Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre: A Materialist-Feminist Study.

Amy Margaret Atchley

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APHRA BEHN AND SUSANNA CENTLIVRE: 
A MATERIALIST-FEMINIST STUDY

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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B.A., Louisiana Tech University, 1979 
M.A., Louisiana Tech University, 1982 
May 1995
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Charles Edward Atchley, Jr., and Peggy Appel Atchley, whose love and sacrifice over the years enabled me to realize many dreams and continue to do so today.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An undertaking of this kind is not done in a vacuum. Over the years, many people have contributed not only to the evolution of this work but also to my own development as a teacher and scholar. One such was Dr. Kathryn Robinson, who introduced me to Theatre, instilled in me a passion for it almost as great as her own, and gave me a solid foundation in it on which to build. I am also indebted to all my teachers at Louisiana State University whose considerable knowledge and expertise added immeasurably to my intellectual growth, especially Dr. Elsie Michie, whose Women's Studies courses added feminist theory to my critical arsenal. I would like to extend a special thanks as well to Dr. Gresdna Doty, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Theatre and extraordinary skill as a scholar enriched my understanding and enhanced my own raw potential as a writer. And, of course, a very special thanks goes to Dr. Bill J. Harbin. Not only did his classes give me a solid grounding in literary theory and a new appreciation of important playwrights throughout history, but his direction of this dissertation has been exemplary. He has unfailingly responded in a timely manner with incisive criticism that has only improved this document. I also very much appreciate Dr. Harbin's forbearance and understanding when there were delays in the progress of this work.

I have been blessed not only with the best educators, but also with the best friends. Truly this undertaking was only possible "with a little help from my friends," as the old Beatles classic goes.
I am indebted to my colleagues at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College for the interest they've taken in my work and their moral support, especially our Division Chair, Dr. Lew Akin, who has been very accommodating in arranging my class schedules. I am also grateful to Ms. Amy Burt, who has tried to lighten my load, as well as lent her discerning eye to this work. A special thanks goes to Dr. Charlotte Pfeiffer and her husband, Pete, who lugged me and a computer to Hilton Head, South Carolina, and helped me get the fourth chapter on the computer. Not only did Charlotte take me back there to work on the last chapter, but she also typed the notes for several chapters and helped me edit the last two. All of this in addition to being one of the best friends I've ever had. Another person whose friendship has always been invaluable, but never more so than these last few years, is Dr. Ray Scott Crawford, who gets the medal for "Service Above and Beyond the Call of Duty." Ray Scott singlehandedly dragged me kicking and screaming into the twentieth century by giving me a computer and helping me learn how to use "Hal." Many thanks go to him for his incredible patience and indispensable aid when he'd get an hysterical call from me.

But I am indebted most of all to my family, my sister Charlyn and her husband, Marcus Pittman, whose unflagging love and support got me through the dark years. Anything I may achieve can be attributed to their unselfish gift of their time and themselves. I am particularly grateful to Charlyn for her efforts to help me get the first two chapters on the computer, but, more
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ABSTRACT

Only with the fairly recent advent of Women's Studies have attempts been made to rediscover neglected works by female authors. This dissertation examines the works of English playwrights Aphra Behn (1640-1689) and Susanna Centlivre (1669-1723) and the uniquely female perception of the Restoration and early eighteenth century they have left us. Both women wrote intrigue comedies, among other genres, within a generation of each other. Each made arranged marriage for profit and the suffering it caused women the primary object of her criticism and satire. But while the women shared a sex, nationality and vocation, not to mention a preoccupation with the rights of women, there are significant differences in the way each handled the same elements. This study focuses on those differences in four areas: themes and conventions, gender issues, portrayal of the same character types and morality.

After pinpointing the disparities using their plays as primary evidence, a materialist-feminist methodology is utilized to explore the biographies of Behn and Centlivre and the eras in which they wrote. This exploration attempts to show how dissimilarities in both account for the differences between the two canons. Since Behn was the first Englishwoman to make a living by writing plays, and Centlivre the most important female playwright in England until the twentieth century, the study also documents the evolution of the female playwright in England until women turned to the novel as their primary means of expression. The conclusion of this work is
that while superficially it appears that Behn and Centlivre trod the same thematic path, important differences exist in their themes and how they treat them. These disparities can be attributed to the women's different lifestyles and the evolution of England from a quasi-medieval state to a capitalistic, constitutional monarchy.
CHAPTER I
"RESTORING" THE RESTORATION AND BEYOND

In the introduction to her book, His and Hers: Essays in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature, Ann Messenger uses the restoration of an old painting as a metaphor for contemporary scholarship's attempt to resurrect and re-evaluate neglected material and to view traditional works and criticism of them in light of new data.1 She asserts that although lesser-known works by both women and men are coming to light "the dim and invisible figures [in the painting] are more often women than men. . . . The women, especially the women who wrote before Jane Austen, are much less known."2 Statistics confirm this assessment. Between 1660 and 1720, over sixty plays by women were produced on the London stage—more than from 1920 to 1980.3 At least half of these were by Aphra Behn (1640-1689) and Susanna Centlivre (1669-1723), yet until the relatively recent advent of Women's Studies, both the women and their works were largely ignored by critics and scholars. The supposed indecency of Behn's plays, and, to a lesser extent, Centlivre's, is often cited by earlier generations of commentators as justification for their neglect of the two dramatists' plays. Yet the works of Behn and Centlivre are no more lewd or lascivious than those of their male colleagues; if anything, their pieces tend to downplay the salacious vulgarity so prominent in Restoration and early eighteenth-century drama. Why then were these playwrights shunned, and in Behn's case, even maligned, for three hundred years?
Once we cut through all the scholarly humbug and critical rationalizations, the answer is clear: Behn and Centlivre were not fit subjects for serious study simply because they were women. This attitude is grounded in beliefs about the female sex that go all the way back to the Greeks in Western civilization. A woman's place was in the home: the only respectable roles she could aspire to were those of wife and mother. This dictum was as true for Socrates's mother as it was for women in Victoria's England. The domestic sphere was considered the only appropriate female domain. Since feminine experience was limited to the private sector, the argument went, it lacked the superior intellectual achievements and worldly experience of the male, ergo, it was not important. Indeed, what angered some of Behn's and Centlivre's contemporaries, as well as later literary arbiters, was not so much what they wrote but that they dared to write for the public stage at all.

This is not to say that women were not allowed to write anything in Restoration England. They were permitted—even encouraged—to engage in writing—certain kinds of writing: Homilies, letters, religious tracts and the like were considered appropriate for the well-educated woman to turn her hand to since those genres were concerned with the personal sphere deemed woman's province. However, women were also allowed to exercise their supposedly inferior intellect by translating the works of others. This liberality on the part of the ruling sex was due to the fact that none of these intellectual pursuits was a threat to male hegemony as they did not trespass on the man's domain, the public arena. Even published
translations by women were tolerated since translating was traditionally "considered a 'feminine' (because non-original) endeavor, best suited for women." The attitude that restricted women to a literary ghetto was not peculiar to the Restoration; it had a long and glorious history in Europe since classical times and was predicated on beliefs about the female sex that transcended nationality and epoch. Not surprisingly, every aspect of female existence, including artistic expression, was affected by the inherent misogyny of these views and the oppression that resulted from them, yet some women managed to resist and even triumph over what sometimes seemed insurmountable obstacles. Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre were two such women. But they were not the first. To better understand their achievements, and the earlier victories that made theirs possible, it is necessary to take a brief look at the history of the woman playwright in England.

While at first glance, classical Greeks and early Christian Church Fathers would seem to have little in common, there was one thing they both agreed on—the "natural" inferiority of women to men in every aspect of being. Not only did they regard Woman as inherently evil—after all, the Christians maintained, she was Eve's descendant—but also intellectually limited. Possessing nearly every Deadly Sin, especially lust, the woman needed the strong hand of a man to keep her on the straight and narrow, as well as to make sure she tended to the domestic duties her inferior intellect was suited to. Indeed, by the time Aphra Behn began writing "most Englishmen, including women
themselves, thought that a woman was by nature incapable of higher learning, being framed by God only for domestic duties."\(^5\)

Realizing early on that literacy was empowering, thus too dangerous a tool to put in the hands of sinful women, and sincerely believing that females lacked not only the capacity for higher learning but also the opportunity to exercise it since they were confined to the home, male authorities prior to the Renaissance recommended that any education for women above and beyond the strictly domestic be restricted to nuns. While their secular sisters were being trained to be good wives and mothers, a training that strongly emphasized morality and obedience to husbands, upper-class women in convents from the seventh to the twelfth centuries were allowed to learn Latin and to study classical and Christian authors.\(^6\) Thus, it is not surprising that the first recorded woman playwright in England was Katherine of Sutton, abbess of Barking convent in the fourteenth century. Between 1363 and 1376 Lady Katherine penned adaptations of traditional liturgical plays designed to rouse the waning devotion of the people.\(^7\) Other English abbesses may also have contributed to "the slow, anonymous, communal growth of the medieval religious drama."\(^8\)

Lady Katherine was able to demonstrate her ability and learning because of her social position. Before the mid-seventeenth century the literacy rate among English women outside the convents and wealthy homes was extremely low.\(^9\) This condition was exacerbated by the dissolution of the monasteries and convents. However, education for upper-class women and female relatives of learned men was
promoted by Renaissance humanists who thus gave great impetus to
the development of female literary activity. When Elizabeth Tudor
became Queen Elizabeth I in 1558, fathers began to encourage their
daughters to study Latin and Greek, to do translations, to write
poetry, and to participate in the religious dialogues of the day so as
to make them fit members of the intellectually accomplished monarch's
court.10 Thus, most of the women who wrote in the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries were of the privileged caste and labored in
some of the same genres as men. While they wrote closet dramas,
masques and pastoral entertainments, Renaissance noblewomen were
particularly encouraged by profuse praise to produce translations.
Thus it was that the first play by a woman published in England was
a translation of the Marc-Antoine of Robert Garnier (1534-1590).11
Antonie, written in 1590 and printed in 1592, was the work of Mary
Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621) and Sir Philip
Sidney's sister. Although never intended for acting, this tragedy in
the Senecan tradition was widely influential and spawned numerous
Senecan imitations. The Countess also published a dramatic dialogue,
a pastoral containing ten six-line stanzas called Thenot and Piers in
Praise of Astraea (1602), the first original dramatic verse written by
a woman to appear in print. Although until recently remembered more
for being a patron of literature, Mary Sidney, along with other
Renaissance female translators, played a seminal role in creating an
English literary vernacular in their translations,12 and Lady Mary
herself was perhaps "the first author in English to show a method of
dramatic exposition working directly through poetry."13 Perhaps
because of the Countess of Pembroke's example, Elizabeth Tanfield Cary (1586-1639), later Viscountess Falkland, wrote and published the first full-length original play by a woman in England. Written in 1602 and published in 1613, this Senecan tragedy was called Mariam and, like Antonie, was never intended for acting.

Antonie and Mariam were closet dramas because it was considered vulgar to write for the public stage. In spite of what seemed like progress for the Renaissance noblewoman, in actuality the old medieval beliefs about women and their place in the scheme of things were little changed. Although Renaissance curricula were largely the same for men and women, the old distinction concerning spheres of influence still dictated that men should use their abilities in the public domain while women confined themselves to the private sector. Education for women was not an end in itself but was geared towards restraining Woman's "natural" weak moral character so as to make her fit for the only role she was created for—that of a wife.

Above all she was to be chaste in thought and action. . . . She was to tend to her household duties industriously, so as not to waste her husband's goods; she must be silent much of the time and not speak out or argue, so as not to be considered a shrew; and she must never be witty or clever lest she become a shameless temptress of men. Thus, certain kinds of writing such as translations and devotional texts were deemed appropriate for educated women because they were thought to teach moral lessons and were not a threat to the divinely ordained hierarchy that made women vassals to men.

The modicum of intellectual freedom women in England gained under the Tudors (1485-1603) was vitiated by the accession of James Stuart to the throne. During the reign of the deeply misogynistic
James I (1603-1625), women lost much of the ground they had won, a situation Charles I's queen, Henrietta Maria (1609-1669), was determined to remedy. While not a literary figure, Charles's French queen had a profound effect on the English stage. Her attempts to raise the status of women resulted in the platonic cult of the précieuse, which promoted the idea that women had the ability to refine the grosser sensibilities of men. She encouraged her courtiers to write plays illustrating her theories, thus the gentleman playwright was born: the onus on writing for the public stage would disappear by the Restoration. Indeed, the young queen herself had written a pastoral play and masque she also had directed and acted in during her first year in England (1626). However, the appearance of royalty on the stage shocked some of Charles's more conservative courtiers and other influential people who thoroughly disapproved of a woman's intrusion into a public arena, and a queen at that. Henrietta Maria wrote no more plays but she continued to act in amateur theatricals in her private apartments. Soon amateur theatricals became common in polite circles so that by 1660 women were allowed to act on the public stage. As Nancy Cotton points out, "The admission of actresses to the stage was important for women playwrights because as actresses women for the first time obtained theatrical apprenticeship. By the eighteenth century there would be a number of actress-playwrights." Not only did the queen liberalize aristocratic attitudes towards actresses but also towards the commercial stage. The first English queen to attend plays at public theatres, she prevailed upon her husband "to do what no English
king had done before—he looked over scripts and even suggested plots for several plays written by others.\textsuperscript{19}

Perhaps due to the changing attitudes toward actresses and the commercial stage, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), was able to achieve another milestone for the woman playwright in England in the early years of the Restoration. The first Englishwoman to publish extensively in several different genres, she was also the first to publish collections of plays and has been called "England's first feminist playwright."\textsuperscript{20} Her \textit{Plays}, a collection of closet dramas, was published in 1662, and in 1668, she introduced a smaller collection, \textit{Plays Never Before Printed}. While her works have dubious literary value, they are historically significant as early feminist statements, particularly the latter anthology which contains "some of the most ardently feminist plays ever written."\textsuperscript{21} Perhaps because of their subversive tenor and uncertain artistic merit, the duchess's plays were never performed: That honor went to Katherine Fowler Philips (1632-1664), "the matchless Orinda."\textsuperscript{22} Philips, who married into the gentry and was admitted to aristocratic circles, achieved prominence in that time-honored, "feminine" endeavor, translation. However, since Restoration translations in their own time were considered equivalent to original works, \textit{Pompey}, Philips's translation of Pierre Corneille's \textit{Pompee}, may be said to have been the first dramatic work by a woman produced on the public stage when it premiered at the Theatre Royal in Dublin in February 1663. The first rhymed English translation of a French tragedy, \textit{Pompey} was a sensational success in its own period and is now considered the best
Restoration translation of its kind. Philips was translating Corneille's *Horace* when she died in 1664. The manuscript was completed by Sir John Denham, and the play was produced at court on February 4, 1668. Philips's successes with *Pompey* and *Horace* are historically significant because they signal that conditions were favorable for the entrance of women into the profession of playwriting. Indeed, a year after *Horace* was produced, the first original play by an Englishwoman was performed on the public stage. Titled *Marcelia; or, The Treacherous Friend*, it was written by one Frances Boothby and mounted by the King's Company in the late summer of 1669. Having distinguished herself by this achievement, Boothby promptly retreated into the mists of time and was never heard from again. It was left to another woman to pick up the gauntlet.

That woman was Aphra Behn (1640-1689), whose first play was produced a year after *Marcelia* in 1670. Many things distinguished Behn from her upper-class and respectable predecessors. While she was probably of the gentry, she lacked the financial resources to live a life of lady-like leisure; she was, as she put it, "forced to write for Bread, and not ashamed to owne it." Thus, she found herself compelled not only to enter that traditionally male preserve, the public arena, but also to compete with men, a definite challenge to male hegemony. Since her very existence depended on the success of her pen, Behn wrote to please her audience, and that audience had only one thing on its mind--sex. As a result of giving the public what it wanted and writing the same kind of plays as her male colleagues, Behn was castigated and reviled as being "a scandal to
modesty." She was a victim of the same kind of misogynistic prejudice that had confined learned women in convents in the Middle Ages and prevented Renaissance noblewomen from excelling in certain kinds of literature deemed unfit for females. It was considered shocking by some that a woman would violate feminine "modesty" by aggressively promoting her own work, that said work being enough to bring a blush to any respectable lady's cheek. The "matchless Orinda" would never have done it!

Behn's private life did nothing to help her public cause— that of being accepted on the same terms as males. In her plays she insisted on sexual equality between the sexes; she herself made no bones about her own several lovers. Unlike her predecessors, Behn never married, except perhaps for a short-lived union early in her youth. She was intelligent and did not hesitate to use her sharp wit to verbally annihilate her critics. In short, if we look at the criteria for the ideal woman quoted earlier, we realize that Aphra possessed none of those qualities and why she was excoriated not only by her own contemporaries but by several generations of subsequent commentators whose views on the female sex were essentially medieval.

I have gone into some detail about Behn to emphasize the enormity of what she did. Granted that Restoration England with its less restrictive moral atmosphere was favorable to phenomena like a professional woman playwright which would have been unthinkable fifty years earlier, it is nonetheless impressive that Behn, in the face of considerable opposition, managed to compete successfully in a male arena on male terms. Angeline Goreau describes Aphra's achievement:
Aphra Behn, though she did not and could not know it then, would signal a turning in feminine history, augur a whole new spectrum of possibility for her sex. Her example demonstrated that a woman--if lucky, if willing to surrender respectability, comfort, approval, perhaps even love; if prepared to risk ridicule, loss of reputation, vilification or attack--might declare her autonomy and make a living by writing in an age when her only social and economic alternative was to marry or to find a wealthy 'protector.' She was both sign and cause: the wave of women writers who came after would have inevitably come, but for her immediate successors the ground she gained was important.26

Her success merits her something better than a footnote in history since she was the foot in the door through which subsequent female playwrights, like Susanna Centlivre, were able to gain admittance to a world denied their predecessors. Behn was a ground-breaker; Centlivre took the baton and ran with it, earning herself a place in history as the only major female playwright in England after Behn until the twentieth century. For these reasons, if for nothing else, Behn and Centlivre are significant.

In addition to the historical significance of their creators, the works of Behn and Centlivre are worthy of study for their own sake. Behn, the most prolific writer of her time besides Dryden, produced works in several genres that equalled or surpassed those of her male colleagues. Centlivre's plays were immensely popular during her lifetime, and some kept the stage well into the nineteenth century. The purpose of this study, however, is not to examine the artistic merits of both canons--that is taken as a given--but to investigate how the immutable fact of their sex affected Behn and Centlivre's works. Many scholars are beginning to stress "that women's historical experience often differs from men's regarding changing property relations, institutional control, religious and social ideologies."
Thus, part of what I hope to achieve through examination of the two women’s works is an illumination of a female perception of the society of the time. Both Behn and Centlivre used the same comic conventions as their male peers but with a different aim in mind. Since both women resisted gender stereotyping and the oppression of their sex, the social world they depict is subtly different from that of the male dramatists, and social and political events in the real world affected them differently.

For example, unlike many of the gentlemen-authors, Aphra Behn wrote because she had to. She was a single woman in a world which considered marriage the only vocation for a female who would then have a husband to support her. Driven by necessity, it was much more important to Behn than to her dilettante colleagues that her plays be successful. It was literally a matter of life and death to her. Thus, she was compelled to write whatever pleased the audience, as Susanna Centlivre did after her.

Behn and Centlivre also did not have the education of their fellow playwrights. Obviously, both women had some kind of educational training, but they did not have the classical background and philological expertise considered essential for the learned writer as did their male compeers, many of whom were educated at a university, an institution firmly closed to women. Both women, but particularly Behn, deplored the system of the time that denied most females any but a very cursory education—in fact, many authorities believed a woman should be taught reading so she could read the Bible but taught to write nothing except her name—and cited their
superior education as the only thing that men had that made women seem inferior. I would argue that this deficiency in training dictated to some degree the genre in which the two writers were most successful. Both attempted tragedy—with less than felicitous results. They simply did not have the rhetorical background or structural expertise to create a consistently effective tragedy. Their lack of formal education may also account for the fact that frequently plays by both Behn and Centlivre are hybrids—usually intrigue comedies with a large element of the comedy of manners. They also wrote farces and tragicomedies, anathema to the neoclassic critics who ruled the literary world. Behn and Centlivre were not unaware of neoclassic rules—Behn is openly contemptuous of them in her Preface to *The Dutch Lover* (1673)—but not having been formally indoctrinated in them, perhaps the women were less bound by convention. Indeed, both playwrights emphasized the glories of Nature and valorized "natural" artistic expression over writing done by an arbitrary formula. Also, we must remember that both women were professionals whose livelihood depended on their appealing to the playgoers' taste. Intrigue comedies were popular, and both writers seem to have been more at home with that genre for reasons already mentioned.

In addition to a natural propensity for comedy, Behn and Centlivre may have felt an affinity for intrigue comedies because they were excellent vehicles in which to critique gender stereotyping and the oppression of "the fair sex." With its emphasis on love, sex and marriage, the genre provided an opportunity for the women to attack what both considered the most oppressive institution—forced marriage
for money. Of course, this was a common theme in comedies of the Restoration; however, as members of the oppressed "minority" themselves, I would argue that Behn and Centlivre's point of view differs significantly from that of their male colleagues. For example, Behn's plays largely reflect the libertine philosophy of her friends and patrons but she differs from them in one fundamental aspect. While the male comic writers may have paid lip-service to the suffering caused by forced marriages and satirized the hypocrisy of "fashionable" spouses, they did not seriously question the system itself nor the principles underlying it. Behn, who may have been a victim of mercenary marriage early in her life, was obsessed with the way arranged marriages oppressed women and the sexist attitude that facilitated that oppression. While in some of her plays, young men are being coerced into a forced union, more often than not the most prominent victims are women who vigorously resist attempts to subjugate them. In her plays, Centlivre shares this attitude of resistance to patriarchal domination based on misogynistic views of women. Both writers were at some pains to emphasize that women could be just as honorable, loyal and brave as men as opposed to the morally weak, deceitful and lascivious creatures females were commonly deemed to be by religious and social authorities. Their struggle to call attention to the plight of women may also account for the prominence of religious and political propaganda in Behn and Centlivre's works. Not merely content to satirize opposing religious and political views as their fellow dramatists did, the women actively proselytize not only in their plays, but in dedications, prefaces,
prologues and epilogues as well. I think Behn and Centlivre, who were on opposite sides of the political fence, were more concerned with religious and political events than their male peers were because each woman labored under the fond delusion that if her particular faction could just gain the upper hand, women would at last receive some justice. In short, I would argue that the plays of Behn and Centlivre have a didactic function not inherent in those of their male colleagues which makes them significantly different from the rest of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century canon.

An exploration of that difference would go far in "restoring the picture," to use Ann Messenger's metaphor, which is why I undertook this study. I agree with Mary R. Mahl and Helene Koon who have written of women authors that "their acceptance or rejection of contemporary values provides a distinctive insight into a past world from which the present has emerged." Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre are particularly illuminating in this respect as both women shared a sex, nationality and vocation but differed profoundly in their acceptance or rejection of certain contemporary values. What those differences are and how the values themselves may have changed over time are at the heart of my work. Thus, I will analyze the plays of both women focusing on the disparities between their works, especially in the area of gender issues. An attempt will be made to discover the factors responsible for these disparities and determine how they affected the development of the female playwright in England. I have chosen a materialist-feminist methodology to accomplish these tasks, an approach which entails a thorough
examination of the entire context in which texts are produced with special attention to the biographies of both authors and the social, political and economic conditions under which they wrote. I have adopted this method to avoid the kind of scholarly "sin of omission" described in this anecdote:

There was a time when such a distinguished critic of the novel as Ian Watt could observe that "the marriage of the protagonist usually leads to a rise in the social and economic status of the bride, not the bridegroom," and conclusively attribute this pattern to the preponderance of women in the novel-reading public, thus completely ignoring the more pertinent legal explanation that a woman's money in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was almost totally controlled by the men in the family—were a heiress to marry a butler, she could find herself reduced to working as a chambermaid; Mr. B. faced no such consequences.29

Since Behn and Centlivre's plays reflect to a large degree the world in which they lived, it behooves a scholar to know as much as possible about that world to understand why they wrote what they wrote. That is the "materialist" part of the "materialist-feminist" critique. The "feminist" part deals with gender issues such as gender construction, the depiction of the relationship between the sexes, and women's position within society.

While there are similarities between the works of both women, my critical point of view will stress the differences in plot, theme and characterization. Both authors primarily wrote intrigue comedies but there are significant differences in these areas, and I think those disparities can tell us much about the effect that changes in the social, political and economic environment had on these two playwrights in particular and other literary women in general.
Behn's and Centlivre's plays will provide the primary evidence for this study. They will be considered chronologically only in the chapter which deals with the biographies of the two writers; otherwise, plays will be used whenever they support an argument. My point of attack is basically two-pronged: 1) an examination of the differences between the two canons; and 2) an explanation of those differences. Thus, Chapter Two will pinpoint how the comedies of Behn and Centlivre differ in terms of themes and conventions while Chapter Three will focus on gender construction, portrayal of the same character types, and morality. Chapters Four and Five concern themselves with the second part of my point of attack with the former consisting of an examination of the two women's lives and the latter comprising an exploration of the social, political and economic conditions under which both women wrote. The last chapter will be an assessment of the data in the preceding chapters and a summary of conclusions drawn from them.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Katharine M. Rogers, whose statement describes the philosophy which underlies this undertaking:

Women authors must be evaluated as men are—in the context of their period and the mainstream of literature—not isolated in a literary ghetto with its own separate standards. . . . Only then will it be possible to make sound generalizations about the differences between women's work and men's and the particular contribution of women to the tradition.30

In accord with that mandate, this study represents an effort to shed more light on two women who made significant contributions to the English theatre, with an eye toward a better understanding of the plays and of the personalities and periods which shaped them. This study aims also to contribute to our comprehension of how social,
political and economic conditions in England affected the development of the female playwright and her literary works. Since intrigue comedies, the major focus of this study, deal primarily with love, sex and marriage, they are excellent vehicles for demonstrating how changes in the status quo affected perceptions of gender construction and the relationship between the sexes. Feminist scholar Josephine Donovan has asserted that "one main concern feminist critics have is to retrieve the extensive body of women's literature and art that has been neglected in the past--not only to retrieve it but to integrate it into the canon." I hope this work will be one small step toward achieving that goal.
Notes


2 Messenger 3.


7 Cotton 27.

8 Cotton 28.


10 Anderson and Zinsser 2: 86.

11 Unless otherwise indicated, all information about Mary Sidney Herbert is from Cotton 28-31.

12 Wilson xxx.

13 Wilson xvi.

14 For more information on Elizabeth Tanfield Cary, see Cotton 31-37.

15 Dunn 17.

17 All information about Henrietta Maria is from Cotton 37-40.

18 Cotton 39.

19 Cotton 39.

20 All information about Margaret Cavendish is from Cotton 42-49.

21 Cotton 48 and 44.

22 All information about Katherine Fowler Philips is from Cotton 49-53.

23 Cotton 53.

24 Cotton 53 and 54.


27 Wilson x.

28 Mahl and Koon 2.

29 Springer ix.


31 Quoted in Messenger on the back of the title page.
CHAPTER II
A "PARADISE FOR WOMEN"?

"England is a paradise for women, and hell for horses" was a
popular epigram among Continental travelers who had visited the
English court. In the Renaissance it appeared to their European
sisters that English women enjoyed more freedoms than they but
appearances can be deceiving, and what little respect and "equality"
the latter may have gained under the Tudors had largely disappeared
by 1660 when Charles II ascended the throne. Henrietta Maria's cult
of preciosity, which idealized women and emphasized their morally
transformative powers, became the butt of satirical attacks by men
whose perception of "the opposite sex" were both medieval and
misogynistic. Once again the common assumption that females were by
nature intellectually inferior to males with a greater carnal
susceptibility dominated life and art. Such a creature was a
dangerous threat to the divinely-inspired hierarchy so every attempt
was made to confine women firmly in the home where they were
constantly exhorted to be moral exemplars in their limited roles of
wife and mother. Exacerbating the implicit misogyny of this attitude
was a new awareness of sexuality: "[T]he new acknowledgement of
human sexual needs only added to the fear and antagonism male
writers felt toward women."2

This new awareness of sexuality took center stage in Restoration
England due in large part to the violent reaction of Charles II and
his courtiers against the austerity and severity of their Puritan
predecessors. Having chafed under years of Puritan restraint or
endured exile, the aristocracy let themselves go with a vengeance so that "promiscuity, systematic frivolity, and extravagance were adhered to as a social norm": "Adultery was part of the calling of a gentleman, as essential to his place in society as fluency in French, a wig, or a sword at his side." The moral tone of the court was set by the "Merry Monarch" himself with his openly acknowledged mistresses and illegitimate offspring. The cynicism of his courtiers reflected that of Charles himself: His contemporary, Gilbert Burnet, observed that the king "had a very ill opinion both of men and women; and did not think there was either sincerity or chastity in the world out of principle." The licentious atmosphere of the court was disastrous for women who found themselves downgraded from human beings to sexual objects. Thomas Babington Macaulay describes the consequences of the so-called "sexual revolution" for the ladies:

Unbridled debauchery, the natural consequence of unnatural severity, was the prevailing fashion in those days, involving, of course, the moral degradation of women. It was good taste to idolise feminine beauty in a coarse and shameless manner. Admiration and desire aroused by women was very rarely combined with respect and real attachment or with any kind of chivalrous feeling for them, and the qualities which fitted them to play the part of companion, adviser and trustworthy friend, repelled the libertines of Whitehall instead of attracting them.

Thus, the misogyny of society at large was reflected by the "wits" who dominated Charles's court and the social scene.

As proponents of the "sexual revolution," the gallants paid lip-service to the idea that women were entitled to the same sexual freedom as men, claiming to reject traditional views of women. However, they not only subscribed to received ideas about females but added to them a physical repulsion for feminine sexuality. The wits
were obsessed with the possibility that women could have their own sexual desires instead of merely serving as passive receptacles for male gratification. The fear and antagonism this aroused in them contributed to their cynical and heartless treatment of women. In direct contrast to the neoplatonism of an earlier age, the rakes had declared love obsolete, considering it "an elaborate myth to cover what was really no more than sexual desire pressing to be satisfied." Chastity and fidelity were out of fashion, as was any respect for women; thus, ladies were seduced, then dropped as soon as they succumbed. Believing that "Desire must find its expression wherever and whenever it arises," the

proponent of the 'new sexuality' of the 1660s gave his mistress no commitments and no reassurances—except that of his own capriciousness. The only pledge a woman might have in an affair with a wit was the certainty that he would sooner or later abandon her for some fresher adventure and probably prove unfaithful even before.

Indeed, a gallant's reputation depended on his sexual track record: "'[I]f you wished to be excused in society,' wrote Lord Buckhurst, 'say that cunt detained thee.'"

Conversely, a woman who emulated these "liberal" wits was despised as being a whore. Even though the libertines had declared their contempt for all notions about feminine "modesty," they themselves still adhered to them. They took great pains to seduce a woman but once she had submitted they hated her for it, claiming, as the Earl of Rochester did in a poem, that "man's nature is that satisfaction extinguishes love." Male flight in the face of feminine response was so prevalent that contemporaries commented on it repeatedly. Further, the wits imputed their own faithlessness to
women: Lorenzo Magalotti, a visitor to the court of Charles II, observed, "The rule is that in all the Court of England there was not at that time any honest woman except the Queen, but she was universally reputed to be weak and not very clever."\(^\text{12}\) Given the rakes' conflicting attitudes toward feminine "modesty" and sexuality, even notorious women tried to maintain a semblance of respectability: "Sexual experience reduced the value of a lady even as it served to make a gallant more charming. Too many love affairs inevitably branded her a whore."\(^\text{13}\) This sexual double standard put women in an impossible position: If a woman tried to remain chaste, she was despised as a prude; if she submitted, she was reviled as a harlot. This no-win situation and the storm of feminine protest it evoked engendered the battle of the sexes which dominates Restoration literature, as it did the society.

One of the most conspicuous battlefields of the war between the sexes was the institution of marriage. Here again, traditional notions about female "modesty" reared their ugly heads. Marriage in seventeenth-century England was one of the primary vehicles by which families built dynasties and gained status and property. The system, however, depended on the legitimacy of heirs. Samuel Johnson articulated the traditional argument against female sexual freedom and the basis of the sexual double standard when he told Boswell that

\[\text{women . . . are the basis of property; marriage ensures the order of society and the peaceful and legal transmission of property. Adultery throws all that in doubt. 'Confusion of progeny constitutes the essence of the crime; and therefore a woman who breaks her marriage vows is much more criminal than a man who does it.' . . . I asked him if it was not hard} \]
that one deviation from chastity should so absolutely ruin a young woman. JOHNSON: 'Why, no, Sir; it is the great principle which she is taught. When she has given up that principle, she has given up every notion of female honor and virtue, which are all included in chastity.'

Thus, a man could enjoy unlimited sexual privileges, while his sister, whose only value to her family lay in her marriageability, had to avoid even a hint of "immodesty" since her most important asset, outside of her dowry, was her virginity.

This inequitable state of affairs did not end at marriage. Unlike his wife, a gentleman had sexual alternatives because of the widespread belief that a wife should turn a blind eye to her husband's extra-marital affairs. Indeed, being a wife among the upper classes at this time often meant being confined to a lonely countryhouse far from London for most of one's life while one's spouse was free to do as he liked in London. This confinement was usually an attempt to keep intact family "honor," which both fathers and husbands associated with a woman's chastity.

The arranged-marriage system was predicated on the belief that women were the property of the men in their lives--first fathers, then husbands--and the perception of marriage as a commercial arrangement between two families, love being a purely secondary matter that was the duty of the already married. Marriage for money was the rule rather than the exception, especially among the upper classes when fortunes were at stake. Francis Osborne expressed the common view: "He that takes a wife wanting money is a slave to his affections, doing the basest of drudgeries without wages." A marriage settlement was negotiated like any other business contract.
as it involved setting amounts for what the bride would bring to the union, her dowry or "portion," and the size of the "jointure," the money or property that would be settled on her by her husband should she out-live him.\textsuperscript{18} With money at stake, the vital decision of whom one would marry was usually not left up to the young people. While it was legal in England for a boy of fourteen and a girl of twelve to marry without parental consent, parents had to have their children's consent for a marriage to be valid. Theoretically, it was possible for a proposed union to be effectively stopped at the very altar by a simple negative answer to the question, "Do you take this man for your husband?". However, most children were educated to accept traditional marriage arrangements even though in some cases the prospective bride and groom were the last to know of their impending nuptials. Clearly, the emotional and physical needs of the young marriers were of secondary importance, though we must remember that modern ideals of romantic marriage were not part of seventeenth-century culture. A loveless match was not always deemed a failure since the partners had not come to it with the expectations of emotional and physical fulfillment modern couples bring to a union.\textsuperscript{19} In Dorothy Osborne's words, "To marry for love were no reproachful thing if we did not see that of the thousand couples that do it, hardly one can be brought for an example that it may be done and not repented of afterwards."\textsuperscript{20} In fact, anything approaching passion (lust) was abominated; according to Henry Smith, "[T]here belongeth more to marriage than two payre of bare legges."\textsuperscript{21} While marriage for money was beginning to be attacked during the
Restoration, evidence suggests that the commercial aspect of matrimony was actually on the increase during Aphra Behn's lifetime.\textsuperscript{22}

Marriage, of course, did not free a woman from male tyranny as she simply substituted one master, her father, for another, her husband. In the eyes of seventeenth-century English common law, a married woman became a \textit{femme covert}, which meant she was absorbed into the identity of her husband, leaving her few legal rights. Her husband had sole administration of all of his wife's property. She could own nothing, make no contracts, sue or be sued, and had no legal claim to her own children. Thus, she had no legal recourse if her husband beat her or threatened her life, and she could not leave him because any money she made to sustain herself was automatically his.\textsuperscript{23}

Women of the seventeenth century recognized marriage for the relative loss of freedom it represented but the only alternative to it was worse. In the harsh reality of Restoration England, marriage was crucial to women as the only way for them to gain any kind of status. A spinster was doomed to a life of humiliation and economic insecurity so that even a bad marriage was preferable to no marriage at all. Bachelorhood carried no ignominy and, thanks to the double standard, single men enjoyed sexual freedom denied to unmarried women because even a hint of "immodesty" could destroy a woman's life. Consequently, it was much more important for English women to wed than it was for their brothers.

Unfortunately, the libertines who dominated society viewed marriage as a repressive institution, a curb to their precious freedom
and the sexual variety they valued so highly. Even though a husband's extra-marital activities were accepted with a wink and a smile from society, it was still inconvenient to be saddled with a wife who might be jealous or, worse yet, false. (Although adultery was their favorite hobby, Restoration rakes had an inordinate fear of being cuckolded themselves.) The wits also affected to scorn marriage for profit but they nevertheless wed for financial reasons.24

The Restoration gallant's aversion to marriage shaped much of the period's literature, a culmination of a trend begun in the early part of the century. Noting the lack of poems in the early seventeenth century in which spouses address each other, David J. Latt attributes this to the fact that "aristocratic marriages were less a matter of passion than of policy."25 If passion was missing in marriage, it took center stage in Restoration literature. The comedy of the period in particular reflected the real-life battle of the sexes engendered by the misogynistic view of women and feminine protests against it. Art imitated life by making marriage the battleground wherein male and female wrestled for domination. The typical Restoration comedy usually revolves around a rake's attempt to seduce one or more young ladies without committing himself in any way. For her part, the heroine is bent on trying to tame her gallant to a promise of constancy or even marriage without actually going to bed with him first, which, of course, would ruin her. Marriage itself is not a focus of these plays; the fun arises from watching an "Irresistible Force" meet an "Immovable Object," or, as Marlene Springer picturesquely comments, "[S]exual campaigns are deemed
artistically interesting; the term in office is not." However, it is on
the question of marriage that the different attitudes of both sexes
towards love, sex and matrimony are contrasted in comedy, and the
institution itself dramatically illustrated woman's total subordination
to man. Thus, what was simply an evening's entertainment for the
male playwright became in Aphra Behn's hands feminist polemics.

Before Behn (1640-1689) burst on the theatrical scene in 1670,
there had been few competent female writers in England since women
of all classes were brought up primarily to be wives and mothers and
given only enough education to fulfill successfully their domestic
roles. Even more of a deterrent to women writing and publishing
was the prevailing view that women should confine themselves to the
"private sphere" of the household and not intrude on the masculine
province, the "public sphere" of the world. Here again, "modesty"
kept females in their place:

The social hegemony of modesty and its attributes—virtue, honor, name, fame, and reputation—served to police the segregation by ascribing a sexual significance to any penetration, either from within or without, of a woman's 'private circle'. To publish one's work was to make oneself 'public': to expose oneself to 'the world'. Women who did so violated their feminine modesty both by egressing from the private sphere which was their proper domain and by permitting foreign eyes access to what ought to remain hidden and anonymous.

Notions about "modesty" posed particularly difficult problems for
female playwrights since it limited them in their choice of subjects
and words; the reputation of their whole sex could be blackened by
their boldness. Indeed, no less a figure than John Dryden counseled
an aspiring female poet to "avoid the licence of style which Aphra
Behn allowed herself, for this gave 'some scandall to the modesty of her sex."29

The exigencies of Restoration society, however, were responsible for Behn's "transgression." The only two social roles available to "the fair sex" in male-dominated England were that of wife or mistress, both of which made women dependent on men. A single woman had little chance of making it on her own so it was sheer necessity that compelled the unmarried Behn to become the first woman in England to support herself by writing plays. As the only professional female playwright in the 1670s and 1680s, "she was an often embattled minority of one."30 Vilified not only for her bold invasion of masculine territory but also for her "immodesty" in writing the same kind of bawdy comedies as her male colleagues, Behn often complained about the double standard at work within criticism of that time which deemed the frankly sexual jokes and situations in plays by men "wit," and the same material in her work, "obscenity." Some even accused her of plagiarism, asserting that her male lovers must have written her plays because women just weren't that clever. In the face of considerable opposition, Behn persevered and became one of the most popular playwrights of her era.

Part of her popularity was due to her talent for writing intrigue comedies, one of the most commercially successful genres of the period. Originally modeled upon the comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher but heavily influenced by Spanish comic plays, the comedy of intrigue consisted of a plot involving one or more cynical gallants who sought to seduce (or marry) a like number of brisk young
ladies, and who had to overcome or circumvent a heavy father, an old husband, or a set of rivals. Fortified with a variety of fools, country bumpkins, braggarts, fops, and half-wits (all of whom provided broad physical comedy by their appearance and behavior in farcical situations), and spiced with erotic bedroom scenes, pretty actresses in breeches, and passages of double entendre, a merry intrigue comedy was sure to please the taste of the Town.31

Within that framework, often Behn would introduce comedy of manners elements as her hero and heroine commented on the foibles and silliness of those around them, but, unlike those of her fellow dramatists, her characters' satiric attacks were frequently directed against the sexual double standard and the oppression of women, particularly in the arranged-marriage system. Susanna Centlivre (1669-1723), whose first play was produced eleven years after Behn's death, also wrote comedies of intrigue and shared Behn's concern with the forced marriage theme but her approach and treatment of it were substantially different. The following discussion will address the question of how the works of the two women who wrote in the same genre on the same subject within a generation of each other differ in the area of themes and conventions. Chapter 3 will continue our investigation by exploring disparities in the two canons in the areas of gender construction, portrayal of the same character types and morality.

Themes and Conventions
In this section an attempt will be made to determine if Behn and Centlivre used the same comic themes and conventions for different purposes and in different ways with an eye toward pinpointing those disparities. The possibility that Centlivre introduced new themes will be explored as well.
Given the subordinate and second-class status English women endured in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it is not surprising that both female playwrights were obsessed with the cultural oppression of their sex. Both were vigorous in their assertions in dedications, prefaces, prologues and epilogues that the only "natural" advantage men had over women was the name. In opposition to the misogynistic female stereotype perpetuated by society and art, they insisted that women were just as capable of honor, integrity, courage and wit as men, making it a point to list the achievements of women in several ancillary portions of their plays. Further, they argued that man's supposed superiority was really the result of his superior education; women were lucky to get any education at all, outside of the strictly domestic. Interestingly, however, both dramatists associated writing with masculinity, indicating how deeply indoctrinated they had been in the cultural mores of their time. In her preface to The Lucky Chance (1686), Behn cavils against those who have condemned her plays as obscene and accuses them of doing so because of her sex:

That had the Plays I have writ come forth under any Mans Name, and never known to have been mine; I appeal to all unbyast Judges of Sense, if they had not said that Person had made as many good Comedies, as any one Man has writ in our Age; but a Devil on't the Woman damns the Poet.32

She also pleads for "the Priviledge for my Masculine Part the Poet in me . . . to tread in those successful Paths my Predecessors have so long thriv'd in . . ." (3:187). Centlivre goes Behn one better; in many of her dedications, she has a charming habit of claiming she is not capable of adequately listing her patron's many virtues. For example,
in her dedication of *The Busy Body* (1709), she demurs, "But I shall resist that Temptation, being conscious of the Inequality of a Female Pen to so Masculine an Attempt." In addition, both women acknowledge masculine superiority, Centlivre even writing in the dedication of *The Perplexed Lovers* (1712): "Tho' we Women are incapable of serving our Country in the Discharge of weighty Affairs, we would not be thought so insipid a Part of it, as not to admire those that are" (vol. 2). The conflict between their claims of equality and their internalization of received ideas is apparent and adds a tension to Behn's and Centlivre's works absent in those of their male colleagues. However, both women claim that, all things being equal, a woman can write as well as a man can, although Centlivre mediates her outspokenness by constantly referring to the "weakness" of her sex while Behn uncompromisingly asserts women's artistic equality with men. Each also declares she writes for the same reason men do—"fame"—and complains of being robbed of "that which inspires the Poet, Praise" on account of her sex. Obviously, the women were attacked for their daring, for the two playwrights repeatedly defend themselves against accusations of plagiarism and, in Behn's case especially, immodesty. Behn was a major target for the latter charge because, unlike Centlivre, she called attention to the sexual double standard of her time and insisted that women should have the same sexual privileges as men. The lack of such an assertion in Centlivre's works constitutes a major difference in the canons of the two dramatists.
Despite their ambivalent and conflicting attitudes toward the status of the sexes, the playwrights both protested the oppression of women by attacking the most prominent manifestation of it—arranged marriage for money. Behn and Centlivre deplored the marriage of young women to fops or old misers for the sake of a "filthy Jointure" but each used the money motive in a different way. Both dramatists emphasized how "filthy lucre" makes the world go round, imparting youth to the aged, beauty to the deformed and virtue to the vicious, but Behn's treatment of the profit motive in marriage is ambiguous. She is virulently opposed to matrimony handled as a business deal, believing love should be the primary basis of a marriage. In play after play, she valorizes true love over a union based on economic considerations even though in some cases her hero or heroine has voluntarily submitted to such a match for financial reasons. A case in point is Lady Fulbank in The Lucky Chance (1686) who weds the aged, miserly Sir Cautious for the express purpose of supporting her penniless lover, Gayman. Behn's plays abound in instances where young women bestow handsome gifts on their lovers, if not actually maintaining them, which is another indication of the problematic position money holds in the playwright's works. In general, her unattractive husbands or fiancés are old, lecherous and wealthy merchants who hope to satisfy both their lust and their greed by wedding young, beautiful heiresses. Their rivals are young, dashing Cavaliers who usually espouse libertine principles and are just as interested in seducing a young beauty as their foes are; they also make a great pretense of disdaining money but don't refuse it when
it's offered. However, the rakes are not castigated for the same behavior condemned in their enemies, presumably because they are in love. Much is made of the fact that the merchants are bent on honorable marriage merely to secure more of this world's goods while the rake-heroes desire simply "natural" love—sexual union between a man and a woman unencumbered by economic considerations or a formal ceremony. A theme central to Behn's works, this view is articulated in *The Rover* (1677) when the titular hero, Willmore, responds to his inamorata's announcement that she will submit to his advances if "old gaffer Hymen and his priest say amen to't":

Priest and Hymen? Prithee add a hangman to make up the consort. No, no, we'll have no vows but love, child, nor witness but the lover: the kind deity enjoins naught but love and enjoy. Hymen and priest wait still upon portion and jointure; love and beauty have their own ceremonies. Marriage is as certain a bane to love as lending money is to friendship.35

Significantly, Willmore does wed Hellena, who has inherited three hundred thousand crowns.

Thus, Behn's plays emphasize seduction as young men attempt to satisfy their sexual appetites without committing themselves while keeping an eye out for the main chance. Unremunerative marriage is to be avoided, except for those couples determined upon it at the outset, who are usually not the major characters. Behn further highlights the ambiguous relationship between hero-rakes and mercenary marriage by making courtesans and whores prominent characters in her plays. These ladies are piously castigated by the libertines for selling themselves but the latter see nothing wrong with their own willingness to take gifts from mistresses or their attempts to seduce money out of unattractive women. For example, Gayman
accepts money anonymously sent to him by Lady Fulbank and determines that even if his unknown patroness is a hag he will give her her money's worth of love. Similarly, references to younger brothers living off the bounty of City Wives are rife in Behn's plays.

Courtesans and whores serve another important function in the playwright's works. They call attention to what Behn believed to be the immorality of bartering women's bodies for money in the arranged-marriage system. Most of her plays which feature "professional" ladies explicitly valorize women who "honestly" sell themselves over those who are "sold" in loveless marriages. For Behn, matrimony for anything other than love is an empty ceremony, not binding on those who have been coerced.

Like the fictional protagonists of her predecessor, Centlivre's characters, both male and female, make no bones about their preoccupation with money. Indeed, the profit motive in marriage takes center stage in the plays of the later writer. Unlike Behn's, Centlivre's comedies are not powered by seduction and the battle of the sexes in which the heroine schemes to win the rake who is equally determined to enjoy himself without sacrificing his freedom. Her heroes do attempt seduction but more often than not are told brusquely by their prospective partners that there is no time for that nonsense; the gallant must move fast if he wants both woman and fortune. Although Centlivre's rakes initially bad-mouth marriage as much as Behn's do, when thus confronted they quickly cave in. The emphasis is no longer on sexuality--will she or won't she?--but on overcoming obstacles such as fathers or guardians to secure a
profitable marriage. Money is more prominent in Centlivre's comedies since often the intrigue revolves around acquiring the "Writings" of a woman's estate rather than her participation in sex. Significantly, it is the women themselves who refuse to marry without their fortunes despite the fact that their lovers declare their willingness to take them without it: "Love makes but a slovenly Figure in that House, where Poverty keeps the Door," Ann Lovely tells her would-be fiancé in Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718) (3: 8). The ladies' insistence upon this condition, which provides the impetus for the comic action, arises from their belief that living in poverty ultimately would alienate their husbands. This attitude is more implied than stated in Behn's plays in which dowries are often a second thought introduced at the end or even implied; money is treated somewhat less ambiguously in Centlivre's works. The connection between marriage and money is more explicit and "upfront"; many of Centlivre's heroes are not in search of sexual prey but a wealthy wife and not ashamed to admit it. One even calls money the "very God of Marriage." Furthermore, her canon features far more wealthy women who control their own fortunes than does Behn's, especially citizens' widows who are determined to wed titled men. Thus women are not excoriated for mercenary motives as they are in Behn's works but for presumptuous social-climbing. Similarly, Centlivre draws no parallels between mercenary marriage and prostitution: there are no "professional" ladies for her heroes to preach to. Her heroines are not as open-handed to their lovers as Behn's are, and not one of them weds someone else to keep a lover in style. In fact, some of Centlivre's
heroes refuse gifts from their mistresses, so the ambiguous relationship between rake-heroes and money prominent in her predecessor's comedies is absent in Centlivre's. The shift of emphasis from the seduction that powers Behn's works to the pursuit of a fortune in Centlivre's is a major thematic disparity, both sign and cause of fundamental differences in plot, characterization and subsidiary themes.

One of those differences is apparent in the two playwrights' treatment of female sexuality. While both argued that women should be allowed to choose their own husbands, Behn's plea for sexual equality between the sexes is conspicuously missing from her successor's works. The Restoration playwright was obsessed with the sexual double standard of her supposedly "enlightened" era that compelled females to preserve family honor by remaining chaste while at the same time despising them as prudes if they were not "kind." She calls attention to this no-win situation in play after play. For example, in The Amorous Prince (1671), the rake, Lorenzo, in a rare moment of soul-searching, articulates Behn's preoccupation as he muses on why it is wrong for his sister Laura to be as promiscuous as he is:

And why the Devil should I expect my Sister should Have more virtue than my self? She's the same flesh and blood: or why, because She's the weaker Vessel, Should all the unreasonable burden of the Honour Of our House, as they call it, Be laid on her Shoulders, whilst we may commit A thousand Villanies? but 'tis so-- (4: 195-196)

Implied in this passage, also, is Behn's belief that the "weaker Vessel" had the same kind of sexual drives as her masters and should be
allowed the same latitude in expression of those feelings. If we recall that female sexuality and aggressive expression of it both fascinated and repelled the wits, it is no wonder that Behn’s comedies were both praised and censured. Her insistence that women be permitted to be as promiscuous as men without condemnation is highlighted by her use of courtesans and whores who successfully appropriate to themselves male sexual privileges. Behn’s views of female sexuality underscore the fact that for her sexual union need not be consummated solely within marriage or even result in marriage. She believed that if both partners were honest and sincere with no coercion on either side, then there was no need for "old gaffer Hymen and his priest [to] say amen to't." This attitude also reflected her belief that forced marriages were not true marriages; in several of her plays, adulterous young wives end up with both a fortune and a lover.

Not so with Centlivre. Rarely does she call attention to the sexual double standard: In *Love at a Venture* (1706), it is clear that that is in operation as the women's virtue is questioned while the men jest about their multiple lovers, but Centlivre does not suggest it should be otherwise. As for championing female sexuality and demanding equality in the exercise of it, she maintains a modest silence. This conservatism extends to marriage, which is sacrosanct to Centlivre. A major difference between the works of Behn and her successor is that the former tends to emphasize "the sexual campaign," while the latter is preoccupied with "the term in office." Centlivre's comedies feature far more married women than Behn's do.
and give them greater prominence. While Behn tends to cover over the fact that her independent, assertive heroines will become their husbands' vassals even in a love-based marriage with a man who occasionally announces his intention to treat his wife as an equal, Centlivre makes a wife's rights within marriage a major theme. Although many of her young wives hint at coercion, the playwright places less emphasis on the "forced" part of a forced marriage than does her predecessor. Furthermore, her young brides are not allowed to disport themselves with lovers; those who are tempted are usually frightened or punished into remaining chaste. For Centlivre, sex is subsumed under the heading of marriage; any other kind is unlawful and unacceptable. Her preoccupation with a woman's rights in marriage accounts for the prominence of what I call "locked-up ladies," females imprisoned in their homes by their male relatives to keep them chaste. This occurs in Behn's comedies, but usually it is a father or brother who does it, and the term of confinement is short. In Centlivre's case, many times it is a husband who confines his spouse for long periods of time, in some cases for years. Thus, what is only one element of intrigue in Behn's plays becomes a subplot in Centlivre's as a clever wife schemes to teach her husband a lesson. That lesson is the moral of most of the later playwright's works—that men should trust their wives and allow them more liberty within marriage. She held the charmingly naive conviction that a happy wife was a virtuous wife whose husband would not be tempted to roam. In contrast to Behn's demand for sexual equality and autonomy, Centlivre associates sex with marriage and ignores it; more freedom
within the institution itself is her solution to her sex's oppression. So both playwrights attacked the arranged-marriage system and insisted women be allowed to choose husbands for themselves. But Behn emphasizes women avoiding a forced marriage, and Centlivre prefers to depict the disastrous effects of a fait accompli.

This leads us to another thematic distinction between the two. Both writers point out through dialogue and action that the subjugation of women to the men forces the females to be cunning and deceitful. Deviousness and dishonesty were universally held to be feminine traits, and Behn and Centlivre persistently called attention to the fact that the unfair restraint of women made this a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, the hypocrisy this engendered in the relationship between the sexes is more apparent in Centlivre's works because of her emphasis on married couples. There is no lack of satirical hypocrisy in Behn's comedies, or Centlivre's for that matter, but in only three plays of the former do we find young wives feigning love and concern for their husbands. But this is a recurring theme in Centlivre's canon: a young fiancee or wife dissemble love for an old man and endure his despised caresses the better to manipulate him into doing what she wants. This scenario is more prominent in the works of the later playwright because of her interest in demonstrating how oppression within marriage can transform even a virtuous woman into a manipulative hypocrite.

Similarly, two factors affect Centlivre's treatment of another common theme of the intrigue genre, Age vs. Youth. One is her concern with illustrating the deleterious effects of a loveless match
for profit. The other is the thematic shift in emphasis from sexual pursuit to fortune hunting in her works. Like Behn, Centlivre contrasts her clever, virile young heroes to their lecherous, jealous old rivals. However, not all of Behn's "blocking figures" are old; many of her unacceptable fiances are young, lecherous fops. Clearly, with her use of oppressive fathers or guardians, Behn holds the elderly responsible for the miseries of the young. But Centlivre takes this one step further. Most, if not all, of her antagonists are old fathers or guardians and old husbands. The prominence of married couples in her plays and Centlivre's loathing of May/December marriages for money—marriage being sacred to her—account for the fact that she seems to refer to the Age vs. Youth theme more often and more explicitly than does Behn. In the canons of both women, younger men are recruited to teach the "old dog" new tricks, but the lessons are vastly different. Since Behn's works emphasize seduction, we watch dashing young rake-heroes outwit and cuckold their impotent, jealous foes, who usually resign themselves to the situation at the end of the play. Not so with Centlivre, who treats her old husbands more kindly. They, too, fear cuckolding, even to the point of physically imprisoning their wives, but, having been the target of a clever plot, renounce their jealousy and promise their wives more freedom, and so remain hornless at the final curtain.

In the plays of both Behn and Centlivre, their older antagonists (father, husband or fiance) are always on what each woman considered the wrong side politically. For Behn, this meant her "villains" were always Parliamentarians; for Centlivre, Tories. Behn's plays in
particular both implicitly and explicitly emphasize the heroic qualities of her young Cavaliers and proselytize on the viciousness of their enemies. Both women made politics a central issue in dedications, prefaces, prologues and epilogues, leaving no doubt where their sympathies lay. Behn made politics a major theme in *The Roundheads* (1681) and *The Widow Ranter* (1688); Centlivre in *The Gotham Election* (1715). A staunch Stuart supporter, Behn was convinced that the Parliamentarians were playing "the old Game o're again" (1: 113). The theory of the divine right of kings is a subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) thread that runs through most of her works. Centlivre, who calls her ancient Tory characters "Old Sedition," believed that the Jacobite faction was determined to install what she called "Tyranny and Popish Superstition" on the English throne so "Liberty of Conscience" and a "freeborn Mind" dominate her polemics. In play after play, she reiterates the right of a people to dismiss an unjust and tyrannical monarch, especially one who threatened the national religion. Like Behn, Centlivre makes this theme essential to the structure of her plays.

Indeed, it is possible to see an analogy between the basic plot of the women's works and the political point each was trying to make. At first glance, it would seem that both playwrights contradict their own political convictions. If we remember that at the time these dramatists were writing, the husband/wife relationship was considered analogous to that of monarch/subject, then Behn's adulterous wives could be said to have committed "treason," and Centlivre's long-suffering wives endure "tyranny." However, a closer look at the plot
structure and characterization in the women's canons reveals that those elements actually reinforce what each author makes explicit in dialogue. For example, all of Behn's old husbands, and some of her fathers and guardians, are Puritan aldermen with definite Parliamentarian leanings whose hypocrisy and viciousness she is careful to compare to her young Cavaliers' generous gaiety and "honest" pursuit of love. Without exception, her young rake triumphs in the end, either winning his paramour outright from her father or husband or becoming the beneficiary of an "arrangement" between his mistress's spouse and himself. Frequently, the defeated character renounces his political convictions and embraces the libertine philosophy of the victor. Thus, we could draw a parallel between the old antagonists and Oliver Cromwell, with the victorious gallants representing Charles II, so that Behn's plays celebrate the events of 1660 when what was to her a corrupt regime gave way to a new and supposedly liberating social order. Furthermore, if we remember Behn's fear that the Parliamentarians were attempting to resurrect the "Good Old Cause," then we can also see her satirical treatment of the old aldermen, whom she holds up to scorn and ridicule, as a kind of "warning" to audiences as to what life would be like should the ex-Cromwellians again hold the reins of power. She emphasizes the tyranny and oppression of the young by these "saints," contrasting them to her young Royalists who frequently announce their intention to treat their brides as equal partners in marriage. Thus, Behn suggests that only in the "enlightened" atmosphere of Charles's reign could women attain justice and equality.
Centlivre makes the same suggestion but from the other side of the political fence. Her old antagonists are always Tories with Jacobite sympathies. Like Behn, she attacks her political foes for "arbitrary" tyranny and unlawful rule, accusing them, as Behn does, of avarice, ambition and vengefulness. It is not difficult, then, to see her fathers or guardians, who are much more ruthless than Behn's, as analogous to the "Old Pretender," a would-be despot in Centlivre's eyes. In fact, Liberty is a prominent theme in all of Centlivre's plays, more so, perhaps, than in Behn's works, which are less didactic than her successor's. In play after play, Centlivre expresses her conviction that a tyrannical monarch could and should be deposed by the people he or she is enslaving. In The Gotham Election (1715), when Alderman Credulous asserts that the "Passive-Obedience" of wives and children to husbands and fathers should be like that of subject to monarch, Sir Roger Trusty replies, "Yes, whilst Husbands, Fathers and Monarchs exact nothing from us, contrary to our Religion and Laws" (3: 56). Centlivre reinforces this point in the recurring scenario of the old husband who arbitrarily confines his wife but is brought to his senses at the end of the play, promising to trust his spouse and allow her more freedom. If we think of the old codger as the king and the young wife as Parliament, we see that Centlivre, like Behn, is demonstrating how her particular political ideology best serves the country but Centlivre goes Behn one better: She subsumes women's rights under the heading of individual rights in general. Like her predecessor, Centlivre is careful to contrast the hypocrisy, viciousness and oppressiveness of her political foes, the
Tories, with the honesty, integrity and fairmindedness of her party, the Whigs. But Centlivre's emphasis on "locked-up ladies" suggests that these figures represent not only women but the nation itself under a tyrant. While Behn does show concern for the loss of freedom she believed would result from an overthrow of the monarchy, her pleas for women's equality take center stage in her plays. Centlivre is certainly interested in the just treatment of her sex but tends to conflate that issue with the more inclusive one of a subject's rights in a monarchy.

Similarly, while both women accuse the opposing party of disloyalty to king and country, this theme seems more prominent in Centlivre's works. Her plays seem to feature more soldiers than Behn's, and the question of allegiance to the nation tends to recur more frequently and more explicitly. Indeed, Centlivre directly ties patriotism to love: The Gotham Election (1715) ends with Lucy's couplet: "This is my Maxim in a Married Life, / Who hates his Country, ne'er can love his Wife" (3: 72). Centlivre's preoccupation with this theme manifests itself in her bitter attacks on France, which was supporting the Jacobites. It also accounts for her obsession with "factions," which she perceived as an imminent threat to the security and stability of England.

Like Centlivre, Behn points out how politics has taken a prominent place in the life of the country and also mentions "factions," but she is less emphatic about them. She reserves her animus for the leaders of the opposing party (whom she calls "the Politick self-interested and malitious [sic] few") who "betray the
unconsidering Rest, with the delicious sounds of Liberty and Publick Good" (1: 113). She accuses her foes of furthering their own interests by deliberately inflaming the passions of the ignorant with fabricated dangers and grievances. She speaks scornfully of "The Rabble... those powerful things, / Whose Voices can impose even Laws on Kings" (1: 115). To further underscore her contempt for the "Rabble," Behn constantly asserts that the Parliamentarians like only plays that have no wit or sense: A regular theme in her prologues and epilogues is how the "Monarch Wit" has been dethroned by the "Tyrannick Commonwealth... Where each small Wit starts up and claims his share" (4: 8). Not only does Behn charge her enemies with taking advantage of unthinking mobs, but she also condemns the Parliamentarians, many of whom were Puritans and dissenters, for using religion to subvert the unsophisticated. Her plays teem with bitter satirical portraits of so-called "saints," whose hypocrisy is a prominent feature of her works. Behn emphasizes what she considered the Parliamentarians' lack of respect for both England's church and God, and makes much of their aversion to the Pope and the French king as evidence of their contempt for religion and monarchy in general.

We find a similar theme in Centlivre's comedies but one that is profoundly different in both degree and kind. Behn is witty at the expense of her sanctimonious "saints" and associates attacks on the king with attacks on Anglicanism. However, the issue of religion itself is ambiguous in her plays and of less importance than it is in Centlivre's. Indeed, Behn's characters often mention church visits,
but always in the context of seduction; church is where they have
seen their next sexual conquest. In The Lucky Chance (1686), when
Sir Feeble forbids his young wife to ever go to church again, Lady
Fulbank objects to his denying Leticia "the chiefest Recreation of a
City Lady." Sir Feeble's response typifies the prevailing opinion in
Behn's works:

That's all one, Madam, that tricking and dressing, and prinking and
patching is not your Devotion to Heaven, but to the young Knaves
that are lick'd and comb'd and are minding you more than the
Parson—ods bobs, there are more Cuckolds destin'd in the Church,
than are made out of it (3: 208).

Furthermore, often her female protagonists pretend to pray to
conceal the presence of a lover from a husband or father. The only
unambiguous religious figures in Behn's comedies are the blatantly
hypocritical Puritans; the religion of her main characters is usually
left unstated and hardly ever referred to.

Not so with Centlivre. She draws a much closer relationship
between religion and country than her predecessor does, explicitly
linking political liberty with religious loyalty to Protestantism.
Leonora's statement in The Cruel Gift (1717) is echoed in different
forms throughout Centlivre's canon: "Religion is the best Support of
Power, / And honest Men are still its best Defenders" (3: 4). Not
surprisingly, for Centlivre, "honest Men" did not include Tories or
Jacobite sympathizers. Her attacks on Catholics, especially French
Catholics, are identical to Behn's on the Puritans and dissenters; both
women accuse their targets of blatant hypocrisy designed to subvert
honest men. Indeed, in her dedication of The Cruel Gift, Centlivre
calls her particular bug-bears, "Tyranny and Popery," "the two most
implacable Powers that can be let loose upon Mankind" (vol. 3), again underscoring her more explicit connection of politics with religion compared to Behn's ambiguous and less pronounced treatment of the latter. While the Restoration playwright contents herself with making fools of her "conventiclers" and subsuming religion under the general heading of loyalty to the king, Centlivre does this and more: Her protagonists, male and female, always pontificate at some point in the play on the sacredness and symbiotic relationship between church and state in which each supports the other. Sir Roger Trusty in *The Gotham Election* (1715) articulates this view when he vows to stand by his religion and country because "their Interests are inseparable; who gives up one, betrays the other" (3: 57). Furthermore, Centlivre's major characters also announce their loathing of anyone who does not adhere to the same principle, and they resist a forced union with such a person. Behn's heroes and heroines make similar statements since the unacceptable husband or fiance is usually of the "wrong" political and religious party, but she does not emphasize this theme as much as Centlivre does. Sometimes Behn mediates it by "converting" her antagonists to the "right" party at the play's end.

Not only is Behn's treatment of religion more ambiguous than Centlivre's, but her attitude toward a specific aspect of it, namely marriage, is profoundly different. For one thing, morality was not necessarily tied to religion for the Restoration playwright; some of her most immoral characters are religious, and they are compared unflatteringly to her conspicuously irreverent and amoral rakes. Similarly, Behn valorizes true love vows over formal, ceremonial vows
dictated by economic motives in a forced union. For her, since a loveless match is not a legitimate one if one of the parties has been coerced no sin attaches itself to an adulterer. Furthermore, in Behn's eyes, sex outside of marriage need not result in matrimony to validate it as moral. In her insistence that true love transcends marital bonds and need not be sanctified by the church, Behn makes it clear that she conflates religion with business. Willmore's speech in *The Rover* (1677) echoes the sentiments promulgated by most of her heroes: "Hymen and priest wait still upon portion and jointure; love and beauty have their own ceremonies." One might even go so far as to say that Behn implies that the church itself sanctifies "prostitution" in its validation of forced marriage for money.

Centlivre is lightyears away from sharing this attitude. For her, morality is inextricably tied up with religion. Many of her heroes state their determination to defend their faith, something Behn's seldom do, and her married women often do not commit adultery because of the sin attached to such a transgression. Centlivre insists on the sanctity of marriage, even if one partner has been coerced for economic reasons. Her morality is absolute; a woman's whole duty is to her husband regardless of his age or irrationality since the union has been blessed by God. Again, religion plays a much less ambiguous role in Centlivre's works than in her predecessor's since the church is not implicated in the arranged-marriage system but posited as an absolute moral authority. Indeed, not only is the connection between civil liberty and religious liberty more prominent in Centlivre's canon but she also goes one step further than Behn
and associates political and religious freedom with domestic liberty. Here we can recall the preponderance in her comedies of "locked-up ladies" who teach their husbands to trust them and allow them more autonomy, Centlivre's solution to female oppression. She draws a parallel between the husband and wife relationship and that of monarch and subject; loyalty to the monarch is the subject's duty as long as he allows the subject the proper amount of liberty. Centlivre's major themes, Liberty and Loyalty, are summed up best in Colonel Fainwell's speech at the end of *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718) when he declares, "Love and Religion ne'er admit Restraint, / Force makes many a Sinner, not one Saint," and ends the play with ""Tis Liberty of Choice that sweetens Life, / Makes the good Husband, and the Happy Wife" (3: 68).

Behn's attitude towards her political and religious foes, the "Roundheads," leads us to another difference in the treatment of the same theme. In her innumerable warnings that the Parliamentarians were playing "the old Game o'er again," she repeatedly emphasizes the obscurity and low-class status of the "tyrants" who "miserably reduc'd all the Noble, Brave and Honest, to the Obedience of the ill-gotten Power, and worse-acted Greatness of the Rabble" (1: 113). And in play after play she depicts that Roundhead-loving "Rabble" as ignorant, violent and cowardly in contrast to her intelligent, cultured and courageous Royalist heroes. Indeed, one of the worst crimes she accused her foes of was that of appealing to the degraded sensibilities of the lower classes who, among other things, were deposing the "Monarch Wit" on the stage. Indeed, very often in her
plays she advocates loyalty and duty to one's "superiors," part of her commitment to the divine right of kings. This is not to say that the aristocracy didn't take a satirical drubbing at her hands (some of her most odious fops are noblemen) but the jokes she makes about the upper classes were the same ones those very elevated individuals made about themselves. She paid that stratum of society a surreptitious compliment and got great comedic effects out of portraying unsophisticated fools attempting to emulate the "Quality." Even though Behn called attention to the fact that Quality excused faults in people which would not be tolerated were they not hightborn and imputed the hypocrisy of fashionable marriages to the need to "keep up appearances" because of social position, on a fundamental level she subscribed to the very same values she satirized. For example, while many of her heroes are penniless, their rivals are usually wealthy; however, they have acquired their fortunes through unacceptable methods—robbery, informing or trade. Yes, trade. In the rarefied atmosphere of Restoration high society, a gentleman did not work. If he had no money or inheritance, he married a woman who did. As far as Behn's heroes are concerned, the only honorable profession for a man is the military. George, the titular hero of The Younger Brother (1696), articulates this prejudice when he bemoans the fact that in England "we basely bind our youngest out to slavery, to lazy Traders, idly confin'd to Shops or Merchants Books, debasing of the Spirit to the mean Cunning, how to cheat and chaffer" instead of being "train'd up in Arms, where Honour and Renown attend the Brave" (4: 328). Thus, she draws a sharp distinction between the
leisured class and money-grubbing citizens, especially City merchants, whom she unmercifully parodies as *nouveau riche* social-climbers, if not as criminals. In short, while Behn does occasionally articulate the view in her plays that the lowborn can act nobly; on the whole, her works celebrate the privileges of those born with a silver spoon.

What Behn subordinates to the sexual hi-jinks of her protagonists, the nobility of the lowborn, takes center stage in Centlivre's comedies. In play after play, she demonstrates her conviction that innate virtue in a man is more important than a title. Especially in her later plays, she seems to contrast her "natural-born" gentlemen with decadent aristocrats, valorizing the former's honesty, bravery and industry over the latter's deceit, cowardliness and sloth. Not all of her aristocrats are objectionable by any means (some are heroes) but Centlivre's insistence that a title does not automatically confer real nobility, and inner virtue is more valuable than empty rank, is a departure from Behn, who may occasionally make the same argument but not in play after play. Furthermore, while Centlivre satirizes the aristocracy as Behn does, she becomes progressively more ironic in her treatment. What was sophisticated humor in the Restoration becomes an indictment of vice at her hands. Interestingly, both playwrights criticize the hypocrisy of highborn marriages, but they are particularly virulent when a woman weds a man for his title. In Centlivre's canon especially, which features more women of independent means than does Behn's, these females are held up to scorn and ridicule.
Another difference in the playwrights' treatment of class issues is that Behn's "Rabble" is conspicuously missing from her successor's works. Centlivre makes use of one or two mobs but doesn't excoriate them as Behn does; nor are they a constant theme in her dedications, prefaces, prologues and epilogues. This is consistent with the fact that not only does Centlivre not draw as sharp a distinction between the classes as her predecessor does, but she also does not share Behn's acceptance of aristocratic values. For example, there is no onus on hard work in most of Centlivre's plays. In her later ones, we even start to see a valorization of earned wealth over that inherited. Like Behn's, many of Centlivre's heroes are not wealthy, but none of her husbands has acquired his fortune through illegal means. While the later dramatist adheres to the old Restoration stereotype of the merchant in her early plays, she becomes increasingly more sympathetic towards that character later in her canon, as evidenced by the fact that her uncuckolded husbands are usually merchants or bankers. When a hero's rival is wealthy and unattached, many times he is either an impostor or revealed to be a useless, unscrupulous aristocrat. In her repeated assertions that inner nobility is more important and worthy of more respect than an empty title and her celebration of work and chastity in marriage, which even her highborn characters espouse in her later plays, Centlivre questions the aristocratic values Behn seems to accept and adopts a more middle-class code of ethics.

Centlivre's class bias also manifests itself in her introduction of a new element which is not altogether missing in Behn's works but
profoundly different in degree and kind. Both women responded to contemporary attacks on the stage by stoutly maintaining that the theatre was a useful social tool to correct vice by exposing it. For Behn, however, the reigning "vice" of her period was lack of wit, so most of her moralizing is aimed at ridiculing feckless fools who ape their intellectual superiors. Even then her proselytizing takes a back seat to the comic action. Centlivre, on the other hand, makes moralizing a central theme in many of her plays, attacking what those not born to the peerage would consider true vice. For example, both The Gamester (1705) and The Basset-Table (1705) were ostensibly written to call attention to the viciousness of gambling, and most of Centlivre's comedies end in speeches praising the chastity of married women and the blessedness of the married state, an anthem which has already been sounded several times in the course of the play.

Centlivre's staunch support of the wedded state is responsible for a difference in her handling of the conventional ending to the intrigue comedy, a veritable orgy of weddings. She makes it quite clear at the end of a piece that those who are already married will remain that way, and those who are engaged will marry and be faithful. Behn's conclusions, however, are more problematic. Like Centlivre's, most of Behn's protagonists end up married or affianced; however, there are several instances in her plays where it is not clear what kind of relationship will exist between the main characters after the play ends, especially in the case of women married at the beginning. Sometimes the husband resigns his connubial rights to his wife's lover, other times, as in The Lucky Chance (1686), we are not
told what will happen to the women. In The Rover Part II (1681), Willmore does not wed the young heiress who has set her cap for him but ends up promising fidelity—not marriage—to the courtesan, La Nuche. Thus, Behn is less conventional than Centlivre in the traditional happy ending, even though the latter's comedies contain women (although not the main characters) who decide not to marry.

Exotic settings are another convention of the intrigue genre handled differently by the two women. Behn makes full use of this element, setting eleven of her seventeen plays in countries other than England. Centlivre uses English backgrounds for twice as many of her plays than does the former. The Restoration playwright stresses the bloodthirstiness and jealousy of the Italians and Spaniards in contrast to the rationality and good nature of her English heroes, and she also contrasts the bravery of her Britons with the cowardice of their Continental foes. Centlivre likewise lionizes her Englishmen at the expense of the Spanish, but she is more vituperative toward the French and the Dutch than her predecessor. Since many of Centlivre's plays are set in England, often her antagonists are English persons who have adopted some objectionable affectation from a foreign country. Like Behn, Centlivre implies that the supposedly hot-blooded nations are more prone to senseless violence over trivial things than are the more civilized English. Both women emphasize the extreme restraint put upon women in those countries compared to the relative liberty English women enjoyed in that "paradise for women." For example, in Centlivre's Love at a Venture (1706), Beliza tells the jealous Sir William, "Leave then, your Spanish Airs--and put the true
English Husband on, that is the only way to have a Virtuous Wife" (2: 60). Behn celebrates the "liberality" of British males in The Rover (1677): When the Spaniard Pedro, Hellena's brother, tells Willmore as her husband he must now guard Hellena's virtue as Pedro has done, Willmore responds, "Faith, Sir, I am of a Nation, that are of opinion a Woman's Honour is not worth guarding when she has a mind to part with it" (1: 103). However, once again what is for Behn one theme among several becomes a leitmotif throughout the later playwright's canon. Centlivre stresses to a much greater degree than Behn the freedom enjoyed by her countrywomen as opposed to the severe oppression of her sex in other countries, especially Catholic ones. Furthermore, she is concerned with the autonomy of wives in particular which may account for the prominence in her works of jokes about how easy-going English husbands are more subject to cuckoldom than other men. Centlivre's preoccupation with these comparisons is part of an over-all strategy in her plays to demonstrate the fact that Englishmen worship Liberty and are willing to fight for it. In The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret (1714), Frederick tells Don Lopez about the English:

My Lord, the English are by Nature, what the ancient Romans were by Discipline, courageous [sic], bold, hardy, and in love with Liberty. Liberty is the Idol of the English, under whose Banner all the Nation Lists, give but the Word for Liberty, and straight more armed Legions would appear, than France, and Philip keep in constant Pay (3: 2).

Behn makes similar comparisons but for Centlivre celebrating England and its love of Liberty versus the "Tyranny and Popish Superstition" of its enemies has become a "message" rather than conventional chauvinism.
Summary

At the thematic heart of both Aphra Behn's and Susanna Centlivre's plays is the conviction that the forced-marriage system unjustly oppresses the female sex. Both playwrights advocated that women be allowed to choose their husbands for themselves. Behn and Centlivre chose the comedy of intrigue genre as the best vehicle to air their views so perforce used the same comic themes and conventions; however, they did so in different ways and for different purposes.

While both deplored marriage for money, Behn's handling of the profit theme is much more ambiguous than Centlivre's. The avarice of her unacceptable husband or fiance is satirized while the gold digging rake is valorized. However, often the dowry or portion of a prospective bride is not mentioned until the end of the play when the hero has already resolved to marry her. In Behn's plays, the male leads are more interested in enjoying a lady's sexual favors than in getting into her piggy bank. On the other hand, the profit motive, rather than seduction, takes center stage in Centlivre's works, many of whose male protagonists are expressly seeking a wealthy wife. While his Restoration counterpart intrigues to circumvent a husband or father in order to satisfy his sexual appetite, Centlivre's hero schemes to overcome obstacles to his marriage: The plot revolves around his efforts to secure his prospective wife's fortune as well as her person. Thus, while illicit sex powers Behn's plays, an unambiguous love of money provokes the comic action in Centlivre's.
The shift in emphasis from romance to intrigue is part and parcel of the absence of sexuality in Centlivre's works. Aphra Behn's insistence that women had the same sexual desires as men and her pleas for an end to the sexual double standard have no place in her successor's works. Behn did not link sexuality to marriage. For her, true love between two people transcended the bonds of a mercenary marriage; an unfaithful wife was committing no sin yielding to a lover, just as unmarried lovers were transgressing no moral law in their enjoyment of each other. For Centlivre, however, marriage was sacred, and any sex outside of wedlock was morally reprehensible. Instead of advocating sexual equality, then, Centlivre pleaded for more rights for women within marriage.

Centlivre's insistence on more freedom for wives constitutes a new theme, but, over-all, Centlivre treads the same thematic path as Behn, emphasizing certain issues more than her predecessor does and taking an opposite stance on some. For example, while both women sought to demonstrate that oppression forced women to be devious, deceitful and hypocritical, Centlivre emphasizes this theme to a greater extent. Centlivre's canon features more married women who are either plotting to teach their husbands a lesson or attempting to commit adultery, as well as single heroines who do not take the same pleasure in intrigue that Behn's do. Similarly, Centlivre highlights the Age vs. Youth theme, making more of her antagonists (fathers or husbands) old, and referring to the clash of generations more frequently than does Behn.
While both authors are preoccupied with politics in their comedies, again we find a difference in both degree and kind of treatment. Behn is not subtle in her satirical attacks on the Parliamentarians; clearly, we see a commitment to the divine right of kings but only in a handful of plays is this a major theme. Her polemics take a back seat to comic action. For the Whiggish Centlivre, however, individual rights under a monarch is a major theme. Indeed, while Behn takes individual liberty under the Stuarts for granted and advocates more rights for women, Centlivre subordinates women's rights to the more inclusive category of a subject's rights under a sovereign. Furthermore, Centlivre draws much closer ties between patriotism and love than does Behn, Liberty and Loyalty being her two major themes to which all else is subordinated. Consequently, we find less use of the conventional exotic setting in Centlivre's works; instead, we have Englishmen who have adopted some foreign affectation made more ridiculous by contrast to their countrymen. While Behn is certainly guilty of national chauvinism in her unflattering comparisons between Britons and their Continental counterparts, Centlivre goes further by her emphasis on the liberty English people enjoyed, particularly women, compared to what she considered the tyranny of kings and "popish superstition" that oppressed other European countries.

"Popish superstition" is one of Centlivre's favorite phrases, underscoring religion as a much more important theme for her than for Behn. Again, while the Restoration playwright satirized Puritans and dissenters for comic effect, rarely do her major characters
discuss their theological beliefs. For Centlivre, however, religious loyalty to the Church of England is inextricably tied to political liberty: the one guarantees the other and vice versa. Numerous speeches in her works link the two directly, and we are never in doubt as to her characters’ attitudes toward God and man. Indeed, one of the more heinous aspects of her villains, who usually have Catholic sympathies, is their opposition to religious freedom and intention to impose "popish superstition" on Protestant England.

Since religion is more prominent in Centlivre’s canon, being part of the Liberty-Loyalty matrix, her treatment of it is much less ambiguous than Behn’s. Behn links the church to mercenary marriages and glorifies unforced true love vows over those coerced at the altar. Her belief that a forced marriage is no marriage at all results in ambiguous endings to some of her plays in which it is not clear who has taken possession of a disputed lady. With Centlivre, however, religion is an absolute moral authority, and her plays end in the conventional cluster of weddings, although occasionally a female will decide not to marry. Likewise, her wives who are married before the play starts sometimes cite religion as the reason they do not commit adultery and only plead for more liberty within marriage. Thus, Centlivre, unlike Behn, ties political and religious freedom to domestic liberty in her analogy of monarch/subject to husband/wife.

Finally, both women make the point that innate nobility is more valuable than an empty title, but what is for Behn an occasional observation becomes for Centlivre an obsession. Although she satirizes them skillfully, Behn tends to celebrate the privileges of the
nobility and does not question the existing class structure. Furthermore, she spends much of her time attacking what she calls "rabble," vulgar and ignorant common people whom she accuses of treason and of attempting to degrade their social superiors. In contrast, while Centlivre has no dearth of titled heroes in her canon, often they have achieved their rank through hard work or, if their rank is inherited, they are inherently virtuous anyway. However, in some of her plays, she draws an explicit contrast between an untitled but noble man and a decadent, dishonorable aristocrat. In addition, one of her characters usually moralizes on the responsibility of the aristocracy to set a good example for the lower orders, a dictum completely absent from Behn's works. Furthermore, Centlivre does not draw as sharp a distinction between the classes as Behn. Peer and gentleman financier frequently rub elbows or are the same person. There are virtually no "rabble"; often praiseworthy sentiments are put in the mouths of common people. Unlike Behn, Centlivre becomes progressively more ironic in her treatment of the upper class, and she tends to emphasize more middle-class values such as the virtue of hard work and fidelity in marriage, missing no opportunity in her plays to advocate both. Thus, while Behn had a few bees in her bonnet, on the whole Centlivre's treatment of the same themes tends to be more pointed and more didactic. A consideration of each woman's handling of gender construction, characterization of similar types and morality in the next chapter will support this conclusion.
Notes


2 Latt 57.


4 Goreau 169.


6 Goreau 183.

7 Goreau 170.

8 Goreau 171-172.

9 Goreau 168.

10 Goreau 171.

11 Goreau 178.


13 Goreau 175.


16 Goreau 176.


18 For information on portions and jointures, see Goreau 77; Slater 62; Thompson 47 and 164; and Alan Macfarlane, Marriage and Love in England (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 263-265.
19 Slater 142.

20 Thompson 116.

21 Thompson 117.

22 See Goreau 220 and 221, Slater 61 and Thompson 119 on the arranged-marriage system. See Macfarlane 125-127 and 129 for the laws governing the marriage of children without parental consent. Thompson observes that the financial aspect of marriage was on the increase on p. 118.

23 For discussion of a woman's rights in marriage see Goreau 82 and 83; Macfarlane 272-273, 287; Thompson 162.

24 Goreau gives examples of this on ps. 228-229.

25 Latt 50.


28 Goreau 150.


Hereafter all citations from this work will be designated in the text by volume and page number.

33 Susanna Centlivre, The Plays of Susanna Centlivre, ed. Richard C. Frushell, Eighteenth-Century English Drama 7, 3 vols. (New York: Garland, 1982) 2: second page of dedication. Hereafter all citations from this work will be designated in the text by volume and page number. Since Centlivre's plays are facsimile reproductions in this edition, the plays are paginated individually rather than
consecutively so the page numbers refer to one particular play whose name will be given in the text or in these notes. In the case of materials which are not paginated, only the volume number will be given in the parenthetical reference.

34 Centlivre's dedication of The Platonick Lady (1706), vol. 2.


CHAPTER III
MEN, WOMEN AND MORALITY

Having established that Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre did indeed employ the same comic themes and conventions for different purposes and in different ways, we can now explore how their comedies differ in three main areas. The first section of this chapter will deal with the women's constructions of gender with an eye towards pinpointing how their depictions of men and women and the relationship between the sexes differ. An examination of the playwrights' portrayals of the same character types follows in which we examine how differences in theme and gender construction affect each woman's depiction of a stereotype common to intrigue comedies. The third section will address the question of Morality and attempt to answer the following: Did Behn and Centlivre play by neoclassic rules? If not, why? Were Centlivre's comedies more "sedate" in terms of plot, character and theme than Behn's? How? If they were not, was her critical reception the same as Behn's and for the same reasons? The chapter will conclude with a summary of all three discussions.

Gender Construction

The major thematic shift of emphasis from Behn's "sexual campaign" to Centlivre's "term in office" profoundly affects the gender construction of each author's leading characters. Behn's comedies commonly feature two or more couples who are explicitly contrasted with each other. One pair of lovers is already in love at the play's beginning; they are depicted as steadfast and faithful with
honorable marriage as their goal. Opposed to this is the rake and the object(s) of his affections; seduction and conquest is the name of the game. By far, the more interesting of the two, and the more prominent, is the latter. The vicissitudes of the plot usually involve the loyal couple in mix-ups which temporarily cast doubt upon their partner's fidelity, and their intriguing is aimed at overcoming obstacles to their marriage. The "rover," on the other hand, usually has several irons in the fire, and the fun arises out of watching him scheme to satisfy himself and outwit ladies bent on matrimony. We never doubt for a minute that the constant lover will be rewarded but the rake's progress is always in jeopardy. While Behn's gay, amoral libertines are often spokesmen for her views, their disdain and distrust of the opposite sex are vividly set against the respect accorded women by their marriage-bound friends. Behn's libidinous hero thinks nothing of lying to a prospective lover to gain his amorous end, usually dropping the unfortunate female after she yields. Similarly, the character set on marriage does not disparage that institution as his compatriot does, loudly and at length, nor is he concerned with a lady's financial status. In fact, Behn seems to draw special attention to the fact that her often penniless seducers affect to scorn money but are quite willing to take it from mistresses and admit that wealth does indeed enhance the appeal of a prospective bride. In Behn's case, she distinguishes quite clearly between her two kinds of heroes: Much of the amusement we get from her plays is engendered by watching her liberty-loving
libertines be transformed into that most "hideous" of animals, a "Husband Lover."1

For Centlivre, the distinction between faithful lover and roaming rake is much more ambiguous. Many of her male leads are libertines at the beginning of the play with similar characteristics as Behn's, especially in their attitudes toward marriage, but when they attempt seduction like their Restoration counterparts, they are not engaged in a battle of wits with their female targets, the focus of the earlier plays. Instead, the heroine usually tells her swain somewhat brusquely that they have no time for that nonsense, he must move fast if he wants both woman and her fortune. Faced with that ultimatum, the would-be seducer is easily persuaded to a promise of marriage, and the rest of the play revolves around the intrigue attendant upon the efforts of the ex-rake to be united with his mistress despite "blocking figures" such as fathers and guardians. This shift in emphasis from romantic seduction to pursuit of honorable marriage is responsible for subtle differences in Behn's and Centlivre's constructions of masculinity. While Behn's "rovers" are openly promiscuous and unashamedly faithless toward their female lovers, Centlivre's putative rakes suffer the tortures of the damned once they have vowed fidelity to a lady but are attracted to another. Frequently they confess to loving one woman even as they chase another, which they do not do as wholeheartedly and without scruple as their Restoration predecessors. They are also not as vehement in their hatred of marriage as Behn's heroes are. In fact, in Centlivre's comedies some of the most fulsome paeans to married bliss issue from
the mouths of her "converted" seducers. Given the less clearly
defined "rakish" nature of Centlivre's rakes, the "taming" of such a
close character is neither as frequent nor as prominent as it is in Behn's
works. Thus, the later playwright places less emphasis on character
development (the "rover" undergoes a change) than on narrative
action (he overcomes obstacles to win his bride).

With more emphasis on marriage in Centlivre's canon comes more
emphasis on money. She does not attempt to draw an ironic
comparison between her gallants' scorn for mercenary marriage and
women and their alacrity in accepting or marrying money as Behn
does. Centlivre's heroes unambiguously worship wealth; often they
are not in search of sexual prey but a wealthy wife and not ashamed
to admit it; one even calling money the "very God of Marriage."2
While Behn's swains confess their weakness for gold, the question of
the heroine's dowry is usually resolved after the couple have decided
to marry; in Centlivre's canon, the lady's fortune is often the reason
for the union. Thus, not only does Centlivre construct her male leads
along more conventional moral lines regarding sex and marriage, but
also less hypocritically vis-a-vis the profit motive in matrimony than
does Behn.

Centlivre's foregrounding of the innately-virtuous-man-versus-
the-decadent-aristocrat theme also affects her construction of
masculinity. While Behn occasionally highlights this aspect by
depicting supposedly lowborn heroes, they are usually revealed to be
nobility at the play's end. In fact, she tends to use more wealthy
noblemen as protagonists than Centlivre, whose leading men are about
equally divided between wealthy nobility and wealthy gentlemen. Both women make frequent use of soldiers, who are usually poor thanks to their service to their country. Soldiers exemplify what the women and their eras considered the essence of manhood: honor, a quality principally manifested through a man's willingness and ability to fight. Much comic mileage is gained in both canons by the sharp contrast between the bravery of soldier-heroes and the cowardice of their foes, who often attempt to pass themselves off as warriors. However, Centlivre emphasizes her servicemen's profession more than does Behn not only in her comedies but also in dedications, prefaces, prologues and epilogues; praise for the military and comments addressed to them are ubiquitous. Behn is more intent on ridiculing fops and fools. For Behn, lack of wit is the next greatest sin in a man after cowardice; for Centlivre, it is lack of patriotism. The latter's use of penniless soldiers, who are not always revealed to be nobility, allows her to do two of her favorite things at once: valorize the soldier and denigrate "empty title." Leonora's speech at the end of the third act of The Cruel Gift (1716) articulates Centlivre's preoccupation with the inherently virtuous but untitled individual when she asserts that "The Man, tho' ne'er so meanly born in Blood, / That, next his Soul, prefers his Country's Good; / Who more than Interest, does his Honour prize, / And scorns by secret Treachery to rise" deserves to be "a Monarch's chiepest Care" (3: 41). We rarely get this kind of moralizing in Behn's works although she shares the sentiment.

Needless to say, all the women's heroes--soldiers or not--are brave, dashing and resourceful; however, when it comes to the
boundaries of honor, they have different maps. Behn's male protagonists, other than her faithful lovers, revel in the deceptions they practice to cheat or outwit a father or guardian, but occasionally, especially in the case of a soldier, Centlivre's characters comment on how it is inappropriate for a man to lie and scheme, treachery being beneath an honest man. While this sentiment is by no means universally expressed among Centlivre's male leads, it is a distinct departure from the Restoration rakes who have no such scruples. For males in both canons, their adherence to honor defines them as heroes and men but their attitudes toward the "honorable" keeping of a promise is different. While Behn's gallants will move heaven and earth to keep a promise to a male friend, her "rovers" promise women anything for their favors with no intention of keeping their vows. But they are not considered dishonorable by their society, the male portion of it at least. For Centlivre, vows are an integral part of a man's honor, and her swains tend to honor oaths made, regardless of the sex of the recipient. In fact, the later playwright calls into question the attitude of the Restoration rakes. In The Gamester (1705), Valere's father is shocked that his son considers gaming debts "debts of honor" but sees nothing wrong in not paying tradesmen (1: 28); in The Artifice (1722), Sir John tells his brother, who has seduced a woman by promising marriage, a promise he never intended to keep, "Whatever you think of such Proceedings, I assure you, I should have very little Confidence in that Man who forfeited his Faith and Honour to a Woman" (3: 7-8).
Similarly, we find significant differences between Behn's and Centlivre's constructions of the feminine gender in the case of their heroines. Both writers are anxious to emphasize the deleterious effects the subjugation of women to the men in their lives has on their sex's moral character. Thus, they go to some lengths to portray the "fair sex" as just as honorable, courageous and intelligent as the ruling one, but at the same time they stress the deceitful measures women are compelled to take in order to escape the unfair restraints placed upon them and marry the men of their choice. The playwrights' message is clear: the strict limitations on a woman's autonomy meant to curb her "inherently" immoral character actually encourage misconduct and make such a misogynistic view a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, while Behn certainly addresses this issue, Centlivre builds whole plays around it and makes it a major focus of her moralizing about Liberty. We find many more instances of "locked-up ladies," frequently wives, in the later dramatist's works, and her heroines are treated far more ruthlessly by fathers and guardians than Behn's. It is not surprising, then, that often Centlivre's ladies are moved to more desperate measures than their predecessors. Cross-dressing aside, most of Behn's female leads usually feign illness or devotion to prayer to avoid doing something they don't want to do, but Centlivre's pretend dumbness or even madness. Woman's deceit and hypocrisy are more prominent in the latter's plays because so many of her characters are wed to men they don't love. Wives in both canons employ dishonest stratagems but always express regret at being forced to do so. A major difference
is that frequently the shady practices of Behn's heroines succeed, and they unashamedly yield to a lover; whereas, Centlivre's adulterous spouses are never rewarded: a woman's scheme is successful only if she is teaching a jealous husband about Liberty.

While female leads in both canons reflect regretfully on the "cunning" they're forced to practice, Centlivre's do it more often and more sincerely than do Behn's, whose gay ladies seem to enjoy matching wits with old husbands or roving lovers. This difference can be attributed to a profound shift in characterization: many of Behn's heroines subscribe to "male" values and appropriate for themselves male prerogatives; Centlivre's tend to espouse and assume more conventionally "female" attitudes. For instance, the Restoration playwright is insistent in her belief that women have the same sexual desires as men so her female protagonists play the game of seduction with the men of their choice, and play it on male terms, which means "Anything goes." Centlivre downplays seduction in her plays and emphasizes instead woman's wit in scheming to be united with a lover or teaching an errant husband a good object lesson. Centlivre's references are rife to women's skill in handling men and intrigues; her females often celebrate their mastery over men. Behn's males repeatedly express their fear of "woman's wit": "[Y]our fair kind Woman, will out-trick a Brother or a Jew, and contrive like a Jesuit in chains," says Frederick in The Rover (1677) (1: 25). But Centlivre's recognize it and respect it, probably because the ladies are exercising their wit on behalf of the gallants. Behn's heroines employ their wit in taming a rake to become a husband (hence the
rovers' fear), but those of her successor use their "feminine wiles" either to overcome obstacles to marriage to men who are actively seeking their hand for honorable purposes or to make a point to a husband. Either way, Centlivre's sympathetic female characters do not engage in sexual gameplaying on any terms: it is marriage or nothing. Consequently, where Behn's heroines resort to seduction and duplicity to gain their ends, Centlivre's tend to rely on cajoling and pretended affection in the case of her wives, and the lure of a fortune in the case of her unmarried women. Interestingly, occasionally one of Behn's obliging females is "punished" by not ending up with the object of her affections, a situation which never arises in the later dramatist's comedies since her ladies are never "kind" to anyone other than a husband: her chaste maidens are always "rewarded" with the men of their choice and her faithful wives with the promise of more freedom.

The absence of pre-marital and extra-marital sex in Centlivre's canon can be attributed in part to her less ambiguous treatment of female "modesty." Like their flesh and blood counterparts, the heroines of both playwrights are obsessed with maintaining at least a semblance of chastity, that immutable barometer of a woman's "honor." The courtesan, Angelica, in Behn's The Rover (1677), believing Willmore does not love her because she has lost her honor through her profession, articulates the privileged position held by a woman's "fame": "Nice Reputation, tho it leave behind / More Virtues than inhabit where that dwells, / Yet that once gone, those virtues shine no more" (1: 78). However, Behn's ladies, especially her wives,
"doth protest too much." While only one of her single heroines yields to temptation, often her married or widowed women make a great pretence of concern for their honor throughout the play only to succumb during the action or to give indications of yielding at the end in the ambiguous conclusions noted in our previous chapter. There is no such ambiguity in Centlivre's comedies. Her female protagonists, like Behn's, associate their honor with their chastity but, unlike Behn's wives and widows, they regard both attributes as moral absolutes which admit no transgression, even though a few of Centlivre's spouses are coerced into remaining faithful. Similarly, the heroines of the later dramatist openly acknowledge their husbands' right to mastery over them, while Behn's express resistance to the idea or actively rebel against a spouse.

Other aspects of the two playwrights' handling of feminine "modesty" support the observation that Behn's leading ladies assume more of a "male" persona than do Centlivre's. For example, not only do the latter's heroines express discomfort with some of the methods they must employ in pursuit of their men but they even question the propriety of a respectable lady's chasing a man at all since a non-aggressive woman was considered a "modest" woman. Occasionally, Behn's females express similar sentiments but that does not stop any of them from assuming an active role in intrigues, and very few of them are squeamish about their methods since they are playing the courtship game on male terms. One element of the plays bears this out: cross-dressing. Seventeen of Behn's women cross-dress compared to only five of Centlivre's. Indeed, in the former's works,
women disguising themselves as men is often integral to the movement of the plot; whereas, it seems gratuitous in the latter's. Also, Behn's sprightly ladies do not suffer the angst about their transvestitism that Centlivre's do.

Not only do Behn's women tend to don masculine garb more often but when they do, they also act more like men than Centlivre's. Like the males, they associate their honor as "men" with their ability and willingness to use a sword. Consequently, Behn's females not only participate in numerous swordfights, but even in battles. The incidences of violence among Centlivre's female cross-dressers in her comedies, on the other hand, are so few that they can be enumerated: Clarinda and Emilia cuff and kick Sir William Mode and Ogle in The Beau's Duel (1702); and Isabinda threatens priests with a sword in Mar-Plot (1710), eventually gaining their cooperation by bribery. Indeed, the disguised Angelica actually runs away from a duel in The Gamester (1705). The "lady-like" and relatively non-aggressive nature of these acts are a far cry from Behn's women warriors, a few of whom actually kill.

While Behn's Amazons and Centlivre's finicky ladies may differ in the degree to which they accept the opposite gender's values, they have one thing in common—money. The female protagonists of both dramatists are usually rich (that's how they can afford to wed penniless men), but often the profit motive takes a back seat to seduction in the Restoration playwright's works; many times the true worth of a woman comes as a pleasant surprise at the end. While this also occurs in Centlivre's comedies, more frequently the monetary
value of a prospective bride provides motivation for the comic action as she and her gallant scheme to get the "Writings" of her estate from a father or guardian. Thus, the appeal of Behn's single women is often their beauty and wit; whereas, Centlivre's possess those qualities in abundance but emphasis is also laid on their bank accounts. Males in both canons declare, with varying degrees of sincerity, their willingness to take their inamoratas without their fortunes, but this becomes an issue only in Centlivre's plays, because the women themselves insist on bringing their money into a marriage, reasoning, probably accurately, that poverty would eventually make their husbands hate them. Since money is a major inducement to marriage in Centlivre's plays, her ladies are not as open-handed as Behn's. Frequently, Behn's pique and then retain a rake's interest with valuable gifts; a few even marry wealthy old men for the express purpose of supporting a penniless lover. We find no such self-sacrifice or generosity in the majority of Centlivre's females, although there are a few notable exceptions; however, none of her wives have wed with the intention of maintaining a lover. The frugality of these women can be partly attributed to the fact that they do not have access to their wealth since the acquisition of "Writings" provides the impetus for the action. Perhaps, also it stems from the possibility that making a man financially independent obviates his need to have a rich wife. As for the converse, women who marry for money, both authors depict the misery of such unions and emphasize those characters' regret, although Behn is much more sympathetic in her treatment of them than her successor. Similarly, wealthy women who
want to marry a titled man appear in both canons but are especially prominent in Centlivre's plays where they are often subjects of a subplot. Behn satirizes status-hungry widows in passing, but Centlivre limns biting caricatures of them in vitriolic acid. Women who marry for status are as unacceptable to Centlivre as those who marry for money.

Indeed, widows and fatherless heiresses seem to populate more of Centlivre's comedies than Behn's. Independent of male control, they usually engage in intrigue on behalf of a less fortunate friend. While there are a few such lucky ones in Behn's canon, most of her female characters who live life on their own terms are courtesans and whores. Here again we find women appropriating to themselves male prerogatives. Behn's common prostitutes are usually "kept women" who make no bones about their love of money. They are shrewd, cunning and manipulative, willing to tell any lie they must to achieve their ends, just like the rakes. Furthermore, they exercise the same sexual freedom as the men, deciding for themselves whom they will favor and when. In the case of courtesans, however, cunning and manipulation are downplayed in favor of involving them in romance with the heroes. Initially depicted as practical women who think themselves impervious to love, and who are upfront about their pursuit of "filthy lucre," Behn's courtesans also claim the right to choose their own lovers; but they invariably end up enamored of a rake and willing to sacrifice anything to keep him. Behn's "ladies of the night" are in the business of selling themselves in contrast to their respectable sisters whose bodies are "sold" by men for their
own benefit in arranged marriages for property. The author suggests that the former is more "honest," hence more moral, than the latter and infinitely preferable from the woman's point of view. (Indeed, several of her virtuous heroines disguise themselves as courtesans to avoid detection or further an intrigue.)

There are absolutely no practicing "professional ladies" in Centlivre's canon: her businesswomen are businesswomen. Centlivre introduces several new roles for women in her works, among them females engaged in trade for themselves. For example, Mrs. Security in The Gamester (1705) is a pawnbroker and a moneylender; Mrs. Brazen in The Platonick Lady (1706) a professional matchmaker. These are independent widows who successfully shift for themselves in a man's world, although frequently they are not sympathetic characters. Similarly, Centlivre's treatment of the "learned lady," a figure which appears in Behn's plays but more prominently in Centlivre's, is also ambiguous. For example, the scholarly Valeria in The Bassett Table (1705) is caricatured but nevertheless expresses cogent arguments for education for women. Typically for Centlivre's heroines, Valeria is married at the end of the play; but this is not always true for some of the playwright's subordinate female characters who decide against matrimony, a decision uncommon in comedies of Behn's time. For instance, Marton, a fairly prominent woman in Mar-Plot (1710), enters a cloister after Colonel Ravelin rejects her. Also, the unmarried Mrs. Plotwell in The Beau's Duel (1702), a reformed prostitute whom inherited money has made respectable, depicts Centlivre's answer to
the unregenerate courtesans and whores who enliven so much of
Restoration comedy.

The sexual double standard Behn attacks with the use of sexually
liberated prostitutes affects her portrayal of the relationship between
the sexes. She is very careful to distinguish between men's and
women's conflicting ideas about sex, love and marriage. The care-free
male, whose sexual peccadilloes only aggrandize him in society's eyes,
sees no connection between sex on the one hand and love and
marriage on the other; promiscuity does not threaten him with loss of
reputation or pregnancy. The female, however, bound by the dictates
of "modesty" which deem her unfit for marriage with the least breath
of scandal and confine her to one man once married, is vitally
concerned with maintaining her chastity and winning the man of her
choice despite familial opposition and that of the man himself. Thus,
the rake attempts to seduce his lady without committing himself while
she is equally determined to marry her man without compromising
herself. Given two such conflicting enterprises, it is not surprising
that the relationship between the two antagonists is tainted with
distrust and a certain amount of hostility. This is mitigated somewhat
in Centlivre's works since many of her couples have already agreed
to marry. For instance, while Behn's characters of both sexes are
quick to believe the worst of their partner, many of Centlivre's
demand proof before they judge and resist the idea of their
paramour's unfaithfulness, as Clarinda and Colonel Manly do in The
Beau's Duel (1702) and Felix and Violante in The Wonder: A Woman
Keeps a Secret (1714).
Although in the later dramatist's works men and women seem more inclined to trust each other, there still exists some mutual suspicion. Both sexes accuse the other of having a propensity for inconstancy although there seem to be more references to women's falseness in Behn's comedies; even the women admit it. The ladies believe their suitors will tell them anything to gain their favors and will spurn them once they've yielded. In fact, both sexes recognize this: In Centlivre's *Love at a Venture* (1706), Bellair says, "What various hazards do we Rovers run, / To purchase what we slight, as soon as won; / And Women know it too, yet long to be undone" (2: 34). For their part, the rakes charge females with preferring titles and money to virtue, an accusation which Centlivre's women tend to accept more than do Behn's. Each playwright emphasizes how both sexes marry for money, but this is much more prominent in Centlivre's works in which even women say gold is the way to a female heart, and the men explicitly state how riches can make any woman attractive. In this respect, Behn is more interested in calling attention to how males flatter old, rich women into marrying them so that the men are "kept" in the same manner in which old men keep mistresses. Indeed, City Wives keeping younger sons is a familiar trope in both canons but again we see actual examples of women maintaining lovers in Behn's works only; Centlivre excoriates her City Wives for presumptuous social-climbing since none "keep" a man.

In her insistence on highlighting how men as well as women "sell" themselves in marriage, Behn underscores the hypocrisy inherent in the relationship between the sexes in which lip-service is
paid to true love but both have an eye out for the main chance, especially the men. This is less pronounced in Centlivre's comedies because her characters are straightforward about their concern for money; her women insist on bringing their fortunes to a marriage, a demand that initiates the action of the play. However, the two sexes in both canons accuse the other of another kind of hypocrisy. The men constantly refer to the difficulty of distinguishing "Quality" from whores and vilify women for claiming virtue in public while being promiscuous in secret. For example, Willmore in Behn's *The Rover* (1677) tells Angelica, "I have lain with a Woman of Quality, who has all the time been railing at Whores" (1: 71). Behn's rakes, unlike Centlivre's, despise virtue or honor in a woman, believing it to be merely pretense. Thus, Willmore to Angelica in the same scene: "Virtue is but an Infirmity in Women, a Disease that renders even the handsom [sic] ungrateful; whilst the ill-favour'd, for want of Sollicitations [sic] and Address only fancy themselves so . . ." (1: 70-71). Later, when Angelica accuses him of spurning her because of her lack of Fortune and Honor, Willmore replies, "Honour! I tell you, I hate it in your Sex; and those that fancy themselves possest of that Foppery, are the most impertinently troublesom [sic] of all Woman-kind, and will transgress nine Commandments to keep one" (1: 76-77).

Behn is careful to point out, however, that when marriage is the issue those self-same libertines are interested only in ladies "possest of that Foppery." Indeed, "Quality" to them often seems as important, if not more so, than the woman's wealth. Absent in Centlivre's comedies are cynical comments by the heroes about how prostitutes
are more honest than "honest" women since they lay no claim to a virtue they do not possess.

The women in both canons accuse males of faithlessness, of making promises with no intention of keeping them. For Behn, these are usually vows of marriage or constancy but many times in Centlivre's works they are merely promises to keep silent about a lady's "indiscretion," oaths which are invariably broken. Similarly, Centlivre also emphasizes her rakes' tendencies to abandon their lovers "to the public" (other men) after they have finished with them. Unlike Centlivre's, Behn's heroines are so afraid of the "deluding Tongues of Men" that many express a preference for fools who can easily be manipulated over "witty" men who will love them and leave them. Behn's men constantly express their contempt for women who abide fools but are themselves terrified of what they perceive as deceitful cunning on the part of females--woman's wit--and resist becoming not only subordinate to a woman but reduced to that most hated thing, "A Woman's Implement." In contrast, Centlivre's heroes are not so gynophobic, openly admitting the power women have over them, a condition that carries no onus (as in the earlier plays), probably because a lady's "wit" is being exercised on their behalf. Revelling in their mastery over men, Centlivre's female protagonists often use their "woman's wit" as a threat to jealous lovers or husbands, warning them that the more restraints their partners place upon them to keep them from cheating, the more they will "study to deceive." They assert that only virtue can regulate a woman's sexual conduct, not imprisonment. Although Behn expresses similar
sentiments, they do not take the pride of place they do in Centlivre's works.

Not only do Centlivre's heroes recognize and accept women's hegemony more willingly than Behn's, but they also respect women more than do their predecessors. For Behn's rakes, women come in only two models, "Quality" and whore, and often they make headway by treating the former like the latter. (Indeed, in both canons, references are made to ladies liking "to be ravish'd of a kindness"!) On the other hand, Centlivre's gallants are fond of a good time but respect the "awful Lustre of Virtue" in honest women. Similarly, they are not nearly as emphatic about their hatred of marriage as their predecessors are. Behn's wits are determined to remain single so they can enjoy sexual variety; they talk about the "scandal" of marriage and how it "debases" honorable rakes. Wives are troublesome "clogs," to be avoided at all costs. While Centlivre's swains echo these sentiments, they debate more about the institution; it is not taken for granted that matrimony is bad. Her libertines also cave in quickly to demands for marriage and end up spouting enthusiastic paeans to it and their wives at the end of the play. None gloat about seducing a woman without having to marry her as Behn's "rovers" do.

Women in both canons, aware of the supposed emptiness of loveless marriages, perceive husbands as dull things who will ignore them once married. However, Centlivre's females acknowledge the rights of the male over them, and (unlike Behn's) accept that the responsibility for a good marriage is the wife's, provided her husband
allows her the freedom that she deserves as a human being. The attitudes of Centlivre's characters of both sexes towards marriage and spouses is represented in the last two speeches of Mar-Plot (1710). Isabinda, Charles's wife, through patient diligence has gently prevented him from cheating on her. A repentant Charles speaks first:

Cha. Come, Colonel, Marriage is the only happy State, when Virtue is the Guide.
    Had but all Women Isabinda's Mind,
    So Constant, Prudent, Virtuous, and so kind,
    What Joys so great as Wedlock cou'd we find?
    No more shou'd we unlawful Love pursue,
    But think our Wives for ever young and new,
    And learn from them the Art of being true.

Isa. In vain we strive by haughty ways to prove
    Our chast [sic] Affections, and our duteous Love.
    To smooth the Husband's rugged Storms of Life,
    Is the design and business of a Wife;
    Still all his Faults with Patience to behold,
    And not for every Trifle rant, and scold:
    Men from Example, more than from Precept, learn,
    And modest Carriage still has power to Charm.
    After my Method, wou'd all Wives but move,
    They'd soon regain, and keep their Husbands Love:
    Our kind Indulgence wou'd their Vice o'ercome,
    And with our Meekness strike their Passions dumb. (2: 62)

While Behn's constant lovers, who are contrasted to her rovers and sprightly young ladies, express opinions similar to Charles's about marriage, rarely do the libertines, who are by far more prominent in the plays. Furthermore, even the female partner of the constant couple, much less the spunky heroine, rarely, if ever, endorse the modest passiveness Isabinda eulogizes.

Portrayal of the Same Character Types

Not only are significant differences discernible between the two playwrights' constructions of their major characters but variations
also exist in their handling of character types common to intrigue comedy. One such is the fop, a witless fool who fancies himself a fashionable "Man of Sense" and ineptly apes the behavior of the true "wits." Fops boast of being "men of parts" and "witty men," and they "roar," whore, drink, and gamble because that is what they think fashionable men do. They are correct; the rakes they lionize engage in these simple pleasures, but their viciousness is vitiated by virtues such as courage, honor and good sense. The imitators, on the other hand, openly disdain honor and valor in favor of such "whore's tricks" as singing bawdy songs and breaking windows; "rake-hells" are not the same as "rakes." Not only are the former cowardly, but they are also silly, gullible, vain and very brutal in their treatment of women. They make no bones about the fact that they will marry for money nor that they will be unfaithful to their wives. Significantly, the matrimony-hating libertine is brought to heel by true love at the end of the play; whereas, his ersatz emulator remains unchanged by his status as a husband.

Since the fop provides such a telling contrast to the hero, it is not surprising that he appears prominently in the comedies of Behn and Centlivre. But Behn tends to emphasize this figure more, employing twice as many in her plays than her successor. Further, Behn's fops are usually more germane to the plot than Centlivre's "beaus," frequently being the unacceptable fiance of the heroine. Behn tends to emphasize that not only are women oppressed by forced marriage itself but often their agony is increased by the witless foppishness of their intended. A typical exchange occurs in Behn's
Sir Patient Fancy (1678) in which Isabella and Lucretia discuss "the numberless Impertinences wherewith [fops] continually plague all young Women of Quality":

Lucr. Yet these are the precious things our grave Parents still chuse [sic] to make us happy with, and all for a filthy Jointure, the undeniable argument for our Slavery to Fools.

Isab. Custom is unkind to our Sex, not to allow us free Choice; but we above all Creatures must be forced to endure the formal Recommendations of a Parent, and the more insupportable Addresses of an odious Fop; whilst the Obedient Daughter stands--thus--with her Hands pinn'd before her, a set Look, few Words, and a Mein that cries--Come marry me: out upon't. (4:11)

In contrast, Centlivre's male antagonists are objectionable on other grounds, cowardice being a major one. Both writers suggest that their fops or beaus are not "real men" because of their reluctance and inability to engage in manly swordfights. But I would argue that in addition to downplaying the role of her beaus in the comic action, Centlivre is more mellow than Behn in her depiction of fools. After all, the titular character of one of Centlivre's best plays, The Busy Body (1709), is a silly ass, but he is well-intentioned. Although he gets the full measure of humiliation due his ilk, his friends are still sympathetic towards him despite his bumbling. Most of Behn's fops are highborn, and she uses them to satirize the beau monde. However, she does not suggest that there is something wrong with the class structure itself; her opprobrium is reserved for those within it who are not worthy. On the other hand, two of Centlivre's four fops are lowborn: one a footman who dubs himself the "Marquess of Hazard," and the other a commoner who slavishly apes an aristocrat. The former enjoys some success in his imposture of a nobleman, but
the latter is mercilessly parodied. There is an element of class-consciousness in Centlivre’s renderings of this figure absent in Behn’s characters. The footman who can pass himself off as aristocracy has several kissing cousins in Behn’s works; both authors call attention to the fact that given the right dress and manners, anyone can successfully masquerade as a lord. However, while Behn’s gently-born fools are excoriated for their stupidity, Centlivre attacks her commoners for also valorizing the upper class. Indeed, the Deadliest Sins in Behn’s eyes as far as the fop goes are cowardice and a lack of wit; Centlivre downplays the importance of wit (witness Mar-Plot in The Busy Body) in favor of manly courage and democratic principles.

Not only do Behn and Centlivre illustrate the misery of forced marriage inflicted on women by depicting the poor quality of the fools they are expected to marry, but they also emphasize the injustice of the institution in their portrayal of tyrannical parents. These are usually fathers or male guardians who seek to augment family wealth and status by yoking their daughters or wards to wealthy and/or highborn imbeciles or lecherous old men. Both writers stress the selfish callousness of men willing to sacrifice their children’s happiness for “a filthy Jointure,” but in Centlivre’s hands, the parental figure is more prominent and ruthless to the point of being monstrous. Centlivre’s father often explicitly states his belief that his offspring is his property to do with as he will, and he not only manhandles and/or locks up his daughter to compel her to comply with his demands, but tries to cheat her, (or, in a few cases, him),
and actively attempts to make her miserable. A case in point is Ann Lovely's deceased father in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718) whose will expresses the warm paternal sentiment of regret that the father will be out-lived by the daughter. It also stipulates that she must gain the approval of four profoundly different guardians if she wishes to marry and inherit her father's fortune. Since Centlivre's fathers are often the "blocking figures" that the hero must overcome, they are frequently more integral to the plot than Behn's, and thus more developed. Centlivre emphasizes their motives more—status, heirs and, above all, money. Interestingly, we don't see a preoccupation with heirs in Behn's parental figures nor do we get speech after speech by these characters explicitly stating their cruel plans for their offspring and the reasons for them, as we do in Centlivre's plays. Similarly, while most of Behn's outwitted fathers or guardians cheerfully reconcile themselves to their defeat, (especially after the inevitable revelation of the wealth and/or noble lineage of the formerly despised suitor or daughter-in-law), Centlivre's "are not amused" and often exit at the end of the play vowing revenge.

The shift in focus from seduction to intrigue in Centlivre's works which gives greater prominence to "blocking figures" such as fathers, also affects her depiction of another kind of "blocking figure," the old husband. Both writers characterize this type as gullible, lecherous and jealous but the crying sin of Behn's is avarice while Centlivre tends to stress the jealousy of her old spouses and downplay their lust. The profound jealousy of Centlivre's characters motivates much of the comic action as the heroine tries to be united
with her lover. The same situation occurs in Behn's plays but her emphasis on sexuality highlights the disgusting sexual advances of unacceptable husbands rather than their jealousy. Thus, Behn is much more vitriolic in her depiction of old husbands, who are inevitably outwitted by the hero and heroine. As mentioned earlier, some of the married men resign themselves to sharing their wife with her lover. However, this does not occur in any of Centlivre's plays since none of her heroines successfully commit adultery. Clearly, the later playwright is more sympathetic in her treatment of old husbands than her predecessor was; they are not as viciously satirized or cuckolded, and they are amenable to reform when their spouses demand more liberty. However, both playwrights use these characters to demonstrate the political theme that underpins most of their plays. Behn's aged husbands are invariably Parliamentarians and Puritans who usually eschew their politics at the end of the play in favor of adopting the Cavalier's lifestyle. Centlivre airs her political views differently, for it is her parental figures who are usually "seditiously" Tory and sympathetic to "papacy," and rarely, if ever, do they relent. Unlike Behn's aged husbands, Centlivre's are closely tied to one of her central themes: the right of a subject to be treated fairly by a monarch. While the Restoration playwright merely contents herself with parodying her political enemies and "proving" by their conversion the supposed superiority of the Royalists, Centlivre demonstrates her Whiggish belief that a subject owes no loyalty to a tyrannical king who would compel his subjects to act in violation of their consciences by her protagonists' triumph over
despotic fathers. In the case of husbands, however, this dictum is mediated by the fact that ultimately, they are not obdurate: When shown the effects of constraint on their wives, they promise to accord them the freedom they deserve as human beings. Thus, we have the greater ruthlessness of Centlivre's parents and the gentler handling of the husband character as opposed to Behn's more benevolent fathers and satirical savaging of the aged husband.

A similar difference in treatment can be discerned in the women's portrayals of merchants, who are often the unacceptable husband or fiance in Behn's works but are the more sympathetic spouse in Centlivre's. As noted earlier in Chapter 2, while both playwrights poke fun at the different classes, Centlivre, in her later plays particularly, displays a definite bias toward the middle classes as opposed to Behn's aristocratic leanings. The avaricious old merchant, a prominent character in the latter's plays, is usually the butt of vicious jokes and a likely candidate for cuckoldom. An exchange between Dullman and Timorous in Behn's *The Widow Ranter* (1688) leaves no doubt as to the author's opinion of those who are in business for a living: Dullman says, "For the old Fellows, their business is Usury, Extortion, and undermining young Heirs." Timorous replies, "Then for young Merchants, their Exchange is the Tavern, their Ware-house the Play-house, and their Bills of Exchange Billet-Doux, where to sup with their Wenches at the other end of the Town" (4: 253). Behn excoriates merchants for committing the deadliest sin in her eyes, adulterating marriage with business as they wed young women primarily for their fortunes. In play after play,
Behn emphasizes the alacrity with which businessmen will sacrifice their wives or daughters to enrich themselves. Typical of the breed is Sir Cautious Fulbank in _The Lucky Chance_ (1686) who agrees to let his wife lie with Gayman to avoid paying his rival a gambling debt: when his wife asks him what he has lost, he says, "A Bauble--a Bauble--'tis not for what I've lost--but because I have not won--" (4: 258). The greedy old man then ends the act with a speech about how merchants make money off their wives: "His Wife's crack'd Credit keeps his own entire" (4: 259).

In Behn's _The City Heiress_ (1682), however, we get the definitive picture of Behn's attitude not only towards merchants, but also towards "citizens"; her unsympathetic characters are usually both. For example, in _The City Heiress_, the grasping old City merchant, Sir Timothy, is compared unfavorably to his rakish nephew and heir, Tom Wilding. Not coincidentally, the former is a Parliamentarian, the latter a Royalist. Indeed, Otway's Prologue to the play refers to the fact that the defeated Roundheads settled in London where they try to play the "old Game o're again" with fools. The conflation of merchant with citizen is apparent when Otway says that the Roundheads are "For ever damn'd in dismal Cells, call'd Shops" where they "cheat and damn themselves to get their Livings" and contribute money to "Sham-plots" (2: 201-202). Many of Behn's antagonists are City aldermen or justices of the peace, and she goes out of her way to depict them as hypocritically sanctimonious and treasonous. She accuses the citizen of cheating the courtier of his estate in revenge for the latter's cuckolding him "till rich enough to marry his
Daughter to a Courtier, again gives him all—unless his Wife's over-gallantry breaks him.\textsuperscript{5} Behn also reserves much animus for what she sees as presumptuous social-climbing by those who have acquired wealth through trade. As Tom Wilding puts it in \textit{The City Heiress}, 
"[N]othing woos a City-Fortune like the hopes of a Ladyship" (2: 242). Behn parodies this overweening ambition to jump class barriers in \textit{The False Count} (1681). Isabella, a City merchant's daughter, refuses to marry another merchant because she thinks her beauty and wealth deserve a title. When she tells Francisco, "Why, Father, the Gentry and Nobility now-a-days frequently marry Citizens [sic] Daughters," he replies:

\texttt{Come, come, Mistress, I get by the City, and I love and honour the City; I confess 'tis the Fashion now-a-days, if a Citizen get but a little Money, one gets to building Houses, and brick Walls; another must buy an Office for his Son, a third hoists up his Daughter's Topsail, and flaunts it away, much above her breeding; and these things make so many break, and cause the decay of Trading (3: 116).}

Significantly, the haughty Isabella is punished by marrying a chimney-sweep under the mistaken impression he is a lord. Not only are citizens' daughters targets for satire in Behn's works, but their wives are, too. The susceptibility of "City Wives" to the blandishments of young gentlemen in need of a meal ticket—usually a younger brother—was a commonplace in Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy. Much comic mileage was gained by sly references as to how brisk young gallants served the often old and feeble citizen by providing him with heirs in return for the financial support of the latter's wife. Similarly, as suggested by Sir Cautious Fulbank's reference to a merchant's "Wife's crack'd Credit," jokes were made as to how the citizen owed his customers to his wife's "commodities." We
find all these stereotypes in Behn's plays, including her scathing portrait of City Wives' "over-gallantry" as they try to ape the fashionable.

While there are similar character types in Centlivre's works, during the course of her career she discarded Restoration cliches in favor of a more balanced view of the classes, especially in her depiction of the merchant. The unscrupulous, grasping businessman is still present in her plays but usually as a father or guardian; her merchant-husbands are more jealous than acquisitive. Indeed, John Loftis goes so far as to assert that in Centlivre's plays "there is no suggestion of social rivalry between merchant and gentlemen" and points out that Sir Toby in Love's Contrivance (1703), a lecherous and miserly merchant of the Restoration stereotype, is rejected "because of his personal qualifications and his age rather than his social status." If anything, Centlivre seems to tip the scales toward her hard-working husbands. For example, in Mar-Plot (1710), the merchant, Don Perriera, is not as foolish as other old husbands and is not as class-conscious as his brother-in-law, the aristocratic Don Lopez, who takes every opportunity to tell Don Perriera he is not worthy of the noble family he has married into. Furthermore, Don Lopez is portrayed as violent and bloodthirsty while Don Perriera is moderate and reasonable. In the following exchange between Sir John Freeman and Colonel Fainwell in Centlivre's The Artifice (1722), the author questions the aristocratic values Behn takes for granted and at the same time validates those of the practical-minded businessman:

Sir John: Honour's a Commodity not among the Merchants; there is no Draw-back upon't.
Fainwell: That's a Mistake, Sir John; I have known a Statesman pawn his Honour as often as Merchants enter the same Commodity for Exportation; and like them, draw it back so cleverly, that those who give him Credit upon't, never perceiv'd it 'till the Great Man was out of Post.

Sir John: Honour's a stale Cheat.

Fainwell: It may pass at Court, or at the Groom-Porter's; but no Citizen will lend a Shilling upon it. (3: 6)

While the class lines seem blurred between merchants and gentlemen in Centlivre's later works, her distinction between businessmen and "citizens" is clear. For one thing, she is not as rabid about the City and its denizens as Behn is; most of her plays take place in London and feature even titled men in business. As might be expected, her unsympathetic characters are Tories but she does not tie them to London as Behn does her political enemies nor does she emphasize the City as a hotbed of sedition and its citizens de facto traitors. There is no conflation of merchant with citizen as there is in Behn's canon: Centlivre portrays the wealthy financier as clearly distinct from a shopkeeper. Thus, she can construct respectable businessmen and still get comic mileage out of satirizing the efforts of the ignorant lower class to pass themselves off as their social superiors. A case in point is Mrs. Sago, a druggist's wife, in The Basset-Table (1705), who has been having an affair with Sir James Courtly and stealing her husband's money to gamble with the fashionable Lady Reveller. When her husband is arrested for debt, Mrs. Sago renounces her attempts to live in the fast lane and promises to "take up with City Acquaintance, rail at the Court, and go Twice a Week with Mrs. Outside to Pin-makers-hall" (1: 62). The disaster that befalls Mrs. Sago and her hapless husband is typical of
the punishment Centlivre inflicts on social-climbers in her works. As mentioned earlier, she is even more virulent towards wealthy women who want to marry a title than is Behn so it is not surprising that we also find the same jokes about City Wives and young gentlemen in her comedies as we do in Behn's. However, in many cases, the male citizen in Centlivre's plays can give as good as he gets when confronted by his social superior. In the following exchange between a disguised Colonel Fainwell and Tradelove, a change-broker, in Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), the former emerges victorious but not before the latter gets his licks in. Fainwell tells Tradelove his business is that of a gentleman, and the change-broker responds:

Tradelove: That is to say, you dress fine, feed high, lie with every Woman you like, and pay your Surgeon's Bills better than your Taylors or your Butchers.

Fainwell: The Court is much oblig'd to you, Sir, for your Character of a Gentleman.

Tradelove: The Court, Sir! What wou'd the Court do without us Citizens?

Fainwell: Without your Wives and Daughters you mean, Mr. Tradelove? (3: 22)

It is worth noting here that even as Centlivre employs Restoration cliches, she does so with a difference; her titled characters are also satirized for their vices to an even greater and more ironic degree than they are in Behn's works. The latter reserves the worst of her poisoned darts for merchants and citizens, usually one entity with her, while Centlivre strikes a balance in her satirical attacks, dispensing vitriol with an even hand to the highborn as well as the
middle class, which is clearly distinguished from its working-class brethren.

Centlivre's more critical stance toward the upper class is also apparent in her portrayal of the "fashionable lady of society" character. Like Centlivre, Behn satirizes the emptiness and hypocrisy of fashionable marriages of convenience but while her descriptions of "fashionable" life poke fun at adulterous wives and even compare them to prostitutes, their infidelity is more a source of laughter in the plays than a serious attempt at moral criticism. In Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), Lodowick's detailing of Lucretia's life should she marry the old and greedy country knight, Sir Credulous Easy, is typical of Behn's somewhat lighthearted attitude towards adulterous ladies of fashion:

Lod. Beginning at Eight, from which down to Twelve you ought to employ in dressing, till Two at Dinner, till Five in Visits, till Seven at the Play, till Nine i'th'Park, Ten at Supper with your Lover, if your Husband be not at home, or keep his distance, which he's too well bred not to do; then from Ten to Twelve are the happy Hours the Bergere, those of intire [sic] Enjoyment.

. . .

Isab. Well, Sir, what must she do from Twelve till Eight again?

Lod. Oh! those are the dull Conjugal Hours for sleeping with her own Husband, and dreaming of Joys her absent Lover alone can give her. (4: 22)

Behn's main satirical point is that turning a blind eye to a spouse's unfaithfulness is considered good breeding. Indeed, in Behn's posthumously produced comedy, *The Younger Brother* (1696), Mirtilla, who is Lady Blunder's daughter-in-law, is entertaining George, a would-be lover, when Lady Blunder comes to tell her her husband is
coming. When she sees how her son's wife is amusing herself, she
tells Mirtilla she will delay her son until Mirtilla is "more at leisure."
When George expresses amazement at this development, Mirtilla
remarks, "She'd sooner pimp for me, and believe it a part of good
Breeding" (4: 346). However, even though there is some implied
criticism, none of Behn's fashionable ladies are really punished for
their roaming, perhaps because the writer is more interested in
indicating the forced-marriage system than individuals. She holds the
former responsible for the straying of the latter.

Not so with Centlivre. Her plays feature several wealthy widows
of nobility whose promiscuity cannot be blamed on unpleasant
husbands. Not only do her plays contain more references to
fashionable ladies than do Behn's but they have more bite to them.
Centlivre castigates ladies of society for their propensity to gossip
and gamble but above all, for their vanity, which is only fed by
flirting and making as many conquests as possible. In both The
Gamester (1705) and The Basset-Table (1705), we find two such women,
Lady Wealthy and Lady Reveller. Both are coquettes whose chief
diversions are gaming and encouraging attention from every man they
meet despite the fact that each has a faithful lover who desires
honorable marriage. In The Gamester, Lady Wealthy is so vain and
selfish that she plans to steal her sister's lover simply for the
challenge he poses. The sophisticated Lady Reveller in The Basset-
Table is warned by her cousin, Lady Lucy, that her immodest
behavior towards men will ruin her reputation; however, the proud
Lady Reveller is unrepentant and proclaims her delight in being a
subject of gossip. Both Lady Wealthy and Lady Reveller are shocked into proper feminine submission to their respective suitors by clever stratagems. The latter's rude awakening especially resonates with echoes of Behn's analogy between "fashionable" wives and prostitutes. Sir James Courtly pretends to rape a reluctant Lady Reveller, even offering her money for her favors, and citing her indiscriminate attitude towards men as the reason he thinks he can get away with the deed. Thus, what Behn only implies in good-natured jokes about ladies of society, Centlivre makes manifest in action, and action which does not condone "fashionable" promiscuity. As can be seen from the two cases just cited, none of Centlivre's women, of any rank or marital status, are allowed to flaunt the moral laws of chastity and "modesty" without severe retribution.

Also, Centlivre uses servants subtly to critique the aristocratic values Behn accepts. Servants are much more prominent in Centlivre's canon, often being involved in subplots of their own. While Centlivre's maids and valets resemble Behn's in their greed, cunning and talent for deceit, Centlivre seems to emphasize over and over again those qualities. Further, her servants take a much more active part in the intrigues of their employers than Behn's do, often being the instigators of the plots designed to further the interests of their superiors, as well as the means by which those plans are accomplished. Since this often involves morally questionable behavior such as bribery or blackmail, Centlivre shifts such shady actions onto the servants as a means of keeping her major characters' hands clean; hence, the greater prominence of employees in her canon as
compared to Behn's, whose leads are not so squeamish. Similarly, Centlivre's serving people are much more outspoken than Behn's; especially the lady's maids who attend the heroines and frequently scold tyrannical fathers and husbands in no uncertain terms while their mistresses stand by in silence. Again, since such behavior in a dutiful daughter or wife would be impossible in the moral world of Centlivre's comedies, inferiors are chosen to enact it. Thus, the author uses menials as a means of keeping true to the dictum she reiterates in play after play, that those of noble birth should act nobly and set an example for the lower orders. Centlivre also uses servants to undercut the pretensions of her less sympathetic characters. In scenes in which a leading character is eulogizing something or attempting to persuade someone to do something, their rhetorical ecstasies or mendacious blandishments are counterpointed at every turn by a servant's honest interpretation of his or her employer's speech. For example, in The Gamester (1705), the titular character, Valere, is singing the praises of gambling--its supposed virtues. His valet, Hector, counters each declaration with the true nature of the "virtue":

Val. In short, there is an Air of Magnificence in't--a Gamester's hand is the Philosopher's Stone that turns all it touches into Gold.

Hec. And Gold into nothing.

... 

Val. Our Engagements are not so Terrible,--with us revenge reaches no farther than the Pocket.

Hec. No more don't a Highway Man,--and yet the World thinks both Lives equally immoral. (1:36)
So, Centlivre's servants not only provide ironic commentary on the real qualities of their employers and their world, but they also function as a type of chorus providing a norm by which the spectator can judge the actions of the characters. Behn's maids and valets are not so privileged, but then Centlivre is critiquing aristocratic sacred cows that her predecessor took for granted.

Morality

Centlivre's more critical stance toward the Restoration stereotypes Behn valorized is partly a result of her acceptance of neoclassic rules; namely, that plays were meant to be moral exemplars. Here, however, we must be very careful to distinguish between the actual practice of the two women and their responses to criticism of the supposed immorality of their comedies. Both playwrights primarily wrote to please their respective audiences so that the nature of those audiences presumably affected their works, a topic we will pursue in another chapter. In fact, something must have occurred between 1673 and 1681, because Behn goes from asserting that plays were merely meant to entertain to insisting on the usefulness of drama to teach morality. For example, in her "Epistle to the Reader" in The Dutch Lover (1673), Behn attacks university learning and neoclassic rules as useless, declaring that plays were meant for entertainment and not some high moral purpose or serious study: "I take it Comedie was never meant, either for a converting or a conforming Ordinance" (1: 223), and she thinks it sufficient to adhere only to "making [plays] pleasant, and avoiding of scurrility" (1: 224), ridiculing those who would study them. Subsequent prologues and epilogues of her plays
accuse others of cheating the public by setting their plays up as high art and assert that she herself makes no such claim, as she is only aiming to amuse. She also attacks those who would confine plays to neoclassic rules and indict the audience itself of "dethroning" the "Monarch Wit" so that anything may pass for clever comedy. But at the end of the prologue to The Rover Part II (1681), several lines declare how beneficial drama was for governments and people in the past; drama, in fact, was important enough to be protected by laws (1: 115-116). While heretofore Behn has mentioned the value and usefulness of plays, here she offers a more strongly emphasized leitmotif in which her earlier ambivalence about the purpose and use of drama gives way to a conviction that theatre can indeed be a helpful tool. She explicitly states as much in her dedication of The Lucky Chance (1686) in which she calls plays "one of the most essential Parts of good Government" and writes:

Cardinal Richelieu, that great and wise Statesman, said, That there was no surer Testimony to be given of the flourishing Greatness of a State, than publick Pleasures and Divertisements—for they are, says he—the Schools of Virtue, where Vice is always either punish't or disdain'd. They are secret Instructions to the People, in things that 'tis impossible to insinuate into them any other Way. 'Tis Example that prevails above Reason or DIVINE PRECEPTS. (Philosophy not understood by the Multitude;) 'tis Example alone that inspires Morality, and best establishes Virtue, I have my self known a Man, whom neither Conscience nor Religion cou'd persuade to Loyalty, who at beholding in our Theatre a Modern Politician set forth in all his Colours, was converted, renounc'd his opinion, and quitted the Party. (3: 183)

Thus, Behn made no secret of her contempt for neoclassic rules, which she tended to ignore in her plays, but found herself having recourse to them to justify her profession.
Like Behn, Centlivre was aware of Aristotelian principles but, unlike her predecessor, she does not reject them out of hand. Rather, in her preface to *Love's Contrivance* (1703), she modestly concedes the importance of the unities and other neoclassic rules but states her belief that the Town would rather have wit and humor, which she herself prefers. Like Behn, she admits to not playing by the rules but she takes refuge in the moral purity of her literary efforts, asserting that she "took peculiar Care to dress my Thoughts in such a modest State, that it might not give offence to any" (vol. 1). There is no ambivalence toward the purpose and utility of drama in Centlivre's literary declarations as there is in Behn's. In her dedications of both *The Gamester* (1705) and *The Basset-Table* (1705), for example, Centlivre states her intention to expose the evils of gaming since the first intent of plays is to recommend morality (vol. 1). Despite her protestations of virtuous goals, Centlivre, like Behn, spends much of her time defending the usefulness of plays and responding to charges of immorality.

Behn's rejection of the morality aspect of neoclassicism versus Centlivre's equivocal acceptance of it is manifested in each woman's adherence to the dictum that the good be rewarded and the evil punished at the play's conclusion. We have already seen how Behn's adulterous wives and cuckolding rakes are ultimately triumphant over fathers and husbands, who themselves are not severely "punished," except in a few instances, often accepting an heretofore objectionable son- or daughter-in-law or, in the case of husbands, adopting the libertine lifestyle of their young rivals. This is not the case in
Centlivre's canon: would-be female adulterers are invariably punished or frightened into fidelity while prospective cuckolders or confirmed rakes are transformed into honorable husbands before being awarded a spouse. Centlivre also confers harsher punishments on her villains, usually fathers or guardians who exit at the final curtain vowing revenge on disobedient offspring. Her husbands are "punished" somewhat by being the targets of plots but they are never cuckolded and remain in full possession of their wives.

There also seems to be a difference in what each woman considers vice. The element of social satire is strong in Behn's works where the Deadliest Sin is lack of "wit" in both senses of the word: intelligence and clever repartee. Behn reserves her animus for those who do not behave appropriately for their age, status or native intelligence. Thus, we get searing portraits of lecherous old husbands, City merchants who live beyond their station and assinine fops trying to pass themselves off as "men of parts." Invariably, these figures are cheated and humiliated by their more clever and resourceful enemies.

On the other hand, Centlivre declares "humor" to be her objective in various works rather than satire. Her opinion is expressed in the prologue of The Artifice (1722) by "Mr. Bond," who begs the audience's indulgence for the author's lack of wit: "If she your Taste in Plot, and Humour hit: / Plot, Humour, Business, form the Comick Feast; / Wit's but a higher-relish'd Sauce, at best; / And where too much, like Spice, destroys the Taste" (vol. 3). Thus, we find a somewhat gentler treatment of fops like Mar-Plot and jealous
husbands in Centlivre's canon; her fury falls upon adulterous wives, vain ladies of fashion, gaming aristocracy and tyrannical fathers.

Gaming, infidelity and promiscuity are Centlivre's targets, not a lack of social graces, so it is not surprising that we find more explicit moralizing in the later playwright's works. Rarely in Behn's plays do we find any major character pontificating on the virtues of chastity, fidelity or marriage, much less reflecting on the questionable moral nature of his or her actions. In Centlivre's comedies, however, even the most hardened rake is respectful of the "awful Lustre of Virtue," worries about his unfaithfulness and becomes an ardent supporter of the married state. Thus, we find many fine speeches both within and particularly at the conclusion of Centlivre's plays about the virtues of matrimony and other moral issues. Behn's comedies do not contain much proselytizing, except on the subject of loyalty to the king, and usually end with a dance or lighthearted epigram.

Consequently, we definitely see a shift toward a more middle-class morality in Centlivre's works as she critiques aristocratic values and valorizes a more stringent value system over the libertine philosophy which characterizes so much of Behn's canon. For example, Centlivre downplays the element of sexuality so prominent in Behn's plays; overcoming obstacles to matrimony replaces the Restoration "love chase." Marriage is sacrosanct to Centlivre, as are vows, neither of which are respected by Behn's libertines. Further, there is a significant difference in the depiction of violence in the two women's plays. At least thirty-five swordfights occur in Behn's
comedies as opposed to four in Centlivre's, three of which are in the same play. Behn's mayhem tends to be potentially life-threatening; Centlivre emphasizes comic beatings. Also, most of the physical conflict in the former's works occurs between social equals, noblemen or gentlemen; whereas, the bulk of the beatings in the latter's usually involve a gentleman inflicting punishment on a servant. Centlivre exhibits a middle-class horror of dangerous violence and prefers rational decision-making—remember the bloodthirsty Don Lopez and the moderate Don Perriera in her *Mar-Plot* (1710)—and she subtly implies tyranny on the part of the nobility who abuse their helpless inferiors.

**Summary**

Centlivre's pronounced tendency toward moralizing results in significant differences between her construction of gender and that of Behn's. Behn's comedies usually feature two or more contrasting couples: one set on marriage, the other engaged in a battle of wits designed to convert the prospective partner into consenting to illicit sex (the rake's goal) or marriage (the heroine's goal). A sharp distinction is made between the faithful male lover, who respects women and marriage, and the hero-rake, who values neither as sex without commitment is his aim. In Centlivre's works, however, the boundaries between these two figures are much more blurred. Unlike Behn, Centlivre draws no ironic comparison between the rake's scorn for mercenary marriage and his alacrity in accepting money and gifts from a mistress; instead, her heroes unambiguously confess their gold digging, which is why they are bent on honorable marriage rather
than mere seduction. Furthermore, while both women's constructions of masculinity emphasize courage as the litmus test of manhood, Centlivre's preoccupation with the innate-virtue-versus-empty-title theme results in her greater use of lowborn soldiers as heroes who are used as mouth-pieces for her views on patriotism, a prominent part of her Liberty-Loyalty matrix. The more didactic tenor of Centlivre's treatment of masculinity is also apparent in her protagonists' views on honor. While Behn's heroes often revel in the deceptions they must practice, frequently their eighteenth-century counterparts express trepidation and sometimes outright scorn for the lying and the scheming they are forced to do as conduct unbecoming a gentleman.

We see similar disparities between the two playwrights' constructions of femininity. While both women were at pains to demonstrate how the unjust oppression of their sex in the forced-marriage system compelled women to adopt the deceitful and duplicitous measures for which misogynists excoriated them, Behn's heroines enjoy matching wits with their lovers or husbands; whereas, Centlivre's regretfully reflect on the cunning they're forced to practice more often and more sincerely than do their predecessors. Indeed, Behn's sprightly ladies wholeheartedly take part in the Restoration "love chase," playing the seduction game by male rules. Her heroines adopt male ideas about honor and act as violently as their lovers do. In contrast, such mannish behavior is largely lacking in Centlivre's heroines who tend to be more conventionally "feminine." Since seduction is not the issue in the later writer's works, her
females depend less on sexuality as a tool of persuasion. Furthermore, Behn's canon features women who succumb to sexual temptation with impunity, and who resist subordination or actively rebel against a spouse. For Centlivre's heroines, however, honor and chastity are moral absolutes, and they frequently refer to a husband's right to mastery over his wife. Thus, the Restoration playwright is much more sympathetic to her mercenary wives than her successor, who has a greater tendency to highlight City widows looking to marry titles.

Finally, Behn's use of courtesans and whores, who are depicted as equally as mercenary and promiscuous as the rakes, to make an analogy between forced marriage and prostitution, is totally absent from Centlivre's works. Instead, the eighteenth-century playwright creates new roles for women; they are portrayed as independent and self-sufficient, not dependent on men for their livelihood as Behn's "professional ladies" are.

Since Aphra Behn's comedies are dominated by the Restoration "battle of the sexes," it is not surprising that the relationship between men and women is tainted with distrust and even a little hostility. While these qualities are not totally lacking in Centlivre's portrayal, her protagonists of both sexes are much less ready to believe the worst of their paramours. Similarly, Behn underscores the hypocrisy of both genders in paying lip-service to "true love" but keeping an eye out for a profitable marriage; whereas, Centlivre's characters are honest about their fortune hunting. In both canons, men accuse women of sexual hypocrisy, and women charge men with
faithlessness, but the degree of alienation between the sexes is more pronounced in Behn's works.

While characters of both sexes in the two women's plays express contempt for marriage and a spouse, Centlivre's are much less passionate in their opinion. In her comedies we tend to get debates about the benefits of matrimony, and the hero is not only converted but often ends the play eulogizing wedlock and wives. Furthermore, Centlivre lays the responsibility for a successful marriage squarely at the wife's door, while Behn espouses a view of matrimony as a partnership in which each spouse has equal rights and privileges, as well as sharing the task of making the union work.

Differences in theme and gender construction also account for differences in the way each woman portrays certain character types. For example, the fop is much more prominent in, and germane to, Behn's plots than Centlivre's. Behn tends to emphasize the witlessness of her fools, but for Centlivre, lack of wit is not as heinous a sin as lack of democratic principles. Thus, we can see that the abundance of fops in Behn's works underscores her thematic preoccupation with social satire as opposed to Centlivre's moralizing on Liberty and Loyalty.

Centlivre's concern with those themes is also manifested in her depictions of parental figures and old husbands. The former are portrayed as ruthless to the point of being monstrous, and they are more important in Centlivre's plays than in Behn's, where they are much more benevolent. The old husband is also treated differently by the two writers. Behn tends to emphasize the avariciousness and
lechery of her aged husbands who are invariably cuckolded; whereas, the crying sin of Centlivre's is usually jealousy, but they are much more sympathetic. In Centlivre's canon, the more tyrannical nature of the parental figure, and the more appealing treatment of the aged husband, underscore the writer's thematic interest in demonstrating an important Whiggish principle: that subjects owe loyalty to a monarch only as long as they are permitted to act according to their own consciences.

Centlivre's Whiggism is also apparent in her portrayal of the merchant. Behn employs the Restoration stereotype that depicts these characters as greedy and dishonest, and she conflates the merchant with the "citizen." While Centlivre's early plays contain examples along these lines, as her career progressed, she began to draw a much more balanced picture of the social classes. Centlivre depicts her businessmen as honest, hard-working and even titled. Thus, the distinction between merchants and gentlemen is blurred. Similarly, Centlivre's traders are not lumped together with "citizens"; she clearly distinguishes the middle-class financier from the shopkeeper. Thus, while Behn scores political and class jokes off her Parliamentarian merchants/citizens, Centlivre demonstrates her more democratic principles.

Not only does Centlivre elevate middle-class characters, but also middle-class ethics. This is apparent in her depiction of the "fashionable" lady of society. While Behn drew witty satirical portraits of loveless marriages of convenience, she nevertheless rewarded her adulterous society ladies with lovers. Centlivre,
however, always punishes her coquettes for their immodesty in chasing men, as well as wives who contemplate adultery. Thus, the later playwright uses her fashionable ladies not as an indictment against the arranged-marriage system as her predecessor does, but as object lessons testifying to the moral absoluteness of modesty and chastity.

Centlivre's emphasis on morality is also evident in her use of servants, who are much more prominent in her works than in Behn's. Centlivre's protagonists are more conservative than Behn's, often expressing uncertainty and/or dislike for the subterfuge they're forced to practice. Thus, the morally questionable behavior necessary to conduct an intrigue is displaced from Centlivre's moral exemplars onto their servants. Furthermore, although Behn occasionally allows her menials to mock their superiors' pretensions, the butt of the joke is usually a figure of fun already; whereas, Centlivre's servants sometimes provide ironic commentary on a leading character.

Centlivre's critique of aristocratic values is part of her tendency to use her comedies as proselytizing vehicles. Neither she nor Behn, however, really played by neoclassic rules. Both were forced by charges of immorality and obscenity to defend the theatre as a site for teaching morality. It is worth noting here, though, that the ultimate goal of both women, who, after all, were professionals, was to amuse their paying customers so that sometimes their avowed intention of teaching virtue through their plays has the ring of rationalization about it.
Centlivre adheres much more closely to the neoclassic dictum that drama should teach ethics than Behn does. For one thing, Behn repeatedly violates the neoclassic law that "the good are rewarded, the evil punished." This statement should be qualified, however, by noting that what is "good" and what is "bad" mean different things to the two playwrights. For Behn adultery and promiscuity are not as sinful as parental tyranny, sexual despotism and lack of wit. Seen in this light, one could make a case for Behn's upholding the poetic justice principle; however, while superficially at least these were the values of the aristocracy, they are not representative of those of society at large. Indeed, even as she satirizes middle-class morality, Behn abides by some of its rules.

There is no such moral ambiguity in Centlivre's canon. Unlike Behn, whose social satire was largely directed against those who lacked wit, Centlivre targets "real" vices like gaming, infidelity and unchasteness, and there is no question as to who is rewarded and who is punished. The nature of her morality is different from Behn's, too. In contrast to Behn's tacit acceptance of the value system of the aristocracy, Centlivre critiques what she sees among the nobility as decadent and valorizes middle-class virtues. Thus, there is no sexuality to speak of in her plays, and much less violence.

To conclude, then, while Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre had the same destination in mind—the destruction of the forced-marriage system—they traveled profoundly different paths. How and why did Behn's lighthearted "love chase" become Centlivre's "sermon on the
mount"? The next chapter will examine the lives of the two women with an eye toward finding clues to this mystery.
Notes


2 Susanna Centlivre, *The Plays of Susanna Centlivre*, ed. Richard C. Frushell, Eighteenth-Century English Drama 7, 3 vols. (New York: Garland, 1982). Quote taken from *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret* (1714), 3: 7. Hereafter all citations from this work will be designated in the text by volume and page number. Since Centlivre's plays are facsimile reproductions in this edition, the plays are paginated individually rather than consecutively so the page numbers refer to one particular play whose name will be given in the text or in these notes. In the case of materials which are not paginated, only the volume number will be given in the parenthetical reference.

3 Behn, *The Younger Brother* (performed 1696), 4: 388.

4 Mrs. Plotwell's speech in Centlivre's *The Beau's Duel* (1702), 1: 19.


6 Quoted in F. P. Lock, *Susanna Centlivre*, Twayne's English Author Series 254 (Boston: Twayne, 1979) 44.
"Let me with Sappho and Orinda be / Oh ever Sacred Nymph, adorn'd by thee; / And give my Verses Immortality." Thus wrote Aphra Behn in her translation of Book VI of Abraham Cowley's Six Books of Plants published the year she died (1689). This appeal was interpolated into the text with the marginal note: "The translatress speaks in her own person." Impoverished and dying, the "translatress" was pleading for recognition of her achievements from posterity, a recognition she felt her contemporaries had denied her. Unfortunately, eleven generations of critics and scholars subsequently consigned Behn's memory to literary limbo, only resurrecting her ghost to excoriate her for her supposed immorality. "A harlot who danced through uncleanness," Dr. Doran's contribution to the colorful epithets heaped on the dead woman, is typical of the critical view that allowed Behn's life and works to sink into oblivion. Similarly, Susanna Centlivre's life and legacy were, until recently, afforded scant attention because of her sex and supposedly "immodest" conduct in pursuing a career in a "male" profession. Alexander Pope referred to Centlivre in a 1716 pamphlet as "the Cook's Wife in Buckingham Court." Contemporary opprobrium was at least a sign that Centlivre was worth attacking; the subsequent centuries of scholarly silence relegated her to a persona non grata status. Thus, any investigation into the biographies of the two women is greatly hampered by the dearth of information on them.
Whatever differences there are between the two playwrights, they are alike in that little is known about either until each began writing for the stage. Many of the available facts contradict each other. Worse, interesting legends have grown up about the two women which may or may not be grounded in reality. Consequently, any attempt at a definitive biography for either Behn or Centlivre means unraveling a Gordian knot of truth, half-truth and fantasy. Fortunately, this discussion has no such pretensions. What it will do is present verifiable data and the scholarly speculation that attempts to make sense of it, at least insofar as the early years of the women are concerned. The lives of both are better documented once each stepped into the public arena. We will begin with an exploration of Behn's life, then move to a consideration of Centlivre's. The essay will conclude with a summary of the information presented.

The "harlot"

As one of Behn's biographers, Angeline Goreau, points out, "The search for Aphra's identity... must begin with the recognition of the paradox that the first woman to forcibly emerge from anonymity by claiming an identity as a writer has been rendered anonymous by history." It wasn't until the late nineteenth century that scholars began serious attempts to resurrect Aphra and her works. By that time, most traces of her life, especially the early years, were either obliterated or so entangled with half-truth and sheer fantasy that today most biographies of Behn are bodies of speculation stretched across skeletons of documented facts. The sad truth is that after three hundred years, we still don't know when or where Behn was
born, or who her parents were. However, modern scholarship has
produced three theories.

The first hypothesis of Behn's origin is supported by
contemporary statements and twentieth-century research. Indeed,
many reference works accept it as the most likely scenario.\textsuperscript{5} Except
for a brief preface to the first quarto of \textit{The Younger Brother} (1696),
the earliest information about Behn's birth and childhood is found in
the \textit{Memoirs on the Life of Mrs. Behn by a Gentlewoman of her
Acquaintance} printed in the first edition of the collected \textit{Histories and
Novels} (1696).\textsuperscript{6} As is the case with so much of Behn's biography,
controversy continues over exactly who wrote the \textit{Memoirs}. Some
scholars believe Charles Gildon, Behn's literary executor, was the
author; others, a lady whose "modesty" prevented her from signing
her name.\textsuperscript{7} Whoever the "Gentlewoman" was, the writer probably knew
Behn. Details from the \textit{Memoirs} are corroborated in Behn's works,
particularly her novel \textit{Oroonoko}. Evidence suggests, however, that
parts of the \textit{Memoirs} are inaccurate, parts sheer fiction. The creator
of the \textit{Memoirs} does make one statement which has proved useful to
modern commentators. He (or she) writes that Aphra "was a
gentlewoman by birth, of a good family in the city of Canterbury in
Kent; her father's name was Johnson, whose relation to Lord
Willoughby drew him, for the advantageous post of lieutenant-general
of many isles, besides the continent of Surinam, from his quiet retreat
at Canterbury."\textsuperscript{8} That Aphra's maiden name was Johnson was never
contradicted after her death; indeed, it was confirmed in another
contemporary document. Colonel Thomas Culpepper, a friend of
Behn's, wrote in his manuscript "Adversaria" that "Mrs. Aphra Bhen [sic] was born at Canterbury or Sturry [and] her name was Johnson. She was foster sister to the Colonel [i.e., Culpepper himself], her mother being the Colonel's nurse." Another Behn biographer, Maureen Duffy, has uncovered an entry in a baptismal register at St. Michael's Church, Harbledown, for one "Eaffry Johnson," daughter of Bartholomew and Elizabeth Denham Johnson, who was baptized on December 14, 1640. Duffy takes Colonel Culpepper's assertion at face value and concludes that Aphra's mother was wet nurse either to him or his sister. Culpepper was born in December 1637, his sister in 1640. As a "foster sister," Behn might have been nursed with either, but the latter date seems more likely, given the baptismal entry and the chronology of Behn's later life. Angeline Goreau cites a nineteenth-century history of Surinam that states that Lord Willoughby appointed a relation of his named Johnson to the post of Lieutenant General of Surinam; said Johnson "took with him his wife and children, and in that number, an adopted daughter Aphra." But after she raises the tantalizing possibility that Aphra was an adopted child, Goreau quickly contradicts it by pointing out that if Behn was low-born, as some scholars believe, she would never have been adopted into a prestigious family—unless Aphra was illegitimate. Goreau speculates that Behn might have been the "natural" daughter of Lady Willoughby, whose husband stayed for long periods in the West Indies. In such cases, it was customary to give the child to its nurse who was told to claim it as her own. This circumstance could help explain another mystery about Behn. Much later in life, she
writes that she had once been "designed a nun." As it happens, Lady Willoughby was a Catholic at a time in England when persecution had rendered that religion relatively rare. However, unless or until other evidence is discovered, many tentatively accept that Aphra was the daughter of Bartholomew and Elizabeth Denham Johnson, but her status as a "foster sister" or bastard cannot be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Another theory of Aphra Behn's origins was put forth by Edmund Gosse in 1884. Gosse published a marginal note he found in a manuscript copy of the Countess of Winchilsea's poems. The Countess had written opposite a line of poetry referring to Behn: "Mrs. Behn was daughter to a barber, who lived formerly in Wye, a little market town... in Kent. Though the account of her life before her works pretends otherwise, some persons now alive do testify upon their knowledge that to be her original." What gives weight to the Countess's statement is that she knew Behn personally. Gosse himself found an entry in the parish register at Wye: "On July 10th, 1640, were baptized at Wye, Ayfara the daughter and Peter the son of John and Amy Johnson." So convinced was Gosse that he had managed to capture the elusive Aphra that in his article on her for the Dictionary of National Biography he wrote,"She was the daughter of John Johnson, a barber." Goreau, however, takes exception to this, pointing out that Behn's education was that of a gentlewoman, not a barber's daughter: "Aphra Behn seems to have received, more or less, a conventional gentlewoman's instruction: she played on the flute, she says, spoke French, and was 'mistress of all sorts of pretty
("Pretty works" refers to handicrafts designed to keep idle hands out of trouble.) Her future literary works make it clear she had gone beyond the mainly practical education given to young girls to prepare them for marriage and motherhood. Behn must have delved into history, philosophy and literature. She was familiar with classical mythology, philosophy, poetry and drama. A knowledge of French, Italian and some Spanish is evident in her plays, as well as her acquaintance with literature in those languages.

Furthermore, Goreau notes that when Aphra, her mother and sisters, were staying on Lord Willoughby's plantation in Surinam, the steward referred to them as "ladies" when he wrote a letter to his employer. In later autobiographical accounts, Behn herself makes it clear that in Surinam she and her family were accorded the privileges enjoyed by those of the upper levels of society. Indeed, their connection with the Willoughby family is a strong thread running throughout most of the information we have on Behn. It also appears that Thomas Killigrew, Groom of the Bedchamber to Charles II, knew Aphra's mother well.

A third theory purporting to expose Aphra's "true identity" was advanced by Montague Summers when he was preparing his edition of Behn's works (1915). He had an informant check the vicar's entry cited by Gosse, and that worthy found a major error: Her name was not Johnson after all, but "Ayfara, or Aphara (Aphra) Amis or Amies, the daughter of John and Amy Amis or Amies." No mention of "John Amis's" occupation is made. However, an Englishman, A. Purvis, checked the burial registry at Wye and printed the entry he found
in January, 1954: "1640, Afara ye daughter of John Amis, July ye 16th." This "Afara" would appear to have died about the time Aphra was being born.

Whichever version of Behn's origin one chooses to believe, the three accounts are similar in where they locate her birthplace. Wye and Sturry are very near Canterbury, Kent; Harbledown is only half a mile from Canterbury. So it's probable Aphra was born somewhere in the vicinity of Canterbury. In August 1642, Parliamentarian troops were sent into Kent to seize supplies and plunder the homes of Royalists. They arrested and imprisoned suspected supporters of the King. Goreau suggests that Behn's adopted "family" may have been among the victims, but we don't know for sure who was taking care of Aphra at this time or what their politics were. Lord Willoughby was a Royalist; his lady, however, once betrayed him and his co-conspirators to the Cromwellians. Aphra's loyalties may have been divided, but I believe her early experiences under the Commonwealth, whatever they may have been, account in some degree for her fervent, life-long devotion to the Stuarts.

This dedication to the monarchy was probably augmented if, as evidence seems to indicate, Behn's father was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Surinam, a new British colony in South America, in 1663 by Lord Willoughby. All that we know about Aphra's sojourn in Surinam comes from the Memoirs and her novel, Oroonoko, about a slave rebellion that Behn claimed to have witnessed herself. In Oroonoko, she writes that her "stay was to be short in that country, because my father died at sea, and never arrived to possess the
honor that was designed him.\footnote{24} Aphra's family (minus her father) probably arrived in Surinam early in the fall of 1663. They stayed at Sir Robert Harley's plantation, St. John's Hill, and frequently visited Parham Hill, Lord Willoughby's plantation. If we are to believe Oroonoko, Behn engaged in activities that must have shocked the few British women there: "going out 'tyger-hunting,' visiting savage Indian tribes, befriending Negro slaves, and involving herself in their rebellion.\footnote{25} She was already manifesting those qualities that would characterize her in her struggles to achieve fame and fortune in London: bravery, adventurousness, and a determination to be herself. Behn was also writing; probably pastoral poetry and perhaps her first play.\footnote{26} If the colony rumor mill is to be believed, she even had time to engage in romantic dalliance with "the infamous republican exile, William Scot," objective evidence of which is an allusion to the affair Major Byam, Deputy Governor of Surinam, made in a letter to Sir Robert Harley.\footnote{27} Behn left Surinam shortly before March 14, 1664.

She probably arrived in London around the middle of May. Behn would then have been about twenty-three. She was unmarried, without a father or husband to support her. While the loss of her father permitted her more freedom in Surinam than she would have had under paternal authority, it also left her without a dowry in an age when a woman's marriageability was calculated in terms of cold hard cash. Time was running out for Behn. The few alternatives to marriage for women (prostitution or menial labor) were unthinkable for a woman of gentle birth but a female was considered past her prime at twenty-five. And the "marriage market" at that time was highly
competitive, due in part to a superfluity of eligible girls. That may be why Aphra married a man named Behn, probably a London merchant of Dutch ancestry, between her return to London in 1664 and 1666, according to the Memoirs. No records of the marriage have emerged, which has led to speculation that it never occurred but Behn's contemporaries never questioned it, and no evidence has been produced to the contrary. The marriage was of short duration, no more than a year and a half, and must have been ended by Mr. Behn's death as divorce was out of the question for all but the wealthy. Aphra's husband may have been a victim of the Great Plague which raged through London for a year (1665-1666).

Behn herself never mentioned the marriage so we can only speculate on what it was like. Given her circumstances, she may have been a victim of a forced marriage for profit, a system she was to devote much of her life to attacking. Also, she reserves more antipathy in her plays for her City merchants who marry young women coerced into the union by avaricious and tyrannical parents than she does for anyone else. What was bad news for Mr. Behn was a stroke of luck for Aphra. A respectable married woman would never have been allowed by a seventeenth-century husband to work in the seamy, sordid world of the London theatre. Perhaps Behn recognized the loss of autonomy marriage represented and/or hers was unpleasant because she never married again.

Apparently the unlucky Mr. Behn left his widow with little or nothing in the way of an inheritance so Aphra was once again thrown upon her own resources. This time it appears that Sir Thomas
Killigrew came to her rescue. While Behn was in Surinam, the second Anglo-Dutch War broke out, although it was not officially declared until February 1665. Sir Thomas introduced Aphra into a spying network run by the Secretary of State, Lord Arlington. Arlington wanted to send someone to Holland to persuade William Scot, son of a Parliamentarian, to spy for England, because he was an important member of the exiled Parliamentarians who were conspiring to overthrow the Stuart monarchy with the help of the Dutch. Aphra, who had had a "gallantry" with Scot in Surinam, seemed an ideal candidate for the job so in July 1666 she found herself in Antwerp engaged in the dangerous business of espionage for the King. The first unquestioned facts in Behn's life concern her time in Antwerp. Among the official State Papers, nineteen documents survive that cover the period from July 17 through December 26, 1666, and describe in detail Aphra's activities on behalf of the King.28 Her letters make for poignant reading. She made contact with Scot and managed to provide valuable information to Arlington, but her efforts were severely hampered by the fact that her repeated pleas for money to carry out her mission fell on deaf ears. She was reduced to selling personal items to maintain herself and Scot. When she was summoned home in December 1666, she had to borrow the money for her passage back to England from one Edward Butler.

Arriving in London around May of 1667, Behn found herself unable to repay Butler. For more than a year, she unavailingly petitioned the King to pay the debt she'd incurred in his service. According to State Papers, she was incarcerated in debtor's prison
towards the end of 1668. How long she remained there and why she was released are unclear, but evidence suggests that she was free by the middle of 1669 "and at the door of the theatre with a play."\textsuperscript{29} Angeline Goreau speculates that Aphra's stint in her official capacity as an agent for the King, a position unusual for a woman, and her performance of her duties considering the hardships under which she worked, may have contributed to the attitude she expressed when she started to write for the stage. She boldly acknowledged her work as her own and claimed the right to engage in a "masculine" activity.\textsuperscript{30}

The London Behn returned to in 1667 was vastly different from the one she'd left in 1666. It had suffered the ravages not only of the Great Plague but also the Great Fire which had broken out September 2, 1666. London was being rebuilt; so, in a sense, was the theatre. Little remained of the theatre that had existed before the Commonwealth. Players from the days of James I and Charles I were dead; most of the playhouses had been destroyed or converted; few writers of the former age were still writing. A whole generation of Londoners had never seen a play or playhouse.\textsuperscript{31} It was an atmosphere ripe for innovation. For Behn, the two most important were the introduction of actresses to the public stage and the advent of the professional writer. With women on the stage, it was a logical step to have women behind the scenes as well. And playwrights were starting to demonstrate that one could make a living, albeit a tenuous one, at writing. The old patronage system was giving way in the face of the new custom of author "benefits."\textsuperscript{32}
Behn was not the first female to have a play performed on the public stage. A woman named Elizabeth Polwhele seems to have had a tragedy called The Faithful Virgins performed sometime in the 1660s but it was never published. In 1669, Marcelia; or, The Treacherous Friend, a play by one Frances Boothby, was produced by the King's Company. Neither woman ever had another work produced.

No one knows for certain how Behn gained entry into the theatrical world of London. One possibility is through the offices of Sir Thomas Killigrew, himself a playwright and holder of the patent for the King's Company. It also appears that Aphra knew several people associated with the theatre before 1670, especially the dramatists. Interestingly, it was not the King's Company who mounted her first play but Sir William Davenant's troupe, the Duke's Company, which was under the direction of Thomas Betterton after Davenant's death in 1668. Betterton may have thought a woman playwright would be a novel drawing card; alternatively, Behn may have become associated with the Duke's Company because of Davenant's introduction of actresses. Whatever the case, the Duke's Company mounted all of Behn's plays during her lifetime.

Upon her return to London in 1667, Behn had attended exclusive performances of amateur theatricals at court, as well as other fashionable entertainments, so it seems she had some connections with the aristocracy, such as the influential Howard family. (Sir Robert Howard was a principal shareholder in the King's Company.) She also became acquainted with John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, a leading light among the wits who surrounded Charles II and dictated what
would pass as fashionable. By the time her first play premiered in 1670, Behn was already friendly with men who eventually became the most prominent playwrights and critics of the 1670s and 1680s. In addition to befriending new dramatists who made their debut around the time she did, such as Henry Neville (Payne), Edward Ravenscroft and Thomas Otway, the neophyte had met Dryden and probably Wycherley. Her court and theatrical connections were very important for Behn as the relationship between those worlds was almost incestuous. Not only did some of the wits themselves write plays but also playhouse audiences were largely composed of courtiers and minor state officials. It was vital for a beginning playwright to earn the approval of influential amateurs like Rochester who could make or break a play with one well-turned bon mot. Indeed, sometimes the intervention of an established playwright or powerful amateur was necessary to even get a manuscript read by a troupe. Aphra would also have been aware that to survive as a playwright, she would have to please this small clique who had very definite political allegiances. While Behn had already proved her loyalty to the King and his supporters, Elaine Hobby suggests that had her politics been different or less publicly avowed, she would most probably have been unable to make a living.

Not only did Behn have to be politically correct, she also had to contend with the fact that most of her audience considered the theatre a great place to socialize, the plays themselves merely minor distractions. Restoration playgoers were notorious for being noisy, rowdy and hard to please. To get their attention was hard enough,
to keep it almost impossible. Playwrights, whose very existence depended on that all-important third day, went to great lengths to give the public what it wanted, no matter how vulgar or artistically worthless. Dramatists were constantly attempting to anticipate the tastes of a fickle audience. When Behn was taken to task later in her career for what she wrote, she defended herself by pointing out she simply gave the Town what it wanted in order to survive. Unlike the few women who had achieved a certain amount of literary fame, like Katherine Philips or the Duchess of Newcastle, Aphra had no husband for encouragement or financial support. Her very existence depended on how well she "read" her audience and pleased their jaded palates.

Apparently, she did just that with her very first play. The Forced Marriage, a romantic tragicomedy in the Beaumont and Fletcher tradition, was produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields by the Duke's Company in September 1670. It had a respectable run of six nights. It also introduced what was to be Behn's major theme in most of her works: the evils of the arranged marriage system which put economic and social factors ahead of love. Far from pretending, as her literary foremothers had, that her work was produced without her knowledge and consent, Behn signed her work and boldly declared her sex in her prologue and her intention to scout "masculine" territory. It was an important moment in the history of the woman writer in England.

Perhaps encouraged by her success, Behn quickly followed The Forced Marriage with a second play, The Amorous Prince, another romantic tragicomedy with more emphasis on the comedy. It was produced at the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields in February
1671. At about the same time, Aphra's poetry was beginning to be circulated outside her immediate circle of friends; the modern editor of a miscellany first published in 1671, The Westminster Drollery, attributes one of the poems to her. There is also the possibility that Behn may have been the editor of a volume of verse published in 1672. It was called The Covent Garden Drollery and advertised as "Written by the refined' st Witts of the Age. And Collected by A. B." The book included works by Dryden, Wycherley, the Earl of Rochester, Thomas Killigrew and four poems by Behn herself that were printed for the first time. Several of Behn's poems also appeared in the miscellany Choice Airs and Dialogues (1673) along with pieces by prominent poets and poetasters of the day.37

Aphra's third play, The Dutch Lover, was performed at the Duke's new theatre in Dorset Garden in February 1673. It was a dismal failure. The novelty of a woman writer had vanished in the realization that Behn fully intended to continue competing with men in a "masculine" profession, which was perceived as a threat not only to male dramatists but to masculine superiority as well. Critics attacked the play so viciously that when it was published Behn felt compelled to preface the edition with a lengthy "Epistle to the Reader." In it she asserts that while the piece was "hugely injured in the acting," the main objection to it was the sex of its author. She had overstepped the bounds of feminine "modesty" and dared, in the prologue to The Amorous Prince, to take sides in the ongoing literary debate (the "Ancients" vs. the "Moderns") over the proper form and purpose of drama. A woman, who had the limited education
accorded females at the time, had boldly and publicly voiced her opinion in a matter which was outside her proper "sphere." In the "Epistle," Behn defended her position, which was that of a "Modern," by ridiculing as "academic frippery" the so-called "learning" she had been denied. She dismissed as pretentious and useless attempts to regulate art and made it clear she thought that drama's chief purpose was entertainment, not the "reformation of men's minds or manners."

Not only had her intelligence as a woman been impugned, but Behn's morals were called into question. In the minds of her contemporaries, a woman who exposed herself to public scrutiny was little better than a strumpet: "Whore's the like reproachful name, as poetess--the luckless twins of shame." Behn resented being condemned for simply pursuing a career, and she made no apologies for her private life. She believed the sexes should have equal sexual freedom; still, her behavior was more circumspect than that of her friends, the wits. Thus, she was doubly indignant when her plays were condemned as being lascivious. In the "Epistle," she points out that they were no more "bawdy" than the plays written by men. She was singled out for condemnation, she maintains, because of her sex. Accusations of personal immodesty and of writing "obscene" plays would dog Aphra for the rest of her life—and beyond.

The Dutch Lover is a transitional work. Behn was abandoning the Beaumont and Fletcher tradition in favor of the intrigue comedy that would eventually become her favorite genre. Comedy of intrigue suited Behn's personal talents; "its many plots offered a chance to appeal to romance, intrigue, manners, and farce in the same play, and
to indulge her interest in spectacle."\(^3\) Besides, sex comedy was becoming popular. As Aphra pointed out in a later work (Sir Patient Fancy), if the critics who reviled her for writing "lewd" plays wanted to reform her, they should first reform the audience. After all, as someone who had to write for a living, she only gave her customers what they wanted.

After the failure of The Dutch Lover, no works in any genre by Behn, with one possible exception, are known until July 1676. (A play, The Woman Turn'd Bully (1675), is sometimes attributed to her but no evidence exists for the attribution.) Despite her defiant attitude in the "Epistle" to The Dutch Lover, Behn may have been discouraged enough to withdraw from the theatrical world. Or there may have been another reason for her three-year silence. We can only speculate on her activities during this period, but it seems probable that sometime in the early or middle 1670s, Aphra began a long love affair with one John Hoyle, a lawyer. Evidence suggests she had had previous liaisons with William Scot and Jeffrey Boys but to judge by the letters and poems she addressed to "J. H.," the intensity of her love for Hoyle was unprecedented. John Hoyle "was unquestionably a Restoration rake in lifestyle," part of the gay and amoral society of the Court and the playhouses: "He was witty and cynical and had the reputation of a libertine."\(^{40}\) Theirs was a tumultuous relationship. Hoyle wanted Aphra to confine her activities to him alone and at his convenience while he offered no reciprocal fidelity and forbade her to object to his affairs. Behn chafed at his unfair restrictions and was deeply hurt by his infidelities. He clearly
had the upper hand in their relationship because when, like the spirited woman she was, Aphra attempted to assert her independence he brought her to heel by withholding his affection. Hoyle's myriad sexual exploits included both men and women. Aphra knew he was a homosexual; she appeared neither to approve nor disapprove. In February 1687, Behn's errant lover was tried for sodomizing a poulterer. The grand jury brought in a verdict of *ignoramus*, and he was released. The exact chronology of the Hoyle/Behn liasion is uncertain, but probably it was over by the time of Hoyle's arrest. (He outlived Aphra by three years, dying in a knife fight after a drunken brawl in a tavern.) Several poems by Aphra renouncing men in general, and Hoyle in particular, reveal her pain and disillusionment; one hints that she may have turned to women for sexual gratification in the last few years of her life.41

Whatever else Behn was doing in the period from 1673 to 1676, she was making a splash in society. Her circle of acquaintances had grown to encompass all the Court wits, leading poets, playwrights, musicians, actors and actresses, as well as lawyers, doctors, painters and students. She had pleased Charles II and won the patronage of his brother, the future James II. Dryden liked and encouraged her; Sir Peter Lely painted a portrait of her; Nell Gwyn and Elizabeth Barry were close friends. She was widely admired for her beauty and wit. She wrote verses to many of her friends, and they returned the compliment.

When Behn returned to the stage with the tragedy *Abdelazer* in July of 1676, she returned with a vengeance. She was entering her
most productive period in terms of output and quality. Between July 1676 and March 1682, she produced eleven plays known to be hers and perhaps three others. All but one were printed. The majority of her best and most well-known plays were mounted during this five and a half year period.42

Abdelazer, one of her worst plays, was a success, in part because romantic tragedy was popular. The Bettertons and Elizabeth Barry took the leads, and Nell Gwyn brought a large Court contingent to see it, thus ensuring its popularity. It was chosen to be the first play to reopen Drury Lane in the spring of 1695.

Again Aphra found herself under attack, this time for plagiarism. (Rumors persisted throughout her life that one of her lovers, notably John Hoyle, wrote her plays.) This was a particularly unjust accusation because it was standard practice to rewrite earlier material; most Restoration playwrights, including Dryden, had done it. Usually, the "plagiary" was little more than using an old plot for a new purpose. In fact, the only way Behn could write as many plays in the space of time she did was to work with old material. What she used she made her own and often vastly improved on the original. Thus, she bitterly resented this charge and felt that she was being singled out for punishment.43

The driving force behind Behn's extraordinary output was financial necessity. Poetry paid nothing so playwriting was her only means of livelihood. That her need was great is evidenced by the fact that her fifth play, The Town Fop, followed quickly on the heels of Abdelazer, which had been produced in July of 1676. The Town
Fop, mounted at Dorset Garden in September of the same year, marked a distinct departure for Behn, being partly a comedy of intrigue and partly one of manners, presaging the pattern of most of the plays to follow. The piece was a success; performances are recorded as late as November.

Two plays produced in 1677 have been attributed to Behn. The first, The Debauchee, was produced at the Duke's Theatre in February; the second, The Counterfeit Bridegroom, performed in the fall of the same year. In both cases, strong evidence makes it probable that the plays are Aphra's but we cannot say for certain.

However, the comedy, The Rover, which debuted in March 1677 at Dorset Garden, is definitely Behn's. Her most famous success in her own time, the play is now considered one of the best and most representative of all her comedies. Ironically, when it took the stage, Behn hid her identity as the author by resorting to a stratagem she had employed on a few earlier occasions, using the pronoun "he" in the prologue to refer to the writer. The printed edition appeared without a name on the title page until the third issue. Apparently, the critics had been at it again. In a postscript to The Rover, Behn complains that the malicious accusation of plagiarism had caused her publishers to postpone printing the play.

The Rover, a comedy of wit presented within a comedy of intrigue framework, contains several characteristics of Aphra's mature comedy: "the handsome, carefree gallant, the frank and witty heroine, and a sparkling dialogue laced with comic images from everyday life." The play remained popular longer than any other by Behn, becoming
part of the repertoire of the Duke's Company. When it was revived at Covent Garden for the last time in February 1757, it was still popular enough for ten performances.45

Behn's seventh play, Sir Patient Fancy, was produced at Dorset Garden in January 1678. Frederick Link calls it "one of the best of the English adaptations of Moliere" and a fine play "combining within its intrigue framework a considerable amount of witty dialogue; analysis of contemporary manners; satire on such topics as Puritanism, mercenary marriages, and pedantry; and obvious but very funny farce."46 The latter was increasingly beginning to dominate Restoration theatre. Behn had a gift for farce, but she was equally admired for her repartee. Once again, she found herself under attack, and in a "Preface to the Reader" in the printed edition of Sir Patient Fancy, she blames her haste in printing the play on her need to defend herself against accusations that the play was bawdy and she a plagiarist. She also complains about the support she has not received from members of her own sex despite the fact that it was their rights she was trying to uphold. She contends that the charges being made against her spring from resentment of a woman playwright. She was probably right.

Behn's life got harder in the summer of 1678 when the so-called "Popish Plot" burst like a thunderstorm over London. Panic ensued when dubious informants, like the notorious Titus Oates, claimed to have evidence of a Jesuit-inspired conspiracy to assassinate Charles II and install his brother, James, a Roman Catholic, on the throne. For years, the anti-Royalists had feared that when James ascended
the throne, he would revive Roman Catholicism in England and rule as an absolute monarch with the help of his cousin, Louis XIV of France. The Plot seemed to confirm their worst fears. In the atmosphere of hysteria, people were arrested on flimsy or non-existent evidence, even executed. The incident brought to a head years of partisan struggle and was the beginning of the Tory and Whig parties. Gone were the merry days of the Restoration. In the volatile atmosphere of charge and counter-charge, when political rivalries were white-hot, few had the time or inclination to indulge in frivolous activities.

Thus, the two theatres were in serious trouble as attendance began to decline. Behn’s livelihood was threatened. This is apparent in her prologue to her eighth play, *The Feigned Courtesans*, a comedy produced at Dorset Garden in March 1679. In it, she complains that real plots like Titus Oates’s had stolen attention away from poets’ plots. She makes it clear that she believes the Popish Plot to be nothing but an invention. In the epilogue, she bemoans the increasingly smaller audiences and their growing taste for farce with which she had endowed *The Feigned Courtesans* to ensure its success. The play did not become part of the repertoire but was acted more than once after the spring run; it was revived for at least five performances in the 1716-17 season.

As the fallout from the Plot continued to dominate life in London, it became necessary for playwrights to declare allegiance to one party. Considering her many Court connections and recent royal patronage of her plays, it is not surprising Behn aligned herself with the Tories. She was already predisposed by sentiment to take this
stance, but it was also good business since Whig playwrights were subjected to censorship and direct interference. In order to make her political position clear and raise some much-needed money, she began to dedicate her plays to outstanding Tories. (Her early plays had appeared without dedications.) Indeed, she had already expressed her sympathies in her very first play. Frederick Link notes that, "The political theme appears in some form in nearly half of the twenty-two prologues and epilogues presumably written by Mrs. Behn. . . . The reverse of the coin appears in the frequent panegyrics to Charles and his policies."48

While no account exists of a performance, probably Behn's ninth play, The Young King, took the stage in September or October 1679. A romantic tragicomedy, it was most likely written before Behn's first produced plays, The Forced Marriage and The Amorous Prince, because it is typical of her early style and inferior to its successors. Behn revived the play and added to it explicit references to the current political situation. In the following year, a play attributed to Behn, The Revenge, was produced around June at the Duke's Theatre and published anonymously. It seems likely but not certain that she was the author.

With the possible exception of The Revenge, the London stage had no new Behn creation in 1680. The financial difficulties engendered by dwindling theatre audiences drove Aphra, as it did many of her colleagues, to take advantage of a new vogue for translation. "A Paraphrase on Oenone to Paris," published in Ovid's Epistles, Translated by Several Hands (1680), was prefaced by Dryden,
who also contributed a translation, as did many other prominent literary figures. Behn labored under a distinct disadvantage in that she had no training in Latin, having been excluded from a classical education because of her sex. She was forced to work from a literal translation done by someone else, and her "loose paraphrase" is very loose, indeed. However, Dryden praised her, and the volume went through several editions, suggesting that her contemporaries did not particularly object to her small Latin.49 She was lampooned in "A Satyr on the Modern Translators" (1684), but it was for her attack on the hypocrisy of sexual codes applying to feminine behavior in her translation, rather than for its quality.50 By the middle of the 1680s, her abilities as a translator had been recognized by her contemporaries.51

When Aphra resumed her playwriting in 1681, once again it was with a vengeance. Between January 1681 and May 1682, she produced five plays increasingly more militant in their political stances. In the middle of the Exclusion Bill Crisis, Behn dedicated her tenth play, The Second Part of The Rover, to James, Duke of York, who was then in exile abroad. Produced around January 1681 at Dorset Garden, the play left no doubt, if there was any, about Behn's political allegiance. In the dedication, Aphra asserts that the Whigs were playing "the old game o're again," the "old game" being the Parliamentarian rebellion of Charles I's era. In the prologue, she attacks fellow playwright Elkannah Settle who had championed the Whigs; in the epilogue, she condemns the other writers who had abandoned the royal cause. The Second Part of The Rover represents an obvious attempt to capitalize
on the success of the earlier play, but the piece, inferior to its predecessor, suffers from Behn's inability to integrate its farcical elements into her comedy of intrigue framework. Like most sequels, it was never as popular as the original.

In her next play, Behn continued her one-woman war against Whiggism. The False Count was produced at the Dorset Garden Theatre late in November or early in December 1681. In the prologue, Aphra sarcastically pretends to have embraced the Whig cause and ridicules her enemies by listing all her Tory "sins." Angeline Goreau suggests that her list of "sins" indicates that Behn had not been confining her political activities to the stage but had also been penning lampoons and satires—probably anonymously—and maybe even pamphlets. Behn even reverses the position she had taken in her "Epistle" in The Dutch Lover that comedy was not meant to teach virtue. In the dedication to The False Count, she makes political morality an exception, saying that drama could and should be political when the situation called for commitment. The False Count, a light comedy, almost pure farce, found receptive audiences and was presented often during the period. Although never a regular part of the repertoire, the play was revived in the 1715-16 season and in 1718 and 1730.

Behn's next play, The Roundheads, her most explicitly partisan play to date, was based on John Tatham's The Rump. The farce depicts the final days of the Commonwealth when members of the Committee of Safety fought among themselves to find a successor to Cromwell. Behn used the real names of the people involved but
turned them all into bumbling fools and cowards whose machinations smacked more of motley than Machiavelli. Through farcical exaggeration, she draws parallels between the persons and events of 1659–60 and the contemporary political situation, casting the Whigs, of course, as the Roundheads. She dedicated the play to Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton, an illegitimate son of Charles II. In it she exhorts him to set an example of loyalty to his royal father; however, clearly she is actually speaking to another of Charles's illegitimate sons, the disloyal Duke of Monmouth who was conspiring with Shaftesbury. The Roundheads, more political propaganda than a serious satire, and one of the worst of Behn's plays, is ruined by her inability to integrate dissimilar elements: "The mixture of love intrigue with farce seriously mars Part II of The Rover; here, where the farce is not only dominant but political, the mixture is intolerable." However, the play's performance in December 1681 was apparently successful, perhaps because Tory sympathies were ascendant in the theatre by 1682.

Between The Roundheads and Behn's next published play appeared her only known play that was never printed, Like Father, Like Son, performed at Dorset Garden around March 1682. All that remains of it now are its prologue and epilogue. It must have been an utter disaster because a piece had to be pretty bad not to be published.

Behn had much better luck with her next attempt. The City Heiress, one of her best comedies, was produced at Dorset Garden in late April or early May 1682. Like The Roundheads, it is an explicit
expression of Aphra’s political sentiments. The times they were a-changing; the preponderance of Tories in the audience allowed Behn to air opinions that might have been dangerous only a few years before. Subtitled Sir Timothy Treatall, the play is a comedy of wit with political satire a strong thread running throughout. Sir Timothy, the very essence of all the City merchants Behn mercilessly caricatured in her works, is also an obvious analogue to Shaftesbury. An avaricious Whig, he is hypocritical, bribes his supporters and engages in shady political intrigues. Should anyone miss the connection, satiric references are made to Shaftesbury’s support of the Exclusion Bill, the Ignoramus verdict handed down in his trial and his hopes of being elected king of Poland in 1675. Behn dedicated the play to Henry Howard, whose great-uncle William Howard, Viscount Stafford, had been executed in the fever of the Popish Plot. She had been outraged by the unjustified killing, which had only intensified her hatred of the Whigs. She praised Henry for his unswerving loyalty to his great-uncle and the King. The City Heiress was initially popular and played at intervals for some years. It was revived for at least one performance in 1707 but never appeared on the stage again.

Up until now, Behn had increasingly allowed her political views free reign on the stage, but then she went too far. In August of 1682, she was asked to write a prologue and epilogue to an anonymous play, Romulus and Hersilia. Her epilogue contained an obvious attack on the Duke of Monmouth, and warrants were issued for the arrest of Behn and Lady Slingsby, the actress who had spoken the offending
passage, for "abusive reflections upon persons of quality." It is not known if they were imprisoned for the offense but if so, it was for a short time only because both were in evidence publicly soon after. However, the incident ended Behn's theatrical expression of her political views which were from then on confined to her poems on state occasions. Indeed, the London stage was bereft of any Behn production until 1686.

In many respects, 1682 was a turning point in Behn's life. Not long after her arrest, the ailing King's Company merged with the Duke's Company to form the United Company (November 1682). Since declining attendance at the theatres already had playwrights complaining of hard times, the policy of the United Company to favor the revival of old plays over production of new ones was disastrous for the struggling dramatists. Those who depended on playwriting for a living were in desperate need, including Behn. To make matters worse, possibly about this time, Aphra began experiencing the first symptoms of the sclerotic and dystrophic disease that darkened her last years and impoverished her. Sixteen-eighty-two marked the end of Behn's reliance on the playhouse for a living. She had to find other ways to raise revenue, especially as her health worsened.

Behn turned to poetry, translation and fiction. Many of the songs she had written for her plays appeared in a collection of her works called Poems upon Several Occasions: With a Voyage to the Island of Love in 1684. A Voyage was her translation of Abbe Paul Tallemant's fantasy Le voyage de l'isle d'amour (1663), which she expanded by a third. Her first attempt at fiction, based on a
contemporary scandal, was published that same year. Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister is a fictionalized account of the adventures of Lord Grey of Werk, a Whig, who had outraged society by eloping with his sister-in-law. Behn wrote two more parts of this "novel" over a four year period as real events developed, making it her longest fictional work. Love Letters was so popular that it had run into at least sixteen editions by the end of the eighteenth century.61

Behn's life was changed again in 1685 when Charles II died on February 6. With his passing, an era came to an end: "Aphra's beloved theater was operating in severely reduced circumstances; her means of income was seriously threatened; her world had been torn apart by political strife; her generation was quickly passing--dead or dying, starving, burned out or simply given up to staidness."62 She wrote an elegy on Charles's death, A Pindaric on the Death of Our Late Sovereign, and a poem on James's accession, A Pindaric Poem on the Happy Coronation, as well as A Poem to . . . Catherine Queen Dowager. In her paean to James, she mentions how loyal she has been to the Stuarts and how weary, overworked and impoverished she is. She was indeed hard up and chronically unwell, her arthritis making it difficult to write. Hardpressed, she edited a Miscellany, Being A Collection of Poems by Several Hands, including her own. Behn appended her translation of four hundred maxims by La Rochefoucauld, titled Seneca Unmasked; or, Moral Reflections, to her Miscellany.
In 1686, Behn returned to her first love, the theatre, with *The Lucky Chance*, her first play after a four year absence from the stage. Produced at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane about April 1686, it was the only new piece done by the United Company that month. *The Lucky Chance*, typical of Behn's intrigue comedies, contains also a good bit of wit and the usual infusion of farce. It had a successful run, drawing a full house on the third day, and was played at intervals for ten years. Revived at Lincoln's Inn Fields in the summer of 1718, the comedy was adapted by Hannah Cowley in 1786 as *A School for Greybeards*. Despite its success (or because of it), the comedy was attacked for its supposed "indecency," an accusation motivated by the sex of its author. After years spent establishing herself as a successful, professional playwright, Behn once again was faced with the same prejudice she had had to overcome at the very beginning of her career. Infuriated, she added a manifesto to the text when the play was published in 1687, answering the charges made against her and asserting her right to be treated as any other professional, regardless of sex.

In the same year that *The Lucky Chance* appeared (1686), Behn published her translation of Balthasar de Bonnecourse's courtesy book, *La Montre; or, The Lover's Watch*. She retained the title but combined the two-part French work into one. Her "translation" was almost twice as long as the original, containing new material added by the translatress.

The last of Behn's plays to be produced during her lifetime was a "comedy-farce," *The Emperor of the Moon*, which went on the boards
at Dorset Garden in March 1687. Frederick Link calls the play "a remarkable one, combining a love intrigue, satire on contemporary foibles, the antics of the commedia dell'arte, and the spectacle of a contemporary opera, into one integrated whole." The prominence of Harlequin and Scaramouch, Link notes, establishes the farce as one in the "new" style, based on French and Italian models. The complete assimilation of the commedia figures into the action makes The Emperor of the Moon one of the first plays of its kind in English.65 Interestingly, in many of her previous prologues, Behn had castigated audiences for their taste for farce, which she saw as degrading and beneath her. She blamed her increasing reliance on that genre on the exigencies of being forced to write for a living. Giving customers what they wanted literally meant life or death to her, particularly at this time when her health was deteriorating, and she was living a hand-to-mouth existence. Indeed, the prologue to The Emperor of the Moon documents the progression of Restoration drama from heroic tragedy through comedy to farce, and its epilogue pinpoints the rapidly dwindling number of playgoers as the reason why playwrights were doing anything they had to to stimulate business. Ironically, Behn's "comedy-farce" was a great success and became her longest-lived play. The piece, performed more than 132 times between its 1687 debut by the United Company and 1749, was a repertory piece for many years, frequently revived, and was acted (with some changes) for the last time in 1777.66 The Emperor of the Moon was also Aphra's last successful play.
The year 1687 saw publications by Behn in other genres. Francis Barlow, a famous artist much admired for his engravings of animals and birds, put out an elaborate folio edition of *Aesop: Aesop's Fables with His Life*; in English, French and Latin, to which she contributed 32 quatrains for the biographical plates and 110 to the fables. Although she no longer aired her political views on the stage, Behn managed to work topical allusions to the English political situation, as well as to the literary scene and the foibles of society, into nearly a quarter of her contribution to the work.\(^6\)\(^7\) Despite her illness and poverty, Aphra continued to champion the Stuart cause in her "translations" and poetry, as evidenced by her poems published in 1687, *A Pindaric to . . . Christopher Duke of Albemarle* and *To the Memory of . . . George Duke of Buckingham*. The same year saw the publication of the third and final part of *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, titled *The Amours of Philander and Sylvia*.

As her health worsened and her financial condition became desperate, Behn worked feverishly to maintain herself; consequently, 1688 was one of the most prolific years of her career. She continued her practice of writing occasional poems about important Tory events and leaders in hopes of remuneration: *A Congratulatory Poem to . . . Her Most Sacred Majesty*; *A Congratulatory Poem . . . on the Happy Birth of the Prince of Wales*; and *A Poem to Sir Roger L’Estrange*. Behn also wrote a poem called *To Poet Bavius* attacking one written by the anti-Royalist hack John Baber. She published three translations. *The History of Oracles* is her translation of Fontenelle’s *Histoire des oracles* (Paris, 1686), and *A Discovery of New Worlds* is
translated from Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (Paris, 1686). The third is *Lycidus;* or, *The Lover in Fashion,* an adaptation of Tallemant's sequel to *A Voyage to the Island of Love.* Appended to *Lycidus* is the last substantial group of poems known to be by Behn.

Sixteen-eighty-eight also saw the publication of three of her "novels," including the one for which she is most remembered: *The Fair Jilt, Agnes de Castro* and *Oroonoko.* *Agnes de Castro* is an adaptation of Mlle de Brillac's *Agnes de Castro, nouvelle Portugaise* but *Oroonoko* is reputedly based on Behn's adventures in Surinam. It is the work by which most modern readers and scholars know her and has kept her name alive. Frederick Link notes that many of her plays are better works, but he calls *Oroonoko* "one of the best pieces of seventeenth-century English fiction." Indeed, debate continues today over whether *Oroonoko,* rather than *Robinson Crusoe,* is the first true English novel.

Time was running out for Behn; she knew she was dying. So was the cause to which she had devoted her life. After a turbulent reign, James II took ship for France on Christmas Eve, 1688, never to return. He had been ordered into exile by his successor, the Protestant William of Orange, who was married to his daughter Mary. Behn wrote *A Congratulatory Poem to . . . Queen Mary,* who at least was a Stuart, but when Gilbert Burnet suggested she pen a eulogy to the new king, who would probably reward her handsomely, she balked. She sent Burnet some other verses instead and explained "that her loyalties would not permit her to turn her pen whichever
way the prosperous wind blew: 'The breeze that wafts the crowding nations o're, / Leaves me unpity'd far behind / On the forsaken barren shore.'

In 1689, Behn published works in other genres besides the poems she sent Queen Mary and Dr. Burnet. Two more of her "novels" appeared: The History of the Nun and The Lucky Mistake. A statement in the former has fueled speculation that Aphra had been a closet Catholic all her life. In the opening of The History of the Nun, the narrator, after discussing Continental convents and religions, declares, "I once was design'd an humble Votary in the House of Devotion" but decided against the religious life. Scholars point to other evidence in Behn's life, such as her devotion to the Howards of Norfolk, the premier Catholic family in England. She confidently believed the Popish Plot was a Whig fabrication, and she portrayed Viscount Stafford, Henry Howard's great-uncle executed during the Plot fever, as a martyr comparable to Christ. Her plays and stories contain sympathetic portrayals of Catholics, and she was fanatically devoted to the Catholic James II. We cannot, of course, say for certain where her religious affiliation was placed but this possibility cannot be dismissed out of hand, especially if we remember that Behn may have come under the influence of the Catholic Lady Willoughby early in her life.

The other publication of 1689 to which Behn contributed, The Third Part of the Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley, Being His Six Books of Plants, like her first translation, is from the Latin. Many writers had a hand in its creation; Aphra's part is Book VI, "Of Trees."
"translation" is almost three-quarters again as long as the original with a large percentage of space devoted to political sentiments. (Cowley was a Tory, too.)

On April 16, 1689, five days after the coronation of William and Mary, Behn's earthly struggles came to an end. She died alone, in great pain and in penury. Even death could not stop the attacks upon her. When it was decided to bury her in Westminster Abbey, the first woman to be so honored for her literary achievements, objections were raised because of her "scandalous" life and "indecent" works. Charles Gildon, her literary executor, described Aphra's burial "in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, under a plain marble stone, with two wretched verses for her epitaph, who had herself wrote so many good." Traditionally attributed to her ex-lover, John Hoyle, the "wretched verses" were "Here lies a proof that wit can never be / Defence against mortality."

If Behn's detractors thought they'd seen the last of her, they were doomed to disappointment. In November of 1689, George Jenkins staged her posthumous play, The Widow Ranter, at Drury Lane. Probably composed around 1688, this "tragicomedy" revolves around Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia in 1675-76 but contains four plots that are ineffectively integrated. The production failed, and no records of other performances are known. Behn's second posthumous play, and her last to be staged, was The Younger Brother, a comedy performed at Drury Lane February 1696. Charles Gildon produced it with his revisions but, again, too many unassimilated plots crippled it. Gildon attributed the play's failure "to some faction that was made
against it" but Frederick Link notes that while that may be partially true the play's "inherent weakness would in any case have precluded continued success."74

In the years following Behn's death, poems by her and attributed to her appeared. The year 1698 saw publication of six of her "novels": *The Adventure of the Black Lady; The Court of the King of Bantam; The Nun, or the Perjured Beauty; The Unfortunate Happy Lady; The Unfortunate Bride;* and *The Wandering Beauty.* The last of her fiction, most of which was written before 1685, was published in 1700: *The Dumb Virgin* and *The Unhappy Mistake.*

Many things were written about Behn during and after her lifetime, much of it pejorative, but perhaps the best description we have of the woman herself comes from the author of the *Memoirs* in the first edition of her *Histories and Novels,* quoted by Frederick Link:

She was of a generous and open temper, something passionate, very serviceable to her friends in all that was in her power, and could sooner forgive an injury than do one. She had wit, honor, good humor, and judgment. She was mistress of all the pleasing arts of conversation, but used 'em not to any but those who loved not [sic] plain dealing. She was a woman of sense, and by consequence a lover of pleasure, as indeed all . . . are; but only some would be thought to be above the conditions of humanity, and place their chief pleasure in a proud, vain hypocrisy. For my part, I knew her intimately, and never saw aught unbecoming the just modesty of our sex, tho' more gay and free than the folly of the precise will allow. She was, I'm satisfied, a greater honor to our sex than all the canting tribe of dissemblers that die with the false reputation of saints.

Link observes, "Nothing in her works, or in what is known about her, suggests that this description is anything less than accurate."75 It is just one of life's (and literature's) little ironies that a woman, who
was more prolific than any other Restoration writer except Dryden, and who competed successfully with men on male terms, should have been relegated to the literary dung-heap of the forgotten for centuries.

The "Cook's Wife"

Susanna Centlivre, the "best comic playwright in the early decades of the eighteenth century," wrote nineteen plays, three of which—The Busy Body, The Wonder, and A Bold Stroke for a Wife—stayed in the repertory throughout the nineteenth century and were performed not only in England, but also in the United States and Australia. Yet, as in the case of Aphra Behn, we know very little about Centlivre, apart from the body of her work. Like Behn's life too, Centlivre's is an inextricable tangle of fact and fiction: few facts, lots of fiction. No one can say for certain who her parents were, when or where she was born. Indeed, we have no reliable record of her existence until her literary debut in London and even then her personal life is shrouded in mystery. However, four accounts based, in whole or in part, on firsthand knowledge, furnish scholars with a starting point.

According to F. P. Lock, "The earliest, the most authoritative, and the only source that appeared in Centlivre's lifetime is the article on her in Giles Jacob's literary reference work, The Poetical Register (1719)." Lock notes that "[s]everal considerations" make it possible that Jacob obtained his information from the lady herself; he quotes Jacob:

This Gentlewoman, now living, is Daughter of one Mr. Freeman, late of Holbeach, in Lincolnshire, who married a
Daughter of Mr. Marham, a Gentleman of a good Estate at Lynn Regis, in the County of Norfolk. There was formerly an Estate in the Family of her Father; but he being a Dissenter, and a zealous Parliamentarian, was so very much persecuted at the Restoration, that he was necessitated to fly into Ireland, and his Estate was confiscated: Nor was the Family of her Mother free from the Severities of the Times, they being likewise Parliamentarians. Her Education was in the Country; and her Father dying when she was but three Years of Age; and her Mother not living till she was twelve, what Improvements she has made, have been meerly [sic] by her own Industry and Application. She was married before the Age of Fifteen, to a Nephew of Sir Stephen Fox. This Gentleman living with her but a Year, she afterwards married Mr. Carrol, an Officer in the Army: And survived him likewise, in the space of a Year and a half. She is since married to Mr. Joseph Cent Livre, Yeoman of the Mouth to his present Majesty.

Another account comes to us from Abel Boyer, a Whig historian and journalist who had edited a collection of letters to which Centlivre had contributed. In his obituary of her in his monthly review, The Political State of Great Britain, Boyer wrote, "Her Father's Name, if I mistake not, was Rawkins, her first Husband's, Carol. From a mean Parentage, and Education, after several gay Adventures . . ." Centlivre commenced her career as a playwright. While her education may have been "mean," Boyer mentions that Centlivre "improved her natural Genius, by Reading and good Conversation." In yet a third version, we get an intriguing glimpse of one of those 'gay Adventures' Boyer mentions so coyly. A Complete List of All the English Dramatic Poets, appended to Thomas Whincop's Scanderbeg (1747), is usually attributed to John Mottley. Mottley resided in London in the latter half of Centlivre's career and claimed to have helped her compose A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1718). Lock
calls Mottley's tale "a curious amalgam of apparently authentic detail and improbable apocryphal anecdote":

According to Mottley, Susanna left home to escape the cruelty of a stepmother. Weeping at the roadside, she was picked up by a Cambridge student (Anthony Hammond, future M. P., man of affairs, and minor poet), disguised as his "Cousin Jack," and installed in his college rooms. The imposture, and Susanna's university education, were prolonged by some months. At length, Hammond sent her away to seek her fame and fortune in London. Mottley places the incident before the first two "marriages," which he goes out of his way to discredit. He describes her as "married, or something like it" to the nephew of Sir Stephen Fox, whom Carroll merely "succeeded in her Affections."89

Mottley also says that at Cambridge, Centlivre "learned to fence, and studied grammar and the terms of logic, rhetoric and ethics."81 He adds, "From her first coming to London, she took care to improve both the Charms of her person and her Genius; she learnt French, and read a great deal of Poetry especially, but studied Men as well as Books."82

The last account of Centlivre's early life which may be based on firsthand knowledge is found in William Rufus Chetwood's The British Theatre (1750). He agrees that Susanna's father's name was Freeman, and that the family was "Respectable," but he asserts that her education could be attributed "intirely to her own Industry, and the Assistance of a Neighboring French Gentleman, who so much admired her sprightly Wit and Manner, that he undertook to instruct her in the French Language."83 Consequently, she could read Moliere before she was twelve. Like Mottley, Chetwood has Centlivre leaving home to escape a wicked stepmother after the death of her father but instead of going to Cambridge, he has the teenager joining a band of
strolling players. According to him, the neophyte actress specialized in male roles: "She had a small Wen on her left Eye lid, which gave her a Masculine Air." Chetwood, who knew Centlivre personally, claims the playwright died "in the 56th Year of her Age."

What are we to make of these contradictory "fairy tales"? At this point, none of these versions can be proved or disproved so we can only talk in terms of probability and educated speculation. Most of the evidence indicates that Centlivre was born sometime between 1667 and 1677. Chetwood's statement of her age at death would put her birthdate at 1667; however, the editor of her Works claims she died "when she was near forty-five Years old," which puts it between 1677 and 1678. Also, the editor mentions that she wrote her first play at twenty, giving us a date sometime before 1680. There also seems to be general agreement on Centlivre's birthplace; all of her early biographers except Abel Boyer connect her with Holbeach, a small market town near the Wash, in the Fen district of Lincolnshire. The *Flying Post* for June 21-23, 1716, refers to "Mrs. Centlivre, who was Born at Holbeach." Parish records at Holbeach don't mention her, however, which has lead to speculation that she was born elsewhere, possibly in Ireland. But John Wilson Bowyer, whose 1952 biography of the dramatist seems to be the only work of its kind thus far, points out that a "number of Freemans lived in Holbeach in the second half of the seventeenth century, some of whom must have been Susanna Centlivre's relatives for we have convincing evidence she visited Holbeach in 1716 and in 1718." Indeed, many modern scholars accept Holbeach as the most likely birthplace because it is
known that Centlivre made frequent trips there during her life. Given all the evidence, Centlivre has been tentatively identified as Susanna, the daughter of William and Anne Freeman, who was baptized on November 20, 1669, in the parish church of Whaplode, Lincolnshire.

All the early accounts agree that Susanna lost one or both parents at an early age. Jacob avers her father died when she was three; her mother before she was twelve. Mottley says her mother died when she was a child, and her father remarried but died, leaving his daughter to the tender mercies of a stepmother. Chetwood confirms that the teenager left home upon her father’s death to escape abuse by her stepmother. Bowyer suggests that Susanna’s father died when she was three, and her mother remarried, but died when the child was twelve. Her stepfather then remarried. It seems possible that Centlivre may have been the daughter of one Edward Freeman, a yeoman of Holbeach, Lincolnshire, whose will, dated March 4, 1673, was proved June 23, 1674. He left his wife, Susanna, as executrix of a small estate, and bequeathed twenty shillings to his daughter, Susanna, the youngest of six children. If this Freeman was Centlivre’s father, he did indeed die when she was three or thereabouts, as the accounts claim. Whatever the case, it seems likely Susanna was orphaned because she made no mention of her family or connections in her later life.

The early versions of her life indicate that the playwright had little or no formal education as a child. (But the accounts of Mottley and Chetwood mention Centlivre’s early exposure to French, and her works indicate she did have a knowledge of that language.) This
handicap would seem to have been remedied if we believe Mottley's account of "Cousin Jack's" stay at Cambridge. His tale would certainly qualify as a "gay Adventure." Bowyer suggests that in view of Mottley's detailed knowledge of other aspects of Centlivre's career, Boyer's allusion to "gay Adventures" and a poem by Anthony Hammond addressed to Astraea (Susanna's poetic pseudonym) that probably dates from thirty years prior to its publication, we cannot dismiss the alleged event out of hand. The chronology would be correct if the incident took place during Hammond's undergraduate days (1684-85). Towards the end of her life, Centlivre and Hammond were members of what may have been an informal literary club, and she contributed poems to a miscellany of his; perhaps they had known each other before. However, there is no actual proof the Cambridge adventure took place, especially as the other biographers contradict it. The most likely possibility is that Mottley's story is based on a kernel of truth much embroidered to make a "tall tale." But current scholarship cannot say how much is fact, how much fiction.

The same holds true for Chetwood's assertion that the young runaway joined a troupe of strolling players at Stamford (only 25 miles from Holbeach). Mottley also makes this claim; Bowyer suggests that Susanna may already have been a performer when she met Anthony Hammond. He points out that strolling companies were plying their trade in that vicinity about that time and suggests she may have been a member of John Power's band who had apparently taken over the Newmarket company from Robert Parker by 1687. The company would normally have been performing in the towns of Lincolnshire, Norfolkshire, and thereabouts. Not far from
Stamford are Somersham, the home of Anthony Hammond, and Cambridge, at both of which Susanna may have acted and at either of which she may have attracted the young student’s fancy. Her skill in male parts may have suggested the masquerade, or her successful masquerade at Cambridge may have suggested her suitability for male roles.93

Again, it is probable that the accounts of Centlivre as a novice actress have some basis in fact. However, F. P. Lock notes, "[T]here is too much improbability and inconsistency in [these] accounts for us to reconstruct them in detail," perhaps because the dramatist herself "was evidently anxious to prevent such stories from becoming public."94

Of the next phase of Centlivre's somewhat "irregular" life, her two marriages, we have no record at all. Mottley declares the teenager "was married, or something like it; in the sixteenth Year of her Age; but, whether by Death, or whatever Accident it happened, they lived not together above one Year." He says she "married" Mr. Fox, a nephew of Sir Stephen Fox. Although Jacob has her married before she was fifteen, he agrees that Susanna "married" Mr. Fox, and that they lived together for one year. Most of the early accounts are in agreement that after Mr. Fox left the scene "by Death, or whatever Accident," Centlivre married an army officer called Carroll. They apparently lived together in a "regular" marriage for a year and a half until Carroll was killed in a duel.95 That Centlivre had legalized her union with Mr. Carroll is evident from her marriage license to Joseph Centlivre which refers to her as "Susannah Caroll als Rawkins ... Widdow." This may have given Abel Boyer the idea that the playwright's maiden name was Rawkins; Bowyer, however, suggests
that her father's name was Freeman, and that "Rawkins" is an alias for Carroll.96

Whatever "gay Adventures" the youthful playwright may have had, we know that she was in London by March of 1700. Like Aphra Behn upon her return from Antwerp, Centlivre was thrown entirely upon her own resources to make her way in the world. Like Behn, also, she turned to her pen. Somehow she had made the acquaintance of several writers, among them Abel Boyer and Tom Brown. At the turn of the century, collections of miscellaneous letters were popular, and both men took advantage of the trend. On May 11, 1700, a collection of *Familiar and Courtly Letters*, edited by Tom Brown, was published in which Susanna made her debut in print. The volume contains seven letters to and from her, five of which are conventional amatory letters between Centlivre and an unknown correspondent. (At this time, she was known as Mrs. Carroll.)

That same month Abel Boyer wrote her suggesting that she write an elegy for Dryden who had just died and unaccountably nominating the virtual unknown to be his successor. She replied that she wished she had the genius of Aphra Behn or Katharine Philips to deserve Boyer's nomination; she herself believed Farquhar should inherit the laurels as the living poet who had best pleased the Town. She also said she agreed with Farquhar that "the main design of Comedy is to make us laugh."97 This attitude was to be the guiding principle underlying most of her plays.

She obviously took Boyer's advice for she was one of six women who contributed to a collection of elegies on Dryden's death called
The Nine Muses that was printed in September of 1700. Her collaborators included women playwrights: Mrs. Delariviere Manley; Lady Sarah Piers or Peirce; Mrs. Sarah Field (Mrs. Sarah Fyge Egerton); Mrs. Mary Pix, and Catherine Trotter. Unlike Behn, Centlivre did not have to wage a one-woman war on the bastions of male privilege; she had close friendships with several other women whose ambitions matched her own, such as Mary Pix and Jane Wiseman.

That ambition was to establish herself as a professional writer in a man's world that was still essentially hostile to feminine intrusion. Like Behn, Centlivre was more or less compelled to take a stand because she had to support herself. Like Behn, also, she discovered that playwriting suited her own talents and was more lucrative than other literary venues. Thus, in less than a year after her arrival in London, (if we accept that she did not get there much before March 1700), her first play went on the boards.

It was a difficult time for established playwrights, much less an unknown novice. The vestiges of the theatre that Aphra Behn had known were in an uneasy transition towards the genres that would eventually dominate the eighteenth-century stage. Part of the change was due to a new moral climate under William and Mary. Even before Jeremy Collier's notorious A Short View (1698), there had been attempts to reinstate the authority of the Master of the Revels to censor plays. Early efforts were largely ineffectual but towards the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, the censor seemed to be back in business.
Like the moral climate, the audience, too, was changing. No longer confined to Court cliques and their hangers-on, people were becoming more bourgeois, more middle-class. They were "becoming more interested in politics, science, and trade. In their interests they had been shifting from the court to the town, from court amusements to party controversies, from leisure to business." The new playgoing public was a less homogeneous group than its Restoration counterpart. Tastes had also changed. The trend for farce begun in Behn's era continued to grow, and dramatists also had to contend with the popular appeal of opera, pantomime and spectacles. Consequently, most playwrights were struggling, handicapped by the fact that with a more diverse clientele, it was hard to know exactly what would please. When Centlivre began her playwriting career, no dominant, sure-fire dramatic form ensured success. As a result, Centlivre spent the first several years of her career experimenting with different genres in an attempt to hit upon the magic formula for success.

Her first theatrical effort was The Perjured Husband performed at Drury Lane in the fall of 1700 and published on October 22. Billed as a tragedy, the play was actually a tragicomedy, combining a conventional love-versus-honor plot with a comic subplot of an attempted cuckolding reminiscent of Restoration comedies. Interestingly, the play had resonances of Behn's Rover, taking place in Venice during carnival time when festive disguises and deceptions offered the dramatist opportunities for comic situations and intrigue in the subplot. Like Behn also, Centlivre attempts to present two
different genres in one, flying in the face of contemporary contempt for "bastard" genres like tragicomedy. According to the preface to the play, "[I]t went off with general applause," however, no other performances are recorded although its plot was used by later writers. Perhaps this is why, like Behn, Centlivre abandoned the tragic mode and turned to comedy as more congenial to her talents.

Not surprisingly, the newcomer found herself victim of the same attacks Behn had suffered. The play, which had been published under her married name of Carroll, came under fire for the supposed indecency of the comic subplot, particularly in the speeches of Lady Pizalto, the adulterous wife. In the preface to the printed edition, an annoyed Centlivre pointed out that if the theatre meant to mirror "real life," then it would be ludicrous to put psalms in the mouth of a woman planning to violate her marriage vows. Furthermore, as Behn had asserted before her, if the reformers wanted to change the manners and morals of the stage, they should look first to reforming the society which the drama merely reflected.

That the movement for the reform of the stage had made some headway, particularly as the bourgeoisie began to infiltrate audiences, is apparent from the prologue and epilogue to The Perjured Husband, which mention it. That Centlivre herself was acutely aware of it is evidenced by a poem she wrote to George Farquhar:

For since the learned Collier first essay'd
To teach Religion to the Rhiming Trade,
...I'll teach Thee Language in a pleasant stile:
Which, without Smut, can make an Audience smile.
Let fall no word that may offend the Fair;
Observe Decorums, dress thy Thoughts with Air;
Go—lay the Plot, which Vertue shall adorn;
Thus spoke the Muse; and thus didst Thou perform.101
This poem, "To Mr. Farquhar upon his Comedy call'd A Trip to the
Jubilee," also initiated a correspondence between the two playwrights.
When the second volume of Tom Brown's collection of Familiar and
Courtly Letters was published in May 1701, it included a section called
"A Pacquet from Will's," (the famous coffeehouse), that contained
seven letters between Centlivre ("Astraea") and Farquhar ("Celadon").
In them, "Celadon" tries to tempt "Astraea" to sleep with him but is
"firmly but goodnaturedly" refused.102

Other correspondence between Farquhar and Centlivre are
included in Abel Boyer's collection of Letters of Wit, Politics, and
Morality published in July 1701.103 Other contributors were Samuel
Garth, William Burnaby, John Oldmixon, Charles Gildon, Mrs. Jane
Wiseman, and Boyer himself.104 Those letters involving Centlivre, who
was still styling herself "Mrs.Carroll," fall into two groups. First, a
series of 22 letters are exchanged between "Celadon," "Astraea" and
"Chloe." "Astraea" is Mrs. Carroll, and "Celadon" has been identified
as Captain William Ayloffe, sometime writer and a friend of Tom Brown.
(Bowyer notes that Centlivre "no doubt desired to attract attention by
imitating Mrs. Behn in calling herself Astraea and her correspondent
Celadon.")105 "Celadon" pens most of the letters in an attempt to
seduce "Astraea," who discovers he already has a mistress, "Chloe."
Then the two women gang up on "Celadon." The other
correspondence is composed of various letters between members of the
literary group, including the letter containing Centlivre's poem to
Farquhar which she asks Boyer to pass on to him. The next two
letters are from Centlivre ("Astraea") and Farquhar ("Damon"). Two complimentary poems addressed to Farquhar by Centlivre follow the letter, as does a complimentary poem to Susanna herself by Jane Wiseman. A letter from Boyer ends the series in which he writes to Centlivre that she has "gain'd a victor's Right o're me as well as Celadon." Interestingly, Bowyer tells us that Charles Ustick challenged Ayloffe to a duel, the outcome of which is a mystery. The biographer says that although the letters in Boyer's collection may have been written with publication in mind, if they were all "pure fiction, this question would probably have been answered."

At this point in her career, Centlivre was firmly established in London. Her connections with other writers had already gotten her into print and on the stage. Abel Boyer and Tom Brown had published her letters; Boyer had helped get The Perjured Husband produced. In addition to those already mentioned with whom she corresponded, she had also probably met Richard Steele, Nicholas Rowe and Charles Johnson, as well as others with whom she would be associated later. She knew the performers of the time and would develop close relationships with Anne Oldfield and Robert Wilks.

Centlivre's second play, The Beau's Duel, was staged at Lincoln's Inn Fields about June 1702 and printed July 8. While Centlivre's name is not on the title page of the printed edition, the dedication is proudly signed "Mrs. Susanna Carroll," and the prologue refers to "Our Female Author." The War of the Spanish Succession had begun when England declared war on France and Spain in May, and The Beau's Duel reflects the popular support the War had engendered. A
comedy set in London, the play is a distinct improvement over *The Perjured Husband* as Centlivre brings her comedic talents to bear on contemporary issues. The moral tone of *The Beau's Duel* is also an improvement over Husband's adulterous subplot, reflecting the changes taking place in comedy.\textsuperscript{108} While the playwright has not fully developed the social concerns that would dominate her later plays, F. P. Lock calls *The Beau's Duel* "the first characteristic expression of Centlivre's art."\textsuperscript{109} Its initial performance was repeated at Lincoln's Inn Fields in the autumn, with a revival at Drury Lane on April 11, 1785. However, the comedy was essentially dead to the stage within a year of its premiere.\textsuperscript{110}

With Centlivre's third play came a deliberate effort to conceal the sex of its author: *The Heiress*, performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields on December 31, 1702, was published anonymously on January 19, 1703, as *The Stolen Heiress*. Both the dedication and prologue suggest the author is male. Women in Behn's time had often resorted to presenting their plays as the works of men, Behn herself occasionally doing so, but in the first few years of the eighteenth century, the hostility toward women playwrights seemed to have abated somewhat due to a movement that advocated more equality for women. That is probably why Centlivre felt free to acknowledge authorship of her first two plays. However, this push to improve the status of women created a backlash of conservative opposition so that by the time Queen Anne ascended the throne in 1702, the hostility toward women writers was even greater than before.\textsuperscript{111} Consequently, many of Centlivre's succeeding plays were published anonymously.
The Stolen Heiress, another tragicomedy, examines the tyranny of parents in both the tragic plot and its comic subplot. As in The Perjured Husband, Centlivre attempts to integrate the elevated tone of tragedy with the realism of its comic counterpart but, as Lock observes, "[T]he realistic treatment of the subplot makes us impatient with the artificial main plot." The audience may have felt the same way; the play does not seem to have been revived.

Centlivre had better luck with her next play. The farcical comedy, Love's Contrivance, performed at Drury Lane on June 4, 1703, ran for three nights and was occasionally revived up until 1726. Like The Stolen Heiress, it was published anonymously except for the initials "R. M." appended to the dedication. Two days after its publication on June 14, Centlivre put a notice in The Daily Courant:

Whereas the last new comedy called Love's Contrivance; or: Le Medecin Malgre Lui, has the two letters R M to the dedication. This is to give notice that the name of the author (who for some reasons is not willing to be known at present) does not begin with those two letters.

Susanna was angry indeed with the trick she attributed to the publisher, but it was not until 1706 that she acknowledged her authorship of the play in the dedication to The Platonic Lady, in which she claims that "passing for a Man's," Love's Contrivance was very successful. Clearly, she was frustrated that she was compelled to conceal her sex because of unreasonable prejudice but, like Behn, her life depended on pleasing her audiences, no matter how bigoted and unfair they were.

That she was more concerned with making an honest living than in writing plays that fit arbitrary formulas is made apparent in her
preface to *Love's Contrivance* in which she states her dramatic theories. While Centlivre pays homage to neoclassical principles, she points out that popular successes, such as Farquhar's *Trip to the Jubilee*, please the Town just as well with all their "Irregularities," so why torture oneself with rules when the Town prefers wit and humor? This is the pragmatism of a professional. Collier's influence can be seen in her assertion that she endeavored to write modestly, to avoid anything that might offend the innocent. She also acknowledges her debt to Moliere and ends by attributing much of the play's success to the performers.

Thus far in her career, Centlivre had experimented with different genres in attempts to hit upon the one that would best please the uncertain taste of the Town. Out of her first four plays, the farce, *Love's Contrivance*, had been the only success. F. P. Lock observes that, "A recurrent failure in these early plays is Centlivre's inability to forge the separate elements into a coherent whole," a recurring problem throughout her career.115 (This, it may be remembered, was also Aphra Behn's problem.) However, with her fifth play, *Susanna* struck gold.

Over a year had elapsed between the production of *Love's Contrivance* (1703) and the debut of *The Gamester* in January 1705 at Lincoln's Inn Fields. In that time, the new direction comedy was to take became manifest. Richard Steele's "moral" play, *The Lying Lover*, was produced at Drury Lane in December 1703. At the beginning of the next year, two royal proclamations were issued concerning the regulation of the stage. One decreed that "no play, new or old, no
song, prologue or epilogue be presented on the stage without being first licensed by the Master of the Revels;" the other commanded the Master of the Revels to be "careful in the perusing and licensing of plays." The season following these edicts saw the production of two "moral" comedies even more successful than The Lying Lover: Colley Cibber's The Careless Husband produced at Drury Lane in December 1704; and Centlivre's The Gamester.116

The Gamester represents a distinct break from its predecessors. It's a social comedy whose avowed purpose is to expose the reigning vice of gambling in the reformation of its titular character. Heretofore, Centlivre's plays had reflected her belief that the purpose of drama was entertainment but with this work she does a complete about-face. As her dedication to the play makes clear, she accepts Collier's argument that "the first intent of Plays" should be to recommend virtue and attack vice. Accordingly, the gamester, Valere, sinks further and further into degradation because of his compulsive gambling, but the play has the usual "sentimental" ending in which the prodigal is reformed, and everyone lives happily ever after. It is a measure of how much the face of comedy had changed since Behn's time that The Gamester was a complete hit. Its first performance is not recorded, but it was published "as it is this Day acted the twelfth time" on February 22, 1705, and was revived numerous times, with occasional performances as late as 1756.117

Despite the fact that Centlivre's next play purported to continue her attack on the vice of gambling, The Basset Table, produced November 20, 1705, at Drury Lane, ran for only four nights and was
never revived. *The Gamester* had been published anonymously, and when the printed edition of *The Basset Table* came out November 21, it was signed "by the Author of *The Gamester."* (No doubt, Centlivre hoped to capitalize on the popularity of her last play.) Again, in her unsigned dedication, she claims to want to expose the evils of gaming, but she puts less emphasis on moralizing, more on comedy, in this play than in its predecessor. In spite of Centlivre's apparent dedication to use the stage as a forum for moral reform, she still came under fire for "indecency," most notably from one Arthur Bedford, a Bristol clergyman, who was Jeremy Collier's "chief heir in the fight against the theater." In his treatise, *The Evil and Danger of Stage-Plays* (1706), he accuses both *The Gamester* and *The Basset Table* of glorifying what they purport to correct. He also indicts them for mocking institutions like religion and marriage.118

Bedford may have been partially right about Centlivre's stabs at moral reform. That her change of heart about the aim of comedy may have been motivated to some extent by the vagaries of public taste is suggested by her happy endings and the fact that after a brief fling with moralizing comedy, she returned to the kind she had practiced earlier in *The Beau's Duel*. Her seventh play, *Love at a Venture*, a comedy with no moral pretensions, was offered to Colley Cibber who rejected it. (Cibber came under fire in 1707 when his *The Double Gallant* was produced. He called it a new play but it was clear he had borrowed the basic story from *Love at a Venture.*) The play was performed at Bath by John Power's traveling company, the Duke of Grafton's Men, in 1706. According to Mottley, Susanna joined the
troupe and performed in her own comedy. No doubt it was financial necessity that drove the playwright to this expediency. Playwriting, a tenuous profession at any time, was particularly so at the beginning of the eighteenth century for reasons already discussed. Of all Centlivre's plays thus far, only *The Gamester* had seen a sixth night.

Although Centlivre may have been compelled to take up the strolling life (again?), her sojourn with Power's company changed her life. The company performed for the court at Windsor where, according to Mottley, Susanna "put on her breeches again, and acted the part of Alexander the Great, in the tragedy of that name. She played this part it seems to great perfection." She attracted the attention of Joseph Centlivre, one of Queen Anne's cooks, whom she would later marry.

Meanwhile, back in London, *Love at a Venture* was published with the attribution "by the Author of *The Gamester*," and Centlivre's eighth play, *The Platonic Lady*, debuted at the Queen's Theater in the Haymarket November 25, 1706. The piece had a disappointing run of only four nights and was never revived. Lock describes it as "another variant on what is by now a familiar comic pattern: a main plot with two pairs of contrasting lovers and subsidiary humor characters providing comedy of a broader kind." The play was published December 9, its creator designated as "the Author of *The Gamester*, and *Love's Contrivance*." The necessity to conceal her sex and the criticism her plays had evoked had become too much for Centlivre. The unsigned dedication of *The Platonic Lady*, ironically
titled "To all the Generous Encouragers of Female Ingenuity, this Play
is Humbly Dedicated," is a bitter outburst of resentment against the
treatment she had received for being a female writer. Like Behn, she
complains that her works are successful enough when taken to be a
man's, "But if by chance the Plot's discover'd, and the Brat found
Fatherless, immediately it flags in the Opinion of those that extoll'd
it before, and the Bookseller falls in his Price, with this Reason only,
It is a Woman's" (2). In an eerie echo of an incident Aphra Behn
mentions in her "Epistle to the Reader" before The Dutch Lover, in
which she describes how a fop publicly condemned her play sight
unseen because it was written by a woman, Centlivre relates that
a "spark," who had seen The Gamester three or four times "and lik'd
it extremely," upon being told the author was a woman, "threw down
the Book, and put up his Money, saying, he had spent too much after
it already and was sure if the Town had known that, it wou'd never
have run ten days" (2). Like Behn, also, Susanna resents that being
forced to conceal her identity robs her of "that which inspires the
Poet, Praise" (2). After referring to the publisher's trick of signing
"R. M." to the dedication of Love's Contrivance, she goes on to make
the same argument Behn did; namely, that there was no reason why
a woman could not write as well as a man. Like Aphra, she upbraids
those of her own sex for their failure to support the efforts of one
of their own and ends her diatribe by pointing out the achievements
of women in the arts and in war with particular reference to Queen
Anne, "this Miracle, the Glory of our Sex" (2).
Centlivre must have been discouraged and angry at this point in her career. Of the eight plays she had written, only one had been a popular success. Most of her works had been published anonymously, and financial necessity had driven her to tread the boards. Perhaps that is why over two years would go by before the London stage would hear from her again. In that hiatus, she married Joseph Centlivre, a widower with a son and a daughter. They were wed April 23, 1707, at St. Bene't's Church. Mr. Centlivre was Yeoman of the Mouth to Queen Anne, a middle-ranking position in the royal kitchen he had had under King William and continued to hold after Susanna's death in 1723. The annual pay for his rank was 55 pounds board wages and five pounds with a perquisite of one pound six shillings from each person newly knighted. The effects of a steady income and financial security (the reason she wed?) can be seen in that after her marriage, Centlivre was less prolific since she no longer had to support herself, and her plays became more original and well-crafted without the pressure of trying to keep bread on the table. The extra time she could take paid off; her three best plays were written after her marriage.

The most successful of these was *The Busy Body*, produced at Drury Lane May 12, 1709, for an initial run of thirteen nights. As a comeback to the stage, it was a spectacular success. When it was published on May 31, Centlivre's name proudly appeared on the title page. All of her succeeding plays would be printed as "Written by Mrs. Susanna Centlivre." Never again would she be forced into anonymity. Ironically, the players had not liked the comedy when it
was presented to them. In October, the Female Tatler reported that at a rehearsal Robert Wilks, who had the lead role of Sir George Airy, had "flung his Part into the Pitt for damn'd Stuff, before the Lady's Face that wrote it." Indeed, Mottley tells us that the piece had been reported to be "a silly thing wrote by a Woman, that the Players had no Opinion of it." Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed, and one of the most enduring stock pieces was born.

The Busy Body concerns the schemes and machinations of the usual quartet of lovers endeavoring to be united. What distinguishes this comedy of intrigue, and no doubt accounts for its success, is the titular character, Marplot. According to F. P. Lock, Marplot's "peculiar humor is his insatiable and usually unseasonable curiosity," and he goes on to explain why this type of figure appealed to early eighteenth-century audiences. They "were beginning to distrust wit and the laughter" that arises from watching the follies and vices of others that makes us feel superior, the kind of humor typified by Restoration comedy. Instead, the trend now was towards lovable characters whose foibles evoked sympathetic laughter, not derision. The "amiable humorist," as Lock calls such a character, is different from his or her predecessors in that he or she has no directly didactic or satiric function, unlike the humors characters of Jonson and Shadwell. We are meant to laugh at such a figure but not feel superior. Marplot is just such an "amiable humorist"; although his uncontrollable curiosity continually complicates and threatens his friends' intrigues, he is nonetheless likeable for his good nature and willingness to be of service to the lovers. Consequently, Lock sees
Centlivre as "a transitional figure in this progress from satiric to sympathetic humor."\textsuperscript{129}

The Busy Body remained a repertory piece well into the nineteenth century; a performance at the Haymarket in November 1871 is recorded.\textsuperscript{130} It was played over 450 times between 1709 and 1800. The Prince of Wales commanded two performances in October 1717; the King himself on December 14, 1719, and March 17, 1720, for the benefit of the author.\textsuperscript{131} So popular was it that forty editions of the play were printed between 1709 and 1884. (All Centlivre received for the printed work was ten pounds, the minimum for printing rights.)\textsuperscript{132}

Unfortunately, The Busy Body was followed by a flawed farcical comedy. Centlivre's tenth play, The Man's Bewitched, opened at the Queen's Theater in the Haymarket on December 12, 1709, but ran for only three nights. In her preface to the printed edition, published December 31, Susanna attributes the short run to the resentment of the actors over an article that appeared in the Female Tatler for December 12-14. The feature described a fictitious supper Centlivre had with a "Society of Ladies" who ask her how a play gets produced. Apparently, the performers took umbrage at what purported to be Centlivre's mildly satirical account of the problems an author encounters in getting a play mounted. In her preface, the playwright denies any knowledge of the story, pointing out that "nothing but an Idiot wou'd express themselves so openly" and put "those People out of Humour, whose Action was to give Life to the Piece."\textsuperscript{133} The Female Tatler was supposedly edited by a "Society of Ladies" but the identity of the real editor(s) is still uncertain. In
her lifetime, some suspected Centlivre was connected with it as a contributor or even an editor but Lock thinks this unlikely. The author of the offending passage in the *Female Tatler* has never been identified but the Tory Delariviere Manley is a likely suspect. While the actors may have been partially responsible for the comedy's abbreviated run, *The Man's Bewitched* is not one of Centlivre's best efforts. Revived at Goodman's Fields on April 28, 1730, and acted twice more, the comedy never became a regular part of the repertory; its farcical scenes were used in later short works, *The Witchcraft of Love* (1742) and *The Ghost* (1767).

Centlivre's eleventh play, a one-act farce called *A Bickerstaff's Burying*, debuted at Drury Lane on March 27, 1710, and ran for three nights. The farce is a light-hearted treatment of one of Centlivre's major themes: the marriage of a young woman to an old man for economic profit. She makes plain her abhorrence of this common practice in her dedication when the play was published December 26. At "the particular Desire of several Ladies of Quality," the farce was staged May 5, 1715, under the title *The Custom of the Country* along with *The Busy Body* for Centlivre's benefit. Although repeated four times during the 1715-16 season, *A Bickerstaff's Burying* never became a stock piece.

On December 30, 1710, Centlivre's twelfth play, a sequel to *The Busy Body*, was produced at Drury Lane. Like most sequels, *Marplot* is inferior to its predecessor. As Lock points out, Marplot himself is less amiable and more mechanical; in fact, the whole play seems more contrived. Worse yet, the comedy's various components--farce,
intrigue and the reformation of a character—are not assimilated well enough; the moral tone of the final act results in a serious inconsistency in a major character and an abrupt change of mood from the light-hearted escapades of the first four acts. Lock also notes that Marplot takes place in Lisbon, a likely city for English merchants to visit since the Methuen Treaties of 1703 had made Portugal an important ally and trading partner of England. Moreover, Lisbon gave Centlivre an opportunity to elaborate on her celebration of liberty of women in England compared to their Continental sisters' restricted lives, as well as to take potshots at Catholicism.140

Published in 1711, Marplot was produced seven times before the end of the season. It was also performed seven times before 1772 but then disappeared from the stage.141

With her thirteenth play, Centlivre entered the political fray provoked in England by the War of the Spanish Succession. Initially popular in 1702, the War by 1708 had begun to steadily lose support so that peace negotiations were begun at the Hague early in 1709. Like most Whigs, Centlivre was opposed to a negotiated peace but by the time Marplot had been produced, most Whigs had been removed from office, replaced by Tories who promised to end the war. Help from Prince Eugene of Savoy was sought by both parties, and he arrived in England in January 1712. Centlivre's comedy, The Perplexed Lovers, debuted at Drury Lane on January 19, 1712. In the epilogue to the play, the playwright praised both Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough, who was then in disfavor and had been stripped of all of his offices. In her dedication, Susanna reveals that
the managers of the theatre did not want the epilogue spoken without being licensed to avoid trouble. Failing to get it licensed in time, she was compelled to let one of the actors speak only "six Lines Extempore." Although the actor, Norris, promised the audience an epilogue the following night, they hissed, believing no other epilogue had been prepared. Centlivre got the epilogue licensed by the Vice-Chamberlain the very next day but by that time word had gotten around that it was a "notorious Whiggish Epilogue." Mrs. Oldfield, who was to speak the offending passage, "had Letters sent her to forbear, for that there were Parties forming against it, and they advis'd her not to Stand the Shock." Consequently, the second night Norris spoke an epilogue intimating that the intended one had never been licensed but nobody was fooled. In the printed edition of the play, Centlivre included the original epilogue and asked readers to judge for themselves whether it was partisan or not. Her poem, "To his Illustrious Highness Prince EUGENE of Savoy," was published with the play, for which the Prince gave her a gold snuff-box worth about 35 pounds.143

The Perplexed Lovers ran only three nights; Centlivre blamed the short run on the controversy over the epilogue. She may have been partially right but the play, one of her weakest, is structurally flawed. It was never revived; however, it is significant as the first of her dramatic works to express her political sentiments. All of her plays following this up to The Cruel Gift in 1716 would be in one way or another vehicles for demonstrating her zealous Whig loyalties.
No new Centlivre play graced the boards in 1713 but significant developments were occurring on the national and personal scene. In March, the Treaty of Utrecht ended the War of the Spanish Succession. In the same year, the Centlivres took up residence at Buckingham Court, near Charing Cross, where they lived until Susanna's death. The family must have been doing well; Bowyer tells us that the Centlivres paid a higher rate than anyone else in Buckingham Court save the Admiralty Office, which was located there part of this time. 

Earlier in her career, Centlivre had written several poems in hopes of gaining patronage; in 1713, she wrote two, though the first was undoubtedly motivated by friendship. It was written in a book, Fontenelle's *The Plurality of Worlds*, which Anne Oldfield had lent her. The poem celebrated Oldfield's performance as Martia in Addison's *Cato*, first acted at Drury Lane on April 14, 1713. Centlivre may have been drawn to *The Plurality of Worlds* because of its speculative subject and Fontenelle's interest in the instruction of women. She addressed the second poem, *The Masquerade*, (published September 3), to the ambassador extraordinary from the French court, Duke d'Aumont. According to Mottley, Centlivre inscribed it to D'Aumont despite the fact that she was so "violent a Whig"; but "there was nothing of Politics in it." Since the signing of the Utrecht treaty, Centlivre may have felt she could hold in abeyance her abhorrence of all things French and Roman Catholic. Mottley says D'Aumont sent her a Tory snuffbox to match Prince Eugene's gift of a Whig one. 

On September 24, a special performance of *The Busy Body* was given at Drury Lane for the "Entertainment of his
Excellency the Duke d'Aumont." Bowyer says it was probably a "command" performance, and the Duke rewarded both the players and the author.¹⁴⁶

One of Centlivre's best plays, The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret, opened at Drury Lane on April 27, 1714. Daringly, she dedicated it to the Duke of Cambridge, Prince George Augustus of the House of Hanover, who was extremely unpopular at Queen Anne's court. Before the comedy had opened, Mottley tells us,

> a Writ had been demanded, but refused, to call [the Duke of Cambridge] to his Seat in the House of Peers in England. Mrs. Centlivre [dedicated the play to him] to shew her Attachment to the House of Hanover, and was rewarded for it when the present Royal Family came to the Throne, who bespoke this Play, which they Honoured with their Presence, and made the Author an handsome Present.¹⁴⁷

Fortunately for Centlivre, Anne died August 1, and George I was proclaimed King without opposition. Centlivre's precious Protestant succession was achieved despite Tory machinations. The Duke of Cambridge was now the Prince of Wales. The Wonder, set in Lisbon like Marplot to afford opportunity for the playwright to compare the liberty and freedom of Protestant England to the tyranny and despotism of Catholic Portugal, initially ran for only six nights but appeared again December 16, 1714, at the command of the Prince of Wales. This began a series of royal command performances of several of Centlivre's plays for the Hanovers, but the economic benefits she had hoped to reap from her loyalty to them failed to materialize. Although those performances were probably accompanied by gifts to the author, Centlivre later lamented, "Anna Resign'd and Brunswick Came, / And yet my Lot is still the Same."¹⁴⁸ According to Bowyer,
"Many of the literary Whigs . . . were provided for under the new regime but Susanna Centlivre was a woman, and the political plums were not thought proper for a woman's table."\(^{149}\) Despite this discrimination, Centlivre never wavered in her devotion to the royal family, which she celebrated in a series of poems.

The Wonder, a comedy of intrigue with the usual quartet of lovers, is one of Centlivre's best, well-structured and extremely effective. However, after its 1714 productions, it was not revived again until November 1733, when it was acted eleven times running at Goodman's Fields. Eventually, the play was performed fifty times before 1750, and nearly two hundred times between then and 1800. The leading role of Felix was one of Garrick's best; he acted the part more than 65 times between 1756 and 1776, and chose it for his farewell performance in 1776.\(^{150}\) The Wonder continued to be played in England and America in the nineteenth century with famous actors and actresses in the leads. It had been a favorite of the Hanover kings, and even Queen Victoria requested a performance at Covent Garden on March 24, 1840. In 1897, one of the last revivals of The Wonder was at Daly's Theater in New York where Ada Rehan played Violante.\(^{151}\)

Centlivre expressed her joy and delight at the Protestant accession in two poems written in 1714. The first was A Poem Humbly Presented to His Most Sacred Majesty which was published November 7 and was six pages long. In it, she lauds George I as the savior of Britain from the machinations of the self-seeking Tories who had surrounded Queen Anne and sought to destroy the "true religion" and
liberty. The second poem appeared a week later. Called *An Epistle to Mrs. Wallup*, who was part of the entourage of the Princess of Wales, the work celebrated William and Mary, the King, Carolina Princess of Wales and her children and praised Mrs. Wallup for her steadfast loyalty to George I motivated by her love of her country.\textsuperscript{152} Centlivre may have been the author of a third poem published in the *Patriot* for November 16-18. "On the Right Honourable CHARLES Earl of HALLIFAX being made Knight of the Garter" contains a brief Whig summary of British politics since the time of King William and praises Halifax for his unswerving devotion to his country. On the authority of Pope, Samuel Johnson tells us that Halifax was "fed with dedications; for Tickell affirms that no dedication was unrewarded. Almost all of the poets except Pope and Steele praised or flattered him." Indeed, Mottley asserts that "For some other Poem, the Title of which I know not, the Lord Halifax had made [Centlivre] a Present of a fine repeating Gold Watch."\textsuperscript{153}

The triumph of the Whigs and the peaceful Protestant accession seemed to have energized Centlivre. She wrote yet another poem which she presented directly to the Princess of Wales on New Year's Day, 1715. A "trite and dull compliment to the Princess's beauty," "To her Royal Highness the Princess of WALES. At her Toylet, on New-Year's Day" was published in the *Patriot* for January 15-18, 1715.\textsuperscript{154}

Besides the poems, it is likely that Centlivre wrote three plays in the second half of 1714, two farces and one tragedy. Lock says the chronology is important because "it confirms the genesis of all three plays in the political situation of 1714."\textsuperscript{155} This is certainly
true of Centlivre's farce, *The Gotham Election*. An election was pending in January 1715, and the playwright took timely advantage of this fact. Ostensibly written to show the new royal family how elections were held in England, *The Gotham Election* actually satirized Tory electioneering which is characterized by fawning, deceit and bribery. As Lock points out about the subsidiary love interest, "The political allegory is paramount here. Lucy (England) chooses a guardian (George I) in preference to the father (the Pretender) who has betrayed her."156 The Lord Chamberlain refused to license *The Gotham Election*. Feelings about the elections had been running high; the elections themselves were marked by violence. The government was not inclined to further exacerbate already dangerously polarized public opinion.

Centlivre's other 1714 farce, *A Wife Well Managed*, was likewise denied a license. It concerns an attempted sexual liaison between a Catholic priest and a married woman that is foiled by the intended cuckold. Both farces were published in June 1715 in a single volume dedicated to James Craggs (who was to be Secretary of War in 1717 and Secretary of State in 1718); Centlivre praises him for his devotion to the Protestant cause. (Mottley tells us Craggs rewarded Susanna with twenty guineas.)157 Both the dedication and the preface furnish Centlivre's defenses of the two plays, which, she says, were condemned by those who did not know them; she has had them printed to demonstrate how she has been slandered. These documents give us insight into Centlivre's political beliefs at this time and particularly the strength of her animosity towards Catholicism. For
instance, she tells us in the dedication that *A Wife Well Managed* was denied a license because

it was said there would be Offence taken at the exposing a Popish Priest. Good God! To what sort of People are we chang'd! Are these worthy Gentlemen (the Emissaries of our most avow'd and irreconcilable Enemy) to be treated with so much Tenderness? Is not their very Profession Treason in any Subject of Great Britain? (3)

In 1737, *The Gotham Election* was republished as *The Humours of Elections*, "ironically enough as propaganda against Walpole and the Whigs, but it seems never to have been acted under either title."158 Along with *Jane Shore*, *A Wife Well Managed* was produced, by subscription, on March 2, 1724, at the "new Theatre over against the Opera House" in the Haymarket. In 1732, it appeared at the Haymarket again as *The Disappointment*, "A New Ballad Opera of One Act, Alter'd from a Farce after the Manner of The Beggar's Opera." Centlivre's play was performed at Hussey's Great Theatrical Booth during the course of Bartholomew Fair in 1747. Its last appearance was on a triple bill with *The Young Quaker* and *Duke and No Duke* at the Haymarket on August 27, 1789.159 Centlivre's outspoken stance on politics had earned her enemies, among them, Alexander Pope.

Mrs. Centlivre was naturally beneath the contempt of Pope. As a member of the struggling new democracy among letters, as a Whig and Protestant, as a friend of Addison's circle, as a writer of popular plays without great literary quality, as a woman without formal education or high social position, in his eyes she was merely despicable. That Mrs. Centlivre hated and distrusted Pope and most of his crowd is also obvious. To her Pope was a Tory, a Catholic, a Jacobite, a man tolerated only because of his friends and literary gifts.160

At the end of March 1716, Pope published two pamphlets attacking the bookseller, Edmund Curll, and his writers, Centlivre among them. The
second pamphlet included "Instructions to a Porter how to find Mr. Curll's Authors." Pope refers to Centlivre as "The Cook's Wife in Buckingham Court" and adds, "bid her bring along with her the Similes that were lent her for her next new play," referring to the fact that Nicholas Rowe had helped Susanna with The Cruel Gift, her next play to be produced. On May 31, a ballad called The Catholick Poet appeared which attacked Pope's Homer. He immediately attributed it to Centlivre, which won her a place in The Dunciad in Book II, line 365, of the 1728 edition, among the dunces who talk themselves to sleep. A second reference to her was removed from later editions when The Curliad (1729), presumably written by Edmund Curll, cited Oldmixon as the writer of the ballad. Pope supposedly made another allusion to Centlivre in his First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, published February 1733. (Interestingly, he linked her to Aphra Behn.)

However, Centlivre was dead before The Dunciad was published.

In the spring of 1716, the leader of the Whig majority in the House of Commons, Robert Walpole, fell dangerously ill. James Roberts published a small volume of State Poems "By the most Eminent Hands" for Edmund Curll on May 19. An "Ode to Hygeia," which asks the deity of health to save Walpole, and "The Patriots," the last three stanzas of a previously published poem, were Centlivre's contributions to the volume; she may have contributed others. On May 28, Centlivre was in Holbeach and wrote "Verses were writ on King George's Birth-Day [May 28], by Mrs. Centlivre, and sent to the Ringers while the Bells were ringing at Holbeach in Lincolnshire." It
was published with the full text of the poem from which "The Patriots" was taken in A Collection of State Songs, Poems, Etc.. According to the Flying Post of June 21-23, Centlivre did more than write poetry to celebrate George's birthday. The verses she wrote in Holbeach were part of a joyous celebration to which Centlivre invited "all the widows that take Collections of the Parish." They had supper at the tavern in Holbeach where Susanna had them drink the health of the members of the royal family and all the Whig leaders. It must have been a lively gathering: "The Musick playing in the Room, and the bells ringing by her Orders all Supper Time, and the windows of the Room illuminated; the old Women Danc'd and were exceedingly rejoyc'd, and the whole Town was in an Uproar."

Like The Gotham Election and A Wife Well Managed, The Cruel Gift was probably composed during the latter half of 1714, and it reflects the political situation. A tragedy, it concerns the conflict between love and duty but here the duty is to an absolute and arbitrary monarch. Thus, it reflects events in England, such as the Jacobite plots and 1715 rebellion to restore "James III" and to reestablish Catholicism in England, and the loss of favor suffered by the Duke of Marlborough. Centlivre's dislike of the Treaty of Utrecht is also apparent in The Cruel Gift; however, the play is not a political allegory so one cannot say with certainty what people or events are being alluded to. According to Mottley, Nicholas Rowe "gave some slight Touches to the Play," and wrote the epilogue for it; he may have inspired Centlivre to employ her talents to advance the Whig cause. A celebration of personal and political freedom assured under a constitutional
monarchy, *The Cruel Gift* represents a distinct technical advance over Susanna's first tragedy, *The Perjured Husband*. With no mixture of genres, no comic subplot, and a higher level of verse than that in her other plays and poems, *The Cruel Gift* is Centlivre's most successfully sustained serious play.\(^{167}\)

*The Cruel Gift* premiered at Drury Lane on December 17, 1716, and had a good run of six nights. The Prince of Wales (later George II) commanded a performance on May 3, 1717, for Centlivre's benefit. However, the play, not of a caliber to become a repertory piece, was never revived.\(^{168}\)

Centlivre's five plays between 1712 and 1716 run the gamut from farce to tragedy but all are similar in their forceful expression of the playwright's Whig sentiments. Nowhere else does she so strongly advocate a constitutional, not to mention Protestant, monarchy than in *The Perplexed Lovers, The Wonder, The Gotham Election, A Wife Well Managed* and *The Cruel Gift*. Her last two plays would be less politically-oriented.

At the beginning of 1717, Centlivre's nemesis, Pope, struck again. A farce called *Three Hours after Marriage* written by him, Gay, and Arbuthnot was produced at Drury Lane on January 16 and ran continuously for seven nights. Phoebe Clinket, a character in the play, is a female playwright who has difficulty getting her new tragedy produced. While it appears some people at the time thought Phoebe was a caricature of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, a more likely victim would be Centlivre. The Countess never wrote for the public stage as Centlivre did, who had had trouble getting her new
plays mounted. Furthermore, *Three Hours after Marriage* was partly a parody of Centlivre's favorite genre, the comedy of intrigue. Centlivre returned the favor by taking a potshot at Pope and his farce in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*.169

The year 1717 saw no new plays from Centlivre but perhaps she was preoccupied with the newest danger that threatened her beloved Hanovers. The mad king of Sweden, Charles XII, was threatening to invade England in order to overthrow the Hanovers and restore the Stuart dynasty. The English discovered the plot and arrested Gyllenborg, the Swedish ambassador, on January 29, 1717. However, there was still cause for anxiety until Charles's death on December 11, 1718. According to Giles Jacob, Centlivre wrote a poem, "*An Epistle from a Lady of Great Britain to the King of Sweden, on the intended Invasion,*" which was probably published separately but Bowyer found only "*An Epistle to the King of Sweden, from a Lady of England*" in *A Miscellaneous Collection of Poems, Songs, and Epigrams* (Dublin, 1721) which also includes two other poems by the playwright.170 Bowyer thinks the poem must have been written shortly after Gyllenborg's arrest and notes that while Centlivre's main objective "is to warn Charles to leave England alone, she finds another opportunity to attack the Pretender and to declare her support of George I."171

On February 3, 1718, Centlivre's third and last major comedy, (the others being *The Busy Body* and *The Wonder*), debuted at Lincoln's Inn Fields and had a successful run of six nights. *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* tells the story of Colonel Fainwell who must gain the written permission of four extremely different guardians in order to
marry the heiress, Ann Lovely. To achieve this, Fainwell masquerades as four different men designed to appeal to the four guardians who are an old beau, a Quaker, an antiquary and a stockjobber. Thus, Centlivre used familiar dramatic stereotypes to heighten the humor and poke fun at the foibles and bigotry of each. She manages to do so with an even hand: the beau and antiquary are Tories, the Quaker and stockjobber Whigs. But politics takes a backseat to fun and the comedy's serious message, a plea for a more tolerant society in which people are free to exercise their rights as human beings.

Although it was successful in its initial run, A Bold Stroke for a Wife was not produced again until it was done at the playhouse on Epsom Walks on July 7, 1724. Eventually, it became popular, being acted in London more than eighty times before 1750, including a command performance for George II on March 5, 1741. It was done nearly 150 times between 1750 and 1800, including command performances for George III and his Queen on January 27, 1763, and December 14, 1774. The comedy was given an average of six times a year toward the end of the eighteenth century. Bowyer has discovered seventeen editions of the play printed before 1800 and eighteen after. In the nineteenth century, A Bold Stroke for a Wife attracted leading actors like Charles Kemble and Charles Matthews. Indeed, as late as 1884, Albert Ellery Berg called the piece still a "favorite" acting play. 172

In 1718, Centlivre also wrote two poems. The first was from Holbeach addressed to Rowe, "From the COUNTRY, To Mr. Rowe in Town," written not long after George I's birthday, May 28. It
appeared in *A New Miscellany of Original Poems, Translations, and Imitations* (1720) and showed the big-city dweller's condescension towards the rural community. The second poem was written following Rowe's death on December 6. "A PASTORAL TO THE Honoured Memory of Mr. ROWE" attracted a great deal of attention. In it, Centlivre as "Amaryllis" grieves over the death of "Colin" with Daphnis, Thyrsis and Menacles. The most interesting part of the elegy is "Amaryllis's" claims, on Rowe's authority, to superiority among the poetesses.173

Susanna fell seriously ill in 1719, and no major work dates from this time. The year also saw one "of the last of the full-blooded attacks on the stage." Arthur Bedford, whose 1706 treatise had condemned *The Gamester* and *The Basset Table*, published his second moral examination of the stage, *A Serious Remonstrance in Behalf of the Christian Religion*. In it, he cites portions of *The Basset Table* and *The Busy Body* and devotes a long section to *The Wonder* to prove his contention that such works flout Christian principles.174 Bedford needn't have worried; the London stage was beginning to reflect the slow movement toward sentimental comedy with its moralizing that was later to dominate the theatre.

If Centlivre had made an enemy of the Reverend Mr. Bedford, she had plenty of friends to make up the deficit. In addition to those mentioned earlier in this essay, by this time in her life she had had a friendship with the poet laureate (Rowe), Richard Steele, Eustace Budgell (Addison's cousin and a contributor to the *Spectator*), Ambrose Philips, and Thomas Burnet. Around 1720, she was a member of some kind of informal literary group that included Anthony
Hammond, Mrs. Eliza Haywood and possibly Defoe, among others. She had been the recipient of commendatory verses, among them some addressed to her by Hammond and another minor poet, Nicholas Amhurst, which appeared in Hammond’s *A New Miscellany of Original Poems, Translations, and Imitations* (1720). Two poems by Centlivre were included in the volume: "TO THE Earl of WARWICK, On his Birthday." Lock points out that Centlivre’s friends "were not the great writers of the day, but were drawn instead from the middling ranks of authors and even from the confines of Grub Street." Most of the authors were well known for their Whig convictions; however, Lock notes that in 1714

> it was no disgrace to number among one's friends Budgell, Johnson, Philips, Rowe, and Steele. If Centlivre did not move in the most aristocratic circles, she had a group of friends who would take her seriously as a writer and whose society would be a valued source of criticism, encouragement, and example."

Centlivre obviously recovered enough to write a verse epistle in the summer of 1720 to Charles Joy, one of the directors of the South Sea Company. Stock in the company was booming; James Craggs had presented some to John Gay and Alexander Pope. Centlivre felt that she, as a staunch Whig, at least deserved the same kind of treatment as the Tory writers. Thus, she wrote *A Woman's Case* in which she asks Joy to make her a gift of South Sea stock for her unswerving devotion to the Whig cause. She describes her political services over the past ten years and offers a humorous portrait of her married life. Joseph Centlivre is portrayed as impatient with her literary efforts that have not been as profitable as his wife had promised. Indeed, the poem makes it clear Centlivre herself was disappointed that she
had received no more preference than royal command performances. The poem was published separately in 1720 and was reprinted in A Miscellaneous Collection of Poems, Songs, and Epigrams (1721). It is not known whether Centlivre's suit was successful but it appears the piece attracted some attention when it was published.178

In the fall of 1720, Centlivre began contributing a series of political-religious abstracts to the Weekly Journal; they were taken from the Independent Whig. From September to December, Centlivre's communications were printed in the form of letters to the editor. In them, she expounds on religion at Catholicism's expense and English liberty versus the tyranny of "Popish countries." No doubt these were the essays her anonymous biographer had in mind when he or she wrote, "To reform the [Church], was our Author's latest Employ, and she shewed herself Mistress of the Subject in her Treatise which discloses and confutes the Errors of the Church of Rome." If Centlivre's letters were ever collected into a "Treatise," it has not yet been found.179

Centlivre's last play is notable only for the controversy it provoked. The Artifice was produced on October 2, 1722, at Drury Lane, although a report had been printed in the Weekly Packet of February 20, 1720, that it would "shortly be acted" at Drury Lane.180 (What caused the delay is unknown, but other playwrights had been similarly treated by the managers of the theatre.) The play ran only three nights, the first of Centlivre's staged plays since The Perplexed Lovers failing to reach a sixth night and a second benefit. Part of the failure of The Artifice may be attributed to its unflattering
allusions to an unsuccessful Jacobite plot of 1722, Non-Jurors and Catholics. In November, a new periodical, the Monthly Packet of Advises from Parnassus, published a detailed attack on The Artifice. Purporting to object to the play on literary grounds, the article actually vilifies Centlivre's politics. An advertisement printed in the Daily Journal of November 7 and signed "Susan Centlivre" defends The Artifice from the attack in the Monthly Packet. Then a letter signed "Susanna Cent Livre" appeared in the St. James Journal of November 22 disowning the advertisement and claiming ignorance of the Packet article. The author suspected "that some of my good Friends, the Jacobites, had inserted that Advertisement with my Name to it." She believed they had done so to support the rumor they had circulated "That this Comedy was so full of Obscenity that no modest Woman could see it." Probably Centlivre was not responsible for the Daily Journal advertisement since she had never signed herself "Susan"; Edmund Curll is a more likely suspect. Curll published The Artifice shortly before the Packet article; he may have thought a little controversy would sell more copies. The letter in the St. James Journal was probably Centlivre's since the newspaper, which had carried a preproduction notice of The Artifice, was friendly to her.

While political references may have played a part in The Artifice's short run, Lock asserts that the "decisive factor" in its failure was the play itself: "It is too long, and Centlivre tried to pack into it too many different actions and effects without sufficiently considering the resulting incongruities of tone and inconsistency of
morality. The Artifice was never revived intact but was used by other writers during the century.

With the exception of a letter signed "S. C." in the Weekly Journal of October 20, 1722, containing a poem commemorating King George's coronation day, her epistle in the St. James Journal is Centlivre's last known publication. Susanna's health may not have been good since her serious illness in 1719. On December 1, 1723, Centlivre died at her house in Buckingham Court and was buried at St. Paul's in Covent Garden on December 4. Several newspapers carried brief notices of her death saying she had been well known to society by the plays she had penned.

As in Aphra Behn's case, a contemporary description of Centlivre's personality has come down to us. In his Complete List, Mottley writes:

If she had not a great deal of Wit in her Conversation, she had much Vivacity and good Humour; she was remarkably good-natured and benevolent in her Temper, and ready to do any friendly Office as far as it was in her Power. She made herself some Friends and many Enemies by her strict Attachment to Whig Principles even in the most dangerous Times, and had she been a Man, I dare say would have freely ventured her Life in that Cause.

She lived in a decent clean Manner, and could show (which I believe few other Poets could, who depended chiefly on their Pen) a great many Jewels and Pieces of Plate, which were the Produce of her own Labour, either purchased by the Money brought in by her Copies, her Benefit-Plays, or were Presents from Patrons.

From an examination of her letters, F. P. Lock concludes that Susanna was an independent young woman hellbent on succeeding in the male-dominated world of literature without sacrificing any of her independence. In her correspondence, "Her implicit demand . . . is
to be treated as a friend and an equal, not as a woman and, therefore, a potential mistress. She is an unaffected and intelligent woman of sense who will not coquet with men whom she means to refuse." Like her heroines, Centlivre believed "in plain dealing in love." Like most of her heroines, also, Susanna Centlivre faded back into oblivion.

Summary

If we compare the contemporary characters given both women, we are immediately struck by how similar they are. Both accounts emphasize the generosity to friends and the love of honest relationships exhibited by the two writers. In fact, Behn and Centlivre have much in common. The origins of both are obscure and controversial. Neither had an education that would prepare her for her profession. Fantastic stories and legends have grown up about the two women: Aphra's adventures in Surinam, Susanna's Cambridge story. Each pursued activities thought unfit for modest women: Behn spied for King Charles; Centlivre acted "breeches parts" in a strolling troupe. They were both thrown upon their own resources at an early age and strove to retain their independence throughout their lives. Forced to write for bread, each catered to the tastes of her audience. For this and for their supposed "immodesty," both women were subjected to personal attacks and had to fight an obdurate prejudice against women competing in a "male" profession. Behn and Centlivre shared a determination to succeed in their vocation and answered these assaults with spirit and wit. They were also similar in their literary activities. Neither was good at tragedy; they experimented
with "bastard" genres like tragicomedy, putting them squarely on the side of the "Moderns" in the debate over neoclassic rules. The two playwrights even had the same kind of technical weaknesses: too many plots in one play and failure to satisfactorily assimilate different genres into a coherent whole. Both found the comedy of intrigue the most congenial vehicle for their talents and used this venue as a means of propaganda for their political and religious beliefs.

But here the similarities end. Behn used her pen in service to the Stuart dynasty and may have been a closet Catholic; Centlivre was a diehard Whig and virulently anti-Catholic. How the two women used the elements of the comedy of intrigue in different ways has been demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three. Our discussion here has revealed several differences in the biographies of the playwrights that may account for those disparities. The most obvious one is that each was exposed to the different political philosophies in early childhood: Behn's father had connections to the Stuart court; Centlivre's was a zealous Parliamentarian who had to flee to Ireland at the Restoration. Also, the lifestyle of the women as adults were dissimilar in that Aphra never married after Mr. Behn's death but Centlivre did—three times, if some accounts are true. Furthermore, the Restoration playwright had close ties to the Stuart court while Centlivre's husband was a royal cook; the closest she got to royalty was at the occasional command performance of one of her plays.

But these few facts tell half the story. These women were products of their time; more importantly, their audiences, whom they had to please to survive, are understandable only in terms of their
historical context. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the factors responsible for the evolution of Behn's sex comedy into Centlivre's "morality play," it is necessary to examine the social, political and economic conditions under which both women wrote. The next chapter concerns itself with that examination. The last chapter will contain an assimilation of data from this essay and the next and present my conclusions.
Notes


4 Goreau 7.


6 Frederick M. Link, Aphra Behn, Twayne's English Author Series 63 (New York: Twayne, 1968) 17.

7 Link is inclined to the former (p. 17); Angeline Goreau the latter (p. 10).

8 Quoted in Link 17.

9 Quoted in Goreau 11.


11 Duffy 29.

12 Goreau 11.

13 Quoted in Goreau 12.


15 Link 17.

16 Link 18.

17 Goreau 29.

18 Goreau 29.

19 Goreau 12.

21 Link 18.

22 Goreau 11 and Duffy 28.

23 Goreau 19-20.

24 Quoted in Link 19.

25 Goreau 48.

26 Goreau 54 and 55.

27 Goreau 68.

28 Link 20.

29 Goreau 115.

30 Goreau 104.

31 Goreau 119-120.

32 Goreau 118-119.

33 Goreau 119.


37 Goreau 138-139.

38 Goreau 158.

39 Link 38-39.

40 Goreau 192.

41 Goreau 205.

42 Link 41.

44 Link 85–88.
45 Link 51 and 52.
46 Link 52 and 53–54.
47 Link 58.
48 Link 104–105.
49 Link 117–118.
50 Goreau 254.
51 Link 116.
52 Link 65.
53 Goreau 248.
54 Goreau 249.
55 Link 67.
56 Link 69.
57 Link 26.
58 Link 73.
59 Goreau 251.
60 O’Donnell 347.
61 Duffy 231.
62 Goreau 258.
63 Link 77.
64 Link 121.
65 Link 77–78.
66 Link 80.
67 Link 122–123.
68 Link 142.
69 Link 142.
69 Goreau 291.

70 O'Donnell 342-343.

71 Mendelson 148.

72 Link 127-129.

73 Quoted in Link 28.

74 Link 84.

75 Link 28.


77 Lock 13-14.

78 Lock 14 and 15.


80 Lock 15-16.


82 Quoted in Bowyer 7.

83 Lock 16.

84 Quoted in Bowyer 11.

85 Quoted in Bowyer 6.

86 Bowyer 6.


88 Bowyer 5.

89 Bowyer 6-7.

90 Bowyer 4-5.

91 Lock 17.
Unless otherwise indicated, information about Centlivre's participation in *Letters of Wit, Politics and Morality* is taken from Lock 124-125.
Lock 47.

Bowyer 75-76.

Bowyer 76.

Lock 18.

Quoted in Morgan 54.

Lock 58-59.

Susanna Centlivre, The Plays of Susanna Centlivre, ed. Richard C. Frushell, Eighteenth-Century English Drama 7, 3 vols. (New York: Garland, 1982) 2: First page of dedication to The Platonic Lady. Hereafter all citations from the work will be designated in the text by volume and page number. Since Centlivre's plays are facsimile reproductions in this edition, the plays are paginated individually rather than consecutively so the page numbers refer to one particular play whose name will be given in the text or in these notes. In the case of materials such as dedications, prefaces, prologues and epilogues which are not paginated, only the volume number will be given in the parenthetical reference.


Bowyer 93.

Lock 19.

Quoted in Lock 63.

Lock 65.

Lock takes the term "amiable humorist" from Stuart M. Tave's The Amiable Humorist (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1960) and quotes from pp. 104 and 105. I have paraphrased the quote: "Humor is no longer the satirist's carrion, but the expression of good nature. People like Colley Cibber begin to appear, parading their foibles, happy and complacent. . . . This distinguishes [Sir Roger de Coverley] from the humorous characters of Jonson and Shadwell; unlike them he has no directly didactic, satiric function as a comic character." Lock 66.

Bowyer 116.

Bowyer 105.

Bowyer 98-99.
133 Lock 79.
134 Lock 79.
135 Todd Dictionary 78.
136 Bowyer 131.
137 Lock 81-82.
138 Bowyer 134.
139 Bowyer 134 and Lock 82.
140 Lock discusses Marplot 85-88.
141 Bowyer 138 and 141.
142 Bowyer 144-145.
143 Bowyer 147.
144 Bowyer 147.
145 Bowyer 150.
146 Bowyer 152.
147 Quoted in Bowyer 152-153.
148 Cotton 127.
149 Bowyer 154.
150 Bowyer 177.
151 Bowyer 189-190.

152 Bowyer 155-157. Bowyer gives the publication dates of the two poems as October 7 and October 14, 1714, but I have used the dates found in F. P. Lock's Chronology.

153 Bowyer 158 and 159.
154 Bowyer 157.
155 Lock 98.
156 Lock 113.
157 Bowyer 162.
Bowyer 160.

Bowyer 164.

Bowyer 191-192.

Bowyer 192-193, 194.

Bowyer 166.

Bowyer 169.

Quoted in Bowyer 170.

Lock 106 and 107.

Lock 103.

Lock 106 and 104.

Lock 103.

Lock 30.

Bowyer 219.

Bowyer 220.

Bowyer 215-218.

Bowyer 221, 222 and 223.

Bowyer 235-236.

The Amhurst poems originally appeared in his Poems on Several Occasions (1720), Bowyer 223 and 224.

Lock 19.

Lock 21.

Bowyer 226-229; Lock 129-130.

Bowyer 231-232; Lock 126.

Unless otherwise indicated, the discussion of The Artifice is from Lock 116-122.

Quoted in Bowyer 241.

Lock 121.
183 Lock 119.

184 Bowyer 242.

185 Bowyer 243.

186 Bowyer 244.

187 Quoted in Bowyer 233.

188 Lock 126.
"Love makes but a slovenly Figure in that House, where Poverty keeps the Door," Ann Lovely tells her would-be fiancé in Susanna Centlivre's comedy, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718). Of course, the connection between money and matrimony was not a new theme in the early eighteenth century: it had been around ever since families began to turn into dynasties and society became economically hierarchical. However, in the latter half of the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth, this leitmotif took on new prominence, especially in English comedy. With the restoration of Charles II, marriage, especially marriage for money, came increasingly under attack by the wits who comprised Charles's court and dominated the social scene. This attitude was a direct result of socio-economic conditions in 1660, conditions which had undergone significant change by the time Centlivre's play was produced. Indeed, Aphra Behn's playwriting career (1670-1687) and Centlivre's (1700-1722) encompass the pivotal years when England began its transition from a "feudal-agricultural" to a "bourgeois-industrial society." The care-free days Behn knew under Charles II ended with his death in 1685 when parliamentary opposition to James II resulted in the so-called "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, the watershed year in which England was irrevocably set on the path to constitutional monarchy and European supremacy. Behn lived long enough to see William and Mary ascend the throne in 1689, but Centlivre witnessed first-hand the birth-pangs of a nation struggling to shed the last vestiges of
medievalism and enter a new era. By the time of Susanna's death in 1723, Behn's beloved Stuarts had been replaced by the Hanovers, and new legislation and economic policies were breaking down a class system once thought inviolate.

This revolution in politics, economics, and society made an indelible impression on playwrights whose livelihood depended on pleasing as many paying customers as possible. Therefore, an understanding of these aspects of British history from 1660 to 1723 is fundamental to an appreciation of the works of Behn and Centlivre, with special attention to how differently each handles the comedy of intrigue. Those differences have already been discussed in Chapters Two and Three. This chapter, then, will focus on significant political events between 1670, when Aphra Behn began her playwriting career, and 1723, the year Susanna Centlivre died, and the socio-economic repercussions of these political events.

Charles II (r. 1660-1685)

By the time Aphra Behn made her playwriting debut with The Forced Marriage in 1670, much of the euphoria which had surrounded the restoration of King Charles II to the throne had dissipated in the face of internal dissension, war, and natural disasters. Charles succeeded to his father's position with much of the "Glorious Martyr's" sovereignty intact thanks to the country's disgust with Cromwell and the reforms of the Puritan Revolution. One historian has noted:

In that reaction lay a determination, which was profoundly to influence the politics of the coming generation, that civil war should not come again. The most conspicuous legacy of the revolution was a bitter
one: the entrenchment of that politics of polarization and vilification which the hatreds of civil war had created and which was to persist through the remainder of the Stuart Age.3

Indeed, Charles's 25 year reign was to be characterized by a fierce struggle between the Court and a Parliament composed of rival factions who kept the religious and class hostilities of the Civil War alive.

Parliament, particularly the Commons, had already begun to flex its muscles in 1661. The so-called "Cavalier" or "Pensioner" Parliament met May 8, 1661, and lasted for eighteen years. Under the new government, common-law courts were given wider jurisdiction and Parliament itself took over many legal duties once reserved for the King and his ministers.4 The year of 1661 also marked the beginning of the Commons' ascendancy over the House of Lords in initiating bills and appropriating supplies, an ascendancy firmly established by 1678.5 Over the course of the next five years, the Cavalier Parliament passed a series of severe laws known as the Clarendon Code designed specifically to keep nonconformists out of central or local government. (Nonconformists were the political rivals of the Cavalier-Anglican party.)6 Thus, the groundwork was laid for the political strife to come.

Among other significant developments before 1670 was Charles's marriage in 1662 to the Catholic princess Catherine of Braganza, awakening fears that he might attempt to restore Catholicism in England. As it would turn out, those fears were justified. Catherine was the Infanta of Portugal, and Portugal was an ally of France. Charles's predilection for all things French and his favor to Catholics
would be the causes for much of the dissension during his reign and his gradual alienation from Parliament.  

In 1660, Parliament had passed the Navigation Act whose declared object was "the increase of shipping" but which was actually a blatant attempt to cut in on the lucrative trade of the Dutch. England's seizure of Dutch stations on the West African coast and its taking of New Amsterdam (New York), an English effort to exclude the Netherlands from trade with the North American colonies, precipitated the Second Anglo-Dutch War in 1664. Then, both England and Holland were ravaged by the Great Plague in 1665. When hostilities resumed in 1666, France and Denmark came to Holland's aid to fulfill treaty obligations. In September of that year, the Great Fire of London destroyed much of the city. By 1667, England was almost bankrupt because of the war, and in June the nation was humiliated when the Dutch brazenly sailed up the Medway and burned and captured some of the Navy's greatest ships. England had had it. In July, peace was concluded but the war had destroyed the 1661 consensus and momentarily eliminated any beginnings of a recovery in royal finances that would have made the government independent of the purse strings of Parliament.  

In January 1668, the Secretary of State, the Earl of Arlington, joined Dutch and Spanish ministers in an alliance whose object was to compel the French king, Louis XIV, to end his war with the Spanish Netherlands and give up his gains. However, two years later, King Charles himself signed the secret Treaty of Dover in which he promised to collaborate with Louis in an attack on the Dutch
republic; furthermore, in a secret clause, he agreed to declare himself a Catholic and reinstate Roman Catholicism in England. He did not fulfill the latter obligation.\textsuperscript{10} The year, 1670, also saw Aphra Behn's playwriting debut.

Two years later, war preparations prevented the government from repaying its debts, causing a crisis of confidence in London and permanently damaging the government's credit (the "Stop of the Exchequer"). Then in March 1673, England entered the Third Dutch War as an ally of France. Two days earlier, Charles had issued a Declaration of Indulgence removing the penal laws from Catholics and permitting Protestant nonconformists free exercise of their religion under license. Charles's use of the royal prerogative to supersede the Parliamentary acts outlawing religious dissent disturbed many, infuriated the Anglicans who had been staunch Stuart supporters, and awakened fears of Catholic penetration at court.\textsuperscript{11}

When Charles had to call Parliament to get money for the war, it compelled him to cancel the Declaration and to adopt a Test Act which would effectively prevent Catholics from holding office. Charles's brother, James, resigned as Lord High Admiral, confirming the rumors of his Catholicism. A successful propaganda campaign was launched by Dutch agents and their allies pointing to recent developments as proof that Charles's ministers were attempting to introduce Catholicism into the country, as well as a French-style absolute monarchy. This resulted in a popular demand for peace. When Parliament met again in the winter, it criticized the government's religious and foreign policies and James's conversion
and refused to allocate money for the war. As a result, England was forced to make a separate peace with the Dutch in February 1674.\textsuperscript{12}

Charles hoped to regain the support of the Anglican majority in Parliament by returning to an Anglican policy and promoting an Anglican minister, Sir Thomas Osborne, who was made Earl of Danby in 1674. Danby set about vigorously enforcing the laws against nonconformists and Catholics. He also sought to strengthen the government's weakness in the Commons, whose power was increasing thanks to Charles's poverty and the financial demands of war, by paying members from the excise revenue. Danby's bribery alarmed the conservative country gentry concerned with the survival of free Parliaments. His persecution of religious dissenters resulted in an alliance between Catholic and Protestant nonconformists to stop his repressive Anglican measures. Consequently, during much of Danby's administration (1674-79), Parliament was prorogued.\textsuperscript{13}

With no money from Parliament, Charles was forced to live off small subsidies from Louis XIV, thus strengthening the hold the French king had on his impolunious neighbor. Danby attempted to remedy this situation by renewing old taxes and generating new revenue. So in December 1677, England signed a treaty with Holland vowing to enter the war on the Dutch side if Louis refused to negotiate on terms they found acceptable. Louis did, and England prepared for war once again. Unfortunately for Danby, the war ended before England could join it so she was left with an army but without sufficient funds to disband it and an additional debt of more than 750,000 pounds. Danby's enemies had spread suspicion that the
supplies he had obtained from Parliament were to strengthen the standing army, fanning the flames of anxiety that the King would try to usurp the power of Parliament.14

Confidence in the government was also shaken late in 1678 when Titus Oates, a disreputable ex-Anglican clergyman who had been recently in training to be a Jesuit priest in France, came forward with "evidence" of a supposed Catholic plot to kill Charles. Incriminating letters were found in the possession of James's secretary, Coleman, and although Coleman had been acting on his own initiative, rumor implicated James. While Oates and his associates were hardly unimpeachable witnesses, the so-called "Popish Plot" confirmed the worst fears of many that the presence of Catholics in high places was indicative of an attempt to subvert English religion and liberties. Consequently, there was an outbreak of violent feeling against English Catholics which even resulted in some executions. This destroyed whatever national unity was left from the 1660 consensus as the nation was divided by the "Exclusion Crisis" (1678–81).

The "Exclusion Crisis" ensued when Parliament demanded that James be removed from court and influence to be replaced as Charles's successor by the Duke of Monmouth, the King's illegitimate son. Although Charles took many of the opposition leaders, including the Earl of Shaftesbury, into the Privy Council and temporarily exiled James, he was unable to prevent Danby's impeachment or stop the introduction of a bill into the Commons excluding James from the throne. Once again, the King was compelled to prorogue, then dissolve, Parliament.15
After having dissolved Parliament, Charles was forced to call it again in August 1680 as taxes had run out and the colony of Tangier was massacred by a powerful Moorish army. When Parliament met in October, it was clear the Whigs had gained the upper hand. The Commons passed a second Exclusion Bill which was defeated in the Lords. So in January 1681, the Commons refused the King any further supply until the Exclusion Bill was passed. Parliament was dissolved, and new elections held in the hope that the radicalism of Shaftesbury and his cohorts had alienated the country.\textsuperscript{16}

Unfortunately, the Parliament that met at Oxford in 1681 brought in another Exclusion Bill and was dissolved after a week. However, the pressure on Charles was easing: Tangier was saved; Louis of France agreed to give him a small subsidy; and a new Treasury Commission had instituted reforms that were to Charles's advantage. Since he no longer had to depend on Parliament for finances, Charles had no reason to call one and never did again. In the last four years of his reign, he achieved some political independence by close collaboration with the Tory-Anglican gentry. In February 1685, Charles II died suddenly and unexpectedly, declaring himself a Catholic on his death-bed.\textsuperscript{17}

The vicissitudes of Charles's reign were largely the result of his economic policy. Burdened with a debt of at least 925,000 pounds at his accession, he was dependent on a recalcitrant House of Commons for taxes to support his government.\textsuperscript{18} Chronically short of money and periodically at odds with the Commons, he turned to foreign powers, most notably France, for financial assistance even though his
dependence on them could adversely affect England's political and economic interests. His foreign wars only made matters worse, increasing his dependence on Parliament. Unable to levy any form of un-Parliamentary taxation, Charles routinely anticipated revenue by borrowing from London banks.\textsuperscript{19} The King's irresponsible borrowing habits proved a decisive factor in the evolution of a banking system in England. Heretofore, the principal borrower from the banks had been the government but the "Stop of the Exchequer" in 1672, when the Crown declared itself unable to pay its debts, had profoundly shaken the loaning institutions' confidence in the Crown so for the next several decades or so London banks cautiously avoided making loans to the government and restricted themselves to private loans.\textsuperscript{20}

The Restoration also saw a definite change in the way the landowning classes viewed their land. This new breed of landlords realized that in promoting the best interests of their tenants, they would be contributing to their own prosperity. Further assistance was gained from the government whose major goal at this time was to stimulate production and protect the producer, rather than to safeguard the consumer or to preserve the subsistence farmer. Thus laws, as well as agricultural improvements, gave great impetus to production.\textsuperscript{21}

The advent of large commercial farms forced many subsistence farmers and cottagers off their land because of their inability to compete in an atmosphere designed to promote the interests of large landowners. Many of the dispossessed sought "the greater freedom and economic opportunity of the cities, where a mass of casual labor
prevented wages rising too rapidly and began to form that new phenomenon, the mob.\textsuperscript{22} At this time, also, industrial rebellion began to take on more modern forms in strikes, mutinies, and riots. One effect of the Restoration was to strengthen the position of the employing classes since high rents from prosperous tenants and cheap labor from starving people benefited landowners. Thus, the distinction between labor and capital was starting to appear. Historian Christopher Hill concludes that England was becoming a two-class society, divided into the ruling class and the masses.\textsuperscript{23}

The rise of commercial farming also undermined the traditional structure of rural society. A rising food market motivated the aristocracy, gentlemen farmers and yeoman farmers to buy more land or raise rents to meet the demands of the market.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, landlords profited from higher rents; some yeomen did well enough to become gentry, a rapidly expanding class with increasing wealth and social and political ambition. However, husbandmen and independent farmers did not fare very well as they could not produce for the market.\textsuperscript{25}

Nowhere was the distinction between the classes more apparent than in social behavior. The court of Charles II shocked even the jaded sensibilities of other European courts with its debauchery and depravity. John Evelyn opined that "the king had thoroughly dissipated the immense stock of goodwill with which he began his reign by his libertinism, his neglect of state business and his apparent indifference in matters of religion."\textsuperscript{26} He surrounded himself with men who took their cue from the Merry Monarch and lived lives of unbridled hedonism. The escapades of these libertines, many of
whom were Aphra Behn's friends and models for her heroes, scandalized the greater portion of England which was still influenced by years of Puritan rule. The complete amorality of Charles's court eventually alienated a majority of his subjects and motivated much of the opposition his government faced.

In direct contrast to the excesses of the aristocracy was the moderation practiced by the hard-working, God-fearing middle-class. Unlike the upper class, who played fast and loose with the sanctity of marriage, those of the middling rank built their lives around families. The formation of individual families was of great economic significance in that each one was a new economic unit which could operate its own business or work for others, as well as be a new unit of consumption. During the Stuart period, those of the middling and upper ranks of society enjoyed increased prosperity which was reflected in many facets of life, such as homebuilding. A change in taste brought a great demand for labor which provided employment for the much larger segment of the population unable to afford most of the new products.

However, one aspect of Restoration life among the upper classes did not benefit from this new world-view: the property-marriage system. For centuries, marriage among the aristocracy had been a means of gaining wealth and consolidating power. Matrimony was a business deal motivated solely by financial and political considerations rather than the desires of the bride and groom. The latter were simply pawns in the process of building dynasties. Dynasties were predicated on primogeniture so a child's paternity should never be in
doubt. What this meant to women was that their sole value lay in their chastity, a commodity jealously guarded by fathers among the rich and middling people. Thus, women were considered property both by society and by the law. A woman was subjugated first to her father who then "sold" her to her next master, her husband. Unfortunately, after the Restoration, due to a shortage of eligible men, the marriage market was weighted heavily against women. By the end of the seventeenth century, the ratio between a woman's dowry, the cash sum her father gave to the groom upon marriage to his daughter, and the jointure, an agreed-upon income promised to the bride by the groom, was ten to one. This meant that a woman's saleable value had dropped to half of what it had been in just a little over half a century.²⁹

This was very bad news for women of the upper classes since the only two roles available to women in seventeenth-century England were those of wife or mistress. Both capacities left women dependent upon the men in their lives but there was very little chance that a woman could survive on her own. The so-called "sexual revolution" of 1660 had given women like Aphra Behn and her circle a certain measure of freedom but the majority of women remained under the yoke of enforced chastity imposed by the property-marriage system. And even Behn and her friends suffered under the double standard at work in society that branded a woman a whore if she behaved as promiscuously as a man. This belief was propagated by the very rakes who paid lip-service to the idea of sexual equality but who cynically regarded all women as sources of cheap sex. Thus, the
unevenly balanced marriage market and the easy availability of sex undermined women's position in society. This devaluation of women was Aphra Behn's main concern which motivated most of her work.

The loosening of moral strictures after 1660 was also reflected in a decline in church attendance. Many who went to church had no understanding of Christianity; others didn't go at all, despite the penalties. This trend began to affect the more respectable sections of society as the period progressed. According to Peter Earle, "[M]aterialism, hedonism and a growing secular spirit informed the minds of society." At the Restoration, the Bishops lost much of the power they had had as the supremacy of Parliament over them became apparent. Thus, they lost their dominance in politics.

While the Church may have lost most of its ground in politics and society, it retained control of education. The Parliamentarian belief in equality of educational opportunity had given rise to grammar schools in the Interregnum. After the Restoration, it was widely believed that these schools had caused the Civil War because they had educated too many people above their proper station. Consequently, educational expansion, which had begun in the century before the Civil War, slowed down after 1660. Over half of the population was illiterate. Not surprisingly, the poor accounted for most of this figure since their children received little or no education. If they had some type of schooling, it usually terminated around the age of ten because they had to go to work to help support the family. The largest section of the population benefiting from educational expansion were the middle-classes. Peter Earle notes the growing
disparity between popular and educated beliefs in the Stuart period and attributes the situation to unequal access to education. He concludes that "this division in belief provides a good example of a mental polarization which paralleled the increasing economic polarization of rural society."

Nowhere was there more evidence of a mental polarization among society as a whole than in the Restoration theatres. Charles, and James as well, had a passion for drama and attended plays frequently, making the playhouses the cultural focal points of society. Both the King's Company and the Duke's Company depended largely on court patronage for survival. While recent scholarship suggests that the Restoration audience covered a broader social spectrum than was heretofore believed, the fact remains that the cost of attending a play was prohibitive for all but the well-to-do. While there may have been some citizens among the upper-class patrons, true tradesmen were not welcome. Thus, most of the plays of the period reflected the taste and morality of their aristocratic audiences.

And what a rowdy group they were! The play was definitely not the focus for the fashionable who viewed theatre-going primarily as a social occasion at which to see and be seen. During performances, audience members chatted audibly with each other, prostitutes plied their trade and gallants frequently brawled among themselves, when not heckling the performers. Dramatists of the period responded by catering to the tastes of their fickle audiences. Heroic tragedy was popular until the mid-1670s when the comedy of manners began to dominate the stage. This genre reflected the change in society as it
depicted faithfully the gay, amoral lifestyle of the court and its hangers-on. It reproduced the witty repartee of the upper-class and its sophistication while it unmercifully satirized the follies of others not born with a silver spoon. Other strata of society viewed these plays as licentious, vulgar and blasphemous; another indication of the gulf that developed between the King and the majority of his subjects.

Not only did desperate playwrights attempt to keep the attention of their restless patrons with bawdy language and erotic situations but they also increasingly began to use the nontextual resources of the theatre to dazzle the eyes and ears of a jaded clientele. As the period progressed, scenery became extremely elaborate, and effects and machinery more sophisticated, to the point of surpassing the text as the most important element. Music, song and dance saw their full development during the Restoration to the point where virtually no play was free of them, no matter how inappropriate. The structure of tragedies and comedies was being weakened as they were designed more with an eye toward the musical entertainment they could provide rather than their opportunities for artistic expression. All of these trends can be seen in the works of Aphra Behn, from her early heroic tragedies, like The Forced Marriage (1670), to her last play performed during her lifetime, the farcical masque, The Emperor of the Moon (1687).

In addition to writing to please the changing taste of the beau monde, Behn shared another trait with her male colleagues—a definite Royalist bias. During the 1660s and for most of the 1670s, the
majority of plays in whatever genre championed the Cavalier cause and vilified the King's enemies in the Civil War, especially those dissenters in the business community who had supported Cromwell. This was hardly surprising considering that Charles had granted patents to two men only, giving them a virtual monopoly of theatrical activities. Those two men, Thomas Killigrew and Sir William D'Avenant, were both dyed-in-the-wool Tories who probably recognized that their financial survival depended on court patronage. Indeed, many dramatists were courtiers, whose political sentiments coincided exactly with their sovereign's since they had a vested interest in seeing that the monopoly survived. Scholar John Loftis cites Dryden's plays as the most comprehensive expressions of Royalist preoccupations and says their political themes may be considered typical of the prevailing sentiment on the stage during the sixties and seventies. If we take Dryden's dramatic works as the paradigm of this period, then plays depicted "the common people as a thoughtless and irresponsible mob," expressed contempt for statecraft and statesmen and, by implication, constitutional principles, and celebrated "kingship lavishly portraying it not as a necessary condition to the fulfillment of a social compact, but rather as an awesome state sanctioned in the order of nature." Due to censorship, Whig playwrights were given little chance of expressing their views, except for attacks on Catholicism, and even those largely disappeared after 1680. But politics onstage lost out to the politics happening offstage. The last years of Charles's reign were marked by political upheaval and turmoil which resulted in a declining attendance at the theatres. In an attempt to mend their
reversal in fortune, the two theatre companies merged into one, the United Company, in 1682 so that until 1695 London had only one theatre, one venue for all of England's playwrights.40

We have already seen the deleterious effects on Aphra Behn's career occasioned by the decline responsible for the formation of the United Company but theatre historian Allardyce Nicoll observes that in her career Behn "was establishing a surer position for her sisters than any of the Elizabethan women had succeeded in establishing."41 This was a considerable achievement given that while the "growth of commercial capitalism, the transition from aristocratic feudalism to dynastic monarchy, the spread of education and printing, the Protestant Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution had changed a great deal in the lives of men," little improved for women, who even lost ground in some ways at this time.42 Professions traditionally belonging to women were being appropriated by men. Enclosure also gradually affected working women in that some of those who lost their land stayed in rural areas and struggled for a precarious existence while others migrated to cities only to be excluded from the skilled occupations that capital investment and urban reconstruction were creating. At the same time, traditional family structure based on kin was giving way to a family unit based on the married couple. Since a woman's wages were usually two-thirds those of a man, economic independence for a single woman was extremely difficult. Thus, changing work patterns forced many women to look to marriage for economic survival.43
However, not all occupations were closed to women. More and more of them were attracted to education as a profession. Another profession whose ranks began to be swelled by women was writing, despite the hostility of society towards those bold souls who dared to transgress that exclusively male dominion. Published works by women began to increase steadily in the seventeenth century, then exponentially in the eighteenth. One estimate is that four hundred women wrote between 1640 and 1700 in England, their works constituting approximately one percent of the texts published. Many who wrote were inspired by the ongoing debate over the supposed inferiority of women that had been raging since the Middle Ages. Others, like Aphra Behn, who had literary aspirations expressed feminist sentiments at least partly because of the misogyny and obstacles they faced as female writers. Women scholars, although still considered unusual, increased during this period so that the mid- and late seventeenth century saw an unprecedented outpouring of polemical writing by women who shared a collective awareness of their gender and a desire to address the subject of women's condition and potential in the so-called "querelle des femmes." Thus, the seventeenth century saw a flowering of women's art as more and more women—either by necessity or by choice—wrote for a living. These pioneers left us with a legacy of feminist aesthetics and with a rich picture of female experience, but perhaps "the most important aspect of the legacy was the growing collective awareness of gender not only as a determining factor of individual identity but also as the parameter of most tenets of social, political, and intellectual
endeavor."49 These writers recognized the oppression of their sex under patriarchy and argued that, as human beings, they should be accorded the same rights and privileges enjoyed by males: "One should judge a person by his or her accomplishments, early feminists argued, not by gender."50

Many of these female writers of the early Modern era were married and did not necessarily seek to emulate the male ideal in their works; consequently, they often created female heroes, women who were not merely appendages to men, in attempts to valorize female experience and the contributions of women to society.51 The writings of women scholars of this period also reflect an awareness of shared, gender-specific ideas and experience. This sense of collectivity was manifested in the "almost inevitable catalogs of famous virtuous/heroic women of the past and present, whose examples are presented to support the view that women's suppression and supposed inferiority are by no means historic, philosophic, or ethical absolutes."52 Female exemplars of all eras were held up as proof that women were capable of contributing to civilization on every level.

However, not all women shared this new sense of gender collectivity. Some women writers were misogynistic in their attitudes towards women who sought public positions or who voiced protests publicly. Others seemed more concerned about class than gender when confronted with controversial issues; aristocratic women tended to think of themselves as aristocrats first and women second. Thus, this new self-consciousness about gender is most prominent in the works of the polemicists, non-aristocratic women and successful
writers like Aphra Behn, who continually draw attention to a gender-bond.\textsuperscript{53}

Like Behn, early Modern women scholars and writers boldly asserted woman's spiritual and intellectual equality with man, citing woman's inadequate education as the cause of her seeming inferiority. Most girls were educated just enough to allow them to run efficient households as their sole occupation would be marriage. Classical studies and institutions of higher learning were exclusively male preserves. In 1675, the writer Hannah Woolley complained, "Most in this depraved later age think a woman learned and wise enough if she can distinguish her husband's bed from another's."\textsuperscript{54} Nearly every woman who published in this period protested the insufficient education accorded to females. Educational parity was one of the major concerns of these early feminists who firmly believed that women were capable of attaining the same intellectual heights as men. (Many of them were living examples.) The other focus for feminist protests in the late seventeenth century was men's treatment of women in courtship and marriage. Not only did these women call attention to the sexual double standard but they also objected to the total subjugation of women within these institutions, even "delineating the types of men who oppressed women: the seducer, the bully, the wife-beater, the miser, the fop."\textsuperscript{55} Feminist criticism in this area would become even harsher in the next century.

Thus, the twenty-five years following Charles Stuart's restoration to the throne saw dramatic changes taking place in every aspect of English life. In spite of political turmoil and various wars, wide-
ranging trends in economics begun earlier in the century started to change the social structure of England as commercial farming and burgeoning urbanization affected both the class system and the shape of family relationships. New ideas about individual rights and the erosion of traditional values made it possible for women to assail exclusively male bastions as some professions and the literary arts, as well as to give voice to a rising feminist consciousness. All of these movements would continue in the short-lived and turbulent reign of James II.

James II (r. 1685-1688)

Given the considerable Parliamentary opposition to the Catholic James during Charles's lifetime, it is somewhat surprising that he succeeded his brother to the throne in 1685 relatively peacefully. There were two revolts, one by the Earl of Argyll and the other by the Duke of Monmouth, but both were put down in a matter of weeks and their leaders executed. The Parliament that met in May of 1685 was more favorable to the King than any since 1661, in large part due to the remodelling of borough charters during Charles's time. But there may have been another cause underlying the new amity between sovereign and legislative body. Christopher Hill observes that as class lines sharpened in the late seventeenth century, and the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" widened, the "have-nots" were growing increasingly restless and hostile toward the smaller ruling class. This class hatred grew more apparent as the age progressed, and awareness of it underpinned much of the political thinking of the gentry. Indeed, Charles's old nemesis, Shaftesbury,
had alienated many as his policies grew more radical so that by the
time of James's accession, many viewed the Whigs as just as much a
threat to social stability as the Catholics. Thus, the moderate gentry
gave its support to James and the Tories.\textsuperscript{56}

One wonders if so many would have rallied to James's cause if
they had known his secret ambition. According to Paul Seaward,
James's ultimate goal was to reconcile England with Rome, not by force
but by establishing toleration of Catholicism. He believed that once
Roman Catholicism had taken root in England, its attractions would
become obvious. Also, limiting his royal favors to Catholics alone
would be an incentive to those seeking power and prestige.\textsuperscript{57} This
was the driving force behind all of James's actions in his short reign.

It began auspiciously enough as a strongly Tory Parliament
voted him the permanent revenues enjoyed by Charles with additional
taxes.\textsuperscript{58} Then James began his Catholic campaign. In direct violation
of the 1673 Test Act designed to keep Catholics and dissenters out of
the armed forces, James granted commissions to Catholics. He also
used the short-lived rebellions as an excuse to ask Parliament for a
permanent standing army. When it met in November, Parliament
objected to his flagrant disregard of the Test Act and suggested that,
instead of a standing army, the militia should be reorganized.
Displeased, the King prorogued Parliament which never met again.\textsuperscript{59}

James's next assault on the Test Act came in a legal action. James
assured a favorable decision by getting rid of any justice
likely to disagree so in Godden vs. Hales, judges ruled that the King
had a right to dispense with any law he chose, including the Test
Act. James used the decision to appoint Catholics to offices in the army. But for the next three years he would continue to try to cajole or bully the gentry into accepting a repeal of the Test Act and penal laws against Catholics.80

James's agenda became clearer in 1686 as his Catholicising campaign got under way in earnest. Several key positions in government were given to Catholics. A papal nuncio was publicly received, and several Catholic orders opened houses in London. A Court of Commissioners for Ecclesiastical Causes was set up, which was indistinguishable from the High Commission, declared illegal in 1641. James appointed the anti-English Papist, the Earl of Tyrconnel, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland where James was building a formidable Catholic army. Realizing that the Tories were unwilling to repeal the Test Act or the penal laws against Catholics, James turned to men who had been outside the law for years—the dissenters, republicans and Papists—for support. He even enlisted the aid of his brother's nemesis, the Whigs. The Parliamentary franchise and administration of justice in many towns was handed over to these men. Consequently, Catholics and radical dissenters were introduced into local government. Finally, towards the end of 1686, James demonstrated his solidarity with his new supporters by firing some of his Tory ministers.61

James continued his reckless dash to disaster in April 1687 when he issued a Declaration of Indulgence that suspended the tests and granted the free exercise of their religion to Catholics and Protestant nonconformists. He ordered a purge of Tory power in London, giving the city back to the Whigs. In July, James dissolved Parliament, and,
in an attempt to ensure that the next one would be favorable to his policies, continued his remodelling of town corporations, displacing the Anglican gentry from local offices and replacing them with ex-Whigs, Papists, dissenters, Cromwellians and ex-parliamentarians. A year later, he issued another Declaration of Indulgence and ordered bishops to have it read in every church in England on two successive Sundays. Seven bishops refused, arguing that the King had no right to dispense with the statutes denying toleration to nonconformists. They were tried for seditious libel but found not guilty. His actions outraged the Anglican establishment further and gained the support of only some of the dissenters and Whigs who were suspicious of his Catholic policies and his increasingly arbitrary actions. Then, in June 1688, James's wife had a son, James Edward, and the specter of a Catholic dynasty ruling England hastened an unlikely coalition of moderate Whigs and dissenters with Tories against government policy. It was the beginning of the end for James.

Christopher Hill observes that the Tories were "badly confused and rattled" in 1688; while they did not want to oppose a king, they believed that their property and religion was in grave danger from an openly Catholic sovereign who showed no respect for Parliamentary laws and liberties granted to his subjects under the law. The perceived threat of James's Catholicism and progress towards absolutism, not to mention his advancement of landless and nameless men, united the propertied class against him and healed the breach between Tory and Whig that had seemed to threaten civil war in 1681.
So it was that after the birth of James's son, an invitation to invade England signed by seven prominent Englishmen citing general dissatisfaction "with the present conduct of the government in relation to . . . religion, liberties and properties," among other things, was sent to James's Protestant son-in-law, William of Orange. William began preparations for a full-scale invasion, setting sail in November 1688 with the avowed intention to force a meeting of a "free and lawful Parliament" for the reconciliation of James and his subjects. For his part, James began some hasty back-pedalling and attempted to win popular support by abandoning his most controversial policies. Among other things, he removed Catholics from the army, gave local offices back to the men he'd taken them from, returned all the corporation charters surrendered since 1679, and disbanded the Ecclesiastical Commission. But it was too little too late. He still refused to call a free Parliament or promise redress for other grievances which kept suspicion about his intentions alive. The English army disintegrated under defections and desertions, and James had little popular support. When William landed at Torbay, the peerage and gentry flocked to his formidable army. James, fearing the same fate as that of his father, fled to France, enabling those who wished to make William king declare James's "abdication."

Such was the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688. William called the "Convention Parliament" in February 1689 which offered the crown jointly to him and his wife Mary, James's daughter. Although Tories, like Aphra Behn, were hesitant to accept the new sovereigns, unlike Behn, few were willing to defend James.
So the political consensus of 1660 which had promised unity and stability was irrevocably broken under the mismanagement of first Charles, then James. Historian Paul Seaward notes several factors that contributed to the breach between monarch and subjects that led to the "Glorious Revolution." Bribery of Parliamentary members by the King's ministers to ensure support for the King's policies threatened free Parliaments. Charles's and James's attempts to invalidate Parliamentary statutes by dispensation or suspension led many to fear for the very survival of Parliament. And their armies, French alliances and Catholic inclinations seemed to threaten the very laws, constitution and religion of England. These threats were not as evident in the 1660s and 1670s when Charles's financial woes made him dependent on Parliament but conditions in the 1680s created an environment favorable to a French-style absolutism. Expansion of the permanent revenue in the last years of Charles's reign gave him financial stability, making him less dependent on Parliament. A modest army could be used to put down disturbances at home although serious rebellion was unlikely due to the Tory principles of non-resistance and the memory of civil war. In many European countries at this time the trend was towards royal power and the divine right of kings which was the philosophical basis of absolutism. In 1688, it seemed to many that the same thing was happening in England, endangering English liberties, religion and the ancient constitution, hence, the depositon of a king and the "Glorious Revolution."68

Not only did the Revolution result in a change of monarchs but it also made the protection of the new monarchy and the succession
a dominant political concern until well into the Hanoverian reigns. Moreover, it transformed England's system of government as William had to make constitutional concessions as a condition of his accession; however, many of these did not have immediate effect. They began to come into use during Queen Anne's reign when Parliament gained more power and the royal prerogative was curbed with Cabinets and ministers. But the seeds were sown in 1688.

William III (r. 1689-1702)

If the instigators of the 1688 Revolution wanted a drastic change in leadership from Catholic James's arbitrary rule, they certainly achieved it in their selection of Protestant William of Orange. The Dutch monarch was anything but English in most ways, unlike James. For one thing, his political preoccupations embraced all of Europe rather than being confined solely to English affairs. Indeed, he had "invaded" England because he hoped to use that nation's power and wealth in his ongoing struggle with Louis XIV of France. Unlike James, he accepted the fact that to rule England he would have to live with Parliament. In addition, he would have to share his title with his wife, Mary II, but he insisted that he would not also share the power. Thus, although Mary was personally popular and William was not, he was the one who wore the pants in the royal family.

But the House of Commons was determined that this time the sovereign would not get too big for his breeches. The Convention Parliament offered the crown to William and Mary on condition that they accept a Bill of Rights designed to prevent the kind of high-handed behavior exhibited by James II. The Revolution had restored
power to the traditional ruling class, the shire gentry and town merchants, and shown the ultimate solidarity of the propertied class. They intended to protect the religion, laws and liberties of their country before accepting a new monarch. The bill's "Declaration of Rights" was much watered down for fear William would not accept the crown and the bill. It was also a political compromise. United by a common foe, James II, Tories and Whigs had patched up their differences to effect a change in government; consequently, the Declaration stated both positions and left it up to people to work out the contradictions.

Nevertheless, the Declaration of Rights went some way towards curbing the kind of power wielded by James as it concentrated on removing specific grievances: the King's claim to suspend laws without Parliament's consent; his dispensing power 'as it hath been exercised of late'; the Ecclesiastical Commission; maintenance of a standing army within the kingdom in peace time; tonnage and poundage without Parliamentary consent; imposition of excessive bail or fines; cruel and unusual punishments.

The Declaration also espoused freedom of elections to Parliament and freedom of speech in Parliament, as well as asserted that frequent Parliaments were the rights of the subject. It was clear that any future monarch would defy the people whom Parliament represented at his or her own peril. No one did.

The vagueness of the Declaration would be clarified by later legislation when articles unwillingly dropped from it would be made law, but William accepted the Bill of Rights in 1689 because he still enjoyed most of the powers and prerogatives of a sovereign under it. Inroads on his powers as king would be made by Parliament
during his reign so while by no stretch of the imagination could his government be considered a constitutional monarchy, the groundwork for one was starting to be laid.

The security of the new regime was tested a month after William and Mary were coronated. In March 1689, James II invaded Ireland with the help of Louis XIV and rallied the Irish Parliament to his side. In May, England declared war on France in response to French aggression against Germany, entering the "Nine Years' War." Called "King William's War" in England, it would rage on for eight years and significantly affect the government and politics of this time. In addition to the Irish rebellion, a Scottish revolt took place but was put down. Two other significant developments of 1689 were the passage of two acts by Parliament. The Mutiny Act, which made it illegal to maintain an army longer than a year, had to be renewed annually. A Toleration Act granted freedom of worship to Protestant dissenters.

William's actions in the first year of his reign were motivated by several concerns. Two longstanding objectives of his had been protecting the Netherlands from France and limiting French expansion elsewhere so that a balance of power in Europe could be maintained. Now he also sought to defend the Revolution settlement, crush the rebellion in Ireland and protect English trade from France's maritime might. When he had assumed power, he had assembled a ministry composed of both Tories and Whigs, but in 1690, William became disillusioned with Whig support of his policies and called another Parliament.
Both political parties had changed since their rise during the Exclusion Crisis, abandoning their more radical wings in the consensus of 1688. Once a party of opposition, the Whigs were now competitors with the Tories for William's favor. Their new leadership was largely composed of aristocrats who began to lose enthusiasm after 1694 for limiting the royal prerogative any further. Their support also lessened for theories which granted sovereignty to the subject or ordained that tyrannical kings could legally be deposed. However, they were solidly behind the Revolution settlement and the Protestant succession. Mostly Anglicans, the new generation of Whigs received powerful support from dissenters in the trading and "monied" interests so they were opposed to High Church extremism and champions of the Toleration Act. The Tories, on the other hand, considered themselves "the Church Party," and their hatred of dissenters only increased as the latter grew more respectable. Dissent was an urban phenomenon but with the Toleration Act it began to extend into the villages, threatening the supremacy of the squire. The party of the "landed" interest, most of the Tories regarded the Toleration Act as a temporary maneuver. However, "James II's excesses and the unpalatable settlement of 1689 bred in many backbench Tories 'country' attitudes which would have been alien to their predecessors." Few of them openly opposed the Revolution but the Tories "were unhappy over its disturbance of the hereditary principle and their ambivalence over the Hanoverian succession finally developed into deep division." In 1690, though, party divisions were not as divergent as some thought but the weight
of future events would eventually polarize the Tories and Whigs. Two of the most divisive issues would be the wars and the question of England's present and future relationship with Europe.80

The Parliamentary elections of 1690 resulted in significant Tory gains, and for the next three years William allowed that party "a growing sway in his new Cabinet Council."81 In June, the French defeat of the English fleet at Beachy Head led to an invasion scare but the following month saw William's decisive victory over the Irish in the Battle of the Boyne. So while "King William's War" continued, by 1691 the Irish rebellion had been crushed, leaving Anglican Protestantism once again supreme there. In May of the following year, there was another invasion scare but the French fleet was shattered in the Battle of La Hogue. All of France's invasion plans were thwarted, and the presence of a British fleet (1694-1696) in the Mediterranean provided valuable protection to British commerce and helped the allied cause in southern Europe. After 1692, there were no major naval engagements but French attacks on British commerce, mostly by privateers, were very effective.82 However, with the Irish revolt put down and the threat of a French invasion removed, the Revolutionary settlement was now secure.

Meanwhile, the administrative failures and the inability to effectively manage the Commons of William's Tory-dominated ministry, as well as the willingness of the Whigs to support the war on his terms, motivated the King to tip the balance of power in his government decisively towards the latter. Between March 1693 and May 1694, the groundwork was being laid for the closest thing to a
party-dominated ministry to be seen during William's reign as he brought Whigs into the ministry. As historian Christopher Hill notes, "The nature of the court had changed, and with it the nature of party rivalry, as the Tories became the country party, the 'outs' and not the 'ins.'" But if the nature of the Court and the parties had changed, so had relations between the Court and the parties. After the Revolution, effective patronage slowly but surely slipped out of the hands of the King into those of his ministers who controlled Parliament. Due to the expansion of the civil service, there were now many more Parliamentary members dependent on the government for their livelihoods who could be dismissed at will. (Hence came the "Place Bills" designed to keep holders of paid government office ["placemen"] from sitting in the Commons.)

From 1694 to 1706, a string of Place Acts and clauses were enacted which excluded several thousand crown office-holders from the Commons. In 1694, also, the Triennial Act was passed that mandated not only that Parliament should meet every three years but also that it should not last longer than three years. This meant that now Parliament was a necessary and continuous part of the constitution and more dependent on the electorate. The Act also "encouraged factiousness and an almost permanent electioneering atmosphere." The unprecedented costs of "King William's War" resulted in a new system of public credit in 1693-94 designed to raise loans for the war. Thus, the Bank of England was founded. Dubbed "the Financial Revolution" by historians because of its permanence, the system had important constitutional implications: "By voting
duties for 99 years to fund the first long-term loan in 1693 and by underwriting the incorporation of a state bank... parliament became the guarantor for the present and the future of the new 'National Debt'; in effect, the underwriter of the crown itself." The other significant event of 1694 was the sudden death of Queen Mary which again aroused fears for the Protestant Succession.

In 1695, the Licensing Act lapsed and was not renewed so that a relative freedom of the press existed. The election in the same year cemented the supremacy of the Whigs in William's ministry, due in part to the discovery of the Fenwick conspiracy. The conspiracy involved a plot laid by James II and Louis of France to combine an invasion of England with the assassination of William. The discovery was a turning-point in William's reign as James's involvement in the plot turned many against his cause.

Thanks to the parliamentary and administrative skills of his ministers, William was able to make an honorable peace with Louis in 1697. "King William's War" had dragged on for eight years, a war of attrition which no one really won. The Peace of Ryswick was concluded in September when it was clear there was a stalemate but it was little more than a truce. All parties realized that no permanent peace would be established until the most important European problem had been solved—the fate of the huge Spanish empire when the insane and childless Charles II died. However, Louis agreed to abandon the territories France had occupied in the Rhineland and returned a string of Netherlands fortresses to Spain. More
importantly for England, he recognized William's place on the English throne.90

King William's War was unprecedented in English history. The allied armies numbered more than 300,000 by 1694, 70,000 of whom were in English pay. The war cost much more money than anyone had foreseen when the war began: 2.7 million pounds annually for the war on land alone. Between 1689 and 1697, England built the largest navy in the world in ships and firepower. The enormous sums of money necessary for all this were raised by loans, like the new long-term "funded" loans, and by taxation. Most of the income resulted from the latter, especially the Land Tax which came from the propertied classes and raised two million pounds a year.91 The war was responsible for the establishment of the Bank of England and William's dependence on the Whigs.

That dependence, however, began to weaken as a new "country" House of Commons elected in 1698 helped a decline in Whig power by its refusal to vote William more than a derisory standing army.92 The decline was apparent in 1700 when Charles II of Spain died, leaving the huge Spanish empire to the second son of Louis XIV's heir, Philip of Anjou. England and the Netherlands recognized the Bourbon Philip as the new Spanish king. Anxious for peace at first, the Commons impeached William's Whig ministers, "the Junto," for concluding the Partition Treaty without reference to Parliament. The House of Lords, dominated by Whigs, urged William to become part of an anti-French military alliance with the Emperor and the Netherlands, and they acquitted the impeached Whigs.93 However, between 1698 and 1700,
all of the Whig leaders except one left the Cabinet or were removed from office. Late in 1700, the King struck a deal with leading Tories that resulted in a new ministry dominated by that party. Parliament was dissolved, and a new one elected in January 1701, the most Tory of the reign.94

The second Partition Treaty was attacked by the new Commons who impeached three Junto lords they mistakenly held responsible for it. The Commons also delayed the Bill of Settlement establishing the Protestant succession "after festooning it with clauses that were an implicit indictment of many features of William's own rule."95 The wrangling between the two Houses caused William to prorogue Parliament in June. In August, England, the Netherlands and the Emperor signed a Grand Alliance designed to curb French power. The goals of the Alliance were to make sure France would never dominate the Mediterranean or the Netherlands, the crowns of Spain and France would never be combined and France would never possess Spanish America. James II died in France nine days after the signing, and Louis recognized his son as "James III," King of Great Britain, which was a violation of the Ryswick Treaty. William dissolved Parliament in November, and in the elections of December 1701, the pendulum of power again swung towards the Whigs. The new Parliament accepted the Grand Alliance and voted supply. Moreover, all members of Parliament and office-holders were required to take an oath repudiating "the Pretender," James III.96

The most significant piece of legislation in 1701 was the Act of Settlement. It sought to ensure the Protestant succession first
through Mary's youngest sister, the sick and childless Anne, then through the Dowager Electress Sophia of Hanover, a grand-daughter of James I of England. The Act also contained the first ever statutory restriction on the sovereign's freedom of action in foreign policy as a result of William's practice during the war of not consulting his ministers or telling Parliament when he made diplomatic decisions. Both Parliament and the public had been incensed by the King's unilateral negotiation with France of the two Partition treaties in 1698 and 1700; consequently, they ended for good the practice of secret royal diplomacy exercised by English monarchs since the 1660s. Another limitation on royal control of foreign policy was the part of the Act of Settlement that mandated that no foreign king could involve Englishmen in war for the defence of territory that did not belong to the English crown. The Act also transferred the right to dismiss judges from the ruler to Parliament, and, most significantly, asserted that no royal pardon should be pleadable to a Parliamentary impeachment. This last provision removed the final barrier to Parliament's control of the King's ministers. The erosion of the royal prerogative begun in 1689 was well and truly under way in 1701 due in large part to William's conduct during and after the war. It would continue through successive reigns until Parliament achieved the dominant position in government it holds today.

Although Tory leaders lost office in the December election, "William's reign ended as it had begun with a makeshift left-of-centre coalition government uneasily in charge of his affairs. The big difference was that by March 1702 the political nation was split far
more comprehensively along Whig-Tory lines than at any time in the
previous fifteen years." William died in a riding accident that
month; war was imminent, and party divisions receded into the
background. The breach between Whig and Tory was further
healed by the accession of Anne. The whole nation, including the
Tories who had questioned William's right, welcomed their "Church of
England Queen." Anne's accession also helped reconcile the parties
to the new war which broke out in May, the War of the Spanish
Succession. The nation would be so preoccupied with the war for the
first eight years of Anne's reign that the threat posed by the
Jacobites, those subjects who wished to restore "James III" and his
line to the English throne, would be eclipsed by it.

Historian Gregory Holmes points out that the different way
England was governed by the end of William's reign was due in large
part to the nation's involvement down to 1697 "in an unprecedentedly
demoralizing war." King William's War destroyed the system of public
finance, "the root cause of so much seventeenth-century constitutional
tension," and forced its replacement. The Civil List Act of 1698
separated civil expenditures from the cost of maintaining the army
and navy. Thus, financing the armed services, in peace and war,
became the permanent responsibility of Parliament. Since 1689, annual
sessions had been necessary for raising the many "extraordinary"
impositions needed to pay for the war. After 1698, Parliament was
compelled to meet annually if only to vote the armed services budget,
including the new Land Tax which remained the principal direct tax
from 1693 to 1798. Even the new "Civil List," which the King was to
use to pay the expenses of the Royal Household and the bureaucracy, was initially set by Parliament but it was guaranteed to each sovereign for life. As mentioned earlier, the Bank of England and a "Financial Revolution" were the results of a new system of public credit designed to raise loans for the war.\textsuperscript{103}

Aphra Behn, who died in 1689 shortly after the coronation of William and Mary, might have had a little difficulty recognizing the England of 1700. That was the year Susanna Centlivre (1669-1723) began her playwriting career. Much had happened in the eleven years between Behn's death and Centlivre's debut as the quasi-medieval England of Behn's era took its first tottering steps toward industrialization and European domination. The divine right of kings had been successfully challenged by the expulsion of James II in 1688 and the installation of William of Orange as his successor on conditions dictated by Parliament. The state was now more important than the monarch whose powers were not as circumscribed as they would have been in a constitutional monarchy; however, it was clear that the balance of power had begun to shift decisively towards Parliament, particularly the House of Commons. The beginnings of a constitutional monarchy coincided with the emergence of a two-party political system that had its roots in the "Exclusion Crisis" (1678-1681). While the factions were not to become fully distinct from each other until the debates over the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the Tories were identified with Anglicans and Cavalier Royalism, the Whigs with nonconformists, Presbyterians and ex-Cromwellians. The struggle for
domination between the two shaped many of the events of William III's reign, as it would of Anne's, as well.

The "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 was also an economic turning-point. Just as the king was losing his ascendancy so too was the medieval concept of monopoly exporting companies privileged with royal charters. Under pressure from manufacturing interests, the government reversed its economic policy to allow companies to form without royal or Parliamentary charter, in complete independence of the state. With the ground thus laid for free enterprise, exports and imports probably trebled, and changed markedly in character, between 1603 and 1714. The Navigation Acts passed between 1660 and 1696 were also instrumental in stimulating England's burgeoning capitalism by giving the nation a monopoly on the exporting of goods produced in her colonies. In turn, new industries developed for export and to meet expanding consumer demand at home. Changes in money and credit, and the establishment of the Bank of England, provided a steady flow of capital for investment which was also facilitated by government action. Indeed, as historian Brian Murphy points out, "Since the bulk of its assets consisted of loans to the government, and since the government's capacity to pay its creditors depended in significant measure on its ability to borrow from the Bank, the credit standing of the two was from the beginning founded on a large measure of reciprocal dependence." The government was never again forced to any measure like the "Stop of the Exchequer" in 1672. In this way, the Bank of England also contributed towards maintaining the stability of the London banking and credit system as a whole.
The steady flow of capital from changes in money and credit meant that a greater proportion of the national income was invested, not consumed, an indispensable condition for future industrial expansion. This was a reflection of "a change in the psychology of wealth—away from it as a stone representing solidity and security towards an apprehension of its accumulation as a measure of estimable achievement." In the forefront of investment were the merchants. When the rapidly expanding volume of trade slowed from about 1690 to the early 1720s, they found themselves with a lot of money they could not use in their own business. As "they were particularly wedded to the doctrine that money should make money," investment was their alternative of choice. All of these factors, among others, meant that by 1714 England would be much more prosperous than she had been at the Restoration.

The changing political situation in which economic interests cut across party lines was reflected in the drama of the late seventeenth century. The Revolution of 1688 brought about a significant reversal in the political tenor of the drama. Theatres of the Restoration had glorified the royal prerogative and, especially in James's reign, begun to show a limited tolerance of Catholicism as Tories held sway in them. With the accession of William and Mary, dramatists again began to portray royal tyranny and Catholic atrocity. Plays habitually ridiculed Jacobites as the Whigs regained prominence in the theatres, as well as in the nation. It was a gradual process: "Only after Nicholas Rowe's Tamerlane of 1701 did dramatization of the constitutional principles which were used to justify the Revolution
become a commonplace of tragedy." Tamerlane was a taste of things to come in tragedy "in which a seemingly endless series of variations on Lockeian political ideas was to be dramatized against a background of remote times and exotic places." Gone forever was the Stuart royalism expressed by such dramatists as Dryden. Any expression of Tory principle in eighteenth-century tragedy was almost indistinguishable from Whiggism. While Tory social philosophy may have persisted in comedy throughout Anne's reign, a strong Whig theme was articulated completely and clearly in tragedy before William's death. So by the time Anne ascended the throne in 1702, the ground was laid for the dominance of Whig ideas on the eighteenth-century stage.

In 1695, the theatrical monopoly of the United Company had been broken by a coalition of actors led by Thomas Betterton. They were granted a royal license by the King and opened a new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields in April. Christopher Rich continued to operate Drury Lane under the patents granted to Killigrew and D'Avenant by Charles II. While Lincoln's Inn Fields may have enjoyed more Court favor than Drury Lane, plays presented in both venues were equally as favorable to William's government.

Indeed, most of the playwrights were in favor of King William's military policies. Several of them were officers themselves, and not a few soldiers would have been part of their audiences. The dramatists welcomed the advent of the War of the Spanish Succession, sounding patriotic appeals in prologues and epilogues and employing war metaphors in their dialogue.
An attempt to control what was perceived as the immoral excesses of the theatres was an order by Parliament in 1696 that all plays had to be licensed for public performance. In June of the next year, the Master of the Revels was mandated to delete obscenities and other scandalous matters from theatrical works. Early in 1704, the Lord Chamberlain exhorted Charles Killigrew, Master of the Revels, to be diligent in the reading of plays submitted to him. This command was most probably a response to the controversy that was raging over the moral reform of the drama. Killigrew did his job well. He was particularly sensitive to anything that might offend the government and would not allow the dramatic treatment of controversial religious subjects. Consequently, in the drama of the earlier years of Anne's reign, most political expression was confined to enthusiasm for the war and the dramatization of political theory.\textsuperscript{118}

While the vicissitudes of politics were reflected fairly markedly in the theatre by the time of Anne's accession, the social changes wrought by England's rapidly expanding and diversifying economy were less apparent on the boards. Both the political situation and the steady growth of the economy had social repercussions. They helped to enrich merchants and industrialists, thus aiding the expansion of the urban middle classes. Increasingly, the moneyed men began to make their influence felt in government and on the social scene. Since land was still considered the most important indication of status, many bought estates, especially from the lesser gentry hit hard by war and land taxation, acquiring the power, if not the prestige, of their rivals, the landed aristocracy. However, class lines, never firm,
began to blur, especially after 1694, when land-owning peers and gentlemen with money to spare began to invest in trade. Further distinction between the two classes was also obscured by frequent intermarriage between the families of rich merchants and those of less affluent gentlemen. Indeed, the presence on the marriage market of so much merchant wealth was a major cause of the rise in dowries which hastened the decline of the lesser gentry who could not provide comparable portions for their daughters. Also, many of the younger sons of the gentry, barred from inheriting estates by primogeniture and victim of their families' inability to compete on the marriage market, swelled the ranks of some professions or found gainful employment in the expanding civil service.

In his excellent analysis of the plays of the three leading playwrights of this time—Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar—John Loftis points out that their works reflect the importance of marriage to gentlemen, usually younger brothers, without expectations. If we assume the playwrights' lesser brethren followed their lead, then, in the drama at least, matrimony was still considered the only "honest" way for such individuals to acquire estates and status at a time when social status was everything. Consequently, nearly all of the comedies of this period depict a love chase that culminates in marriage; only rarely do they involve the affairs of married couples. But, as Loftis notes, the love affairs are invariably intertwined with financial considerations, usually the terms of strict marriage settlements, that distinctly reflect contemporary conditions. A prospective bride's fortune, or the lack of it, was of paramount importance to the would-
be groom and his family, both in art and in life.\textsuperscript{119} In the comedies, wealth is almost as an important motivating factor as love; indeed, the heroine's fortune, often in the form of a landed estate, is described as precisely as is the state of the heroine's affections. Since the heroes of the comedies were frequently younger sons whose sole support would be whatever their wives brought to the marriage, they make no bones about their interest in a woman's fortune.\textsuperscript{120}

Not only do the comedies of Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar, as well as their colleagues, reflect the early eighteenth-century preoccupation with wealth and status, they also demonstrate the relatively fluid class lines resulting from intermarriage between impoverished nobility and the upper levels of the squirearchy. Noting that the "social rank of the important characters is most frequently that of the lower levels of nobility and the upper levels of the squirearchy," Loftis observes that, "The barrier between the nobility and the squirearchy is not impassable in these comedies: there is some movement, and some attempted movement, from one group to another, and members of the two groups mingle socially."\textsuperscript{121}

While the plays of the leading dramatists at the turn of the century may have begun slightly to mirror contemporary social conditions, they were still firmly rooted in dramatic stereotypes and traditions as old as, or older than, the Restoration. Loftis points out that Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar "make little acknowledgement of social changes in their plays."\textsuperscript{122} A major theme of late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century comedy was provided by the clash between the multitudes of country squires who went to
London because of their joint stock investments and their more fashionable London counterparts, provoking comparisons between the advantages of the country versus those of the town. Hardly a new theme, it failed to reflect the real life fact that the distinction between the aristocracy and the squirearchy was no longer clear-cut because intermarriage between the two classes occurred, and social status began to be determined more by social adeptness than rank. Wherever it appears, rusticity is portrayed as a liability and sharply contrasted with the "wit" of urban society. The preference for town over country in Congreve's case, for example, is manifested in his treatment of wit as the skill of an urbane gentleman, a skill resented by both merchant and squire. Vanbrugh contrasts country and town by depicting the former as representing "dull virtue," the latter "attractive sin." While he satirizes both and criticizes the sophisticated vice of the Town, his sympathies clearly lie with London. Only in Farquhar's last two comedies, The Recruiting Officer (1706) and The Beaux' Stratagem (1707), both set in the country, do we see a major change in attitude away from the traditional contempt for the squirearchy. However, Farquhar's attitude towards the country was not shared by most of his fellows who continued to treat their country characters with mocking disrespect. Loftis points out that all of the other popular dramatists of the day set most of their plays in London; all but two of Susanna Centlivre's take place there.

If comedy was slow to respond to changes in the relationship between country and town, it was equally tardy in reflecting the
growing importance of the merchant class in England's economy, if not its society. At a time when merchant investment was boosting the nation's economy as a whole, dramatists were still portraying them as grasping, immoral fools to be mocked and cuckolded. This caricature of the merchant had been a commonplace in the drama even before the Interregnum but times had changed. The new political situation and changing economy were enabling businessmen to penetrate preserves traditionally reserved for the titled. The rivalry between the mercantile City and the fashionable west end had fueled many comedies long before the eighteenth century but the theme took on new meaning at this time. According to Loftis, "The redistribution of families that accompanied the growth of London produced social tensions by placing together as neighbors persons of sharply different social backgrounds, at a time when egalitarian ideas had as yet gained little acceptance."128 This social tension was to take center stage in drama as audiences ceased to be dominated by the Court and began to include members of other social classes.

However, at the turn of the century, if we take Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar as representative of comic dramatists, Loftis notes that nowhere in plays was "there an implied acknowledgment of the importance of the merchant and of trade to the nation; on the contrary, there is a tone of contempt for the business community and the prudential virtues associated with it, which is only occasionally lightened by irony."129 Playwrights persisted in thinking of merchants as "citizens," (as opposed to gentry), with "wit" again being a distinguishing feature of a gentleman that lowly citizens could
neither practice nor appreciate.\textsuperscript{130} Citizens worked for a living; gentlefolk did not and scorned those who did. Many comedies of this time were powered by the dynamics of Court-City rivalry as they ridiculed \textit{nouveau riche} characters, such as City Wives, who used vast amounts of money in vain attempts to ape the "Quality." A dramatic commonplace was the seduction of a hapless City merchant's wife by a penniless younger brother of "quality" with the sole purpose of not only robbing her husband of his wife's fidelity but also of his own hard-earned money. We see similar situations in Centlivre's plays in which wealthy widows of inferior rank set their caps for nobility. An observation made by Loftis in his discussion of Vanbrugh's \textit{Confederacy} (1705) could apply equally well to all comedies in which the mercantile class and the fashionable aristocracy are at odds:

"Always in the background of the intrigues, determining which direction they take, is the jealousy and envy felt by characters of the merchant class for the nobility and gentry."\textsuperscript{131} It is clear that comic playwrights of this time meant to valorize the lifestyle of those born with a silver spoon since the people outside the charmed circle of rank and sophistication are almost invariably the objects of scornful satire.

But about the time Anne ascended the throne, social and economic pressures were bringing about "not a sharp change, but a perceptible modification of social values in comedy,"\textsuperscript{132} one result of which was a noticeable change in the dramatic treatment of the merchant. This modification was also engendered by a movement to reform the drama that began during William's reign. Not only had the
Revolution of 1688 changed the political tenor of the drama but it had also changed the relationship between the Court and the theatre. Since the Restoration, there had been hardly any open opposition to the stage since both Charles and James were avid playhouse patrons whose Courts virtually supported the theatres. Not so their Stuart successors. Their relative indifference created an atmosphere which allowed critics of the stage to speak out at last.

The debate about the moral reformation of the stage began about 1695 as part of a wider controversy concerning the proper function of "wit" in literature. As we have seen, "wit" was considered by the comic dramatists to be the hallmark of the sophisticated and nobly born in opposition to the stupidity and social ineptness of their inferior antagonists. Now wit was under attack in most literature for the often immoral uses to which it was put. Comedies, in particular, were susceptible to this charge for their use of wit in both senses of the word: first, as a verbal tool to ridicule any not "to the manor born," and, second, as an instrument for intrigues with less than honorable goals. Wit was seen by many as an evil that undermined morality and religion in its glamorization of vice. One such was Sir Richard Blackmore whose preface to his epic, Prince Arthur (1695), was one of the first salvoes in the war that would rage between reformers and "wits." Insisting that the purpose of literature is to inculcate religious and ethical principles, Blackmore accuses playwrights and poets of not only failing to do that but of actually encouraging vice and irreligion. He describes the "Man of Sense" of
the comedies, who is held up as a model for the audience's admiration and emulation, as

a Derider of Religion, a great Admirer of Lauretius, not so much for his Learning as his Irreligion, a Person wholly Idle, dissolv'd in Luxury, abandon'd to his Pleasures, a great Debaucher of Women, profuse and extravagant in his Expences [sic]; and, in short, this Finish'd Gentlemen will appear a Finish'd Libertine.¹³⁵

Blackmore had strong ties to the business community and, as Loftis points out, his definition of a "Gentleman" reveals "a well-defined merchant-class bias," as do his objections in his writings to the dramatic stereotypes of the citizen and the alderman.¹³⁶ Blackmore continued his quarrel with the wits throughout his career; however, his assault on "wit" inevitably became entangled with the stage dispute of which Jeremy Collier was the leading light.

Collier and Blackmore were alike in several ways: Both men "were moralistic critics of the stage who drew strong support from the merchant class; both were considered by hostile contemporaries to be writing in the tradition of the mid-seventeenth century Puritans; and both were humorless men whose literary sensitivity was blunted by religious zeal."¹³⁷ In fact, Collier's motive in writing his famous A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage (1698) was primarily religious. Although Collier was a High Church Anglican, as were many in mercantile life, he expressed the grievances long held by the merchant class, even though it included an influential portion of those Anglican foes, the dissenters, against the gentry and nobility. Thus, the controversy A Short View provoked took the form of class antagonism in which the dramatists assumed an alliance between the reformers and the mercantile City.¹³⁸
Indeed, with the exception of Collier, the major leaders of the dramatic reform movement—Collier, Blackmore, Defoe, Addison and Steele—were all connected in some way with the merchant class and were critical of stage depictions of merchants.\textsuperscript{139}

According to Loftis, the controversy surrounding the stage raged from about 1695 to 1745. Some, like Collier, Blackmore and Defoe, decried the very existence of the theatre as conducive to sin, while Addison and Steele, who were playwrights and drama critics themselves, admitted "the immorality and profligacy" of the stage but contended that it could be put to use in the service of morality.\textsuperscript{140} The reformers posed a very real danger to the stage which could no longer depend on the Court for support or protection from repressive legislation or complete annihilation so many dramatists participated in the propagandizing campaign to save the theatres, many by arguing that drama could be used to reform society.\textsuperscript{141}

However, at the time of Anne's accession in 1702, the comedies of Wycherley, Congreve and Farquhar still dominated the stage with their Restoration stereotypes, helping to perpetuate them.\textsuperscript{142} Without Court patronage, the theatres had to have popular support, and the mercantile class, among others, formed a large part of the potential audience. So, while comedy would not catch up with social reality until several decades later, the slow process had begun of reforming certain stage characters, like the merchant, and the very social values depicted in the plays to reflect the many economic and cultural changes taking place at the turn of the century.
The political, economic and social changes occurring after the Revolution of 1688 that affected the theatres also influenced the ongoing debate about women's rights and place in society. An unprecedented number of women wrote about women's condition from about the mid-1680s until around 1713, "the first sizable wave of British secular feminist protest in history," according to scholar Moira Ferguson. The curbing of royal power with its concomitant extension of new rights to men guaranteed by the 1688 Revolution inevitably brought forth a demand from early feminists for more rights for women, who were still considered the inferior subordinates to fathers or husbands. "If absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a State, how comes it to be so in a Family?" wrote Mary Astell shortly after the Revolution, "If all Men are born Free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?" However, early feminists such as Astell did not concern themselves with politics but instead "wrote as philosophers, hoping to encourage debate and the acceptance of new ideas, to challenge cultural traditions denigrating women."

Ironically, the same conditions which prompted Astell to speak out resulted in "a society divided into gender-based public and private spheres. As newly domesticated women accommodated the emerging capitalist-based economy, the individualist stance and ethic tended to become a male prerogative." Women were increasingly subjugated and discouraged from taking any kind of autonomous action. A sermon preached by Reverend John Sprint in 1699, which provoked a storm of feminist protest, demonstrates how the traditional view of women was changing in response to new economic realities.
The nonconformist minister advocated "absolute female obedience toward husbands," touted marriage as "the sole or highly desirable option for women" and exhorted females to think of monogamy "as a social and political goal . . . a sacrosanct institution." But there was an even more significant aspect to Sprint's sermon:

Whereas men had been busy ridiculing women for "Eve-like" tendencies in the past, now such men of the cloth as Sprint (and a host of contemporary marriage manuals) promoted a more submissive, madonna-like image of women. Thus, by 1700, women were beginning to be viewed as dependent and weaker beings, scarcely competent to fend or think much for themselves. This new condescension appropriately served a society in which men employed out of the home needed a wife to care for house and children and to establish guaranteed heirs to hard-earned fortunes. Underpinned by science and rational-empirical beliefs, the new order was burying, at least ostensibly and without ceremony, unscientific myths about sexually insatiable, wanton, fickle, impudent women, and substituting a new view of women as property-in-need-of-protection.

Poetry was one way many aristocratic and middle-class women escaped from the fatigue of their enforced "leisure," and most of it celebrated female friendship "as a haven of security, born of common bondage and resistance, as well as choice." Some, like Lady Mary Chudleigh, Sarah Fyge and Astell, also wrote philosophical essays and polemics about the inequalities of marriage, equal education for women and other feminist concerns. Moira Ferguson points out the significance of the outpouring of feminine writing: "Whether they lauded liberty, female friendship, and the right to write, or criticized male privilege and the injustice of a woman's lot, they were fashioning a public self that advertized female resistance to anything short of equality and full humanity."
The changed political situation in England also altered the ranks of women writers and allowed them wider freedom in poetry and prose. Heretofore, poetry had been considered an acceptable avocation of aristocratic women only but in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, women from all social classes began writing poetry, as well as prose, in the less severely regulated decades on either side of 1700. New approaches in feminine poetry and prose were also fostered by the changes taking place in this period. For example, the female dramatists after Aphra Behn claimed the right for women to use forms traditionally reserved for males only, as Behn had. But women continued to face opposition. When three female playwrights launched their plays during the 1694-96 season, they were cruelly parodied in a play called *The Female Wits* (1696).\textsuperscript{151}

So while the reign of William III, with its costly wars, saw power slowly but inexorably slipping from the king's hands into those of Parliament, thereby granting men more freedom, women were still compelled to fight for basic rights such as self-determination. The changing economy, which saw a wider distribution of wealth among the classes so that gentlemen and merchants were beginning to rub shoulders, engendered a gender-based segregation between men who worked outside the home and women who were expected to confine their activities to housekeeping and childrearing. Political conditions may have encouraged early feminists to speak out but economic ones only exchanged one crippling stereotype of women—the temptress Eve—with another no less restrictive—"property-in-need-of-protection." The years of William's reign were indeed pivotal ones for
England as it was set firmly on the path to a constitutional monarchy but to Englishwomen they seemed to demonstrate that killing one head of the Hydra of sexism meant only that another would grow in its place.

Anne (r. 1702-1714)

The new century brought England a new monarch, James II's daughter Anne, the last of the Stuarts. The next one hundred years would be very different from the preceding ones. Historian John B. Owen describes the eighteenth century:

It was an oligarchic and pragmatic age in which . . . ideas had little influence upon either political or economic life, and the working classes were expected to remain in that decent obscurity to which they were believed rightly to belong. This was the century neither of tiresome ideologies nor of the common man . . . pride of place went to the practical politics of the ruling classes. 152

Elsewhere, Owen writes that this was an age "when personal loves and hatreds were more significant in determining political actions, and even the fate of the nation, than any ideas or principles."153 Certainly this would be true in Anne's case, whose reign would be dominated by often acrimonious party politics and the influence of Court "favorites" who had the Queen's ear.

The struggle for dominance between Tories and Whigs that characterizes so much of Anne's reign was provoked by England's entrance into the War of the Spanish Succession in May 1702, a few months after Anne's coronation. This war resulted from the issues left unresolved by the Treaty of Ryswick with England's overriding concern once again being to limit French expansion of power. Before he died, William had appointed John Churchill to be the commander of
the allied troops, and England's conduct of the war, as well as much of its diplomacy to 1710, were controlled by him. He was made the Duke of Marlborough in December 1702 while his friend, Lord Godolphin, was put in charge of raising funds for the war. Neither man was firmly committed to a political party but both were determined to make sure they kept a secure Parliamentary majority to maintain a war that surpassed "King William's War" in scale. Consequently, the two men "managed" the Queen's ministries until 1710. They were firm believers in William's preference for major land campaigns, a position supported by the Whigs, and considerably extended their range in the Methuen Treaty with Portugal in 1703. To lure Portugal out of her alliance with France, the Treaty committed England to assist in the deposition by force of the Bourbon Philip V from the Spanish throne and his replacement by the Habsburg Archduke Charles. Thus, "No Peace without Spain" became a principal part of Whig war policy so that in less than three years, a large English army was engaged in heavy fighting in Portugal and Spain. Thanks to the Duke of Marlborough, this war would follow a different course than William's; however, the government's insistence on Philip's abdication would keep it going until 1713.

Meanwhile, back home, Queen Anne firmly supported Marlborough and the war. In the popular elections of 1702, the Tories gained a resounding victory, and the Queen brought many Tories back into office. They soon made their presence felt. Between 1702 and 1705, High Tory commoners introduced three Occasional Conformity Bills, designed to penalize nonconformists, in successive sessions of
Parliament. Initially strongly in favor of the first and most penal bill, Anne began to rethink her position when the House of Lords, where Whigs still had some influence, blocked the first bill and threw out the second. She was eventually convinced by her managers that these measures were not wise in wartime since they provoked Parliamentary division, held up the voting of revenue and jeopardized the financial support of the rich City dissenters. When her ministers, together with Harleyites and Whigs, successfully thwarted an attempt by the Commons to railroad the third Occasional Conformity Bill through the House of Lords by tacking it to the Land Tax Bill, Anne applauded.156

In other Parliamentary action, the Regency Act of 1705 was passed to repeal a clause in the Act of Settlement which excluded all office-holders from the Commons. Such a policy would have frustrated the emergence of Cabinet government and would have been an invitation to perennial political deadlock by making a complete divorce between executive and legislature. The Regency Act repealed the clause before it could go into effect. Now it would at least be possible to create harmony between the two major centers of power—the Closet and the Commons—that dominated this period of mixed government.157 In 1705, also, the Whigs won back much of the ground they had lost in the election: "With the appointment of two Whigs to Cabinet office either side of the election, the Junto were in full cry."158

The progress of the war preoccupied the nation almost to the exclusion of anything else but in 1707 fear of a Jacobite invasion
prompted England to form a Union with Scotland to keep the "Old Pretender" and his French army from invading England through that country. The Union granted Scotland significant rights: "The Scots were given fair representation in the new parliament of 'Great Britain'; retained separate identity through their own legal system and their own established Presbyterian Kirk; and were granted full economic rights in England and in her colonies."159

The next year saw an allied victory at Oudenarde and the seizure of Minorca from the sea which confirmed England's naval stranglehold on the Mediterranean.160 Seventeen-eight was also a turning point in Queen Anne's reign. Sir Robert Harley and his adherents, who were the moderates in the Queen's ministry, fell as a new election resulted in a clear Whig majority, and Anne's husband, Prince George of Denmark, died. It was possible to keep up at least some semblance of coalition government before Harley's fall but by 1709 the entire Cabinet had become Whigs, with the exception of Marlborough and Godolphin who were considered Whigs even if they did not call themselves that. However, as historian Gregory Holmes observes, "Britain's first true party government proved relatively short-lived."161 The triumphant Whigs made two fatal mistakes in policy. Louis sued for peace in 1709 but the Whigs' insistence on "No Peace without Spain" destroyed negotiations at the Hague and prolonged the fighting. To make matters worse, Marlborough's last major field victory at Malplaquet on French soil was at the expense of so many lives that pressure to end the war, as the Tories were advocating, began to intensify in Britain.162 The Whigs' first mistake,
then, was their failure to recognize their countrymen's changing attitude toward the war. Their second misstep was to impeach Dr. Henry Sacheverell, an Anglican clergyman, for "high crimes and misdemeanors" as a result of a sermon he preached in St. Paul's, and later published, that was critical of the Whigs and seemed to question the legality of the 1688 Revolution and its settlement, especially the Toleration. Although Dr. Sacheverell was found guilty by the House of Lords, he was given a derisory sentence. However, his impeachment by the Whig government confirmed the fear of many of their countrymen, including the Queen, that the Anglican religion was threatened under a Whig supremacy.¹⁶³

By 1710, a fierce reaction had set in against Godolphin and the Whigs. Not only did Anne share her subjects' concern for their Church but she also wanted an end to the war, as they did. These two attitudes and her own pent-up resentment of the past four years made her eager to help Harley accomplish "the most celebrated political renversement of the eighteenth century."¹⁶⁴ By the autumn of 1710, Anne had dismissed Godolphin and put together a predominantly Tory ministry under the leadership of Harley that was pledged to a negotiated peace. A tactical dissolution of Parliament by Anne created a landslide Tory victory in the October general election.¹⁶⁵ At this time, English Jacobite sympathies became more overt thanks to disillusionment with the war, Sacheverell's impeachment and the overwhelming Tory victory. In fact, the "arch-moderate" Harley faced a House of Commons so extreme in its Toryism
that it was almost as big a threat to his incoming Tory coalition as it was to the decimated Whigs.\textsuperscript{166}

In February 1711, 150 malcontents, calling themselves the "October Club," began giving Harley's ministry nearly as much trouble as it gave the Whigs in the first session of the 1710-13 Parliament. Harley survived, however, and in May became the Earl of Oxford and Lord Treasurer. By July, his ministry, which had originally been a coalition of Harleyite Tories, High Tories and Court Whigs, had become completely Tory at Cabinet level except for Harley's ally, the Duke of Shrewsbury. Less than a year later, his ministry would be overwhelmingly Tory at all levels.\textsuperscript{167}

As soon as it had been installed, Harley's ministry had begun secret unilateral negotiations with France. In December 1711, it laid the peace preliminaries before Parliament. The Elector of Hanover, who would succeed Anne under the terms of the Act of Settlement (1701), was a proponent of "No Peace without Spain," and he quarreled bitterly with the ministry over its clandestine negotiations. This fueled fear among Tories, who were already uneasy with the Hanover succession, that the first Hanover king would be ill-disposed towards them from the start. Their fears seemed to be confirmed when all efforts to placate George failed.\textsuperscript{168} For its part, the House of Lords threatened to cause a crisis by voting against "Peace without Spain." At Oxford's urging, Anne created twelve peers en bloc to help the ministry regain control of the House. In order to prevent any Tory Parliamentary unrest during the Utrecht peace talks, Harley dismissed Marlborough on a trumped-up charge of
corruption, had Walpole committed to the Tower by the Commons and promised to finish the purge of Whig placemen at the end of the session. These measures worked well. A general conference began in Utrecht in January 1712 to negotiate peace between Britain and France. In May, Marlborough's successor, Ormonde, received "Restraining Orders" designed to isolate the Dutch and the Imperialists militarily as the secret negotiations had done diplomatically. With the conference in progress and Britain, the paymaster of the allies, so committed to a negotiated peace, the alliance was forced to give up. Consequently, in April 1713, the Dutch and the Imperialists agreed to a general peace at Utrecht.

In Britain, the Tories welcomed the peace established by the Utrecht Treaty but gave Harley's ministry trouble. Their most serious challenge was to an integral part of the agreements, the Commerce Treaty, which bestowed "most favored nation" status on France. Eighty Tories joined the Whigs in opposing it, and it was wrecked in the Commons. Undoubtedly, some opposition was the result of economic pressure applied by constituents but just as many members were motivated by anxiety for the safety of the Hanoverian succession in the face of this new relationship with France. The Whig Junto took advantage of the situation by running a propaganda campaign attempting to persuade the public that Harley's ministry was planning to yield to the Jacobites. However, that summer Harley and his allies not only emerged triumphant from a ministerial reshuffle but also with their positions strengthened. The hopes of Oxford's one-time friend, Bolingbroke, who was now his rival and hoped to replace him, seemed
futile. But towards the end of 1713, the relationship between Oxford and the Queen began to deteriorate, while Bolingbroke was cultivating the Queen's new favorite, Abigail Masham; consequently, his fortunes began to improve.\textsuperscript{171}

The most significant event of 1713 was, of course, the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, ending the War of the Spanish Succession. The Whig objective of installing a Habsburg on the Spanish throne was not realized but the archduke had just succeeded Emperor Joseph, making such an aim politically undesirable and militarily unrealistic. The Bourbon Philip V was confirmed as the rightful ruler; however, the Treaty stipulated that the crowns of France and Spain were never to be united. Other than "Peace without Spain," Britain achieved all of her war goals and much besides. France abandoned "James III" and recognized the Hanoverian succession. England acquired Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, the Hudson Bay territories, Fort James in Senegambia, Gibraltar and Minorca. English merchants were given the right to trade with Spain on equal terms with French merchants and were granted legal entree into the Spanish South American market.\textsuperscript{172}

In 1714, a new Parliament met with the succession as its paramount concern. Division between Jacobite Tories and "Hanoverian" Tories erupted into open conflict. In a series of attacks on their foes, the Whigs made several charges, the most important being Jacobitism. "Hanoverian" Tories in the Parliament organized themselves and joined the Whigs in attempts to bring pressure to bear on the government. A power struggle began between Oxford and
Bolingbroke, now chief Secretary of State and known to be connected with the Jacobites in Parliament. He introduced a Schism Bill in both Houses, to the horror of the dissenters, in part to rally the Tories but also to cause major embarrassment to the ex-Puritan, Oxford. However, the wily Earl escaped the trap and retaliated by conspiring with the Whigs against Bolingbroke.\textsuperscript{173}

It was to no avail. Queen Anne dismissed Harley and died suddenly four days later. On her deathbed, she had not "handed the white staff" to Bolingbroke but to the moderate Earl of Shrewsbury, who was an advocate of the Hanoverian succession and still had some influence with the Whigs. For their part, Bolingbroke and his allies were caught off-guard. They had spent years trying to restore the Stuarts through the repeal of the Settlement Act so their military plans were less than half completed at Anne's sudden death. In accordance with the Regency Act, a Regency Council partly composed of the Elector's own nominees replaced the old ministry. Thanks to the disarray of Bolingbroke's faction and the Council's efforts, George I, England's first Hanoverian king, was able to ascend the throne peacefully. His Whig adherents would have a year to firmly entrench themselves in the government before the Protestant Succession would be threatened by force.\textsuperscript{174}

Though turbulent and stormy, Anne's reign saw significant developments in the life of the nation, many of which can be attributed to Sir Robert Harley, who had served under William and become the Earl of Oxford under Anne. Historian Gregory Holmes notes that among his triumphs in his career (1689-1714) can be listed
five of Stuart England's greatest achievements: a limited, constitutional monarchy; a secure Protestant succession; the Union with Scotland; the victories of England's greatest war; and a peace "that confirmed beyond question Britain's new standing as a great power, not only in Europe but in the wider world of commerce and colonies beyond."\(^{175}\)

Elsewhere, Holmes writes, "The full constitutional harvest of the Glorious Revolution was gathered in during the twelve years of Anne's reign."\(^{176}\) What had started in 1688 came to fruition under Anne as the sovereign's power was further limited, and Cabinet government began to take shape. Unlike the energetic William, sickly Anne needed a leading minister to do most of her work so it is in her reign that the office that would later be called "Prime Minister" began to develop. Although they were not officially recognized as such, Holmes cites Godolphin (Lord High Treasurer, 1702-10) and Oxford (Lord High Treasurer, 1711-14) as the first politicians to perform that function. More than William, Anne also needed a Cabinet to supervise the war effort and diplomacy, as well as a small Cabinet committee to do business and plan policy at the highest level.\(^{177}\) Constitutional monarchy and a two-party system had arrived. Indeed, historian Christopher Hill also links the rise of the Cabinet to the political struggles of the period and the emerging sovereignty of Parliament. By the end of the Stuart era, although the concept of joint Cabinet responsibility was not fully established, and the Cabinet not officially recognized by law, it was formalized enough so that leading ministers were assumed to have a right to attend and consequently be held
responsible for government policy.\textsuperscript{176} Thus, we see a distinct departure from pre-Revolution monarchy based on the divine right of kings that allowed Charles and James to ride roughshod over their subjects and to use their almost unlimited power to further their own interests at the expense of those who had no recourse under the law. Power was now decisively being shifted from the sovereign to a group of ministers who were answerable not to a king, but to the people's representatives in Parliament. According to Hill, another development of the post-Revolution period that affected the growth of the new system was the rapidly expanding civil service that resulted in a more complex administration in which rule by committees was more convenient than that by single department heads. The ranks of civil servants were swelled by members of old families who were financially embarrassed with the result that they were tied to the Glorious Revolution and the Hanoverian succession "no less effectively than the Bank of England tied the moneyed classes."\textsuperscript{179}

The majority of civil servants resided in London, as did half of all of England's town-dwellers.\textsuperscript{180} The spectacular growth of London into the largest city in Europe reflected two trends during the Stuart period that undermined the rural organization of English society. The first was the growth of towns, especially London. In the preceding century, the urban population was less than ten percent of the whole population but by the end of the Stuart period towns contained almost a quarter of the total population.\textsuperscript{181} The second trend that was eliminating land as the determining factor of English economic life was the increasing sophistication of the division of labor. As towns
developed, the range of occupations within them became more varied and sophisticated. This trend was most evident in London whose larger population was matched by a wider variety in types of urban economic activity. In addition to being the seat of government and the main residence of the Court, London was the only center of banking and publishing in England. Not only did it control three-quarters of the nation's foreign trade but also owned almost half of England's mercantile marine and dominated inland trade. London was home to a great proportion of all professional people, as well as the largest concentration of industrial workers in the country.¹⁸² No wonder so many playwrights writing at the turn of the century, like Susanna Centlivre, set almost all their plays in the City.

The increasing urbanization of England was reflected by the rise of something similar to a modern proletariat in both town and country. The number of landless workers increased throughout the Stuart period so that most urban workers depended entirely on their labor for others for their livelihood.¹⁸³ Before this time a young individual could progress up the ladder from apprentice to master but during this era that number significantly decreased "as the increasing sophistication and capitalization of small urban businesses raised the entry costs for potential aspirants, and as more and more masters ignored the apprenticeship laws and simply took on labour as and when they wanted it."¹⁸⁴

The rise of commercial farming, which displaced many people and compelled them to seek employment elsewhere, often in towns, resulted in innovations in agriculture that would remove the fear of famine
from England. These improvements were a radical reorganization of the rural landscape that significantly added to the proportion of cultivable areas and changes in techniques of husbandry that increased the number of animals the land could sustain. Thus, by the second half of the seventeenth century, English agriculture was contributing in a major way to the wealth of the country as a smaller segment of the population was producing a much bigger and more diversified amount of food which was then being sold on the market at stable or even falling prices. Even the poor, some of whom had been hit hard by the reorganization of the countryside into large commercial farms, benefited by the end of the Stuart period from their improved position in the labor market and a modest increase in their wages brought about by an end of population growth. Stable or falling food prices also provided them with a modicum of comfort.  

If the growth of commercial farming had increased the number of landless poor it also gave them employment, although much of it seasonal. It created a market for labor in the processing, distribution and marketing of food and raw materials. Alternatively, many of the newly landless began to depend solely on production of goods for export, especially woollen cloth, as a means of survival. But the most rapidly developing source of employment for the poor was industrial production for the home market. Historian Peter Earle attributes the development of the home market to the new wealth created by the processes of commercialization and social polarization. With the proceeds of commercialized farming, other social classes besides the aristocracy—gentlemen, yeomen and "middling" people—
now had more money to use. A cumulative process, by the end of the Stuart period, a gradual rise of real wages meant that even the poor supplied a marginal increase to the demand for goods and services.187

Changes in England's foreign trade also occurred during the Stuart period. At the beginning of the period, the majority of England's exports and trade was between London and the Low Countries. From there, foreign merchants distributed it to more distant markets. While this remained the most important method of trade, developments during the seventeenth century improved the nation's long-distance trade. One of these was "a massive geographical diversification of English overseas trade" in places like the Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire, Italy, Spain and Portugal. England's Asian trade expanded dramatically, particularly in the 1670s and 1680s. But the most important development for its effects on the English people was the growth of the American colonies. Colonization not only reduced population growth, it gave England a major market for English industrial goods and for ships constructed and manned by Englishmen.188

Not surprisingly, all of these trends during the Stuart period affected English society, which underwent fundamental changes. The radical reorganization of the economy significantly enriched the country and bettered the material situation of almost everyone. Increasing polarization in the social structure also resulted from changes in the economy; the gap widened between the few wealthy or relatively well-off and the many poor, particularly in the countryside. Earle notes:
This division was intensified by a cultural change as the upper and middling ranks of society became increasingly literate, secular and rational, while the poor remained illiterate and continued to cling to a largely superstitious view of the world. Cultural division bred contempt and encouraged the view that the only function of the poor was to work hard for low wages to support the comfort and the leisure of the increasingly respectable members of the middling and upper classes.160

Not only had the chance for prosperity become available to a wider range of people but so had employment in the professions. At the beginning of the Stuart period, there were few professions outside the Church, the law and agriculture but by the end, there were new opportunities for employment resulting from the rapid expansion of the numbers employed in medicine, from a fast-growing professional civil service and from the introduction of a truly professional officer corps during William III and Queen Anne's wars. Earle points out the significance of this development:

Every one of these professions claimed for its more successful practitioners a gentility that had little or nothing to do with older concepts of gentility based on the ownership of land. This was an important factor in the development of what can be called the urban gentleman, a rather different and generally more sophisticated character than the country gentleman living in his big house on a landed estate.190

Not all urban gentlemen were in the professions; many were independently wealthy. Some followed the classic pattern of a gentleman by getting income from the rents of country estates while others, men of leisure who behaved like gentlemen, drew most of their income from urban investments. According to Earle, the most important dividing line in society was "the line between those who were gentlemen and those who were not," but at the end of the Stuart period, such distinctions were less rigid: "Since many of the
citizens earned their living and behaved in exactly the same way, there was an inevitable blurring of the concept of gentleman in people's minds.\textsuperscript{1191}

The social results of economic change preoccupied the comic dramatists of the early eighteenth century, as they did their audiences. The traditional conflict between the landed classes and the moneyed classes was changing as the lines separating the two became more fluid, and this became the major concern of almost all of the comic writers. Although much of the prosperity England enjoyed at the end of the Stuart period was achieved through the efforts of her merchants, playwrights persisted in depicting them in their Restoration guise. Eventually, however, dramatists could no longer ignore the modifications in society, and the lines were firmly drawn between those who approved of them and those who did not. Consequently, early eighteenth-century plays contain many straightforward discussions of the importance of merchants and of trade to England but, Loftis cautions, merely citing these passages is not enough to understand the impact of the moneyed interest upon the drama, "rather, it is in the more elusive, because more inward, fact of changed dramatic values, reflecting changed social values, that the more meaningful impress of the altered social organization on the drama is to be sought."\textsuperscript{1192} These changed dramatic values affected the choice of subject, the direction taken by dramatic satire and often the course of the plot.\textsuperscript{1193} After Collier's attack and the turn of the century, drama began to take a more critical attitude toward society. Loftis writes that Pope's irony in \textit{Rape of the Lock} holds "in neat
suspension the older values and the new," as do the comedies of other writers "though with less skill," among them Susanna Centlivre.¹⁹⁴

The drama was slowly but surely starting to reflect the social reality that class barriers were no longer firm. The terms "merchant" and "trade" lacked precise meaning but by Queen Anne's time a clearly understood distinction was made between men who were financiers or large-scale traders and those who were mere shopkeepers; the former were the "merchants" eulogized in the early eighteenth century.¹⁹⁵ While the prosperity of the merchants made marriage with the gentry more common, eventually a belief arose that they were worthy of a high place in social esteem in their own right, regardless of their ability to change themselves into "gentlemen" by marriage or the buying of land. Thus, it was no longer necessary for a merchant to cease being so in order to become a gentlemen while simultaneously landowning families were beginning to increase their involvement in joint-stock companies. However, Loftis notes that the "commercial changes did not all contribute to a closer identification of the interests of landowners and merchants."¹⁹⁶ With other alternative investments besides land available, the moneyed men were no longer compelled to compete with the gentry for real estate. With no overriding economic need to transform themselves into "landed" men, merchants began to insist that they be regarded as "a species of gentry," an insistence depicted in the drama of the early eighteenth century.¹⁹⁷ And the successful ones were well in a position to make such a demand, having been enriched by London's
vigorous foreign trade, by the War of the Spanish Succession and by First Minister Walpole's economic policy that made the encouragement of trade a major objective in George I's reign.¹⁹⁸

The intermarriage between merchant families and "honorable" families can be traced in contemporary maps which chart the great expansion of London to the fashionable northwest during the first three decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁹⁹ What this meant to the theatres was a large new audience that was increasingly heterogeneous in both taste and background, especially as members of the merchant class began to make inroads into the gentry. "Citizens," as opposed to the gentry or the peerage, were becoming an increasingly important portion of the audience in the early eighteenth century. As theatre-goers moved west, so did the playhouses, with the exception of Goodman's Fields.²⁰⁰ However, except for Goodman's Fields, the audiences of this time were still dominated by fashionable people. As Loftis notes, the important changes seem to have been in the composition of the beau monde and that of the citizenry:

Many of the merchants attending the theater, no longer considered "citizens," were accepted in the audience as gentlemen; many of the prominent financiers, performing functions that earlier were performed by citizens, belonged to gentle or even noble families. The citizens recognized as such in the early-eighteenth-century theater were not the leading members of the business communities, the exporters and financiers, but rather the petty traders, the shopkeepers, and the apprentices. The social relationships of the audiences, then, remained constant on the surface; but the substance of the relationship, especially as they affected the business community, underwent an important change.²⁰¹
Indeed, Loftis cites the presence of men who had made fortunes in
the wars, mostly merchants, in the pit and the boxes, the most
remunerative part of the audience, as the most important difference
between Restoration audiences and those of the early eighteenth
century. Dramatists seemed to be aware of this development,
sometimes referring to the newcomers in dramatic dialogue. While
they were careful to do nothing to alienate their high-paying
customers, playwrights continued to allude derisively to "cits" in the
house during the early part of the century. This suggests that the
term "citizen" was gaining a more specialized meaning than it had at
the Restoration, when it was applied even to a businessman operating
on a relatively large scale. As the century advanced, "citizen" would
increasingly be confined to a lowly member of the mercantile
community, in part because the more important members were moving
out of London. Playwrights increasingly began to make distinctions
between great merchants and citizens among their dramatis personae.
They could malign "citizens" with some impunity since not many could
afford the time or expense to attend the theatre, which continued to
attract no more than a minute fraction of the whole population.

While economic developments were bringing about a change in
drama, politics had little apparent impact on the social themes of
comedy in William's reign and the early years of Anne's but 1710
marked a turning point in the relationship between party politics and
the stage. That year the debates over the Treaty of Utrecht began,
and "political rivalry was clearly and emphatically expressed by
official propagandists in terms of the central social rivalry in comedy,
that between gentry and merchant."205 Loftis sees a connection between the Whig propaganda of Anne's last years and the changing social relationships depicted in comedy in the two decades after 1710. He also notes that only after 1710, do comedies openly and unequivocally endorse the merchants.206

Conflicting attitudes toward the War of the Spanish Succession sparked political rivalries in Anne's reign. Those who approved the war and those who opposed it corresponded roughly to the split between the moneyed and the landed interests: "The overseas traders and the financiers saw profits that were in the main rising; whereas the landed men (other than the great lords) were hard hit by wartime fluctuations in the price of agricultural products and the four-shilling land tax, so much so that some had to sell their land."207 When Harley's Tory ministry replaced the pro-war one of Godolphin in 1710 and began peace negotiations, the Tories mounted a major journalistic campaign headed by Swift to discredit Marlborough, the Whigs and the war. The Whigs retaliated with their own propaganda.208

Besides the question of the war, other issues arose which delineated clearly the opposition between the moneyed and the landed interests. One was the Landed Property Qualification Bill of 1711, a failed Tory attempt to keep moneyed men out of the Commons and to maintain the majority of country squires.209 Another demonstration of the conflict between gentlemen and merchants was the controversy over the commercial clauses in the Treaty of Utrecht by which England would resume trade with France. The French Commercial Treaty was sponsored by Henry St. John, leader of the landed
interest, who hoped that the resumption of trade with France would strengthen support in England for the Pretender, who was backed by the French, and hurt the English merchants by eliminating protective tariffs and hindering their lucrative trade with Portugal. While the issue was complex, in general the Tories approved the Commercial Treaty, and the Whigs opposed it. Although there was a Tory majority in the Commons, the Whigs were able to defeat the measure mainly because they persuaded a significant number of the squires that such a policy was unsound in terms of mercantilist economic theory. Therefore, just as differences between Tories and Whigs were brought into sharper focus by the debates over the 1713 Treaty, so too was the conflict between social classes.

And the theatres of Queen Anne's time were in the midst of the battle as political life was closely linked to the life of the playhouses. The outbreak of war at Anne's accession was greeted with enthusiasm by most of the dramatists whose near unanimity of zeal would be unabated until about 1709. The initially popular war provided a focus for the playwrights whose plays teem with military characters who speak of current campaigns and abound with allusions to British victories. The course of the war affected the drama, not only in celebratory prologues and epilogues, but in its other components. For instance, Loftis speculates that the successful Gibraltar campaign in 1704 indirectly caused an increased use of Spanish and Portuguese settings and characters, perhaps even plots from Spanish plays. Among several dramatists seemingly influenced by the victory, he lists Susanna Centlivre whose works seem to suggest that the interest in
Spain and Portugal was provoked by the war, noting that "in a series of plays beginning with *The Busy Body* in 1709 she depicted Spanish customs and characters, and probably used some unidentified Spanish plots."²¹²

If the dramatists' enthusiasm for the war was somewhat conventional, their adoration of the great war leaders, Marlborough and Godolphin, went far beyond a prudent pandering to customers' tastes. While the two men were political moderates, they headed a coalition government that in the beginning had a Tory bent, in the end a Whig one. Initially, dramatic favor of their war policy did not necessarily indicate a party leaning, but in the winter of 1704–05, the beginning of the "High Tory vendetta against Marlborough," support for the two leaders and the war increasingly suggested Whiggism.²¹³ The close association between that party and the theatres in these years was partly the result of the patronage of Whig politicos. Among their contributions to the stage was financial assistance in building the Haymarket Theatre. The members of the Junto seem to have been generous benefactors of the playwrights if we are to judge from their dedications to plays; similar honors were not bestowed on the Tory leaders.²¹⁴ Consequently, when political theory was expressed in the drama, it was dominated by Whig doctrine. But it was not until after the debates over the Treaty of Utrecht, which clearly defined the rival parties, that the Whig endorsement of the financial community began to be reflected in the theatres in sympathetic portrayals by Whig playwrights of the conventional character of the merchant.²¹⁵
Politics also affected the theatres between 1704 and 1712 as a bewildering series of managerial changes reflected the part political influence played in their affairs and the lack of a clearly articulated governmental policy toward the playhouses. The opening of the new Haymarket Theatre in April 1705, to which Thomas Betterton's company transferred, was the first change in the pattern of theatrical operation in existence since the actors' revolt in 1695 when Betterton assumed leadership of the company at Lincoln's Inn Fields and Christopher Rich managed Drury Lane. The struggle for control of the Haymarket Theatre and Drury Lane by various managers in the middle years of Queen Anne's reign involved the Lord Chamberlain and Court influence. The upshot was that in November 1710 it was arranged that Owen Swiney and three actor-managers (Wilks, Doggett and Cibber) would manage a company at Drury Lane devoted to legitimate drama while the Tory William Collier headed an operatic company at the Haymarket. Then, in April 1712, new licenses were issued when Swiney and Collier swapped playhouses, although Swiney left the Haymarket after the 1712-13 season when debts forced him to flee to the Continent. Evidently, the Queen's ministers considered the supervisory posts as Court favors with the important proviso that they be dispensed in a manner that would keep the theatres prosperous. Patent rights were not strictly observed. Managing a theatre required a highly specialized skill that courtiers, regardless of party, did not have; however, Court favor was decisive in determining changes in management. Thus, national politics had an
effect on the theatres as the influence of the Whigs began to wane after 1709 in the face of an even stronger Tory influence.\textsuperscript{216}

The landslide victory of the Tories in the election of 1710, which put Harley (later Lord Oxford) and St. John (later Lord Bolingbroke) at the head of a Tory ministry, had an immediate effect on the theatres. Before this time only the Lord Chamberlain and his subordinates, the Vice-Chamberlain and the Master of the Revels concerned themselves with the operation of the theatres but for the four remaining years of Queen Anne's reign, Harley and St. John kept an eye on the stage, as they did on all media of public persuasion. Thus, plays between 1710 and 1714 were more intensely scrutinized by both the government and the public for real or imagined political innuendo. Under such close ministerial supervision, only the mildest criticism of the government was allowed so that if any partisan opinion was expressed, it was mostly Tory; however, the Whigs continued behind the scenes to try to have their say.\textsuperscript{217}

Like their predecessors, Harley and St. John tried to use their Court prerogative of bestowing management positions in the theatres to further their political aims. Perhaps about June 1713, they offered some theatrical post, presumably that of governor of Drury Lane or of the Haymarket, to Richard Steele, one of the most outspoken of the Whig propagandists, to either gain his loyalty or at least to silence his criticism. Steele responded in the fall by beginning his journalistic attacks on the ministry, thereby refusing the bribe.\textsuperscript{218} Another example of how party politics affected the theatres was the ministry's refusal to grant the request of one of the leading Tory
literary figures, Jonathan Swift, to assign a post to another Whig
dramatist, Nicholas Rowe. Unlike Steele, Rowe was not a powerful
political journalist, and Oxford and Bolingbroke saw no reason to seek
his support. Indeed, they had banned his play *Tamerlane*, a
dramatization of Whig political principles, from the stage in 1710, and
would not allow performance of his new tragedy, *Jane Shore*, until he
removed a passage that had offended Bolingbroke.219

However, it is doubtful that the Tory leadership actually tried
to compel playwrights to write works articulating partisan bias on
current issues. If they had, their success was limited. Even before
the overwhelming Tory victory in 1710, enthusiasm for the war had
disappeared from the playhouses, and a demonstration had taken place
at the Haymarket against the Duke of Marlborough, but, as Loftis
notes "otherwise little of a positive nature can be associated with the
party's programme."220

Even though little direct pressure to write politically correct
plays may have been applied by the ministers, their influence and
censoring powers were feared and respected by the actor-managers
of Drury Lane, so much so that they refused to allow an epilogue to
Susanna Centlivre's *The Perplexed Lovers* (1712) be spoken because
it contained a complimentary reference to Marlborough. So far had
the winds of political opinion changed that the "war-time chauvinism
apparent in the play, which several years before would have been the
merest commonplace, had become controversial."221 Those cautious men
were Cibber, Wilks and Doggett, who had returned to Drury Lane from
the Haymarket with their nominal partner, Owen Swiney, a few months
before the 1711-12 season. Although we do not hear much about Swiney, or about William Collier who replaced him in 1712 as the partner of the actor-managers, Loftis cautions that it is important to remember they were there and that they owed their highly remunerative positions to the Tory government. Indeed, none of the managers of Drury Lane were interested in making political statements since they recognized that their precarious tenure was dependent on the goodwill of the ministry while the prosperity of the theatre depended on their not offending either political party. Even though propaganda plays were written and occasionally published, none saw the light on the Drury Lane stage. Consequently, the non-partisan troupe prospered as it enjoyed a monopoly of the legitimate drama in London during the last years of Queen Anne's reign.\footnote{222}

The political debates over the Treaty of Utrecht that started in 1710 also affected the drama in that the incongruity between the traditional merchant stereotype and social reality was becoming apparent. While sympathetic portrayals of merchants are almost non-existent before 1710, in the second decade of the eighteenth century, the better dramatists were beginning to create merchant characters that reflected more realistically the attributes and importance of that class. Like society at large, they began to distinguish between businessmen and mere shopkeepers in their plays. This was not an overnight development, however, but a gradual process which, in Centlivre's case at least, Loftis associates with the Whig propaganda campaign. She had depended on the old Restoration caricature of the merchant in her early career but after 1709, she began modifying her
portrayal of that character to coincide with her own Whiggish views. Loftis attributes Centlivre's abandonment of Restoration situations and characters to her own increased mastery of her art and the change in her implied social judgments to the Whig propaganda campaign of 1710.\textsuperscript{223} Even in her earlier works, Centlivre had made the distinction between great merchants and mere traders and had demonstrated her approval of intermarriage between the "Quality" and the merchants. As in the case of her colleagues, the theme of merchant-gentry rivalry began to dominate her plays.\textsuperscript{224}

The drama was also undergoing changes thanks to the dramatic reform movement begun around the turn of the century. The two major threads of the movement were a moralistic one emanating from Jeremy Collier and an aesthetic one leading to Alexander Pope.\textsuperscript{225} Both controversies provoked an examination of the relationship between the drama and contemporary life: "'Literary fallacies' inherent in the Restoration tradition in comedy came under scrutiny; the rigid set of social values in comedy, inherited from the early years after 1660, were seen to be at variance with the conditions of life."\textsuperscript{226} Times had changed, and the amoral gaiety of Restoration comedies no longer appealed to the more heterogeneous audiences that included a class of people not disposed to look kindly on aristocratic decadence. Just as the landed class was beginning to lose its prominence to the moneyed men, so too were the latter's more middle-class values gaining preeminence in literature. New members of the audience for both dramatic and nondramatic works were being blamed by neoclassicists like John Dennis and Alexander Pope for what they
saw as a decline in the aesthetic quality of literature. Many plays of
the early eighteenth century were intended as relatively serious
critiques of the stage; a lot of dramatic satire was directed at the
stage itself. The neoclassicists deplored what they saw as a
degeneration of the drama due to the inanities of sentiment and the
growing use of spectacle which they attributed to the theatrical
managers' pandering to "vulgarized" tastes for profit.227 The third
decade of the century would see a host of pamphlets, and Pope's
_Dunciad_, as the reformers like Cibber and Steele would come to
dominate the popular stage with their sentimental comedies that
celebrated middle-class values.

The economic developments of the early eighteenth century which
affected society and the drama also wrought changes in the lives of
Englishwomen. English feminists at the turn of the century were still
demanding better education for women and kinder treatment from
husbands; unfortunately, the state of female education was not much
different than it had been at the Restoration as women of every rank
were actively discouraged from learning, but male attitudes toward
"the fairer sex" were slowly changing. In the new economy, men were
working in an environment divorced from their private lives, and
there was a new focus on marriage. Most middle-class women were
being trained to believe that motherhood was a paramount priority so
their lives became more isolated and private. Motherhood, in turn,
was regarded with a new respect that helped offset "the lack of
respect and sense of social unproductiveness engendered by women's
exclusion from the marketplace."228 Middle-class women gained a
unique identity and status from the cult of motherhood that made up
for their absence from the waged workplace. According to scholar
Moira Ferguson, "The doctrine of separate spheres had become a
living reality in eighteenth-century gender reconstruction. Chastity
and modesty became essential female characteristics, being without
waged work was an acceptable and eventually, for some, a desirable
status." The traditional view of women as fickle, wanton, ambitious
and sexually insatiable present in Restoration drama was beginning to
be replaced by the image of women as virtuous, domesticated, weak
creatures in need of protection whose delicate constitutions were too
pure even for fiction. No longer was it socially or economically useful
from the standpoint of the bourgeois male to consider women as Eve-
like tempters.

This new perception of women was beginning to find its way into
literature as writers of less stature than the misogynous Pope and
Swift, who were fast becoming a minority in their view of females,
started exhibiting in their works markedly tolerant, even respectful
attitudes toward women. Scholar John J. Richetti outlines the causes
of this turnabout and the new role women assumed in literature:

The literary decline of the court and its libertine ethos
and the virtual disappearance of the cynical sexual
realism of Restoration comedy are related facts. As
power, economic and cultural, shifts toward the
commercial classes and bourgeois ideals replace
aristocratic myths, literary developments such as
sentimental drama and domesticated romance occur in
which women are opportunities not for moral revelation
but for the rich pathos implicit in their exploitation and
almost inevitably wretched fates. Quite often, the
romance and drama of the early eighteenth century linger
over the plight of women in a male world, tricked and
then abandoned for following their natural tendencies for
passion and fidelity.
These developments were just getting under way when Susanna Centlivre was writing; they would not come to fruition until later in the century.

Queen Anne's reign saw the fruits of the 1688 Revolution attain full growth in England's new constitutional monarchy, capitalist economy and growing European dominance. Many attributes of modern England were taking root now such as a Cabinet system and party politics. Land was no longer the preeminent investment and only basis of social status. Class barriers were becoming less rigid as merchant families intermarried with gentry. The traditional ruling class was losing prominence to the up-and-coming middle classes who had been enriched by the new political and economic situation. With the growing influence of the middle class came a change in social values. Aristocratic amorality was being superseded by the family-oriented values of hard-working, God-fearing citizens for whom marriage was a sacred institution and respect could be earned without a title. As always, the drama slowly but surely began to reflect societal changes in the first decade and a half of the eighteenth century. Those dramatic trends would continue in the next reign when sentimental drama would vanquish the more objectionable elements of Restoration comedy.

George I (r. 1714–1727)

Historian Howard Robinson has written that "The year 1714 marks more truly than most precise dates a point where one period ended and another began." According to him, "It was the first time in a century that England counted for much in continental affairs, and
about the first time in the history of the country when its interference in mainland concerns was of paramount importance.\textsuperscript{232} He observes that England had been at war for most of the twenty-five years following the 1688 Revolution but that the next quarter century was "as peaceful as the preceding century was warlike. . . . The gains of the Revolution were given further security, notable advances were made in parliamentary power and practice, wealth and strength were recovered after the long wars."\textsuperscript{233}

This new era was ushered in by the arrival of George I from Hanover, a great grandson of James I who ascended the throne of England after Queen Anne's death on August 1, 1714, according to the terms of the 1701 Act of Settlement. The Protestant succession, so dear to the hearts of the Whigs, seemed to have been achieved just as they had regained control of the government. They had long courted the favor of George and were rewarded when he favored a predominantly Whig ministry under Lord Townshend. An election in 1715 also buttressed the Whigs' position when a majority of that party was returned to the Commons. Immediately, they began impeaching leading Tories, some of whom were driven by desperation to join the Jacobites, who were hatching a rebellion designed to put James II's son (James Edward, the Old Pretender) on the throne.

Although conditions were favorable for a revolt—the new dynasty was not popular—the rebellion of 1715, or "The Fifteen" as it was called, came to naught. There had been riots and demonstrations for "James III," so many, in fact, that the Whigs felt compelled to pass the Riot Act, an important constitutional measure still in force
But, in the end, the uprising failed when its potential leaders, the Duke of Ormonde and Viscount Bolingbroke, lost their nerve and fled the country and when Louis XIV died, depriving the Pretender of his French support. When the Earl of Mar, who had been Secretary of Scotland under Anne, started a rebellion in the Scottish highlands without adequate plans or resources, few Englishmen joined and the revolt was easily put down. The Pretender returned to the Continent on February 4, 1716. In both 1718 and 1719, the Jacobites would again attempt to restore the Stuarts to the throne through force of arms with the same success they had in 1715. After another failed plot in 1721, no more would be heard from them until their ill-fated campaign of 1745 that would end once and for all any hopes of destroying the Protestant succession.

One of the important results of "The Fifteen" was to establish a Whig ascendancy in the government that would last until George III's reign. They lost no time in getting the last of the Tories out of the ministry by tarring them with the "Jacobite" brush. So complete was their victory, and so demoralized their foes, that "Toryism in the generation after 1715" had degenerated into "a sentimental pose, a nostalgia." The rebellion of 1715 also had an important effect on the British constitution when the Whigs passed the Septennial Act extending the life of Parliament from three to seven years. It was designed to give them four more years in which to consolidate their position, and it brought the Commons more power. Intended as a temporary measure, it remained the law until 1911.
Having secured their domination of the government, the Whigs spent the next seven years quarreling among themselves over several issues, the most important being foreign policy. Townshend worried about Great Britain's interests being sacrificed to advance those of Hanover while another minister, James Stanhope, was not afraid of committing the country's resources to the service of Germany. The situation in Europe was becoming unstable as the peace of Utrecht had left dissatisfaction in many quarters. Acting on Stanhope's advice, George I made two alliances in 1716. Under the Treaty of Westminster, Britain and Austria agreed to assist each other in the defense of their existing possessions. Then a treaty with France provided for mutual help against their respective pretenders ("James III" and Philip V). Townshend opposed this last measure, and his opposition cost him the leadership of the Cabinet. To protest the policy, he and his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Walpole, left the government and joined with George's heir, who would later be George II and was heartily detested by his father, to form an effective opposition movement within the Whig party. It also became clear at this time that the King was now dependent on a Cabinet of the party in the majority in the Commons although he still retained the right to choose his ministers from among the leaders of that party. Stanhope succeeded Townshend as leading minister, a position he held until 1721.

The chief threats to Europe's stability came from Sweden and from Spain. The first was met by a naval attack on Sweden, the second by the Quadruple Alliance. In 1717 Great Britain joined with
France and Holland to form a Triple Alliance to ensure the status quo in Europe. When Spain attacked Austria in Italy, that country joined the other three in 1718 to create the Quadruple Alliance. When Spain refused to keep the peace, it was invaded by land by France while a British fleet destroyed its fleet in the Mediterranean. Spain was forced to withdraw from Italy and to settle its differences at a European congress that met in 1722. A year earlier, the war in the north had been concluded by a treaty. Stanhope's foreign policy had been successful in gaining the Whigs' objectives of securing the temporary stability of the Hanoverian dynasty and of preserving the peace in Europe under the conditions of the Utrecht treaty.239

The Whigs may have been triumphant in their management of the country's foreign affairs but in 1720 confidence in them was severely shaken by the so-called South Sea Bubble. Under the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, a limited number of British subjects were granted the right to trade with Spain's American colonies, and the South Sea Company was organized in 1711 to exploit that trade. In 1720, the Company made a lucrative deal with the government, and speculative mania hit England. The price of the Company's shares rose from 110 to 1000 pounds. Many companies, mostly bogus, were formed and easily floated in attempts to duplicate the Company's success. The inevitable crash came in the autumn of 1720. Most of the business houses and investors were ruined, so many, in fact, that the crash took on the proportions of a national financial disaster. Since the government's support of the Company had given the public confidence, and some members of the Cabinet had accepted bribes
from it, public indignation was directed at the Whigs, whose political power was threatened.\textsuperscript{240}

As a result of the crash, those Whigs associated with the Company were discredited and either resigned or died, while Stanhope, who was not guilty, was so viciously attacked in the investigation that he succumbed. Enter Sir Robert Walpole, who had been made paymaster general of the armed forces in 1720 when his opposition faction had been reconciled to the King. Walpole had no connection with the South Sea Company and had a reputation for having a head for figures. Furthermore, his skillful handling of the House of Commons saved King George from disgrace when he and his mistresses were implicated in the South Sea disaster so the King was forced to give Walpole and Townshend a free hand in the ministry. Sir Robert, who took the offices of First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, was largely responsible for restoring the national credit, not to mention that of the Whigs, by the financial measures he adopted. As a result of his efforts, he was made indisputable head of a reorganized Cabinet, becoming Prime Minister in 1721, an office he held until 1742.\textsuperscript{241}

Thus, when Susanna Centlivre died in 1723, the country was on the road to a long period of peace and prosperity under the stewardship of Walpole. Her beloved Whigs were at the helm of the ship of State, and the Protestant succession seemed secure when George I died in 1727 and his son succeeded him peacefully.

The accession of George I was the final step in the 1688 Revolution, establishing the principle that the monarch reigned by act
of Parliament. His reign also marked a new era in the working of the British constitution. The King knew no English, his ministers no German, and not all of them could converse with him in French. Consequently, around 1715, George stopped going to Cabinet meetings since he couldn't understand what was being said and relied instead on the reports of his advisors. As a result, the ministry became much more independent of the King. Lacking interest in domestic affairs, he allowed many of his functions to be performed by the leading minister, thus it was in his reign that the office of Prime Minister came into effect, the first being Walpole. This was a further step toward party government and constitutional monarchy. As was the realization that any ministry depended for its survival on keeping a majority in the House of Commons, whose supremacy rested on its control of the purse. Under Walpole, a new principle of Cabinet government evolved—a one-party, unified ministry under the leadership of a single man, although he recognized that his position as Prime Minister depended on his ability to command a majority in the Commons. This development was a major step toward the modern form of the Cabinet and a demonstration of the fact that power was passing from the monarch to Parliament.  

However, while it may have appeared at the time that there was a marked decline in monarchical power in the reigns of the first two Georges, still the House of Hanover can be said to have maintained its power remarkably well. Under them, a greater degree of political stability than either William or Anne had enjoyed was achieved by the development of a new system of government and the emergence of a
different pattern of politics. It had seemed in 1714 that the sovereign's power had been curtailed only at the expense of political anarchy, but by 1760 English government would be the envy of its European neighbors.243

Historian John B. Owen notes that neither George I, nor his successor George II, were "mere constitutional figureheads"; they exercised real power. The sovereigns had to be consulted not only on broad questions of policy but also on all details of importance. But occasionally political circumstances arose which forced them to yield. And both Georges limited their own freedom of action by recognizing that their own best interests were served by keeping the favor of the Whigs, a belief bolstered by their unwillingness to negotiate with the Tories or anyone who had been connected to the two Pretenders.244

In the lives of ordinary citizens, however, the central government played little part so national politics was not a predominant concern in the constituencies. Although differences of opinion still existed, in politics on both the national and local levels much of the tension was gone.245 The establishment of a limited monarchy and the development of a stable form of mixed government meant that the reigns of the first two Georges were not periods of profound political speculation.246 No doubt the resounding victory of the Whigs over their foes, the Tories, contributed to the relative tranquility of early Georgian politics.

This era of peace was economically significant in allowing for an uninterrupted internal development: "The island, rich in itself,
became richer by its commerce. The monied interests found an opportunity such as never before was presented for the expansion of trade and industry.\textsuperscript{247} Indeed, while land remained an important investment, and agriculture was making a considerable contribution to the nation's economy, speculation in the stock market became a national pastime. The establishment of the Bank of England in 1694 meant that by 1715, England was reaping benefits in advance of others. The advantageous trade provisions in the Treaty of Utrecht encouraged the spread of trade as well as gave some men the false hope of quick profits where none were to be made. A deal between the government and the South Sea Company was struck which culminated in the speculation mania that burst the South Sea Bubble. Under Walpole's aegis, the Company remained "a solvent but subdued concern." Trade continued to develop but with more realistic expectations of the profits to be earned.\textsuperscript{248}

Ironically, just when enough political stability had been achieved to foster England's economic growth, party politics reared its head in the theatres. Seeing the way the wind blew at George's accession, the actor-managers of Drury Lane (Cibber, Wilks and Booth) were quick to associate their theatre with the triumphant Whigs and to do their best to insinuate that their rival, Lincoln's Inn Fields, which had opened late in 1714 at the "new" theatre under John and Christopher Mosier Rich, harbored Tory sympathies. Indeed, there does seem to be evidence that a Whig, Hanoverian claque developed at Drury Lane while a Tory (either Hanoverian or Jacobite) one emerged at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Certainly, Drury Lane at this time
was ostentatiously Whiggish and enjoyed more royal favor than the Richs' theatre. For their part, the dramatists at Lincoln's Inn Fields protested against party feelings in the theatre, as well they might. However, that was to be the pattern of theatrical competition throughout George I's reign. During most of this time, Drury Lane, with its better management and stronger company of actors, was more popular and prosperous than its opponent. Consequently, the better plays were mounted at Drury Lane.

However, in the early and mid-1720s, the rivalry between the theatres took on less of a political tone as the managers became more interested in trying to outdo each other in pantomime. The increasing appearance of "non-rational" entertainments such as pantomime in the drama brought a storm of protest from critics of both political parties. Men like John Dennis accused the managers of the two theatres of pandering to the taste of their audiences, which was low, without making any effort to improve it. The leaders of the theatres may or may not have agreed with the critics but they felt themselves compelled by financial realities to continue to present entertainments such as singing, dancing, juggling and especially pantomime. Consequently, we find vigorous appeals by many contemporary theatrical commentators for the government to maintain stricter controls over the theatres in the belief that the quality of the drama would improve. The question of governmental supervision had been raised in 1715 when the actor-managers of Drury Lane and their new partner, Richard Steele, were given a theatrical patent, and they began to operate under the conviction that they were not
answerable to the Lord Chamberlain and his subordinates. This was not a problem until April 1717 when the Duke of Newcastle became Lord Chamberlain. He insisted on his prerogatives which precipitated an ongoing dispute with the managers of Drury Lane, at one point resulting in Steele's suspension from his post for nearly a year and a half. This measure was applauded by those advocating more government supervision of the theatres. However, their joy was short-lived as Steele returned to Drury Lane when Robert Walpole came to power in 1721. The government was not inclined to meddle in theatrical affairs unless issues of national politics were involved. Walpole saw nothing in the theatres that offended him, and the Lord Chamberlain followed his policy of non-intervention. Thus, during George I's reign, what regulatory machinery the government had was allowed to fall into disrepair.

While the theatre managers elevated the "sensual" (sound and spectacle) over the "rational" (appeals to the mind) as their critics charged, the drama was beginning to reflect more accurately the contemporary social scene, at least at Drury Lane where the better dramatists were employed. Virtually gone was the Restoration stereotype of the merchant as sympathetic depictions of him began to appear in such plays as Centlivre's The Wonder and A Bold Stroke for a Wife. The Whig dramatists of Drury Lane used the stage to air their social views, and the Whigs had traditionally been associated with the monied interests. Similarly, plays containing the old caricature of the merchant and the stock situation of his cuckolding by a gallant were more apt to be mounted at Lincoln's Inn Fields.
which had a reputation for Tory sympathies, the conservative party of the landed classes.\textsuperscript{254} The most explicit expression of Whig doctrine in comedy was Steele's \textit{The Conscious Lovers} (1722), which provoked a debate about literary theory in its violation of the neoclassical principle of kinds. It is also significant for Steele's portrayal of the merchant and his relationship to the gentry. John Loftis describes the departure from tradition represented by Steele's play:

By way of satire as well as by the direct statements of normative characters, Steele insists on the hollowness of the gentry's assumption of superiority. The subjects of social satire in the play are not cuckolded alderman but family proud gentlefolk. Steele exploits the theme of social rivalry; he insists on it through repeated allusions; yet he does so with a reversal in satirical intent from that evident in the plays of Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar.\textsuperscript{255}

Steele reveals his Whig bias in \textit{The Conscious Lovers} in his valorization of the business community and, while the merchant stereotype continued to appear, other dramatists both before and after 1722 demonstrated similar sentiments in their comedies.

As the playwrights' animosity towards the merchant declined so, too, did their contempt for country people. In his last two plays, Farquhar had departed from Restoration tradition by depicting life in the country sympathetically, and some later dramatists followed his example. As early as 1715, there are indications of a change in attitude toward rusticity in comedy.\textsuperscript{256} Loftis speculates that the shift of locale and sentiment from the City to the country in the 1720s had something to do with the South Sea Bubble. That fiasco had made a deep impression on the playwrights. Since it was a financial
disaster made possible by the relative ascendancy of the moneyed men over the landed class, it confirmed the prejudices of the conservatives. For their part, the Whigs always made a distinction between the merchant, whose role was considered constructive, and the "stockjobbers" (speculators), whose was viewed as parasitical.257 However, writers of both parties pilloried the stockjobbers in satirical caricatures and numerous allusions to the speculation they promoted in each decade before and after the Bubble burst.258 While the South Sea debacle served to reinforce the distrust of the business community among the conservative dramatists, Loftis suggests it had another, perhaps more important, effect on comedy:

Disillusionment in speculation understandably turned some men's attention back to the country, just as the disaster of the Bubble made investment in land, as opposed to investment in stocks, more attractive. It is therefore plausible that the Bubble disaster contributed to the shift of literary interest from London to the country that begins to be apparent in the 1720's and becomes marked in the 1740's.259

Whether the Bubble was responsible or not, dramatists began setting more comedies in the country and showing signs of a preference for rustic life over that of the city. Although many comic writers continued to use the satirical stereotypes of country characters, the trend towards reversing the Restoration contempt for all things bucolic had begun.

There was also a reversal in the volume of feminist writing. After an outpouring of feminist works in the first decade or so of the eighteenth century, there was a backlash in which even women considered exceptional were marginalized and ridiculed. This discouraged other women from mounting opposition to or suggesting
reforms for women's second-class status although there was a growing body of work by female authors that celebrated female friendship; some, like Susanna Centlivre, were creating strong heroines.\textsuperscript{260}

However, even if they no longer wrote feminist tracts, women did form a substantial minority of the writers in the eighteenth century. At a time when occupations traditionally considered feminine were being taken over by men, writing for publication, especially fiction, became a growth industry for women. There was an explosion of female writing and a female demand for it during the eighteenth century caused by the emergence of a rudimentary education for women who, barred from economic activity, had more leisure.\textsuperscript{261} Women like Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre had made names for themselves in the drama but the group of women playwrights in the Restoration and the early eighteenth century decreased as the century advanced, and fiction became women's genre of choice. Indeed, as scholar Janet Todd has written, "Mostly women wrote fiction, regarded as a lesser genre and therefore suitable for the second sex. In the novel they could write in the familiar style perfected in informal letters and use their own experience and consciousness as material."\textsuperscript{262} A new genre, the novel offered more possibilities for women as it did not require classical training, which was denied to them, and, as a new genre, it was less restrictive. Thus, the novel became the primary venue through which women examined themselves and their lives and defined themselves as women. Furthermore, these female writers "turned the novel toward a new purpose. They created, perhaps unknowingly, a new emphasis in art,
based on the developing interest in individual experience (inner and outer), yet focussed on the forces of a social milieu." Women's incursion into the public sphere of publication, for so long a wholly male preserve, continued into the eighteenth century, then, but took a new direction, moving from drama into the novel.

Summary

So, England underwent revolutionary changes between the time Restoration playwright Aphra Behn wrote her Cavalier comedies and Susanna Centlivre's death in 1723. In that period, the nation saw the fall of one dynasty and the establishment of another. The divine right of kings was successfully challenged; the Revolution of 1688 sowed the seeds of the modern form of English government. War also affected the evolution of constitutional monarchy, helping to strengthen the power of Parliament, and eventually the development of party politics when the debates over the Treaty of Utrecht clearly differentiated Tory and Whig from each other. The increasing power of the House of Commons and the dependence of Anne and George on their ministers led to the Cabinet system which went a long way toward its modern form under Walpole. The conduct of foreign policy made England for almost the first time an important force in European affairs and started the country on the road to two hundred years of European dominance.

Economically, England prospered as well. The advent of commercialized farming and new agricultural techniques finally freed England from the threat of famine in addition to boosting agriculture's contribution to the economy. The War of the Spanish Succession not
only confirmed England's importance in Continental affairs but tremendously improved its trade under the provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht. Trade and industry began to become important factors in the economy, almost eclipsing the more traditional ones. England was developing a capitalist economy as trade grew, and speculation in stocks became more common.

As the business community became more important to the nation's prosperity, social relations began to change. Middle-class merchants growing wealthy on trade and industry started to challenge the monopoly of power wielded by the landed classes. The changing political and economic situation saw frequent intermarriage between rich merchant families and those of the less affluent gentry so that class barriers began to blur. Eventually, the aristocratic class would differentiate between wealthy businessmen and mere shopkeepers, especially when some nobility became financiers themselves. Economic conditions benefited all the classes to some extent but the gap between well-to-do and poverty-stricken widened as a kind of proletariat emerged.

Although it was very slow to respond, eventually the drama started to reflect societal changes in its portrayal of certain characters like the merchant and the moral values it depicted. Part of the reason for this was how the audiences changed from a homogeneous Court party during the Restoration to the more heterogeneous one of Centlivre's time when newly affluent middle-class people began to penetrate the theatres, as indeed they did all the aristocratic preserves. Exploiting the tastes of this new audience for
"non-rational" entertainments, the theatrical managers precipitated a movement for dramatic reform among neo-classical conservatives who deplored what they considered mindless trash. Governmental supervision of the stage exercised at times of political unrest was allowed to lapse under Walpole.

While the liberties of Englishmen were being expanded and secured with Parliament's ascendancy, Englishwomen remained at the mercy of husbands and fathers. Although many women distinguished themselves by intellectual achievements and produced logical, persuasive feminist tracts, the traditional system of separate spheres continued to hold sway with women relegated to home and hearth. Despite successful women like Behn and Centlivre, as economic conditions improved aristocratic and wealthy middle-class women were barred from economic activity and indoctrinated with the belief that marriage and motherhood were the only productive occupations for women. The image of women in literature as Eve-like sirens was being superseded by the economically and socially expedient one of them as saintly but frail "property-in-need-of-protection."

Discouraged by the contemptuous backlash against feminist writing, female authors turned instead to the novel, a less public genre than drama, as a means of examining their situation and expressing themselves.

Knowing the context in which text is generated clarifies the content and enriches our understanding. Having investigated the biographies of Behn and Centlivre and the cultural conditions under
which they wrote, we can now draw some conclusions which will be
the focus of the final chapter.
Notes


5 Hill 192.

6 Hill 200.

7 Worden 154 and 155.

8 Worden 159-161.


10 Seaward 164.

11 Seaward 164.

12 Seaward 165.

13 Seaward 165.

14 Seaward 165-166.

15 Seaward 166-167.

16 Seaward 167, 170 and Hill 169.

17 Seaward 170-171 and Hill 169 and 198.

18 Seaward 150.

19 Seaward 150 and Hill 188 and 189.


21 Hill 173.
22 Hill 178.
23 Hill 179.
25 Earle 33.
28 Earle 260-262.
30 Goreau 177.
31 Earle 44.
32 Earle 45, 46 and 247.
33 Earle 44.
36 Nicoll 59-60, 62, 63.
38 Loftis 10 and 15.
39 Loftis 14.
40 Loftis 21.
41 Nicoll 25.
43 Ferguson 3.
44 Ferguson 2 and 3.
48 Wilson and Warnke xi.
49 Wilson and Warnke xii.
50 Wilson and Warnke xiii.
51 Wilson and Warnke xiii.
52 Wilson and Warnke xiv.
53 Wilson and Warnke xiv.
55 Anderson and Zinsser 338.
56 Seaward 171.
57 Seaward 172.
58 Seaward 172.
59 Hill 170 and Seaward 172.
60 Hill 202 and Seaward 172.
61 Hill 170, 202, 203 and Seaward 172.
63 Hill 205.
64 Hill 202.
65 Hill 204.
66 Seaward 174.
67 Hill 171 and Seaward 174.
68 Seaward 175.
70 Holmes 199.
71 Hill 234.
72 Hill 236.
73 Hill 236.
74 Hill 236-7.
76 Holmes 207-208.
77 Holmes 214.
78 Hill 240.
79 Holmes 214.
80 Holmes 214.
81 Holmes 215.
82 Holmes 208.
83 Holmes 215.
84 Hill 239.
85 Hill 239.
86 Hill 237.
87 Owen 94.
88 Holmes 206.
89 Holmes 202.
90 Holmes 209.
91 Holmes 208-209.
Loftis 44–45.


Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 46.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 48.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 43.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 68.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 68–69.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 69–70.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 70 and 72.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 74.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 20.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 49.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 49.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 51.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 20.

Loftis 22.


Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 29.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 29.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 30.


Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 34.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 32.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 33.

Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 35.
143 Ferguson 15.
144 Anderson and Zinsser 348.
145 Anderson and Zinsser 352.
146 Ferguson 15-16.
147 Ferguson 16.
148 Ferguson 16.
149 Ferguson 19.
150 Ferguson 18.
151 Ferguson 18.
152 Owen xii.
153 Owen xv.
154 Holmes 209.
155 Holmes 210.
156 Holmes 216-217.
157 Owen 97.
158 Holmes 217.
159 Holmes 203.
160 Holmes 210.
161 Holmes 218-219.
162 Holmes 211.
163 Holmes 219.
164 Holmes 219.
165 Holmes 219.
166 Holmes 203.
167 Holmes 219-220.
168 Holmes 203.
Holmes 220.
Holmes 211.
Holmes 221.
Holmes 211 and Hill 222.
Holmes 203 and 221.
Holmes 203 and 221.
Holmes 221.
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Earle 25.
Earle 24–25.
Earle 27.
Earle 28.
Earle 33.
Earle 33.
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Earle 36.
Earle 47.
Earle 27.
Earle 27.

Loftis, Comedy and Society 1 and 2.
Loftis, Comedy and Society 2.
Loftis, Comedy and Society 3.
Loftis discusses managerial changes from page 46 to 50 in The Politics of Drama in Augustan England.
221 Loftis 55.

222 Loftis 56, 57, 61 and 62.

223 Loftis, Comedy and Society 86.

224 Loftis, Comedy and Society 68.

225 Loftis, Comedy and Society 41.

226 Loftis, Comedy and Society 42.

227 Loftis, Comedy and Society 38.

228 Ferguson 4.

229 Ferguson 5.

230 Ferguson 5.


233 Robinson 556.


235 Lunt 506.

236 Hill 241.

237 Lunt 506.

238 Lunt 507.

239 Lunt 507.

240 Lunt 508.

241 Robinson 565.

242 Lunt 511.

243 Owen 95.

244 Owen 115 and 119.
Owen 119-120.
Owen 159.
Robinson 562.
Robinson 563 and 564.
Loftis 63.
Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 94.
Loftis 92.
Loftis 72.
Loftis 93.
Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 93.
Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 84.
Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 82 and 83.
Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 94.
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Loftis, *Comedy and Society* 96.
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Todd 18.

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CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION: "HERSTORY"

As the preceding chapters have made clear, whatever England was for horses, it was certainly no "paradise for women." During their lifetimes, both Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre were compelled to battle a millenia-old misogynistic view of women that assigned them an inferior and subordinate role in an oppressive patriarchy. Forced by circumstances to write for a living, both women trespassed into the "public sphere" sacred to males and were harshly persecuted for it, all the more for being successful on male terms. Not only did these pioneers, and their literary sisters, break new ground for women but they also left us a distinctly female perception of their times in their works. Whatever political and ideological differences existed between Behn and Centlivre, both shared a gender in a world where that largely determined an individual's destiny. Consequently, although the playwrights used the same themes and comic conventions as their male colleagues, they did so with a different perspective and aim in mind. As members of the "inferior" half of the human race, Behn and Centlivre were more sensitive to gender stereotyping and the oppression of women than their privileged fellows since they had first-hand experience of them. They vigorously resisted both and created fictional worlds that are subtly different from those of their male peers. Their plays reflect the fact that social, political and economic events in the "real" world affected them in ways quite different from those experienced by the male population.
One of the most obvious and profound influences on the women dramatists was their lack of classical training and university education. Both were largely self-educated, and this determined to a great degree the genres they favored and their indifference to neoclassical principles. Neither was proficient in tragedy, excelling instead in such hybrid forms as intrigue comedy blended with the ingredients of the comedy of manners. While both women were aware of neoclassical principles, they rejected them in favor of so-called "natural" writing, a kind not bound by arbitrary rules, especially since it seemed to appeal to the audiences they depended on to survive.

Their gender also determined how they treated the central theme of their works. While the male dramatists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries paid lip-service to the disastrous effects of forced marriage for profit, they did not seriously question the institution itself nor the principles underlying it. As part of the segment of the population most victimized by the system, Behn and Centlivre turned a comic convention into a crusade. Their plays were vehicles of protest which sought not only to entertain but also to persuade. Thus, their works have a didactic element not inherent in those of their male colleagues who largely benefited from the status quo. This also accounts for the preoccupation with religious and political events in the canons of both women. While literary men were certainly not silent about the turbulent events of their day, most of the male dramatists contented themselves with satirizing their foes as an implicit form of criticism. Behn and Centlivre repeatedly took this
one step further, explicitly proselytizing for their faction. Their emphasis on plays as propaganda was born of each woman's fond belief that if her party could gain control of the ship of State, women would at last receive some justice.

But while Aphra and Susanna shared characteristics that define a uniquely female perception of the period, they differ profoundly in their acceptance or rejection of certain contemporary values. Behn boldly claimed that women could write as well as men while Centlivre consistently acknowledged male superiority. Both women objected to the misogynism which was the basis for the unfair oppression of their sex, but while Behn claimed equal sexual rights for women, Centlivre simply asked for better treatment of women within marriage. They each focussed on the arranged-marriage system as the most obvious and insidious instrument for the subordination of women but offered substantially different solutions. Thus, while both playwrights specialized in intrigue comedy, whose emphasis on love, sex and marriage make it an excellent vehicle for critiquing gender stereotyping and the plight of women, their works differ in several major areas including themes and conventions, gender construction, portrayal of the same character types, and morality.

The profit motive in marriage is a prominent theme in the plays of both women but Behn treats it much more ambiguously. While her rake-heroes profess to valorize true love over a union based on economic considerations, they not only accept money from lovers but also wed with an eye to the main chance. The emphasis is on seduction in Behn's comedies as the male protagonists seek to satisfy
their sexual appetites without committing themselves—unless the price is high enough. In contrast, many of Centlivre's heroes are straightforward about their gold-digging as they shamelessly pursue wealthy wives. The ladies themselves insist on obtaining the "Writings" which will give them control of their fortunes so the focus of the dramatic action shifts from seduction to circumventing a "blocking figure" in order for a couple to be honorably (and profitably) wed.

Another important thematic difference exists between the two canons. While both women argued that females should have the right to make the most important decision in their lives, their choice of husband, Behn went one step further and pleaded for equal sexual rights. She abhorred the double standard of her day which allowed men unlimited sexual freedom while condemning their wives and mistresses to forced chastity. Centlivre rarely calls attention to the sexual double standard and certainly did not advocate sexual equality for women. Rather, she upholds the sovereignty of marriage for whatever reason and focused her energy on pleading for more rights for women within marriage.

Many of those married women have been imprisoned by jealous husbands at the beginning of Centlivre's plays, and a subplot usually deals with the wife's scheming not to cuckold her husband but to convince him to trust her and allow her more liberty. This scenario not only reinforces Centlivre's arguments for marital equality but can also be seen as a political fable. Like Centlivre, Behn made her politics an integral part of the structure of her plays but from the
other side of the political fence. However, the theme of Liberty is much more prominent in Susanna's works which are designed to illustrate her belief that a tyrannical monarch could and should be deposed by his or her subjects. Her plays are more didactic in this regard than Behn's; the latter considers the divine right of kings a given and contents herself with defaming those who would try to threaten it. Furthermore, while pleas for women's equality take centerstage in Aphra's canon, Centlivre conflates the issue of just treatment for her sex with the more inclusive one of a subject's rights in a monarchy.

Also, Behn's treatment of religion is much more ambiguous than that of Centlivre who explicitly links political liberty with religious loyalty to Protestantism. Further, Behn does not tie morality to religion. An act of love between two consenting adults need not have the sanction of the Church, she believed, and since a forced marriage was no marriage at all, then adultery wasn't a sin. Indeed, the Church itself is implicated in the "prostitution" of women with its validation of forced marriage for money. For Centlivre, however, religion is a moral absolute, and marriage is sacred, forced or otherwise.

Indifference to religion and scorn for traditional values were characteristic of the aristocracy in Behn's time, characteristics she satirized but did not fundamentally challenge. While her early plays were somewhat in the same vein, Centlivre soon adopted a much different theme. In most of her best works, she began to concentrate on demonstrating her belief that innate virtue in a man is more
important than an empty title. Like Behn, she satirizes the aristocracy but becomes progressively more ironic in her treatment of them, ultimately rejecting their decadent values in favor of a middle-class moral agenda. Furthermore, while Behn confines her moralizing to decrying fools who would pass for their superiors, Centlivre makes moralizing a major theme and attacks what those not of "Quality" would consider true vice, such as adultery.

Centlivre's moralizing also results in differences between her gender construction of protagonists and Behn's. There is a sharp distinction between Behn's faithful male lovers who respect women and marriage and her hero-rakes who value neither, but Centlivre's libertines respect virtuous women and acquiesce to marriage quicker than Behn's do. While both playwrights use soldiers as heroes, Centlivre uses more, who act as mouthpieces for her views on patriotism and function as exemplars of the superiority of innate virtue over an empty title. Thus, Centlivre's soldiers serve as moral paradigms, lending a didactic tenor to her works, a tenor reinforced by her male protagonists' trepidation about using underhanded tactics.

Similarly, Aphra's heroines enjoy matching wits with men and play the "love game" according to male rules, some even appropriating male sexual prerogatives. When masquerading as men, they subscribe to male values such as defending their honor with violence. In contrast, Centlivre's female protagonists regret having to practice deceit and are much more conventionally "feminine," few dressing as men or resorting to violence. And none aspires to the same sexual
privileges as their lovers. Furthermore, some of Behn's women commit sexual "sins" with impunity, and all resist subordination to men, while honor and chastity are moral absolutes for Centlivre's heroines who frequently refer to a husband's right to mastery over his wife.

Considering the pleasure both sexes take in the love chase in which all is fair and anything goes, it is not surprising that the relationship between the sexes in Behn's canon is tainted with hostility and distrust. Indeed, the degree of alienation between males and females is much more pronounced in the works of the Restoration playwright than in that of her successor. The "unpleasantness" of marriage is taken for granted in Behn's comedies until the rake's final-act conversion, but in Centlivre's works, we get debates about the benefits of matrimony, and the plays usually end with paeans to wedlock and wives. The success of a union is the responsibility of the wife, Centlivre asserts, but Behn envisions marriage as a partnership in which husband and wife share the same rights as well as the responsibility for its success.

Behn's preoccupation with satirizing the socially inept and Centlivre's emphasis on morality result in differences between their treatment of the sexes, as well as the playwrights' portrayal of the same character types. While both women use fops as foils to highlight the courage and resourcefulness of the hero, these figures are much more important in Behn's comedies. She is at pains to emphasize the witlessness of such characters in contrast to Centlivre's more sympathetic treatment since lack of wit to her was not as damning as a lack of democratic principles. The abundance of fops in Behn's
canon underscores her thematic concern with social satire versus Centlivre's overriding interest in moralizing about Liberty and Loyalty.

Centlivre's preoccupation with political persuasion is also evident in her handling of such "blocking figures" as the father or guardian and the aged husband. Her parental characters are more monstrous in their treatment of the protagonists and much more prominent than Behn's more benevolent despots, no doubt due to the shift in emphasis from seduction to the pursuit of a wealthy wife. Conversely, while Behn mercilessly caricatures her avaricious and lecherous old husbands who are always cuckolded, Centlivre paints a more sympathetic picture.

Significantly, many of Behn's old villains are wealthy and lecherous merchants with Parliamentarian and dissenting sympathies who have acquired fortunes through dishonest means. To the Restoration playwright, the merchant and the "citizen" are one—both are treasonous, sanctimonious and hypocritical social-climbers. She satirizes them unmercifully, making them the butt of all the comic action. Centlivre's early plays utilized the same stereotype, but as her career progressed, she began to draw a much more balanced picture of the merchant, whom she began to portray as an honest, hard-working businessman, quite distinct from a mere shopkeeper or "citizen."

Centlivre's middle-class ethos is also apparent in her portraits of fashionable ladies. Centlivre questioned aristocratic values that Behn satirized but accepted. Thus, Aphra drew satirical portraits of
loveless marriages of convenience in which spouses turned a blind eye to each other's infidelities. However, she rewarded her adulterous ladies with lovers, perhaps because she blamed the forced-marriage system for compelling women to seek satisfaction outside an unfulfilling union. In contrast, Centlivre emphasizes the vanity and flirtatiousness of her coquettes who are invariably punished for their immodesty in chasing men. The two playwrights used the same character but for different purposes. The adulterous travails of Behn's ladies of fashion are an indictment of the arranged-marriage system while the virtue, enforced or otherwise, of Centlivre's heroines make them exemplars of the moral absoluteness of modesty and chastity.

Centlivre's emphasis on morality also affected her use of servants in her plays. She employs these characters to a much greater degree than does Behn, whose protagonists enjoy the scheming and duplicity they have to practice. In contrast, Susanna's leading characters hate to use subterfuge, and the dictum that the nobly born should set good moral examples for their social inferiors is a constant litany throughout the dramatist's works. Consequently, we find all the morally questionable behavior of the leading figures displaced onto their servants. Furthermore, Behn's menials are allowed to mock their superiors' pretensions only if the target is a figure of fun already, while Centlivre's sometimes provide ironic commentary on protagonists as part of that writer's critique of aristocratic values.
Not surprisingly, we find a great difference in both degree and kind in the morality of each woman's canon. Both were forced to defend the theatre as a site of moral teaching but Centlivre seems to have taken this neoclassic principle more to heart than did Behn. Her plays are more "sedate" in plot, character and theme, and they celebrate marriage and moral values Behn had satirized.

While Behn's heroines are usually virgins bent on marriage, and her rakes vow fidelity, there is often a sense of moral ambiguity at the end of her plays. Not so with Centlivre's. She leaves no doubt as to who is rewarded or punished; her morality is absolute. Where Behn mainly chastises the witless, Centlivre targets "real" vices such as promiscuity and adultery. Unlike Aphra's protagonists, Centlivre's moralize about such middle-class values as chastity, marital fidelity and rational decision-making. The aristocratic preoccupation with sex and honor maintained by violence has given way to a morality based on more conventional values.

The values embraced by the two dramatists were no doubt influenced by circumstances and events in the lives of both. At first glance it would seem that Behn and Centlivre had more in common with each other than otherwise. However, surviving by her pen was more of a struggle for Behn who was the first woman to invade the male preserve of the public theatre; Centlivre had plenty of company and Behn's trailblazing to help her career. Also, while it seems likely that experiences in early childhood would dictate the political path each would follow, those experiences were different. Behn's family were Tories with ties to the Court during the Commonwealth while
Centlivre's were Parliamentarians whose fortunes declined at the Restoration. Living under the sway of an inimical party left a lasting impression on both women which accounts in part for their preoccupation with politics in all their works.

Both women were persecuted for their "immodesty" in writing for the public stage, and their plays attacked for their "immorality." The two women accused their critics of applying a literary double standard to their works based solely on their sex and were compelled to hide their identities, but after the success of The Busybody in 1709, Centlivre proudly signed her works.

Not only were the two playwrights attacked for "immorality" but also for their indifference to neoclassical principles. Both believed plays were meant to be entertainment and should not be written according to arbitrary formulas. However, as the Restoration progressed, and critics of the theatre became more vocal, Behn was forced to defend the theatre as a potential instrument for teaching morality. But Centlivre seemed to have taken the criticism more to heart than Behn, at least for a little while. Several of her plays were ostensibly written to address certain vices, and most of them celebrated conventional virtues.

No doubt the moral conventions in Centlivre's works were motivated in part by the fact that her audiences were different from Behn's. Since they were driven by financial necessity to write, the women were compelled to please the tastes of the paying customers. For Behn, that meant catering to a largely homogeneous crowd composed of the Court and its hangers-on who enjoyed nothing more
than a lively satire glorifying the "witty" and fashionable over the low-class and socially inept. But by Centlivre's time, the theatre-going public was more heterogeneous, and dramatic values began to reflect this as "wit" came to be viewed with suspicion and moral instruction became the focus. Even the genres had changed. Behn deplored the increasing popularity of farce during her career, and the "non-rational" elements of theatre—singing, dancing and spectacle—were beginning to gain the ascendancy. During Centlivre's career, these trends continued to develop as we can see with her experimentation. A major difference between Behn and Centlivre, though, is that the unmarried Restoration playwright had to rely wholly on what she could earn by her pen to survive; the married Centlivre could write at her leisure. This also helps to explain Behn's prolific output in so many different literary forms.

Both women used their plays, and writings in other genres, as vehicles for expressing their political affiliations. But those affiliations couldn't have been more different. Behn was a staunch Stuart supporter for whom the divine right of kings was sacrosanct and was convinced that the Parliamentarians were attempting to resurrect the Commonwealth. For her part, Centlivre was a dyed-in-the-wool Whig and proponent of a constitutional monarchy who believed that Jacobite Tories wanted to restore both the Stuarts and Catholicism to England. However, Centlivre championed her cause publicly when it was not popular to do so while Behn's sentiments reflected the prevailing opinion of those in authority. This, too, can probably be attributed to Behn's more pressing financial need.
Since both women were so preoccupied with the political events that shaped their times as well as their works, the changes that took place in England at the turn of the century and their effects on the female playwright can be charted. Behn began her career in the merry days of the Restoration when a nation recovering from a disastrous civil war was united in support of a popular king; however, by 1667, that consensus would be largely destroyed as war with the Dutch would almost bankrupt England. Then, Charles II concluded the secret Treaty of Dover in 1670 with Louis in which he promised to help the French king in an attack on Holland and to declare himself a Roman Catholic and restore that religion to England. Thus began the struggle between Charles and Parliament that characterized much of his reign as he began his campaign to gain tolerance of Catholicism through royal edict and use of the royal prerogative. It also began to seem that Charles, who admired the absolute monarchy of France, was attempting to impose such a form of government on England in violation of its ancient constitution. Attempts by a strong opposition party to exclude James from the succession led to the so-called "Exclusion Crisis" (1678-81) during which the political parties that would later be called "Tory" and "Whig" began to take shape. The extravagant and financially irresponsible Charles had had to periodically appease Parliament who controlled the purse strings of the realm but after this time he was able to depend on other resources and achieved a measure of political independence.
Like his brother, James II ascended the throne with a Parliament that was mostly favorable to him as members of both political parties recognized that the Court and the government was a stabilizing influence at a time when the lower classes were beginning to grow restless and hostile toward the smaller ruling class. However, it took a few years only for James to alienate the rich and powerful with his openly aggressive campaign to restore Catholicism to England, a campaign he carried on without Parliament, prorogued early in his reign. An unlikely coalition of moderate Whigs and dissenters with Tories opposed James, whose government seemed a threat to the property of the landed gentry. In 1688, an invitation to invade England was sent to William of Orange. James fled to France at the end of 1688, and the "Glorious Revolution" was accomplished without any blood being shed.

William called the "Convention Parliament" in February 1689 which offered the crown jointly to him and Mary—but with strings attached. The efforts of Charles and James to force Catholicism and an absolute monarchy on England by riding roughshod over her ancient constitution made the ruling class determined that succeeding sovereigns would recognize and respect the power of Parliament. Although William III retained most of the powers and prerogatives of a monarch, the balance of power would start to shift from the King to Parliament during his reign, in large part due to England's involvement in the "Nine Years War" (or "King William's War") that started in 1689 against France. The war would be unprecedented in
British history in terms of money and men and would change forever the way England was governed.

In 1697, the Treaty of Ryswick ended the war although most factions recognized that it was little more than a truce. Four years later, the Act of Settlement was passed which sought to ensure the Protestant succession. Not long after, William died. His reign had seen historic changes. The Revolution had successfully challenged the divine right of kings, and its settlement meant that the state was now more important than the monarch. The balance of power had begun to shift decisively towards Parliament, especially the Commons. Along with the beginnings of a constitutional monarchy, a two-party political system was emerging.

Both Whigs and Tories welcomed the accession of Queen Anne in March 1702, which also helped reconcile them to the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession in May. But in 1710, when enthusiasm for the war had largely waned and some, including the Queen, feared a Whig supremacy threatened the Anglican religion, Anne dismissed most of her Whig ministry and put together a predominantly Tory one with Sir Robert Harley at its head. Peace negotiations with France began in Utrecht in January 1712, and a general peace was concluded by treaty a year later. Not only had Britain accomplished all of her war goals but she also gained new territories and trading rights with Spain and its South American market. In 1714, Queen Anne died, leaving the moderate Earl of Shrewsbury in charge.

Queen Anne's reign had seen the victories of England's greatest war and achieved a peace which confirmed Britain's new standing as
a great European power. It had witnessed the fruition of the constitutional seeds sown by the Revolution. As the monarch’s power was further limited, Cabinet government and the office of Prime Minister began to develop. Constitutional monarchy and a two-party system had arrived. The divine right of kings was no more now that power had shifted to a group of ministers who were not answerable to a king, but to the people’s representatives in Parliament.

The first Hanoverian king, George I, ascended the throne peacefully in 1714, and, despite periodic Jacobite uprisings, retained it. In contrast to the previous twenty-five years, his reign would be a peaceful one in which the gains of the Revolution would be given further security, and notable advances would be made in Parliamentary power and practice. James Stanhope was made leading minister until 1721. He died that year, partly as a result of the bursting of the South Sea Bubble which shook the throne and threatened the dominance of the Whigs. Both were secured by Sir Robert Walpole who was Prime Minister from 1721 to 1742. When Susanna Centlivre died in 1723, the country was on the road to a long period of peace and prosperity under Walpole and the Whigs.

George I’s accession was the last step in the 1688 Revolution as it established the principle that the sovereign ruled by act of Parliament. It also marked a new era in the working of the English constitution as the ministry became much more independent of the King. A major step toward the modern form of the Cabinet and a further demonstration of the fact that power was passing from the
ruler to Parliament was the evolution of a new principle of Cabinet
government under Walpole.

Just as political developments were changing the structure of
England's government, new economic trends were transforming the
country's financial infrastructure. The "Glorious Revolution" of 1688
was also an economic turning point. Companies were allowed to form
in complete independence of the state. New industries opened up for
export and to meet expanding consumer demand at home. The
founding of the Bank of England in 1694 brought changes in money
and credit, providing a steady flow of capital for investment.

The rise of commercial farming resulted in agricultural
innovations that would eventually remove the fear of famine from
England. It also undermined the traditional structure of rural society
into landlord, commercial farmer and laborer. A two-class society
began to emerge—a landless working class dependent on wage labor
increased in contrast to a smaller ruling class of employers.

Increasing urbanization was reflected by the rise of something like a
modern proletariat in both town and country as most urban workers
had to depend entirely on their labor for others for survival. The
processes of commercialization and social polarization, as well as
improvements in agricultural techniques, materially improved the lot
of everyone, including the poor.

In addition, by George I's time, there were opportunities such as
had never before existed for the growth of trade and industry. The
nation's long-distance trade had improved dramatically during the
seventeenth century as it had expanded and diversified all over the
world. But while land was still an important investment, and agriculture was making a contribution to the nation's economy, speculation became another important economic activity.

Political and economic changes also wrought changes in English society. At the Restoration, the amorality of Charles and his court eventually alienated a majority of his subjects, who were still influenced by years of Puritan rule, and motivated much of the opposition his government faced. As the Stuart period progressed, and Parliament began its rise to dominance, the conservative middle class began to make its presence felt in politics, particularly in the House of Commons. Also, with the change of sovereigns in 1688, the moral orientation of the Court switched from the libertinism of Charles and James to the "family values" of William and Mary, a trend which continued.

Economic trends reinforced the social changes taking place. While the upper ranks continued to prosper, the fortunes of the middling ranks also began to rise significantly. The middle classes made inroads into previously forbidden areas as the chance for employment in the professions became available to a wider range of people. Professions gave practitioners a gentility that had little or nothing to do with older concepts of gentility based on the ownership of land. Consequently, the concept of gentleman began to blur in people's minds, especially when peers began to invest in trade or work in banking. The traditional scorn for merchants disappeared as they became essential to the nation's economy and intermarried with the families of the gentry. So, while society was much more polarized
at the end of the Stuart period between the "haves" and the "have-nots," there was a greater flexibility of movement among those who were prospering.

Social changes began to make an impact on the theatres at the turn of the century. During Behn's time, the comedy of manners with its witty repartee and mocking portraits of the lower class was in vogue among the fashionable elite who frequented the playhouses. Also, the majority of plays during the 1660s and 1670s championed the Cavalier cause and vilified the King's enemies, especially dissenters in the business community. But when Centlivre began her career in 1700, the 1688 Revolution had brought about a significant reversal in the tenor of the drama as the Whigs gained prominence in the theatres. While it would take comedy several decades to catch up to reality, it began the slow process of reflecting the social and economic changes that had taken place since the Restoration. That class barriers were no longer firm was evident from the audiences of this time which were still dominated by fashionable people but now that group included merchants accepted as gentlemen and prominent financiers belonging to gentle or even noble families. With this new audience came new social values which hungry playwrights were quick to adopt. Indeed, early eighteenth-century plays were preoccupied with the conflict between the landed classes and the money men with their opposing values. It would be evident after the second decade that the latter were beginning to gain the ascendancy.

Another factor responsible for the sea change in the social values depicted in comedy was the dramatic reform movement at the
turn of the century, part of a larger controversy over the function of "wit" in literature. Critics such as Jeremy Collier blasted the stage as a place where vice was elevated and virtue belittled. For their part, writers like Alexander Pope mocked the posturings of Collier and company and lambasted the theatres for a greater sin--lack of artistic quality in their products. By the end of George I's reign, however, it would be clear that the reformers had gained the upper hand as literary critics of both political parties would lament the artistic "decline" in literature due to the inanities of sentiment and the dominance of pantomime and its ilk.

As we can see from this summary, the England that saw Behn's first play was quite different from the one that witnessed Centlivre's debut. It was more democratic, richer and more conservative. It was shedding the last vestiges of feudalism and developing more modern forms of government and finance. Class barriers were beginning to break down as the middle class became upwardly mobile. Peace and prosperity would eventually help make England a force to be reckoned with in Europe. All of these trends can be discerned in the differences between the two women's works within the same genre in what they praised and what they rejected. Background and lifestyle also affected what they wrote. The unmarried Behn was a staunch Tory who may have been a Catholic at a time when the Cavalier cause was still popular while Centlivre, who was definitely an Anglican Whig, married and wrote at a time when the political situation made it dangerous to take too public a stand on issues. Having a husband gave her greater security than Behn had and more freedom to answer
opposition. Both women, however, refused to be cowed and were vocal proponents of their respective causes.

What, then, can we conclude from an examination of the lives and works of these two women about the development of the female playwright in England? We know that at the time Behn began writing, conditions were conducive to a female dramatist in that the loosening of traditional values at the Restoration allowed for unorthodox developments unthinkable a half century before, such as actresses. With her many Court connections, Behn was able to get a foot in the door. But when she made it clear she was in to stay, the attacks began on her "modesty" and honesty. Behn held firm and expressed her feminist sentiments in many of her works. She believed that women were not inferior creatures compared to men; the only advantage men had was their superior education. She was careful to create fictional heroines who were the equals of their male counterparts. Behn made forced marriage the focus of her crusading since she believed this institution was the one that oppressed women most. At the end of the seventeenth century, there was an unprecedented outpouring of writing by women addressing the same issues.

What facilitated this flood of feminist sentiment were the changing political, economic and social conditions in England after the 1688 Revolution. As men began to demand more individual liberty, women saw no reason why they should not have the same privileges. The new political situation also resulted in a more democratic community of letters in which women from all social classes wrote
poetry and prose. While women scholars were writing logical, coherent arguments for better education for women and better treatment of them in marriage, others, like Centlivre, were writing plays for the public stage expressing similar ideas. However, while their plays focused on the oppression of women in forced marriage, few female dramatists demanded sexual equality as Behn had. They also modeled strong fictional heroines but in a much more demurer mode than Behn's lusty nymphs. Furthermore, the dramatic emphasis had shifted from the sexual "love chase" to a plea for more equality within marriage. Even so, these women were subjected to the same kind of attacks of which Behn had been a victim.

However, Centlivre had an advantage over Behn in that at the time she was writing, she was not a lone female voice crying in the desert. Changing work-patterns brought about by the emerging capitalist society affected professions traditionally belonging to women as men began to replace them. Some of the dispossessed turned to writing as a means of livelihood, although marriage was often the only alternative. Many were inspired by the ongoing debate over the supposed inferiority of women while others, like Behn had, expressed feminist sentiments at least in part because of the misogyny and obstacles they faced as women writers. What most of these women had in common was an awareness of shared, gender-specific ideas and experiences. They celebrated female friendship in poetry; created exemplary heroines in prose; and supported each other's endeavors. Thanks to Behn in particular, female dramatists claimed the right to use forms traditionally reserved for males only. Another important
factor in the increase of women writers was a growing demand for them from their own sex who, barred from economic activity in the new capitalist system, had more leisure to read.

However, the explosion of feminine writing in the last decades of the seventeenth century declined after the first decade or so of the next century when a backlash set in against women; even extraordinary women were marginalized and ridiculed. Ironically, this was due to the very same conditions which had encouraged the "fairer sex" to venture into writing for publication in the first place. The new capitalist economy divided society into gender-based public and private spheres in which the husband worked outside the home for himself or others while his wife devoted herself to the care of children and household. There was a new focus on marriage as middle and upper class women were trained to believe motherhood was a paramount priority (heirs) and monogamy a social and political goal. One consequence of this economic imperative was that attitudes towards women were changing. It no longer served the bourgeois male economically or socially to consider women the Eve-like tempters they had been branded as for centuries. The new stereotype to which women were supposed to conform was that of a weak, submissive madonna-like creature who was pure and noble but too fragile to fend for herself. Those women who dared to defy convention in the early decades of the eighteenth century and express their opinions in public were mocked, which discouraged other women from voicing their opposition.
By the time Centlivre died in 1723, these trends were apparent and gaining currency. In a society so rigidly segregated into public and private spheres, women who wrote for the public stage faced increasing opposition. Consequently, the number of female playwrights decreased dramatically; indeed, Centlivre is the most important female English playwright until the twentieth century. But women did not quit writing. Publication was a growth industry for women who formed a substantial minority of eighteenth-century writers, especially in fiction writing. A new genre, the novel, became an important vehicle for female authors since it involved an activity which did not trespass into the "public sphere." Furthermore, it was regarded as a lesser genre so it seemed appropriate for the "weaker sex;" it required no classical training; and it was less restrictive. The novel was also well suited to women because they could write in the familiar style perfected in informal letters and use their own experiences. Indeed, it became the primary venue through which women examined themselves and their lives and defined themselves as women.

In their effort to define themselves, members of the "second sex" have sought an identity in all places and all times but too often in Western history, we get "his-story," and not hers. Women's history is one of resistance to institutionalized oppression and attempts to shoehorn them into cookiecutter roles that serve societies which deny them the freedoms women themselves facilitate. Whatever the differences that may have existed between Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre, they shared one immutable characteristic: They were female.
in a world where gender determined destiny. Both found voices and did not let formidable obstacles silence them. They were not alone. They were part of a larger community whose legacy is just now coming to light. Ann Messenger's analogy comparing the restoration of an old painting to the effort to rescue part of our literary heritage is an apt one. It is hoped this work has gone a little way towards restoring two of her "dim and invisible figures."
REFERENCES


VITA

Amy Margaret Atchley was born May 10, 1957, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She attended St. Thomas More Elementary School and St. Joseph's Academy there. As a student at Louisiana Tech University, she received two degrees in Speech: a Bachelor of Arts in 1979 and a Master of Arts in 1982. While pursuing a doctorate in Theatre at Louisiana State University, Atchley is an Instructor in Speech and Drama at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia.
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Title of Dissertation: Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre: A Materialist-Feminist Study

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Date of Examination: April 7, 1995