Nicholas Rowe's writing of woman as feminist hero

Henry Herbert Sennett Jr.
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NICHOLAS ROWE’S WRITING OF WOMAN AS FEMINIST HERO

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by

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August, 2002
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Beverly, Cristie and Alan
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have shaped my life in so many ways, but this dissertation is the culmination of the help of many people. First, I wish to thank my major professor and mentor, Jennifer Jones, Assistant Professor of Theatre at Louisiana State University. She walked with me through this process and helped me to shape and develop my rough thoughts and ideas into a major work. And she taught me how to think historically, for which I shall be eternally grateful.

I also wish to thank Bill Harbin for introducing me to the works of Nicholas Rowe. I wish to thank the other members of my committee: Les Wade, who challenged me to think theoretically; Robin Roberts, who challenged me to think about gender; Femi Euba, who helped me appreciate the value of creative thinking and writing; Ruth Bowman, who helped me think creatively about performance; and John Mastrogiannakos, the Dean’s Representative to the committee for his insights into genre.

I wish to give special thanks to Annabelle Jenkins who patiently and lovingly agreed to meet with me and to talk about Rowe. Her book was an invaluable tool in this work and her suggestions concerning places to look and people to see helped me tremendously. I wish to thank Richard Dammers who took the time to talk to me on the phone on several occasions offering me suggestions as to some directions I
might take in my research. And I wish to thank Irv Zieman, professor of English at Southeastern College, Lakeland, Florida, who aided in editing the final paper.

But, most of all I wish to thank my wife, Beverly, without whose total support I could not have accomplished this project. She meticulously and painstakingly helped with editing early editions of this paper helping me to see my many silly euphemisms which I gladly erased. But, her love and support as well as that of my two children, Cristie and Alan, were the inspiration and grounding for my work. And finally, I wish to give glory to God whose love and power has sustained me and strengthened me when things were difficult. To Him be all glory and honor and praise.

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ABSTRACT

Nicholas Rowe was a playwright of some success during the first quarter of the eighteenth century in London. Rowe’s importance to the theatre can be seen in his contribution to the development of strong female roles. He was part of that group of Whig writers who championed individual freedom, some rights for women, and a stronger parliament. It is my contention that Rowe was an “incipient” feminist and an innovator of theatrical practice through his use of the female protagonist. By “feminist” I mean that Rowe wrote about the plight of women in a society that afforded very few rights to women. Within the context of his milieu, Rowe had “incipient” beliefs in favor of equal rights of women on a limited scale.

This study analyses Rowe’s life and works in order to discover how Rowe made his decision to write strong female roles in his plays. Although he was not the first to write plays strong female roles, he appears to have been the first to have attempted to develop a genre based on the female as hero as evidenced by the unique title he used for the plays: “she-tragedy.” And with the unique purpose of writing female protagonist roles, Rowe was a proto-feminist, or as I call him, an incipient feminist.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 1716, Nicholas Rowe, the Poet Laureate to King George I, assisted a woman named Susanna Centlivre with a play that she was writing. He aided her with suggestions on the poetry and even supplied the epilogue, the last thing the audience would hear before exiting the theatre. By doing this, Rowe had taken a major step in legitimizing the career and writings of a woman known for her outspoken views on women’s rights. In a time when a woman’s domain was considered to be the home, Centlivre was standing against the social and political system of her day as a professional writer with no dependence upon a man. Aiding her in her efforts, Nicholas Rowe seemed to be placing his reputation and political career in jeopardy. Why did he do this? Who was this bold Laureate? What drove him to get involved with a woman playwright? Was he a champion of women’s rights? Did he write anything of significance on the struggle for women’s rights? Just what was his influence and significance to the theatre of his day? What was his influence on the modern theatre? This simple act was not a bold statement on his part, it was the culmination of a career filled with poetry and plays that hinted at a sympathy with women’s issues.

This dissertation will seek to study the life and works of this little known, yet bold Poet Laureate of England and examine how his writing of women’s roles contributed to the rise of several of
England’s greatest actresses and the rise in popularity of the domestic tragedy. This study will also explore Rowe’s plays to discover that his contribution to Mrs. Centlivre’s play was in keeping with his life long interest in women’s rights. Specifically, this study will focus on Rowe’s writing of theatrical female heros that embodied some of the basic ideals found in modern feminist writings. I have chosen to label these characters as feminist heros, a phrase that I shall explain as this study unfolds.

THE STATE OF ROWE SCHOLARSHIP

The last scholarly books on Rowe are Annibel Jenkins, Nicholas Rowe (1977), and Douglas Canfield, Nicholas Rowe and Christian Tragedy (1977). Jenkins includes biographical information, and both books center on a literary analysis of the plays. Both books deal with various aspects of Rowe’s writings but do not focus on the production of the plays nor Rowe’s influence on the theatre of the day. Jenkins’ book contains a discussion of the political context in which Rowe wrote and Canfield stressed the social aspects of Rowe’s writings.

A serious study of Rowe was done by Carolyne Lyles Ellison in a 1981 dissertation that deals with Rowe’s play The Fair Penitent, comparing it to an earlier play entitled The Fatal Dowry written by Massenger and Field. Ellison’s work is comprehensive and contains a great deal of information on the background of both plays. Like the others, she does not discuss the productions nor the influence Rowe had on the theatre of the eighteenth century.

The most recent biography was written by Douglas Canfield and Alfred Hesse and was a lengthy, scholarly article published in the
Dictionary of Literary Biography of 1989. The article takes into account discoveries related to dating the events of Rowe’s life, but, like the other studies, is mainly an analysis of Rowe’s contribution to the literary world. The authors do not touch on Rowe’s significance to the theatrical world of his day. Of particular importance are Richard Dammers’ “The Importance of Being Female in the Tragedies of Nicholas Rowe” and “Female Characterizations in English Platonic Drama: Background for the Eighteenth Century Tragedies of Nicholas Rowe” (both 1980). In these two articles Dammers argues that Rowe created outspoken female characters in juxtaposition to weak, compliant females to show a contrast. He explains that the audience would see that women deserve greater respect in society, yet a respect that is achieved only by their quiet subservient acceptance of their proper place in the home. Dammers was the first scholar to broach the gender issue in Rowe’s writings; he argued that gender was a major theme in Rowe’s works for the purpose of explaining to women exactly what their role was in the division of labor: men do men things and women do women things. I am indebted to Dammers’ writings because he has laid the foundation that gender issues were important in Rowe’s plays. However, it is my belief that Rowe’s plays took gender far more seriously than Dammers has contended. Rowe’s writings implicate men as part of the problem in women’s subjugation. In this study, I hope to show that Rowe’s writing of female heros points to a far more significant problem than women accepting their role in the home. Rowe seemed to be writing that women are just as strong and just as capable as any man to do what needs to be done in society (or the home) to make things better. This dissertation will show that Rowe’s admiration for Queen Anne led him to see the power inherent in a
strong woman. This belief was translated and illustrated in his plays.

Janet Aikens’ piece in Papers on Language and Literature entitled “To Know Jane Shore, ‘Think on all Things Backward’” offers some interesting historical and literary perspectives on the play about Shore. Her thesis is that Rowe manipulated the female characters in his plays in such a way as to trap the audience into expecting a particular ending then turn the climax around on the audience. Aikens’ theory of “entrapment” offers to this dissertation insights into Rowe’s methodology of writing plays for professional production while using strong female characters who appear to have strong “feminist” beliefs. But where Aikens holds to an entrapment motif, I believe that Rowe wrote strong female characters not to entrap his audiences but rather to blind-side them by presenting arguments for women’s rights wrapped in characters the audience could not help but to admire for their courage in other areas. As I shall argue in this study, Rowe’s writing of feminist heros encompasses more than two characters in two plays; they are pervasive in most of his plays.

Matthew Wikander wrote an article in 1976 in which he addresses the problems faced in analyzing the historical plays of the period prior to Rowe’s writings. That article, “Strange Truths: English Historical Drama in the Seventeenth Century” offers some interesting insights into the writing of the plays that Rowe would have studied and been familiar with, and which may have had an influence on his writings. I am deeply indebted to Wikander’s work in understanding the possible influences on Rowe that ultimately led to his writing strong female roles for the stage.
Prior to the writing of this dissertation, fourteen dissertations have been written in English dealing Nicholas Rowe. Donald Clark’s dissertation for George Washington University in 1947 was a literary analysis of Rowe’s writing style. Landon Burns did a study of all of Rowe’s tragedies in 1958 at Yale with only passing references to Rowe’s particular style of tragedy. Crawford Landon addressed the literary career of Rowe in his study in 1966. Canfield’s book referenced above was based on his dissertation at the University of Florida in 1969. Richard Dammers studied all of the female characters in Rowe’s works in his dissertation completed in 1971 at Notre Dame. Also in 1971, Frederick Gilliard wrote a dissertation dealing with the male characters in Rowe’s plays. Since 1989, no serious study of any kind has been published on Rowe’s life.

No scholarly work on Rowe or his writings has discussed in any significant manner his constant references to the problem of the inequality of women in English society. Those references constitute the focus of this dissertation. The proposition is that Rowe developed female characters who were the heros of the plays, not heroines set over against a male hero. The women in his plays drive the action and are central to their plots. This dissertation considers the importance of the many statements given to these heros that call into question how eighteenth century English society treated women as second class citizens.

PURPOSE FOR THIS STUDY

My interest in Rowe grew out of a graduate class that focused on the European drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries taught by Professor Bill Harbin at Louisiana State University. One of the plays we were required to read was Rowe’s The Tragedy of Jane Shore.
I was struck by the strength of the female protagonist in this play. I turned to the other plays of Rowe and found in them a plethora of central female characters, in contrast to many of the plays of the period which placed women in secondary roles. In 1971, Richard Dammers stated in his dissertation, “Rowe makes revolutionary changes in female characterization, showing women as individuals” (ii). The idea of a woman as an independent agent and catalyst for dramatic action was revolutionary in eighteenth century English drama, a point I hope to prove in this study. Plus, Rowe’s ideas on women’s rights, although veiled, helped to undergird the writing of his female characters by giving them a political issue that would place them in conflict with the political and social powers of Rowe’s day.

As a result of my study of Rowe’s plays, I began to ask why Rowe wrote such strong women’s roles? Could it have been, as Dammers believed, that Rowe saw the changing attitudes toward women emerging in the first quarter of the eighteenth century? Or could Rowe’s concern have been more political since he was a member of the Whig party which supported the individual freedoms of all Englishmen and the extension of some legal rights to women? Or could it have been his relationship with some of the most notable writers of the period such as Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and William Congreve? Or could it have been his association with the prominent female writers Mary Pix, Delariviere Manley, and Susanna Centlivre? Could he have been deeply affected by the many daughters he fathered and then buried? Or could it have been his close relationship with three of the greatest actresses of the English stage at the turn of the eighteenth century: Barry, Bracegirdle and Oldfield?
It is my contention that Rowe’s plays indicate an incipient feminism. By feminism, I mean the pursuit to understand how “femaleness” is constructed by a society. This understanding is complicated by the binary inherent in the language used. Female assumes an opposite: “male;” and woman declares the necessity of a “man.” This realization is what Derrida referred to as a “rupture” of understanding, a moment which brings one to recognize that the whole idea of feminism is a societal construct. Within any societal context, though, one can speak of finding how woman is defined by a society should respond to that definition. I believe Luce Irigary has described a basic form of feminism in this way:

Making equal opportunities for women possible does not mean that women should simply model themselves on masculine ways of being and doing, but that they should enjoy equivalent opportunities to men in all aspects ... So it is a question of discovering what woman is and what she wants; and of opening up ways for her to bring her identity and her subjectivity into being. (1-2)

Feminism is the study and the activity of discovering what it means to be woman based on the needs of the women of any given society rather than on the arbitrary dictates of the male dominated traditions of any society. To accept the understanding of “feminist” adopted by many women’s studies scholars would be to describe a person who actively pursues feminism as an academic study and/or as an activist within a society working to make changes.

But, feminism at the turn of the eighteenth century meant something quite different and yet the same. A feminist of that day would not have articulated the nuances of modern feminism such as gender and power issues. Instead, the eighteenth century feminist would have recognized that there was something terribly wrong with the way women were being treated and sought to bring the issue to the
Phillip Kleitz effectively argued this issue in his dissertation “Nicholas Rowe: Developer of the Drama of Sympathy” in 1967.

Prior to Rowe’s literary career, several women had raised their literary voices in recognition of a problem in society’s treatment of women. I believe that Rowe’s plays show a development of a feminist hero with a voice to exclaim the recognition of the “woman problem.” He may not have understood all the implications of the problem and he may not have known what to do about changing the situations that caused the problems. But at least his female characters added a voice to others during his day that called for some changes in England’s tendency to suppress women.

If Rowe had feminist ideas, he did not offer any solutions to the problems that he specified. But, at least he pointed them out, and, in doing so, he did more than most writers of his day. Within the context of his milieu, his works reflect incipient feminist themes that support some equal rights for women, rights that exceeded the status quo. In his character Calista, he pointed out the double standard which afforded men the freedom of sexual promiscuity yet required of women total chastity. In his character Artemisia, he pointed out the frustration of women who are ambitious and yet are prevented from succeeding except through a husband. And, of course, his Jane Shore was punished for meddling in royal politics.

I believe that Rowe’s influence on the eighteenth and nineteenth century theatre was such that he paved the way for greater roles and greater influence for women in the English theatre. Following Rowe’s example, the entire genre of sentimental (or pathetic) drama was born.¹ Jenkins has pointed out that Rowe effectively combined political,

¹Phillip Kleitz effectively argued this issue in his dissertation “Nicholas Rowe: Developer of the Drama of Sympathy” in 1967.
social and religious themes in his plays. She wrote that "he was among those who set the pattern for the first half of the eighteenth century" (16). His plays may not have started a "feminist" movement, but they did help to make the tragic female a popular form for over a century.

It was Rowe’s innovation in the development of the female hero that aided in the creation of star vehicles for English actresses and the rise of the many tragedies written for women during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This dissertation is built on research into the life and relationships that Rowe had as he wrote and developed his female characters. At the core of the study is biographical data that I have gleaned from previous biographies and original research done in London. Some of the pieces of evidence that I discovered show a distinct relationship between Rowe and the female playwrights of his day. I hold that Rowe was influenced by these women in such a way that he was willing to explore, through his dramas, some radical ideas of equal treatment of women in society. In this dissertation I explain how the events of his life, the people with whom he associated, and the works he may have read greatly influenced his writings and his development of tragic, leading female characters.

This study will focus on The Fair Penitent (1703), The Tragedy of Jane Shore (1714), and The Tragedy of Lady Jane Grey (1715). Each of these plays features a female as the hero. And each of these characters show strength of will and character unseen in English drama since Shakespeare. Calista, in the fictional The Fair Penitent, offers a look at a strong willed woman demanding, but not receiving, the same consideration expected of a man in sexual matters. Although the play is an adaptation of a 1632 play by Philip Massinger and
Nathan Field, Rowe tightened up the story and shifted the protagonist from the bridegroom to the bride. The character of Calista, the “darker woman” (as Elizabeth Howe has titled the role), became a solid staple for Elizabeth Barry at Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

*Jane Shore* and *Jane Grey* are both based on historical figures familiar to Englishmen of Rowe’s day. Shore was Edward IV’s mistress who got caught up in the intrigue surrounding Richard III’s usurpation of the throne, and Grey is the ill-fated girl who became the target of Mary of Scots’ successful and bloody accession to the English throne. Both Janes drive the story of their respective plays and both share the common tragic circumstance of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. They each face their trials with daring, courage, and a tremendous depth of character. Both roles were originally written for the famous actress Mrs. Oldfield. Later, both roles became solid staples in Sarah Siddons’ repertoire.

This study analyzes the production of Rowe’s plays in order to discover how Rowe made his decision to write in the genre which he referred to in his epilogue to *Jane Shore* as the “she-tragedy.” Although he was not the first to write plays with a female protagonist, he appears to have been the first to attempt to develop a genre based on the female as hero, as opposed to heroine or supporting role to a male hero. This fact is evidenced by the unique title he used for the plays.

Over a hundred and fifty years after Rowe’s death, Mary Wollstonecraft asked the haunting question, “[H]ow many generations may be necessary to give vigour to the virtue and talents of the freed
posterity of abject slave?"² Rowe asked the same question in the dramatic form of the she-tragedy where women in subservient roles fought for their own independence and for the ability to make their own decisions. Rowe would never have referred to his protagonists as "slaves," but his plays point to the fact that women had few rights, and were hardly better off at the turn of the eighteenth century than slaves.

Few scholars have made a serious attempt either to describe or recognize Rowe’s descriptive term of she-tragedy as a separate dramatic genre. Even the dissertations on Rowe’s plays do not argue that the she-tragedy was ever intended to be a separate genre. A preliminary look at some documents written by Rowe’s friends and associates seems to indicate that he may have been planning to write several more plays in this genre. Unfortunately, the project was cut short by his untimely death at the age of forty-four.

Although an attempt to establish the she-tragedy as an intended genre is tempting, this study will discuss the she-tragedy simply as a vehicle through which Rowe expressed his incipient feminist beliefs. Lee, Banks and Otwell had set the precedent for Rowe with their tragedies that were popular in his day. Passionate love carried to heroic proportions was a common theme with these writers. The typical tragedy “starts with a suspiration and ends with ‘tears,’” (92) to borrow the words of Eric Rothstein. Yet, the passion and intrigue of the tragedies of Rowe’s day were held together by a rigid formal

²Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Women was first published in serial form in Susan B. Anthony’s newspaper Revolution in the 1860’s. This quote is taken from Catherine Belsey (1997), The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, 16.
structure built around the French understanding of the classical principles of drama which became known as neoclassicism, which will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Central to this study is an analysis of the specific texts of Rowe’s plays to discover the “feminism” in his female heros. I will prove that Rowe’s incipient feminism is a satisfactory explanation for the numerous places in his plays in which he makes strong, pro-feminist statements. These poetic verses I shall refer to as the “hard sayings” of Rowe, a phrase which I have borrowed from theology used to describe the many words of Jesus that seem to be difficult to interpret. It is my contention that Rowe scholars have had difficulty in understanding or explaining these statements; therefore they have either glossed over them or have simply ignored them. If Rowe truly advocated an incipient feminism in his plays, as I contend, then these hard sayings are no longer difficult to understand.
CHAPTER TWO
THE BEGINNING OF A FINE CAREER

Nicholas Rowe flourished and wrote dramas during the first quarter of the eighteenth century in London. Though the only play of his considered worthy of note by most scholars is *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, Rowe is esteemed among modern English literary students for his translation of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* and as the first modern editor of Shakespeare’s plays. Canfield and Hesse have written, “Rowe was best known in his own time, as he should be in ours, for his plays” (264).

In his day, Rowe enjoyed the friendship of some of the greatest writers of the English language. Rowe spent time with Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, and Alexander Pope. Ironically, the blessing he shared may have also been the curse that later cost him fame, for he was eventually overshadowed by the works and accomplishments of the geniuses with whom he associated. Although well-liked by all who knew him, his importance has often been overlooked in favor of the powerful influences of those other writers of his day.

Rowe’s importance to the theatre of the early eighteenth century can be seen through the contributions that he made to the theatre and dramas of his day personified in his heros he wrote who were female rather than male. His characters addressed ideas and issues new to the theatre public. Annabelle Jenkins has written that Rowe was “the
representative of a new attitude toward the theatre and toward the literary public that was changing rapidly in the first two decades of the century” (16). Rowe was part of that group of writers that championed the later Whig movement that called for more individual freedom and a stronger parliament which would represent the people before the king. As Jenkins continued, “In plot, characterizations, and themes, the plays set out the virtues of freedom, of the church, and of England as Rowe and his audience saw these virtues” (17).

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF NICHOLAS ROWE

Much of what is known about Rowe’s life is based on secondary information because so little primary evidence is available to verify or confirm what is known. To complicate any study of his writing is the problem that he did not feel compelled to write about his own life. Of extreme value is the existence of a work by him of a theoretical nature that dealt with the works of others and included his understandings of tragedy as a dramatic genre. Only a few of his contemporaries wrote about his poetry and drama, and what we do have was written mostly by one man, Charles Gildon. A few of his friends wrote obituaries soon after his death, and these are the richest resource for information about his life. Recent scholarship has added a few bits of information to the basic research on Rowe, but nothing extensive has been discovered since 1975. This dissertation will not attempt to establish a full biography of Rowe, but will include enough biographical data to show just how and why he included incipient feminist ideas into several very successful plays. In this chapter, I begin the biography by discussing Rowe’s background and education in order to establish his scholarship and the political affiliations which helped to shape his writing style.
Early information about Rowe’s life can be found in two major sources. The earliest account of the life of Rowe was by Dr. James Welwood, a noted physician and close friend of the Rowe family. Welwood wrote a biography in the form of a letter to the editor which was included in the first edition of Rowe’s translation of Lucan’s Pharsalia published a few months following Rowe’s death. A second account of the life of Rowe, written by Rowe’s friend Stephen Hales, was included as the preface to a memorial volume of poetry and essays dedicated to Rowe and edited by Edmund Curll, entitled Musarum Lachrymae. Most of the biographies since 1718 have been either reprints of the above or heavily dependent upon these two sources.

The first two biographies were tributes rather than scholarly accounts of Rowe’s life and works. They are brief, offer few details, and rely mostly upon the writers’ memories rather than the research often afforded later famous writers and historical figures. The two authors wrote great praises and had no real critical words to say about Rowe’s life or writings. They do, however, offer insight into Rowe’s relationships with his colleagues and friends. Despite the glowing words, no other writer saw the need to dispute their accounts. Even Alexander Pope, who was a dear friend and colleague of Rowe, never wrote a single critical word about Rowe, and Pope was never reluctant to criticize others around him. The theatre historian, Theophilus Cibber, had nothing of any critical or significantly substantive nature to say about Rowe in his biographical essay published in 1753, nor did he alter any of the information from the first biographies.

During the later half of the twentieth century, several researchers have uncovered historical records about Rowe, most of
which have been published in scholarly journals. I had an opportunity to spend time researching Rowe in London and discovered several letters and documents that refer to Rowe which may enhance the earlier biographies. The biographical information in this paper will unfold as the study progresses with pauses along the way for deeper discussions of issues relevant to the argument about Rowe’s writing of women as feminist heros. But, in order to understand the world in which Rowe lived, I will look at the political situation in England following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, then turn to Rowe’s early life as a way of establishing him as a man who was able to think about women on the stage in a new and innovative way.

**POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND**

Following the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the political divisions among the aristocracy and the commoners in England became highly contentious. A political party known as the Tories became the stalwart defenders of the past and of the divine rights of kings, including their right to decide whether England should be Protestant or Catholic. Overall, they supported the Roman Catholic traditions of the past. The emerging Whig party advocated such principles as personal freedom, toleration of the non-Anglican protestant groups, and kings ruling with the people’s consent. The Whigs believed that sovereignty rested, ultimately, with the people, and while they believed in the blood-line succession, they also believed that a King must be of the Protestant Faith. They believed that anyone contending for the throne who was of the Catholic faith was to be disqualified. This belief led to the passage of the Exclusion Act which prohibited any king from being Catholic.
The Whigs were strong supporters of William III and his wife Mary and sponsored the Glorious Revolution that led to William and Mary’s accession to the throne of England. The party maintained a virtual monopoly on political power during their reign. They suffered some losses during the reign of Anne, but they were able to maintain their influence and power base. Although their leadership was aristocratic, the Whigs were also the party of the new financial and mercantile interests which profited in the early eighteenth century from the wars against France, and they were adherents of the Hanoverians when that dynasty succeeded to the throne.

The Whigs of the late seventeenth century believed in limited equal rights for all Englishmen, but not necessarily women. At the turn of the eighteenth century, women had few rights at all. Men had all the privileges of work and earned the bulk of the money. None other than the author of modern law, Sir William Blackstone, wrote, "[I]n marriage husband and wife are one person, and that person is the husband" (Quoted in Olsen, 43). Blackstone went on to explain that a woman’s “very being, or legal existence” was basically suspended during marriage. This view reinforced the notion that a woman’s place was in the home making babies and doing house work. Although women were “forbidden entry to Parliament, the bar, institutionalized medicine, the Anglican clergy, and the magistracy” (Olsen, 34), most other professions were open to any woman brave enough and/or strong enough to enter. But the bulk of women in England lived on farms and worked in and around the house. The vast majority of the women of London enjoyed privileges only in proportion to the privileges that their husbands possessed and allowed them to have.
This misogynous attitude was not restricted to the men who wrote and enforced the laws; women helped to encourage the status quo of the lower rank of women in English Society. The Lady Mary Whortley Montagu believed that a woman’s learning ought to be hidden “with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness” (Quoted in Olsen, 34). Lady Mary also wrote in her letters to young women of the day that any woman who displays “wit” in public would be akin to bragging about being unfaithful or having no chastity.

The only field of endeavor that opened up for middle-class women in the late seventeenth century was that of the arts. Women were able to make a living as actresses, playwrights, and novelists. By pursuing the limited opportunities available to them, independent women such as Aphra Behn, Mary Pix, and Susanna Centlivre pursued their careers. And it was through the arts that Rowe found a way to encourage, mentor, and support women who may have influenced or shared his incipient feminist ideas. The women writers at the turn of the eighteenth century did not flourish in a vacuum. Their opportunities were made possible through several political realities that formed following the events of 1688 and developed after the turn of the century.

The Court Whigs, those who resided in London, reigned politically supreme from 1714 until 1760, the bulk of that time under the leadership of Sir Robert Walpole. The Country Whigs were those who resided outside London and made up the bulk of the Whig membership. They shared many beliefs with the Court Whigs and were their main support in 1688, but differed in that they believed that the reforms of the Glorious Revolution, should be “frozen in perpetuity,” to use Reed Browning’s description. Although the Whigs did not openly
advocate equality of women to men, their emphasis on personal freedom, economic freedom and suppression of the monarchical powers may have been quite appealing to Rowe and may have influenced his view of women as individuals—at least on the stage. His plays indicate a “feel” for individual freedom as will be explained later.

Although there were no women politicians at the turn of the eighteenth century, there were several writers who were championing the rights of women to have a political voice. They were all part of the larger Whig party movement. One of the boldest writers was Daniel Defoe. In his *The True Born Englishman* (1701) in which he defended the right of William III to be King, he also decried racial and sexual discrimination of all kinds. His works are full of arguments favoring the equality of women both legally and morally. Katherine Rogers has pointed out that Defoe “constantly argued ... that women had the capacity to be independent and should be given educational and economic opportunities to become so” (Fritz & Morton, 3). Defoe believed that it was the lack of education that held women back and not any physical or mental inferiority: radical ideas for the beginning of the eighteenth century. Rowe knew Defoe and even owned a copy of the 1703 edition of Defoe’s *Works*. Rowe could easily have been influenced by Defoe’s thinking in the issues of women’s freedoms. It is no difficult leap to say that they may have discussed the issues on many occasions giving Rowe fodder for thought on women’s issues.

Another important Whig writer during this period was Mary Astell, whose writings made quite a stir in 1694. In *A Serious Proposal to

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3A catalogue of Rowe’s library holdings at the time of his death is located in the British Library and has been published in Jenkins’ book.
the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True Interest, Astell argued that women’s minds were “over-run with Weeds, lie fallow and neglected, unadorn’d with any Grace!” (Quoted in Jones, 197). She advocated a school (which she called a monastery) for the sole purpose of educating young women in the same subjects that men were taught at the numerous colleges throughout England. She saw this project as helping women to fulfill their intended purpose of serving God with their minds. She was cautious in her proposal not to offend the clergy, so she states, “We pretend not that Women shou’d teach in the Church, nor usurp authority where it is not allow’d them; permit us only to understand our own duty, and not be forc’d to take it upon trust from others” (Jones, 204). Her proposal was quite radical for the day. Though there is no direct evidence that Rowe knew or knew of the writings of Astell, the publication was public and available to him to read.

The philosophical understandings of the Whigs toward individual freedoms eventually gave support to a movement that developed later in the 1730’s wherein women began speaking out and even taking part in politics. The content of this movement is preserved in a pamphlet entitled, The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to the Wives. The writer, who purports to be writing for all women of the Kingdom, calls the legal status of women in marriage as “a worse condition than Slavery itself” (Jones, 217). The pamphlet complains about those laws that are intended to deny all rights to married women and calls upon the King to take action to change them. The writer explains that the law allows husbands to place their wives in prison for life at their pleasure. The argument is that “no individual, not even the Sovereign himself, can imprison any person for Life, at Will and Pleasure”
(Jones, 218). And the writer also points out that the law states that a married woman can have no property of her own. Some twenty years later, the pro-Whig feminist, Georgiana of Devonshire, broke the sex barrier in politics and was the first woman to actively campaign in Parliamentary elections. Life in English society was changing throughout the eighteenth century. And Rowe’s writings indicate that he was well aware of the challenges and problems that seemed to spawn those changes. Perhaps Rowe’s plays gave some impetus to those changes since his plays were continuously performed throughout the century.

THE RESTORATION: WOMEN ON THE STAGE

When the Crown was restored in 1660, the Puritan ban on theatrical productions was lifted. As a result, two new theatre companies were chartered. Included in the licensing of the two performing companies was a provision that mandated the use of women on the stage, an innovation for London’s professional theatre world. In part, the directive, dated 1662, stated that women’s roles were “to be acted in either of the said two companies for the time to come may be performed by women” (Thomas, 138). The infusion of mature women into the acting companies required more roles to be written for these new thespians.

Strong female roles were not a new idea in English plays. Many of the greatest roles for women were created prior to the Restoration period. But, female roles were nearly always played by young boys. W. W. Greg compiled a complete list of plays in publication prior to 1660 and found only 836, including those of William Shakespeare. Scholars such as Howe, Hume and Gassner contend that only about 100 of the plays in publication were worthy of production on the
professional London stage in the late seventeenth century. Many of the 100 or so had been written by the Elizabethan playwrights like Shakespeare and Jonson. When writing, the playwrights considered the company that would produce the play. What actors were available? What was the status of the boys who could play the female roles? How many roles needed to be included? As a result, these writers rarely created more than two female roles in each of their plays. Even though many of the female roles were deep, expressive and powerful, there simply were not many roles available for women at the beginning of the Restoration.

The two theatre managers in London worked feverishly to recruit and train women to act on the stage with men who had been working for years at their profession. It took these women little time to learn to hold their own on the stage. Davenant had hired six women early in 1661, Hester Davenport, Mary Saunderson, Jane Long, Anne Gibbs, Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Norris. Killegrew had recruited four ladies: Katherine Corey, Anne Marshall, Mrs. Eastland and Mrs. Weaver (Elizabeth Farley). Anne Marshall quickly established herself as a beautiful leading lady playing the lead role in Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Scornful Lady*.

Other women established themselves as significant players on the Restoration stage of London. Among her many popular roles, Mary Betterton, Thomas Betterton’s wife, played the heroines in Davenant’s *Seige of Rhodes* (1661), Cowley’s *The Cutter of Coleman Street* (1661), Porter’s *The Villain* (1662), Etherege’s *The Comical Revenge* (1664), Behn’s *The Forc’d Marriage* (1670), Davenant’s *Macbeth* (1673), Otway’s *Alcibiades* (1675), and Behn’s *The Rover* (1677). Jane Long played
numerous roles that made her famous among the theatre crowds of London. Among her many roles were Laughing Jane in Cowley’s *Cutter of Coleman Street*, Diacelia in Stapylton’s *The Slighted Maid* (1663), and Lady Macduff in Davenant’s *Macbeth*.

During the 1670's and 80's, the number of actresses working professionally increased. Mary Lee became famous for her many Breeches roles, where a woman played the part of a man placing her in tight breeches to accentuate the female figure. She played breeches roles in Settle’s *Love and Revenge* (1674) and *The Conquest of China* (1675), Durfey’s *Madam Fickle* (1676), Leanerd’s *The Counterfeits* (1676), and Maidwell’s *The Loving Enemy* (1680). Rebecca Marshall played heroine roles such as Berenice in Dryden’s *Tyrannick Love* (1669), Lucrecia in Dryden’s *The Assignation* (1672), and Gloriana in Lee’s play of the same name, *Gloriana* (1676). Mary Davis (also known as “Moll”) had a short but distinguished career in Davenant’s *The Law Against Lovers* (1662), Stapylton’s *The Stepmother* (1663), Etherege’s *The Comical Revenge* (1664), Boyle’s *Henry the Fifth* (1664), and Etherege’s *She Would if She Could* (1668).

Unfortunately, the ladies of the early Restoration stage were not well treated and did not fair well financially. No woman was allowed to become a “sharer” in the company of the two theatres. Mrs. Davenant did take over the management of the Duke’s Company in 1668 following her husband’s death, but did not share in the profits. The women’s wages were significantly lower than that of their male colleagues. However, by the 1680's the powerful draw of some women had forced the companies to arrange for higher salaries. And in some
cases, such as that of Mrs. Barry, the actresses received benefit performances (a practice to be discussed more fully below).

Sometime around 1668 the two theatres began to introduce an average of twenty new plays per year into their repertoire with many of the playwrights including leading roles for the women to play. Thomas Otway wrote six tragedies during the period of 1675 to 1682, all of which included major roles for women. Elizabeth Barry made her debut in Thomas Otway’s *Alcibiades* (1675) in the role of a young maiden, with Mary Betterton playing the role of Timandra and Mary Lee as Deidamia, the villainess. Otway offered roles of substance throughout the next ten years providing such female acting vehicles as *Titus and Berenice* (1676), *Caius Marius* (1679), *The Orphan* (1680), and his most famous play, *Venice Preserved* (1682).

In reading Otway’s tragedies, one can easily see the seeds of what Rowe attempted in his tragic roles for women. In *Venice Preserved*, the hero, Jaffier, is constantly faced with two choices of what appear to be right decisions, yet behind each lurks hidden evil. And his faithful lover, Belvidera, believing that the Senate had their best interests at heart, convinces him to turn over his best friend, Pierre, to them. They immediately send him to the dungeon for torture. When Jaffier discovers what has happened, he cries out to Belvidera, “I’m the wretched’est creature / E’er crawled on earth! Now if thou has virtue, help me” (IV,2,296-7). He then tries to kill her, but her beauty and innocence win him over and he decides to rob the Senate of their justice in his final act of courage. But where Otway wrote traditional tragedies with the female characters in support of the tragic “male” hero, Rowe strove to shift the emphasis to a “lead”
female who would be the hero—and not just a hero, but a symbol of feminine power standing strong against the male dominated society.

Other playwrights arose during the last quarter of the seventeenth century who wrote plays for the actresses of the day and who may have had an influence on Rowe. Nathaniel Lee produced several female characters in plays such as, The Rival Queens (1677), The Princess of Cleve (1680), and Lucius Junius Brutus (1681). John Dryden offered up a number of female roles in his plays and even collaborated with Nathaniel Lee on two new plays, Oedipus (1678) and The Duke of Guise (1682) featuring the acting skills of Betterton, Barry and Lee. Chart 1 (located at Appendix B) illustrates the growing number of female roles created by just three playwrights, Lee, Otway and Dryden, between 1667 and 1792.

Among the many roles created for the actresses of the day was the rise of two interesting types: the “darker woman” and the villainess. These roles placed the female in an adversarial role against men and other women. These roles may have been both a delight and a fright for the Restoration audiences who were barely getting used to having a gendered female (as opposed to a female-gendered male) on the stage. The audiences were now facing women they would admire through the “gaze” upon the female body as well as women they would hate because of the actions and characterizations in the roles they played. Chart 2 (located at Appendix C) is a representative listing of major roles written between 1660 and 1700 that were considered the villainesses and the “darker women.”

Rowe had a great tradition behind him as he wrote his plays featuring women in leading, tragic roles. What Rowe ultimately did was to synthesize the many types of female roles into some of the most
unforgettable characters to grace the London stage. Rowe focused on the female, giving her a more prominent place in the story and in the spectacle. And he also offered respectable roles that the women would be proud to perform and to recreate again and again.

THE RESTORATION: CHALLENGE OF THE GAZE

In 1661, the limited number of roles for women was only one of the problems to be faced by the new stars of the stage. After the introduction of actresses to the professional stage, the availability of roles seems to have been less important to the public than the viewing of actual women (not young boys in drag) in performance. Colley Cibber wrote of that period, “The additional objects then of real, beautiful women could not but draw a proportion of new admirers to the theatre” (Cibber I:91). Young boys may have performed admirably in the roles of women prior to the Commonwealth, but with the advent of the female body upon the stage, the space for performance of story had become a space for exhibition with an “exchange of desires” as Senelick has insightfully observed concerning the issue of the presence of the female body on display. He continues, “The inscription of gender as allure, ... becomes one of the theatre’s most potent attractions” (xii). Cibber declared that the reason people were not as interested in the acting skills of the women on the stage was that their very presence was intriguing. He continues from the earlier quote to say, “We may imagine too that these actresses were not ill chosen, when it is well known that more than one of them had charms sufficient at their leisure hours to calm and mollify the cares of the empire.” He was referring to Nell Gwynn and Moll Davis who were frequent guests at the court and later became mistresses to Charles II.
The actresses may have been outstanding performers, but the public was more interested in having a chance to gaze upon the king’s courtesans than in appreciating their acting skills. In 1662, John Evelyn wrote in his diary a brief statement that seems to crystalize the opinion shared throughout London by high society toward actresses of the day. He wrote of Nell Gwynn that he saw the last performance she did before leaving the theatre to become “the Earl of Oxford’s Miss (as at this time they began to call lewd women)” (Thomas 141). Actresses were considered to be “lewd women,” especially if they took up with royalty. Some actresses were accosted or stalked outside the theatre as men believed that the women of the theatre were prostitutes and free game. Rebecca Marshall had several serious incidents in which she had to appeal to the king for protection against several gentlemen who were desiring her by force. Other women had humorous epilogues or prologues written for them to set the audience straight about their life off the stage. Unfortunately, the low opinion of actresses and the intrigue of the gaze were slow in changing over the decades. Some thirty years after the Restoration began, the writer Anthony Aston made note of Anne Bracegirdle by describing her physical characteristics rather than her acting abilities. He wrote, “[W]hen ever she exerted herself [she] had an involuntary flushing in her breast, neck and face, having continually a cheerful aspect and a fine set of white teeth” (Cibber, II:305).

In 1661, the audiences would view women playing roles that were actually written for women. William Davenant’s Seige of Rhodes (1656)

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4 For an in depth discussion of this issue, see Elizabeth Howe, especially chapters 1-3.
may have been one such play. A production of that script ushered in the new era of the theatre and was extremely popular in the 1660's. Davenant’s role in bringing women to the stage cannot be over looked. He had been involved with writing roles for women at the court of Charles I, including Queen Henrietta Maria. And in 1656, Davenant had cast a woman, a Mrs. Coleman, to perform the lead role of Ianthe in the first performance of the Seige of Rhodes performed before a private audience at Rutland House. Not only was he instrumental in bringing women to the stage, he was experienced in the use of women on the stage in major roles.

Traditional Shakespearean plays such as Othello, Hamlet, and Macbeth may have drawn large audiences with Elizabeth Barry, Jane Long, Rebecca Marshall, Moll Davis and Nell Gwynn in the roles of Desdemona, Ophelia and Lady Macbeth. One can only imagine the electricity generated as these great actresses gave a new dimension to the parts that had been played by young men and boys. Thus, the challenge before the playwrights of the day was to bring a gazing audience to a new regard for the talents of the actresses by writing strong, thoughtful roles for them to portray. Rowe’s plays were important in meeting this challenge.

ENTER NICHOLAS ROWE

Two significant events occurred in 1674 which would influence the English stage for years to come. First, the Drury Lane Theatre was opened with the King’s Men performing their repertoire of plays; and, second, in the home of his maternal grand-parents in Little Barford, Bedfordshire, Nicholas Rowe was born to John Rowe, an attorney “of fair reputation,” (Welwood) and Elizabeth Rowe, daughter of Jasper
Edwards, Lord of the Manor of Little Barford. Elizabeth and John had married on September 25, 1673. Nicholas, their first-born, arrived barely ten months later and was christened on June 30, 1674.

Having recently been called to the bar in the Middle Temple of London, John Rowe moved his new family to the city to live. Although he had inherited a great deal of property in Lamberton, Devonshire, John Rowe was far more comfortable living in and around the court than as a country gentleman. John Rowe’s politics were more in line with the Court Whigs, rather than the Country Whigs. He was instrumental in the publication of Benlow and Dallison’s Report on the reign of James II, a strong defense of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In the preface, he set out a strong defense of the liberties enjoyed by the people and argued against any encroachment upon those rights by the crown. Nicholas may have been strongly influenced by his father’s outspoken support of English liberty which later would be fleshed out in his dramatic reflections upon the rights of women.

John Rowe was instrumental in defining the relationship between London and the Scots which later led to Scotland being accepted into the British Empire. Holding the office of “serjeant” at the bar (a mostly ceremonial post laden with some prestige), John Rowe struck a major cord for the freedom of parliament and the subjects of the crown, without fear of retribution or retaliation. Also, as a staunch Whig and supporter of William and Mary, John faired well in his professional life. Nicholas admired his father’s work and followed in his father’s footsteps as a devout Court Whig.

Nicholas Rowe was educated in several of the finest schools of London. He began his primary education in Highgate, then later became a student at the Westminster School under the tutelage of Dr. Richard
Busby, a noted scholar and teacher of young men since the 1660's. Dr. Busby worked closely with young Nicholas recognizing his quickness and insight and his penchant for literature and language. At Westminster, Nicholas was schooled in the classics where he did reading in English, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. In 1687, he was named a King’s Scholar, a high honor for a young boy of only thirteen years of age. Nicholas’ days were filled with rigorous training that lasted as long as fifteen hours a day. He became quite proficient in languages and classics demonstrating his abilities by writing exceptionally well in Latin, Greek and English. Although he excelled in his studies, he had a natural bent toward poetry. Dr. Welwood wrote of Rowe’s poetic verses at that time that, “they cost him little Pains, and seemed to flow from his Imagination, almost as fast as his Pen” (xix). But, his love for the arts was to take a back-seat to his father’s wishes for him to have a more substantial profession. On August 4, 1691, John Rowe enrolled his son at the Middle Temple for the study of law. Nicholas threw himself into his studies and excelled in his legal preparation and was later called to the bar and became a barrister of the Middle Temple.

Fortunately for Rowe, life at the Middle Temple at the end of the seventeenth century consisted of more than the study of law and the classics. According to the archivist at the Middle Temple library, the barristers and students would eat together in the Dining Hall almost daily and would often schedule performances and other literary activities to include readings, lectures, and various artistic performances such as music recitals and theatrical productions. The barristers were often encouraged to write, perform, and pursue artistic and literary endeavors. In this nurturing environment toward
the arts Rowe would actually practice very little law, and his love for writing, led him to develop his successful playwriting career.

**ROWE’S EARLY ADULTHOOD**

On May 7, 1692, Nicholas’ father John Rowe was buried at the Temple Chapel. He bequeathed to his son an annual stipend of £300 and his chambers at the Middle Temple. To some extent, Nicholas Rowe may have felt that his father’s bequest had freed him to pursue his writing rather than a legal career. Welwood was not entirely accurate when he wrote, “The Muses had stoln [sic.] away his Heart from his Infancy ... for Homer and Virgil, Sophocles and Euripides had infinitely more charms with him, than the best Authors that had writ of the Law of England” (xix). Perhaps Hales’ version of what happened best describes Rowe’s situation when he wrote, “But the Spirit of Poetry soon got the better of the Works of Profit, and while he still kept his Chambers, a Play or two of his came upon the stage with great success” (3). Over about a year or two, Rowe became less interested in law than his father was and eventually drifted into literary pursuits and writing plays.

Soon after his father’s death, Nicholas felt secure enough with his studies and finances to marry Antonia Parsons, the seventeen year old daughter of Antony Parsons, auditor of the revenue. Their marriage is recorded as having taken place on July 6, 1693, in the chapel of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Minories (located just outside the city walls, north of the Tower of London). The records of the church are held at the London Guildhall Library (hereafter referred to as LGL), MS. 9243, 2nd part, 1692-1745, p. 31. The date of 1693 is much earlier than the 1698 date quoted in the biographies of Rowe written prior to 1980.
Antonia resided in a home owned by Rowe’s father-in-law on Fetter Lane, London. Then a year and a half after their marriage, Antonia gave birth to a son they named John. During the year of 1695, Nicholas inherited his uncle Nicholas’ library which contained a number of books on law, history and the arts. One can only imagine Nicholas’ joy at receiving such a treasure. There is no listing of the volumes in this bequest, but an examination of the books in Rowe’s personal library at the time of his death, reveals that nearly half were published prior to 1675 (see Jenkins, 181ff). Although one cannot conclude with certainty that the early works were in his uncle’s library, one can surmise that many of the early books were at least a part of the inheritance. At the turn of the eighteenth century, a personal library was a valuable asset. As a scholar, Rowe must have devoured this special treasure left to him by his uncle.

Although no clear conclusions can be made about the influence that the books in Rowe’s library had on his writing or his thinking, a logical assumption is that the information he had at his disposal did have an impact on his works. Among his collection are the works of Bacon, Johnson, Spencer, Dryden, Congreve, Hale, More, Dunne, Drake, Swift, Defoe, and Pope all of which reflect his regard for the great British writers.

His library holdings were not limited to English editions since he also had numerous volumes of works in the original languages by such writers as Aristotle, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Corneille,

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6The baptismal records for Rowe’s other children were uncovered in LGL by Alfred W. Hesse and reported in an article, “Some Neglected Life-Records of Nicholas Rowe,” Notes and Queries (November, 1975), 485.
Richelieu, Horace, Ovid, Erasmus, Lucan, Virgil, Seneca, Justinian and Pliny. These volumes show the extent of his reading ability in many languages, training in which was a part of his education at Westminster.

Although obtained just prior to his death, Rowe had a copy of Charles Gildon’s *The Complete Art of Poetry* (1718). Rowe knew Gildon, a rather infamous theatre critic of the day. Perhaps they had spent time together in discussions as Gildon wrote his book. One reason for drawing this conclusion is the similarity of the philosophy of this book and that practiced in the plays that Rowe had written. Gildon wrote an in-depth analysis of just what constitutes poetry and drama. The basis of his argument is that the ideal poet should have a thorough familiarity with the Classics of the Greek, Roman, and French stages, though he did not discuss the Italian drama from which the neoclassical principles were developed.

Gildon argued strongly from a pious Christian viewpoint stating that love should never be presented upon the stage except in its purest form and only as it relates to marriage or betrothal. Rowe’s plays, for the most part, seem to adhere to this philosophical view. Gildon was a staunch supporter of the neoclassicism of the Renaissance, so his writing tended to be more prescriptive than descriptive. He criticized the writers of his day for not adhering closely to the neoclassical ideals. The examples that he uses to illustrate his points are drawn from those plays that support his rules. Although Rowe is not mentioned by name in the book, Gildon did criticize his friend and colleague in other publications since he and Rowe disagreed on just what constitutes dramatic tragedy. Gildon held to the neoclassical principles of the unity of time, action, and
The writing, production and reception of this play will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three of this work.

Later, Gildon wrote a critical attack against those critics who would lampoon productions on the stages of London in the name of literary criticism. He mentioned the tract *Bays the Younger, or The Rehearsal*, which was written in the form of a play but was in reality a biting critique of several plays of the day. It singled out Rowe’s play *Jane Shore*, produced in 1714, as an example of neoclassicism gone awry. Gildon held that Rowe’s approach was beyond serious consideration by any thinking Englishman since he had refused to follow the neoclassical principles. Research has shown that Gildon himself may have written the tract/script which was so critical of Rowe. Perhaps he critiqued the tract *Bays, the Younger* in order to distance himself from his involvement in the writing of it.

Theatre criticism at the turn of the eighteenth century in London was not well developed, and there were very few outlets for publishing theatrical critiques. In the 1690’s, a few “miscellanies” were published that had reviews of plays that had been seen by the writers, or announcements of upcoming openings of important playwrights such as Congreve, Dryden, and Southerne. In 1707, *The Muses’ Mercury* appeared monthly with articles that dealt with plays and poetry of the day offering some superficial analyses and reviews. In 1702, *The Daily Courant* began publication. The news centered almost entirely upon politics and religion of the day but did carry paid notices of book sales and theatre offerings. The true beginning of theatre criticism

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7The writing, production and reception of this play will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three of this work.
is found in a publication called the *Tatler*, edited by Richard Steele with contributions by Joseph Addison. These two men were close friends of Rowe. They spent many evenings together discussing drama, art, and literature. Rowe would have been quite familiar with the popular scholarship and writings in dramatic criticism.

The year 1696 saw Rowe being called to the bar. This was soon followed by the death of his son whose burial was recorded on October 31. The child, named John, was less than a year old. The next year, Rowe and his wife moved to Blewitt’s Building “off Fetter Lane” (as it is described in the legal records of the day), a move which placed them in St. Andrew parish. In 1699, Nicholas’s second son, whom he also named John, was born and Christened at St. Andrew, Holborn, on August 24. This John would outlive his father. Rowe’s respect for his father, John, is clearly evident in that he used the same name for his second son, insuring that the name would be carried on. At every turn, Nicholas Rowe was tying himself to the traditions of his father and uncle.

The temporary change of residence may have been the source of the confusion of most of his biographers who wrote that he only had one son. The first son John and all of Rowe’s other children by his first wife were Christened at St. Dunstan in the West, the Rowe family’s church. The records for St. Andrew’s and Holy Trinity (where his second son was born) were more readily available to the public. Wellwood, Hale, and Johnson, Rowe’s earliest biographers, would not have thought to check the records at St. Dunstan in the West since Rowe and his wife were members at St. Andrew’s and Holy Trinity.

Soon after the birth of their second son, Nicholas moved his family back to the house on Fetter Lane placing them again in the Holy
Trinity parish and closer to the theatre at Lincoln’s Inn Fields where his first play was produced. Rowe and Antonia would have five more children. Despite the loss of so many of their children, this young couple would live a life of national recognition and achievement. Antonia did not live to see Nicholas’ greatest triumphs, but his daughter Elizabeth (born to his second wife) would continue to support her father. Her devotion was memorialized with her likeness being portrayed on the Memorial erected to Rowe in Westminster Cathedral (See Appendix D).

Rowe must have been affected by the death of so many children. And even though children often did not survive the first year of life during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (see Shambrook, 182), the loss of a child would have its affects on a man of deep feelings and religious sensitivity like Rowe. His thoughts may have turned to the loss of those children (most of whom were girls) when he wrote of the strength of will and power in his female heroes. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence of his feelings or thoughts on this issue in his poetry or his plays. In fact, there are no references to his personal life in any of his poems or poetry. He must have valued his privacy, but he could not stop his private life from impinging upon his public writings.
CHAPTER THREE
DEVELOPMENT OF A FINE CAREER

As the seventeenth century turned into the eighteenth, a spirit of maturity was beginning to develop in the theatres of London. The two professional theatre houses, the Theatre Royal (or Drury Lane) and Lincoln’s Inn Fields, were solidly entrenched as institutions for entertainment and were attempting to become centers of sophistication as well. One of the managers, Colley Cibber, stated that he was proud that creditors were paid in full every Monday morning during his tenure at Drury Lane (Thomas, 23).

The problems with backstage antics and un-welcomed visitors had been stopped and it was bragged that “no fops or coxcombs ever shoed their monkey tricks there, but if they chanced to thrust in, were awed into respect.”  Although the management of the various theatres found it difficult to keep the houses operating consistently during the years from 1694 to 1714, the theatres were able to establish a sense of stability in the performances and with their audiences. The rowdiness of the audiences of the Restoration had calmed somewhat, and

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8Quoted by W. S. Scott in his The Georgian Theatre. For a fuller discussion of the theatres of that day, see Charles Gildon’s A Comparison Between the Two Stages (1702), Judith Milhous, Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, 1695-1708 (1979), and Deborah Fisk and Deborah Payne’s The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre (2000).
the London theatre world was ready for the changes that would be introduced by men like Nicholas Rowe.

This chapter will show that Rowe’s feminist heroines were formed out of significant historical developments and events as the commercial theatre in London matured following the Restoration of the monarchy. With that background, I discuss the development of female characters in Rowe’s early plays which would eventually lead to the writing of his most famous play, The Tragedy of Jane Shore.

**Influence of Neoclassicism**

Rowe followed in a long line of great writers of tragedy. His contemporary, Joseph Addison, would write his greatest play Cato, considered by some as the best example of English neoclassicism. It seemed to adhere to the neoclassical principles brought to England after the Restoration of the monarchy. Although conjecture, it is believed by some that since Charles II had spent nearly eighteen years at the French court that he insisted upon the English using the same literary and dramatic principles developed by the French. He may have wanted to establish an office similar to the French Academie Francaise, founded in 1629 to further the cause of following the Classical Roman writers and restore the primacy of classical forms. Charles II did exercise control over the theatres through licensing of theatre companies, although an English “Academie” was never formed.

In short, some of the dramatists and most of the theorists in the last third of the seventeenth century did attempt to incorporate some of the principles of neoclassicism. But, in general, the English playwrights of the seventeenth and eighteenth century followed a more medieval model of episodic plot development, best illustrated by
Shakespeare. The unities of time, place and action were seldom held as sacred. Plays could take place in numerous places, over a long period of time with several sub-plots.

The neoclassical principle held in highest regard in the early eighteenth century was the idea of decorum wherein everything on the stage should be in good taste, characters should behave according to the appropriate standards of their social status and there should be a moral lesson while entertaining the audience. Charles Gildon, the theatre critic, held that the unities should be strictly adhered to. He regarded nature as the source of all truth. He was not speaking of untamed nature, but rather the “nature” of things. The neoclassicists could look at nature and see that men were superior to women or that the place for a woman was in the home having babies, nurturing the family and cooking for the man: man as hunter-gatherer and woman as nurturer. With this understanding from nature, the hero of a play was to be male and a female character was to be rescued. A female protagonist or hero did not fit neatly into the ideal of neoclassical decorum.

Rowe was among those writers whose plays followed the style of Shakespeare rather than the neoclassical ideals of Corneille and Racine. He disrupted the unity of action through the use of sub-plots in all of his plays. During his career, he also gave his female characters increasing importance in his plays culminating with Jane Shore and Jane Grey, his female heros. By the term “hero,” I mean the central character of a play who drives the action and ultimately signifies or typifies the ideal of the playwright’s intent. According to Dammers, Rowe was interested in the neoclassical ideal of teaching a moral lesson while entertaining his audiences. Dammers’ thesis may
be true to some extent, but I contend that Dammers’ view is too narrow. Rowe was involved in a deeper purpose of developing a new genre that featured a female hero and ultimately a feminist hero.

In Rowe’s early plays, there is at least one female character who possesses qualities that seem to stand outside the “natural” function of women as supportive and nurturing. Artamesa (The Ambitious Stepmother) is a villainess whose ambition is equal to any man. In Tamerlane, Arpasia shows a strength of will equal to any male hero of ancient classical literature. In The Fair Penitent, Rowe’s Calista is an outspoken critic of the dual standard held for men and women. And Rowe’s two Janes were the culmination of all of the qualities of his earlier women and showed his maturing skills as a playwright.

In using a woman as the hero in his plays, Rowe was not just rejecting neoclassical principles, he was also utilizing a growing understanding of just what kinds of actions, thoughts, and characters would reach the emotions of his audiences. Traditionally, the woman in medieval England had her “place” both in society and in the home. She was relegated to the kitchen or the bedroom. However chauvinistic the English society was at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the women were sensitive to their plight and lack of legal and social rights. Rowe discovered that by placing a woman in harm’s way evoked great emotion from his audiences. Jenkins has written that Rowe’s particular style was “that particular kind of drama that brought tears of pity to the eyes of the fair beauties in his audience as they

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See Daphne Spain, Gendered Spaces (1992) for a more detailed discussion of the concept of architecture and space identification designed for the segregation of the sexes and for gender identification. Also, see Fraser, The Weaker Vessel (1984).
identified themselves with the sorrows of the equally fair beauties he created for the stage” (11). As his career developed, Rowe’s women were placed in increasingly dire straights and in need of rescuing. But, Rowe’s genius can be seen in that when given the opportunity to be “rescued” by a man, his female characters showed the strength to face their circumstances alone. In this sense, Rowe’s women were tragic as well as heroic. And because they stood against the male domination of their society, they became feminist.

Rowe developed his female characters in an atmosphere where the legal system and the church held that women were not equal to men. Even though this society also was tolerating some voices of dissent, the prevailing temperament was to elevate the dominant role of the male in all aspects of the law and society. This view may have been propagated even at the top of the society at the seat of power itself. According to Antonia Fraser, Queens Mary and Anne both considered themselves uneducated and dependent upon their male counselors in making decisions. Rowe’s plays reflected that attitude of women and the social pressures that kept them from pursing any dreams outside those areas sanctioned by the mainstream of society.

**ROWE’S EARLY THEATRICAL SUCCESSES**

The man who introduced Nicholas Rowe to the theatre world of London in 1700 was William Congreve, who is best known for his domestic comedies like *Love for Love* and *The Way of the World*. By the turn of the eighteenth century, Congreve’s theatrical writing career had come to an end, and he had moved into theatre management and journalism. At the time of Rowe’s first play, Congreve was manager at Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre.
Congreve spent a great deal of time writing in defense of the theatre against the attacks of men like Jeremy Collier, who had called for a reformation of the lurid antics and immoral themes of the plays produced prior to 1698, the year Collier wrote his first essay against the theatre and against Congreve’s plays specifically. During 1698, no less than 21 separate pamphlets were published either attacking or defending the plays produced on London’s professional stages. By the time the controversy had ended in 1726, nearly 100 pamphlets, plays, prologues, and other references had been written either in defense of or as attacks against the theatre.¹⁰

By 1700, Rowe was just beginning his career as a playwright with the writing of his first play for the stage, The Ambitious Stepmother. It was produced sometime in December at Lincoln’s Inn Fields probably because Congreve owned an interest in that theatre and was willing to give the new playwright a chance to try his hand. The two men had been colleagues at the Middle Temple and may have shared lodgings when they were students.¹¹ Almost from the time that Rowe entered the Middle Temple, he and Congreve became friends. Later they would meet with others of the literary and dramatic crowd at Will’s Coffee House, a favorite hang-out of the Whig elite of London such as Daniel Defoe, an advocate for women’s education, and Joseph Addison, a proponent for allowing women more freedom. The discussions between these men

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¹⁰For a complete analysis of this controversy, see Sister Rose Anthony’s The Jeremy Collier Stage Controversy, 1698-1726 (1966 reissue). For a brief overview, see George H. Nettleton’s remarks in his British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan (1969), pp. 387-391; it also contains the complete text of the original pamphlet by Collier.

¹¹See J. M. Treadwell’s article “Congreve, Tonson and Rowe’s ‘Reconcilement’” in Notes and Queries Vol. XXII, pages 265-69, for a discussion of this possibility.
probably had an impact on the young playwright and poet in the early years of his career. And it is understandable that Congreve would be Rowe’s champion for production of his first venture into the world of theatre.

The Ambitious Stepmother catapulted Rowe into the public eye as London’s leader in tragic drama. Just before Rowe’s play opened, John Dryden, the greatest tragic writer of the last quarter of the seventeenth century, had passed away. Lee and Otway both had passed from the scene and their plays were no longer produced on a regular basis on the stage. Thus, according to Kleitz, Rowe had achieved the position of “leading tragedian largely by default” (14) with this new play. Rowe’s plays were not of the same quality as that of Dryden, as argued by Dobrée,\(^\text{12}\) but he was to become one of the most popular tragic dramatists of the first half of the eighteenth century having his plays produced more than any other playwright except Shakespeare and Dryden. The Ambitious Stepmother was accepted for production and four of the top actors of the day performed it: Barton Booth (who was a schoolmate of Rowe’s at Westminster), Thomas Betterton, Anne Bracegirdle and Elizabeth Barry. Rowe had started his dramatic career with top quality talent, an ambitious production surrounded by his friends.

In The Ambitious Stepmother, Rowe had offered the public a great tragedy in which he began to develop his concept of the strong woman in the character of the powerful villainess, Artemisia, an archetype of the Amazon. Although Artemisia is not the protagonist, the play

\(^\text{12}\)Note his Restoration Tragedy: 1660-1720 (1920), pp. 156ff. Also, note the discussion of Dobrée’s interpretation of Rowe’s style in Chapter 5 of this study.
highlights her plan to usurp the throne. In the end, she fails in her attempt and brings everyone around her to their death. In Act One, Rowe has Artemisia give a speech about the inequality between men and women, a speech that will be discussed in detail later. She explains that the gods must have had an ironic sense of humor in that they imprisoned such a strong ambition in the body of a woman. At this point, Rowe’s strong female does not offer any arguments in favor of equality but makes an observation that because she is a woman, she must pursue her ambitions on behalf of her son since the path is closed for her. Rowe then has the hero Artaban assert that women are “form’d to obey,” and that the rigors of rule are too great for a woman.

A question to be addressed here is why Rowe did not openly advocate freedom for women in English society. He probably feared being ostracized by the community at large or by his colleagues in the world of letters. Or he might have feared being marginalized by the literary community. Susannah Centlivre was not taken seriously as a playwright and was often accused of having had her plays written by a man then passing them off as her own. English society at the turn of the eighteenth century was not ready for open opposition to the status quo.

I contend that the lines written for these strong women probably betrayed Rowe’s true feelings on women’s rights: thoughts that he may have written without a full comprehension of exactly what he was advocating. Herein lies the foundation of the argument of this paper that Rowe’s feminist writing was incipient and not fully matured. There is no proof that anyone at the time suspected Rowe of advocating that women should be equal to men. And yet, the fact remains that in
most of his plays, Rowe placed some strong words questioning the oppression of women in the mouth of a strong woman—lines that are difficult to explain other than by their incipient feminist underpinnings.

The Ambitious Stepmother contains the incipient feminist thoughts and strengths of his later heroines. Artemisa is not the hero, she is a villain plotting behind the scenes to have her own son, Artaban, usurp the throne from the old king’s eldest son, Artaxerxes. She meets her death, but so does Artaxerxes and his general Memnon, and Artaban takes the throne by default thus vindicating his mother’s efforts. But, she must suffer and die for her plotting and intrigue, a fate she accepts with a clearly visible strength of will, a quality Rowe will use later.

The records for that period of time are very sketchy and the actual date of the production is unknown. There is also no extant record of the number of performances, but Rowe was encouraged to continue writing for the theatre either by a benefit performance or at the very least by colleagues such as Congreve. In a letter to Joseph Keally dated January 28, 1700 (actually 1701), Congreve wrote, “We have had two new plays, a tragedy called The Ambitious Stepmother, written by Mr. Rowe of the Temple, and a very good one ...” (Letters, 18-19). Rowe may also have been encouraged by the publication of the play in March of the following year by a local publisher, Peter Buck.

Unfortunately, the praise from Congreve and the sales of the script were not enough to save the play and it was not performed again
in London until after Rowe’s death.\footnote{In her discussion of the roles of older men played by Betterton at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Milhouse (1979) seems to imply that the play may have been performed more than just the one time. See p. 117.} According to the records compiled in \textit{The London Stage}, the play was performed again in London on January 22, 1722, when the Drury Lane Theatre revived it for one performance. Yet, even before the production of \textit{The Ambitious Stepmother}, Rowe had decided that his future lay in the arts and letters rather than law because it was during 1700 that he surrendered his chambers at the Middle Temple and began to do research and writing in earnest. He had his father’s bequeath of £300 per year to live on. He would not have to wait long for success. Rowe had at least one of his writings published every year (except for 1710 & 1711) of his career. His poetry appeared for the first time in a volume titled, \textit{A New Miscellany of Original Poems, on Several Occasions} published by Peter Buck in 1701. In fact, Rowe’s name appeared on the title page with seven other poets. This particular publication is fascinating because, as Canfield and Hesse pointed out, “There are indeed so many of Rowe’s friends and associates represented in this collection that it could be thought a publisher’s puff for his new playwright” (266).

The publishing business in London was just beginning to flourish at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and publishers were competing vigorously for material to publish. Of particular importance to this study was the popularity of play scripts. Publishers would purchase the scripts from a playwright and then print as many copies as would sell through subscription pre-sales. Playwrights could be paid as little as six shillings or as much as thirty pounds. Often booksellers would carry a few copies of a play...
in their shops for sale. After about 1725, playwrights would arrange to sell their rights to a play before the play opened in order to make copies of the script available in the lobby after the play ended. The business must have been lucrative for the publishers because so many plays produced during the Restoration and early eighteenth century were put into print and are available today.

Was the publication of *The Ambitious StepMother* very profitable? Unfortunately, the sales records of Peter Buck are not extant and no conclusions can be drawn. But, one can speculate that the sale of Rowe’s script to a publisher must have been an encouragement, and an exciting possibility for income to the young, aspiring writer, despite the play’s apparent financial failure for the theatre.

**Rowe’s Established Credentials**

Full recognition as a dramatist was not long in coming to Rowe. In 1701, he produced his first major success as a playwright with the staging of *Tamerlane*. It was produced at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in December. The actual date of the first performance is not extant; however, the play was published and released for sale on January 6, 1702, and proved to be a best seller. It remained in print and available throughout the eighteenth century. Peter Buck published the first edition, but Jacob Tonson, the largest publisher in London, purchased the rights for the play and continued its publication. Early sales records are not available, but according to the sketchy records of the Tonson company, sales were strong enough to keep it both as a single edition and in various collections long after Rowe’s death. *Tamerlane* proved to be so popular that it was continuously produced in the London area for the next twenty years. Whenever a
play was produced on the stage, a publisher would have a copy of the script at the performance for sale. Sometimes, the scripts would be made available before the play was performed. According to extant records, the sales of the script by the Tonson company were strong well into the 1720's. The play had resonated with the London theatre crowd. It established Rowe as a tragic playwright.

On November 5, 1716, Tamerlane was revived at the Drury Lane Theatre as a tribute to Rowe upon the occasion of his being named Poet Laureate of England. This particular production saw an unprecedented run of seven performances during that month. Then during the next seventy years, the play was revived and produced 325 times, thereby making it a mainstay in the standard repertoire of the London theatres. In all, Tamerlane was performed 348 times in London during the eighteenth century. The play's continuous revival throughout the century indicates the popularity of Rowe's particular brand of tragic drama.

Theatre management of that day was no different than today in that companies produced plays that they believed the people would buy tickets to see. George Stone has pointed out that theatres in the eighteenth century were first and foremost a business and that managers and performers alike relied upon the revenue for their livelihood. Thus, managers tended to be far more conservative in the selection of plays, constantly relying on producing those older, familiar themes that audiences loved to attend. Playwrights such as Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher appeared year after year on the playbills of the London Theatres. Many of the newer plays relied heavily upon themes and story-lines developed by the early playwrights; Tamerlane proved to be such a play.
In *Tamerlane*, Rowe was able to experiment further with the development of female strength as seen in the character of Arpasia. Although the main story revolves around the struggle between the Moslem Bajazet and the Christian Tamerlane, the development of the stoic resoluteness in Arpasia in her relationship with her lover Moneses is quite striking. Arpasia has been taken by Bajazet to be his wife despite her marriage to Moneses. When she approaches Tamerlane to annul her marriage to Bajazet and restore her former vows to Monese, he proclaims that two wrongs do not make a right with the words, “Would’st thou have my partial Friendship break / That holy knot, which ty’d once, all Mandkind / Agree to hold Sacred, and undissolvable?” (V, 182-4). Then Bajazet, determined to own Arpasia wholly has Moneses strangled in front of her; a memory she must carry the rest of her life. In this side story we see the early development of a strong woman in conflict with an oppressive man later fully found in the characters of Jane Shore and Jane Grey.

By 1703, Rowe had written a third play, one which would eventually prove to be far more popular than *Tamerlane*. This play, *The Fair Penitent*, opened at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in May; again, the exact date is unknown, but we know that it had a short initial run. However, records do indicate that the play was produced again June 3. A possible reason for the opening disappointment could be that the play was a rewrite of a very popular play by Philip Massinger and Nathan Field entitled *The Fatal Dowry*, published in 1632, though probably written between 1616 and 1619.14

14See the lengthy discussion of this issue in Gerald Eades Bently, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, IV (1956), pages 783-784. The only direct evidence extant that Rowe’s play was a rewrite of Massinger and
Taking others’ works and rewriting them for a modern time was common popular practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such playwrights as Susannah Centlivre, Colley Cibber, Richard Steele, and John Vanbrugh used plays from a former era and rewrote them for their own use. Cibber was known to rewrite Shakespeare’s plays. Several critics of the early eighteenth century drama protested this method of writing plays. Gerard Langbaine called for an end to the practice in his book, *Account of the English Dramatic Poets* (1691). Even Alexander Pope made some pointed remarks against copying other’s ideas in *The Dunciad*. Yet, the practice continued well into the middle of the eighteenth century.\(^\text{15}\) Evidently, the initial audiences of Rowe’s reinterpretation of *The Fatal Dowry* were not impressed with what he had done.

Another probable cause for the audience’s rejection of the play was that the hero of Rowe’s play was not Altamont, the jilted bridegroom and hero of *The Fatal Dowry*; but rather Calista, the recalcitrant bride. With this change in focus, Rowe was able to make a less than covert implication through the dialogue that women are often treated very badly by men. At the outset of Act III, Calista states: How hard is the condition of our sex,/ Through every state of life the slaves of man! (III, 39-40) In Act I, while reflecting on the sorrows that Calista faced, her maid, Lucilla, states that she would rather die a virgin and never know men than to submit herself to a man.

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Footnotes:

15See Malcolm Goldstein’s discussion in his introduction to *The Fair Penitent* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1969), xiv-xv.
"who makes his mirth of our undoing!/The base, professed betrayer of our sex!” (I:241)

In this play one can see the playwright’s attempt at broaching the idea of a female as tragic hero. According to Aristotle’s original treatise on tragedy, a tragic hero is one who is born high and falls low through some “tragic flaw” in his nature or personality. Although Aristotle does not say the hero must be a man, he never considers the possibility that the hero could be a female; it just was not an issue.\textsuperscript{16} The neoclassicists, who reinterpreted Aristotle through the lens of Horace’s dramatic theories, held that the tragic hero is one who has a tragic fall through some heroic feat. One cannot argue that Calista was intended to be a tragic hero according to Aristotle’s definition or even the neoclassical rules.

In \textit{The Fair Penitent}, Rowe subverts the classic idea of tragic hero by defining a new tragic hero: a woman of common origins. Calista would be a precursor for Rowe’s later plays in which he would create his two most memorable tragic heros, Jane Shore and Jane Grey. In the prologue spoken by Mr. Betterton, Rowe explained that he was attempting to do: to write a tragedy about every-day problems:

Long has the fate of kings and empires been  
The common business of the tragic scene,  
\ldots\ldots  
We ne’er can pity what we ne’er can share:  
\ldots\ldots  
Therefore an humbler theme our author chose,  
A melancholy tale of private woes;  
No princes here lost royalty bemoan,  
But you shall meet with sorrows like your own (1-2,11,15-18)

\textsuperscript{16}Although one can argue for a female hero by using the play \textit{Antigone}; yet, a stronger argument can be made for Creon as the tragic hero in the play rather than Antigone.
Calista, the hero of the play, willingly accepts the sexual overtures of her lover Lothario and would have married him except that her father, Scialto, forbade it. Instead, he has promised her to Altamont. But, when the indiscretion is discovered, a struggle ensues which results in Lothario’s death. Unable to accept her lover’s death, Calista defies her father’s wishes and declares her undying love for Lothario whereupon Scialto rushes out to defend his honor and is killed by Lothario’s allies.

Just what was Calista’s tragic flaw, if she had one? She is pictured by Rowe as a defiant daughter bent on finding her own way in life rather than following her father’s wishes. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, marriages were arranged by the fathers. Daughters had little or no say in who they married. Calista is the picture of a rebellious daughter. She is also not high born. And no one outside the immediate family and their friends is aware of the tragedy and its consequences. Aristotle’s ideal is not followed. Thus, the initial failure of the play may have been that Rowe had attempted to make too significant a change in what the people were accustomed to. With the neoclassical principles firmly established in the theatres, an audience would have been taken aback by the story of a recalcitrant daughter. She would not have been considered a tragic hero because she could have been seen as deserving of her punishment. And yet, only a few short years later, *The Fair Penitent* would be restaged and become a success.

One question which has been debated during the twentieth century relates to the purpose of the play: what was Rowe trying to accomplish? According to Landon Burns, Rowe attempted to teach as well as to please his audience in this play. The neoclassical ideal
of verisimilitude was interpreted to mean to teach (a moral lesson) and to please (i.e., to entertain the audience). Burns refers to the speeches of Lothario that tend to be highly moralistic in nature and hail the sad state of affairs when women do not know their place in society. Burns continues that the play “did have a didactic purpose; such a purpose was almost inherent in neoclassical theory, and even when it is not made so obvious as it is in The Fair Penitent, the instructional impulse was present, if only by implication” (123).

Even if there was a didactic purpose inherent in the play, Rowe had stumbled onto something more powerful in this play—the manipulation of the emotions of the audience to bring about both pity and tears. Burns pointed to this idea when he wrote, “One is occasionally conscious of an attempt to arouse emotions not really inherent in or emanating from the situation” (124). Calista’s mother, Lavinia, makes the following statement when unable to heal the rift between her husband and her brother. Note how the lines, as Goldstein has observed, are “calculated assaults on the feelings of the audience” (xx).

Is there not cause for weeping? O, Horatio!
A brother and a husband were my treasure;
’Twas all the little wealth that poor Lavinia
Saved from the shipwreck of her father’s fortunes.
One half is lost already; if thou leavest me,
If thou shouldst prove unkind to me as Altamont,
Whom shall I find to pity my distress,
To have compassion on a helpless wanderer,
And give her where to lay her wretched head? (III:361-369)

Rowe found that by placing a female in harm’s way through the movement of the plot and story, and by manipulating the language with highly emotional words, the audience was likely to feel what he believed was Aristotle’s terrors of pity and fear. However, what the
audience’s experienced were feelings of tears and very little fear, emotions that were not immediately associated with the events on the stage.

In *The Fair Penitent*, the opening scene of Act V is an excellent example of this manipulation by Rowe, as Burns has pointed out.

Scene is a room hung with black: on one side, Lothario’s body on a bier; on the other, a table with a skull and other bones, a book, and a lamp on it. Calista is discovered on a couch in black, her hair hanging loose and disordered; after music and a song, she rises and comes forward. (61)

And yet, instead of being repulsed as the earlier audiences obviously were, audiences throughout the later two-thirds of the eighteenth century found that experiencing the play brought them to tears and shocks of horror: a response especially intensified by the presence of Calista, a strong yet tragic figure. The late eighteenth century actress, playwright, and sometime theatre critic Mrs. Inchbald took issue with the whole premise of the play stating that “a woman of superior rank in life is rarely guilty of a breach of chastity—beneath the sin of adultery.” And it could be that she touched on one of the main reasons why the play was not immediately accepted by the audiences of London in 1704.

After the initial failure of *The Fair Penitent*, Rowe turned his play writing skills to comedy. That attempt would end in devastating results when *The Biter* opened at Lincoln’s Inn Fields on December 4, 1704. This play was not accepted by the critics of London, although the audiences sustained a six night run. But there is no record of its ever being produced again. It had little humor and no plausible

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17Mrs. Inchbald’s writings are found in numerous places. This quote is taken from *The British Theatre* (London, 1808), X, Preface to *The Fair Penitent*, pp. 3-5.
plot, plus, the poetry was poorly written. Rowe proved to be no Congreve, the master of the domestic comedy. The play does have some merit in that the female characters Angelica and Mariana are ingenious and clever. They outwit Sir Timothy, the central character and pantaloon of the play. And Rowe’s character Mrs. Clever proves to be not only clever but an extremely “sophisticated” (to use Jenkins’ word) delight in the play. Rowe was continuing to develop his female characters in this comedy using them to manipulate and drive the actions of the play.

The script appears to be an updating of Jonson’s *Epicoene* (1609) with the humorous uncle, Sir Timothy Tallapoy, a rich merchant who deals almost exclusively in goods from the orient. And like Jonson’s play, *The Biter* is set during a country fair which offers the opportunity for the parading of a cast of humorous characters who are engaged in all kinds of slapstick antics. Canfield and Hesse state this juxtaposition of merchants and “performers” is to establish class distinctions. Another interpretation would be more in line with Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque in the establishment of a festive, comical atmosphere in which almost anything could happen and be fully accepted by the participants (and audience). The play borrows some from Etherege’s *Man of Mode* in the relationships but is quite original in the story-line. A quick comparison between Etherege’s play and Rowe’s script shows the lack of both a strong comic metaphor and the depth of innuendo found in the Etherege comedy.

Although 1704 would end with the relative disappointment of *The Biter*, the year would prove to be quite productive for Rowe. He was selected by the publisher Jacob Tonson to edit volume Five of Dryden’s
Poetical Miscellanies, a journal begun by Dryden with the intention of giving voice to new and experienced writers of the day. This appointment was a singular honor. Since 1677, The Tonson brothers had been the exclusive publisher of John Dryden’s works and had become the major London publisher of poetry and drama (including the introduction of Aphra Behn’s works). The “Miscellany” series started in 1684 with an edition that included over 100 pages of Dryden’s works. This first volume also included works by Thomas Otway, Nahum Tate, and Charles Sedley. This first collection compiled and written by Dryden was such a huge success that a second volume followed in 1685.

No doubt Tonson and Dryden never knew just how important their collaboration would be. The “Miscellancies” gave established writers a wide forum for their poetical works and introduced new poets, including Alexander Pope (in 1706, the sixth edition), to the public. According to MacKenzie, this series became “a new publishing genre—one that was to remain important for many years and that no doubt helped to create both a market and an outlet for shorter poetic work” (294). Volumes three and four were published before Dryden’s death. Tonson continued publishing the series, selecting Rowe to help out in the editorial and writing process.

By the end of 1704, Rowe’s place in the theatrical and literary world was clearly established. In a letter to Philip Ambrose dated March 3, 1704, Joseph Addison mentioned two of Rowe’s projects when he wrote, “Mr. Row [sic] has promis’d a Farce [The Biter] this Winter, but it dos not yet appear. He has too on ye Stocks a Tragedy on Penelope’s Lovers where Ulysses is to be the Hero” (49). On November 23, 1705, Rowe’s play Ulysses was produced at the Queen’s Theatre at Haymarket (the theatre at Lincoln’s Inn Fields had been closed earlier
that year). *Ulysses* was revived at the same theatre on December 15, then again on February 19, 1706. Although spoken well of by some, the play lacked the depth and vivacity of *The Fair Penitent*. Charles Gildon, in 1714, wrote that the play was one of Rowe’s best tragedies, but he goes on to say, “The poet has left it without any Moral” and concluded the discussion noting that it had “a weak appearance of a tragedy” (56). And Samuel Johnson, in 1781, wrote that the play had faded into obscurity with the common fate of most stories based on mythology: it “is now generally neglected” (390).

In *Ulysses*, Rowe further explored the concept of stoic suffering by his female characters. He also explored the arrogance displayed in so many high-born men of the realm. He casts Ulysses as boastful and self-absorbed. Even faced with the evidence that the god Pallas has intervened on his behalf and endowed Ulysses with the thunder of Jove, the champion of the play declares his self-centered nature. In a declaration to the Ithacan traitor, Antinous, he says,

> For know,<br>Ulysses is alone sufficient<br>To punish thee.

Although the play’s plot is extremely complicated, the point being made was that although Ulysses triumphs, it would be at the cost of everything he holds dear. The women surrounding him suffer immeasurably, but they do it with strength and resolve.

In this play, Rowe did not seem to be working on any of his incipient feminist views, but rather was more concerned with the development of his ability to manipulate the audience to feel pity. In Act II, Penelope, Ulysses’ wife, believes she has been betrayed and must face being wed to her foe thereby forfeiting her son’s life. As
she faces Mentor and Eumaeus after expelling Ulysses (who was in disguise) from the room, the Queen turns to them and states:

Here sit thee down then, humbly in the dust,
Here sit, a poor forlorn, abandon’d woman:
Cast not thy eyes up to yon azure firmament,
Nor hope relief from thense, the Gods are pitiless,
Or busy in their heav’n and thou not worth their care ... (II, 283–7)

She sees no hope for herself or her son. She has discovered the heavy weight of being loyal to her husband when she has no proof that he will ever return. Rowe had found a powerful tool which he would use to its fullest in Jane Shore and Jane Grey--the strength of character inherent in womanhood, a strength that should be released and allowed to grow of its own accord in women.

Although interpreters such as Canfield and Hesse (275-7) have attributed an economic-socialist interpretation to this and other of Rowe’s plays, they miss the obvious contrast Rowe had been drawing in his plays. Rowe may have wanted to illustrate that the resolve, focus, clarity, and strength of character that is often portrayed in men could be as powerful in a woman. Penelope is a tragic heroine who had to endure a storm of suitors for her love after word had arrived that Ulysses had died. Since there was no physical proof of Ulysses’ death, her unflinching loyalty to her husband is tested many times until Ulysses appears in disguise to test her fidelity, a test that she passes. Penelope stands strong and patient and becomes a symbol not just of womanhood, but of the strength of all humans when standing for what they believe is right.

18See Jenkins, 79–84, where she proposes a fascinating theory that Penelope was the embodiment of Queen Anne.
For Rowe, the year 1706 was fraught with much pain and sorrow, and a reorganization of his finances. Rowe had a fixed income from a legacy of £300 per year left to him by his father; however, his father had also left many debts for which Rowe had taken responsibility. His ethical standards were admirable, but may have put him in some financial straits. His father-in-law, Antony Parsons, a man of some means, lodged Rowe’s family and probably even provided him with extra finances as needed.

On January 18, 1706, Antony Parsons was buried at St. Dunstan’s in the West. This event must have caused Rowe some difficulty because he instituted legal proceedings to protect himself from his father’s creditors through an act of Parliament initiated January 14. The protecting document was given royal assent on March 17, 1706. In the act, Rowe was obliged to sell his ancestral properties in Bedfordshire. With the proceeds, he would set up a trust in the amount of £1,800 to provide for his wife and son. Any money from the sale of the land over and above the trust amount would go to paying off his father’s debts. With the value of the land estimated to be about £3,000, the provisions seemed to be reasonable.

Parliament was obliged to act because at Rowe’s wedding two indentures had been enacted giving him and his wife life estates in the properties; but at their deaths, the lands would go to the eldest surviving son “in tail mail,” a legal term indicating a right to accession and ownership. If Rowe were not survived by his own son, then the eldest living male Rowe relative would inherit the lands. By supplying the trust, he was in a sense “buying off” his son’s interest in the lands. Only Parliament could void the original indentures.
Just how this act of Parliament impacted Rowe’s family and the execution of his final will in 1718 will be discussed further in Chapter four of this study.

There is no physical evidence as to the actual existence of the trust set out by the Parliamentary act. However, in Rowe’s will there is a statement giving his son, John, the sum of £20 and a ring because “he is sufficiently provided for otherwise.” (See Hesse 353) The estate must have been in force at the time of Rowe’s death, otherwise he would have provided his only son with a great deal more rather than leaving the bulk of Rowe’s estate, including his library, to his second wife.

During 1707, Rowe enjoyed success both as a poet and as a playwright. He published his translation of The Golden Verses of Pythagoras. He also wrote a poem entitled On the Late Glorious Success of Her Majesty’s Arms, a tribute to Queen Anne’s exploits overseas. On November 25, 1707, Rowe’s sixth play, The Royal Convert, was produced at the Queen’s Theatre at Haymarket. In this play, Rowe attempted to return to the success he had with Tamerlane by writing a heroic tragedy based on a mythical incident in the history of the British Isles. There was no second performance and there is no record of the play having been performed again in London during the succeeding twenty years. The failure of this play may have disappointed Rowe. On November 18, just prior to the play’s opening, Rowe buried his third son who had died after living only six months.

**ROWE’S DEVELOPING PHILOSOPHY OF TRAGEDY**

The next year, 1708, proved both successful and tumultuous for Rowe. He may have written the highly popular and unsigned book,
Bickerstaff Detected, published that year, although it has also been attributed by some scholars to Congreve because of its humorous content. Rowe wrote the preface to John Ozell’s translation of Boileau’s Lutrin and saw the publication of his own essay (in book form) entitled An Original Chapter of the Manner of Living with Great Men, After the Manner of de la Bruyere. In this volume, he outlined his philosophy of writing. The language is stilted and difficult to read, but it is invaluable in the understanding of what Rowe believed important in writing poetry and drama. He thought that writers found their best subjects in truth rather than fancy. He wrote, “The chief art of an author consists in defining and painting well,” which no one in his time would have argued with. Then he goes on to say, “Truth is the best guide to make a man write forcibly, naturally and delicately” (6), which is an excellent explanation of verisimilitude.

Rowe had a rather low opinion of some of the popular writers of the stage as can be seen in this interesting passage:

Some poets in their dramatic pieces are fond of big words and sounding verses, which seem strong, elevated and sublime; the people stare, gape and hear them greedily; they are transported at what they fancy is rare, and where they understand least, are sure to admire most; they scarce allow themselves time to breathe, and are loth to be interrupted by claps or applause: When I was young, I imagined these passages were clear and intelligible to the actors, the pit, boxes and galleries; that the authors themselves understood them, and that I was in the wrong to know nothing of the matter after much attention: But I am now undeceived (5).

He then dismissed many of his rivals on the English stage with a terse statement that most “men have generally more fire than judgement” and that there are “few men whose wit is attended with a solid taste, and a judicious criticism” (5). Rowe wrote that the playwright must strive for a clear, concise style that could be understood by his
audiences. He points out that the playwright “should always aim at perfection; and tho’ his contemporaries refuse him justice, posterity will give it him” (5). Perhaps his last two plays are the vindication of his understandings of good writing as explained in his works.

Rowe discussed his views of tragedy in this essay as well. And it is in this discussion that we find hints about his decision to write tragic dramas. He was intrigued by the way a plot can develop and seem to grip the heart and soul of the audience. He wrote, “Tragedy engages the soul in the very beginning, and gives it no time afterwards to wander from what ‘tis employed about” (21). Rowe believed that “the poet” (meaning the playwright) of tragedy was able to sustain interest more effectively than the writers of any other dramatic genre.

Rowe was fascinated by the ability of a good writer to engage and then to sustain that engagement. He goes on to say, “If a man gets a little release, ‘tis only to be plunged in new abysses, and into fresh alarms” implying the use of action and suspense on a regular basis throughout the play. Through this technique, the writer is able to take the audience “by terror to pity, and reciprocally by pity to terror: It leads him thro’ tears, sighs, incertitudes, hopes, fears, horrors and surprises, to the catastropher” (26). Rowe wrote this following his failure at comedy, probably as a justification of his own decision to return to the sentimental tragedy of his earlier plays and to more fully develop a genre he would later refer to as the she-tragedy.

On March 17, 1708, a local newspaper, The Daily Current published an article stating that Rowe was about to publish a new edition of The Works of William Shakespeare. This announcement caused quite a stir.
Just how the paper found out what was going on is anyone’s guess. But, it is safe to assume that Tonson, Rowe’s publisher, may have leaked the story to build up interest in the sale of the six massive volumes. Tonson was shrewd in that the books sold quite well for that day and were reprinted many times during the next twenty years.

Rowe’s edition of Shakespeare’s plays appeared over a year after the announcement, and is regarded by scholars to this day as Rowe’s greatest achievement. The plays Rowe included are those still regarded to this day as the plays written by Shakespeare. Rowe set the plays in quarto format and then divided them into acts and scenes for the first time. The biography of Shakespeare that Rowe wrote was based on much of the research that Thomas Betterton had done. Rowe’s scholarship is confirmed in that very little of the biography has been changed over the years. Even Rowe’s scene divisions have stood the test of time as accurately reflecting those intended by the Bard of Avon.

Less than a year later, a seventh volume of the works of Shakespeare was published by Charles Gildon. This volume contained Shakespeare’s poems and a reprint of the biography written by Rowe. Some scholars have speculated that it was an unauthorized printing. However, a search of the legal documents of the day showed no action taken by Rowe on the matter.

On February 5, 1709, Rowe’s interests turned to other important matters: making a living for his family. With his lands gone, the £300 yearly income ended. He was appointed the Under-Secretary to the Duke of Queensberry, who was Secretary to Scotland. This was a civil service job that carried a guaranteed income. His work was quite impressive, and so for the next several years Rowe devoted himself to
his work for the Duke to the point that according to Stephen Hales, the relationship was “near familiarity and friendship” (Rowe, 1728, 4). Although quite busy, Rowe still found time to work with others on the translation of Claudius Quillet’s *Callipaedia, or the Art of Getting Beautiful Children*. Rowe worked on the first book only. The entire set was published in 1712. During the years 1709 and 1712, the Rowe’s lost another child, the Duke died costing Rowe his job, and then he buried his wife, Antonia, at St. Dunstan in the West on February 13, 1712.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE FEMINIST HERO TAKES SHAPE

In approaching Rowe’s penultimate tragedy, *Jane Shore*, one must remember that this play has been considered his masterpiece by most critics of the twentieth century. It is the best example of the genre that featured a tragic female in distress fighting against all odds and ultimately losing. Rowe called this form the she-tragedy, a form that never became a recognized genre. However, the she-tragedies of Rowe, especially *Jane Shore* influenced the whole of political and social tragedies of the eighteenth century. Annabelle Jenkins stated that *Jane Shore* “is the epitome of all the frailty of feminine beauty ... [and] the focal point of the political themes of the play” (116). And Schwartz wrote, “Rowe found the type of tragic drama which suited exactly the popular taste of his age and which best represents it to the modern reader” (238).

In the character of Jane Shore, Rowe found a combination that worked well for him, that of the tragic hero and a woman who would stand for her rights. Jane was a hero in that she is the central character in the play who drives the action and brings about the climax in her struggle against her nemesis Richard III. She is a tragic hero in the sense that her actions bring her to a tragic end. Her fault (in the Aristotelian sense) is that she would not accept help from a man to gain the return of her possessions. She did accept
the help of another woman, Alicia, who betrays her for jealousy. The tide of history, events and her own personal drive to the end brought Jane to ruin. But, she is also feminist in that Rowe writes some strong words for her that describe the state of women in the eighteenth century. As a fifteenth century woman, Jane is depicted as tragic. As a dramatic character she is a hero. As a character being played to an eighteenth century audience she is feminist.

In this chapter, I show that the character of Jane Shore afforded Rowe an opportunity to develop a story that would illustrate his ideas of the feminist hero. I also show how Rowe was able to weave within the story of Jane Shore a belief in an individual woman’s ability to stand on her own feet and not rely on a man for either her identity or survival. I also show how Rowe’s relationship with Alexander Pope and the other prominent men and women of letters had a strong influence on Rowe’s incipient feminist writing of Jane Shore.

OUT OF TRAGEDY, TRIUMPH

The years 1711 to 1714 were pivotal for Rowe. He was to reach his deepest depths of despair; and yet, he was also about to reach his greatest heights of success on stage and in print. Perhaps Rowe’s tragedies helped to shape his ideas about the strength and wonder of the strong female, an important element in his incipient feminism. In July, 1711, Rowe lost his position as the Duke’s secretary; in November, he buried another child; in February, 1712, his wife died. Then, as a result of her death, Rowe moved out of the house owned by his father-in-law’s family. The tax records for August, 1712, show that the house on Fetter Lane was listed as “vacant.” Having to move away from the theatre district and the Temple area may have been quite
upsetting for him. Visiting the coffee houses would have been far more difficult since he had to move to the other side of the Thames.

In September, the widow, Elizabeth Spann, approached Rowe to aid her in an appeal to the government on a matter of importance to her, the content of which is not known. Rowe agreed to represent her and embarked on the assignment only to be charged in January, 1713, with embezzlement of funds. Public records do not indicate the exact outcome of this matter, but, as Canfield and Hesse point out, “[T]he matter did not help Rowe’s morale nor his reputation” (281). These tragic events could easily have affected his writing, especially of the play Jane Shore. The script contains a depth of tragic pathos that seems to have come more from experience than from the imagination of a very happy man.

Before the end of the year 1713, records indicate that Rowe was residing in the village of Stockwell, located about a mile south of the Thames at Vauxhall. For about six months, Rowe lived virtually in exile from his beloved Middle Temple and friends on Fetter Lane. However, by May, 1713, Alexander Pope may have arranged for his publisher, Bernard Lintot, to publish the new tragedy written by Rowe about Jane Shore.

A year later, in February, 1714, when the play opened, Rowe was back on top and living in London. His reputation had been restored, he was once again with his friends, and he had even gained financially. Canfield and Hesse quote a letter from Pope in which he says that Rowe had probably made as much as £500 (281) from the play, The Tragedy of Jane Shore, as a result of at least three benefit performances and the sale of the printed version. After about 1704, playwrights were paid a small royalty for the rights to publish and
sell scripts. However, no such payments were made for this
production. If the play was successful and there was a demand for at
least three performances on the initial run, which was rare, then the
proceeds for the third night were often given to the playwright as a
“benefit.” If the play ran longer, which was even more rare, then the
playwright often was given benefits on the sixth and ninth
performances as well. But, the theatres were under no obligation to
do so.

POPE’S AID AND COUNSEL

Among the many literary relationships of English history, few can
compare to that between Alexander Pope and Rowe. Pope appreciated the
mentoring that Rowe gave him in his formative years, so when Rowe
needed his help in advocating his Whig ideals in the play The Tragedy
of Jane Shore, Pope was available with a helping hand. These two men
had a great mutual respect for one another’s skills and talents, and, they genuinely liked each other’s company. According to Norman Ault,
their friendship was in full bloom as early as July, 1707, as noted in
a letter that Pope had written that year to Cromwell containing a
humorous reference to Rowe’s “strong political principles and his
enthusiasm for the Union with Scotland then being concluded” (128).
In the years following 1709, Rowe’s friendship with Alexander Pope
grew to the point that they visited in each others homes. An
important point here is that in 1708, Rowe and Pope seemed to have had
a serious disagreement over a comment Rowe had made concerning
Wycherly in the preface to the new translation of Boileau’s Lutrin
published by Ozell. Pope wrote that he was offended at the reference.
Pope had a high regard for the older poet and playwright. In fact, at
the time of the incident, Pope was actively involved in editing a volume of the complete works of Wycherly, which might explain why he took offense at Rowe’s statement.

The disagreement may have been more of a public stand Pope felt was necessary rather than a genuine point of contention between the two poets. In a letter to Edward Blunt, Esq., and quoted by Cibber, Pope wrote the following about Rowe: “There was a vivacity and gaiety of disposition almost peculiar to Mr. Rowe, which made it impossible to part with him, without that uneasiness, which generally succeeds all our pleasures” (Cibber III:283). Pope’s earliest biographer, William Ayre, writing in 1745, notes that Pope loved being with Rowe to such an extent that he “oftentimes passed whole days in his company” (I:209). And it seems that Pope not only enjoyed being with Rowe, he also valued Rowe’s opinion to such an extent that at one point he mentioned that whenever he would have Rowe look over his poems “they were like gold three times tried in the fire” (Ayre, I:209).

In 1713, the two friends demonstrated their love for the ironic by collaborating on a response to a piece circulated freely throughout the city titled, “Epigram on a Lady who wept at Cato,” a reference to Joseph Addison’s extremely popular play, Cato. Pope and Rowe’s response to the epigram was a humorous treatise entitled, “On a Lady who shed her Water at seeing the Tragedy of Cato.” The short poetical essay found its way into a publication called The Poetical Entertainer (published February 4, 1714) under the title “On a Lady who P_st at

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19 For an in depth discussion of this controversy, see Ault, 128-130.
the Tragedy of Cato." Even though the piece is not the height of poetic prowess, four lines from the poem should suffice to illustrate the state of humor in that day.

While maudlin Whigs deplor’d their Cato’s Fate,
Still with dry Eyes the Tory Celia sate,
But while her Pride forbids her Tears to flow,
The gushing Waters find a Vent below. (Quoted in Ault, 132).

The piece might not have (or should not have?) survived except that Curll included the poem in his edition of Rowe’s Poems published in 1714. Then in 1727, the piece appeared in Pope and Swift’s version of Miscellanies. In most of the cases cited by authorities, the piece was not signed or directly attributed to either Pope or Rowe, but it certainly was written by them together. Tom Burnet, a man who was among the Addison circle, wrote in a letter to a friend in the country, “That Copy of Verses of a Lady depissing her self at Cato, was written by Pope & Rowe both in Ridicule of those that cryed at Cato.”

Although this little incident seems almost trivial, it points to Rowe’s respect for and ability to work with Alexander Pope.

Pope’s famed biting sarcasm coupled with Rowe’s propensity for jocularity and drinking became quite noted as they became frequent visitors in London coffee houses such as Button’s and Will’s, the popular gathering places of the Court Whigs. Among their stalwart companions were some of the great men of letters, such as William Congreve, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele. Out of one of these late evening meetings, Rowe and Pope developed a satirical letter that appeared in The Tatler (Nov. 22, 1710) poking fun at the use of the word “Britain” rather than

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20 The original of this letter is found in the British Library, Add. 36722, folio 86.
“England.” Rowe was supportive of the union, as were most Whigs. Rowe’s openness, pleasant nature, and love of a good drink were reflected in a poem written by Pope called, “A Farewell to London” (1715). Pope referenced Rowe with these lines: “To drink and roll be Rowe allow’d/Till the third watchman’s call” (Ault, 145).

One can easily assume that conversations with these great thinkers and writers helped to prime Rowe’s fertile mind resulting in revolutionary and innovative ideas that led to Rowe’s writing of strong, tragic female characters. When one remembers that the works of Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe focused on self reliance and rugged individualism, it is easy to understand where Rowe may have gotten his ideas for his women characters. His play, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, celebrated the qualities of self reliance and individual strength. Perhaps Pope recognized the value of the play and wanted to help his dear friend of many years to return to London. Based on the themes in the play and Pope’s loyalty to Rowe, Canfield and Hesse state, “Perhaps it is no wonder that Pope helped Rowe get his play published” (283). I believe that it was Pope who both encouraged and aided Rowe in the writing and production of the she-tragedy, *Jane Shore*.

**A JOYFUL RECEPTION**

Rowe’s easy going nature and loyalty to both church and family probably contributed to the fact that he would develop his incipient feminist values within a palatable format such as the she-tragedy. His genius for hiding radical views about women’s rights within the context of the familiar can be illustrated in his use of English history to achieve his ends. This is particularly evident in his last two plays, the first of which was the story of Jane Shore. In this play, Rowe was able to focus on such feminist concerns as the
independence of women, the sexual double standards for men and women, and the right of women to be treated equally to men under the law.

On February 2, 1714, Rowe’s finest dramatic work, The Tragedy of Jane Shore, was first introduced to London at the Drury Lane Theatre. The production was so popular that it ran almost every night from its opening February 2 until March 4, an unprecedented run for that period and second only to Addison’s Cato in length of continuous performances. The play was revived for four more special command performances during the remainder of the year.

During the next seventy-five years, the play was produced in London at least once a year, with many of those years seeing multiple performances. The index to The London Stage: 1660-1800 lists over 500 separate performances of Jane Shore between its opening night, in 1714, and April 17, 1800. This last recorded performance of the nineteenth century took place at the Drury Lane Theatre. According to Avery (The London Stage: 1660-1800), the play was revived almost annually at Drury Lane until the late nineteenth century. In fact, next to Shakespeare, Rowe’s two tragedies, Jane Shore and The Fair Penitent were produced more than any other plays between 1750 and 1850.

Jane Shore opened after three to four weeks of rehearsal and was to be one of only four new plays produced during the 1713-14 season at the Drury Lane Theatre. Competition had waned with the close of Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre. So, the company management, now under the capable hands of Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks and Barton Booth, seemed intent on making as much profit as possible in the season, relying upon their repertoire of proven favorites. Taking a chance on
a new play, however, certainly paid off; their reported profit for that season was £2,567 (in excess of a million dollars in today’s funds), of which Jane Shore generated nearly £500 in profit to the company.\textsuperscript{21}

Several factors contributed to the initial success of this play. The script was written specifically for the talents of the most admired and successful actress of her day, Anne Oldfield. Rowe knew her abilities through his previous plays. And Rowe was not an amateur when it came to playing the political game at the London Theatres, for he knew that no play would be produced that did not have a major role for Mrs. Oldfield. Even though Colley Cibber implied that Rowe was secretly in love with Oldfield, no proof has ever been discovered to substantiate the claim. However, Rowe was impressed with this actress’s ability to move an audience to tears. The lines in the play were written with her in mind. And with Oldfield’s acting skills at his disposal, he was able to write with subtlety, finesse, and intrigue knowing the part would be handled well. With Jane Shore, Rowe’s personal politics, his love of individual strength and freedom, and his skill in writing to bring the audience to pity and tears came together.

What appealed to Mrs. Oldfield may have been the power of the character of Jane Shore. The late nineteenth century critic, Mrs. Inchbald, wrote that the play had drawn tears from the rich and poor.

\textsuperscript{21}These figures are taken from a study of documents in the Folger Shakespeare Library and published in an article by Judith Milhous entitled "The First Production of Rowe’s Jane Shore," Theatre Journal (October, 1986) 38.3:309-321. One must remember that the theatre companies did not pay the playwright out of the income except on the benefit nights.
She also noted that the scene between Jane and the condemned Hastings is one of the most heart wrenching scenes ever written. The role of Jane became one of Oldfield’s favorites, proving to be both popular with the audiences of London and lucrative for her; she received two benefit performances of the play during its initial run.

Rowe’s play was timely in that Queen Anne was stricken ill just a few weeks before the opening in February and everyone expected her to die at any time. (She did recover and lived until the next August.) The issue of succession was high on the minds of Englishmen, with many fearful of the accession to the throne of the Roman Catholic Stuart family. Still others were mindful of a possible insistence by the Whigs that the Protestant house of Hanover in Germany take over the throne.

As a strong Whig, Rowe favored the foreign monarch over the possibility of the fall of the Church of England and the restoration of the Stuart line. Jane Shore struck a cord with the people of London as they contemplated the change of monarch soon to occur. The play dealt with an historical take over of the throne through murder and espionage surrounding the rise of Richard III. Queen Anne was a strong female head of state, with no heir, nearing death and leaving the fate of the nation uncertain. The parallels of current events and the play’s story were not lost on the London crowd.

HISTORY AS VEHICLE

The play was based on a critical incident in the late fifteenth century and involved a seemingly insignificant woman married to a goldsmith and well-to-do businessman named William Shore. Most of what we know of Jane Shore is found in the history of Richard III written by Thomas More. According to his account, the couple was well
off financially and was often seen at the court of Edward IV. It was
during one of those visits that the monarch invited Jane to be his
mistress. She immediately filed for an annulment and accepted the
king’s proposal. She remained with him until his death in 1483.

After Edward’s demise, Jane was taken under the protection of
Thomas Grey, First Marquis of Dorset, the son (by a previous marriage)
of Edward’s widow and a supporter of the passing of the crown to the
elder of the young sons of Edward IV. Dorset fled to the continent
when he heard that Richard, Duke of Gloucester, had his sights on the
crown. Jane was then taken under the protection of William, Lord
Hastings, who was later beheaded after being accused of conspiracy
against Richard. The Queen and Jane were both accused of complicity
in the plot against Richard and Jane was punished by the church for
“infidelity.” Richard dared not touch Edward’s wife who remained
under the protection of the church as the wife of a deceased monarch.
Richard then had the two sons of Edward killed and took the crown
himself to become Richard III.

Very little in Rowe’s play is actually historical. Taking
artistic license, Rowe developed his play to loosely follow the neo-
classical rule of the unities of time, place and action by having the
events occur over a short period of time in a few places with a few
characters who are essential to the events. Alfred Jackson stated the
issue this way: “Jane Shore’s pitiful story was the sole attraction
for Rowe; biographical accuracy was of minor importance” (321).
However, he understates the power of the story of a strong woman who
was willing to stand on her own and face the power of Richard III.
Rowe may have been drawn not simply to the “pitiful story” but also to
the strength of character and will he saw in this historical woman.
The time of the play is uncertain and cannot be rectified with the historical events found in official documents and other historical records. The place is also ambiguous at best. What Rowe did was to manipulate place and time to fit his needs for the dramatic. He also manipulated the characters to achieve his aims of evoking pity and tears from the audience. Richard and Jane never met, though it is certain that he knew of her relationship to Edward IV. Showing Jane Shore standing toe-to-toe with the likes of the tyrant gave Rowe a vehicle for illustrating a strong female, heroic despite her lowly birth and lack of royal station. According to Dammers, Rowe’s sole intent was to evoke pity and tears from his audiences. But, this play contains more than simply a pathetic story engineered to evoke pity and tears. Rowe manipulated all of the elements of the dramatic in order to have his feminist hero drive the action of the play rather than simply be a victim of circumstances.

The historical inconsistencies are numerous in the play. Jane Shore’s husband was never heard from after the annulment and did not try to rescue her before she died. Rowe uses Jane’s husband to evoke identification from the audience with this lady who stands on her own no matter what even when he reveals himself in the end and offers to forgive her and take her back. No one by the name of Alicia was ever mentioned historically, but Rowe uses her as Jane’s foil in triggering Richard’s anger against Jane. Historically, Hastings was not romantically involved with Jane. But, Hastings’ advances to her in the play to help strengthen the tension and ultimately illustrated Jane’s irresistible nature as both a woman and a hero. The audiences responded with great enthusiasm to Jane’s plight in the play. Men and women cried, and women even fainted at the sight of Jane facing her
unjust punishment. But, the historical inconsistencies did not matter to Rowe. Creating a tragic story with a strong female in serious distress (circumstances that would draw the tears) was Rowe’s focus.

Rowe seemed to shift or manipulate other historical events. Richard never offered his protection to Jane. Instead, he offered his protection to Catherine Hastings and gave her control over her dead husband’s fortune, thereby buying her tacit support. But in that act, Rowe was showing that Jane would not be condescended to. Richard never sentenced Jane to wander the streets of London like a harlot. But, having Richard proclaim the sentence shows Jane’s importance in the plot and she becomes the victim of Richard’s usurping madness, and thus the tragic hero. Historically, it may be argued that Richard had a hand in her humiliation. But, he actually passed the matter of Jane’s punishment and fate to Thomas Kemp, the Bishop of London. He was the one who sentenced her to walk through the streets of London for about an hour in her undergarments in humiliation for her “sins.” Rowe used the historical event of her humiliation because it was an ideal picture for drawing the audience into his hero’s pathetic situation.

At the center of Rowe’s story is Jane Shore’s involvement in an alleged plot to aid Edward’s wife and Hastings in their support of an early coronation of Edward’s young son, Edward V. This act would have ended any attempt by Richard to seize the throne. Rowe thrust a “commoner” into the intrigue and subterfuge within the realm where only royalty had been allowed to tread. Jane Shore’s courage and strength of will was well within the popular Whig beliefs of individual rights and royal rule by the will of the people rather than by divine (or forceful) right. As a Whig, Rowe was illustrating that
the old belief in the Divine Right of the king to rule (a basic Tory tenet) was not just outmoded but was indefensible. And Rowe was also showing that the English strength of will could be found not only in her men but also her women.

Given a strong, beautiful and courageous female as his hero, Rowe could then stir the emotions. Jenkins points out that “Jane Shore contains some of Rowe’s best poetry ... whereby he moves his audience to pity and tears” (117). And Pedicord asserts that Rowe had taken a dramatic style from the seventeenth century and had perfected it and made it significant for his own period of time. “And in Jane Shore he found a suitable heroine for the evocation of pity” (xxvii).

Rowe was able to integrate his Protestant Christian beliefs into this play showing the vicious nature of the Catholic church in the person of the Bishop of London thereby playing upon the Protestant sentiments of his audience to evoke strong emotional reactions. Canfield noted that this play was Rowe’s best and it included the major themes that seem to dominate all of his plays, which were divine mercy and divine justice. The play is Rowe’s quintessential she-tragedy with Jane Shore as “all Rowe’s protagonists wrapped into one, an epitome of the Christian heroism that his tragedies define” (176). Surely the connection between the suffering saint pictured in Jane Shore and the sufferings of Christ did not pass by his audiences. And they surely saw in Jane an illustration of the lowly birth of the Christ who rose to become the Savior of the world, pointing to the equality of all which should ultimately include women.

Rowe used his ingenuity and imagination to create an unforgettable character who certainly appealed to the London theatre crowd. He was able to comment upon the state of women in eighteenth
century England by using a woman from the fifteenth century. Jane was a commoner who moved in the highest circles of politics and royalty through her own strength of will and tenacity. And she was oppressed by a tyrant who would usurp the throne from the rightful heir. Ultimately she was put in her place by a church that was the king’s tool for repression.

**POLITICS AS VEHICLE**

Many of Rowe’s contemporaries could see the strong parallels in the politics of the day with Anne nearing the end of her reign, the Old Pretender waiting in France for her demise, and the possible restoration of the Catholic Church to preeminence in the kingdom. Rowe showed women in the midst of political intrigue and complications. And he showed that a woman did not have to rely upon a man for her identity. And yet, being a product of his day, Rowe had to allow events to unfold logically and within a recognizable social context. In the play, Richard accuses Jane of breaking the seventh commandment—a ruse at best. But her greater sin was mingling in the affairs of state, which was unacceptable for a woman of low estate. In the end, Jane had to atone for her sins and for her aggressive nature.

Rowe uses historical and fictional characters to craft his play. He uses history as a vehicle for transmitting the story of a tragic, yet heroic woman who typifies the female plight of the early eighteenth century woman. There is no pretense as to the historicity of the play; nor is there any indication that Rowe wanted people to believe that the events unfolding on stage were to be taken as historical. Jane Shore was a familiar figure to the English having been institutionalized in songs, poetry, stories and biographies for
several hundred years. Her story had become almost mythic in proportion. Rowe’s contribution added a new dimension stressing her independent spirit.

Jane Shore moved the audiences to pity and tears for nearly two centuries. Charles Beckingham, a contributor to the Musarum Lachrymae, wrote a poetic eulogy of Rowe in 1719 in which he writes, “When some fair Wanton [Jane Shore] mourns her past desires, /Love’s soul embraces, and unlawful fires; /So soft she pleads, the pitying audience melts” (16-21). Thomas Newcomb, another contributor to that volume wrote of Rowe’s play, “In reason we ask our reason’s aid, /To stop our tears, or ease our pain” (59). Even Samuel Johnson in 1781 wrote of this play that it “is one of those pieces which we still welcome on the stage” (392). Even in 1846, Sir James Macintosh is quoted in The Gentlemen’s Magazine in reference to Jane Shore, “Perhaps you have never saw Mrs. Siddons act it [Jane Shore], but, even read, it is most touching poetry. You must allow Jane Shore her rank among the heroines of the English stage” (588).

Jane Shore was able to stir up pity within the audiences, but not without making several statements about the situation of women in eighteenth century England. Rowe seems to have been sounding a quiet cry to the men of his day. Women could be as strong and enterprising as any man. The inclusion of radical statements of women’s freedom and independence appear on many pages of Jane Shore. In Act IV, Jane is questioned by Gloster as to her role in a possible conspiracy with Hastings. When Jane realizes that Gloster is about to murder the young Edward and his brother and take the crown himself, she stands up for Hastings and declares that if Hastings is opposed to Gloster’s
actions then, “Reward him for the noble deed, just heavens!/ For this one action guard him and distinguish him” (IV:113-4). For a woman of her estate to openly defy Gloster would take tremendous courage. Rowe was examining the power that just one woman had to shake the foundations of the regency.

Rowe could not have been completely blind to what he was advocating even though he shows Jane Shore being brought down for asserting herself into matters outside her concern: she was not royalty, nor did she have any vested interest in royalty. Through Jane, Rowe showed that the crown is the concern of all Britons. Although the text has Jane being punished for her “sins” of the past, in reality, this brave woman was being punished for defying the King in what she perceived was a travesty of justice as she exclaims support for Prince Edward and his brother, “Shall they be left a prey to savage power?” (IV:123). The audience knew that Rowe’s words echoed the belief of everyone that the two young princes were murdered by Richard III.

Jane’s strength is seen throughout the play, but is illustrated dynamically in her declaration concerning the plight of women in English society: a theme which Rowe explored in The Fair Penitent and would later illustrate in graphic form in his last play, The Tragedy of Lady Jane Grey. Jane’s speech in Act I has been studied and dissected over the years and yet bears repeating.

Why should I think that man will do for me
What yet he never did for wretches like me?
Mark by what partial justice we are judged;
Such is the fate unhappy women find,
And such the curse entailed upon our kind,
That man, the lawless libertine, may rove
Free and unquestioned through the wilds of love;
While woman, sense and nature’s easy fool,
If poor, weak woman swerve from virtue’s rule,
If, strongly charmed, she leave the thorny way,
And in the softer paths of pleasure stray,
Ruin ensued, reproach and endless shame,
And one false step entirely damns her fame.
In vain with tears the loss she may deplore,
In vain look to what she was before;
She set, like stars that fall, to rise no more.  (I:178-193)

Through Jane, Rowe deplores the practice of men of the eighteenth century of living selfish lives that hardly ever considered the needs and wants of their wives or any other woman. So, Jane’s words indicate that she must not expect any man to do what is right when she has the power to do it for herself. She alludes to the teachings of the church in the line “And such the curse entailed upon our kind” that speaks of the female curse to bear children in pain as found in the book of Genesis. Through Jane’s words, Rowe continued that argument by stating that men see themselves as the agents of God to keep women in the cursed position. Rowe even has Jane allude to the common practice of allowing men the right to do as they please morally, but punishing a woman who might act like a man by making her an outcast: “Ruin ensued, reproach and endless shame, / And one false step entirely damns her fame” (4).

Through Jane, Rowe’s words bemoan the state of women at the beginning of the eighteenth century with their lack of any legal rights and the blatant double standard imposed by society. It cannot be said that Rowe believed in women being given the right to freely flaunt themselves sexually; his Christian beliefs and his own high moral standards would not have allowed him that stance. He might have argued that both men and women should refrain from sexual promiscuity, or women should trust the men to do what is right, or to realize that
Parliament was for the educated (women were not allowed a university education). Through Jane he protests the popular double-standard for men and women wherein men were expected to sew wild oats while women were to keep themselves pure for marriage. The play seems to connect this idea to a double standard in politics reflected in the belief that only high-born men are allowed to dabble in the political intrigue of a nation where a king should be male. Rowe may have been saying that each Englishman has a right and a responsibility to be involved in a country’s affairs: even an English-woman.

Rowe was not alone in decrying the inequality of women in London. Among Rowe’s closest colleagues and friends was the playwright Susanna Centlivre whose quiet style of writing became popular during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. As John Bowyer points out in his biography of Centlivre, “She was the friend of George Farquhar, Nicholas Rowe, Sir Richard Steele, and others” (vi). She followed in the tradition of Aphra Behn, but with a quieter form of verbal protest and less sexual promiscuity among her characters. In her play The Wonder: A Woman Keeps A Secret, Centlivre wrote about the double standards of her day.

The Custom of our Country enslaves us from our Very Cradles, first to our Parents, next to our Husbands; and when Heaven is so kind to rid us Of both these, our Brothers still usurp Authority, And expect a blind Obedience from us; so that Maids, Wives, or Widows, we are little better than Slaves to the Tyrant Man. (Quoted in Bowyer, 188)

But, could Rowe openly declare that women were equal to men? He may not have believed it safe to call for the total overthrow of major social mores. His plays reflect a recognition of problems; but, there
are no specific calls for reform. The fact that Rowe expressed some radical ideas means that they must be dealt with in literary criticism. The words of Alicia to Jane in Act I were quite radical for that day. Women had few rights and Alicia points to the sad state of women by referring to men: “Ev’n man—the merciless insulter, man—/Man, who rejoices in our sex’s weakness” (I:ii,174-5). But, it is in the mouth of Alicia that Rowe records his rationale for using Jane Shore: “Man ... shall ... record thy praise” (I:ii,175-7). Rowe appears to encourage women to stand on their own. The play does not openly advocate action; but embedded in the script is a caustic response from one of the characters in the play. Alicia advises Jane to stand up for herself and not depend upon a man for her identity or to do for her what she can do herself.

Raise thy sad soul to better hopes than these;  
Lift up thine eyes and let ’em shine once more,  
Bright as the morning sun above the mists.  
Exert thy charms, seek out the stern Protector,  
And soothe his savage temper with thy beauty.  
Spit on his deadly, unrelenting nature,  
He shall be moved to pity and redress thee. (I,ii,108-114)

Jane takes Alicia’s advice and goes to Gloster in order to plead for her situation and to demand the return of the lands and possessions left to her by Edward IV. The action depicted by Rowe never happened. So, why did he have her perform this blatant act of courage? Did he realize how radical this advice and action really was in the context of a society that frowned upon successful women (apart from royalty)? Above all considerations, Rowe was a dramatist. In this situation, he manipulated the historical events so that the action would enhance the dramatic nature of the scene and intensify the movement toward the
climax. In the same way, Rowe manipulated the actions of the play to emphasize his female characters’ strengths and to enhance their position as spokes persons for women’s rights.

**WHAT PRICE GLORY?**

One major sign of Rowe’s popularity in the theatrical community appeared in 1714 after the opening of *Jane Shore*. For several years, Charles Gildon, had been writing criticisms of productions in London in the form of dramatic scripts. Although Gildon fancied himself a drama critic and scholar, most scholars today place him in the category of dramatic “hack.” His piece *A New Rehearsal, or Bays the Younger* caused quite a stir in that it lampooned the gentle playwright and his play about Jane Shore. But, to have one’s works recognized in a satire was a recognition of the popularity of that playwright and poet. At last, Rowe had become a power to be reckoned with in the literary world. Because of the dominance of Whigs in London in 1714, the anti-Catholic message of *Jane Shore* would have been loudly applauded.

But, those critics within the ranks of the Tories (or the Royalists) would have recognized the artistic freedom Rowe used and seen it as a threat to the order and decorum of the neoclassical ideals. In this parody, Rowe was depicted as “Mr. Bays, a pedantic, reciting poet, admired by the mob and himself, but justly condemned by men of sense and learning, and a despiser of rules and art” (3). The main criticism of Rowe was that he wrote for the masses rather than following the basic rules of drama as typified by the neoclassical tradition of the seventeenth century and defined by Gildon. He begins
by saying that Jane herself “is no Tragical Character.” He continues then to argue, “Incontinency in Woman being on the same Level with Cowardice in Man; and Mr. Bays might as well have brought a Coward for his Hero, as a Whore for his Heroine” (68). Gildon was arguing against the use of the historical Jane Shore as the hero. He was steeped in the neoclassical traditions and the heroic tragedies of the late seventeenth century. Thus a pathetic figure like Jane did not fit his view of a tragic hero. His implications indicate a resistance to the use of any female as a hero (although he uses the word “heroine” almost as a synonym), though he does not actually say it.

The criticism that may have hurt Rowe the most was the accusation that he wrote just for the applause of the audience rather than for art. In the script, Mr. Bays admits to the others sitting at the table, “I have a better art of getting applause than can be learned from all the rules of Aristotle, Horace, or any other of the demagogues of Parnassus” (84). Gildon’s parody then continues to explain the success of Jane Shore as being calculated by Rowe through the pre-sale of the books about Jane Shore. In the text, Mr. Bays explains his circumstances in this way:

I had some accidental helps to expectation, my bookseller, and some others of the trade to get by my name, publish five or six sorts of Lives of Jane Shore: This brought all who had bought the Lives, and secured all who use to come to plays; so if every one of those come but once, it must give my play a comfortable run. And then it is not one farthing matter whether it pleased or not; I did my business by it, and that’s enough I think (85-86).

There is no record of just how Rowe reacted to this criticism of his work and success. One would hope that he took it in stride as this type of critical essay (in this case a play script) was common
during the years of 1675 to 1750. It does show that aged old problem that success always breeds contempt and jealousy. But Rowe would have the last laugh. Gildon’s works are all but forgotten and Rowe’s plays are still in print and studied by theatre and literary scholars three hundred years after the fact. And Rowe’s play about Jane Shore would be performed continuously for over 100 years. His female hero would be accepted not as a “whore” but as a strong, outspoken advocate of women having the right to stand alone and to fight their own battles in life.
CHAPTER FIVE
GROWING MATURITY

Rowe’s reputation as a poet, translator and scholar continued to grow following the success of Jane Shore. Although the death of his wife was followed by a period of financial difficulties and personal struggles, Rowe was able to recover and throw himself into his work. The opening of Jane Shore was barely over before he began working on another historical tragedy: this one based on the story of the Lady Jane Grey.

ROWE’S COMMITMENT TO THE HANOVERIANS

Rowe had taken over a project begun by his dear friend Edmund Smith of Christ Church, Oxford. In the preface to the play, Rowe admits that he and Smith had discussed the project, “and if he had liv’d, I should never have thought of meddling with it myself” (4). Smith’s play was to be based loosely on John Bank’s earlier play The Innocent Usurper. Rowe writes, “[T]he plan of his being drawn after that, which is in print, of Mr. Banks” (4). But Smith died in 1710, before he could complete the project. Rowe took it on as a memorial to his friend, though he completely changed the story and made Jane a

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²²The original notes for Smith’s play were left to the care of a George Ducket. Rowe asked a mutual friend, Thomas Burnet, son of the English historian Gilbert Burnet, to write to Ducket for Smith’s notes. Ducket complied with the request. Ducket’s papers and
feminist hero. It is doubtful that either Banks or Smith would have developed Jane in the same way that Rowe did.

Rowe began by portraying her as a woman focused on doing what was best for England. Here he had Queen Anne as a model of the strong, independent woman able to act with England’s best interests at heart. Second, he pictured her as a warrior standing against tyranny. Then he painted Jane as a saint who dies defending her Protestant faith. Fourth, Rowe made Jane into a woman who was willing to face the men who opposed her with courage and strength. And finally, he created a character who was a woman who could be herself; she had no need for a man to tell her what to think or how to act. Altogether, these characteristics paint a picture of an early feminist hero who could be looked upon by other women as a model of independent freedom.

The preface of the play was an apology by Rowe in which he explains that he had not copied the work of Smith, nor had he followed the plot of Bank’s play. He explained that although he had been given all of Smith’s notes and papers, there really was very little he could use, even though he had hoped that Smith had done a great deal more work on the play before his death than he did. Rowe writes, “I hop’d to have met with great part of the play written ... I found the quantity of about two quires of paper written over in odd pieces, blotted, interlin’d and confus’d” (4). By the time Rowe actually had a chance to see the papers, he had already put his play together, so
he claims that little of what Smith had written was useful to him. The play was completely his.

In *The Tragedy of Jane Grey*, Rowe’s politics were maturing along with his dramatic writing skills. As the production began at the Drury Lane Theatre, Queen Anne was once again gravely ill and her death was expected soon. And the Old Pretender, James II’s son, was preparing to return to England to claim the crown. Rowe used this play to expound upon the dangers of allowing a Catholic to ascend to the throne and to legitimize the Hanover claim to the kingdom. Rowe’s Whig politics would strongly influence his statements throughout the play characterizing the Catholics as evil villains. As a result, the play has numerous sweeping indications that the throne is not simply an heirloom to be shared with anyone who claims a birthright, but it is a precious gift owned by the people of England to grant to whom they believe is the legitimate heir.

On the surface of the play, it is a domestic tragedy about a young woman who is caught up in political intrigue in an attempt to block Mary of Scots, a Catholic, from ascending the throne. On another level, it is a political critique of the Tory bias for the restoration of the blood line that would bring a Catholic to the throne. Although the Tories were, for the most part, pro-Anglican, they probably would have gladly accepted Catholicism if it meant the restoration of the Stuart line through the crowning of James III. And on an even deeper level, the play was Rowe’s ultimate illustration of a strong woman with definite incipient feminist beliefs who is willing to place her future on the line for her convictions. Jenkins has
called Jane Grey “Rowe’s own handiwork” (120). In this play, Rowe had perfected his talents and created a “she-tragedy” mingled with a strong dose of current politics. Jenkins writes, Jane Grey “exhibits even more than Jane Shore Rowe’s two interests: the pathos of the beautiful, tragic woman (the she-tragedy) and his constant support of liberty and order in government” (120).

Rowe’s sources for the historical details of the play are easy to discern. In his library were Foxe’s Acts and Monuments (known today as Foxe’s Book of Martyrs), Holinshed’s Chronicles, Cambden’s Annales, Speed’s Chronicle, and Eachard’s History of England. Rowe stated in the preface that he had intended to present the character of Jane Grey as close to the historical record as possible. He even gave credit to Gilbert Burnet’s History of the Reformation. According to Sherry, “... internal evidence cannot confirm Rowe’s debt to Burnet, since for the most part Burnet repeats what earlier authors had written” (ix). Sherry’s research showed that Rowe had taken nearly all of his information about Jane Grey from Holinshed’s book. This book pictured the Lady Jane Grey as a martyr of the Protestant faith, an image that Rowe uses throughout the play.

According to the historical records, Jane Grey was the granddaughter of Henry VII, niece of Henry VIII and cousin of Edward VI. According to Henry VIII’s will of 1547, Jane was to be fourth in line to the throne. With Parliament’s consent, Henry had hoped to block Mary of Scotland from assuming the crown. Since Mary and

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23 The list of Rowe’s library is contained in Canfield, 181-194, and Jenkins, 159-166.
Elizabeth were both under a cloud of illegitimacy due to Henry’s many annulments, the crown was rightfully Jane’s mother’s. But since she was married to the Duke of Suffolk (who was not royalty), she could not be queen. So, Jane Grey was the “legitimate” heir (if Henry’s will was accepted) to succeed to the throne. To seal her claim, she married young Guilford, who was in the royal line.

At Edward VI’s death, several nobles had tried to entice Mary and Elizabeth to London to be by Edward’s side at his death hoping to imprison them both. Edward had named Jane Grey to succeed him in his will, following the same line as stated in Henry’s will. In a vain show of support, the Duke of Northumberland, Jane’s father-in-law, rode out of London to fight the supporters of Mary and Elizabeth. The people in London and in the country did not support Jane Grey, so as the word spread that the council had decided to change their allegiances to Mary, the Duke’s soldier’s began to disperse fearing reprisals if they participated in what might be a revolt against the new Queen. Before he could reach the port where Mary would arrive, his army was in disarray. Northumberland went into hiding.

Mary arrived on July 19, 1553, with support from the Council of Lords, and took the Tower of London where Jane, her husband Lord Guilford, and her parents were staying. They all remained in prison until February 12, 1554, when Jane and Guilford were executed. Most historians believe that Jane might not have been killed had her father, the Duke of Suffolk, not joined with Sir Thomas Wyatt in the rebellion of January 1554, which followed the announcement of Mary’s impending marriage to Philip of Spain. The uprising involved a plot
to unseat Mary and declare Jane Queen. Mary seized the opportunity to try Jane and Guilford for treason in order to rid herself of the danger of another uprising against her.

Rowe’s alterations to the historical records in Jane Grey are not as expansive as they are in Jane Shore. He was able to do more with the history than he did in any of his other tragedies by writing a character who would both tug at the hearts of audiences and stand as a symbol of strength as a woman. Sherry suggested that Rowe’s purpose in writing Jane Grey was “to create a believable Protestant character willing to die for her country and religion ... [and] a genuinely admirable and pathetic heroine who is victimized by her family’s ambitions” (vii). Sherry’s analysis is perhaps too presumptive because as the discussion unfolds below, one sees a woman who was faced with a decision, chose to make it, then did all in her power to carry it out. She was not “victimized by her family’s ambitions.” Rowe’s Jane Grey is decisive, strong, and outspoken on the issues of the freedom of all the English, especially women.

Rowe altered some of the historical accounts to fit his own dramatic purposes and to give a very complex story of political intrigue a romantic conflict. One major alteration that Rowe made was in the Pembroke-Jane-Guilford love triangle. The historical Pembroke was a man in his fifties who at first sided with Jane and then quickly joined with the council in declaring Mary as Queen. What Rowe did was to make him younger. Another alteration that suited Rowe’s political agenda was the use of Gardner as the central figure in the Catholic re-institution and the driving force behind Jane’s execution. With
the emphasis on Gardner, Rowe also de-emphasized the role that Northumberland actually played. As Guilford’s father, Northumberland was the driving character in the historical account. He was driven by his greed and ambition for power as evidenced by his miraculous conversion to Catholicism when word reached him that Mary had ascended the throne.

A third alteration is actually an addition to the historical story. Rowe writes numerous meetings between Jane and various people just prior to her death, including Gardner’s final attempt to talk Jane into receiving the sacraments from the Catholic Church. Historically, it was John Feckenham, Dean of St. Paul’s, who tried to convince Jane to convert to Catholicism. By these alterations, Rowe builds suspense, creates dramatic tension, and heightens the role of the Catholic Church in Jane’s demise. Rowe dramatically points to Jane’s strength of character and will as she stood alone against the power of Mary and the Catholic Church.

Rowe’s preoccupation with strong women can be seen in his dedication of this play to Caroline of Anspach, the Princess Royal (Princess of Wales whose husband was the king’s son who succeeded him on the throne as George II). There is no direct evidence that Rowe knew The Princess personally, but he must have had a great admiration for her. He may also have been thinking of his own political career. He writes:

We are your Debtors, MADAM, for the Preference You gave us, in chusing to wear the British rather than the Imperial Crown; ... It is to YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS we owe the Security that shall be deliver’d down to our Children’s Children, by a most Hopeful and Beautiful, as well as Numerous Royal Issue. (2)
George and Caroline were the monarchs of Denmark when they were appointed Regents of Britain. Although Rowe makes much of the change, in reality, they retained their power and influence in both Denmark and the old Holy Roman Empire. Rowe was impressed, though, that they would come to live permanently in England and not just be absentee rulers, as George I had been.

In the dedication, Rowe also makes reference to Caroline’s Protestant Faith and the fact that she was, with her husband, the head of the Church of England. He writes to her, “You are not only the Brightest Ornament, but the Patroness and Defender of our Holy Faith.” It was George I who made it possible for the rise of the Whigs to political power in England. And it was George I who made it impossible for the Catholic Church ever to resume its place as the official church of England. Why did Rowe dedicate the play to Caroline, George I’s daughter-in-law? She was the true power in the marriage with George. He was not so ambitious as she. Also, Rowe knew that offering the play as a gift to her would place him in good stead with her husband. Rowe was an artist and Caroline was the patron saint of the arts, so it only made sense that he present to her his first play since the arrival of the new King.

Rowe’s admiration for Caroline may have been even deeper than indicated above. This lady who ruled England with her husband was the type of woman that seemed to fit Rowe’s idea of womanhood as depicted in his plays. She was highly educated, having personally studied under the tutelage of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, one of the best known philosophers and thinkers of his day. Then after arriving in London,
Caroline met and had many long conversations with Isaac Newton. Later, Caroline would gather the letters exchanged between Isaac Newton and Liebniz, a collection which formed the foundation for the great argument on the meaning of gravity to modern science. Caroline’s brilliant mind, independent spirit, and grasp of intellectual matters most assuredly caught Rowe’s fancy.

THE PRODUCTION OF JANE GREY

*Jane Grey* opened at the Drury Lane Theatre on April 20, 1715, with the same group of actors that had performed *Jane Shore*. Anne Oldfield was cast as Jane Grey just as she was cast as Jane Shore and as Marcia in Addison’s *Cato* the season before. She was recognized as one of the great tragic actresses of this period in London. After Oldfield had joined the company of players at Drury Lane, she became one of the most popular actresses in London. According to Edmund Curll, both Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle retired in 1708 because of Oldfield’s popularity. Barton Booth played Guilford and was also cast as Lord Hastings in *Jane Shore*. The popular Irish actor Thomas Erlington played the part of Pembroke, Colley Cibber was cast as Gardner, and John Mills played Northumberland.

Like *Jane Shore*, this play was introduced with a great amount of publicity and advertising. Books about Jane Grey were revived and republished to give people a chance to re-familiarize themselves with

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24 For a lengthy discussion of this and other evidence as to Oldfield’s influence with the managers of Drury Lane, see Judith Milhous and Robert D Hume’s article, “Theatrical Politics at Drury Lane: New Light on Letitia Cross, Jane Rogers, and Anne Oldfield,” *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* (1982), 412-29.
the story, and the published version of the play was released almost immediately. As an indication of its initial acceptance by the community, the play ran eight consecutive nights and had a one night interruption followed by a single performance the next evening. The play closed its initial run on May 12 (Avery, I:351-3).

Lady Jane Grey's success may be due in part to the fact that Jane Shore was still fresh in the theatre goers' minds. Avery states that the production of Jane Grey was eagerly awaited by the public (I:316-7). A pamphlet published as an open letter to Rowe following the opening of the play stated in part, “The memory of your first Jane was scarce asleep in the Town, e’re they were rouz’d up to Expectations of this your more Saint-like Heroine (Remarks, 3). Although Sherry and Jenkins point to the political intrigue of the period as a possible reason for the play’s success, Rowe followed the success of Jane Shore with another play very similar to it. He may also have been working to perfect his female hero.

Rowe’s politics were evident in this play. He refers to the Roman Catholic Church as “That Fiend of Rome and Hell” (III:310). He also calls into question the issue of royal succession and how that is carried out. Rowe has Jane Grey ask the question, “Can Edward’s Will,/Or Twenty met in Council, make a Queen?” (III:356-7). Near the end of the play, Jane cries out to heaven to “Call up a Monarch of the Royal Blood ... To save thy Altars from the Rage of Rome,/Long let him reign, to bless the rescu’d Land” (V:343-7). It would not have escaped the crowd that Jane was speaking of George I. Rowe then indicts the Holy See with the words of the Earl of Pembroke:
Is not the sacred Purpose of the Faith
Peace and Good-will to Man! The hallow’d Hand,
Ordain’d to bless, shou’d know no Stain of Blood. (V:106-8)

In the character of Jane Grey, Rowe had found a perfect vehicle
to illustrate what his previous characters could only spoken of: the
courage to place her life in jeopardy for her faith and her politics.
In Jane Grey, Rowe was able to show a maturing of his incipient
feminist hero character. Instead of presenting a strong female who
talks about the problems inherent in the system (e.g., The Fair
Penitent) or points out the injustices of the system (e.g., Jane
Shore), he draws a distinct picture of a strong woman who is not only
equal to men, but possibly superior to them. Rowe pictured this
feminist hero as a woman of action among men afraid to take any
action, or at least the right action, against the Catholic oppressors.
Sherry states the issue this way:

With Jane Grey, Rowe could stir an audience to oppose tyranny,
and the danger of Catholicism, by showing her [Lady Jane Grey]
pathetic position. He could please the audience which had
mourned the plight of Jane Shore by showing another victim of
circumstance, Jane Grey, and he could, while dramatizing Jane’s
suffering, develop a view of women as equal to men— and frequently
superior to them. (vii)

Although the Catholics had a strong woman (Mary of Scots) to lead
their cause, the true hero, another strong woman (Jane Grey), arose to
lead the nation. Without actually stating that women are as equal to
any task as men, Rowe depicted a woman who took action when no man was
available since they all had run in fear. Rowe must have been aware
that his feminist hero was not fictional, she was part of English
history providing a historical precedent for the strength and resolve
of eighteenth century women.
At the beginning of Act One, Jane is faced with Edward VI’s desire for her to ascend the throne instead of her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots. Edward was Henry VIII’s son and had no heir of his own to succeed him. His desire was to keep a Protestant on the throne and to follow the wishes of Henry VIII as stated in his will. Jane recounts the king’s words in Act Two:

When I am gone do thou be good to England;
Keep to that Faith in which we both were bred,
And to the End be constant. (II:77-79)

Here, Rowe is putting into the mouth of the king his belief that a young woman of 15 who is a Protestant is far more acceptable than a more mature woman who is a Catholic. Rowe selected Jane Grey for two obvious reasons. First, she was a Protestant who was viciously sacrificed by a Catholic sovereign. And second, a character like her was ideal to draw the pity of the audience in her death. Rowe’s Jane Grey was a strong figure who could make feminist statements while implying that the Protestant faith would be more inclined to undergird the freedoms of Englishmen than the Catholics would.

Jane Grey was not raised to be queen. So Rowe has her strongly protest the legality of Edward’s desires in the matter, “Could Edward do this? Could the dying Saint,/Bequeath his Crown to me?” (III:196-7). Tories would have agreed with these lines because they breathed of actual succession from one king to another. Whigs would have agreed and been happy because Edward’s words were solidifying the need to keep the throne Protestant. After much persuasion by her mother, the Duchess of Suffolk, Jane relents to Edward’s will and decides to take up the cause for the sake of the nation and to keep England’s church
Protestant. Her consort, Guilford Dudley, protests her decision to face the serious possibility of death in taking the stand. She turns to him and calls him to task.

Still wilt thou frame thy Speech to
this vain Purpose,
When the wan King of Terrors stalks before us,
When Universal Ruin gathers round,
And no Escape is left us? Are we not,
Like Wretches in a Storm, whom ev’ry Moment,
The greedy Deep is gaping to devour?
And us see the pale of despairing Crew,
Wring their sad Hands and give their Labour over;
The Hope of Life has ev’ry Heart forsook,
And Horror sits on each distracted Look. (I:284-294)

This passage illustrates Jane’s strength of resolve and her understanding of her calling. She sees the future as bleak, but she sees an even bleaker future if she runs from her responsibilities and duty to her country. She stands tall and even becomes an inspiration to Guilford. In this instance she has become the tower of strength for her man.

At the beginning of the play, Lady Jane is encouraged to take the crown by several members of the Counsel of Advisors to the king. But, as the play progresses, she learns that those who had stood with her at the beginning had fled to join the forces of Mary as she rode toward the Tower of London. Jane laments their cowardice but encourages Guilford with the following:

Greet our insulting Foes with equal Tempers,
With even Brows, and Souls secure of Death.
Here stand unmov’d, as once the Roman Senate
Receiv’d fierce Brennus and the conquering Gauls,
Till ev’n the rude Barbarians stood amaz’d
At such superior virtue. Be thy self,
For see the Trial comes! (IV:372-8)
Here the man is being instructed on how to face the enemy by a woman. Although the audience would have been caught up in the sad circumstances of this poor couple, embedded in the pathetic situation is this interesting scene where Guilford has to be told to “buck up” by a woman.

As Lady Jane and Guilford are arrested at the Tower by Mary’s Guards, Guilford wonders from what source had Lady Jane had gained her courage. His question is followed by a most profound statement from a woman on the early eighteenth century stage:

Guil. Oh teach me! Say, what Energy Divine
Inspires thy softer Sex and tender years
With such unshaken Courage?
L. Jane. Truth and Innocence;
A conscious Knowledge rooted in my Heart,
That to have sav’d my Country was my Duty.
Yes, England, yes, my Country, I would save thee;
But Heav’n forbids, Heav’n disallows my Weakness,
And to some dear selected Hero’s Hand
Reserves the Glory of thy great Deliverance. (IV:442-450)

What a powerful scene this is as the young soldier and politician, Guilford, must turn to his wife and ask her to “teach me! Say, what Energy Divine / Inspires thy softer Sex and tender years / With such unshaken Courage?” Rowe’s genius can be seen in how the audience is distracted with the tears and sorrow of a situation, then are confronted by Jane’s profound insight that she must not have been chosen by God to be the nation’s deliverer after all. But she will face her fate undaunted.

One of Rowe’s friends and colleagues was the poet Anne Kingmille Finch who was known for her early feminist poetry and views. He had encouraged her and served as a mentor (along with Pope) of her writings. Perhaps Rowe found encouragement to write such scenes as
the above from his knowledge of her works. She had only a few years earlier penned the following words in a poem entitled, “The Introduction.”

To write, or read, or think, or to enquire  
Wou’d cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time ...  
Whilst the dull mannage, of a servile house  
Is held by some, our utmost art, and use. (Lines 16-17, 19-20)\(^{25}\)

Although I may be stretching here, I believe that Rowe may have been aware of the difficulties that women faced in the past and had wanted to say something himself about the circumstances. At the very least, his writings indicate an awareness that his incipient feminist statements were not being written in a vacuum. Other writers were making strong, poignant statements concerning the plight of women who sought education and a political voice.

Rowe’s talent for drawing sympathy from the audience is best illustrated in Jane Grey at the beginning of Act Five, scene two. Rowe wrote out the stage directions himself. “The Scene draws, and discovers the Lady Jane kneeling, as at her Devotion; a Light and a Book plac’d on a Table before her.” As if the directions were not enough, he has one of “Jane’s Women” tell Guilford as he enters the chamber, “Softly, my Lord!/For yet she kneels” (V:139-140). Rowe has placed his feminist hero in a subservient position to God in prayer. The implication is that she is preparing herself for the inevitable execution that will occur. The audience views her in prayer perhaps inspired by the passages in the New Testament that describe Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his betrayal in St. Matthew

\(^{25}\)The poem is quoted in Sitter, page 160.
26:42, “He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, 0 my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (King James Version). Perhaps Jane’s strength was being compared to that of the Christ of the Christian Church.

At the final scene, Lady Jane has just witnessed her young husband’s death. Now she faces the gallows alone. Gardiner, the Bishop of Winchester, asks her with derision, “Would you then die?/Thy blood be on thy Head” (V:337-8). In reply, Jane states with solid resolve her defiance against what Mary has ordered with these words:

My blood be where it falls, let the Earth hide it, And may it never rise, or call for Vengeance: Oh that it were the last shall fall a Victim To Zeal’s inhuman Wrath! (V:338-341).

Jane’s resolve was absolute. She knew she was in the right and she was willing to die at the hands of this her kinsman. But, instead of calling for revenge, she speaks a profound word of prophecy.

Lady Jane is defiant to the end walking calmly to her death on the gallows. The picture drawn by Rowe was clearly understood within the politics of the day. Queen Anne had been an inspiration in her resolve to keep the Anglican Church in power and was determined not to allow a Catholic to dethrone her. Rowe may have been painting a tribute to Anne at the same time he was offering a laurel to the new King and his family as a gesture of thanks for helping England to remain Protestant.

Lady Jane has no need to rail against the system. She was part of the system, and yet standing against the system with a calm resolve.
and power found only in a woman of deep conviction and moral character. Even when given chances to recant and save herself and her young husband, she chose to stand her ground. Pembroke arranged for her to receive a pardon which she declines because it required her to renounce her Protestant faith and attend Mass. Several times during the play, Rowe writes in opportunities for Jane and Guilford to escape. But, she will not. Even when Guilford pleads with her to leave, she responds that she must stand against the tyranny to come.

Rowe concludes his portrait of Jane Grey by having her find hope that perhaps her martyrdom will inspire a king of greater influence to restore forever the Church of England to its rightful place and the crown to be forever Protestant. She sees clearly her fate and accepts it. Jane Shore is a victim of circumstance. Jane Grey is a strong woman representing all Englishmen and women. Canfield and Hesse state that Jane and Guilford are “portrayed not as ambitious opportunists but Protestant saints (straight out of John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*) who gladly sacrifice their lives for the Whig buzzwords of Liberty, Country and the Protestant Religion” (84).

At the end, Rowe delivers his final portrait in the last speech of the play given to Pembroke who, although he had joined with Mary, realizes that an injustice has been perpetrated. He turns to Gardner and makes a major prediction.

But know, thou proud perversely-judging Winchester,
Howe’er your hard imperious Censures doom,
And portion out our Lot in Worlds to come;
Those, who with honest Hearts pursue the Right,
And follow faithfully Truth’s Sacred Light,
Tho suffering her, shall from their Sorrows cease,
Rest with the Saints, and dwell in Endless peace. (V:365-71)
One can imagine the Whigs in the opening night crowd standing with loud applause with tears flowing down their cheeks. Rowe would have felt he had accomplished far more than he had ever hoped by touching the emotions of the audience. Susanna Centlivre wrote of this play in the Preface to her *The Gotham Election*. As Lock pointed out in his biography of Centlivre, “The production seemed to her evidence that the stage had ‘become a better Advocate for Protestantism than the Pulpit.’ Her own tragedy—with which Rowe had assisted her—had been written as an ‘Advocate’ for constitutional monarchy” (99). Rowe had presented to a 1715 London crowd a woman who could think, reason, act, and even die on her own without the help of a man.

**ROWE AND THE FEMALE WITS**

Rowe’s feminism may not have been obvious to everyone, but, evidence seems to point to the possibility that Rowe had an affinity for strong, talented women. Rowe hoped for the success of these women, even to the point of working closely with Mrs. Susannah Centlivre. In 1705, he met Mrs. Centlivre at the Drury Lane Theatre and was able to work with her on her play *The Gamester*, a piece that has found some popularity in recent years because of its radical view of women’s rights. He wrote the prologue for the play and may have been an encouraging editor. A year before the beginning of their relationship, three female playwrights (Mrs. Manley, Mrs. Pix, and Mrs. Trotter) had been ridiculed and condemned in a parody produced at the Drury Lane Theatre called, *The Female Wits: or, The Triumvirate of Poets at Rehearsal* (1704). Although speculative, I like to think
that this stinging satire may have moved Rowe to extend a hand of friendship and aid to the female wits around him.

Rowe’s relationship with women such as Centlivre may have been an influence in his life and writings. As mentioned at the outset of this dissertation, in 1717, Rowe wrote the epilogue to Centlivre’s play The Cruel Gift and even supplied some aid in the writing. In this Epilogue Rowe reminded the audience of their duty to Church and State, an understandable statement given the strong divisions between the Tories and Whigs at this particular time. According to Mottley, Rowe, ‘who had a great value for the author,’ also gave a few slight touches to the drama; ‘particularly a Simile of an Halcyon building her Nest in fine Weather, which ends one of the Acts, was his.’ The simile is used by Antimora as she is forced to leave her brother in the prison scene in Act IV:

So when Rising Floods
Bear from some Rock, in secret where they lay,
The Halcyon’s Nest, and all her brood away,
The careful Mother hovers as they glide,
Hangs on the Wing, and flutters with the Tide;
Till at the last the Waves invading creep,
Fill her frail House, and sink it in the Deep,
With one shrill note she shrieks her last Despair,
Starts from the Sight, and flits away in Air. (Quoted by Bowyer, 208)

Rowe’s relationship with the female wits, especially with Centlivre, begs the question: Why would Rowe, only five years in the theatre and very popular in 1705, become actively involved with mentoring, encouraging, and even having his name associated in print

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26 This information is gleaned from Bowyer’s book, The Celebrated Mrs. Centlivre, which, although old, is an excellent and fascinating read.
with a woman with feminist views? One satisfactory answer is that Rowe felt some sympathy with the ideas that she was espousing in her plays and other writings. Centlivre held that women were hindered by society due to the double standards fostered therein and that they had very few legal rights at all. These ideas also appeared several times in Rowe’s plays. His association with Centlivre’s production ten years later confirms his support and appreciation for her work. In an interesting remark in the prologue to The Platonick Lady (1707) she wrote, “To all the Generous Encouragers of Female Ingenuity” (Bowyer, 89), an obvious reference to the men in the literary circles who allowed her to share her work and who gave her their aid. Rowe was in that group of encouragers.

As to the other women playwrights of his day, one can speculate as to what Rowe’s relationship was with them. Mary Pix was a major writer for Lincoln’s Inn Fields and then the Queens Theatre at the same time that Rowe was also active in the theatre. They would have known each other. While her best work was in comedy, she also wrote the kind of sympathetic, domestic tragedy that Rowe also wrote. Linda Payne has written,

The few critics who have dealt with Pix have regretted that she bothered with tragedy instead of honing her greater talent for comedy. While this attitude is eminently sensible from a modern perspective that tends to dismiss both the decadent and Augustan strains of tragedy that her work spans, historically she appears as one of the more-successful tragedians of her era ... In Pix's tragedies the women who have been violated always choose death, usually remarking on the nobility of Roman heroines as their patterns for heroic honor. There are also an unusually large number of women who are the true movers and controllers not only of their own lives but of those around them. Her strong women, both virtuous and evil, are just as often agents as victims. (289-90)
There is a striking resemblance between the plays and characters that Rowe wrote and those that Pix wrote. During the early eighteenth century, playwrights met together to discuss each others’ works and gain aid in strengthening their works. Bowyer has written, “in this age of literary clubs and gatherings when the custom was to pass one’s compositions around for improvement, the remarkable thing would have been for her not to receive suggestions of any kind” (89). One can easily conclude that Rowe had read and had seen some of Pix’s productions which began in 1696 with *The Spanish Wives* and ended in 1706 with *The Adventures in Madrid*.²⁷ Rowe may have also had a working relationship with Anne Finch. Rowe asked her to supply the epilogue to his play *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*. Marta Stranycki has made a case for the various playwrights knowing and working together by pointing out that the normal practice of the men was to meet together and share comments. Thus it is safe to assume that the women met among themselves as well as with the men for the same reason.²⁸

**CONCLUSION TO AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE**

In 1714, Tonson published a complete set of the *Tragedies of Nicholas Rowe* in two volumes. Then *The Works of William Shakespeare* was re-published in nine volumes. Rowe’s popularity as a poet, dramatist, and writer was such that when Edmund Curll issued a pirated edition of Rowe’s poems in quarto format, the sales were tremendous.

²⁷It is important to note that this play has been attributed to Pix but was produced anonymously about the time of the vicious satire, *The Female Wits*.

²⁸Stranycki argues this in various places in the article cited in the bibliography under her name.
Unfortunately, since there were no copyright laws in existence, no legal action was taken against Curll.

By 1715, Rowe had moved to Kensington and had remarried. His new wife was Anne, daughter of Joseph Devenish of Buckingham, in Dorsetshire. They were probably married at the parish church of Fulham, All Souls, Middlesex. This union produced one child, a daughter, Charlotte, christened June 1, 1718, at St. Paul’s Church, Covent Garden, just six months before Rowe’s untimely death.

On July 23, 1715, Nahum Tate, the Poet Laureate of England, died. Alexander Pope and Anne both encouraged Rowe to apply for the position. Rowe received the appointment which became effective on August 1, 1715. He was sworn in on August 12, as reported by The Evening Post for August 13-16, 1715: “Nicholas Rowe, Esq. Is appointed Poet Laureate, in the room of N. Tate, Esq. Decease’d, and on the 12th instant took the usual office before the Duke of Bolton, Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty’s Household.”

Through Rowe’s appointment as Poet Laureate by George I, respectability and prestige returned to the position. Like Tate before him, Rowe’s appointment was political, however, Rowe had proved his worth as a poet of great merit. Unlike Tate who was not an active poet and did not know men of note, Rowe counted among his close friends some of the finest among the men of letters of his day. According to Broadus, “Nicolas Rowe bade fair to give the laureateship

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Unfortunately, the official records of the parish church of Fulham, All Souls, Middlesex, have been lost; but, the Bishop of London’s registry has an official notice of Rowe’s intent to marry Anne Devenish which is dated, March 31, 1716.
a respectability which it had lacked since Dryden’s day” (103). Rowe had gained the recognition he so richly deserved as one of the finest poets and playwrights of his day.

Rowe had reached a pinnacle in his career. He worked hard at translating and paraphrasing the epic poem Pharsalia by Lucan, a daunting task in itself. But, Rowe did not seem satisfied. September 17, 1716, he was appointed Land Surveyor of the Port of London, a prestigious position at the Court and a civil service job which demanded a great deal of his time. His friend, John Dennis, wrote to him and commented on the fact that the position was “by warrant,” which required his personal attendance and attention. Many civil service jobs during that day were “by patent” which meant that the appointee could hire someone else to do the actual work. Such was the case of Rowe’s appointment in May, 1718, as Clerk of the Presentations by the new Lord Chancellor, Thomas Parker. This position allowed him an increased income without a major commitment of time.

In 1716, Rowe published several poems including Ode to the Year 1716 (a requirement of his Laureate position) and Verses Upon the Sickness and Recovery of the Right Honorable Robert Walpole, the man who would dominate parliamentary politics for nearly thirty years. At this particular time, Walpole was an emerging leader among the Court Whigs. Nearly all of the poets and dramatists of the day were in full support of his rise to political power and hoped that he could aid in bringing about social, legal and political reforms desired by most Whigs. Unfortunately, he became somewhat of an autocrat and eventually tried to muzzle the theatre in the Licensing Act of 1737.
As a result, poets and dramatists no longer praised his exploits but called for his removal from office.

Rowe’s Ode for the Year 1716 was published and introduced by him at court. However, it was never heard by the king who had spent less than six months in England consolidating his power before returning to Germany. Rowe recited the poem to the royal Prince and Princes of Wales. Rowe was not entirely out of the theatre circuit at this time, because, as mentioned earlier, he found time to assist Susannah Centlivre in the writing and production of her play, The Cruel Gift, and supplied the prologue to the play.

In 1717, Rowe presented his Ode to the Year 1717. There is some question as to whether or not Rowe is the actual author. According to a letter written by Rowe to John Hughes, dated October 22, 1716, Rowe asked Hughes to write a poem for the new year. In the rare book archives of the British Library is a volume compiled by the friends of Hughes after his death entitled, Letters by Several Eminent Persons Deceased Including the Correspondence of John Hughes, Esq. (Author of Seige of Damascus) and Several of His Friends. There is a footnote at the end of the page on which the letter from Rowe is located in which the editor stated, “Considering the humane and friendly disposition of Mr. Hughes, it is probable, that, in compliance with this request, the new year ode for 1717 was written by him” (I:107). According to Canfield and Hesse, Rowe also wrote to Thomas Tickell, another of his poet acquaintances, for help in writing the ode for 1717.30 The

30Canfield and Hesse hold that Rowe did not write a poem for that year. They state on page 84 that no poem for the year was published.
published version of this ode is not extant, if in fact it was actually published. Rowe had become extremely busy and his services were in great demand. It appears that his “hard sayings” had not hindered his popularity as a writer and scholar.

At the turn of the year 1718, Rowe was rising more in popularity and in positions of authority and responsibility. He had published his Odes to the King and had published a new ode for the year, but before the end of that year, Rowe became ill and died on December 6, 1718. He was interred at Westminster Abbey on December 19, near the tomb of Shakespeare. According to Hale, Francis Atterbury, the Bishop of Rochester and dean of Westminster, presided over the ceremony. Rarely does a bishop of Atterbury’s stature administer the funeral of a commoner such as Rowe. However, Hale and several other biographers have pointed out that Rowe and Atterbury attended the Westminster school together and were considered the best of friends.

Rowe was the subject of many tributes and honors after his death. The most poignant and important to this discussion are those tributes written by Susanna Centlivre and published in Musarium Lachrymae: or, Poems to the Memory of Nicholas Rowe (1719). This work was dedicated to Congreve and edited by Charles Beckingham. Centlivre’s tribute was written in the form of elegy and a dialogue between Thyrsis and Amaryllis over the death of their beloved Colin. One brief quote will suffice to see her commitment to her mentor.

Help me, Menalcas, help me to complain,
To tell the Earth, to Air, and Seas my Pain.
Colin! The dear lov’d Colin! Is no more.
Come, all ye Nymphs, and Colin’s Loss deplore ... Mourn, all ye Nymphs, your Tears incessant shed,
Your Tribute’s all too poor for him that’s Dead. (Quoted in Bowyer, 222)

The one striking point in this short piece is the many references to “nymphs” rather than to people or men. It appears that Centlivre may have sensed the contribution that Rowe had made to the cause for women’s rights in his own quiet and congenial way.

During the following year, Rowe’s wife was awarded a Royal pension of £40 per year and Rowe’s poem, *Ode to the Thames for the Year 1719* was published. Tonson quickly published Rowe’s translation of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* and included a hastily written biography in the form of a letter from Rowe’s childhood friend, Dr. Welwood. Rowe’s son John was married to Judith Boutell (a cousin on his mother’s side) on August 20, at the Chapel Royal, Whitehall.

Rowe’s library of books and folios was auctioned off on August 26 by his widow. In the will, Rowe had left all his possessions to his wife and young daughter of only six months. This was unusual for this period. The standard practice was to leave everything to the eldest son who would see to the care of any women and other children. Rowe had already provided for his son John with a trust of some £1,500, which he mentioned in the will. He also left him a ring. Even in his last act, Rowe was thinking of the women in his life and provided for them.

During the next several years, Rowe’s works were continuously republished in various formats. Then on October 29, 1742, the Chapter of Westminster Abbey gave permission for Rowe’s wife to erect a monument to Rowe designed by Michael Rysbrack. It was placed at the south wall of the South Transept (otherwise known as Poets Corner).
Alexander Pope provided the inscription on that monument as a tribute to his dear friend, colleague and mentor. Unfortunately, the monument was removed from its location and placed in storage immediately above where it had stood. It has not been on public display since 1934. At Appendix D is a picture of the monument provided by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, London. Also, at Appendix D is a copy of the official document outlining the monument’s inscription, design, location, and purpose as recorded in the Muniment Room and Library of Westminster. Pope’s inscription is quoted on this document. (Permission to include the picture and description is located at Appendix E.)

An amazing feature of the monument is that it featured Rowe’s bust as well as a cameo of his daughter, Elizabeth, in profile and in high relief above him. As she reached adulthood, she became dedicated to raising the money for the monument to be placed in Poet’s Corner at Westminster. She was only 21 when she died in childbirth. Her work and dedication to her father’s memory earned her a place of remembrance on her father’s memorial; a man she could not remember since he had died when she was only an infant.

Rowe’s influence was continuously felt as the plays that he wrote were revived and performed on the stages of London for over a hundred years. Some of the greatest actresses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries prized the parts of Jane Shore, Jane Grey and Calista in their repertoire. Anne Oldfield played all three roles at the Drury Lane Theatre until her retirement in 1730. Mrs. Gifford would play both Jane roles continuously between 1730 and 1745 at
Goodman Fields and Drury Lane. Peg Woffington played all three parts on a continuing basis for nearly a decade at Covent Garden following 1751. She was considered one of the greatest tragic actresses of her day and it was partly through her choice to perform Rowe’s plays that she earned that reputation. Daly claimed that Tate Wilkinson commented that the command performance of Jane Grey before the Royal Family gave Woffington a reputation and prestige that brought in the audiences for many years (89). George Anne Bellamy, who acted at Drury Lane between 1752 and 1753, rivaled the performance of Woffington, according to Derrick (303). Other actresses who played Jane Shore were Mrs. Yates, Fanny Kemble and Genevieve Ward (in the twentieth century!). The strong, feminist heros of Rowe’s plays offered to these actresses opportunities to have their talents highlighted on the stage.

The greatest actress to play the role of Jane Shore was Sarah Siddons. Her performances were stunning and captivated her audiences. The role of Jane became one of her favorites. In an anonymous book published under the title, *Letters from a Lady of Distinction to her Friend in the Country* (1786), one letter offers commentary on a performance of Jane Shore by Mrs. Siddons. The author was struck by Siddon’s acting style which created a realism resulting in the impression that “when she appeared tottering under the weight of an apparently emaciated frame, I absolutely thought her the creature perishing through want, ‘fainting from loss of food’” (48). Her conclusion was that if Jane Shore had been as she was displayed by Siddons on the stage, “she might have wrought pity in the mind even of
the execrated Glo’ster, and we of the present age would never have lamented her piteous fate” (50). Rowe’s influence was strongly felt for nearly two hundred years.

Nicholas Rowe was a dedicated Whig who defended his nation’s right to liberty under the monarchy. He was a devout Christian who not only supported the Church of England but also practiced his faith in everyday life. He was an accomplished poet who wrote in the style of the poets of the seventeenth century and who was representative of the best of that period. He was a dramatist who knew his audiences well and wrote to please them. It is within the context of his own time period that one can say that Rowe was a grand success in life. Quoting Stephen Hales: “His conversations either struck out mirth, or promoted learning or honour wherever he went ... and the perfect freedom of an Englishman attended him in all his actions” (5).

Hales’ comment about promoting learning strikes a note of perfect harmony with the thesis of this paper that Rowe was intent on promoting a cause that was very near and dear to him through the relationships he had with the many women in his life. His greatest contribution to English literature may well have been the female hero.
CHAPTER SIX

ROWE’S CRITICS

Rowe was a highly popular poet and dramatist who was liked by nearly everyone who met him; and he seemed to be able to charm everyone from the lowest stage-hand to royalty. When Rowe published and produced *Jane Shore*, many critics began to take his works seriously and to write about them. In this chapter, I will deal with Rowe’s critics in chronological order to show that although they all had interesting theories about Rowe’s writings, they do not offer a sufficient explanation for the “hard sayings” in Rowe’s plays that deal with women’s rights. I will address each critic’s theories to advance my own argument that these hard sayings in Rowe’s plays are indications of Rowe’s incipient feminism.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM

The earliest extant critical analysis of Rowe’s works appeared in an anonymous pamphlet in the form of a play entitled, *A Comparison Between the Two Stages*, a look at the productions being presented at the two theatres operating in London at the turn of the eighteenth century. Although this work has been attributed to Charles Gildon, there is no definite proof that it was written by the famous literary critic. However, this publication follows the same format as a later essay written by Gildon entitled, *A New Rehearsal*. The two pieces are
similar in style, wording and approach. Also, both works defend the same dramatic rules giving credence to Gildon’s authorship.

A Comparison Between the Two Stages, is written as a conversation between Ramble and Sullen, two gentlemen, and a theatre “critick” named Chagrin. The arguments do not address the political or social issues in Rowe’s plays, nor do they critique the hard sayings of Rowe’s women. The approach used is entirely focused on the style of his writing and the poetic content and structure of his plays.

Concerning Rowe’s talent and writing skills, Chagrin states: “I do not see the Magnificence either in his Drama or in his Words, that bears it up to the mighty reputation it has” (101). Gildon was saying that Rowe’s plays [only Tamerlane and Ambitious Step Mother had been written at this time] are shallow and his poetry is less than lofty. So, when the other gentlemen complain that Chagrin is being too critical and that Rowe is still quite young, Chagrin states that even considering Rowe’s youthfulness, “there is not that Vivacity, that Spirit, that Fire, which is in Lee or Dryden, that Variety which is in Shakespeare, nor that Power of moving that we feel in Otway” (101).

This critic was attempting to evaluate the style rather than any political or social issues raised or even the purpose of the plays as stated by Rowe. Tamerlane had been written as a tribute to William III who was one of the most popular kings in English history, and The Ambitious Step Mother had within it a story that many could relate to. Both stories had strong female characters who attempted to manipulate and work their society to their advantage. Gildon missed this quality in Rowe’s plays, a quality that Rowe would continue to develop and
perfect in his writing. Instead, Gildon concentrated on Rowe’s inability to delineate character to fit his standards. He wrote that “the Characters of Arpasia and Selima are too much a-kin; there’s so great a resemblance between them, that with very little alteration they might change Parts” (103).

In 1715, Gildon wrote another critique of Rowe’s plays in the form of a dramatic script, the work referenced in Chapter Four, A New Rehearsal. Three years later, Gildon published a two volume work entitled, The Complete Art of Poetry (1718), in which he lays out the basic precepts of neoclassicism for English writers. Then in 1721, Gildon wrote his seminal work, The Laws of Poetry in which he vigorously defends the neoclassical principles of poetic drama.

Gildon’s agenda is clear in his writing. He held Otway, Lee and Dryden as his models. These men wrote dramas that adhered very closely to the neoclassical ideal of decorum. To Gildon, any play should offer an ordered society where everyone knows and stays in their social place. The world is upset by the villain, but right and might prevail and the social stability is maintained at all costs and individual honor is held as the highest standard. In Otway’s Venice Preserved, the play ends as the hero Jaffeir stabs his dear friend and co-conspirator, Pierre, then stabs himself in defiance of the corrupt government. The play stood as a sentinel for right and justice in the face of evil wherever it stood.

Within the conversation of the Rehearsal, Gildon accuses Rowe (as the character of Bays, the younger) of writing for the masses rather than for the art. Gildon’s intent is to hold up the neoclassical
standards no matter how popular a play might be in the public eye. To him, Rowe was no better than a charlatan by not being true to the Neoclassical ideals. He refers to Rowe’s method of getting applause and popular acceptance as the “rule of expectation” (85). Gildon has Bays describe this rule in this manner:

I pick out some of the smoothest and most sonorous lines in my play, some of the best simile’s and descriptions, and these I repeat about to all I meet, thus applying to their judgment, I impose a liking on them, and these thinking parts give a great idea of the whole; so that coming with this prepossession, they must be pleased, and they engage the rest (85).

Gildon’s argument then turns to what he perceived as a serious deficiency in Rowe’s plays: presenting truth. By the term “truth” Gildon is quite clear; he means those things that are evidently true in nature. He defines several of these truths. He says that ambition (as in The Ambitious Step Mother) is not a true tragic flaw since ambition can be either good or bad. According to Gildon, “Ambition is not properly a Dramatic Passion, it has too much of Sedateness, ‘tis too particular, it extends not to the general life, as Anger, Curiosity, Rashness, Obstinacy, and the like” (18). Then he points to The Fair Penitent and holds that although both Rowe and Otway made their heroine a whore, Rowe made things worse by making her the focus of the play, since no thinking person would possibly sympathize with Calista in her plight. And just like Jane Shore, the heroine is brought down because of her own sins and transgressions and thus is totally unworthy of the audience’s pity or tears.

In his need to defend neoclassical decorum, Gildon overlooked the fact that Rowe was writing to an emerging middle class that sought a new set of ideals with which they could identify. The thinking and
“rules” of the seventeenth century were no longer relevant in light of the new ideas blossoming at the turn of the century, ideas that included offering women more opportunities outside the domestic sphere. As early as 1696, Elizabeth Singer Rowe (no relation to Nicholas Rowe) was writing in defense of women as thinking, rational beings capable of doing anything a man could do. She wrote that when men say that women can’t think for themselves or are not able to learn, “we then must ask their Pardons if we are not yet so Completely Passive as to bear all without so much as a murmur” (Jones, 144).

Rowe’s plays, in part, addressed such issues.

Rowe was keenly aware of the subtle changes in attitudes within society and stated his intention in this matter in the prologue to The Fair Penitent which was spoken by Thomas Betterton on opening night in 1703. Although the following passage has been quoted in part, it is important to repeat here to focus on Rowe’s opinion of classic tragedy in relation to contemporary society.

We ne’er can pity what we ne’er can share:  
Like distant Battles of the Pole and Swede,  
Which frugal Citizens o’er Coffee read,  
Careless for who shall fail or who succeed.  
Therefore an humbler Theme our Author chose,  
A melancholy Tale of private Woes:  
No Princes here lost Royalty bemoan,  
But you shall meet with Sorrows like your own;  
Here see imperious Love his Vassals treat.  
As hardly as Ambition does the Great;  
See how succeeding Passions rage by turns,  
How fierce the Youth with Joy and Rapture burns,  
And how to Death, for Beauty lost, he mourns.  
Let no nice Taste the Poet’s Art arraign,  
If some frail vicious Characters he fain:  
Who writes shou’d still let Nature be his Care,  
Mix Shades with Lights, and not paint all things fair,  
But shew you Men and Women as they are. (Lines 11-28)
Rowe made his purpose clear. He was attempting to write a new type of tragedy crafted specifically for the tastes of the people of his day. He knew the classical and neoclassical teachings very well. He chose not to follow them. Instead, his plays indicate a shift from the “tried and true” form of neoclassicism to a new way of looking at “men and women as they are.”

In calling for a “humbler Theme” Rowe was reaching for stories about common people, particularly women, with problems that are just as serious as those faced by male royalty and great generals. And realizing that most domestic difficulties are seldom discussed outside the home, he calls his story “A melancholy Tale of private Woes.” He took lofty themes, such as honor, loyalty, duty, and respect, from the lives of everyday people and lifted them to the plane of heroic tragedy, with a twist. The hero would be a “Beauty lost” in serious circumstances which overwhelm her: a strong woman of average means. Rowe presented a new kind of hero. But, he had to also develop a new way to present that hero.

Rowe’s plays indicate a different view of writing tragedies that did not necessarily conform to the standards of the unity of time, place, and action as defined by the Neo-classicists. Nor did he have an understanding of truth as seen by the staunch supporters of the Neo-classicists who looked to their understanding of “nature” for truth. He stated in the prologue above, “Who writes shou’d still let Nature be his Care,/Mix Shades with Lights, and not paint all things fair,/But shew you Men and Women as they are.” What Rowe considered
as truth in nature was to reveal human beings not as others would want them to be but rather how Rowe saw them “as they are.”

Rowe was no adherent of decorum and social status. The neoclassical understanding of the nature of women as subservient to men did not fit with his understanding of nature in which a woman could be a hero fighting for what is right. Rowe may have felt the changes rising within London’s emerging modernism and attempted to deal with those issues in his own way. Within his reach were a few plays that may have offered some precedence. John Banks had written a tragedy about Jane Grey called The Innocent Usurper (1683) which combined the sentimentalism of Rowe’s she-tragedy format with the Whiggish politics of the right of succession being in the hands of the people rather than solely in the blood-line of the King. John Banks had another good example for Rowe to follow in the play Vertue Betray’d (1682) which portrays the life and trials of Anna Bullen (e.g., Anne Boleyn) with the lead character being pictured as a woman having strong Protestant beliefs who is deeply concerned over the fate of England.

Rowe had been a country gentleman who had chosen to live a middle-class life first as a barrister, then as a writer, and finally as a civil servant. Having studied the classical writers in their original languages, he may have seen the breach that had been drawn between the upper class understandings of life and travail as defined by classical literature and that of the emerging middle class of the industrial age on the cusp of full development. Rowe made a decision
to redefine the tragic hero in terms of a commoner with common
difficulties but royal ambitions and heroic strength.

Rowe’s critics called him to task for his work. Gildon reissued
his Bays, the Younger with an additional piece titled, “Some Remarks
on the Tragedy of the Lady Jane Grey.” In the article, Gildon
suggests that after reading Rowe’s play about Jane Grey, he was
convinced that Rowe new nothing of true tragedy. He wrote the
following:

It is no difficult thing to prove the excellence of tragedy, as
we find it among the ancients; whom, if we have not equaled in
this admirable performance, it is because we have either
ignorantly or obstinately refused to pursue the same roads to
perfection, which the ancients took. We have reason to believe,
that this nation has produced, and may yet produce men capable of
all the beauties of the old tragedy, if they would but study the
Greek writers, and the Greek critic Aristotle, more than they
have hitherto done. (3-4)

Gildon considered that Rowe had failed to achieve “all the beauties of
the old tragedy.” Later in the article, Gildon wrote,

Not to dwell too long on this play, which in reality has nothing
in it worthy of our consideration, as a dramatic piece, since it
is plain it wants the essential, a fable: I shall draw to a
conclusion to this head; only I must do Mr. Banks the justice to
think that he has come nearer to nature than Mr. Rowe; he has hit
it here and there, the latter never (11).

Rowe rejected the Aristotelian idea of a high-born hero who falls
to a lower estate. His work anticipated plays written nearly two
hundred years later, such as Hedda Gabler, A Doll’s House, and Death
of a Saleman. Within the milieu of the rising middle-class at the
beginning of the eighteenth century came a gradual shift in the
definitions of morality and equality. And it is within this context
that Rowe chose to introduce (in a rather subtle way) the power of an
independent thinking woman in nearly all of his plays. The late
eighteenth century theatre and drama critic Samuel Johnson wrote of Rowe’s play, *The Fair Penitent*, that

... there is scarcely any work of any poet at once so interesting by the fable, and so delightful by the language. The story is domestick, and therefore easily received by the imagination, and assimilated to common life; the diction is exquisitely harmonious, and soft or spritely as occasion requires. (390)

Rowe’s critics may not have liked the form in which Rowe wrote, but the audiences loved it and supported the productions of his three she-tragedies continuously for nearly two centuries.

**TWENTIETH CENTURY CRITICISM**

Because of the large number of twentieth century Rowe scholars, this discussion will take a representative sampling of their critical thought. No modern critic has chosen to deal seriously with the numerous incipient feminist passages in Rowe’s plays which have been outlined in this dissertation. For the most part, the few speeches in Rowe’s plays that present an argument against the inequality of men and women are either glossed over or simply explained away by these critics as Rowe’s way of making the point that the arguments should be ignored or rejected. None of the modern critics have considered that Rowe may have intended these feminist arguments to be taken seriously, and therefore they failed to satisfactorily explain the “hard sayings” of Rowe.

Sophie Chantel Hart edited *The Fair Penitent* and *Jane Shore* in 1907. As part of the edition, she wrote an extensive introduction in which she critically analyzed both plays. She held that the Massinger and Fields’ play, upon which *The Fair Penitent* was based, was far superior to Rowe’s adaptation since it was closer to being
neoclassical tragedy with characters in clearly defined roles: hero, heroine and villain. According to her, Rowe’s character Altamont, who Rowe made the villain in his work, is, at best, a boring character and robs the original story, by Massinger/Fields, of its power and sympathy. The character of Lothario, who is the real villain in the story according to Hart (and she quotes Johnson as support), is simply despicable and neither a hero nor a villain. And to make Calista the heroine was unforgivable except that her father hands her the dagger whereby she is to commit suicide. Hart stated that in that act there was poetic justice.

Hart explained that had Rowe closely and seriously studied the Massinger/Fields play he might have actually learned something about good play writing. She was convinced that Rowe was an excellent poet, but not a very good playwright. She accuses Rowe of having “no habit of concrete observation, no first-hand perception of life” (xiv) thus making it impossible for him to write believable characters. She held that Rowe’s characterizations were his greatest weakness in his playwriting because of his lack of specifics and details. “Nowhere are there those little touches that express the very savor of human life” (xxviii).

Hart attempted to explain why Rowe wrote the way he did by saying that he merely wrote for his day. Nearly all modern critics would accede that point. However, she made a strong argument for his popularity in that his poetry was so well liked during the eighteenth century that people committed many of his lines to memory. She writes that Rowe’s plays “were written for imposing declamation in accordance
with the taste of his day. ... His reputation was due primarily to his style and diction, which charmed the ear by its suavity and by its polished vivacity of manner” (xviii).

Where Hart critically appraised the characterizations in Rowe’s plays, she was quite insightful. She showed the difficulty that this great poet had in developing believable stories and plots. But Hart never did deal with the difficult passages in either of the plays she edited. She had concluded that Rowe was a close adherent to eighteenth century morality and Anglican theology and therefore could not see the incipient feminism inherent in his works. The hard sayings in both plays she edited and critiqued were some of the most profoundly feminist of all of Rowe’s plays. Hart chose not to mention them other than to say that they were the rantings of two thinly drawn characters who suffer immeasurably from their own serious defects.

Bonamy Dobrée wrote a book in 1929 which, was reprinted in 1950, 1954, 1959, and 1963, entitled Restoration Tragedy: 1660-1720. Since its introduction, this book has been a standard reference book for those studying Restoration and early eighteenth century drama. Dobrée held that Rowe’s real talent was in writing pretty lines of poetry rather than any real tragedy. He reminds the reader that “it is no shame to enjoy the plays of Rowe, so long as one does not confuse that pleasure with the quite different emotions of tragedy” (151). He then discussed each play in chronological order beginning with the premise that none of Rowe’s tragedies have “any of the turbulence or trouble of real drama.” The only exception was The Fair Penitent which he
thought had enough tumult to qualify it as tragic, but not a true tragedy.

Dobrée believed that Rowe was not capable of writing true tragedy with the breadth and depth it needed to succeed. He writes, "Rowe was not built to see things on the tragic scale: even in his plays of larger scope, it is the domestic side which he works out with most enthusiasm" (157). Dobrée then defined tragedy within the context of the early twentieth century and held that Rowe did not fit into his redefining of tragedy. Dobrée held that Rowe’s characters did not depict humanity at its best nor did they have any universal appeal. His conclusion was that Rowe’s “tragedies” were not really tragedies at all but domestic dramas.

Dobrée’s point concerning the universality of tragedy is a reference to the theories of Aristotle where the greatness of the drama was to be found in the importance of the subject matter. According to Dobrée, Rowe’s tragedies did not rise to the level of an Oedipus Rex or a Hamlet. But, Dobrée failed to note that Rowe’s plays contain tragic elements of a “common” nature, as he explained in his prologue to The Fair Penitent. Within the idea of everyday life, Rowe’s plays appealed to the emerging middle class within the context that their difficulties were just as important as those faced by kings or generals or nations.

In another book published in 1959, Dobrée argued that “It was not within him [Rowe] to produce a stark final vision; his intention was to offer something which had its notion as ... beautiful” (246). In this book, the best he could say was that Rowe offers some good
reading. "Rowe for all his faults, his weaknesses, his sentimentality, and his occasional absurdities, achieved something which is still worth reading for relaxation" (247). Dobrée did not address or even acknowledge the presence of the feminist passages in Rowe’s plays. His forte was the literature of the early eighteenth century, yet he simply ignored the number of passages by Rowe dealing with the Whiggish issue of equality.

Dobrée and Hart were literary trail-blazers in the early to mid-twentieth century, and they helped to open the doors of modern critical thinking for later scholars to move through. Their understandings were deeply buried in the textual critical techniques of their day which precluded the consideration of other factors that might have influenced Rowe’s thinking. Their methodology was considered valid research until the historiographical methodologies of the later twentieth century were developed. But, their contributions to critical studies cannot be ignored and should be greatly appreciated.

In 1971, Richard Dammers wrote his dissertation on Rowe at Notre Dame. During the intervening years he wrote numerous articles dealing with various aspects of the female characters in Rowe’s plays. It was Dammers who first broached the gender issues in Rowe’s work and dealt with the hard sayings with an insightful and critical eye. His basic contention has been that Rowe’s characters served as “indicators and as arbiters of the strict, fashionable, Whiggish morality that Rowe taught through his dramas” (i). In his writings, Dammers gave support to the idea that Rowe spoke a strong word about the inequality of
women. He wanted them to have liberty but “to accept their proper state in society” (37) which would help to keep society from a chaotic state. Thus, Dammers’ thesis was that Rowe wanted women to know they deserved respect, but respect within their acceptance of marriage as their only true profession in life in subjection to men.

To support his contention, Dammers looked at each of Rowe’s plays and found that each (except Tamerlane) had two women in juxtaposition with one another arguing the issue of inequality between the sexes. One would represent the problem of a double standard while the other held forth the “proper” viewpoint of fidelity and obedient loyalty in marriage. But, Dammers’ arguments do not hold true in Jane Shore where Jane repents of her past sins but does not accept the offer from her former husband to return to his arms and care. She preferred to face her difficulties alone and independent. Nor does the argument work with Jane Grey since in that situation there was no issue with marriage. Lady Jane was simply ready to stand for political right in the face of overwhelming opposition and even death. She was for Rowe the quintessential strong female.

In an article in 1978, for Women and Literature, Dammers dealt with three of Rowe’s strongest speeches. He acknowledged their uniqueness in Rowe’s writings. He wrote, “Curiously, Rowe’s antagonistic female characters often receive his most powerful lines ... Rowe effectively presents female dissatisfaction with the status quo in dramatically central speeches” (29). By using these devices, Dammers held that Rowe was able to bring about an uneasiness in those who were watching or reading the plays. His contention is that Rowe
was examining the questionable mores and values held by society in general. “In this way,” Dammers continues, “Rowe’s drama disturbs, to at least some degree, the collective conscience of the audience” (34). And yet, Dammers concludes the article with the same conclusion drawn in his dissertation, that although Rowe’s “distressed” females draw “atypical empathy” from Rowe and his audience, the intention is still to educate the audience in the values of the marital bond “and the responsibilities of the marriage relationship” (34).

Dammers’ arguments speak instructively of the condition of women in the eighteenth century. He argues that the conservative movement during the first half of the century called the citizenry to return to fidelity, loyalty, love in marriage, and the superiority of men over women in all matters other than before God. Dammers held that Rowe was arguing in favor of these principles. Although Dammers introduced gender issues in his criticism of Rowe’s work, he followed earlier critics who had glossed over Rowe’s strong statements about women’s rights when he claimed the straw man rhetorical ploy. But, Rowe’s revolutionary women speak well beyond simple rhetorical devices. They attack gender bias and question strict gender roles, issues that Dammers was close to addressing but never did. The words Rowe wrote for his strong females are too sharp and too close to the crux of the problem (i.e., the system that sustains their subjugation) to be explained away as a language tool.

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

Two scholars who have recently written concerning Rowe’s tragedies and the women in those plays present several arguments for
serious consideration in defense of the strength of the feminist statements in Rowe’s radical women characters. Writing in 1982, Janet E. Aikins viewed the tragedies of Rowe as works of entrapment. She held that even though the plays were quite pleasing to the audiences throughout the eighteenth century, they were able to please by “frustrating the usual expectations about plot progression in dramatic tragedy” (260). The strength of Aikins’ argument is that she explained that the plot of both *The Fair Penitent* and *Jane Shore* were drawn to move the audience to expect one ending, then would turn in a different direction to an unexpected ending. She explained that the two main characters’ assessments of the inequality of women and men are all part of Rowe’s ability to turn the plays to unexpected paths that entrapped the audiences.

In *The Fair Penitent*, the play deals with a serious predicament in which Calista has become embroiled through her own miscalculations and manipulations. Aikins holds that the play is not the story of a woman who suffers from her actions but rather an “exploration of Calista’s psychic torment as a major structuring principle of the work” (267). Calista’s misery is not necessarily that which Aristotle spoke of as an internal flaw of nature. Calista simply found herself in a no-win situation: being promised in matrimony by her father to a man she did not love. As Aikins puts it, “Calista is a victim of forces over which she has no control” (270). It is my stance in this dissertation that Calista was less a victim than an instigator of events. She chose to fall in love with a man she would not be allowed
to marry. And her actions resulted in her father’s death. Here I believe Aikins missed the idea of Calista as a protagonist.

In *Jane Shore*, Aikins holds that Rowe has also entrapped his audience to believe from the beginning of the play that Jane is already on the road to total destruction and death. Rowe uses Jane’s former husband, disguised as Dumont, as his primary vehicle for telling the story and for trapping the audience in its expectations. Near the end when Dumont reveals his identity and forgives Jane for her past transgressions, she does not fall into his arms in submission to this wonderful man who still loves her. Instead, she faces her destitute condition which ends in her death. The audiences of the early eighteenth century would have expected Jane to have joyfully accepted his forgiveness and then died in his arms. Aikins holds that by not giving the audience what it would expect, Rowe had entrapped them and given them something deep to think about.

According to Aikins, *Jane Shore*, like Calista, is a victim of circumstances beyond her control. The story is not about a hero with a natural flaw that brings her down, but rather, seen through the eyes of Dumont, Jane’s psychic struggle inside is the structuring element of the plot. The audience learns to pity and to cry for this misguided woman who has attempted to explain her actions within circumstances that include the political struggles of a great nation. Those events and her part in them are out of her control. Aikins states her case clearly that Rowe “disturbs us by refusing to provide a time-bound progression of morality determinate events as our guide through these two tragedies” (277). In the end Rowe has asked his
audience to accept the “grandeur of his unblemished penitent and his flawed paragon” as great, if not greater, than any hero that has graced the stage.

Aikins’ discussion of the troubling passages in the plays with which this study is concerned is disappointing at best. She states that the reason that Calista speaks against the inequality of women is that men in that society have fixed the system through law to restrict the freedoms of women. Aikens points to that inequality as the cause of Calista’s downfall. She writes that Calista “complains of the domination of men over women and questions why women are ‘born with high souls’ if they cannot use them to ‘assert’ themselves in the world” (267). Aikins argues, however, that Calista’s “struggle to control her powerful passions and ‘high soul’ while suffering under such ‘vile obedience’ demonstrates her very nobility to the audience” (268). That argument may be valid, but her nobility can be seen far more deeply in her willingness to speak out against what she sees as an injustice. And despite her courage and strength, she discovers that in that bold stance she is placed in a gender-defined social trap that dooms her to death.

Aikins’ theory is that the women heroes in The Fair Penitent, Jane Shore, and Lady Jane Grey, in particular, are all fighting forces against which they cannot win. The political, social and religious situations of each of these women are far stronger than their efforts to overcome them. Their speeches of frustration become the heroines’ statements against the self-serving atmosphere of their surrounding society. The odds are stacked against these women, and the men who
developed and enforce the status quo fight to hold the women in their places. Aikens believed that Rowe may have understood the dynamics at work to prevent women from succeeding, but that ultimately Rowe disappoints the modern reader because he did not make some strong statement about those dynamics.

In 1997, Jones DeRitter described the success of Rowe’s Jane Shore as a product of the political and historical situation that made up the context of its first production (an issue discussed in Chapter Three). With this in mind, DeRitter argues:

Rowe’s tragedy should be viewed as a relatively conservative valediction on an epoch that appeared to be hastening toward its end; and epoch when gender stereotypes and political realities had seemed to be in open conflict, and when the dividing line between public and private life seemed temporarily to have been blurred or even erased.

DeRitter’s argument has merit because he points to an obvious element in understanding performance: the political and social situation surrounding the production. He argues strongly that Jane Shore is a type of Queen Anne, nearing the end of her life, broken, ill, and full of problems that she can do nothing about. The audiences of that day would certainly have caught such allusions. His argument begs the question: was the audience highly sophisticated and politically astute? His answer is “of course.” But, he did not lay a foundation showing that answer to be the case.

In the course of the article, DeRitter expands the argument to show that the play is Rowe’s attempt to “substitute a passive, highly domesticated exemplar of feminine virtue for the more activist public heroine of the chronicles” (87). But, DeRitter has difficulty dealing with what he sees as being a combination of “the ambition of a female
politician with the temperament of the cast mistress and the destructive power of the scandalous woman writer” (95) in Jane’s character. In essence, DeRitter was questioning Rowe’s choice of an independent woman as a his central figure. DeRitter’s argues that the passages that address the inequality between men and women were Rowe’s attempt at hinting that Anne’s reign was nearly done, and rightly to be succeeded by a man, George I of Hanover.

DeRitter raised the issue of Rowe’s use of the martyrdom of strong, independent women in his plays. Is there anything feminist about a female martyr as I have argued throughout this paper? Rowe wrote plays that were tragic but also addressed the middle-class morality and society in which he lived. He created characters with which his audience could easily identify and understand. And these independent women had to come to their end for the sake of peace in the society and to maintain the status quo. Women seeking and receiving the same rights as men would totally upset the basis upon which the whole of the society was built. It would shake the very structure of the religious foundations of that society by disturbing and disrupting the theological underpinnings of the church which taught that women were inferior to men. Perhaps the dilemma that Rowe faced and that which his heros faced can be summed up on the epilogue to The Fair Penitent where he writes:

Italian ladies lead but scurvy lives;  
There’s dreadful dealing with eloping wives;  
Thus ’tis because these husbands are obeyed  
By force of laws which for themselves they made.  
With tales of old prescriptions they confine  
The right of marriage-rule to their male line,  
And huff and domineer by right divine. (4-10)
Rowe makes the point even more strongly when he states later in the epilogue that “you men must first begin the reformation” (28) thus calling for a change in society. Men must be as faithful to their women as they expect their women should be to them. This idea from Rowe is understandable given his deep Protestant beliefs. The church taught fidelity in marriage, a strong tenet in Rowe’s plays, though church leaders winked at the sexual freedom exercised by men. If reform was to take place, men would have to take the initiative and make changes in their domestic behaviors and in the laws. The martyrdom of a strong woman was Rowe’s way of making a statement against the male dominated society. If the status quo continues, more and more women will rise to fight the system. Their deaths would be on the heads of the male leaders of society. But Rowe also knew that taking a sweet, though strong, female figure and placing her in a difficult situation resulting in her death was a sure-fire way to draw the tears and admiration of the women in the audience (and possibly even the men). Rowe was going for the jugular, and I believe he did it effectively within his time and milieu.

Critical analyses from the past and present have not seriously addressed the issue of women’s rights in Rowe’s plays. The speeches that argue against the inequality of women and men are either ignored or summarily dismissed as aberrations. This study has been an attempt at defining those statements in gendered terms arguing for an incipient feminism in Rowe’s work as shown by a number of serious speeches about how women were dealt with in his society.
IN CONCLUSION

Rowe’s incipient feminism did not drive him to call society to task for its suppression of women’s rights. Still his characters point to a serious issue that would, in the future, be addressed throughout the world politick: the equality of all persons under the law and the right of women to pursue their lives unhindered either by regressive laws or societal pressures. Rowe’s incipient feminist views, embedded in his feminist heros, were however, tempered by his deep religious convictions and his understanding of practical politics. The plays seem to indicate an awareness that he might be relegated to insignificance as a writer/scholar in his day if he were perceived as being a trouble maker. He might have feared that his writings would be considered irrelevant and ridiculed as were the writings of the female wits by his society.

Rowe was deeply entrenched in both English Protestant religious beliefs and Court Whig politics. He believed in liberty for all, yet realized that social order must be maintained. Rowe believed that the king or queen ruled as long as the people were content with that rule; but, he also knew that the people did not elect their kings or queens, thus the idea of blood succession was still important to him. Finally, Rowe believed that all English persons were equal under God. With these assumptions and the basic argument of this paper, the following conclusions may serve as a proper closing.

First, the incipient feminist statements written by Rowe were most often uttered by the protagonist of each play rather than the antagonist. If Rowe’s intent was to defend the status quo, as some
critics have held, then the accusations against society would most likely have come from the mouths of the less sympathetic characters. Rowe does the unexpected here and uses his most powerful women to make his points about the inequality of the sexes in English society. Calista bemoans the fact that her society would not allow her to make her own choices in marriage but that she must bend to her father’s wishes. Jane Shore was outspoken in her desire to be allowed to keep the possessions left to her by Edward IV; but she had to suffer poverty without recourse because one man thought she should suffer for crimes she never committed.

Second, each of Rowe’s protagonists sets herself against the system of her day. Rowe’s practical politics and understanding of reality has these strong women succumb to the pressures and power of the systems against which they fought. In the end, Rowe’s plays indicate that the status quo had to be triumphant, but the resistant voice had been heard. In the end, Calista loses everything because she would not relent and Jane Grey had to die because she would not bow to the tied of public opinion for Mary’s reign. But, the issue stands that within the context of each play’s milieu, Rowe recognized that his feminist heros had something important to say even if they had to lose their fight while saying it.

Third, although Rowe may have had incipient feminist beliefs as indicated in his plays, he never once offered any solutions to the problems he raised. All of the speeches point to the seriousness of the problem of the inequality of the sexes in English society, but no character sets forth just how that inequality might be overcome.
Rowe’s realism in facing the way things were is frustrating, but understandable given his responsibilities, his politics, and his religious beliefs. Calista asks why men can do what they please but women must act a particular way. But she does not say women should also act the same way, an issue too controversial for Rowe’s day. But Rowe had paved the way for those ideas to be raised by future playwrights.
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APPENDIX A

AN OUTLINE OF THE LIFE OF NICHOLAS ROWE

1674  Baptized June 30 at Little Barford, Bedfordshire

1680  Education begun at “a private Grammar School in Highgate”

1688  Elected a King’s Scholar at Westminster (age 14)

1691  Admitted to the Middle Temple on August 4

1692  John Rowe (Father) died. Buried May 7. Bequeathed Nicholas £300 a year and his Temple chambers.

1693  Married to Antonia Parsons, daughter of Antony Parsons (auditor of the revenue) July 6 (Records of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Minories - outside the City walls just north of the Tower of London).  

1695  Birth of first son, John, christened Nov. 15 (Record of St. Dunstan in the West)

1696  Called to the Bar, May 22.

31Records located at the London Guildhall Library (LGL), MS. 9243, 2nd pt., 1692-1745, p. 31.

32Children’s baptismal and burial records located in LGL, MSS. 10,348; 10,349; and 10,350.
1699    Son John born, christened at St. Andrew Holborn, August 24.\textsuperscript{33}
    (This son survived him. All other children were christened at St. Dunstan in the West.)

1700    \textit{The Ambitious Stepmother} produced at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, December.
    Birth of daughter, Elizabeth, christened Oct. 30.
    Rowe surrenders his chambers at the Middle Temple.

1701    \textit{Tamerlane} produced at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, December.
    Daughter Elizabeth died, buried March 21

1702    Daughter Ann born, christened April 11. Death is not recorded in usual places but had obviously died by 1706.
    Child is not mentioned in the Rowe Estate Act.

1703    \textit{The Fair Penitent} produced at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, May
    Son Charles christened April 19, buried April 27.

1704    \textit{The Biter} produced at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, December 4.
    Edited no. 5 of Dryden’s \textit{Poetical Miscellanies}

1705    \textit{Ulysses} produced at the (Queen’s) Haymarket Theatre, November 23

1706    Death of Rowe’s father-in-law, Antony Parsons, buried January 18.
    Rowe Estate Act passed by Parliament establishing a trust of £1,800 to pay Rowe’s father’s debts and to protect his widow’s possessions and provided for his son John Rowe by inheriting the trust fund.

1707    \textit{The Royal Convert} produced at the (Queen’s) Haymarket Theatre, Nov. 25
    Translation of \textit{The Golden Verses of Pythagoras}
    A poem \textit{On the Late Glorious Successes of Her Majesty’s Arms} published.
    Son Nicholas christened April 13, buried Nov. 18(?)

\textsuperscript{33}LGL, MS. 6667/6
1708 John Ozell’s translation of Boileau’s Lutrin published with preface by Rowe.  
An Original Chapter of the Manner of Living with Great Men, after the Manner of de la Bruyère published.  

1709 Appointed Under-Secretary to Duke of Queensberry, February 5.  
The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare Published in six volumes.  
Edited no. 6 of Dryden’s Poetical Miscellanies  
Daughter Mary christened May 15

1710 Charles Gildin produced a seventh volume of The Works of Mr. William Shakespear including the poems and Rowe’s biographical essay (unauthorized?)  
Daughter Mary buried August 7.

1712 Claudius Quillet’s Callipaedia, or the Art of Getting Beautiful Children published in translation (first book only by Rowe).  
Death of Rowe’s wife, Antonia Parsons Rowe, buried February 13.

1714 The Tragedy of Jane Shore produced at Drury Lane Theatre, Feb. 2  
The Tragedies of Nicholas Rowe published in two volumes.  
The Works of Mr. William Shakespear published in 9 volumes.  
Edmund Curll issued a pirated edition of Rowe’s poems in quarto and A New Rehearsal, or Bays the Younger by Charles Gildon.

1715 Appointed Landwaiter (Land Surveyer of the Customs)  
Appointed Poet Laureate by George I (Aug. 1).  
The Tragedy of Lady Jane Gray produced at Drury Lane Theatre, April 20.  
Appointed Clerk of the Prince of Wales’ Council.  
Remarried—to Anne, daughter of Joseph Devenish of Buckham, in Dorsetshire.  
Appointed Clerk of the Presentations
1716  *Ode to the Year 1716* published.  
       Assisted Mrs. Centlivre in writing *The Cruel Gift* and  
       supplied the Epilogue, produced at Drury Lane Theatre, Dec.  
       17.  
       *Verses Upon the Sickness and Recovery of the Right Hon.  
       Robert Walpole* published.

1717  *Ode to the Year 1717* published (†).  
       *Odes to the King* published (†).

1718  Daughter Charlotte born; christened June 1.  
       Completed the translation of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*  
       Died December 6; buried in Westminster Abbey December 19.

1719  *Ode to the Thames for the Year 1719* published.  
       His widow granted pension of £40 per year by the Crown.  
       Translation of Rowe’s Translation of *Pharsalia* published with  
       a brief biography of Rowe included by Dr. Welwood.  
       His library of books, manuscripts and folios was sold August  
       26.

1720  *The Dramatic Works of Nicholas Rowe* published in two volumes

1733  *Miscellaneous Works of Nicholas Rowe* published in three  
       volumes.

1736  *Plays by Nicholas Rowe* published.

1742  Chapter of Westminster Abbey gives permission for the  
       erection of a monument to Rowe and his daughter Charlotte on  
       October 29. The monument was designed by Michael Rysback and  
       was placed at the south wall of the South Transept.

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34This Ode may have actually been written for Rowe by John Hughes.  
Note the letter from Rowe and the footnote in *Letters by Serval  
# APPENDIX B

**FEMALE ROLES IN THE PLAYS OF NATHANIEL LEE, THOMAS OTWAY, AND JOHN DRYDEN WITH THE ACTRESSES WHO FIRST CREATED THE ROLES 1667-1692**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Playwright</th>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Actress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Lucius Junius Brutus</td>
<td>1680</td>
<td>Teraminia</td>
<td>Barry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sempronia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Princess of Cleve</td>
<td>1680</td>
<td>Princess</td>
<td>Barry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marguerite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theodosius</td>
<td>1680</td>
<td>Athenais</td>
<td>Barry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constantine the Great</td>
<td>1683</td>
<td>Fausta</td>
<td>Barry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Massacre of Paris</td>
<td>1689</td>
<td>Marguerite</td>
<td>Barry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophonisba</td>
<td>1675</td>
<td>Rosalinda (B)</td>
<td>Boutell</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alexander the Great</td>
<td>1677</td>
<td>Statira</td>
<td>Barry</td>
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<td>Mithridates</td>
<td>1678</td>
<td>Semandra</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Caesar Borgia</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>Bellamira</td>
<td>Lee</td>
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<td>Dryden</td>
<td>Nero</td>
<td>1674</td>
<td>Poppea</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyara (B)</td>
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<td>Gloriana</td>
<td>1676</td>
<td>Gloriana</td>
<td>Boutell</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Spanish Friar</td>
<td>1680</td>
<td>Leonora</td>
<td>Barry</td>
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<td>Elvira</td>
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<td>Betterton</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Don Sebastian</td>
<td>1689</td>
<td>Almeyda</td>
<td>Barry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Amphitryon</td>
<td>1690</td>
<td>Alcmena</td>
<td>Barry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Night</td>
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<td>Butler</td>
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<td>Cleomenes</td>
<td>1691</td>
<td>Cassandra (V)</td>
<td>Barry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cratisclea</td>
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<td>Betterton</td>
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158
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<td>Love Triumphant</td>
<td>1694</td>
<td>Cleora Bracegirdle, Victoria Barry</td>
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<td>Ximena Betterton</td>
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<td>Celidea Bracegirdle</td>
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<td>Dalinda Mountfort</td>
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<td>Troilus and Cressida</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>Andromache Betterton</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cressida Lee</td>
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<td>Conquest of Granada, Part 2</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>Benzayda (B) Boutell</td>
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<td>Almahide Gwynn</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lyndaraxa (V) Marshall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marriage a la Mode</td>
<td>1672</td>
<td>Melantha (B) Boutell</td>
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<td>Doralice (B) Marshall</td>
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<td>The Assignation</td>
<td>1672</td>
<td>Laura Boutell</td>
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<td>Lucretia Marshall</td>
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<td>All for Love</td>
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<td>King Arthur</td>
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<td>Emmeline Bracegirdle</td>
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<td>Feign’d Innocence</td>
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<td>An Evening’s Love</td>
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<td>1669</td>
<td>Valeria Gwynn</td>
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<td>1673</td>
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<td>1675</td>
<td>Nourmahal (V) Marshall</td>
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<td>Dryden &amp; Lee</td>
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<td>Titus &amp; Berenice</td>
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<td>The Cheats of Scapin</td>
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<td>Don Carlos</td>
<td>1676</td>
<td>Queen of Spain</td>
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</table>

**Code:**  
(B) Breetches Role  
(V) Villainess
### APPENDIX C

**REPRESENTATIVE ROLES FOR WOMEN CONSIDERED**

**VILLAINESSES (V) AND DARKER WOMEN (DW)**

**1661-1700**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>PLAYWRIGHT</th>
<th>PLAY</th>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
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<tr>
<td>1670</td>
<td>Wm. Jocynar</td>
<td>The Roman Empress</td>
<td>Fulvia</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1670</td>
<td>John Dryden</td>
<td>The Conquest of Granada, Part 2</td>
<td>Lyndaraxa</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1671</td>
<td>John Crowne</td>
<td>Charles the Eighth</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1671</td>
<td>Samuel Prdage</td>
<td>Herod and Mariamne</td>
<td>Salome</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1673</td>
<td>Wm. Davenant</td>
<td>Macbeth (adaptation)</td>
<td>Lady Macbeth</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1673</td>
<td>Elkanah Settle</td>
<td>The Empress of Morocco</td>
<td>Laula</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1674</td>
<td>Nathaniel Lee</td>
<td>Nero</td>
<td>Poppea</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1675</td>
<td>Thomas Otway</td>
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<td>Deidamia</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>John Dryden</td>
<td>Aureng-Zebe</td>
<td>Nourmahal</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Elkanah Settle</td>
<td>Pastor Fido</td>
<td>Corisca</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>1676</td>
<td>Aphra Behn</td>
<td>Abdelazer</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
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<td>Olivia</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>1677</td>
<td>Nathaniel Lee</td>
<td>Alexander the Great</td>
<td>Roxana</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
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<td>Charles Davenant</td>
<td>Circe</td>
<td>Circe</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>Samuel Prdage</td>
<td>The Siege of Babylon</td>
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<td>DW</td>
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<td>The Loyal General</td>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>1680</td>
<td>Nahum Tate</td>
<td>King Lear</td>
<td>Regan</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>1688</td>
<td>Wm. Mountfort</td>
<td>The Injur’d Lover</td>
<td>Oryala</td>
<td>DW</td>
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<td>1689</td>
<td>Nathaniel Lee</td>
<td>The Massacre of Paris</td>
<td>Queen Mother</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>Distress’d Innocence</td>
<td>Orundana</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>King Edward III</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>V</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Play Title</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>Cleomenes</td>
<td>Cassandra</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>1693</td>
<td>Wm. Congreve</td>
<td>The Double Dealer</td>
<td>Lady Touchwood</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>The Ambitious Slave</td>
<td>Celestina</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>Catherine Trotter</td>
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<td>Thermusa</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>1696</td>
<td>Delariviere Manley</td>
<td>The Royal Mischief</td>
<td>Homais</td>
<td>V</td>
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<td>1696</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>The Female Wits</td>
<td>Lady Loveall</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1696</td>
<td>Mary Pix</td>
<td>Ibrahim</td>
<td>Sheker Para</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1697</td>
<td>William Congreve</td>
<td>The Mourning Bride</td>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>DW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698</td>
<td>Catherine Trotter</td>
<td>Fatal Friendship</td>
<td>Lamira</td>
<td>DW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>Henry Smith</td>
<td>The Princess of Parma</td>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>John Dennis</td>
<td>Iphigenia</td>
<td>Queen of the Scythians</td>
<td>DW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>Nicholas Rowe</td>
<td>The Ambitious Step Mother</td>
<td>Artemisa</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>Colley Cibber</td>
<td>Love Makes a Man</td>
<td>Louisa</td>
<td>DW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>William Congreve</td>
<td>The Way of the World</td>
<td>Mrs. Marwood</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

ROWE’S MONUMENT AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY WITH OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION
Below is a duplication of the official picture from Westminster of the monument in its original position in Poet’s Corner. On the next page is the official description of the Triforum which was removed from the south wall of the South Transept, known as Poet’s Corner in Westminster Cathedral. Rowe’s ashes lie just below the south wall in the lower basement of the Cathedral.
Abbey 6/1.001 (No.2)

Triforium, removed from the south wall of the South Transept.

[577] Nicholas Rowe (†1718), Poet Laureate, and his daughter Charlotte (†1739).

A tall standing monument of marble, with volutes on either side of the base. On the latter is a pedestal with a bust of the poet, with a seated mourning woman on the right side; she holds a book in her left hand. Behind and above, on the pyramid is a profile portrait in high relief of Charlotte, wife of Henry Fane, in a roundel. At the top are two unpainted cartouches.

By John Michael Rysbrack

Signed on the lower right in incised Roman and Italic letters: M: Rysbrack / Inv[nt]et Sc[pt]. /

Inscription on the pedestal in incised Roman and Italic letters, coloured black:

To the Memory of / NICHOLAS ROWE Esq; / who died in 1718 Aged 45, / And of Charlotte his only daughter / the Wife of Henry Fane Esq; / who, Inheriting / her Father's Spirit, and Amiable In her own / Innocence & Beauty, died in y' 22d. year of her age / 1739.

and on the base:

Thy Reliques, ROWE, to this sad Shrine we trust, / and near thy Shakespear place thy honourd Bust, / Oh next him skill'd to draw the tender Tear, / For never Heart felt Passion more sincere: / To nobler sentiment to fire the Brave. / For never Briton more disdain'd a Slave: / Peace to the gentle Shade, and endless Rest, / Blest in thy Genius, in thy love too blest; / And blest, that from Our Scene remov'd / Thy Soul enjoys that Liberty it lov'd

and:

To these, so mourn' d in Death, so lov'd in Life ! / The childless Parent the widow'd Wife / With tears inscribes this monumental Stone, / That holds their Ashes & expects her own. /

A peliminary design by Rysbrack, but with a woman standing beside the bust, is in the Print Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is fig. 59 in J. Physick, Designs for English Sculpture 1680-1860, 1969. A small terracotta model* for the figure of the seated woman is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Chapter gave permission for monument 29 October 1742.

[The following is handwritten on the bottom of the page]

For an intended inscription by Pope (referring to Dryden rather than Shakespeare) see The Works of Alexander Pope, Vol. II (1735) Zz. 1. 18a p. 165

*For details see LET press cuttings 1991.
APPENDIX E

LETTER OF PERMISSION TO USE ITEMS IN APPENDIX D
Dear Mr Sennett,

Thank you for your letter of 10 April and congratulations on the completion of your dissertation. You may certainly insert the photograph and description of Nicholas Rowe's monument in your dissertation, and I would merely ask you to indicate in a note or caption that the picture appears 'By courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster'.

Do please get in touch again when plans for publication are in hand. We will certainly grant permission, but a small reproduction fee may be payable.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tony Trowles
Librarian

H. Herbert Sennett, Jr
1565 Woodbridge Lakes Circle
West Palm Beach Florida 33406
U.S.A.
Henry Herbert Sennett, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia, but grew up in South Norfolk, Virginia. Following high school graduation, he received the Bachelor of Science in Education degree from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in 1968. After a two-year tour with the United States Army, he received the Master of Arts degree in theatre from the University of Memphis in 1971. He taught high school speech and drama for five years then attended the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary completing a Master of Divinity degree in 1978. He then served as a pastor for seven years.

In 1985, he moved to West Palm Beach to teach theatre at Palm Beach Atlantic College. During his tenure there, he completed the Doctor of Ministry from the Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1988, and then received the Master of Fine Arts degree (with a major in directing) from Florida Atlantic University in 1989. In 1996, he became associate professor of theatre at Louisiana College and also enrolled at the Louisiana State University to study for the Doctor of Philosophy degree. Upon completion of the comprehensive examinations, Mr. Sennett moved to Lakeland, Florida, where he became associate professor of theatre at Southeastern College.
Nicholas Rowe’s Writing of Woman as Feminist Hero
Dissertation directed by Assistant Professor Jennifer J. Jones

ABSTRACT

Nicholas Rowe was a playwright of some success during the first quarter of the eighteenth century in London. Rowe’s importance to the theatre can be seen in his contribution to the development of strong female roles. He was part of that group of Whig writers who championed individual freedom, some rights for women, and a stronger parliament. It is my contention that Rowe was an “incipient” feminist and an innovator of theatrical practice through his use of the female protagonist. By “feminist” I mean that Rowe wrote about the plight of women in a society that afforded very few rights to women. Within the context of his milieu, Rowe had “incipient” beliefs in favor of equal rights of women on a limited scale.

This study analyses Rowe’s life and works in order to discover how Rowe made his decision to write strong female roles in his plays. Although he was not the first to write plays strong female roles, he appears to have been the first to have attempted to develop a genre based on the female as hero as evidenced by the unique title he used for the plays: “she-tragedy.” And with the unique purpose of writing female protagonist roles, Rowe was a proto-feminist, or as I call him, an incipient feminist.