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LADY LIBERTINES, FEMALE FOPS, AND LADY JULIA FULBANK:
APHRA BEHN'S EXTRAORDINARY FEMALE CHARACTERS.

By

Sarah A. Amundsen

A Thesis submitted to the faculty
of Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

LADY LIBERTINES, FEMALE FOPS, AND LADY JULIA FULBANK:

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Department of Theatre and Media Arts, BYU

Master of Arts

Aphra Behn has, throughout her life and subsequent years, been both demonized as a writer of bawdy and licentious plays and poetry as well as being hailed as the forerunner of female writers. She was a woman writing in a man's world, and not only survived the experience, but was exceptionally successful in her efforts. While so little is known about her background, the numerous plays she has left behind demonstrate a skilled author in many forms, as well as a creative and innovative storyteller. This thesis will examine how Behn used the traditional theatrical forms of the time and created dynamic female characters that were quite unique in their own ways. Stock characters were a standard in Restoration comedies, and she used these types to make significantly stronger female characters than those portrayed by her contemporary male playwrights. I will examine and compare her female libertines to the traditional male libertines in the plays *The Rover or The Banish't Cavaliers* and *The Feign'd Curtizans or A Night's Intrigue*. Following this, I will describe how her female fop in *Sir Patient Fancy* is so much superior to the customary male fop. The succeeding chapter will examine Lady Julia Fulbank from *The Luckey Chance or An Alderman's Bargain* and demonstrates how Behn was able to move outside of the traditional types of characters expected in these plays to

create an entirely new character that has no counterpart in any Restoration play. Behn used the forms and tools available to her to create much more independent and dominant female characters than those expected in the genre. She created a voice for women, and the voice strongly declared that women were as capable, if not more so, than men.

Keywords: Aphra Behn, libertines, cuckolds, Restoration, theatre

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Chapter One—Introduction

Beauty, like Wit, can onely charm when new;

Is there no merit then in being true?

Wit rather shou'd an estimation hold

With Wine, which is still best for being old.

(Prologue to The Young King)

Thus begins Aphra Behn's prologue to *The Young King*, one of at least seventeen plays written in her seventeen-year career. And she is correct—her wit has aged well and now offers a variety of interesting topics for those who seek to re-examine historical texts to find relevant theory for discussion today. The English Restoration was a dynamic period marked by religious, political and cultural upheavals, as well as scientific and artistic innovations. While most of these changes were created and ushered in by men, Behn stands apart as the first woman in England to make a living as a playwright—a field, to this point, completely dominated by men. However, her success did not come easily—she suffered from criticism and prejudice from her audiences and contemporaries through much of her career. Her work was constantly accused of excessive bawdiness, which she stoutly defended on multiple occasions as only being leveled at her because she was a woman writing in a man's world. She resisted the constraints placed on women by continuing her prolific writing career up to the time of her death in 1689, and she stretched the boundaries of what was considered acceptable behavior for a woman, not only in her life but through the characters in her plays. She demonstrated through her female characters that women were perfectly capable of participating in an intellectually and sexually free society, and should be able to do so. Her female characters were created along the lines of Restoration

comedy types, but they exhibited an ability to out-think, out-plan, and generally out-wit their male opponents in an effort to make their own life choices. The types of conduct that her female characters demonstrated would have been considered unacceptable in society, so while her plays stretched female ability much farther than the male playwrights did, in the world of the plays the transgressive behaviors could still be quickly contained by the theatrical setting. Regardless of how they were received at the time, her female characters *were* different from other playwrights, and this difference is one of the reasons that so many modern feminist writers have taken such an interest in her work. She created a space not only for professional women, but strong, intelligent and sexually aware women who expected to be accepted on their own terms.

Criticism and Response

Although during her lifetime Behn's work was constantly under attack for its bawdiness, general unsuitability for female audiences, and inferiority as being written by a woman, she was always quick to defend herself. To these insults she wrote the Preface to *The Luckey Chance* claiming that her critics were jealous that she had achieved a third days performance in which the playwright would receive remuneration for the work. She goes on to defend her work saying

“They charge it with the old never failing Scandal—That ‘tis not fit for the Ladys: As if (if it were as they falsly give it out) the Ladys were oblig’d to hear Indecencys only from their Pens and Plays; and some of them have ventur’d to treat ‘em as Coursely as ‘twas possible, without the least Reproach from them; and in some of their most Celebrated Plays have entertained ‘em with things, that if I should her strip from their Wit and Occasion that conducts ‘em in and

makes them proper, their fair Cheeks would perhaps wear a natural Colour at the reading them: yet are never taken Notice of, because a Man writ them, and they may hear that from them they blush at from a Woman”¹

Her outrage was apparent, and truly, her work was no more bawdy or licentious than her contemporaries. She was simply an anomaly—a woman successfully writing in what had been, up to that point, a strictly male profession. To other’s insistence that her work was bawdy, she continued her defense in the Preface to the *Luckey Chance*, listing several of the most popular plays of the time that she felt were equally risqué, but that:

[i]f I should repeat the Words exprest in these Scenes I mention, I might justly be charg’d with coarse ill Manners, and very little Modesty, and yet they so naturally fall into the places they are design’d for, and so are proper for the Business, that there is not the least Fault to be found with them; though I say those things in any of mine wou’d damn the whole Peice, and alarm the Town.²

She insisted that because the particularly objectionable behavior of a woman leaving the stage, “who goes with a Man she never saw before, and comes out again the joyfull’st Woman alive, for having made her Husband a Cuckold with such Dexterity”³ is not improper because it is appropriate to the action of the play. She also complained that her plays were insulted because of the gender of the writer, and furthers her protest with her epilogue from *Sir Patient Fancy*, saying:

¹ Behn, Aphra. *The Luckey Chance or An Alderman’s Bargain*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 7 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), Preface, 11-19.

² *Ibid.*, 71-76.

³ *Ibid.*, 59-61

I Here, and there, o'reheard a Coxcomb Cry
Ah, Rott it—'tis a Womans Comedy,
One, who because she lately chanc't to please us,
With her Damn'd stuff will never cease to teaze us.
What has poor Woman done that she must be,
Debar'd from Sense and Sacred Poetrie?
Why in this Age has Heaven allow'd you more,
And Women less of Wit than heretofore?
We once were fam'd in Story, and cou'd write
Equall to men; cou'd Govern, nay cou'd Fight.
We still have passive Valour, and can show
Wou'd Custom give us leave the Active too,
Since we no provocations want from you.
For who but we, cou'd your Dull Fopperies bear,
Your Saucy Love, and your brisk Nonsense hear;
Indure your worse than womanish affectation,
Which renders you the Nuisance of the Nation; [...]
To all the Men of Witt we will subscribe:
Bur for you half Wits, you unthinking Tribe,
We'll let you see, what e're besides we doe,
How Artfully we Copy some of you
And if you're drawn to th'life, pray tell me then

Why Women should not write as well as Men.⁴

She was outspoken in her defense of herself and her work and insisted that much of the invective aimed at her was because of her gender. This type of criticism extended for centuries after her death with mostly male critics denigrating not only her work but also her reputation. She defended her works valiantly against the charges laid against them, but eventually her contemporaries began to attack more than just her work.

Sometime during 1686-87 an anonymous poem was written that was a much more personal attack than previous attacks on her work alone. The poem, entitled *The Epistle to Julian* described her:

Doth that lewd harlot, that poetic queen,
 Famed through White Friars, you know who I mean,
 Mend for reproof, others set up in spight,
 To flux, take glisters, vomits, purge and write.
 Long with a sciatica she's beside lame,
 Her limbs distortured, nerves shrunk up with pain,
 And therefore I'll all sharp reflection shun,
 Poverty, poetry, pox are plagues enough for one.⁵

As she was reaching the end of her life, the attacks moved from solely her work to her personal appearance and life. She had been previously accounted beautiful, but as she aged, her infirmity

⁴ Behn, Aphra. *Sir Patient Fancy*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays Vol. 6 of The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), Epilogue 1-17 & 39-44. References are to lines.

⁵ Morgan, Fidelis. *The Female Wits: Women Playwrights of the Restoration*, (London: VIRAGO Press Limited, 1981), 22.

became a new source of ridicule to her detractors. After her death, most referred to her as too shameful and dirty to write about and they tried to consign her life and work to obscurity. In an article written in the *Biographica Britannica*, Dr. Kippis wrote that:

The wit of her comedies seems to be generally acknowledged, and it is equally acknowledged that they are very indecent, on which account I have not thought myself under any obligation to peruse them. It would have been an unworthy employment, nicely to estimate a wit which, having been applied to the purposes of impiety and vice, ought not only to be held up in the utmost detestation, but consigned, if possible to eternal oblivion. It is some consolation to reflect that Mrs Behn's works are now little regarded her novel excepted, which, we suppose, have still many readers among that unhappily too numerous a class of people who devour the trash of the circulating libraries.⁶

The prevailing opinion of Behn's overall "nastiness" remained until the early part of the twentieth century.

But not everyone despised her work—perhaps one of the best known proponents of her work was Virginia Woolf who wanted to emulate Behn's insistence on making a living by her pen. She writes in *A Room of One's Own*,

With Mrs. Behn we turn a very important corner on the road. We leave behind, shut up in their parks among their folios, those solitary great ladies who wrote without audience or criticism, for their own delight alone. We come to town and rub shoulders with ordinary people in the streets. Mrs. Behn

⁶ Morgan, Fidelis. *The Female Wits: Women Playwrights of the Restoration*, (London: VIRAGO Press Limited, 1981), 22-23.

was a middle class woman with all the plebian virtues of humour, vitality and courage; a woman forced by the death of her husband and some unfortunate adventures of her own to make a living by her wits. She had to work on equal terms with men. She made, by working very hard, enough to live on. The importance of that fact outweighs anything that she actually wrote[...] for here begins the freedom of the mind, or rather the possibility that in the course of time the mind will be free to write what it likes.⁷

It took centuries for Behn's reputation to be salvaged from the wreckage of jealous contemporaries and judgmental critics, but once recovered her notoriety was quickly subsumed in the real quality of her work and life.

George Woodcock, author of *The Incomparable Aphra* has a more kind perspective on her life and career than her contemporaries did—though he has the benefit of hindsight. He writes that

Her novels were regarded as mere ephemerae produced to satisfy an economic need, while her struggle for the recognition of woman's right to live by intellectual work stirred so little real attention that, outside her own writings, there is almost no reference to it in contemporary literature—certainly none that recognized its importance as the beginning of a great social revolution which would result in an entire change of feminine status.⁸

⁷ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 68-69.

⁸ Woodcock, George. *The Incomparable Aphra*, (New York: T. V. Boardman and Company Limited, 1948), 226.

Writing a biography hundreds of years after her death, Woolf and Woodcock are able to grasp the implications of Behn's career and the effect that it would have not only on the literary world, but on the ability that women would have to pick up their own pens, not just as a private hobby or past-time but as an actual avenue for expression of their ideas and a method of support. Despite the transgressive nature of her work, Behn's success as a writer created opportunities for other women to follow in her footsteps.

Transgressive Theatre

Without question, Behn created situations in her plays that were contrary to the societal norms of the time. Her women were much more independent and outspoken than women were expected to be in the patrilineal society of the seventeenth century. Robert Markley, author of "Behn and the Unstable Conditions of Social Comedy," writes that "[s]ocial comedy [...] tests as well as reinforces the limits of social and sexual decorum by exploiting the instability of a parodic, often transgressive wit."⁹ With humor, the plays pointed out the men's failings and encouraged women's sexual and outré behavior. Markley goes on to say that "[the] usual targets of such satiric laughter are sexually incompetent males and unfashionable pretenders to wit, men who fail to seduce women into the complicity demanded by a system that exploits their bodies and denies them most legal rights."¹⁰

One of the many complaints against Behn's work was that it was "bawdy". She insisted that her plays were no more inappropriate than her contemporaries, but where the difference lies is in how much more effective and able her female characters are to compete in the men's world

⁹ Robert Markley "Behn and the Unstable Conditions of Social Comedy" from *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* ed. Deborah Payne Fisk, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

of wit and intelligence. In the plays written by men, the female characters were eventually re-subjected in the proper social strata. Desiring women were either properly married to the hero or had their pretensions thoroughly squelched. Behn's women on the other hand, while often married off, made their own decisions and choices in regards to their partners and associates.

Markley notes that “[i]n Behn's comedies, female desire is neither travestied, as it is in figures like Congreve's *Lady Wishfort*, nor celebrated as the psychological cornerstone of a golden-age sexuality; instead it undermines the ideological structures of feminine identity.”¹¹ Behn's female characters were neither squelched nor degraded, and this could have encouraged the complaints of indecency that were so frequently leveled at her and her work. The plays presented a version of female sexuality and intelligence that was at odds with society, and thus pressed firmly on the boundaries of what was acceptable. Markley sums up the situation saying that “her plays explore the process—more difficult for women than for men—of ideological suturing between honour and virtue as both internalized standards of integrity and as deceptive and repressive mechanism to constrain female desire.”¹²

Behn's “standards of integrity” were somewhat different than those of the male playwrights and she asserted those standards in an effort to demonstrate women's ability to exist outside of the subjected position they were placed in socially. She herself was participating in the intellectual fervor of the time and her abilities were reflected in her characters' capability to do so as well. With these examples, she clearly demonstrated women's ability to not only participate in the intellectual activities, but to manage their own sexuality outside of the patrilineal strictures placed on women.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹² *Ibid.*, 103.

Behn's Different Women

Character types were expected in Restoration comedies, and each type was supposed to exhibit a very specific type of behavior. The libertine was supposed to seduce as many women as possible into having sex with no strings attached. He should always be witty, clever and so likeable that his reprehensible behavior can be overlooked in the general charm of his character. The libertine was exemplified by his rejection of all moral codes; his determined womanizing; and his independent determination to serve, please, and cater only to his own wants and desires. David Foxon in his book, *Libertine Literature in London* called this type of lifestyle “a fashionable and pervasive mode of thought whose freedom related to religion, politics, and society as well as to sexual life.”¹³ Libertine characters exemplified the carefree, capricious, and sensational lifestyles of some of the major players in Restoration society.

The fop was expected to make a fool of himself by his pretentious speeches, outlandish dress, and general inability to compete with the libertine in anything. He was the antithesis of the libertine; in trying to emulate the libertine, he made himself a fool. According to Moira E. Casey, author of the article “The Fop” ‘Apes and Echoes of Men’: Gentlemanly Ideals and the Restoration,” the fop was “an aristocratic figure who represents the false wit, exaggerated fashions, and superficial aspirations of pretentious Restoration Courtiers.”¹⁴ These were men, and sometimes women, who were so concerned about their clothes, who they knew, and what everyone was saying about everyone else that they were almost oblivious to the real world around them. He was always behind in his wooing and was usually unsuccessful in any attempt

¹³Foxon, David, *Libertine Literature in England 1660-1745* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1965) 49.

¹⁴Casey, Moira E. “The Fop: ‘Apes and Echoes of Men’: Gentlemanly Ideals and the Restoration.” In *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, edited by Vicki K. Janik, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 207-08.

to engage a woman's attention, and was often bilked out of his possessions by unscrupulous "friends" and prostitutes.

The cuckolded husband was generally as foolish as the fops, but the humor of their characters comes from their inability to either sexually satisfy their wife or to control her actions sufficiently. The cuckold's inability to control his wife's sexual proclivities unmanned him at every turn, and was generally mocked by the other characters in the play. J. L. Styan, author of *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, writes that "[i]n the plays all old husbands fear it at the hands of young wives, and no device—holding the girl under lock and key, keeping her in ignorance, hiding or disguising her—can prevent the inevitable moment when he is looking the wrong way."¹⁵ In most plays there was no question that an old man married to a young and pretty woman would eventually lose her to a libertine character. He is, in fact, usually so convinced that every younger man is out to sleep with his wife that he eventually pushes her into the arms of someone willing to horn him a cuckold.

Behn also used these stereotypes in her plays, but in many cases she made them female instead of the traditionally male figures. Her female characters though, came out on top in situations that would normally call for a failure for comedic effect. She owned the types and elaborated on them so that her female libertines were not as reprehensible as the male libertines, and they were also more dimensional than the typically flat character types. Her female fop, though foolish, was not the butt of everyone else's pranks and tricks—in fact she plays her own jokes on those about her and comes off victorious in situations where the fop would typically fail. The cuckolded husband, far from having a lascivious and loose wife, has an honorable and

¹⁵ Styan, J. L. *Restoration Comedy in Performance*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 226.

honest companion, but because of his own insecurity and greed, horns himself and loses his standing in his household. Markley sums up Behn's use of the Restoration comedy, saying:

Social Comedy, in effect, provides different strategies for incorporating often independently-minded women into a system that denies or restricts their property rights in the name of an absolutist sexual morality and an over-determined rhetoric of love: wits seduce, fools compel, and fops have failed from the start.¹⁶

Behn used these stereotypes to demonstrate women's ability to participate in the intellectually stimulating society of the time and to show that women could be as sexually aware as men. She showed that women were not only capable of these attributes but that they should be as fully able to participate in them as men were.

Gender Inequality

Much has been written about the Restoration, insisting that there was a great deal of gender equality during this time. Maureen Waller, in her book *The English Marriage: Tales of Love, Money and Adultery*, quotes a sixteenth century commentator who said that “[n]ow the women of England, who have mostly blue-grey eyes and are fair and pretty, have far more liberty than in other lands and know just how to make good use of it, for they often stroll out or drive by in very gorgeous clothes and the men must put up with such ways.”¹⁷ This idea was also gathered from the relationships between men and women in the literature of the era—Restoration comedy generally revolved around clever couples searching for and finding love on their own

¹⁶ Ibid., 100.

¹⁷ Waller, Maureen, *The English Marriage: Tales of Love, Money and Adultery* (London: John Murray, 2009), 1.

terms. To some extent this was true, but women were still living their lives under the control of their king, their father, and sometimes their other male relatives. Educational and marriage choices, were, to a large degree determined by a girl's family, and it was accepted by both men and women alike that female intelligence was inferior to a man's, simply as a matter of biology. A woman's education basically consisted of preparing her to be a wife, and if a woman did receive a real education, she "might well be scorned for [her] attainments. In principle, society rewarded the learned woman with disapproval or at best suspicion."¹⁸ It was considered a waste of time and energy for a woman to be classically educated and N. H. Keeble quotes a letter from Sir Ralph Verney to his god-daughter chastising her for her intellectual inclinations. He wrote:

I did not think you had beene guilty of soe much learning as I see you are; and yet it seems you rest unsatisfied or else you would not threaten Lattin, Greeke and Hebrew too. Good sweet-hart bee not soe covitous; believe me, a Bible (with the Common prayer) and a goode plain cattichisme in your Mother Tongue being well read and practiced, is well worth all the rest and much more sutable to your sex; I know your Father thinks this false doctrine, but bee confident your husband will bee of my oppinion. In French you cannot bee too cunning for that language affords many admirable bookes fit for you, as Romances, Plays, Poetry, Stories of illustrious (not learned) Woemen, receipts for preserving, making creames and all sorts of cookeryes, ordering your gardens, and in Breif all manner of good housewifery.¹⁹

¹⁸ Fraser, Antonia, *The Weaker Vessel* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1984), 120.

¹⁹ Keeble, N. H., *The Restoration: England in the 1660's* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 194.

He presses his god-daughter to satisfy herself with reading works of fiction and literature that would improve her skills as a housewife, and thus make her more valuable to a husband. Despite the support the girl had obviously received from her own father, she was strongly encouraged to abstain from learning any other languages (besides the smattering of French) as it may damage her marriage prospects. A woman's place was at home, and any trespass into the man's intellectual territory was considered a breach of decorum and a usurpation of male rights.

Some members of the clergy wrote treatises on the mutual respect and equality that should exist between men and women, husbands and wives; qualified by such statements as “the husband hath ever even in all things a superiority.”²⁰ Traditional wedding vows for men and women were identical with the exception of the command given to women to “obey” their husbands. And despite the proliferation of literature and entertainment pointing toward the ideal “love match” and a trend toward such unions, arranged marriages were still planned and undertaken among the upper echelons of society as a means of securing family titles, fortunes, and loyalty to the monarchy. Maureen Waller writes that:

[on] her wedding day, a woman stepped into the same legal category as wards, lunatics, idiots and outlaws. She surrendered her rights as a *feme sole*, a single woman who enjoyed many of the same rights as men, for those of a *feme covert*, subject to a whole series of legal handicaps[...] On marriage, a woman literally became her husband's property.²¹

As such, this union mimicked the authority of the king over his people. Belinda Roberts Peters writes in her book, *Marriage in Seventeenth-Century English Political Thought* that

²⁰ Yalom, Marilyn, *A History of the Wife* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 111.

²¹ Waller, Maureen, *The English Marriage: Tales of Love, Money and Adultery* (London: John Murray, 2009), 1-2.

the obligations of obedience and fellow governance that every husband required of his wife within the household were a model for his own role in the kingdom. The complex interdependence of these ideas [...] meant that marriage was represented not simply as the only means of legitimate reproduction, but as the foundation of all legitimate subjection and production in the state, the means by which political stability, religious unity, and social order were maintained and recreated with each new generation.²²

Just as a citizen was subject to his king, a wife was subject to her husband, and was expected to restrict her interests to her home and family. But Behn resisted this assumption in her writing by expressing support for the King in her plays. She also rejected a passive role by creating female characters that were at least as capable as men in entering into intellectual and sexual pursuits.

My Relationship with Aphra Behn

When I was a beginning student of theatre history, Aphra Behn seemed to me the epitome of adventuresome and fearless womanhood. Like many students in an introductory theatre history class, I was assigned to read *The Rover* and while the play was entertaining, it was the information about Behn herself that I found so fascinating. Her deviance from the societal norms imposed upon women caught my attention, and the more I studied her various exploits and adventures, such as her time in Surinam as a young woman and her stint as a spy for Charles II, the more I came to appreciate her contribution to playwriting. Despite the mystery that

²² Peters, Belinda Roberts, *Marriage in Seventeenth-Century English Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 77-78.

surrounds her biography, due primarily, to the dearth of information about her private life, she has always seemed to me to be both an independent woman and a gifted writer with an adventurous spirit. Reading her plays, I couldn't help but to read her voice and her life into the plot to fill in the holes that her own history has left open—and I am not alone in this practice. Heidi Hutner acknowledges this problem, saying that “while Aphra Behn is finally gaining recognition from literary critics, they still tend to read her work—as earlier critics did—as an embellishment of her sensationalized biography.”²³ She goes on to explain that “until very recently, the vast majority of critical studies on Behn have been dominated by the premise that understanding her biography is a surefire means to understanding her work.”²⁴ Since a complete understanding of her biography is impossible, by this theory we can never fully understand Behn's work. However, the impact her work has had in literature and society has remained despite the lack of biographical information and so, to fully and critically analyze the texts, I must put the infatuation I have for the playwright's life aside for the time being. To infuse a critical and analytical reading with romantic and adventurous biographical ephemera can only cloud a close reading of the text. While I cannot help but be drawn to the individual, I will strive to be unbiased in my analysis of her work, focusing not on the adventurous life of the playwright, but her skillful use of language and wit to so adeptly illustrate women's ability to match the masculine intellectual and sexual pursuits of the time.

With the current emphasis on freeing our critical reading from biographical overtones, many current researchers²⁵ have gone back to square one, if you will, to best analyze and

²³Hutner, Heidi, ed., *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ Janet Todd, is perhaps the most prolific author of Behn studies. Her books include *Aphra Behn Studies*, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, as well as editing the 1992 edition of *The Complete Works of Aphra Behn* and *The*

contextualize Behn's canon. As an extremely prolific writer (at least seventeen plays are certainly hers with up to three more being credited to her, several volumes of poetry, four novels and two short stories) there is much to consider. In this reading, I will draw examples from her plays *The Feign'd Curtizans*, *The Luckey Chance*, *Sir Patient Fancy*, and *The Rover* as I demonstrate the different verbal ways Behn's women had of accomplishing their goals. From seduction, to argument, to pompously declaiming proof of education, or romantically declaring undying love, Behn's female characters often surpass the male characters in their use of wit, intelligence, and language as they manipulate, seduce, and cajole exactly what they want from their male counterparts. They are her examples of intellectually superior and sexually free females who demonstrate the abilities of women to take advantage of opportunities that should be available to women outside of the lines of the plays. Behn created characters that allowed women in the audience to see other opportunities and examples of actions that should be available to all types of women.

Chapter Overview

Throughout this thesis I will examine Aphra Behn's female characters that stepped beyond the appropriate modes of behavior to create powerful women in a time when women were portrayed by her contemporaries as anything but. Her female characters were as intellectually and sexually open as not only most male characters were, but as men in Restoration society were as well. In *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Curtizans* Behn created independent, young virgin characters who were willing to set aside the rules they had been raised to obey in order to

take up the role of libertines so as to make their own life and marriage choices. Hellena from *The Rover* and Cornelia from *The Feign'd Curtizans* both had family that intended to send them to convents for the rest of their lives. Rather than succumbing to their family's designs that would render them powerless to make any other choices in their lives, they chose to run away and find someone who would marry them before that irrevocable step could be taken. Cornelia's sister, Marcella, though not threatened with a convent, was threatened with an arranged marriage to an old, deformed and wealthy man as a means of securing the family fortune and even increasing it. She staunchly resisted these machinations, insisting on choosing her own spouse—one who was physically appealing to her, instead of the financially superior mate chosen by her family. These were characters who fully understood the value their virginity had in contracting an appropriate marriage, and while they dressed and acted the part of sexually available women, they were careful to maintain their virginity until they were married. Although they were not having casual sex like the libertines they were pretending to be, they still took on the role and carefully balanced their sexuality with their virginity in order to accomplish their goals of selecting their own mate.

When Lady Knowell makes her appearance in *Sir Patient Fancy*, she is labeled as a fop by her family and neighbors, and she spouts badly translated Greek and Latin phrases that enhance that image. However, as foolish and pretentious as she acts, she is diametrically different from typical fops. While most fops end the play having been made a fool of by everyone else, Lady Knowell uses her adroit manipulative skills to manage not only her own affairs, but the relationships of her offspring, as well as bamboozling her neighbor and most vociferous detractor, Sir Patient. She acts like she is besotted with a much younger man and pretends that she intends to marry him. While this type of behavior is often seen from other

widowed female characters, this is merely a ruse designed to further her own aims. She also continuously touts her education and learning and, as mentioned previously, peppers her conversations with phrases in ancient languages. Because the phrases are so badly translated, the use of them makes her look silly. However, as badly translated they are, the fact that she has enough of a grasp on languages (usually only learned by men) to make the effort indicates her ability to educate herself. She is much cleverer than she is given credit for by any of the other characters, and by the end of the play has put everyone into the position that she feels is best for them.

Lady Julia Fulbank, from *The Luckey Chance* is a wife who makes her husband a cuckold. However, unlike most other cuckold-making wives in Restoration comedies, Lady Julia had neither the intention nor the desire to do so. She entered into her marriage with the rich, old Sir Cautious solely for the financial security to be gained by it. Even though she was in love with Gayman, she decided that she would be entirely, physically faithful to the doddering old man for the duration of their marriage. However, when faced with the option of paying his expensive gambling debt to Gayman or giving him a night with his wife, Sir Cautious takes on the role of a pimp and secrets Gayman into Lady Julia's bedchamber, thereby crowning himself with the cuckolds horns. He would never have earned that title by Lady Julia's hand, but his overweening avarice was placed before his reputation when he chose to let another man sleep with his wife. But her strength of character and ability to take control of her relationships sets her apart from any other cuckolding wives in Restoration comedies.

Aphra Behn's female characters were much stronger, more independent, intelligent, and determined than other characters created by male playwrights. She wrote women who could actually be real people rather than the silly and superficial characters expected in Restoration

comedies. Her works, though consigned to the gutter by many historians have re-emerged from history to demonstrate the ability that Behn seems to have, to create women who were as capable as men of pursuing their intellectual and sexual pursuits. She showed her contemporaries that women were even capable of supporting themselves on their own, by their own cleverness.

Chapter Two—Lady Libertines Capture Their Men.

*A thousand martyrs I have made,
 All sacrificed to my desire,
 A thousand beauties have betrayed,
 That languish in resistless fire [...]
 I never vowed nor sighed in vain,
 But both, though false, were well received; [...]
 And while I thus at random rove
 Despise the fools that whine for love.*

(The Libertine, 1688)

*Faith Sir, I am of a Nation, that are of opinion a womans Honour is not worth
 guarding when she has a mind to part with it.*

(Willmore, in *The Rover* defending Hellena's choice to marry him.)

The seductive banter of the libertine hero in his attempt to woo the object of his affection into his bed is a common plot element of Restoration comedy. The libertine's highly intellectual conversation, witty repartee, charm and good looks are often the only assets that he can claim, but he uses them remarkably well to further his seduction efforts. David Foxon in his book, *Libertine Literature in London*, called this type of lifestyle “a fashionable and pervasive mode of

thought whose freedom related to religion, politics, and society as well as to sexual life.”¹ This was the acceptable mode of behavior in Charles’ court and playwrights modeled their libertine characters on real life libertines and their behaviors as demonstrated in John Dryden’s dedication to *Marriage á la Mode*. He writes specifically to John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, saying “the best comic writers of our age will join with me to acknowledge that they have copied the gallantries of courts, the delicacy of expression, and the decencies of behavior from your lordship with more success than if they had taken their models from the court of France.”²

The libertines were not just the ideal to their contemporaries, but were an inspiration for the writers as well. Libertine characters exemplified the carefree, capricious, and sensational lifestyles of some of the major players in the society of the time and made themselves notorious by their behavior. Some of Aphra Behn’s libertine characters are Galliard from *The Feign’d Curtizans*, and most famously, Willmore from *The Rover*. They are quite persuasive in their efforts to obtain their goals—they are looking for willing females who will have sex with them with no strings attached.

This chapter will examine the male libertine’s attempts to seduce women, while simultaneously being manipulated by a “female libertine.” These “female libertines” were virgins of high birth who were proactively seeking a husband of their own choosing, rather than submitting to the plans that their families have for their futures. While these female characters act the part of a libertine, claiming to reject the societal strictures placed on women such as chastity and modesty, they are determined that they will not undervalue their marital prospects

¹Foxon, David, *Libertine Literature in England 1660-1745* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1965) 49.

² Dryden, John. *Marriage á la Mode*. Edited by Mark S. Auburn, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 1.1. 19-23.

by having sex before they are married. They take on the role and act the part of a libertine in order to captivate and eventually capture the actual libertine of their choice. When a female libertine does actively seek out a sexual liaison with the man she hopes to marry, she is not able to maintain her dominance in the relationship and must concede to the arranged marriage planned for her

Libertine Behavior

The libertine was seen as the beau ideal among men—they were the intellectual, sophisticated, clever, masculine exemplar that men looked up to and attempted to emulate. The libertine character is exemplified by his rejection of sexual and religious moral codes, his determined womanizing, and his independent resolve to serve, please and cater only to his own wants and desires. Religious notions of chastity and moralistic ideals upon the proper way to behave were tossed aside in the determined pursuit of sex, fun, and carefree living. They were, however, more in sync with the social codes of the time—they recognized the importance of stylish dress, skilled womanizing, generally making themselves indispensable at societal and court entertainments, and above all other social attributes, witty repartee. Dawn Lewcock, author of *Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene in the Restoration Theatre* writes that “[s]ocial converse [...] was also conducted as a formal game which required knowledge of certain rules: adroit use of language counted not only as a social grace but also as a sign of a cultivated mind.”³ The badinage of a libertine was expected to demonstrate his ability to out-think those in conversation with him, and allowed him the opportunity to demonstrate exactly how verbally

³ Lewcock, Dawn. *Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene in the Restoration Theatre* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2008), 103.

clever he could be. Lewcock goes on to note that “at the time, wit was, if not quite commonplace, an expected social talent displaying breadth and depth of knowledge and the right conduct in society, as well as nimble use of language.”⁴ The successful “use of language” is what set the libertines apart from the less successful male characters in the play—especially fops.

Libertines covered a wide range of behaviors—not all of them had the same type of characteristics. Robert D. Hume, author of *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama 1660-1800* wrote that “to lump all genuine rakes in a single category seem to me to ignore clear and important distinctions.”⁵ Hume identifies three major types of libertines—“the extravagant rake, the vicious rake, and the [...] philosophical libertine.”⁶ The “extravagant rake” is designated by his wild behavior, outrageous conversation, and general extremities of action. He “is characterized by frantic intensity, promiscuity, crazy impulsiveness, cheekiness, reckless frivolity, breezy vanity, and devastating self-assurance.”⁷ The “vicious rake” is simply that—consciousless and implacable in obtaining exactly what he wants—he is “invariably despicable. Often he is threatening and hateful, capable of inflicting irreparable harm.”⁸ The “philosophical libertine” follows the social codes of Court behavior, “and does so without the comic exuberance which would render it innocuous.”⁹ These characteristics are of course not absolutes, but often blended their behaviors, but this gives a general overview of the types of characters to consider when discussing a libertine in Restoration plays. And fictional libertines were often modeled after the real libertines abounding in Charles II’s court.

⁴ Ibid., 104.

⁵ Hume, Robert D., *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 138.

⁶ Ibid., 159.

⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁹ Ibid., 160.

Deborah Payne Fisk, in her introduction to a small anthology of Restoration libertine plays identifies Charles II, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and John Wilmot Earl of Rochester as the epitome of the libertine that the playwrights sought to copy in their plays—as they “gave free reign to their sexual appetites [...and] defied basic standards of decency.”¹⁰ For example, she notes that, “keeping track of the monarch’s numerous sexual conquests became something of a national pastime, as did chronicling the health of the royal ‘member.’”¹¹ Buckingham, she writes, “killed the husband of his mistress in a duel,”¹² but she considers Rochester to be the most extravagant of the libertines. She writes that “he kidnapped his future wife (her father had the good sense to question Rochester’s suitability as a prospective mate); he wrote scatological and pornographic lyrics; he tipped over a sundial in the king’s garden; and he involved the king in a whorehouse caper that included the dramatist George Etherege.”¹³ However, these men are not alone in their seduction efforts. While libertines were expected to be men, Aphra Behn created female characters that also claimed to promote this type of behavior in an attempt to accomplish their own goals. In Behn’s plays, libertine heroes are joined by libertine heroines who are just as determined as the men to get what they want—though their ultimate goal is different from that of the men.

On the surface, Behn’s female libertines exactly match their male counterparts. They claim to be sexually adventurous and are so intelligent and witty that the male libertines often cannot keep up with them in their sexually charged badinage. These characters claim to want to throw off the constraints of societal mores, take a lover, and embrace a libertine lifestyle of

¹⁰ Fisk, Deborah Payne ed., *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xviii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹² *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xviii.

carefree enjoyment, but they have an ulterior motive in their pursuits. While the men are looking for free and easy sexual partners, the women are actively seeking a more secure future with a spouse of their own choosing. As virgins of high birth, their right to select their own spouse would be severely curtailed—a spouse would most likely be chosen for them by their parents, but these women are determined to make their own marital choices. Behn's characters resist this parental dominance in their conversations with their confidants, and insist on choosing a mate for themselves—one to whom they are physically attracted as well as of a like personality. However, rather than facing down their parents (many of whom are absent), the girls flee their homes, giving themselves a temporarily liberated status. Behn's female libertines escape their parental and marital constraints in order to seduce the man they have selected into wedlock all the while (most of them) are very careful with their virginity—they recognize the value a chaste reputation has in actually securing the husband of their choice.

While they may initially be in a weaker position than their male counterparts, they have the ability and the intelligence to reverse their positions. So while they successfully employ the tactics of witty repartee, and appearing to be sexually available, they are actually much stricter than the male libertines. They are willing to act the part, but they do not lose sight of their goal—a legal and reputation-saving marriage. This role playing falls in line with typical Restoration Comedy behavior—disguises, masks, and persona's were common fare in these plays. David Turner, author of *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England 1660-1740*, writes that “[f]ictionalised London life was as duplicitous as it was competitive. The stage was instrumental in constructing a view of a fashionable society obsessed with outward

appearances, a world in which people, like players, were constantly playing roles.”¹⁴ In the plays the female “libertines” are easily able to attract the object of their affection with their well-played libertine demeanor while concealing their conservative ulterior motives. But when a male libertine meets a female “libertine” in Behn’s plays, her witty heroines come out on top with their newly betrothed or married spouse in tow. Behn’s female libertines—Hellena from *The Rover*, and Cornelia, Marcella, and Laura Lucretia from *The Feign’d Curtizans*, while perhaps not specifically modeled on real life libertines, were as witty, intelligent, sexually adventurous, and determined to satisfy their own desires as the other male libertine characters. Hellena and Willmore from *The Rover* seem to be the epitome of the competitive libertine couple, but in Behn’s later play, *The Feign’d Curtizans*, she creates even more female characters, playing the part of a libertine who are less verbally combative with the object of their affection, but who go to even greater lengths to get exactly what they want for themselves.

The Rover or The Banish’t Cavaliers

The Rover or The Banish’t Cavaliers, first performed in 1677, was Behn’s most popular play with multiple performances at court and revivals on the public stage. The main players of this comedy are the sisters Hellena, who is about to be sent to a convent by her family, and Florinda, who is being pressured to marry against her will. Florinda is in love with Belvile and Hellena chooses Willmore, the Rover, as her swain. The other major female role is that of Angellica Bianca, the local prostitute who is so beautiful that she can pick and choose from the wealthiest of lovers. Florinda and Belvile are desperate to be married despite his lack of

¹⁴ Turner, David. *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England, 1660-1740*, (Port Chester: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 98.

income and her family's objections, while Willmore is unabashedly in pursuit of sex with any willing female.

The play begins with Hellena and Florinda disguising themselves as gypsies and sneaking out of their house to attend Carnival. Florinda wants to run into Belvile and arrange an elopement, and Hellena seeks someone with a spirit as adventurous as her own to fall in love with and marry. Hellena meets Willmore who fits the bill of the attractive lover she is seeking and intimates to him that she is willing to have sex with him as long as he saves his love for her alone until they meet again. Before they can meet however, Willmore sees a painting of Angellica Bianca and lusts after the beautiful woman in the image. He cannot afford her asking price, so in retaliation, he steals one of the paintings she has hung on the outside of her house for advertising purposes. Seeing this, Angellica Bianca becomes so enamored of his boldness that she declares her love for him and her willingness to give up sleeping with other, paying men in order to be true to Willmore. After Willmore has enjoyed Angellica Bianca's sexual favors, he turns back to the "gypsy girl"—Hellena whose wit had so intrigued him earlier. She is firm however, that she will not have sex with him until they are married, and finally Willmore gives in only to find that he has stumbled upon an heiress in disguise.

Hellena Outwits Willmore at His Own Game

Hellena and Willmore are each in need. Willmore, who falls more in line with Hume's "extravagant rake," after several months at sea finds himself in need of entertainment in the form of a woman's warm body, and Hellena requires a husband to keep her from being forced to live as a nun for the rest of her life. From the very beginning of their unorthodox courtship, Hellena

has the upper hand, because Willmore is consistently surprised by her display of libertine behavior, which is tailored to match his own extravagant style. He meets her when she is disguised as a gypsy for Carnival and is intrigued by her forthright manner and wit. He begins a flirtation with her inquiring “will you tell an Amorous stranger, what luck he’s like to have?”¹⁵ In true libertine fashion, he sees a woman that he wants and he immediately sets out to see if she is sexually available to him, and if she can be seduced without charging a fee since he has no money with which to pay her if she is indeed a whore. What this libertine doesn’t know is that Hellena has already selected him for her own game of finding a mate and is able to outwit him at every turn.

She is consistently a step ahead of him in their first verbal joust—she knows exactly what he wants and how to pique his curiosity, without revealing anything about herself or committing herself to him in any way. With this demonstration of her wit she must prove to him that she is his intellectual equal and interested in a sexual encounter so that he will not give up on her for easier prey. When he gently hints at offering her something that he would “willingly part with”¹⁶ she quickly devalues any offer he might make her, responding “’tis some Foolish heart you mean, an Inconstant *English* heart, as little worth stealing as your Purse.”¹⁷ With this riposte, she cleverly assures him that she will not be taken in with meaningless vows of love, as well as acknowledging that even if her body were for sale, she is quite aware that he has not the coin to purchase it. However, her flirtatious tone and knowledge of his purpose indicates her own familiarity with the type of liaison Willmore is envisioning.

¹⁵ Behn, Aphra. *The Rover or The Bansi’h’t Cavaliers*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 5 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1.2. 125-126.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.2. 137.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.2. 139-141.

When he pleads for her company based on his long time at sea, she is able to one-up him again by informing him of her upcoming incarceration in a nunnery after which she will never have an opportunity for love again.¹⁸ He feels he has made headway at this point, and he reminds her that “there’s no sinner like a young Saint—nay now there’s no denying me, the Old Law had no Curse (to a Woman) like dying a Maid; witness *Jeptha’s Daughter*.¹⁹ His argument is based on the Biblical account of Jeptha’s daughter who, when she found out she was to be sacrificed by her father requested permission to go the mountain and mourn her virginal state and the fact that it would not be altered in her lifetime. Willmore wants Hellena to know the importance of a sexual encounter to create a full life and feels like he has won the day when she reasonably responds “a very good Text this, if well handled, and I perceive Father Captain, you wou’d impose no severe penance on her who were inclin’d to Console her self, before she took Orders.”²⁰ He presumes her acquiescence is imminent as she continues to ponder his suggestion and indicates her willingness to him by her continued deliberation.

She leads him on by hinting that she’s amenable to enjoying sexual pleasure before entering a convent, which makes Willmore feel that his persuasive argument has won her acquiescence. He begs the location of her home, exclaiming “thy Lodging sweetheart, thy Lodging! or I’m a dead Man!”²¹ which gives Hellena further opportunity to demonstrate her intelligence and deny Willmore at the same time. She queries philosophically “[w]hy must we be either guilty of Fornication or Murder if we converse with you Men—and is there no difference between leave to love me, and leave to lye with me?”²² Disliking the turn the

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.2. 145-164.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1.2. 165-167.

²⁰ Ibid., 1.2. 168-170.

²¹ Ibid., 1.2. 185-186.

²² Ibid., 1.2. 187-189.

conversation has taken, Willmore assures her that “they were made to go together”²³ but he has lost the upper hand in this argument. Even though Willmore believed that he would be able to seduce this unknown gypsy quite easily, he is not terribly concerned when she does not initially leap right into bed with him because she does agree to meet with him later that night as long as he promises to be faithful to her until that time.²⁴

Hellena is rather pleased with her performance with Willmore, and even though she is disappointed that he had sex with Angellica Bianca while he was supposed to be waiting for her, she is still charmed by his wit and finds him the man best suited to her needs. But again, the knowledge she has of his character and inconstancy allows her to manipulate and seduce him into exactly the position that she needs him in—so desperately in love with her that he is willing to marry her in order to possess her. He already likes her wit and is attracted by her form though he hasn’t yet seen her face, but she knows that if she simply concedes and has sex with him then he will use her as he used Angellica Bianca—a stopping point in his quest for more women.

Her insistence on matrimony, combined with her wit, beauty and intelligence are what eventually bring Willmore back to her even though he has an available sexual partner in Angellica Bianca. Because she is constantly able to out-argue and manipulate him so easily, he recognizes her superiority to other loose women, complaining to his companions, “she was some damn’d honest Person of Quality I’m sure, she was so very free and witty.”²⁵ He also realizes that if this is the case, then she is much less likely to be easily led astray.

When she sees him coming fresh from Angellica Bianca’s arms, she is disappointed that he has broken his promise, but not enough to give him up—it merely gives her further

²³ Ibid., 1.2. 190.

²⁴ Ibid., 1.2. 225-226.

²⁵ Ibid., 1.2. 289-290.

ammunition with which to bring him to heel. When she overhears him boast of his conquest to his friends, her response is “Here’s fine encouragement for me to fool on”²⁶ and she is able to use his words against him shortly. He greets her, hoping that she is unaware of his liaison with Angellica Bianca, and immediately jumps to the attack chiding Hellena for making him wait to see her. He tells her that he has become a “Melancholy Dog I have been ever since I was a Lover, how I have walkt the streets like a *Capuchin* with my Hands in my Sleeves.”²⁷ Knowing the falseness of this statement, Hellena nevertheless plays along with his charade questioning if his “appetite” for her has faded with the waiting. He replies that “Faith long fasting Child, spoils a Mans Appetite—yet if you durst treat, I cou’d so lay about me still—”²⁸ This food analogy allows Hellena to slyly insert a mention of matrimony as she asks him if he would “fall to, before a Priest says Grace?”²⁹ Willmore recognizes the allusion and claims that the only thing that could throw him out of favor with her any faster than allusions to marriage would be for her to reveal an ill favored face, which of course is his hint that she unmask so that he can actually see the face of the woman he is trying to seduce. She puts him off a bit longer, and brings up marriage again—but not as something that is desirable, but more as a necessary side-effect of their upcoming sexual relationship. She takes a libertine tone, jesting about marriage as something not to be entered into or taken too seriously, and teases him about his vows of chastity and his modesty—characteristics traditionally expected of virginal young women.

HELLENA: You see Captain, how willing I am to be Friends with you, till
time and ill luck make us Lovers, and ask you the Question first, rather than
put your Modesty to the blush, by asking me (for alas!) I know you Captains

²⁶Ibid., 3.1. 93.

²⁷ Ibid., 3.1. 132-134.

²⁸Ibid., 3.1. 145- 146

²⁹ Ibid., 3.1. 147

are such strict Men, and such severe observers of your Vows to Chastity, that
 ‘twill be hard to prevail with your tender Conscience to Marry a young willing
 Maid.

WILLMORE: Do not abuse me, for fear I shou’d take thee at thy word, and
 Marry thee indeed, which I’m sure will be revenge sufficient.

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

WILLMORE: Oh most damnably—I have a heart with a hole quite through it
 too, no Prison mine to keep a Mistress in.³⁰

She sides with him by taking the libertine viewpoint by celebrating her inconstancy and youth,
 though of course her ultimate goal is fidelity. She recognizes that her beauty will only last for a
 few years and that she needs to make the most of it now while she has a bit of freedom left to
 her. She places herself more on his side of the topic by stating her feigned inability to be
 permanently faithful and grudgingly concedes that because they are so much alike in their sexual

³⁰ Ibid., 3.1. 158-175

propensities that she might give him three full years of fidelity, but after that then they could both do as they pleased. She makes it sound as though she is granting him a favor with the time she is willing to commit to their theoretical marriage making her seem even more of an unfaithful libertine so as to further his interest in her. But through this raillery runs the assumption that there would be marriage vows, and that she would not just give herself to him without those reputation saving words. They are cleverly concealed in the badinage, but the requirement is there nonetheless.

She concludes her seduction by assuring him their purposes are in accord—“yours to couzen as many Maids as will trust you, and I as many men as have Faith”³¹ and also by finally revealing her face to him which so entrances him that he is willing to forswear all other women for the sake of her alone. Hellena, knowing the power of her own beauty and also that Angellica Bianca is a rival, makes him swear that he will never see the prostitute again, but he goes even farther, vowing “I do never to think—to see—to Love—nor Lye—with any” but Hellena.³² He is completely captivated and seduced and praises her virtues to his companions—he moans “Ah Rogue! such black Eyes! such a Face! such a Mouth! such Teeth—and so much Witt!—”³³ Though he is enthralled by her beauty, he was first captured by her intelligence and quick wit. He recognizes in Hellena the things that he so much admires in himself—the intellect, clever repartee, and sexual openness that exemplifies a libertine. Even though he thinks Hellena is a complete libertine, like himself, her determination to withhold sex until he marries her creates an obstacle to his desire that her physical and intellectual allure must overcome.

³¹ Ibid., 3.1. 179-180.

³² Ibid., 3.1. 248-249.

³³ Ibid., 3.1. 264-265.

Despite his infatuation and his vows, he does of course continue in his pursuit of other women—he tries to convince Angellica Bianca that the flirtatious scene she witnessed between him and Hellena was not what she imagined, and he nearly rapes Hellena’s sister, Florinda, in his blind conviction that all women are there for his personal pleasure. But in the final act, when it comes down to the choice to either lose Hellena entirely or wed and then bed her, he does choose the bonds of wedlock over his liberties. He invites her to “retire to my Chamber, and if ever thou wert treated with such Savory Love!—come—my beds prepar’d for such a guest all clean and Sweet as thy fair self, I love to steal a Dish and a Bottle with a Friend, and hate long Graces—come let’s retire and fall too.”³⁴ She is agreeable as long as “old Gaffer *Himen* and his Priest, say amen to’t”, stating absolutely that she will not bed him until he has wed her. He initially declines declaring that “Marriage is as certain a bane to Love, as lending Money is to Friendship: I’ll neither ask nor give a Vow.”³⁵ She declines his offer to attempt the “Miracle of making a Maid a Mother”³⁶ declaring her knowledge of the consequences of the type of relationship he is looking for. She asks him “And if you do not lose, what shall I get? a cradle full of noise and mischief, with a pack of repentance at my back?”³⁷ Realizing that she will not be swayed from her determination to be married before having sex, he attempts at least a kiss. He concedes that “we are both upon our Guards, and I see there’s no way to conquer good Nature, but by yielding,—here—give me thy hand—one kiss and I am thine;—”³⁸ He claims that he will be the one to yield, but no doubt he has hopes that he will be able to so stir her passion by his embrace that she will then succumb to his desire. Unfortunately for Willmore, Hellena is much more in control of this situation than he is—she recognizes his tactics and denies him the opportunity to

³⁴ Ibid 5.1. 411-415.

³⁵ Ibid 5.1. 424-426.

³⁶ Ibid 5.1. 428.

³⁷ Ibid 5.1. 430-431.

³⁸ Ibid 5.1. 435-437.

arouse her physically—and has nothing but wit and scorn for his offer of a kiss, which is what finally brings Willmore to the desired acquiescence.

HELLENA: One kiss! how like my Page he speaks; I am resolv'd you shall have none, for asking such a sneaking sum,--he that will be satisfied with one kiss, will never dye of that longing; good Friend, single kiss, is all your talking come to this?—a kiss, a caudle! farewel Captain, single kiss.

WILLMORE: Nay if we part so, let me dye like a bird upon a bough, at the Sheriffs charge, by Heaven both the *Indies*, shall not buy thee from me. I adore thy Humour and will marry thee, and we are so of one Humour, it must be a bargain—give me thy hand.—

And now let the blind ones (Love and Fortune) do their worst.³⁹

Willmore's determination to remain single is completely vanquished under the persuasion of Hellena's determination to have exactly what she wants, in exactly the fashion and time that she wants it. Both of these libertines despised conventions and societal mores that would traditionally bind them, but Hellena's firm grasp of one convention was what allowed her to maintain the upper hand in her dialogue with Willmore. Her interest and desire to have sex piqued Willmore's interest, but her determination to be married before participating in that course of action is what finally made her lover succumb to the bonds of matrimony. In matters of intelligence and seduction, Behn's female libertine, Hellena, has the upper hand and dominates the male libertine, Willmore, at his own game.

³⁹ Ibid 5.1. 438-447.

The Feign'd Curtizans

The Feign'd Curtizans, first performed about two years after *The Rover*, is also about young women running away from home and disguising themselves in order to escape arranged marriages and convents. In this play though, the women pretend to be prostitutes for days at a time, rather than playing gypsies for a few hours at Carnival in order to get what they want for themselves. The sisters, Marcella and Cornelia, as well as their cousin, Laura Lucretia, escape their houses and thus the futures proposed for them by their families. Once free they disguise themselves as prostitutes in order to associate with men outside of their supervised and sheltered homes. Marcella is betrothed to a deformed, but wealthy man, Octavio, and Cornelia's family plans to send her to a convent. Marcella takes the name of Euphemia and Cornelia uses the name of a famous courtesan, Silvianetta. Marcella is in love with Sir Harry Fillamour, an Englishman, and Cornelia will fall in love in the course of the play with Mr. Galliard, his friend. Laura Lucretia is contracted to Don Julio—Marcella and Cornelia's brother, though the couple have never met. Laura Lucretia, disguising herself as a prostitute, also takes the name of Silvianetta and rents a house next door to the sisters hoping that it will be confused with theirs as she too has fallen madly in love with Galliard.

The play begins with Don Julio, Laura Lucretia's intended, pursuing her from church. He is unaware that the woman he finds so beautiful is his betrothed, since they have not yet met. She, also unaware of his identity, and in hopes that he will be dissuaded from following her, instructs her servant, Silvio, to inform him of her false identity—that of Silvianetta a famous courtesan, which only fires Don Julio's pursuit of her. In the midst of the pursuit, Don Julio

comes upon his English friends Galliard and Fillamour and Julio and Fillamour each, without disclosing the names of their loves, describe the beautiful women who have stolen their hearts. Julio is not aware that the “Silvianetta” he has pursued from church is in fact his intended, and Fillamour is not aware that the Marcella he adores is Julio’s sister.

The runaways have taken houses—Marcella and Cornelia first, and Laura Lucretia, moving in right next door to them. Laura Lucretia believes that the sisters next door are indeed courtesans and hopes to lure Galliard into her house since the doors resemble each other so nearly. However, her plan fails as Galliard does go to the right house where he hopes to have sex with Silvianetta/Cornelia, thinking that she is a prostitute. He storms out in a rage after finding out that the “courtesan” is actually a virgin of high birth. Marcella fares little better with Fillamour since when she has him alone, he, thinking that she is a prostitute, can only lecture her on the benefits of chastity and loyalty. And Laura Lucretia almost has sex with Don Julio because she, mistaking him for Galliard, invites him into her home in the dark, and greets him quite warmly.

Ultimately, the girls’ virginity is maintained and they are eventually united with the partner most suited to their taste. Their drive, wit, intelligence, and determination finally earn for them a match of their own choosing or approval—Marcella finally reveals herself to Fillamour and is reunited with him, Cornelia is able to convince Galliard of the benefits of matrimony, and Laura Lucretia is reconciled to her arranged marriage since Don Julio is such a handsome young man, and so obviously in love with her. The comedy ends in traditional Restoration form—Fillamour and Marcella are united with the blessing of her family, Galliard recognizes that marriage might be acceptable if he is married to someone intelligent and adventurous like Cornelia and Laura Lucretia grudgingly acquiesces to her arranged marriage

with Don Julio. The sisters have bested their guardians who would force them into a path they did not choose for themselves through their pretended amorousness and their determination to maintain their virginity until marriage, while Laura Lucretia has her options severely curtailed by her total willingness to sacrifice that virginity before marriage.

Marcella Tests Fillamour's Devotion

Marcella is a very different type of character from Hellena. While Hellena is fearless and forthright, Marcella's natural tendency is much more in line with the traditional virgin character. She appears innocent, modest and demure—until she feels that the man she loves may be toying with her affections—then she is totally willing to flout societal strictures, disguise herself as a prostitute, and advocate a sexually free lifestyle that will allow her to get exactly what she wants in her relationship. In her disguise, she tempts her love, Fillamour, to see if he will be unfaithful to her. His inclination is to avoid the “prostitute” in favor of his pure love, Marcella, but at his friend, Galliard's, encouragement and because of the prostitute's marked resemblance to the woman that he adores, he agrees to an assignation with her. Feeling betrayed that he has agreed to sleep with a prostitute (even though he only finally acquiesces because of the close resemblance) when the meeting takes place, she is at great pains to demonstrate all of her considerable intellectual bantering skills to make him uncomfortable. She cannot sleep with him—that would be to make the disguise a reality, but she wants to force him to reject the prostitute and choose the virtuous virgin despite the utmost temptation.

When she greets Fillamour and Galliard upon their arrival at her rented home, she greets them very warmly—as if they are customers paying for her sexual favors and invites them to

“Put on soft looks with Eyes all languishing, // Words tender, gentle sighs, and kind desires.”⁴⁰

When Fillamour fails to act upon the invitation she questions his hesitance and he recalls his love for Marcella, saying:

FILLAMOUR: --I’ve often seen that face—but ‘twas in dreams:

And sleeping lov’d Extreamly!

And waking—sigh’d to find it but a dream,

The lovely Phantom vanish’t with my slumbers,

But left a strong *Idea* on my heart;

Of what I finde in perfect Beauty here,

—But with this difference, she was Virtuous too!

MARCELLA: What silly she was that [?]

FILLAMOUR: She whom I dream’t I lov’d

MARCELLA: You only dream’t that she was virtuous too!

Virtue itself’s a dream of so slight force,

The very fluttering of Love’s wings destroys it,

Ambition, or the meaner hope of interest, wakes it to nothing,

In men a feeble Beauty, shakes the dull slumber off,—⁴¹

⁴⁰ Behn, Aphra. *The Feign’d Curtizans or A Nights Intrigue*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 6 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 4.1. 17-18.

Fillamour is outraged by this libertine attitude to virtue and berates her vociferously, demanding “Hast thou been long thus wicked? hast thou sin[n]’d past Repentance [?] // Heaven may do much, to save so fair a Criminal, // Turn yet and be forgiven!”⁴² His indignation and distress only offer her further opportunity to sharpen her wit at his expense, and she teases him that it was

A very pretty Sermon, and from a priest so gay,
It cannot chuse but edify.
Do Holy men of your Religion Signior, wear all this Habit,
Are they thus young, and lovely? sure if they are,
Your Congregation’s all compos’d of Ladys,
The Layety must come abroad for Mistresses.⁴³

Charmed at the repartee, but still wishing her to be honest and virtuous even as she entices him with immediate sexual gratification, he still resists though he does “finde weak Virtue melt from round [his] heart”⁴⁴ at her invitation. On the verge of capitulation, he asks once more, “cou’dst thou not be honest?”⁴⁵ and affirms that even though he has paid the two thousand crowns that is her fee, that he “wou’d sacrifice a Nobler Fortune, // To buy thy Virtue home!”⁴⁶ She scoffs at his idea of fidelity reminding him that to be “constant at my years? // —Oh t’were to cheat a thousand! // Who between this and my dull Age of Constancy, // Expect the distribution of my

⁴¹ Ibid., 4.1. 30-43.

⁴² Ibid., 4.1. 46-48.

⁴³ Ibid., 4.1. 51-55.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.1. 65.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.1. 75.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.1. 80-81.

Beauty.”⁴⁷ She is finally able to bid him farewell, saying “—I might have made a hundred hearts my slaves, // In this lost time of bringing one to Reason.— // Farewell thou dull Philosopher in Love; // When age had made me wise,—I’le send for you again.”⁴⁸

She leaves the conversation victorious—she has out-witted him with every argument he presented, and he is further convinced that virtue is what he truly does admire in a woman and he flees before he can be further tempted by her beauty. Marcella is able to prove his fidelity as well as her intelligence as she pretends to seduce him as a prostitute. But even though her sexual seduction fails, her ultimate determination to get exactly what she wants is fulfilled. By portraying a libertine, she rejects the plans that are made for her by her family, frees herself of the constraints normally associated with a virgin of high birth, and single-mindedly pursues exactly what she wants—a man of her choice. In doing so, she is also able to prove her lover’s faithfulness in the face of great temptation and demonstrate to him her own independence and sexuality.

Cornelia Brings Galliard to the Wedlock Point of View

Cornelia is a bold, adventurous female, much along the lines of Hellena—her family wishes to consign her to a convent and she needs to find a husband in order to prevent that. She is also quick witted, brave, and very sexually curious. While Marcella is a little hesitant about the outcome of disguising themselves as prostitutes, Cornelia is not only excited about the freedom that their costumes offer, but speaks as if she would not mind taking up the occupation if the occasion presented itself. She calls it a “glorious Profession [...] in which [...] there are a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.1. 85-88.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.1. 105-108.

thousand satisfactions to be found, more than in a dull virtuous life!”⁴⁹ She goes on to describe the benefits of the profession to Marcella and then suggests it may actually become necessary to sell themselves because of their straitened circumstances.

CORNELIA: [...] Oh the world of dark Lanthorn men we shou’d have; the Serinades, the Songs, the sighs, the Vows, the presents, the quarels, and all for a look or a smile, which you have been hitherto so covetous of, that *Petro* swears our Lovers begin to suspect us for some honest gilts; which by some is accounted much the lewder scandal of the two,—therefore I think faith we must ene be kinde a little, to redeem our reputations.

MARCELLA: However we may rally, certainly there’s nothing so hard to woman as to expose herself to villainous Man.

CORNELIA: Faith Sister, if twere but as easy to satisfy the nice scruples of Religion, and Honour, I should finde no great difficulty in the rest—besides another argument I have, our money’s all gone, and without a Miracle can hold out no longer honestly.—

MARCELLA: Then we must sell our Jewels!

CORNELIA: *When they* are gone, what Jewell will you part with next [?]⁵⁰

Even though they are both heiresses, their current disguise denies them access to the wealth they have been accustomed to. Cornelia recognizes that sex may actually become an economic

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.1. 88-90.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.1. 90-104.

necessity, but is not terribly upset by the idea. She is much more concerned with day to day living, and living well than she is with maintaining the virtuous modesty expected of ladies of high birth. She has embraced the libertine expectation of pleasure and is reveling in the freedom and accolades she is receiving from her admirers, even though she ultimately feels compelled to protect her virtue. The characters cannot maintain their nubile status if they allow themselves to be deflowered, but the awareness of the sexual activity that Cornelia anticipates acknowledges the sexuality that these women possess and portray. J. Douglas Canfield, author of *Tricksters & Estates: On The Ideology of Restoration Comedy*, writes that “even as the audience is aware they are chaste, Behn points obliquely to the backstairs free love and its attendant erotic celebration of infinite variety that lurk behind the façade of official aristocratic ideology.”⁵¹

She takes an immediate liking to Galliard when she sees him and while Marcella would prefer to flee, she is determined to “stand [her] ground were there a thousand, all Arm’d with Conquering Beauty.”⁵² She does not fawn or dote on him though when he approaches her—rather, knowing he already is sexually attracted to her, she seeks to further demonstrate her intellectual attractiveness by conversing with him and demonstrating her quick wit much like Hume’s “philosophical rake.” He approaches her and rather facetiously greets her as an object worthy of religious reverence saying “I hope a man may have leave to make his Devotions by you, at least, without danger or offence?”⁵³ She pretends to fear his intentions telling him that “I have reason to fear your devotion may be ominous, like a Blazing Star, it comes but seldom,—but ever threatens mischief,—Pray Heaven I share not in the calamity.”⁵⁴ On the surface the conversation retains the religious overtones, but his response indicates that he understood her

⁵¹ Canfield, J. Douglas. *Tricksters & Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 39.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.1. 178-79.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 196-97.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 198-200.

unspoken question—is he willing to make their relationship worthwhile, to which he is able to assure her that he will.

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

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

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

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

GALLIARD: Whe faith 'tis good, to have a little bank upon occasion, though I hope I shall have no great need hereafter,—if the charming *Silvianetta* be but kinde, 'tis all I ask of Heaven.⁵⁵

When he assures her that his zeal will be “hearty” she allows him to proceed with his wooing. He does test her resistance though by wondering if she would save him the “expense” of meeting his obligation, to which hint she instantly refers him to “some other blessing.” She is playing the part of the prostitute fully—she will not even intimate that she might give her body to him

⁵⁵Ibid., 2.1. 201-214.

without recompense, and he accepts the rebuff as long as “Silvianetta” will be “kinde”. While the words of the conversation are strictly religious as Cornelia and Galliard discuss devotion and charity, the subtext is obviously a clever dialogue between a man who would purchase a woman’s favors, and a smart woman’s response and insistence upon her own value.

When the moment that Galliard has negotiated is finally at hand and he is led to her room, he is expecting a sexual encounter and is outraged to find a fop already in the bedchamber having been led there by mistake by Cornelia’s servant. In his anger at what he sees as her deceit, he rails at her as if he did expect her to be virtuous—saving herself only for him. Though he is a libertine, and saw no fault in enjoying Marcella/Euphemia before his assignation with Cornelia/Silvianetta after Fillamour withdrew from the first escapade, for a woman to behave with the same lack of sexual scruples flabbergasts him. He rails at her, saying “Oh Women! Women! fonder in your Appetites // Than Beasts; and more unnatural!”⁵⁶ He acts, instead of the devil-may-care libertine, much as a moralistic husband or even a woman would behave on finding themselves betrayed by one to whom they had exchanged vows. He commands her to “Cease cunning false one to excuse they self, // See here the Trophees of your shameful choice, // And of my ruine, cruel—fair—deceiver!”⁵⁷ She is well able to silence his objections however, by demanding “in what despairing minute did I swear to be a constant Mistress? to what dull whining Lover did I vow and had the heart to break it [?]”⁵⁸ She pretends complete unconcern for his feelings—this is how a libertine and a true prostitute would behave—since sex must be a business only and love and emotion are not a part of that particular work ethic.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.1. 536-537.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.1. 349-351.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4.1. 352-354.

But Galliard is less concerned that she might have sex with another man, and much more concerned that the man she was having sex with was a fool, and had not the intellect, wit and charm that he himself had to offer. He places such a premium on his own wit and intelligence, which is one of the reasons he is so enamored of Cornelia/Silvianetta, that he cannot accept that she would willingly bed someone with such a marked decrease in intellect while he was available. She defends herself saying:

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

GALLIARD: Most gloriously disputed!

You're grown a Machivillian in your Art.

CORNELIA: Oh necessary Maxims only, and the first Politiques we learn from observation—I've known a Curtezan grown infamous, despis'd, decay'd, and ruin'd, in the possession of you witty men, who when she had the luck to break her chains, and cast her net for fools, has liv'd in state, finer than Brides

upon their wedding-day, and more profuse than the young amorous Coxcomb
that set her up an idoll.⁵⁹

Her argument and defense is well framed and makes excellent sense, even though it is of course not what Galliard wants to hear. He has no expectation that she should be faithful solely to himself—he does still think she is a prostitute—but it is the bedfellow that he objects to so strenuously. She seems perfectly in accord with the libertine lifestyle that eschews fidelity to a single lover until she reverses her tactic with him and tries guiding him toward the question of matrimony.

Cornelia's ultimate goal is marriage to avoid a life in a convent, and she carefully turns the tables on him, asking if "wou'd you have the heart—to make a whore of me?"⁶⁰ to which Galliard has no compunction replying "With all my Soul, and the Devils in't if I can give thee a greater proof of my passion."⁶¹ He has no idea yet of the trap that is about to be sprung upon him and he suddenly regains his libertine attitude of sexual freedom when he feels he is the victor. She questions him then, saying, "I rather fear you wou'd deboch me, into that dull slave call'd a wife."⁶² to which he assures her that is not at all the case. He exclaims "A wife! have I no Conscience, no Honour in me! // Prethee believe I wou'd not be so wicked,— // No,—my desires are generous! and Noble, // To set thee up, that glorious insolent thing, // That makes mankind such slaves! almighty Curtizan!"⁶³ She is forced then to admit her masquerade, which sends Galliard away in a rage. He cannot immediately give up his free and easy ideals, even

⁵⁹ Ibid., 4.1. 364-380.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.1. 421.

⁶¹ Ibid., 4.1. 422-423.

⁶² Ibid., 4.1. 424-425.

⁶³ Ibid., 4.1. 426-430.

though he admires everything about Cornelia. When he has gone though, she bemoans her vow of chastity saying “Now a my Conscience there never came good of this troublesome virtue—hang’t I was too serious, but a Devil on’t he looks so Charmingly—and was so very pressing I durst trust my gay Humour and good Nature no farther!”⁶⁴

She knows though, that in order to get the marriage that she desires, she must not give in and have sex with Galliard before he has married her, no matter how badly she wants to, and how much that acquiescence would fit her new libertine persona better than the chastity she clings to for the sake of her goal. She does of course get what she wants after Galliard is cheated of the sexual adventure he next sought out with Laura Lucretia, who was entirely willing to have sex with him. When he is left without a mate at the end of the play, he recognizes Cornelia disguised as a boy and decides that they are of like enough humor that he would rather marry her than lose her entirely.

Laura Lucretia the Libertine

Laura Lucretia, Marcella and Cornelia’s cousin, is much more reckless in her search for a husband and much more willing to completely ignore societal strictures placed on virgins in order to seduce the man of her choice. She is completely unconcerned about the consequences of her actions as long as she is successful in her amatory aims—much like the “extravagant rake” type. She is betrothed to Don Julio, but rejects him sight unseen because it was her family that chose him, and not her own decision. Her reaction to this arrangement is to run away from her home, disguise herself as a prostitute, and attempt to seduce the man that she *does* want to marry,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.1. 505-508.

Galliard, into her house in order to have sex. She is certain that if she is able to seduce him, then he will marry her and thus free her from the arranged marriage she despises. She completely forgoes the modesty and virtue she has been raised to value and espouses the libertine ideal that love is the only thing that should rule her heart.

When she is talking about Galliard, she claims she must have him, but her wording is not indicative of a woman in search of a lasting relationship, but rather a libertine seeking sexual gratification. She tells her servant, Silvio, “that dear Englese I must enjoy”⁶⁵ and goes on to tell him how when he mistook her home for Cornelia/Silvianetta’s they exchanged soft words. She reminisces how “Oft I’ve returned the vows he’s made to her // And sent him pleas’d away; // When through the Errours of the Night, and distance // He has mistook me for that happy wanton, // And gave me Language of so soft a Power, // As ne’re was breath’d in vain to listening Maids.”⁶⁶ She wants to be as “wanton” as the prostitutes and enjoy the sexual relationship that Galliard intended to have with another woman. She scorns her reputation saying “Honour, That hated Idoll, even by those // That set it up to worship: No, // I have a Soul my Boy, and that’s all Love! // And I’le the Tallent which Heaven lent improve?”⁶⁷ She begins her seduction by dressing as a man in order to get close to Galliard as a friend. She continues in her efforts by proving her worth as a companion—she fights by his side when he is set upon by Octavio and his retainers, and matches his libertine language when Galliard encourages Fillamour to engage the services of the prostitute Marcella/Euphemia. Her language is as loose as the men’s and she invents a mistress when Galliard fears she may become a rival for Cornelia/Silvianetta. She tells the men that

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.1. 137-138.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2.1. 144-149.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2.1. 169-172.

[...] My Love has a Nice appetite,
 And must be fed with high uncommon delicates,
 I have a Mistress Sir, of quality!
 Fair as imagination, paints you Angells!
 Wanton and gay as was the first *Corina*
 That charm'd our best of Poets,
 Young as the Spring, and cheerfull as the Birds
 That wellcome in the day!
 Witty as fancy makes the Revelling Gods,
 And equally as bounteous when she blesses!⁶⁸

Galliard is suitably impressed with this description, but Fillamour is still in a funk over the virtue lacking in the prostitute, Marcella/Euphemia, and Laura Lucretia exclaims that “S’hart, I’le be bound to ly with all the women in *Rome*, with less ado than you are brought to one.”⁶⁹ As a man, she can make her language as open as she likes—there are no expectations or constraints placed on a man’s sexual prowess that were placed on the women. But when she continues her seduction as a woman, she turns to more feminine wiles to accomplish the task.

In the final act of the play, after almost, mistakenly, sleeping with Don Julio (whom she mistook for Galliard in her darkened house) she finally has Galliard in her presence, ready to be seduced. She has enchanted him with a song, and is ready to lead him away when Don Julio returns, expecting the same kind treatment he had received previously. However, loathe to

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.1. 116-125.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.1. 152-153.

confess her mistake, she prays “Help me deceive, dissembling, all that’s woman—”⁷⁰ and uses her quick wit to extricate herself from this awkward position. She claims that Galliard resembles her brother, who was murdered and that Don Julio so resembles the murderer that she will swoon if he does not immediately depart. Being too much a gentleman to press his suit when he has been asked to leave, Don Julio exits, leaving the field to Galliard. She is further prevented from consummating their relationship by the arrival of Cornelia disguised as a page from her unknown betrothed (Don Julio) who announces his imminent arrival at her home. Both Galliard and Laura Lucretia are momentarily stalled by this new development—Galliard is given pause that he may be debauching his friend’s affianced wife, and Laura Lucretia with the possibility that she might actually be caught out before she can finalize her act. However, she declares “This wou’d surprise a Virgin less resolv’d, // But what have I do to with ought but Love!”⁷¹ Neither party are deterred for long—the desire for sex and the libertine lack of constraints allow them to cast aside the societal mores that should have prevented their behavior. Ultimately, she is not able to marry Galliard—Don Julio does indeed arrive and reveal himself to Laura Lucretia, who is mollified by his handsome mien and his devotion to her, and Galliard is paired off with Cornelia. But her behavior throughout the play marks her not as the willing bride that she becomes at the end of the play, but a libertine in search of sexual conquest.

Conclusion

The libertine character remains a very popular stock Restoration character—his charm, wit, and sexual availability make him attractive to the female characters in the play as well as

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.1. 313.

⁷¹ Ibid., 5.1. 410-411.

entertaining to the audience. Some of the behaviors espoused by the libertines in the plays may seem outrageous to modern eyes, but at the time they were expected from men as an ideal to emulate. As Willmore promises one woman, Hellena, that he will remain faithful for a matter of hours, he is already planning how he may be able to seduce Angelica Bianca, the prostitute, into having sex with him without pay. When Galliard, even with an imminent liaison planned with Cornelia/Silvianetta, cannot convince his friend Fillamour to succumb to the charms of the false prostitute Marcella/Euphemia, he is willing to step in and fulfill that role himself. Their conversation is so clever and engaging that to refuse a libertine seems impossible.

However, not only did Behn create characters that were strong enough to withstand the intellectual and sexual advances of these confirmed libertines, she made female characters that were just as intelligent, sexually aware, and determined as these men to accomplish their own goals. She created female characters who were willing to act the part of a libertine in order to get what they wanted—their own choice of a husband who would be intellectually and sexually pleasing to them. These female characters were on the cusp of being forced by their family into a choice that they did not make for themselves, and thus they were unwilling to comply. So, Hellena, Cornelia, Marcella, and Laura Lucretia created for themselves new personas that would attract a man of their choice on more than just a physical level.

Beauty would not be sufficient to hold a libertine—for these characters to attract, entice, and secure a man of their choice, they must be as clever, witty, and sexually adventurous as the male libertines, without letting their libertine lovers know their virginal secret. This added challenge of maintaining their virginity until they are married creates more opportunities for the female “libertines” to demonstrate their quick thinking wit in their conversations. While their determination to withhold sex cannot make them a true libertine in the traditional sense of the

word, they are still well able to mimic the behavior sufficiently to captivate and ensnare the men of their choice. And despite the typical libertine's resistance to religion and traditional bounds of society, the men are ultimately unable to deny the attraction they feel for more than just the face and body of the women wooing them.

Because these female characters have so impressed their men with their wit, charm, sexual badinage and their general resemblance to a libertine, the men are ultimately brought to the conclusion that possessing the women is worth succumbing to the moral codes of fidelity and matrimony they had previously rejected. Willmore questions Hellena to truly verify that she is willing to accept the constraints of wedlock. He asks:

WILLMORE: [...] we'll to the Good Man within, who stays to give us a Cast
of his Office.

—Have you no trembling at the near approach? *To Hellena*

HELLENA: No more than you have in an Engagement or a Tempest.

WILLMORE: Egad thou'rt a brave Girle, and I admire thy Love and Courage.

Lead on, no other Dangers they can dread,

Who Venture in the Storms o'th' Marriage Bed.⁷²

She is brave enough to have earned her prize and her libertine agrees to her conditions. He now looks upon this relationship as his next adventure and so goes in willingly to the priest to make his vows and marry his female counterpart. By her willingness to escape constraints, embrace

⁷² Behn, Aphra. *The Rover or The Bansi'h't Cavaliers*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 5 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 5.1. 538-545.

sexuality, and actively and even selfishly pursue her goal—pretending to be a libertine she is rewarded by getting exactly what she set out to have, on her own terms.

Chapter Three—The She-Fop Is Not As Foppish As She Seems

Now Foppery assist to make me very ridiculous [...] Madam,—as Gad shall save me, I'm the Son of a Whore, if you are not the most Bell[e] Person I ever saw, and If I be not damnably in love with you, but a pox take all tedious Courtship, I have a free-born and generous Spirit, and as I hate being confin'd to dull cringing, whining, flattering, and the Devil and all of foppery, so when I give an heart I'me an Infidel, Madam, if I do not love to do't frankly and quickly, that thereby I may oblige the Beautiful receiver of my Vows, Protestations, Passions, and Inclination. [...] upon my Reputation, Madam, you're a civil well-bred Person, you have all the Agreemony of your Sex, La Bell Taille, la Book Mien, & repartee bien, and are tout oue tore, as I'me a Gentleman, fort agreeable.

(Wittmore, from *Sir Patient Fancy* pretending to be a fop)

A Restoration play would seem incomplete without a foolish character upon which the cleverer characters get to sharpen their witty claws. The fop is a staple of Restoration Comedy as someone to provide a foil to the Libertine characters. They are everything the Libertine is not—they attempt to mimic the suave sophisticated language of the Libertine as well as their elegantly fashionable attire with preposterous results. Rather than the urbane outcome they are aiming for, they are usually garishly and outrageously clothed and their conversation makes them foolish instead of admired. They are often bumbling, pedantic, mincing, characters that are used to point out the gap between how the successful characters behave, and how this other type of

character can be duped into doing almost anything. The term was often used interchangeably with “fool”, and the use of the term is “to point out an inferior mode of being, inferior to the user’s own mode or to some established norm. The person called fop does not ‘measure up,’ or can’t ‘cut it,’ or isn’t ‘with it.’”¹

This chapter will examine Lady Knowell from *Sir Patient Fancy* as she is described and exhibits the behaviors of a fop. Her family, friends, and neighbors vehemently declaim her foppish behavior, and her overbearing declamation of her own intelligence, wit and educational prowess should label her as a fop. However, Lady Knowell is different from the traditional fop, in that she is much more intelligent and capable than she would have other believe. She plays the fop, but ultimately defeats all those who would set themselves against her and her plans for her children.

Types of Fops

Simon Callow, author of *Acting in Restoration Comedy* describes a range of foppery seen in Restoration comedy, saying

At one extreme there were Macaronis, who were a vision of Fellini-like decadence. They were extraordinary etiolated creatures with long fingernails, bizarre footwear and wigs that sometimes stood two feet in the air, so burdened down with exaggerations, both sartorial and physical, that they were hardly able to walk. In Etherege’s play *The Man of Mode*, Sir Fopling Flutter is a

¹ Heilman, Robert B. “Some Fops and Some Versions of Foppery.” *ELH*, 49, No. 2 (Summer, 1982), 364.

foolish, hysterical fop whose every entrance is a feat of *haute couture*. [...] But the contemporary portrait of Colley Cibber playing Lord Foppington in *The Relapse* makes it clear that he was a relatively unadorned fop. He is a masterpiece of self-presentation, but he's not the clichéd vision of a camp, mincing, furbelowed creature. Fops are narcissists, not homosexuals. They pursue women enthusiastically, their vanity protecting them from any mockery they receive. They were confident they were attractive, and there was no anxiety about seeming ridiculous.²

Their oblivion to the spectacle they make of themselves allows the Fop to be a consistent butt of jokes and pranks played upon them. When placed next to the Libertine hero, the Fop is even more strikingly absurd—he mimics the libertine characteristics of savvy conversation and elegant dress, but his representation only heightens the difference between the ideal, and the exaggeration that the Fop seems to revel in. Callow goes on to say that “The part of a fop is a glorification of personality rather than a repertory of affectation.”³ They exemplified all the excesses of the aristocracy, but without the suavity, intelligence and wit that made such behavior acceptable when performed by a Libertine. Laura J. Rosenthal writes that the fop's behavior “shows a class outsider attempting to imitate the manners of his betters.”⁴ For example, Sparkish, William Wycherly's fop from *The Country Wife*, is so determined to be one of the “wits,” that he allows his rival to make love to his betrothed, and when the woman complains to him, Sparkish brushes off her concern, saying “but if he does rail at me, 'tis but in jest, I warrant; what we wits do for one another, and never take any notice of it [...] and that] we wits rail and

² Callow, Simon. *Acting in Restoration Comedy*, (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 1991), 51-52.

³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴ Rosenthal, Laura J. *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 104.

make love often, but to show our parts; as we have no affections, so we have no malice.”⁵ He cannot conceive that he might be outwitted or out done in any manner since he thinks he is a wit, but his patent stupidity and blathering conversation deny him the title. Fops abound in Restoration literature, and Sir Fopling Flutter is a prime example from George Etherege’s *The Man of Mode*—if his name did not give him away then his exaggerated mannerisms and mincing behavior did. Simon Callow writes that the fop “moved affectedly as if ‘the floor were paved with eggs’”⁶ In addition, the fop is always identified by the other characters in the play as such. When Sir Fopling Flutter makes his entrance into a scene already populated by the libertine, his cronies, and the object of his affection, they inform each other how to receive him in order to make him act as foolishly as possible.

PAGE: Sir Fopling Flutter, madam, desires to know if you are to be seen.

LADY TOWNLEY: Here’s the freshest fool in town, and one who has not cloyed you yet.—Page!

PAGE: Madam?

LADY TOWNLEY: Desire him to walk up.

DORIMANT: Do not you fall on him, Medley and snub him. Soothe him up in his extravagance; he will show the better.

⁵ Wycherly, William. *The Country Wife and Other Plays*. Peter Dixon, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 23.

⁶ Callow, Simon. *Acting in Restoration Comedy*, (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 1991), 51.

MEDLEY: You know I have a natural indulgence for fools and need not this caution.⁷

The audience is prepared to meet the fop by the response his presence receives from the other characters. The truly witty and clever characters despise his pretensions and either take advantage of him as often as possible, or try to avoid him at all costs—usually with limited success since the fop will press himself upon those he admires, completely oblivious to their disdain. Wycherly's Sparkish, is determined to spend time with the other male characters in the play, but wants to make sure that they recognize his importance and the honor bestowed upon them by his presence. He reminds them that “I have left at Whitehall an earl, to dine with you”⁸ because he values their company so much. As his request to dine with them is ignored, he informs them how necessary they are to his dining experience. He says: But, sparks, pray hear me. What, d’ye think I’ll eat then with gay shallow fops and silent coxcombs? I think wit as necessary at dinner as a glass of good wine, and that’s the reason I never have any stomach when I eat alone.”⁹

His self importance requires him to not only to brag about his noble acquaintances, but also to associate with the wittiest people in society. However, since none of the more polished characters want to spend time with him, he attempts to flatter them into accompanying him, but in the process announces to the audience his insufficient wit and generally demonstrates his stupidity. It is inconceivable to him that his “friends” may consider him one of those “gay

⁷Etherege, Sir George. Wilson, John Harold Editor. *Six Restoration Plays*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), 123.

⁸Wycherly, William. *The Country Wife and Other Plays*. Peter Dixon, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.1. 291.

⁹Ibid., 1.1. 307-310.

shallow fops” that he so despises, and it does not even occur to him that he is similarly despised. The conversation of the Fop also contrasts sharply with that of the Libertine—while the Libertine excels at repartee and banter, the attempts the Fop makes to be clever further heightens his persona of a fool and nincompoop. Aphra Behn also excelled at creating the fop; some of her most famous fops are Sir Signall Buffoon from *The Feign'd Curtizans*, Blunt, from *The Rover*, Sir Timothy Tawdrey, title character of *The Town-Fopp*, and Sir Credulous Easy from *Sir Patient Fancy*.

Some female characters were also accused of foppery and there were certainly overdressing, silly, bombastic females in Restoration plays, but with much less frequency. A female fop would also exemplify the clown in dress and behavior, much as a male fop would. A well known female fop is Lady Wishfort from William Congreve's *Way of the World*. She is the sworn enemy of the hero, Mirabell, because she found out that this much younger man was only pretending to be in love with her in order to woo her niece Mrs. Millamant. She is made to appear utterly foolish in her lust and spite and is thus blinded to the plot revolving around her to make her fall in love with a servant disguised as Mirabell's uncle. Her maid Foible has led her to believe that “Sir Rowland” has seen her picture and is desperately in love with her because of it. When the day arrives to finally meet him, she spends the entire day dressing for the event and rehearsing with Foible the in what posture she should be in for the first introduction, since “There is a great deal in the first impression.”¹⁰ Her behavior displays her silliness—it is impossible to take her for an intelligent or serious character when she monologues for 14 lines about this same introduction, and finally decides that she will be lounging on a couch “with one foot a little dangling off, jogging in a thoughtful way. – Yes – and then as soon as he appears,

¹⁰ Congreve, William. Wilson, John Harold Editor. *Six Restoration Plays*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), 374.

start, ay, start and be surprised, and rise to meet him in a pretty disorder. – Yes – oh, nothing is more alluring that a levee from a couch in some confusion.”¹¹ She is relegated by this frivolous behavior to an object of mockery and subject to the schemes of every person she comes in contact with, with the exception of the male fops, who are as silly as she is.

While a male fop can become effeminate in his behavior, the reverse is not always the case for a female fop. She does not necessarily become more masculine by her outrageous behavior—on the contrary, she often tends to become even more girlish in her mannerisms and actions. Though masculine behavior is not ruled out, and as with male fops, there is a range of behavior that can be used to describe them, and Susan J. Owen notes that this term also “serves as a type of masculinity (as the name of the play, *The Female Fop*, like the phrase ‘male nurse’, suggests).”¹² True fops were expected to be men, and when a woman was called a fop, it was often an insult to her femininity because of her outrageous behavior. Whether she becomes absurdly girlish, or overly masculine in their behavior, a female fop’s behavior is extreme. Lady Knowell, demonstrated both of these types of behavior—she played the amorous woman pursuing a younger man, as well as the much more forthright and educated person capable of handling her own affairs. She demonstrated different types of foppery at specific times to best suit her needs.

To all appearances, Lady Knowell would seem to fit into the typical Restoration stereotype of a Fop. Her behavior is exaggerated to the point of ridiculousness, she appears to be amorously chasing a much younger man, she flaunts her knowledge to all who will listen to her and she is mocked by everyone around her. Everyone has an opinion to share about Lady

¹¹ Ibid., 374-374.

¹² Rosenthal, Laura J. *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 102-103.

Knowell. Her daughter, Lucretia, is quite outspoken in her scorn and disdain for her mother's intellectual pursuits, saying "Methinks to be read in the Arts as they call 'em, is the peculiar Province of the other Sex"¹³ thereby casting her mother in a masculine light. Her son, Lodwick, announces that Lady Knowell "hates all impertinent Noises but what she makes her self"¹⁴ Her neighbor, Sir Patient Fancy, calls her "an idle conceited she Fop, and has vanity and tongue enough to debauch any Nation under Civil Government."¹⁵ He further castigates her when he feels poorly after her visit, saying "I am Poyson'd, this talking Ladies breath's infectious; methought I felt the contagion steal into my heart."¹⁶ Lady Knowell certainly meets the criteria for the fop character type, but she is unique for not only being female, but also ending the play victorious. She neither fails in a love affair nor is she stripped of her valuables—rather, she successfully conquers over all who set themselves against her. She is able to successfully maneuver all of the other characters into exactly the position she wants them to be. She proves that even though she may act the part of the fop, she is perfectly capable of outwitting the other characters—demonstrating her intelligence and ability to outthink not only the other female characters, but the men as well. And thus by the end of the play, she has managed to put herself in exactly the position that she wants to be in. Additionally, she has manipulated everyone else into doing exactly what she wants them to do. She plays the fop, and allows everyone to maintain this conception of her character, but she is far more intelligent than she is given credit for by the other characters. So while Behn may have modeled her along the lines of a fop, Lady Knowell is remarkably successful in all of her endeavors and neither allows herself to be manipulated by the cleverer characters or the butt of their jokes. She is instead an intelligent,

¹³ Behn, Aphra. *The Feign'd Curtizans or A Nights Intrigue*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 6 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1.1. 57-58.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.1. 387-388.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 188-190.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 499-501.

forthright woman who is demonstrating through her machinations exactly how capable she is of participating in an intellectual society, and of managing her own life to her specifications.

Sir Patient Fancy

Sir Patient Fancy begins with Isabella and Lucretia, friends and neighbors, chatting about their respective romantic plights. Isabella is the daughter of Sir Patient Fancy and in love with Lucretia's brother Lodwick. Lucretia is in love with Isabella's cousin, Leander who is Sir Patient's nephew. Sir Patient rejects the proposed matches because of his dislike of Lodwick and Lucretia's mother, Lady Knowell, a wealthy and educated widow. However, despite his aversion for her company and because of her large fortune, Sir Patient has determined that his nephew Leander should marry the widow Lady Knowell instead of Lucretia, for the purpose of gaining control of the widow's money. Lady Knowell, to torment her daughter pretends to court this match, and in several scenes woos Leander knowing full well that his heart has already been given to Lucretia. She even provides the traditional, male fop, Sir Credulous Easy, as a proposed match for Lucretia to further muddy the romantic waters. Sir Credulous is a country bumpkin with pretensions of greatness—he wants to be associated with the poets and wits of London so that he may join their ranks. Lady Knowell is an accomplished manipulator, and to this end she acts as if she wants to want to marry Leander, as Sir Patient wishes. She puts on a good show of pretending to love him, but in reality, she really does want him to marry her daughter, Lucretia. She also thinks that Isabella and Lodwick would make a lovely couple, and is promoting that match as well.

Sir Patient considers himself a clever man but is constantly made to look foolish by his cheating wife Lady Fancy. Despite the consistent evidence of his eyes, Sir Patient continues to believe that Lady Fancy is virtuous and faithful to him, but by the end of the play she has bilked him of several thousand pounds and plans to retire with her lover, Wittmore. He is also outmaneuvered by Lady Knowell, who has kept him occupied and unsuspecting while the two pairs of young lovers are able to sneak off and be married. She has welcomed Sir Credulous Easy, an utterly foolish fop, and the butt of everyone's jokes into her home, with the understanding that he is to marry Lucretia. While the young couples take turns abusing his gullibility, Lady Knowell continues to convince him that his suit will be successful. Even though she never actually planned on having him marry her daughter, Lady Knowell enjoys the spectacle of his attempted wooing and Lucretia's avoidance of him. She further torments Lucretia by pretending that she herself will marry Leander, but by the end of the play Leander and Lucretia are united with both of their guardian's approval and Isabella and Lodwick are also engaged just as Lady Knowell planned. Lady Knowell herself is left alone with her books, her fortune and her freedom intact.

Women's Educational Expectations

Aphra Behn's Lady Knowell is an extremely well read and educated woman, at a time when this high level of education was considered unnecessary and even inadvisable for a woman. While Lady Knowell undoubtedly makes herself appear ridiculous to the audience by her preposterous and repetitive use of badly translated Greek and Latin words in her conversation, Behn is still subversively pointing out the ability that women have to learn, even if

they use that knowledge to make fools of themselves. Upper class women were expected to have a basic education, quite unlike the classical education that men received. They were taught to read, write, flirt, manage a household and perhaps even speak French, but mathematics, science, and languages, were not traditionally taught to women. Antonia Fraser quotes a mother who wanted to ensure that her daughters were carefully taught only certain subjects by the headmaster of their boarding school. Her list includes: “the qualities of music both for the virginals and singing (if they have the voices) and writing (and to cast account which will be useful to them hereafter) he will be careful also that their behaviour be modest”¹⁷ Fraser goes on to clarify that

Some practical accomplishments were of course taught—a form of shorthand for example (not so much for secretarial purposes as suitable for taking notes on ‘good’ reading), enough arithmetic for household accounts [...], legible handwriting, even tolerable orthography was considered desirable—although any girl who actually succeeded in these achievements would find herself way ahead of most of her female contemporaries.”¹⁸

A classical education of science, mathematics and languages (other than French) were the provinces of the men. Fraser notes that “in general, if an English girl, regardless of rank, did receive a good education, it was very much a matter of individual luck.”¹⁹

Lady Knowell, though, imagines herself far beyond this basic level and she takes great pains to demonstrate her knowledge, and this pretension is one of the reasons that the other characters label her as a fop. She reads ancient texts in multiple languages, declares that she scorns the English language and populates her conversations with Sir Patient and Sir Credulous

¹⁷ Fraser, Antonia. *The Weaker Vessel*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 138.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

with Greek and Latin phrases which make her seem even more overbearingly pretentious, especially since most of those quotes are badly translated. As Janet Todd has noted however, the quotes that Lady Knowell uses *are* mistranslated, but the gist of her statements are accurate to her conversations.²⁰ She has a strong enough grasp of the ancient languages to astutely utilize them in her arguments, even though the use of these quotes is designed by Behn to camouflage her real intelligence. However, flaunting her education and knowledge, while making her look ridiculous to the audience, point out the men's educational failings in the play. Bathsua Makin, "known to be the most learned woman in England"²¹ in the seventeenth century, wrote that

[t]he tongue is the only weapon women have to defend themselves with, and they had need to use it dexteriously. Many say one tongue is enough for a woman: it is but a quibble upon the word. Several languages, understood by a woman, will do our gentlemen little hurt, who have little more than their mother-wit, and understand only their mother-tongue; these most usually make this objection to hide their own ignorance.²²

Makin was not the only woman in the seventeenth century to support education for women. Mary Astell was also a proponent for women's education and even wanted to create a "retreat" in which women could separate themselves from the rest of the world in order to amass knowledge. In her 1694 document *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, For the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest*, Astell pleads with the women of her day to step away from their closets and

²⁰Behn, Aphra. *Sir Patient Fancy*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays Vol. 6 of The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 430. See footnote on line 27 in Act IV. Scene I.

²¹Donawerth, Jane. *Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1900: An Anthology*, (Oxford: Bowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 73.

²²Makin, Bathsua. 'An Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen' in *Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1900: An Anthology*, (Oxford: Bowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002),75.

mirrors in order to cultivate and stimulate their minds. She raises her literary battle flag by crying out that:

This is a Matter infinitely more worthy your Debates, than what Colours are most agreeable, or whats the Dress becomes you best? Your *Glass* will not do you half so much service as a serious reflection on your own Minds; which will discover Irregularities more worthy your Correction, and keep you from being either too much elated or depress'd by the representations of the other
[sic]²³

Her argument criticizes the public opinion that women are unfit for a classical education similar to that of men's. She realized the importance of education and attempted to make it a priority for other women despite the resistance she met from the society in which she circulated. This treatise was written sixteen years after *Sir Patient Fancy* appeared onstage, but Astell's and Behn's opinions on women's education seem to be in sync. If women at that time did have the same education as men, then the sharp contrast between Lady Knowell and the men in the play might be reversed, making the male characters the more foolish for their lack of knowledge. It is her superior intelligence and wit (though heavily disguised under her pretentious foppery) that allows her to overcome all of the obstacles in her path to achieve her goals. At the end of the play, she is the victor in every battle of will and wit she has entered into. So while Lady Knowell is still considered a fop, she is different from others because she is not only a female, when most other fops were male, but she is also not the foolishly pretentious fop that most others

²³ Astell, Mary. *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest; In Two Parts*. Edited by Patricia Springborg, (Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd., 2002), 6.

were. She is a different kind of character that shows that even if a woman is as obnoxious, overbearing and generally foppish, she is still able to outsmart her male competition.

Lady Knowell vs. Sir Patient Fancy In Order to Get Her Own Way

Sir Patient, more than any other character finds Lady Knowell annoying and he does not hesitate to spew invective upon her characters when he hears of her impending visit. He rants to his wife, Lady Fancy, and calls Lady Knowell “the intolerable Lady, Madame *Romance*, that walking Library of Profane Books...that Lady of eternal noise and hard words.”²⁴ He hates not only her self-aggrandizing speech, but also the fact that she reads books that he considers inappropriate for a woman. He cannot cast her off entirely, however, because he has such high hopes of gaining control of her fortune by Leander’s marriage to her.

His description of her sums up how many of the characters see her—even Lady Fancy tells her husband that “Indeed ‘tis with pain I am oblig’d to be civil to her.”²⁵ However foolish and out of sync with the other characters Lady Knowell may appear to be, she knows exactly what she wants for her family, and is willing to go head to head with Sir Patient in order to get it. She wants Lodwick to marry Isabella, and Lucretia to marry Leander, both matches forbidden by Sir Patient, and she employs two very different tactics in order to bring about the matrimonial couplings she has decided upon. In the case of Isabella and Lodwick she is assertive and outspoken, but with Lucretia and Leander, she is much more surreptitious in her manipulation.

²⁴ Behn, Aphra. *Sir Patient Fancy*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 6 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2.1. 180-183.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 184.

Isabella makes Lady Knowell her confidante in her concern that Sir Patient will force her to marry someone else²⁶ and in this situation Lady Knowell boldly proclaims her intentions to Sir Patient that her son and Isabella will wed. She chastises him for his intention to force Isabella into unwanted wedlock which forces an argument between them escalating to name calling and aspersions being cast by Lady Knowell on Isabella's parentage. Sir Patient swears that he would give her in marriage:

Sir Patient: To any Fool, except a Fool of your Race, of your Generation.—

Lady Knowell: How! a Fool of my Race, my Generation! I know thou meanest my son, thou contumelious Knight, who let me tell thee, shall marry thy Daughter *invite te*, that is, (to inform thy obtuse understanding) in spite of thee, yes shall marry her, though she inherits nothing but thy dull Enthusiasmes, which had she been legitimate she had been possest with.

Sir Patient: Oh abominable! you had best say, she is none of my Daughter, and that I was a Cuckold.—

Lady Knowell: If I should Sir, it would not amount to *Scandalum Magnatum*, I'll tell thee more; thy whole Pedigree, --And yet for all this *Lodwick* shall marry your Daughter.²⁷

²⁶ Lady Fancy's lover Wittmore disguised as a fop named Fain-love.

²⁷ Behn, Aphra. *Sir Patient Fancy*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 6 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2.1. 405-417.

This challenge to Sir Patient's paternity and authority so enrages him that he vows to leave town rather than endure further corrupting influences on his family. In this exchange, Lady Knowell's manipulative skills are hidden behind the challenging front that makes her seem not only less intelligent, but also belligerent and abrasive. This is a marked contrast to her methods in securing Sir Patient's nephew Leander for her daughter Lucretia, which allows her to mask her intentions in Isabella and Lodwick's direction.

Sir Patient thinks that he is gaining the upper hand in the marriage negotiations—he doesn't believe that she will be able to unite their offspring without his permission, but he still believes that Lady Knowell will marry Leander because he assumes she will not be able to resist the handsome young man. Her combative interaction with Sir Patient effectively conceals from him her other secretive plans and allows her to better manipulate the more complicated case of Leander and Lucretia.

Even with all of the drama and intrigue she is arranging, she still makes everyone believe that she is foolish and lustful. She fulfills her role as a fop, but only on the surface—what makes Lady Knowell so unique is her manipulative ability, and her benevolent willingness to apply those skills in everyone else's behalf. She has more depth than any other character in the play. Unlike other Restoration fops, Lady Knowell is manipulative, clever, and intelligent—attributes she has cunningly hidden behind her guise as a “She-fop.”

Lady Knowell vs. Lucretia and Leander In Order to Torment and Test the True Lovers

When the play begins, Lucretia and Isabella are talking about their lovers and making plans to marry them. When the subject of Lady Knowell's pursuit of Leander comes up,

Isabella teases her friend “I have observ’d of late your Mother to have order’d her Eyes with some softness, her mouth endeavouring to sweeten itself into smiles and dimples, as if she meant to recall Fifteen again and give it all to *Leander*, for at him she throws her Darts.”²⁸ They mock her age and her pursuit of the much younger Leander, with whom Lucretia is in love. Sir Patient has forbidden Leander to marry Lucretia, but is promoting a match with Lady Knowell, since that union would let him gain control of Lady Knowell’s sizeable fortune. However, Lady Knowell is aware of the budding relationship between Lucretia and Leander, and really has no intention of taking the young man away from her daughter—she simply wants to test their affection for each other as well as amuse herself by tormenting both of them a bit.

When Lady Knowell and Leander come across Isabella and Lucretia, chatting, Lady Knowell despairs about their idleness as “an insupportable loss of time”²⁹. Leander, hoping for a chance to spend time with the younger women, concurs saying that they “might be better imploy’d if I might instruct ‘em.”³⁰ This offer of edification gives Lady Knowell the opportunity to boast of her educational and literary pursuits. She agrees that they should be

LADY KNOWELL: [...] in Consultation with the Antients, — Oh the delight of Books! when I was of their age, I always imploy’d my looser hours in reading, — if serious, ‘twas *Tacitus, Seneca, Plutarch’s Morals*, or some such useful Author; if in an Humour gay, I was for Poetry, *Virgil, Homer*, or *Tasso*, Oh that Love between *Renaldo* and *Armida* Mr. *Fancy!* Ah the Caresses that fair *Corcereis* gave, and received from the young Warriar, ah

²⁸ Ibid. 1.1. 29-32.

²⁹ Ibid. 1.1. 80.

³⁰ Ibid. 1.1. 81.

how soft, Delicate and tender! upon my Honour I cannot read them in the Excellence of their Original Language, without I know not what Emotions.

LEANDER: Methinks 'tis very well in our Mother tongue Madam.

LADY KNOWELL: O Faugh Mr. *Fancy* what have you said, Mother tongue! Can any thing that's great or moving be exprest in filthy *English*, — I'll give you an Energetical proof Mr. *Fancy*, observe but Divine *Homer*, in the *Grecian* Language — *Ton d'apamibominus, Prosiphe, Podis Ochus Achilles!* ah how it sounds! which *English*'t dwindles into the most grating stuff: — then the swift Foot *Achilles* made reply, — oh faugh.³¹

Lucretia and Isabella see this byplay, and Leander, longing to escape the pedantic woman creates any excuses he can to lessen her regard for him. She offers to see him privately so that they can read together, and flatters him, but he pleads for Isabella and Lucretia to rescue him.

LADY KNOWELL: [...] I'm strangely fond of you Mr. *Fancy*, for being a Scholar

LEANDER: Who Madam, I a scholar? the greatest Duncie in Nature, — Malicious Creatures will you leave me to her mercy? *To them aside*

LUCRETIA: Prethee assist him in his misery, for I am Mudd, and can doe nothing towards it.

ISABELLA: Who, my Cozen *Leander* a Scholar Madam?

³¹ Ibid. 1.1. 82-97.

LUCRETIA: Sure He's too much a Gentleman to be a Scholar.

ISABELLA: I Vow Madam he spells worse than a Country Farryer when he Prescribes a Drench.

LEANDER: Then Madam I write the lewdest hand!

ISABELLA: Worse than a Politician or a States-man.

LUCRETIA: He cannot read it himself when he has done.

LEANDER: Not a word on't Madam.

LADY KNOWELL: This agreement to abuse him, I understand— *Aside*

--Well then Mr. *Fancy*, let's to my Cabinet—your hand.³²

The girls and Leander hope that if they show how intellectually inferior he is to Lady Knowell that it will discourage her pursuit of him, but she is perfectly aware of why they are so disparaging of his abilities. She allows them to continue in their deceit knowing how much Leander longs to be free of her, and how upsetting her behavior is to Lucretia. Lucretia is even able to slip in an extra insult to her mother, saying that Leander is “too much a Gentleman to be a Scholar”³³ pointing out her opinion that no one of good breeding would really be a scholar. Lady Knowell ignores the jibe, knowing it is caused by spite for her pretended pursuit of her daughter's lover.

³² Ibid. 1.1. 110-125.

³³ Ibid. 1.1. 117.

Leander and Lucretia are so convinced of her inflated sense of self that neither of them doubts that she really would marry the much younger Leander. Lucretia declares in the first act that “twou’d vex me to see my Mother Marry him, --well I shall never call him Father.”³⁴ They decide that the only way to escape from this coil is for Leander to pretend that he does indeed love Lady Knowell, however Lady Knowell is able to talk Leander in circles when she tries to woo him. She commands him to “raise your Soul above that little trifle *Lucretia*, -- cannot you guess what better Fate attends you? – fie, --how dull you are! – must I instruct you in plain right-down termes? – and tell you—that I propose you Master of my fortune? – now possibly you understand me.”³⁵ She appears to be completely enamored of the much younger Leander, declaring her love to him and offers herself and her fortune to him. She draws attention to her charms saying:

I’m far from Age or Wrinkles, can be Courted
 By men as gay and youthful as a Summer’s morn,
 Beauteous as the first Blossoms of the Spring
 Before the common Sun has kiss’d their sweets away,
 If with salacious appetites I lov’d.³⁶

She appears to be as amorous as a widow is expected to be, but she is not interested in Leander other than as a means of toying with Lucretia and masking her intention that he marry her daughter. She has no intention of tying herself to a husband, rather she is teasing the young lovers who find her so ridiculous, much as a libertine might have taken advantage of fop

³⁴ Ibid. 1.1. 35-36.

³⁵ Ibid., 3.2. 1-5.

³⁶ Ibid., 3.2. 18-22.

characters. Her pursuits are not designed to bring her love or sexual gratification, but rather to create her own life that she can manage without the constraints of a husband, and assist others who seem less proficient at managing their own affairs.

With Lady Knowell's pointed advances Leander has no idea where to turn so he pleads that he is not worthy—that he is “Inconstant, wild, [and] debacuh'd”³⁷ in an effort to stave her off. It is of course ineffectual since manipulation is simply her game—she only reels him in further. While he is busy pretending to have any and all vile characteristics that may prevent her affection, she is laughing in her sleeve at the lovers. Leander continues to swear by his disgusting behavior, vowing that he will “get drunk [...] yet in my Drink I'me damn'd ill natur'd too, and may neglect my duty, perhaps shall be so wicked to call you cunning, deceitful, gilting, base, and swear you have undone me, swear you have ravish'd from my faithful heart, all that cou'd make it blest or happy”³⁸ to no avail. It is not until Lucretia arrives in tears and pleads on her knees for her lover to be returned to her that Lady Knowell finally relents. Lady Knowell commands her to stand up, but Lucretia vows:

Never, till you have given me back *Leander*, or leave to live no
 more, -- pray kill me Madam; and the same
 Flowers that deck your Nuptial-bed,
 Shall serve to strow my Herse, when I shall lie
 A dead cold witness of your Tyranny.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., 3.2. 9.

³⁸ Ibid., 5.1. 162-166.

³⁹ Ibid., 5.1. 173-177.

To Lucretia's impassioned plea she replies "I still design'd him yours. – I saw with pleasure Sir, your reclamation from my addresses, -- I have prov'd both your Passions, and 'twere unkind not to Crown 'em with the due praemium of each others merits."⁴⁰ She has not only tested their love and constancy to each other, but created a situation that Sir Patient will not be able to overturn—assuring Leander through it all that "I have no joy beyond cheating that filthy Uncle of thine."⁴¹

When Sir Patient sends his daughter Isabella to church under orders to marry Wittmore, disguised as Fainlove, Lady Knowell arranges for some "physicians" to keep him occupied. With this distraction Isabella is able to swap husbands and marries Lodwick while Lucretia ties the knot with Leander. Lady Knowell has thoroughly convinced not only Sir Patient and Leander, but even her own daughter that she is silly and conceited enough to shamelessly pursue the much younger man, but in the end she accomplishes exactly what she set out to do—she arranges their marriage while showing them that they cannot actually outwit her designs.

Lady Knowell vs. Sir Credulous Easy To Mock The Fop

Unlike her interaction with her daughter, Lady Knowell is not at loggerheads with the "*Devonshire Knight*"⁴² that has been recommended as a proper spouse for Lucretia. Sir Credulous Easy has come to woo and marry Lucretia, but is undoubtedly the male fop of the play. He is described by Lodwick as "the pertest unsufferable Fool he ever saw, when he was at my Uncles last Summer he made all his Diversion."⁴³ Isabella is quick to take advantage of his presence though since "of all Fops our Countrey Fop is the most tolerable Animal; those of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.1. 178-181.

⁴¹ Ibid., 5.1. 185.

⁴² Ibid., 1.1. 38

⁴³ Ibid., 1.1. 40-41.

Town are the most unmanageable Beasts in Nature.”⁴⁴ He is expected to be more of a buffoon than the mincing, macaroni Town Fop, and the girls hope to use him as an entertainment, as long as Lucretia is able to escape from his intention of marrying her. He is the butt of everyone’s jokes, and when he is introduced to Lucretia and Isabella, Lodwick has convinced him that he should pretend to be the “Envoy extraordinary from the blind God of Love, and since like his young Master he must be defective in one of his Senses, he chose rather to be Dumb than Blind.”⁴⁵ With Lodwick acting as interpreter, he mimics his courtship, which of course not only makes him appear more foolish, but allows Lodwick to dupe him of his money and his diamond ring, because his “interpretation” was not really what Sir Credulous was trying to say.⁴⁶ He thinks that he is being remarkably clever in this performance, but the whole scenario was arranged by Lodwick to make him appear as foolish as possible in front of his sister. And Lodwick and Lucretia are not the only ones who encourage the fop’s behavior—Lady Knowell encourages him at every opportunity to pursue Lucretia, knowing full well that she will have none of him.

Sir Credulous Easy is counting on marrying Lucretia not for any romantic reasons, but because he is expected to. He arrives heartily bemoaning the fact that his mare has died en route, and is much more concerned with his animals than the art of wooing. When he is dressing himself to meet with his intended, his servant Curry comments on how out of date his attire is, to which Sir Credulous replies:

SIR CREDULOUS: What then Mun, I never wear it but when I go to be drunk
and give my Voice for a Knight o’th’ shire, and here at *London* in Term time,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1.1. 42-44.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.1. 266-269.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1.1. 265-351.

and that but Eight times in Eight Visits to Eight several Ladies to whom I was recommended.

CURRY: I wonder that amongst Eight you got not one Sir.

SIR CREDULOUS: Eight! Zoz I have had Eight score Mun, but the Devil was in 'em they were all so Forward, that before I cou'd seal and deliver, whip quoth *Jethro*, they were either all Married to some body else, or run quite away; so that I am resolv'd if this same *Lucretia* prove not right, I'le e'ne forswear this Town and all their false Wares, amongst which Zoz I believe they vent as many false Wives as any *Metropolitan* in Chrietendom, I'l say that for't and a Fiddle for't I' faith,⁴⁷

Though he has had no luck in the past in trying to secure a wife, he is determined that his luck will change with *Lucretia*, and he is encouraged by Lady Knowell to believe that he will succeed. Lady Knowell needs *Lucretia* to believe that she may be forced into marrying Sir Credulous in order to further mask her own intentions of pairing her with Leander. She gives no indication to either of them that she is not entirely for the match—she even goes to far as to introduce him to Lady Fancy as “My Son *in Futuro*”⁴⁸ in front of *Lucretia*. With this encouragement he informs Lady Fancy that “I have a pretty competent Estate of about 3000l. a year, and am to marry Madam *Lucretia*,”⁴⁹ and tells Sir Patient that he is “come to Town to Marry my Lady *Knowells* Daughter.”⁵⁰ Lady Knowell has given him enough assurance of his success that he is willing to

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.1. 196-207.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 265.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 228-229.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 352-53.

inform total strangers of his upcoming marriage. And even though Lucretia goes out of her way to avoid him, Lady Knowell throws them together as often as she can.

When they are dancing at Sir Patient's house, she chides him that he is not dancing with Lucretia, asking "Sir *Credulous*, where's your Mistress?" Then, the day after this visit, she informs both parties that they will be wed on the following day—upsetting Lucretia and pleasing Sir Credulous. He is following her about, attempting to impress her with his "Rhetorick"⁵¹ when she flees, just before her mother arrives on the scene. He is miffed by the rebuff and complains when Lady Knowell again questions Sir Credulous on his missing fiancée saying:

LADY KNOWELL: What, alone Sir *Credulous*? I left you with *Lucretia*.

SIR CREDULOUS: *Lucretia*! I'm sure she makes a very *Tarquinius Sextus* of me, and all about this Serenade, – I protest and vow, incomparable Lady, I had begun the sweetest Speech to her – tho' I say't, such Flowers of Rhetorick – 'twou'd have been the very Nosegay of Eloquence, so it wou'd; and like an ungratefull illiterate Woman as she is, she left me in the very middle on't, so snuffy I'le warrant.

LADY KNOWELL: Be not discourag'd Sir, I'le adapt her to a reconciliation, Lovers must sometimes expect these little *Belli-fugaces*, the *Grecians* therefore truly named Love *Glucupicros Eros*.

SIRE CREDULOUS: Nay bright Lady, I am as little discourag'd as another, but I'me sorry I gave so extraordinary a Serenade to so little purpose.

⁵¹ Ibid., 4.1. 16.

LADY KNOWELL: Name it no more, 'twas onely a Gallantry mistaken, but I'll accelerate your felicity, and to morrow shall conclude the great dispute, since there is such Volubility and Vicissitude in Mundan[e] affairs.⁵²

In this conversation, Lady Knowell not only further convinces Sir Credulous that he will indeed marry Lucretia, but further demonstrates her ability to use languages to her benefit.

When Sir Credulous finds out in the final act how he has been used to facilitate the marriage between Leander and Lucretia, he attempts to express his disappointment to Lady Knowell saying:

SIR CREDULOUS: [...] I am damnably sad, – Madam, I shall desire to lay the Saddle on the right Horse.

LADY KNOWELL: what mean you Sir?

SIR CREDULOUS: Onely Madam, if I were as some men are, I should not be as I am.

LADY KNOWELL: It may be so Sir.

SIR CREDULOUS: I say no more, but matters are not carry'd so swimmingly, but I can dive into the meaning on't.⁵³

He recognizes that he has been duped, and would remonstrate with Lady Knowell about his mistreatment, but even in this brief passage he cannot out-talk her. She pretends to know what he is talking about, but in reality, is simply quieting his complaint.

⁵² Ibid., 4.1. 19-33.

⁵³ Ibid., 5.1. 716-724.

Lady Knowell—the Victorious

Lady Knowell is a complex character in that she appears to fit the mold of the silly, pedantic, and exaggerated Fop character, however, she proves to be much more than that. Ultimately, the major difference between her and other Fop characters is that she wins. She sets a goal, she has a plan of attack, and by the end of the play she has accomplished exactly what she set out to do. She is in fact the victor on every point. She outwits Sir Patient in his plans for his daughter's marriage, she out-logics Sir Credulous and Leander, running verbal circles around both of them in their exchanges, and brings both of the contested marriages to a happy resolution.

In the tradition of Restoration comedy, the “good” characters at the end of the play would be happily paired off. But again, Lady Knowell proves an exception to the rule as she ends the play without a spouse or lover in sight. She disposes of her children into wedlock but is left alone in a happily unwedded state herself. She is offered no hindrance to returning to her hobbies of reading and learning. She even ends the play on better terms with her much humbled neighbor, Sir Patient. Her lack of a husband is not a punishment—rather it is her reward for a job well done and her educational abilities are no longer a cause for derision—indeed her prize is to be able to continue unhindered in her pursuits. She may appear to be a traditional Restoration fop character type, but there are so many clever, devious, and subversive elements to her character that it is clear that Behn was not just following a “type”. Lady Knowell ends the play with her jointure intact, marital status pleasantly unchanged, and her educational pursuits unimpeded. By the end, despite the preposterous language she employs in conversation with the silly men in the play, she is understood to be not only the victor, but also the most reasonable character in the play.

Chapter Four—Lady Julia—Sans Pareil

GAYMAN:[...] I've something to deliver to your Ear. [...]

SIR CAUTIOUS: Ay, Ay, 'tis so, he cannot be content to Cuckold me, but he must tell me so too. Aside

GAYMAN: [...] Sir—you are—a Rascal—a most notorious Villain Sir, d'e hear—

SIR CAUTIOUS: Yes, yes, I do—hear—and am glad 'tis no worse.

(Gayman picking a Fight With Sir Cautious in *The Luckey Chance*)

Marriage in the seventeenth century was often a complex contractual arrangement, rather than a romantic union. Arranged marriages were a standard method of uniting families and fortunes and these unions were often arranged by the parents of the couple. In many instances, a wife was given or sold to her husband by her father or guardian—body, property, and rights—all were surrendered to the new spouse under the law of coverture. Amy Louise Erickson writes in her article, “Coverture and Capitalism” that under this law, the “English husband ‘covered’ his wife’s legal identity completely, and therefore took ownership of all but her freehold property—which in most cases was all her property. There was no ‘consideration’ in this marriage contract; that is, he owed her nothing *in law* in return for gaining her property.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Erickson, Amy Louise. “Coverture and Capitalism.” *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), 4.

Then, once married, wives were expected to turn a blind eye to the infidelities of their husbands, since, as Miriam Slater, author of *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century*, notes, “for a gentlewoman, marriage to a philandering but otherwise suitable husband was certainly preferable to spinsterhood.”⁵⁵ On the other hand, fidelity was something that was expected of wives and Slater goes on to suggest that “the existence of sexual alternatives for the husband, combined with the widespread belief that a wife should turn a blind eye to her husband’s extra-marital relations, served to deprive the wife of the personal satisfaction and sense of individual worth.”⁵⁶ This type of devaluation of a woman was yet another example of the way society negated a woman’s sexuality and independence.

There was great anxiety over women’s sexuality—it was something that threatened the power wielded by men. This is demonstrated by the response to Mary Frith, better known as Moll Cutpurse about whom the play *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton was written. The play was written in the early years of the seventeenth century, and was first published in 1611, but the sentiment still held until the latter part of the century when Behn was writing. Anthony Fletcher, in *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*, recognized how this anxiety played out in Moll’s situation. She was a woman who paraded in public in men’s clothing, drinking, smoking, and swearing like a man. She was eventually prosecuted for public immorality, but at core was the concern that “her male persona is taken as

⁵⁵ Slater, Miriam. *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century: The Verneys of Claydon House*, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 144.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 73

representing a powerful and universal sexual prowess.”⁵⁷ This usurpation of male attire highlighted their anxiety about

the sexual inadequacy of men: strip away the clothing in which men prance, its message goes, and you are left with bodies; examine the bodies and you reach the source of male insecurity at a time when men are not quite sure how penises and testicles entitle them to the patriarchal power they claim. If a woman claimed these things, even if only symbolically, might she not be as manly as most men?⁵⁸

And so women’s sexuality and any type of conduct that was considered “disorderly female activity” were couched in sexual terms, and thus in need of suppression.⁵⁹ He also presents the idea that “[w]omen were seen as possessing a powerful and potentially destructive sexuality which made them naturally lascivious, predatory and, most serious of all, once their desire was fully aroused, insatiable.”⁶⁰ So, while women were described by men as desperately sexual creatures and men had the view that women could never possibly be sated; it was the men who were actually given carte blanche by society to be unfaithful to their spouses.

This chapter will introduce Lady Julia Fulbank from *The Luckey Chance, or An Alderman’s Bargain*, who is neither passively willing to allow her husband to control her choices, nor willing to make him the comically expected cuckold. She is honest to herself and her husband that she is in love with another man, but is unwilling to break her marriage vow, and

⁵⁷ Fletcher, Anthony. *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

thus dishonor herself. By her husband's dishonesty and greed though, he does make her a cuckoldress which allows her to take complete control over not only her husband's household, but her own body as well. She is not the traditionally cuckolding wife—she is an emasculating character that has no male counterpart like the female libertines and female fops. She is an entirely new type of character who is able to usurp the man's place in her relationships, relegating her husband to a subservient position and taking ownership of her body and its disposal.

This type of behavior displayed by Lady Julia was in direct opposition to the patriarchal society in which the audience lived. In order for this type of society to go forward, men needed to maintain their dominance over women, and anxiety about women's sexuality drove men to strive to control that. There was even a great deal of apprehension that women might be afforded too much control in their lives and homes which could lead THEM to demand for control in other parts of their life. In response to a call for a greater measure of equality between husbands and wives, by other men, essayist Robert Whitehall wrote:

That many Women are more than ready to snatch at ye Reins of Government, and surrogate a Power allowed neither by ye Laws of God or Nature, is so certain, that to prove it would be to suspect the Sun shines at Noon day; to whome Should an Inch be // given they would presently take more than an Ell, whose Brains being intoxicated with proud desire and ambition after Rule were they admitted to co-equal sway in a Domestick Kingdome, would presently begin to aspire at Absolute monarchy, then to challenge an equall Authority in State, to make Laws, bear Offices, vote as Members in Parliament, and

afterwards presume to sit in Moses his Chair pretending they have power to TEACH as well as RULE.⁶¹

Obviously, it was not just female sexuality that was viewed with suspicion, it was any type of female empowerment—the power that Lady Julia takes for herself. For the most part in Restoration comedies, wives were trying to cuckold or otherwise deceive their husbands and gain some domestic and personal power. For this deceit they were usually contained or controlled in one way or another by the end of the play, but the effect on the horned man though comical, was indicative of the anxiety that men had over their own sexual dominance. David Turner, author of *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England, 1660-1740* writes that:

Although cuckoldry might be represented as a degrading experience, there were a number of means by which it was thought its effects on a man's self-esteem might be mitigated. A series of proverbial expressions that 'cuckolds come by destiny', or that marriage was a 'lottery' and, being 'made in heaven', was subject to providential influence, suggested that cuckoldry was potentially the face of Everyman but was essentially beyond men's control."⁶²

If it was in fact impossible to contain one's wife, then it was less degrading to be the horned character. Turner also notes that "it deflected the sinfulness of marital infidelity by mocking the

⁶¹ Bacon, Jon Lance. "Wives, Widows, and Writings in Restoration Comedy," *Studies in English Literature* 31, no. 3 (Summer 1991), 428-429.

⁶² Turner, David. *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England, 1660-1740*, (Port Chester: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 88-89.

follies or inadequacies of the adulteress's husband.”⁶³ If men were expected to recognize other cuckolds among his friends (even if there was no outward evidence) then the shame could be mocked in the plays without attaching too much degradation to the individual if it were indeed to happen in real life.

Wives in Restoration Plays

Once a daughter became a wife, she was expected to love, honor, and *obey* her husband till death. But in addition, complete fidelity was expected from women to ensure that any offspring resulting from the union were unquestionably legitimate. But in Restoration comedies this expectation was turned upside down and wives were often seen attempting to be unfaithful to their husbands—a man could not become a cuckold “type” without a wife to supply the horns. These plays gave fictional women the opportunity to test their sexuality and the limits placed on that sexuality in a comedic setting that could be disregarded as unreal or merely a theatrical pretence. There were many types of Restoration comedy wives—some who wanted to be faithful but were tricked into having sex, some who never had any intention of being faithful, some who just considered a lover the natural course of events in a marriage, and in some cases, some that were led astray or rebelled from their overprotective husbands. Despite the type of wife portrayed, most have in common an ultimate subservience to their husband's commands and contradictorily, a natural dishonesty in their marital relationship. Fidelity, while expected of women in real life, was often a running joke in plays and literature of the time, exploiting the anxieties over women's sexuality, especially in plays that featured a libertine character—it was

⁶³ Ibid., 83.

almost a duty for him to sleep with married women as part of his abandonment of societal mores. It was expected that husbands would be having or trying to have affairs with women other than their wives, and young wives (especially if they were married to old men) were certain to be enamored of a handsome young suitor.

Cuckolds

The world of the plays though was obviously far from the expectation of actual societal behavior; while men were permitted, socially, to have an affair, for a wife to make a cuckold of her husband was a much more serious offence. David M. Turner, writes that “the common image of the cuckolded husband was one of humiliation and degradation.”⁶⁴ It was an extremely personal affront for a man’s wife to seek sexual gratification elsewhere. Despite the stigma associated with the reality, the cuckolded husband was an exceptionally popular character in plays and literature. J. L. Styan, author of *Restoration Comedy in Performance* writes that

Cuckolding jokes appear to have been popular at all social levels, judging from the numerous jests recorded on the topic in gentry commonplace books, the ‘prodigious crowds’ of metropolitan citizens and apprentices who flocked to see Edward Ravenscroft’s bawdy farce *The London Cuckolds* each Lord Mayor’s Day from its debut in 1682 until 1751, and the mocking ballads and

⁶⁴ Styan, J. L. *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 85.

libels of plebian composition which circulated in the taverns and streets of early modern England.⁶⁵

Despite, or perhaps because of, the shame and humor that could be directed at a freshly horned husband, the cuckold was commonly seen in Restoration comedies. J. L. Styan, author of *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, writes that “matters of adultery and cuckoldry, so serious in real life, are on the Restoration stage [...] exaggerated beyond belief—to the point where there could be no pain for the spectator, and one’s own wife or husband could sit beside one in the theatre without embarrassment.”⁶⁶ For a woman to cuckold her husband was so outrageous, and depicted as so blatantly wrong that it moved past the point where it could be seen to be a bad example, and turned farcical. The comedy was so far from what was expected of women in real life that the transgressive nature of the concept was largely ignored in the comedy created by the bumbling husband unable to control his wife.

Perhaps the most well-known source of unfaithful wives in Restoration literature is William Wycherly’s, *The Country Wife*. Margery Pinchwife, the titular character, is an innocent country bumpkin married to a much older and excessively jealous husband. He has brought her from the country to London for the first time and she is delighted with all that she has seen, though it isn’t much—her husband, Pinchwife, keeps her hidden at home for fear her pretty face will attract an admirer who would attempt to seduce her. And he has reason to fear. The first time she finds herself the object of the handsome Mr. Horner’s flattery she tumbles head over heels in love with him and tries to escape her husband in order to be with him. Of course Horner

⁶⁵ Turner, David. *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England, 1660-1740*, (Port Chester: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 84.

⁶⁶ Styan, J. L. *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 213.

is practiced in the art of turning husbands into cuckolds—he has spread the rumor that he is impotent so that men will allow him to escort their wives about town.

This allows him in turn to have sex with Lady Fidget, Dainty Fidget, and Mistress Squeamish, one right after the other. These are hypocritical women who all swore to their menfolk and themselves that they would never even consider having an affair, and that Horner (before spreading his rumor) was the worst kind of man. The hypocrisy of the women and the utter stupidity of the husbands make them figures of fun to be mocked and ridiculed, while in real life, this type of behavior from a wife would be likely to have serious repercussions. But in her plays, Aphra Behn demonstrates that a sexual liaison was one way in which wives were able to act out on their own, or a way in which they might be able to wrest some semblance of control over their lives and sexuality.

The Behn Difference

Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* provides a perfect example of the traditionally scheming wife, and the gullible husband who is constantly horned and deceived. Sir Patient's wife Lady Fancy has a lover on the side, and the comedy revolves around her being caught in bed with a lover and watching her convince her husband that she is not only chaste, but also completely in love with him alone. He is ultimately undeceived as to her true character, but rather than punishing her or seeking redress, he allows her to run away with her lover along with several thousand pounds she has been able to inveigle during the course of their marriage. Sir Patient ends the play rather nonchalantly summing up his situation as inevitable, saying:

You see what a fine City Wife can doe

Of the true breed: Instruct her Husband too:

I wish all civil Cuckolds in the Nation,

Would take Example by my Reformation.⁶⁷

While Lady Fancy is solely out to cuckold her husband, Behn also created a different type of wife who was openly sexual, had a man on the side, but was completely unwilling to make a cuckold of her husband. In *The Luckey Chance: or An Alderman's Bargain*, she uses the character of Lady Julia Fulbank to demonstrate that not all women are so sexually voracious that they cannot control themselves when faced with temptation. Lady Julia is unlike any other Restoration comedy wives—she is honorable, reasonable, and honest in her dealings with not only her husband, but her lover as well. She uses these attributes to become the most empowered character in the play, ultimately taking control not only of her household, but of her body and affairs as well.

The Luckey Chance

The Luckey Chance, or An Alderman's Bargain was first performed in the spring of 1686 and was the last of Behn's original plays to be produced during her lifetime.⁶⁸ The play is about two young women, Letitia, who is on the cusp of marrying the elderly Sir Feeble Fainwould and Lady Julia, who is already married to another old man, Sir Cautious Fulbank, though both women are in love with young men. Lady Julia Fulbank's lover, Gayman, owes Sir Cautious money because he has bankrupted himself in wooing Julia—he is living in penury waiting for an

⁶⁷ Behn, Aphra. *Sir Patient Fancy*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 6 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 5.1.737-740.

⁶⁸ Todd, Janet ed., *The Works of Aphra Behn*, Vol. 7, (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 211.

uncle to die and leave him an inheritance. Lady Julia, upon finding out that Sir Cautious is about to foreclose on Gayman's debts, steals £500 from his storeroom to give to Gayman. Sir Cautious' apprentice, and Lady Julia's confidante, Bredwell, delivers the money in a disguise, and insists that Gayman must accompany him that night to meet the anonymous benefactress of the gift.

Assuming the money has come from an older, perhaps unsightly woman in need of sexual gratification, Gayman sneaks away from Letitia's and Sir Feeble's wedding reception to meet the "old woman". Julia, also in disguise, has set up the secret meeting with Gayman at her house, but is interrupted by Sir Feeble, who is sent on a wild goose chase by Letitia's lover Bellmour. When Gayman has been led unknowingly to Julia's rooms, where she plans on continuing the deception to test Gayman's devotion, they are interrupted by Sir Feeble's vociferous arrival. Gayman is forced to sneak out of the house dressed as a ghost leaving behind the woman he did not recognize as his love, Julia.

The next day Gayman takes to gambling with Sir Cautious and some friends and wins a substantial sum--£300—from Sir Cautious. The parsimonious Sir Cautious offers to play one more game offering a night with his wife, Julia, against the money Gayman has won from him. Sir Cautious loses and since he would rather sell his wife's body for a night than lose any more money, he arranges a sexual encounter between his wife and Gayman. Not only does he prostitute her, he tricks her into having sex with Gayman. She only recognizes the deception by Gayman's "Excess of Love"⁶⁹ which clearly demonstrates that she is not in bed with her husband. When she finds the wrong man in her bed she immediately ceases her activity and

⁶⁹ Behn, Aphra. *The Luckey Chance or An Alderman's Bargain*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays Vol. 7 of The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 5.22. 242.

demands to know how and why Gayman had been allowed to so dishonor her. When Julia finds out what her husband has done, she is furious and exacts revenge by forever denying Sir Cautious access to her bed. He does, however retain his title as Julia's husband, knowing full well that she and Gayman have been, and will continue to be lovers because of his own greed. He promises to leave Gayman his possessions and his wife in his will after he dies, giving them a future to look forward to.

Lady Julia Fulbank as Faithful Wife and Chaste Lover

Lady Julia Fulbank, while married to a lecherous old man is neither willing to betray her marital vows to him, nor give up the amour she has with her swain Gayman. She is intelligent, capable and quite able to manage both of these relationships on her own terms—much as men might have managed a wife and a mistress in their own life. She is unwilling to be the passive housewife that society dictated she should be, nor is she the silly flibbertigibbet who is taken in by every smooth talking libertine in search of an easy conquest. She takes over the dominant role in both of these relationships, emasculating and relegating the men to more submissive roles. Lady Julia Fulbank uses very different tactics with her lover and her husband to maintain control over them and to keep control over her own choices. She flirts with Gayman to assure herself of his affection, to keep him interested in her, and to test his love for her. While she does love Gayman, she has promised herself and her husband that she will be physically faithful to him for the duration of their marriage, though ultimately her husband forces a pair of cuckold's horns on his own head by trading a night with her to Gayman.

Her relationship with her husband Sir Cautious, is very different from the romantic liaison she has with Gayman. To Julia, her marriage is a pragmatic business arrangement in which she has promised to be faithful to Sir Cautious in return for financial gain and the security that marriage offers. She is neither flirtatious nor coy in her dealings with her husband, but rather frank and almost cold in her assessment of their arrangement. It is her use of these two methods—flirtation with Gayman, and pragmatism with Sir Cautious, that allows her to achieve the type of relationships that she wants to have with both men, as well as setting some boundaries around her own sexual availability and body rights. She is able to use these verbal and physical tools interchangeably to manipulate her men into situations of her own choosing and gain power over them. This use of flirtation and logic puts her on equal footing with the men in the play—the men who would traditionally have been in control of the relationships that Lady Julia takes over. She usurps the man’s place by her ability to outwit and out-argue both her lover and her husband. Through this character Behn demonstrates the validity of female sexuality and points out that honor, honesty, intelligence and wit can be attributes of a Restoration woman. She also creates a character who has no counterpart in other Restoration plays—this is a *woman* in charge—not one who playacts in order to catch a husband or deflect from her natural intelligence. She is unabashedly blunt about taking what she wants in her home and love life—she emasculates the men in the play, and in essence takes on the role of the man—she becomes the dominant character in every relationship that she has.

While Lady Julia Fulbank isn’t entirely honest, neither is she the traditionally cuckolded wife married to an older man. She chose to marry Sir Cautious Fulbank in order to gain financial independence, rather than marry the man she loves, Gayman, who was too poor to support her. She promises Sir Cautious that she will not have sex with anyone else while she is married to

him, even though she is openly disparaging of her husband's sexual prowess; but this fidelity pertains only to intercourse. She arranges meetings with Gayman and they share embraces, but that is as far as she will allow their physical relationship to proceed. She also steals money from Sir Cautious to help support Gayman, and toys with her lover to test his devotion to her—but she insists that she will remain faithful to the promise she made not to make Sir Cautious a cuckold. However, in the end, it is not the woman's much feared sexuality that horns Sir Cautious—it is his own avarice and preference for material goods. She was not complicit in his design, and when she discovered the cheat she was outraged and claimed that her husband had made a prostitute of her. In an era when the predominant perception of women was that they were uncontrollably sexual creatures⁷⁰ Behn created a character who is in control of her sexuality and is acting on her impulses in a considered and direct manner. And her honesty about that sexuality and determination to remain faithful to her husband sets her apart from other wives in Restoration comedies. Lady Julia Fulbank is honorable to her own ideals, intelligent, sexual, strong willed, and in control of her life—in direct opposition to the prevailing views of wives in her time.

Gayman at Lady Julia's Mercy

Lady Julia is exceptionally strong willed, and she demonstrates this strength in all of her relationships. Her determined denial of sex to a man that she obviously has a strong physical passion for is one indication. His frustration with her reticence is apparent, when she invites him to spend an hour alone with her and he complains that the meeting will leave them both sexually

⁷⁰ Fletcher, Anthony. *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 9.

dissatisfied. But she has made a promise, and she is willing to sacrifice her own desire to uphold the vows she made when she married Sir Cautious. She is forced to entice Gayman with attractions other than sex—attractions she is well able to supply with her intelligence and the flirtatious argument she is able to strike up with him. Her argument with him is designed to keep him off-balanced and unsure of his position with her. Though she has declined to have sex with him she is still determined to keep him enamored of her against the time that her husband will die and leave her wealthy and free to re-marry a man of her choosing.

She assures him that “if you can afforde me a Lease of your Love, // ’Till the Old Gentleman my Husband depart this wicked World, // I’m for the Bargain.”⁷¹ This promise of future love is insufficient for Gayman’s impatient nature and he begs for a specific time “when you will be kind, // And I will languish out in starving Wish.”⁷² When he threatens to depart for the assignation with a stranger (Julia in disguise to test his love), she puts him on the spot, knowing that he cannot confess that he must depart to the arms of what he supposes are another woman, by demanding that he stay with her.

LADY FULBANK: Can you deny me—will you not give me one Lone hour
i’t’h’ Garden?

GAYMAN: Where we shall only tantalize each other with dull Kissing, and
part with the same appetite we met—no Madam, besides I have Business—

LADY FULBANK: Some Assignation—is it so indeed?

⁷¹ Behn, Aphra. *The Luckey Chance or An Alderman’s Bargain*, Edited by Janet Todd, *The Plays* Vol. 7 of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2.2. 185-187.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2.2. 191-192.

GAYMAN: Away; you cannot think me such a Traytor; 'tis most important Business.

LADY FULBANK: Oh 'tis too late for Business—let to Morrow serve.

GAYMAN: By no means—the Gentleman is to go out of Town.

LADY FULBANK: Rise the earlier then—

GAYMAN: --But Madam, the Gentleman lies dangerously—sick—and should he die—

LADY FULBANK: 'Tis not a dying Uncle, I hope Sir?

GAYMAN: Hum—

LADY FULBANK: The Gentleman a dying, and to go out of Town to Morrow!

GAYMAN: Ay—a—he goes—in a Litter—'tis his Fancy Madam—Change of Air may recover him.

LADY FULBANK: So may your change of Mistress do me Sir—farewel.⁷³

She knows perfectly well his dilemma—his penurious condition forces him to meet the unknown woman who has already paid him handsomely, but his love for Julia makes him want to stay. She argues with him for her own pleasure and to keep herself in a dominant position in the relationship. But the argument is neither malicious nor intended to send him away. Rather, it is

⁷³ Ibid., 2.2. 223-246.

designed to confirm his love for her and test his constancy. She wants to help support him in his financial distress—especially since that distress was caused by his expensive wooing of her—and have him on hand for the time that she is free to marry him. She keeps him, much as a husband may have kept a mistress.

She also demonstrates her intellectual superiority by constantly outmaneuvering him in her argument. He is unable to keep up with her in the previous conversation as she questions him about his upcoming activities—he is flustered and ends up creating a preposterous story to cover the assignation that he has with the unknown woman. Then, when the roles are reversed and he is pleading for some of her time the next day, she challenges him about the woman he left her for, and again he is forced to dissemble, but without the skill that she shows in her own arguments. When they meet, she questions his love for her, which Gayman foolishly pledges his devotion on a ring he was given the night before by the unknown benefactress (Julia in disguise) which he in turn gives back to her. Recognizing the ring, she quizzes him on his willingness to part with such a valuable object. Gayman claims that the gift is given to “Strengthen the weak Arguments of Love”⁷⁴ but Julia continues to tease him saying:

LADY FULBANK: And leave your self undone?

GAYMAN: Impossible, if I am blest with *Julia*.

LADY FULBANK: Love’s a thin Dyet, nor will keep out Cold,
 You cannot satisfie your Dunning Taylor,
 To cry—I am in love!

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.1. 33.

Tho possible you may your Seamstress.⁷⁵

When she finally drops the flirtatious air and challenges him as to where he got the ring, he is forced to say that he bought it, rather than confess that he allowed himself be seduced by a bag of gold into meeting a strange woman in the night. But when she reveals her knowledge of his precarious financial situation, he confesses that he did indeed go to meet a woman who had paid him for his services but tries to mitigate the crime by describing the lady's unattractiveness. He tells Julia that

GAYMAN: I have—of late—been tempted—
With Presents, Jewels, and large Sums of Gold.

LADY FULBANK: Tempted! by whom?

GAYMAN: The Devil, for aught I know.

LADY FULBANK: Defend me Heaven! The Divil?
I hope you have not made a Contract with him?

GAYMAN: No, tho in the shape of Woman it appear'd

LADY FULBANK: Where met you with it?

GAYMAN: By Magick Art I was conducted—I know not how,
To an enchanted Palace in the Clouds,
Where I was so attended—

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.1. 34-39.

Young Dancing—singing Fiends innumerable!

LADY FULBANK: Imagination all.

GAYMAN: But for the Amorous Devil, the old Proserpine.

LADY FULBANK: Ay she—what said she?—

GAYMAN: Not a word! Heaven be prais'd she was a silent Devil—but she was laid in a Pavillion, all form'd of gilded Clouds, which hung by Geometry, whither I was convey'd after much Ceremony, and laid in Bed with her; where [with] much ado, and trembling with my Fears—I forc'd my Arms about her.

LADY FULBANK: And sure that undeceiv'd him— *Aside*

GAYMAN: But such a Carcase 'twas—deliver me—so rivell'd lean, and rough—a Canvas Bag of wooden Ladles were a better Bedfellow.

LADY FULBANK: Now tho I know that nothing is more distant than I from such a Monster—yet this angers me. *[Aside]*

Death cou'd you love me and submit to this?

GAYMAN: 'twas that first drew me in—

The tempting Hope of means to conquer you,

Wou'd put me upon any dangerous Enterprize:

Were I the Lord of all the Universe,

I am so lost in Love,

For one dear Night to clasp you in my Arms,

I'd lavish all that World—then die with Joy.⁷⁶

Julia is quite delighted to allow Gayman to reveal the assignation that she so carefully planned and executed, until he insults her appearance. With each protestation he seems more and more absurd—the events of the evening sound preposterous when recounted to his love. She is playing him, pretending disbelief up until the moment he gives such an unappealing description of her charms. Even though she is completely aware of *why* he is lying about the “Devil” he embraced, she finds herself a bit annoyed that he didn't recognize her when she finally had him in her arms. Despite her pique, she still manages the argument to her satisfaction—he has confessed his financial situation and lays himself at her feet for forgiveness for his “inconstancy.”

Mistrustful Sir Cautious Betrays His Wife and Loses Control of His Marriage

One of the things that make Lady Julia so different from other Restoration wives, in most other Restoration plays, is her understanding of her own worth, values, and her ability to speak openly to her husband. She engages in a very different type of argument with her husband than she does with her lover. To Sir Cautious, she is logical, pragmatic, honest and forthright in their conversations. Lady Julia has a very defined sense of self and direction in her life and marriage. She chose to marry Sir Cautious on her own terms in order to have the financial security that she could not have with her much younger and handsomer suitor, Gayman. It would appear that she chose this relationship and bond over the appeals of a union with a man she loves in order to

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.1. 62-94.

secure not only her own financial future, but that of Gayman's as well. She has purchased a husband for the benefits he can offer her—money, position, and a substantial inheritance upon his death. While women were often portrayed as hopelessly romantic in their marital aspirations, Lady Julia enters this union as a business contract—she knows what she wants from her husband, and what he expects in return, and she is willing to uphold her end of the contract. She is quite specific in her determination to be faithful to Sir Cautious while she is married to him, but this promise for her relates only to her body. She never pretends to be in love with or attracted to her husband—she is quite open about the distaste she has for her husband's body, even going so far as to mock his performance not only to his face, but in the company of his friends, family and contemporaries.

Sir Cautious, encouraging his elderly friend, Sir Feeble, to not overextend himself on his wedding day so as to be fresh on his wedding night recounts that “Good-facks I danc'd so on my Wedding Day, that when I came to Bed, to my Shame be it spoken, I fell fast asleep, and slept till morning.”⁷⁷ While this is said in jest as an example of what not to do, Lady Julia insults her husband's virility saying, “Where was your Wisdom then, Sir *Cautious*? // But I know what a wise Woman ought to have done.”⁷⁸ She acknowledges the accepted practice in plays of a wife cuckolding her husband, but is unwilling to do so herself even though she sounds a bit regretful that she did not take the opportunity when she had it. When Sir Cautious expresses his concern that she might be unfaithful to him she responds with the pragmatic response that “Wise men, knowing this, should not expose their Infirmities, by marrying us young Wenches; who, without Instruction, find how we are impos'd upon.”⁷⁹ As Lady Fulbank explains to Sir Cautious, she

⁷⁷Ibid. 2.2. 106-108.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 2.2. 109-110.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 2.2. 130-132.

does have sexual desires and is not ashamed of them—she tells her husband that “if forty years were taken from your Age, ‘twoud render you something more agreeable to my Bed, I must confess.”⁸⁰ Her desire is not something that she feels should be repressed, but she does recognize that she has a duty to remain faithful to her husband and she honorably upholds his conjugal rights. She assures him that

Yet you may take my Word without an Oath, were you as old as Time,
and I were young and gay as *April* Flow’rs,
Which all are fond to gather;
My Beautys all shou’d wither in the Shade,
E’er I’d be worn in a dishonest Bosom.⁸¹

She is well aware of her beauty and attractiveness, which is what allowed her to marry the wealthy old man, but she is also aware of the duty she owes as a wife to her husband. She understands the business nature of her marriage—she is now as wealthy as her husband and will inherit the money after he dies, and in exchange, she will be monogamous for the length of the marriage. She does regret marrying Sir Cautious Fulbank, though, saying:

“Had I but kept my sacred Vows to Gayman
How happy had I been—how prosperous he!
Whilst now I languish in a loath’d Embrace,
Pine out my Life with Age—Consumptious Coughs.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid. 5.2. 216-218.

⁸¹ Ibid. 5.2. 99-103.

⁸² Ibid., 1.2. 299-302.

While she is pleased enough with the wealth she has accumulated through marriage, it still is a difficult sentence she must carry out in her passionless union with her husband.

Lady Julia treasures her virtue as much as her love for Gayman, and vows to her friends that she “prize[s] my Honour more than Life”⁸³. She has a remarkably honest and open conversation with Sir Cautious about her faithfulness, right before he allows Gayman into her bed in the dark. He questions her previous flirting with Gayman—suspecting that she may have already made him a cuckold, but she denies being physically unfaithful when he asks:

SIR CAUTIOUS: How, wou’d, what cuckold me?

LADY FULBANK: Yes, if it pleas’d me better than Vertue Sir.

But I’ll not change my Freedom and my Humour,

To purchase the dull Fame of being Honest.

SIR CAUTIOUS: Ay but the World, the World—

LADY FULBANK: I value not the Censures of the Crowd.

SIR CAUTIOUS: But I am old.

LADY FULBANK: That’s your Fault Sir, not mine.

He is not reassured by her response—disbelieving that she could find satisfaction with him alone and further questions her to find out what she would do if he were actually to give her permission to have an affair.

⁸³ Ibid., 1.2. 278.

SIR CAUTIOUS: [...] if I shou'd be good-natur'd and give thee leave to love discreetly?—

LADY FULBANK: I'd do't without your leave Sir.

SIR CAUTIOUS: Do't—what—cuckold me?

LADY FULBANK: No, love discreetly Sir, love as I ought, love Honestly.

SIR CAUTIOUS: What in Love with any Body, but your own Husband?

LADY FULBANK: Yes.

SIR CAUTIOUS: Yes quoth a—is that your loving as you ought?—

LADY FULBANK: We can not help our Inclinations Sir,

No more than Time, or Light from coming on—

But I can keep my Vertue Sir intire.⁸⁴

He is attempting to justify his plans to allow another man to take his place in her bed, and it is her honor, loyalty and honest discussion of her determination that allows her, when she discovers how her husband has betrayed her, to take control over her situation in order to claim full rights over her body in the future.

Per her marriage vow, Lady Julia knew that she must be obedient to her husband, but when he bartered away her body to Gayman, she is given the opportunity to take control of her life. Sir Cautious has been concerned that Julia would cuckold him, but ultimately, it is Sir

⁸⁴Ibid., 5.2. 106- 128.

Cautious that earns the title for himself. This wager is made without Julia's knowledge or consent—she has surrendered her body to her husband upon marriage, and it has become his to dispose of at will according to the laws of the society in which they live. She is justifiably furious when she discovers the transaction and she immediately recognizes that her lover and her husband have negated her vows and compromised the values she has set for herself. To Gayman's excuse that he was driven to the deceit by love she responds "[a]nd must my Honour be the Price of it? // Cou'd nothing but my Fame reward your Passion?"⁸⁵

When she finds out the full extent of her husband's duplicity, she takes absolute control over her body, despite her previous understanding of her lack of rights as a wife, and denies her bed to her husband in the future. She makes a solemn vow, in the presence of Gayman and her husband that "by all things Just and sacred, // To separate for ever from his Bed"⁸⁶ and responds to his pleas for mercy that "I've sworn, nor are the Stars more fixt than I."⁸⁷ By this vow, she declares her independence from her husband's sexual dominance and embraces her own rights to her body. She also takes the dominant position in their relationship by so firmly denying him any right to her body in the future. By wagering her, he gives up the ownership that a husband should legally have had over his wife and she takes full control of her marriage and what she sees as her sexual rights. In essence, she becomes the man of the house and relegates Sir Cautious to a more subservient position in their relationship.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.2. 359-362.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 5.2. 401-402.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 5.2. 273-274 & 288.

Conclusion

Lady Julia Fulbank, from the beginning of the play, expresses her sexuality in both of her relationships—with Sir Cautious and with Gayman through her conversation with them. By allowing her to freely express her sexuality alongside her fidelity to her sexually unsatisfying spouse, Behn demonstrates the validity of female sexuality. She is unapologetically open in her sexual dissatisfaction with her husband, her love for Gayman, and her loyalty to her values and the vow she made to Sir Cautious. She knows that she will eventually be separated from her rich old husband through death—she is anticipating her widowhood, and has taken steps to financially stabilize her life for the post-husband period that she anticipates. Her sexuality, combined with the shrewd business acumen that led her to marry Sir Cautious and her loyalty to him sets her apart from other Restoration wives. These are positive attributes that allow her to win the prize and achieve her ultimate goal—rights to make her own sexual choices, and the financial security that allows some autonomy eventually as a widow.

John Bacon argues that Robert Whitehall, who so strongly felt that women should have no power given to them—even in their own homes⁸⁸

“closes his essay with advice for wives on the subject of personal power: instead of aspiring after ‘equall Authority with their Husbands,’ they should learn to win their husbands’ affection, ‘which is easily engrossed by an oblidging carriage and unfeigned kindness (unless their Fate be to be wedded to a churlish Nabals) and when once they have made themselves Empreses of

⁸⁸ See quote on page 87.

their Husbands hearts, they may easily obtain what power, they can in reason desire, and may command as they please.”⁸⁹

Wives, were then, to use those womanly wiles they possessed as the only tool in their arsenal to coax any type of domestic power from their husbands. However, with the type of disorderly conduct espoused and performed by Lady Julia, she fell under suspicion that she was unfaithful to her husband. Lady Julia had been not only making herself “Empress of her husband’s heart”, but she had also been taking power in their domestic situation through her sexuality and the relationship she had built with Gayman. It was enough that when she was ultimately betrayed by her husband, the balance of power completely shifted into her hands and the domestic order was turned completely upside-down. She steps into the position of command traditionally held by the husband and usurps that power for herself.

Because she is so thoroughly capable of keeping her lover in the position that she wants him to be through her flirtation, and intelligently arguing her position with her husband, she comes into her own authority over both of them by the end of the play because of their dishonesty and avarice. Through Lady Fulbank, Behn demonstrates that just because a woman may have sexual desires, it does not automatically transform her into the insatiable creature that men imagined women to be. She controlled her sexuality and molded that aspect of her life around her values and ideals. She is now the authority figure in both of her relationships—she has in fact, taken on the man’s role with both her husband and her swain.

⁸⁹ Bacon, Jon Lance. “Wives, Widows, and Writings in Restoration Comedy,” *Studies in English Literature* 31, no. 3 (Summer 1991), 431.

Chapter Five—Conclusion

I wish I were that dull, that constant thing,
 Which thou would'st have, and Nature never meant me.
 I must, like the cheerful birds, sing in all groves,
 And perch on every bough.

(Willmore to Angellica Bianca in *The Rover*)

Restoration comedy utilized fast paced, witty repartee, stock characters, and often pushed the lines of what was considered appropriate viewing material. During this time of historical change and upheaval, Aphra Behn emerged as a major influence in the theatrical scene. As the first woman to make her living as a playwright in England, and one of the most prolific writers of the time, her work has left an impression that resonates even today. She struggled with prejudice and discrimination against her work, but was successful in supporting herself through her writing.

During her life and in subsequent centuries Behn's popularity has undergone quite a transformation. Her first two plays, *The Forc'd Marriage* and *The Amorous Prince* were quite well received, though her third play *The Dutch Lover* was not. It was three years before she reappeared with a play *Abdelazer*—her only tragedy—and again rode the tide of success. Interestingly, as she became more and more successful, her contemporaries and former friends became more critical and vitriolic toward her work. They accused her of plagiarism, which was valid since she often reworked previously written plays—as did most other Restoration playwrights, and they joined critics in their complaints that her writing was indecent and lewd.

Alexander Pope famously wrote of her plays “The stage how loosely does Astrea tread,/ Who fairly puts all characters to bed!”¹

Nevertheless, the stigma attached to her and her plays remained through the next two centuries as critics wrote scathingly of her literary efforts. Heidi Hutner offers a selection of invective penned throughout the 18th and 19th centuries: “John Duncombe (1754) maintained that Behn was the friend of moral depravity and the foe of female virtue [...] the dramatic scholar John Doran (1865) asserted that Behn ‘might have been an honour to womanhood—she was its disgrace. She might have gained glory by her labors—she chose to reap infamy.’ In “Literary Garbage” (1872), an anonymous critic wrote that ‘if Mrs. Behn is read at all, it can only be from a love of impurity of its own sake, for rank indecency of the dullest, stupidest, grossest kind, unrelieved by the faintest gleam of wit and sensibility.’”²

Though there were still biographies written about her from the late 17th century, it wasn’t until the early part of the 20th century that her work began to be seen as socially acceptable, and Virginia Woolf is famously quoted as saying that all women should “let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds”.³ With Woolf’s introduction, Behn’s popularity has risen and fallen with the popularity of the feminist movement in the United States and Europe. With the increasing enthusiasm for the radical feminist movement in the 60’s and 70’s, Behn’s work was finally rescued from the abyss of neglect it had fallen into for the previous centuries, and her most popular play, *The Rover or The*

¹ Hutner, Heidi, Editor. *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 2.

²Hutner, Heidi, ed., *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 2.

³Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One’s Own* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 65.

Banish't Cavaliers, was not only produced, but became a standard work in play anthologies. Her popularity waned with the decline of Second Wave Feminism, but surged again in the 90's as interest in the feminist movement led to a re-examination of old texts to see what could be gleaned from the works of ages past. Behn has since been called one of the early feminist writers, though of course no such banner existed when she was struggling to subsist—using her pen to make her living. She used the resources available to her and developed a definite voice among the male playwrights, making female characters that were much more developed and realistic. With these characters she was able to assert a female voice into everyday discourse and affirm the woman's right to participate in intellectual debates and make their own sexual and life choices.

Her female characters mimicked the behavior and attitudes of the most popular stock characters of Restoration drama, and, by taking steps to determine their own futures; they were demonstrating their own abilities and advocating their right to control their own bodies and choices. They were more than capable of holding their own in the fast paced repartee and contest of wits that was standard in Restoration comedy, and demonstrated that Behn's women were as capable of rising to the dynamic intellectual period as men were. She made strategic use of these character types in her own plays by making female libertines and fops who were as witty, sexually adventurous, intelligent, and outrageous (if not more so) than their male counterparts.

This thesis examined several of her female characters as they were compared to stock character types, and demonstrated how they not only bested their male counterparts, but also created a sense of autonomy by their direct actions and choices. I also discovered that one character in particular was *sans pareil*—she was without comparison and completely unique. My

first chapter examined Hellena from *The Rover*, and Marcella, Cornelia, and Laura Lucretia from *The Feign'd Curtizans or A Night's Intrigue*—virginal characters who disguise themselves as women of lower classes in order to experiment with their sexuality and escape arranged marriages created by their families. Each of these characters take on libertine characteristics in order to free themselves from societal restraints and prove to their chosen mate that they can keep up with their witty conversation and sexual innuendo. Chapter Two examined Lady Knowell from *Sir Patient Fancy* and how, even though she is described by all around her as a fop, she is still able to outwit everyone in her efforts to manipulate the circumstances of the plot to her liking. She makes a fool of herself by acting as a fop but she arises victorious from all battles of intelligence and wit that she sets for herself, proving her ability to successfully interact in a man's world. Chapter Three focused on Lady Julia Fulbank from *The Luckey Chance or An Alderman's Bargain*, who was skillfully juggling a flirtation with a lover, as well as being faithful to her husband and managing his household—she was completely unique. Further, when she was tricked into making a cuckold of her husband, by his greed and avarice, the deception allows her to completely take control of her life and body. She is able to usurp the man's role as well as becoming the dominant member of both her marriage and her flirtation. This ultimate domination sets her apart from not only other cuckolding wives, but Restoration female characters, and gives her greater power in her relationships.

Behn's defiant portrayal of these intelligent and sexually aware characters created a dynamic assertion that women were not only capable of these attributes, but that women should be allowed and even encouraged to participate in them. Her plays are diverse and clever, and the characters even more so. Aphra Behn set herself and her works apart from her male contemporaries. As a woman she was a stranger to the field in which she chose to labor, but the

novelty of being a female in a man's field would not have been enough to sustain her through her career. She was the most prolific writer of Restoration literature next to Dryden, and her numerous works made people sit up and take notice. As a woman in a man's world she forged a place for herself, and also created enduring characters that demonstrate through their intelligence and wit that women should not be excluded from this world—that women deserve a place in the men's world because they are on an intellectual level with them. Fidelis Morgan, in her book *The Female Wits: Women Playwrights of the Restoration*, summed up the importance of her life and career, saying, “[e]ven when her works were well-nigh forgotten, Aphra Behn continued to matter, the way pioneers do.”⁴ She was indeed a pioneer forging the way for independent women who would use her example to take up their pens and make their own contributions to the literary legacy created by Behn in England.

⁴ Morgan, Fidelis. *The Female Wits: Women Playwrights of the Restoration*. (London: Virago Press Limited, 1981), 23.

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