her women characters' remind one of the tumultuous journey of other free spirited women characters like Anna Karenina (Tolstoy), Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne) and Emma of *Madame Bovary* (Flaubert). Behn's heroines lead a free and frantic life; indulge in unrestrained adventures and encounters and have a carefree attitude, that are reminiscent of characters like Defoe's Moll Flanders and Thackeray's Becky Sharp from *Vanity Fair*.

In each of the works and characters discussed, the climax does give an 'effect' of glorifying the patriarchal convention of men. As remarked by Jacqueline Pearson: "These contradictions are highly revealing of the contradictions faced by women in the late seventeenth century, and perhaps particularly of the female writer and narrators themselves, powerful within the confines of fiction, powerless outside" (*Gender and Narrative* 44). For committing the 'crime' of venturing into the public sphere, Behn was associated with prostitution. The world spit on her, hurled insults and treated her as if she were a filthy, dirty witch. She utilised to the optimum, this outsider position to shed light on a repressed female voice in the patriarchal society. This gave her the aggression in handling effortlessly themes dealing with women's realm of repression which were shaped and manipulated by traditionally established gender roles. In the fantasy world of fiction, the heroines could act heroic, like lady cavaliers and insist and claim agency, but in the real world, the realistic one which Behn saw in front of her eyes, women were completely dependent on men,

manipulated by men, and not in a position to live without men. Behn exploits these images to egg on the readers, especially the women, to explore, understand and evaluate the conditions which the characters, the creator and they themselves share. It is quite interesting to see how as a woman narrator and author she could lure readers in by her flawless articulation of the experiences of the female body and mind.

Dolores Altaba -Artal depicts Behn's female characters as follows:

> With their intelligence, wit, resourcefulness, and commitment, this small community of women has the importance of being the first to break the mould of the communities of men….(Who) possess indisputable magnitude and significance….This community of women alters the myth of submissive, subservient women; they see dangers clearly, know their risks, and consciously act together to obtain their aim. A woman alone in the world of men cannot survive their unwise attacks. On the other hand, a community of women, as small as this one, is able to shift the development of the events to their advantage. (124)

Behn deconstructs the concept of women's position in society using the tools that the phallogocentric language and theatrical instruments provided her. She etched out a variety of female characters in order to elucidate the relationship between sexuality and freedom. Her works describe the world from the 'other' point of view, a never before attempted one, the female perspective which led to endless, unpredictable, new meanings.

Behn does not fear transgressing the border of propriety and asserting herself in her works especially when discussing about women empowerment. Her heroines "mirror the authors' claim on public functions for women, since their disruptive actions of masquerade, letter writing and verbal expressions of their desires challenge the public/private binary for the sexes that confines women to the domestic sphere and to "idleness" " (Rottiers 89). The motif of disability is used in her plays to inspect society and shatter stereotypes. Female villainy is employed as a device to portray the outcome of excessive patriarchal restraint and stifling. The use of masquerade and cross dressing, which signify two of the key mainstays of the Restoration Theatre reflect Behn's desire to create a world in which men and women would be treated as equals. The manner in which she deals with the theme of forced marriage advocates women as demanding rightful respect from men, a rarity in Restoration literature and displays her distaste for the bonds of matrimony which deny mutual partnership and sexual freedom. Behn strongly believed that mutual affection and equal states of mind are an important prerequisite for successful marriages. She weaves a critique of subordination, gives her female characters equal footing with men and indirectly gives us an extraordinarily lucid image of the cultural position of seventeenth-century woman. Despite the fact that these ideas frequently vexed her contemporaries, it is not astonishing that there was ample audience for her works.

The various chapters of this thesis explore the feminist concerns scattered in the novels and highlights Behn's instinctive ability to articulate the feelings of women. Miranda and Isabella are no ordinary women. They are represented as the

aggressive, manipulative heroines who are quite vocal about female sexuality and demolish the traditional notion of 'feminine'. Hellena, Ranter, Cloris, Marcella and Hyppolita are women who strive for equal rights and resort to cross-dressing and sword wielding in their journey seeking agency. Sharp-witted ladies who break free from the tradition of forced marriages, the marketing of women in the marriage market and take the reins into their hands to write their own destiny are portrayed through the characters of Erminia, Galatea, Cornelia, Euphemia, Atlante, Charlot, Leticia, Julia, Laura and Cloris. Maria, Belvideera, Celesia and the Jewish sisters are the author's rumination on the idea of 'autonomy in disability'. Female characters analysed in this thesis denounce objectification by men and are rebellious to the socio-cultural forces encroaching on their lives. They refuse to be silenced by patriarchal customs of decorum. Her heroines plan intelligent strategies and venture into the world for exposure and experience. Gendered, politicised or sexualised power structures are criticised by her female characters who fearlessly articulate libertine desires.

A reading of the prologue of most of her works proves that she tries to side step and efface herself as a mere teller of tales, rather than an artist and author. But her female pen acts as the agent of her power which could not help exercising her authority and established her gradually as a fiction maker. Behn presents a fresh change from the stereotypical female abidance. She talks about women pinioned to patriarchal designations of right and wrong that constrain female autonomy and desire. Analysis of the works enhances the reader's comprehension of the complex relationships that mediate community and tradition, culture and nation. Behn does

not project herself essentially as a novelist of gender issues but there is no doubt that her writings reflect a strong advocacy stand on gender. Her women centric novels were written with a special drive to unveil the gender imbalance in society and women's disadvantaged condition within patriarchy. Her plays criticised the social and moral status quo and advocated such radical ideas as sexual freedom and feminism.

Behn's works explores the themes of gender, desire and politics through a dense tissue of metaphors - of the nunnery, disability, literacy and theatricity and through a series of complex narrative framework and narrative voices which produce "alternations between romance and irony, idealistic affirmation and critical questioning" (Hughes 201). Behn's characters come alive in ebbs, draughts, flames and quakes of existence. The feminised body is her workspace. Her heroines transcend inherited categories and overstep boundaries. Women characters interact, negotiate and transact with the hitherto (the marginal) models of female characters in history. Aphra Behn was able "to perform the question of the fluidity of gender and to expose the illusion of representation, preparing the ground for subverting the binary patriarchal system and introducing a different vision of woman/women. Woman, object of the patriarchal system which does not permit any female subjectivity, subverts everything in becoming subject. Women control the space as well as the action" (Febronia 189). They have no doubts about their dreams and are not complacent about their female powers and abilities just like the author herself.

The traditional writing norms have become inconsequential in the case of Behn. She uses elemental tools of subversion and disruption. Behn makes a kind of

literary revisionism. She shatters the issues related to patriarchal dominance and denounces man's efforts to curb the freedom of women in society under the guise of history, tradition, religion and culture. Till then literature had just masculinity parading and masquerading itself. She spells out the original issues involved, with a stamp of unconventionality. Her writings explore the various facets of women's life- violence, liberation, female lust, subjugation of women and examine her from multiple perspectives and planes of physicality. She had the courage to make blatant statements, which went against the moral majority. She eludes rules and affects the subconscious of the audience. She might be viewed as participating in her own construction as an actress/ whore. She received negative and sexualised reputation in her own time and modern historians have always upheld it; each narrative of her life builds on the preceding narratives and it is nearly impossible to distinguish between successive layers of representation.

Art does play an important role in forming opinions, attitudes and perceptions. Even if art is just fiction and aims at entertainment, it must question the prevalent perceptions in society. This is exactly what Behn's works did. She was vocal about the issue of patriarchal construction and made the readers realise that radical changes are needed. That too, in a society which firmly believed that women's morals should be on a higher plane then men's. She did not fear loss of reputation and vilification. In this twenty first century, with an influx of digital platforms, internet as a tool of empowerment, social media as 'people power' and media per se backing women who are speaking out loud against an unchallenged patriarchal mindset of male entitlement, one can envisage a rebellion. But what is

impressive and extraordinary about Behn is that, it was during the conservative sixteenth century that Behn exposed the alarming power imbalances and the varied layers of patriarchy prevalent in the Restoration society. She provided her women characters with a voice and a face and made them synonymous with invincible strength and courage. All this was achieved by her single-handedly, in an age when misogyny reigned and even women did not show the courage or comradeship to back another who was fighting for a collective cause.

Behn wrote: Let me with Sappho and Orinda be / Oh ever sacred Nymph, adorned by thee; /And give my verses immortality (*The Poetry of Aphra Behn* 592-594). In an era of traditionalists, she catapulted women and their struggles to centre stage, without being stymied by the powerful men driven by the sense of entitlement to stifle the freedom of speech and expression of a woman. By using the tool of the pen, she had opened a space for herself within the patriarchal system and used it to critique the conventions which denied women the freedom to 'breathe'. Her works have played the catalyst in galvanising women into action despite societal constraints. What we today call feminist revolution is the outcome of the sexual revolt Behn arduously started in the seventeenth century. The long neglected and repressed female issues concerning equality and freedom were taken up and given a stance by this author, who fought the turbulent winds and worked laboriously as a one- woman- army. All these efforts and her literature were neglected and suppressed for the longest time until Virginia Woolf and the feminist movements in the modern period took it on themselves to resurrect and give her the due that she deserved: to be included among the laureate writers. Woolf rightly states: "She lives

in you and me… they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh" (*A Room* 112).

The women characters who fought against patriarchal restrictions become a potential reality in the minds of Behn's readers. The characters live powerful lives-as a reaction against the everyday repressions that women had to face. Moreover, Behn might have got the pleasure of revenge through her characters-women who could truly be their real selves with total freedom and abandonment. All the characters brew mutiny against any kind of subjugation and tyranny. All the characters are metaphoric of a kind of escape route, and depict the many dreams and fantasies of women. Behn and her heroines not only circumvent sexual hierarchy and gender dichotomy, but also tactfully indicate a breakthrough amid the ubiquitous and hegemonic patriarchal domination. The sassy, witty and intelligent female characters were a sort of alter ego of the author who stood out in the literary market of the Restoration Theatre for displaying great theatrical bravura. The female world looked up to her and with her emphasis on female willpower and freedom for the female voice, she inspired her successors as one of the most prolific women writers they had seen.

Virginia Woolf states: "Chastity had then, it has even now, a religious importance in a woman's life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest" ("Shakespeare's" 9). This revolutionary fervor and courage is what makes Behn unique in an age when it was thought that "a woman's composing is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it

done at all" (13). Aphra Behn's literature provides realistic insights into female personality development, self perception, interpersonal relationships and the internal consequences of sexism. Feminism today is not just the forte of the West, but has found roots in the literature of other countries too, especially India. The "consciousness –raising" aspect of Behn's works is what makes her writing and any scholarly research on her relevant. This thesis has attempted a journey into the mind of this mysterious woman and her depiction of 'free women'. The modern century is the age of 'alpha females': women who are impactful, talented, highly motivated and self-confident and Aphra Behn was one of the first alpha women the world has ever seen.

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