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Honour, Desire, Discourse: The Notion of Authority in Aphra Behn's Comic Drama

By: Shannon M. Ross

Honour, Desire, Discourse: The Notion of Authority in Aphra Behn's Comic Drama examines Aphra Behn's negotiation, within her comic drama in particular, with the notion of authority in one of England's most culturally and politically tumultuous eras. Contextualized within the sociohistory of the latter half of the seventeenth century, the paper looks in detail at three of Behn's comic plays: *The Rover, or, the Banish't Cavaliers, Part I* (1677), *The Lucky Chance, or, the Alderman's Bargain* (1686), and *The Widow Ranter, or, The History of Bacon in Virginia* (1689). Each study revolves around Behn's treatment of the notion of authority within the play, the particular social and political moods or events that inform this treatment, and Behn's use of the comic genre as a medium for discourse with dominant cultural paradigms.

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The Notion of Authority in Aphra Behn's Comic Drama

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**Thesis presented to the Department of English
of the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.**

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Introduction

Aphra Behn in the Seventeenth Century

When Charles II returned to London on 29 May 1660 to reassert the rule of the British monarchy, he stepped onto the throne as the ruler of a nation fundamentally different from that which his father had ruled eleven years earlier. In the space of little over a decade, England had seen its sovereign beheaded, had been ruled by a common man with no arguable claim to royal lineage, and had come under the power of the Puritans—a group whose political and religious creeds had never before held such *de facto* power over the nation. And regardless of the zealotry with which Charles' supporters clung to the purple robes of royalty in the spring of 1660, England would never again in practice regard monarchical authority as absolute (Ashley 120).

In spite of a deeply felt need for stable and unified political and religious leadership, British subjects' faith in the capabilities of any one individual to rule their land under the divine ordinance of God were critically shaken by their contemporary experience. The ascension of Charles II to the throne did not end the century's chaos; it merely held it at bay for a few years. The Popish Plot, Monmouth's rebellion, the Glorious Revolution of 1688/89—these mark only a few of the many conflicts that characterize the middle and latter half of the century. The rise of science, the shift in legislative authority from Church to state and the golden decades of literature

before and after the Interregnum—all of these factors contributed to the dawning of a new approach to authority. God was becoming increasingly overshadowed by the growing sovereignty of human reason that would find fuller flower during the Enlightenment.

Indeed, many of the greatest thinkers of the era, including Thomas Hobbes, James Harrington and John Milton, went much farther than simply expressing doubt about concepts like the divine right of kings; they began to portray ideal authority in government as derived from and driven by the desires and needs of the people, not the sovereign himself. Hobbes' autocratic Leviathan—the “Mortal God” created “voluntarily” by the people both to preserve themselves from the anarchy of the individual will in its lust for power and to assuage their fear of powerlessness—is granted its absolute status by the contract agreed to by the people themselves (Ashley 123-128). In *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), Harrington defines the ideal state as one in which “a stable society depended on a direct relationship between the distribution of property and political power” (Ashley 125). In Harrington's utopian vision, the leadership of the nation would rest in the hands of “the steadier section of the community, which engaged in agriculture,” where a “Senate of mature property-owners was to make and debate laws, while an assembly, elected by universal suffrage, was to be allowed to vote on them” (Ashley 125). Milton's anti-royalism is expressed vehemently throughout much of his political writings, particularly in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (c.1649), which embodies his attempt to counter Presbyterian resistance to the execution of Charles I.¹ The tract is a bold statement for the rights of the people to “be governed as seems to the best” (Hughes 750). The voices of the era, then, were expressing a new philosophy in which the roots of democracy have often been found. In America, the Puritans who had fled England earlier in the century were increasingly distanced from the rule of the Crown. The Old World was passing away, and in its place a New World would inevitably dawn.

While these reactions to the issue of right rule remain the subject of study and debate to this day, their importance for my study lies in the political and social reality that they reveal: the crisis of authority that preoccupied the seventeenth-century mind. The key philosophical struggle of the era, it seems, was to move beyond this stagnant and confusion-driven paradigm without undergoing another civil revolt. Yet most writers whose work is still known today seem unable to envision a world whose sociopolitical construction does not partake of Old World forms. Particularly difficult, it seems, is their attempt to clearly examine and to step outside of outmoded concepts of authority on any level—political, economic or social.

The England of Aphra Behn's era, while often upset by upheaval, vehemently clung to the one concept of order which lurked beneath all of its struggles: the notion of hierarchy. Hierarchy was the fundamental concept with which every thinker grappled in this century—how it should be arranged, what system of authority should be established in government, in the Church, in the home. But Behn's vision was different. It was, admittedly, problematic and paradoxical for Behn herself, who while she knew that the web of dominant ideas about authority was losing its substance, could never fully extricate herself from its grasp. Today, however, her themes seem visionary. Aphra Behn's drama, particularly her comic drama, was unique in its ability to step away from the public and private values of her day, beyond the baiting of one form of Old World authority against the other. Her unique position as a female writer in a century when the two categories seemed mutually exclusive perhaps contributed to her insight. She was able to step into a space of alterity where the subject of her argument is not the ideal construction of hierarchies for governing the state and family, but rather the validity of hierarchy as an ordering system, and the viability of Old World systems of authority in general.

Behn uses her comic drama to assert and validate the voice of the elusive "other" that has been the recent subject of much post-colonial, post-modern consideration. In doing so, she attacks the foundations of a cultural vision of authority as an external, imposed and fixed

concept. Instead, authority, for Behn, is tied much more closely to the notion of *author*. Rather than being something that is imposed or withheld, as the case may be, authority is first and foremost the possession of a voice that is heard and a story that is listened to. For Behn, authority is a means of measuring independence rather than submission or dominance.

The “other” to whom Behn grants an authorized voice is usually feminine, or at least non-masculinist and anti-hierarchical. It is also, in more generic terms, anti-heroic—that is, it opposes or deconstructs the values that underlie traditional concepts of heroism. In other words, it is the voice that was usually stifled when the dominant cultural ideologies of Behn’s day asserted themselves. As I will argue in my study of *The Rover*, the “other” is that which is necessarily stifled in order to grant power to dominant forces. In many of Behn’s plays, this other voice is embodied in a strong and independent female character. However, the voice does not simply emanate from the mouths of Behn’s heroines, but from the more immanent ways in which Behn asserts her own voice through the subjects of her plays, the plays’ discourse with contemporary culture, and with other plays, and the ways in which Behn manipulates genre.

Behn was one of the most popular and controversial playwrights of the Restoration, yet her works have been hidden from public view for centuries; indeed, her very existence has been questioned and the authorship of her works has been denied.² While modern biographical research and changes in social attitudes have both confirmed and affirmed not only her existence but also the historical and literary value of her endeavors, her reconstructed biography remains largely speculative. The absence of concrete historical evidence about her life, augmented by the conscious suppression of her literary presence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has rendered her an historical enigma. A basic sketch of her life, however, can be traced in the biographies that do exist. She was probably born to a Mr. Johnson in the town of Wye, in Kent county, in 1640.³ She traveled to Surinam some time in the early 1660s, and it is this experience which provided her with the material for her best known novel today, *Oroonoko, or, the Royal*

Slave (Duffy 16). She probably began some of her earliest writing at this time (Goreau 41-69) and returned to England a few months before March 1664 (Goreau 69). London's Public Record Office contains many of Behn's letters, written in Holland and France during the years 1666 to 1667, and thus supports the well-known claim that she was a spy for England during the Dutch Wars (Woodcock x). Nothing is known of Behn's husband, the elusive Mr. Behn, other than his occupation as a merchant. That he probably died shortly after their wedding is likely, since no reference is made to him by Behn herself during her literary years, although it is possible that they intentionally separated. This refusal to speak of him, combined with the strong presence of widows in her work and the proliferation of noxious old husbands who wed young innocent wives, is often read by biographers and critics alike as an indirect commentary on the circumstances of her own marriage.⁴ Since little evidence exists either to refute or support this reading of Behn's work, most scholars accept that her marriage was, at the very least, unpleasant and short-lived.

In spite of the relative shortage of facts about Behn's life, critics such as Janet Todd, Heidi Hutner and Aaron R. Walden have begun exploring the fruits of Behn's long-forgotten labours. These scholars are (re)discovering a body of work which not only provides important insight into the political and social tastes of Behn's era, but also does so from a unique position—a woman's. Behn's work itself and the cultural history of the world in which she lived and wrote are, unlike her biography, concrete and readily available today. She published at least eighteen plays,⁵ and wrote several volumes of poetry, novels, short stories and at least three translations from Latin. Behn's writings are illuminated by and illuminate the entire cultural matrix of Restoration England. Indeed, her themes can only be understood within the context of Restoration society, for her writing is a response to the ideologies and institutions which dominated her era.

It is the goal of this study to explore the ways in which Behn treats the notion of authority in three of her comedies, *The Rover, or the Banish't Cavaliers, Part I* (1677), *The Lucky Chance, or the Alderman's Bargain* (1686) and *The Widow Ranter, or, The History of Bacon in Virginia* (1689).⁶ In particular, I seek to examine the relationship between her treatment of authority and the sociopolitical context within which Behn wrote her plays. This dissertation will examine Aphra Behn's comic drama as expressive of a social voice that speaks from both the centre and the margins of this culture. As a royalist, Behn was hardly a political rebel. Dutifully, she served her king not only through espionage and foreign intrigue but also in the political themes expressed throughout her work. However, as a female writer in a male-dominated world, Behn also stood in a marginal social space. Her work represents an attempt not only to make sense of conflicting yet interwoven political matrices, but also to negotiate with the dominant ideology from both the centre and the margins of her culture.

The Rover, Part I is Behn's subversive re-writing of Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso, or, the Wanderer* (1663). In this play, Behn uses the linguistic and social dynamics of comedy to illustrate that radical rejections of authority intrinsically partake of their antecedents. In the act of rewriting Killigrew's characters and themes, Behn reveals the supposedly anti-authoritarian libertinism of his play as a mirror image of the ideology that it rejects. In an extension of this theme, Behn also uses comic discourse as a means of undercutting libertine assumptions about sexuality and femininity. By granting discursive mastery to her heroine, Hellena, Behn gives a voice to the "other" that is silenced in *Thomaso*. Authority in *The Rover* is associated with discursive presence and ideological independence. Through the linguistic relationships between the play's characters, Behn thus stages her own interaction with seventeenth-century notions of authority.

In *The Lucky Chance*, Behn addresses the notion of authority as it relates to the institution of marriage and to the individual. The play critiques the practice of arranged marriage

as a system which not only denies the individual will of both men and women, but which also deprives them of access to true love. Women, Behn suggests, are reduced by this institution to sexual property but men are equally enslaved by the dictates of tradition. Through the character of Lady Julia Fulbank, Behn offers an alternative vision of authority: self-authorization. Lady Julia represents a movement on Behn's part outside of all understood and accepted attitudes about the individual's relationship to traditional values. While it is arguable that Behn's liberation stumbles somewhat at the end, her play nevertheless brings into question the patriarchal paradigm which authorized notions of love, femininity and honour in Restoration England.

In *The Widow Ranter*, Behn not only questions the individual natures of Restoration notions of law, honour and authority, but also problematizes the relationship between these notions. Through the battle between Bacon and the Crown, Behn metaphorically stages the ideological battle between the respective authority paradigms venerated by both the monarchy and the new individualism that arose during this era. In the end, however, this battle is intrinsically an Old World one and must give way to the emerging New World order represented by the colonists. Generically, Bacon's plot ends in tragedy, for he and his battle are representative of an ideological system which is fading. The play itself, however, is ultimately comic. It ends with a post-colonial hint at political independence for the colonies. The alternative vision of authority which arises in this political plot is embodied by its title figure, the Widow Ranter herself.

I have chosen to focus specifically upon Behn's comic drama not only for purposes of uniformity and limitation of topic but also because of comedy's traditional tendency towards social, cultural and political transgression. In considering the significance of Behn's choice of genre to her themes and topics, I will draw primarily upon the critical insight of Susan Purdie, whose *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse* sheds light upon the use of this genre (historically and

theoretically) as a forum for political commentary. For Behn, the stage was a locus for the moral illumination of the general public—a space for political discourse. In fact, she even went so far as to suggest that drama is “one of the most essential parts of good government” (“Dedicatory Epistle,” *The Lucky Chance*)—a testimony to her support of Charles II’s government policy. Because Behn does not specify whether any genre is more suitable for these purposes, and since she attaches the dedicatory epistle in which these notions are expressed to a comic play, it is reasonable to assume that she uses her comic drama for these political and didactic purposes. Drawing from this assumption, then, I will devote much of my discussion to considering how the features of comedy (the fool, the butt, the body) lend themselves particularly well to Behn’s purposes, allowing her to subvert, critique and challenge social norms in spite of her gender and/or her political affiliations.

Notes to Introduction

1. Merritt Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1957) 750-780.
2. In *Reconstructing Aphra Behn; A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (New York: The Dial Press, 1980) 9-11, Angeline Goreau critiques Ernest Bernbaum's 1913 article, "Mrs. Behn's Biography, A Fiction," *PMLA* 28 (1913): 432-453. Bernbaum dismisses the validity of the first extant Behn biography, "A History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn" (1696), claiming that its author, "One of the Fair Sex," was actually Charles Gildon. On the basis of this conclusion, Bernbaum dismisses the accuracy and integrity of the biography. Furthermore, in a chapter that was appended to Bernbaum's article, A. Purvis, having consulted the birth register at Wye (where "One of the Fair Sex" locates Behn's birthplace), discovers that one "Afara Amis," whom he assumed to be our playwright, died shortly after she was born. Rather than questioning the validity of his supposition that Aphra was indeed born "Amis," Purvis suggests that perhaps the playwright herself was a fiction ("Mrs. Aphra Behn," *Amateur Historian* 1.9 (1953-1954)).
3. Goreau; Maureen Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess* (London: Johnathan Cape Ltd., 1977); and George Woodcock, *The English Sappho* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989). All three biographers agree upon this surname, although earlier biographers wrongly believe her to be "Amis" (see previous note).
4. Most of Behn's biographers suggest this possibility, as does Heidi Hutner. See her "Rereading Aphra Behn: An Introduction," *Rereading Aphra Behn* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993) 1-16.

5. Janet Todd and Virginia Crompton expand this number to nineteen in “Rebellion’s Antidote: A New Attribution to Aphra Behn,” *Notes and Queries* 38 (1991): 175-177.
6. These are the full titles of the plays; however, for the sake of brevity, I will refer to each by its short title (*The Rover*, *The Lucky Chance*, *The Widow Ranter*) for the remainder of the study. Similarly, I will refer to Killigrew’s *Thomaso, or, the Wanderer* as *Thomaso*, and *Oroonoko, or, the Royal Slave* as *Oroonoko*.

Chapter 1

The Rover, Part I:

Comedy, Discourse and Sexual Politics—Rewriting Transgression

In *Comedy; The Mastery of Discourse*, Susan Purdie asserts that all joking is essentially transgressive.¹ On a linguistic level, joking subverts the fundamental rule of language—the “Symbolic Law” which holds that, “at any given moment only one signifying element functions to represent only one signified element” (Purdie 34). However, joking is also a social activity, and joking discourse subverts the sociopolitical rules that guide relationships between people in much the same way that it undercuts the rules that govern language. A “mode of meaning which negotiates both psychic and cultural restraints . . . [and] manipulates the social relationship of the participants” (Purdie 126), joking as a social activity relies upon the interaction of three distinct groups: the joker, the listener and the butt. Comic plays are one version of joking discourse in which the playwright is ultimately the joker and the audience is the listener. The butt can be anything from a character within the play to a social reality outside the play and most comedies will adopt an array of targets within this vast spectrum.

This study of Aphra Behn’s treatment of authority in her comic drama gains much from Purdie’s discursive, or linguistic, approach to comedy. Of particular value is Purdie’s focus upon comedy as a dynamic interaction between groups whose relationship is founded upon their

relative mastery of discourse. In the end, the most important of the three players for this study is the butt, upon whose powerlessness the joker's mastery depends, for it is in the targets that it chooses that we may trace the collective values of a culture's status quo. Behn's strange social and political position as a seventeenth-century woman, writer, royalist and Catholic makes her a particularly interesting study in conjunction with Purdie's argument, for Behn simultaneously existed in the position of both joker (as playwright) and butt (as woman). This unique combination lends an added layer of complexity to her works. It also grants particular depth to *The Rover*—a play whose discursive dynamics she deliberately changed—for her themes, as a female author, always remain equivocal.

As comedies, both Aphra Behn's *The Rover*² and its antecedent, Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*, are transgressive texts in Purdie's sense. *Thomaso* was written primarily as a libertine foil to the values of the Puritans (who had exiled Killigrew during the Interregnum) and of the religious establishment in general. Behn challenges the same (primarily sexual) moral system in *The Rover*. Unlike Killigrew, though, Behn does not simply undercut the values of the status quo, or what once was the status quo—she challenges these values *and* deconstructs the arguments of the opposing side (in this particular instance, Killigrew himself) to reveal that these reactionary values partake of the same substance as their opposites. Behn ultimately rewrites *Thomaso*'s libertine discourse in order to reveal its social transgression as ideology; she is not challenging puritanical values, but patriarchal ones. She then goes beyond deconstruction to provide a voice for that which Killigrew silences.

Of particular interest to Behn are the sexual politics of Killigrew's plot, which, while violating social propriety by embracing libertine notions of free love, are informed by the era's dominant patriarchal world view. By transforming Killigrew's characters, altering his plot and shifting the balance of discursive power in the play, Behn translates Killigrew's sexual vision into a statement about authority on both a social and individual level. Socially, Killigrew's world

in *Thomaso* is arranged into traditional hierarchies—King over subject, rich over poor, domestic (that is, English) over foreign, beauty over ugliness, male over female. Behn challenges not only the arrangement of these hierarchies but also the validity of a concept of authority that rests upon hierarchy. This challenge is admittedly inconsistent—Behn never addresses issues that are considered essential to cultural study today, such as economic class.³ However, the transgression signalled by her manipulation of discourse in this play still remains striking within the particular social context within which Behn wrote.

Before comparing *The Rover* and *Thomaso*, some note must be taken of the dramatic structure of both texts. *Thomaso* was written by Thomas Killigrew during the Interregnum. It is set in Madrid, where Killigrew wrote it, and it addresses to a much greater degree issues of public politics than does Behn's play. While *Thomaso* is divided into two parts, it is essentially one multi-plotted play, and its characters and their individual adventures span the entire length of the work. The two parts of *The Rover*, by contrast, are, essentially, two independent plays. While some of the characters, such as Wilmore, maintain their roles throughout both plays, each part deals with different plots and a largely new cast of characters.

In thematic terms, it can be said that *The Rover*, Part I embodies a response on Behn's part to *Thomaso*'s sexual and social politics, and to the dominant ideologies of her culture in general, while *The Rover*, Part II reveals more explicitly Behn's own ideology. In Part I, Behn critiques the social realities of her era's patriarchal gender politics, but in Part II she describes the emancipatory possibilities offered by her creative vision. In "Revisioning the Female Body: *The Rover* Parts I and II," Heidi Hutner summarizes and compares Behn's themes in the two parts of *The Rover*. Hutner, who correctly points out the relative absence of critical work on Part II, suggests that, while Behn's treatment of female identity reverts back to the authority of "the patriarchal fold" (103) in Part I, her final vision in Part II is radically subversive of patriarchal ideologies.⁴ For the purposes of this discussion, however, it becomes necessary to approach *The*

Rover in relation to Killigrew's play, from which Behn draws much of her plot and several of her characters, and out of which springs her thematic content. Because Part I, then, deals to a much greater extent with Behn's direct reactions to her culture's dominant paradigms (particularly its notions of authority and related factors like honour and gender stereotypes) it will be the primary focus of this chapter.

Thomaso is a text whose sexual morals are unquestionably libertine. Libertinism, for the purposes of this argument, was a lifestyle characterized by sexual promiscuity, bawdiness and the rejection of traditional morality. It arose primarily in court circles during the Interregnum and saw its fruition during the reign of Charles II. The causes of the rise of libertinism are found primarily in the large-scale shifts in social values that characterize the middle and end of the century and in the royalist desire to oppose all things Puritan. The larger shift in legislative responsibilities from Church to state, particularly with regard to marriage laws, may also be a cause.⁵ As well, the philosophical evolution that underlies this shift, the challenge to traditional notions of authority as expressed, for example, in the writings of Hobbes, was undoubtedly one of libertinism's primary catalysts.

The nature of libertinism is even more difficult to define than its origins. Critics Harold Weber and Robert Hume suggest that the libertine of the 1660s and 1670s is quite a different animal from the libertine at the end of the century. The earlier type, suggests Weber, is characterized by a belief in "human self-interest, aggression and conquest [,] the primitivist's Golden Laws of Nature and . . . the individual's natural affinity for freedom, indulgence, and pleasure" (Weber 55). Towards the latter part of the century, however, there arose a second type of libertinism: what Weber terms "philosophical libertinism" (Weber 58). The philosophical libertine found freedom in thought, rather than in action. Indeed, this definition may be applied to Behn herself who, while regaled for centuries as a loose woman because of her distinctly unfeminine career, was actually quite conservative in her own circle (which was occupied by

hardline libertines like Rochester), yet remained to many degrees philosophically independent from her culture.

The libertine lifestyle was embodied in drama as in real life by its hero: the rake. The rake was an Epicurean to his very soul who answered to the authority of only two masters: his sexual appetite and his King. Charles II himself was generally accepted as model for the rake figure. The poem “The King’s Vows” satirizes this aspect of Charles’ character:

I will have religion then all of my own,
Where Papist from Protestant shall not be known,
But if it grow troublesome, I will have none,
I’ll wholly abandon all public affairs,
And pass all my time with buffoons and players,
And saunter to Nelly when I should be at prayers. (Lord 186)

In this portrait, Charles displays all of the essential characteristics of the rake: a disregard for spiritual or religious concerns, a tendency to favour personal pleasure, a penchant for passing time idly and raucously at the theater or coffee-houses and, of course, a love of conquering mistresses. However, while Charles displayed in life the qualities of the rake, the true rake in drama is actually an exaggeration of his character, for the true rake figure’s identity was grounded solely within his sexuality. And this sexuality itself is, from a modern standpoint, highly problematic—particularly with regards to its relationship to women and feminine ideals.

This problematic sexuality is evident, for example, in the bawdy poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, a close second to Charles as the embodiment of early Restoration libertinism. Almost any sampling of his amorous poems can be read as a banner for the fancy, wit and troubling sexuality of this ideology. Of Charles II, Rochester wrote:

Restless he rolls about from whore to whore
A merry monarch, scandalous and poor
Nor are his high desires above his strength;
His sceptre and his ----- are of a length. (Morrah 105)

It is in this spirit, rather than that of “The King’s Vows,” that *Thomaso* is written. A friend of the King (Harbage 205), Killigrew wrote his play as a celebration of libertine values, and of England and her monarchy, and as a derogation of the Puritan regime that had exiled Killigrew and his Cavalier compatriots at the time the play was written.

Thomaso’s main characters, particularly its title character, are unmarried men whose primary activity in the play is the search for sexual conquest and general debauchery. Although the play was likely enjoyed by those who read it for its robust characters and bawdy content, it was not particularly well received as a work of literature, and may not even have reached the stage (Weber 152). There are too many plot complexities to describe the play in detail, but the main plots surround Thomaso himself and his companions in their pursuit of pleasure—particularly sexual pleasure.

The play gives predominance to the male libertine point of view, which translates into a prioritization of the “public” over the “private.” By these terms, I mean the traditional division of the world, particularly in drama, into the life of the home and heart on the one hand, and the life of the public concourse on the other. Generally, women, emotion or “passion” and sexuality are relegated to the private sphere, while the public forum is ruled by men, intellect and “masculine” action such as war and national politics. From Aristophanes’ farcical look at the idea of women taking on political power in *Lysistrata*⁶ (also known as *The Assemblywomen*) to dramas of the present day, this division has been used as a comic element, and the comedy generally arises when the two spheres meet or overlap. In Killigrew’s play, however, the catalyst for comedy is not the meeting of the two realms, but the complete absorption of the private into the public

marketplace. The joke in Purdie's sense is ultimately upon the private realm itself, which is Killigrew's discursively silenced butt. As this chapter will go on to argue, while Killigrew attempts to undercut the values of a Puritan status quo, he actually ends up defending a value system that partakes of this status quo's underlying ideology.

The very first lines of *Thomaso* establish the play's fundamental concern with public experience. The first speech of the play is spoken by Don Pedro, a Spanish nobleman who describes the political state of Madrid in the wake of a great loss: the death of its leading general. Pedro focuses in these opening lines upon the political crises and doubts which have since arisen in Madrid. "The death of the brave General," he asserts, "has begot discourse and change in Madrid" (I.i).⁷ Pedro's particular concern with the discursive effects of this political event—that it has provoked discourse—is important, for language, in both *Thomaso* and *The Rover*, is fundamentally significant as both a source and an indicator of power. Discourse underpins the power of the masculine status quo and maintains the public/private hierarchy.

As the dons' conversation continues, the topic of the general's untimely death is quickly replaced by the topic of Angelica Bianca, the infinitely desirable courtesan whom the deceased general has left behind. Significantly, when Don Johan introduces this new topic into the discussion, he introduces it, like Don Pedro, as a matter of public discourse:

. . . there is news in Town will concern [one] much more;
The famous Paduana, Angelica Bianca . . . She is now the
discourse of the whole Town; all the youth in Madrid dress
themselves for her sake . . . No song in fashion but her
praise, her Story is the Theam of all the Muses in the Town. (I.i)

Of particular note is the pervasiveness of Angelica's presence in the minds of Madrid's denizens. More important, however, is Johan's insistence upon the publicity of this presence. There is not

simply gossip floating about regarding the dead General's mistress; Angelica Bianca is the topic of *all* public discourse.

Angelica's publicity becomes thematically significant in light of the news that follows Johan's revelation of her novel presence in Madrid—namely, that she has been “exposed to sale” in the wake of her gallant's death. It is in this matter that the play's public discourse melds its treatment of love and sexuality, for Angelica's exposure to sale represents the publication of that which is generally relegated to the private sphere. “Her price,” exclaims Johan, “and her Picture hangs upon the door, where she sits in public view” (I.i). Angelica is intrinsically a part of the cosmopolitan marketplace. By extension, then, in the dons' discourse, “love” is also rendered a marketable commodity. Johan, in fact, explicitly outlines this mercantile, anti-romantic and publicized vision of love as he informs Pedro that if he “be a lover still, there is no need of Fayries, old Women, or Confessors, to deliver or return a message; Now 'tis but so much a Moneth, and you are a Patron; four dayes and nights in the week are yours” (I.i). In one deft sweep, Johan's imagery calls up, then utterly rejects, the entire tradition of romantic love. That the play offers up no alternative to Johan's point of view implies that Killigrew is not being ironic—Johan has expressed the voice of the play.

To return to Purdie's argument, Killigrew can be said to be establishing discursive mastery in *Thomaso* through Johan. By first undercutting the tradition of romantic love, and then refusing to offer it any defense in the play, he makes the private world the butt of his joke. This sublimation does not take the form so much of overt ridicule, but rather of the absence of any subjectivity, particularly within the characters' discourse, independent of the dominant public ideology. Traditionally, when women and their sphere are used in comedy, it is not as a member of the joker/listener/butt triangle. Instead, the feminine element is used as a catalyst to poke fun at man for not taking up his expected role. Such, for example, is the legacy of the shrew: the man whose authority she usurps is the joker's target; she herself is merely a catalyst. The implicit

ideology behind this particular comic pattern is that women are definitively inferior, and the joke arises when a man—naturally woman's superior—forfeits his expected role. However, Killigrew's text is different from such traditional models. We see a world with no private side at all; it has been completely "publicized." The target of Killigrew's joke, however, is not submissive men but the ideology of the private altogether—the concepts of love and loyalty, the existence of any principle that cannot be bought or sold.

Saretta and Paulina, two key courtesans in *Thomaso*, exemplify the vision of love embraced by women throughout the play. Early on, Saretta wonders at Paulina's inability to recognize Thomaso, the man to whom she lost her virginity seven years earlier. When Paulina protests that she still has feelings for the man, Saretta responds paradigmatically: "Thou lovest him, and I do not know for which of the two Reasons best; whether for taking thy Maiden-head, or giving thee Plums" (I.ii). The image of the plum was a commonplace symbol for a prostitute's sexually-gained income. That Saretta aligns such lucre with Paulina's loss of virginity undercuts the value of the latter, suggesting that Paulina's "Maiden-head" (synonymous, in the seventeenth century's vision of virtue and honour, with her female identity) is valuable only to the extent to which it brought her financial gain. Love, in this equation, is merely the valueless by-product of a financial exchange: Paulina's "Maiden-head" for Thomaso's "plums." Such dialogues occur frequently among the play's numerous prostitutes, who view men in much the same way that men view women—as providers of an economic product.

As Purdie points out, at the same time that comedy violates norms, it reinforces the status quo. The violation, especially when contained within the specialized bounds of comic drama, is portrayed explicitly as a violation and is therefore not the norm (Purdie 126).⁸ That most of the women in the play are prostitutes provides Killigrew with a dramatic device through which he may create a world of sexual freedom. The women's sexual status, however, simultaneously signals an acceptable site for such sexual libertinism: prostitutes are *by definition*

sexually available. Had all of the women in Killigrew's play been noblewomen who offer up their favours for free, his celebration of debauchery would have been significantly more transgressive. While Killigrew's play seems to celebrate sexual liberty, immorality and debauchery, then, it also affirms the "accepted characterization and positioning of groups" (36) within seventeenth-century society. Essentially, he simply affirms the same patriarchal ideology that forbids such practices in the Puritan morality that he attempts to violate. In other words, comedy holds the potential for a larger and more genuine overturning of accepted ideology, but Killigrew does not use it for this purpose. Instead, he simply attacks the same targets that have been systematically subjugated throughout history.

Behn's rewriting of Killigrew's sexual vision occurs on several different levels, the first of which is discursive. As Purdie suggests, the "capacity to joke is connected with possession of that proper language which commands full subjectivity" (128). In any discourse in which patriarchal ideology is dominant the "other," whether feminine, homosexual or foreign, is expressly denied such subjectivity. The joker, Purdie explains, is the one who holds discursive power as a full subject. In political terms, the joker is usually an occupant of the centre (131). The butt, by contrast, dwells in the peripheries, and is the person or thing whose loss of discursive power marks and reinforces the dominance of the joker (131).

In *The Rover*, full discursive power is granted not only to the private realm that *Thomaso* rejects but also to an economy which rejects the public/private dichotomy itself. Behn gives a voice and full subjectivity to Killigrew's silent other. The opening scene of Behn's play, in which two young sisters discuss love, acts as an implicit foil to *Thomaso*'s privileging of public, marketplace ethics. Where Killigrew grants the first words of his play to a group of libertine men, Behn's play opens with a feminine discourse on love. As in *Thomaso*, this first scene establishes the play's dominant ethos. However, in *The Rover*, it is love which reigns supreme.

Behn responds to Killigrew's play both by placing women in dramatic positions generally preserved for men—in the opening scene, as the main protagonists—and through the topic of their discourse: the woman's battle for self-authorization and the importance of love. Behn doesn't simply react to Killigrew's play, but negotiates with it. She reveals in its various stages the struggle of the "other" for a voice within a world dominated by an overarching disregard for otherness. While Hellena⁹ can be viewed as an ideologically liberated figure, her sister remains to a large extent bound by the same type of value system that underlies Killigrew's play.

The first scene of *The Rover* reveals two sisters, Florinda and Hellena, discussing the fates into which their father has decided to cast them. Hellena is to enter a convent and Florinda must marry Don Vincentio, a rich old aristocrat whom she despises. Florinda's true love is Belvile, a gallant young English colonel who saved her life during the siege of Pamplona. Hellena, doomed to life in a convent, has no particular love interest—her interest is love itself. Both women struggle with the issue of personal choice. Florinda's rejection of her father's will is explicit: "how near soever my Father thinks I am to marrying that hated Object, I shall let him see I understand better what's due to my Beauty, Birth and Fortune, and more to my Soul, than to obey those unjust Commands" (I.i.19-22).¹⁰ Hellena merely laughs at the religious life into which her father hopes to force her: "And dost thou think that ever I'll be a Nun? . . . Faith no" (I.i.30). However, while Hellena clearly affirms her sister's rebelliousness ("Now hang me, if I don't love thee for that dear Disobedience" (I.i.23)), Florinda condemns Hellena's similar desire to rebel. Florinda is the silenced "private" voice of *Thomaso*. She rejects her father's choice of husbands, but not upon the basis that such a choice is her right as an individual. Instead, she acts from within the same ideology that denies her such a choice. Her reasons for rejecting Don Vincentio underscore the conformity of her opinions to traditional notions about personal value, as she insists, for example, that it is her "Beauty, Birth and Fortune" which entitle her to a better

match, not her right to individual choice. Like the women in *Thomaso*, Florinda embraces the very system by which she is oppressed.

This subjection translates, for Behn, into choicelessness. At the end of the play, Florinda, her identity hidden by her carnival disguise, is threatened with gang-rape by Belmour's companions—including her own brother. Behn uses the scene to illustrate the essential absence of choice for women in a world which co-opts female will to a masculine economy. The specific moment at which this fact is illustrated is in the men's offer to allow Florinda to choose which of them will have her first.¹¹ In the end, however, they draw swords amongst themselves to decide. Significantly, Florinda is absent from the scene the entire time (just as she is absent from her father's presence as he chooses her spouse). When she does re-enter the stage, she can only utter exclamatory prayers ("Good Heaven, defend me from discovery!"(V.i.102)) while the men discuss her fate. Further, her prayers are not pleas to God to divert her impending rape, but expressions of terror at the possibility of being found by her brother, outside her father's house—a symbolically loaded fear. Even in the face of the horrible possibility of sexual assault, her terror is founded not on her need to protect her body, but on the need to hide her rebelliousness. Like the private voice in *Thomaso*, Florinda is not only discursively reduced but also effectively silenced.

Hellena, by contrast, is a robust voice of alterity in Behn's play. It is Hellena who is given discursive eminence above *The Rover*'s other characters. One of a handful of characters lifted out of Killigrew's play, this figure undergoes a radical transformation, reflecting a complex implicit commentary upon *Thomaso*'s treatment of love, otherness and sexual politics. As the stage direction that describes her first introduction in *Thomaso* indicates, Killigrew's Helena is "an old decayed blind, out of Fashion whore, gay, and fine, as Girls of Fifteen," who seeks, "by the magic of a mountebank, to be restored to youth" so that she may act on her still-strong feelings of love and desire (IV.ii). In *The Rover*, Hellena is a beautiful young aristocrat

who is probably not much older than fifteen. In their hearts, however, these two women are identical—both openly express a desire to love and to pursue pleasure. Killigrew's Helena, when asked what she seeks from the mountebank's magic, expresses her longing for love:

They say, he can change Forms and Sexes, and (which is
more,) youth restore; He can both wound and Cure a heart;
O my Child, 'tis the remedy I seek; Let him try his Art, I
have here brought the dart; I love, I love, my Child, and fain
would be belov'd again; A proud, and yet (they say) a lovely
Man; My Age is burnt with desire; Cold limbs feel that fire,
Blind as Love, and yet in Love; I sigh . . . Why should Lust and
desire stay? By what right, since youth and Beauty attain'd
their flight? (IV.ii)

In spite of its somewhat belabored prosody, this speech remains emotionally poignant. The elderly prostitute never gains her wish in *Thomaso*, but Behn's Hellena does. Like her antecedent, she expresses a desire to love, to "sigh, and sing, and blush and wish, and dream and wish, and long and wish to see the Man [one loves]" (*The Rover* I.i.10-12). Also like the elderly prostitute, she is held back from her desire by custom—she is to follow her father's will and become a nun. While Killigrew's Helena cannot fulfill her desire because it is scorned in old and unattractive women, Behn's Hellena is prevented from doing so by the dictates of paternal authority.

Hutner assesses Behn's transformation of Helena as an act of ideological resistance to patriarchy's pathologization of feminine desire:

The older Hellena's body is described in terms that render
her powerless; her lack of desirability is conflated with
her physical decay and moral corruption. Killigrew's portrait

of the old courtesan implies that feminine sexual desire
and freedom are corrupt and promote (bodily) deterioration.
. . . In 'rescuing' Killigrew's Hellena . . . Behn undermines the ideo-
logical constructions of the virgin as the ideal embodiment
of virtue and the whore as base and corrupt. (Hutner 105)

Behn's Hellena, then, places the desire of the prostitute within the heart of the virgin. The purpose of this union is to deny the validity of the whore/virgin dialectic. Hellena thereby becomes an embodiment of unreified femininity, a prototype of the desiring woman who lives according to her own wiles and who will find fuller completion in the Widow of Behn's *The Widow Ranter*.

In Hutner's examination of this collapsing of the whore/virgin identity within the figure of Hellena, however, she suggests that the end result of this collapse is, for both characters, transgressive paralysis (106). Hutner's rationale for such a conclusion is that by removing, in her revision of Helena, the virtue distinction "between virgin and whore," she also removes the character's "moral power" (106), presumably because Behn is performing this collapse within an authorized space—the body of a virgin. Her transgression thus loses its force, for it is much safer to experiment with her culture's social values by granting a virgin desire than by attempting to justify and support desire in an old and homely prostitute (or a young, beautiful one, for that matter). Indeed, it is not until the second part of *The Rover*, when Behn does try to do just this, that Hutner can find Behn's text satisfactorily transgressive.

This conclusion, which raises very important questions about the limitations of Behn's feminist vision, loses some strength in its tendency to measure the work according to modern standards. As a result, she does not sufficiently take into consideration the value of removing "moral power" from a woman in Behn's day. As an unmarried, shameless and sexually-willing female who is also sexually chaste in the physical sense, Helena does not occupy an understood

space within her culture's dominant patriarchal ideology. But Behn's Hellena is not designed to "transgressively turn her world upside down" (Hutner 106); instead, she marks a movement *out* of this world, and an invasion of this world by the other. Behn is not trying to invert the morality of her world or of Killigrew's, she is attempting to explode it—or at least to deflate it. She rewrites Hellena as a part of a larger discursive revision that gives voice to the other world that exists outside of patriarchy. It is in this escape from the paradigm, rather than in an attempt to renegotiate its terms, that Behn transgresses most radically.

Hellena counters the language of the patriarchal sexual marketplace with wit and reason. And her voice expresses and reinforces her self-possession. In fact, it is Hellena's discursive power, not her physical attractiveness, that makes the most profound impression upon Wilmore (and the audience). At one point, Wilmore even suggests that, in order to avoid falling in love with her, he must 'fortify himself against her tongue.' In the play's opening scene, Behn uses Hellena's linguistic powers not only to voice a subversion of patriarchy's commodification, suppression and oppression of the feminine, but also to renegotiate the butt/joker arrangement of *Thomaso* in order to grant discursive mastery to Hellena as "other." This scene centres on an argument between Don Pedro and his two sisters regarding their proposed fates. When Pedro blandly informs Hellena that she "shall be a Nun," she responds with outright defiance: "Shall I so? you may chance to be mistaken in my way of Devotion" (I.i.132-133). Her addition to this statement, voiced in an aside, is not simply defiant but bawdy: "A Nun! yes I am like to make a fine Nun! I have an excellent Humour for a Grate: No, I'll have a Saint of my own to pray to shortly, if I like any that dares venture on me" (I.i.133-135). The audience shares Hellena's joke, and Don Pedro begins to look ridiculous. A far cry from the fearless gallant of *Thomaso*, Don Pedro is now the butt of a shared joke between Hellena and Behn's audience.

Don Pedro's character becomes increasingly more questionable as the scene unfolds. While Florinda begs him to intercede with their father on her behalf, Pedro responds by casually

dismissing her in one sentence: “I have a Command from my Father here to tell you, you ought not to despise [Don Vincentio], a Man of so vast a Fortune, and such a Passion for you—Stephano, my things” (I.i.55-57). While Florinda frets over the entire course of her life, which has been determined by others, Pedro frets over his carnival costume.

Pedro’s odiousness works to justify his sisters’ rebellion. As in *The Lucky Chance* and *The Widow Ranter*, so in this play Behn cannot resist implicating those in authority in the rebellion of their oppressed inferiors. The political undertones of this theme will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters that follow. While Pedro suggests that Florinda’s primary obligation is to gain Vincentio’s fortune, Florinda argues that she does not understand how he can so easily “make a Slave of his Sister” (I.i.61). When she argues that she loves Belvile, who saved not only her own life but Pedro’s as well, Pedro’s response separates love from marriage:

Yes, pay [Belvile] what you will in Honour—but you must consider

Don Vincentio’s Fortune, and the Jointure he’ll make you. (I.i.71-72)

Hellena comes to her sister’s defense when Pedro attempts to assuage Florinda with the prospect of wealth. He asks Florinda, “what Jewels will that Cavalier [Belvile] present you with? those of his Eyes and Heart?” (I.i.76-77). Hellena’s response grants power to the metaphorical jewels which the materialistic Pedro cannot value and it also illustrates her ability to enter into metaphoric discursive exchange with her brother: “And are not those [jewels of Belvile’s eyes and heart] better than any Don Vincentio has brought from the Indies?” (I.i.78-79). Pedro, at a loss for a rational response, instead attacks Hellena on a personal level: “Why how now! Has your Nunnery-breeding taught you to understand the value of Hearts and Eyes?” (I.i.80-81). The dramatic irony of his statement cannot be missed by the audience. As Helena makes clear from the very opening lines of the play, her “nunnery-breeding” has only taught her how little she desires to become a nun, and how strongly she intends to learn of “hearts and eyes.” Pedro’s attempt to impose an identity upon her, and then use this identity to deny her subjectivity, is

unsuccessful. In addition, Pedro's use of the word *value* in his reference to romantic elements gains ironic significance in light of his own materialism and his ignorance of the non-material value of these elements.

Hellena's most powerful statement against her sister's arranged marriage occurs in this passage, as she insists that her sister's unwanted union with Don Vincentio "would be worse than Adultery with another Man" (I.i.118). This sentiment gives voice to the anti-legalistic, anti-ecclesiastical vision of marriage embraced by Behn throughout her entire canon. Behn's vision, described, for example, by Sylvia in *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, embodies a vision of marriage as a union which occurs between equals at a deep spiritual level.¹² Any attempt by Church or state to deny or override such a union marks the breaking of a natural law which, in Behn's ethos, is always superior to "man's law".¹³ Chastity, then, becomes a matter not of sexual experience but of emotional fidelity. To impose a "virtuous" life of marriage upon a woman who loves another is to force her to act dishonourably. Patriarchal relegations of female virtue to the confines of paternally-arranged marriage ironically become, in Behn's economy, fundamentally destructive of honour and thus lose their authority. Hellena's statement, then, radically challenges the power and authority of the legal and moral foundations of marriage as it was understood in Behn's era.

Hellena's discursive mastery is founded not only upon her superior powers of argumentation but also on her role as a joker. She insists that, in forcing Florinda to marry Don Vincentio, Pedro exposes his sister "to a worse confinement than a religious Life" (I.i.89). Pedro is incredulous: "Is it a Confinement to be carry'd into the Country, to an antient Villa belonging to the Family of the Vincentio's these five hundred Years . . . ?" (I.i.89-91). He goes on to list the luxuries that Florinda will know in her new life. Hellena, however, once again takes over Pedro's speech, rendering his vision a comical farce. Her version of Florinda's marriage focuses not upon the material pleasures of wealth but on the noxiousness of a sexual union with an old man:

. . . being a frugal and a Jealous Coxcomb, instead of
a Valet to uncase his feeble Carcase, he desires you to do that
Office—Signs of Favour I'll assure you . . .
. . . That Honour being past, the Gyant stretches it
self; yawns and sighs a Belch or two loud as a Musket,
throws himself into Bed, and expects you in his foul
sheets . . . (I.i.103-110)

Linguistically disarmed by Hellena, Pedro can only reply with curt interrogatives (“Have you done yet?” (I.i.106,111)). He becomes an anti-comic force not only in his attempt to stifle true love but also in his inability to engage in comic discourse. Hellena, by contrast, undercuts his power through comedy. When she persists in her ridicule of Pedro’s discourse, he must finally resort to having her physically removed and locked up. Hellena cannot be discursively subordinated, for she is a substantive being. Pedro’s only recourse lies in physical force.

The essence of Behn’s critique of *Thomaso*, its commodification of women and of love itself, and its attack on the private realm, is expressed through Hellena’s relationship with Wilmore. When the heroine asks Wilmore the memorable and poignant question, “is there no difference between leave to love me, and leave to lye with me?” (I.ii.188-189), Wilmore’s response, “Faith, Child, they were made to go together” (I.ii.190), reveals the critical difference between the language he speaks with regards to the discourse of love and that spoken by Hellena. A professed rake, Wilmore does not approach love outside the context of sex; indeed, in his vocabulary, *love* and *sex* are interchangeable terms. It is this philosophy, similarly undertaken by the male characters in *Thomaso*, which allows Wilmore to partake of the sexual marketplace while simultaneously justifying his exploits as love experiences. Wilmore’s frivolous use of the word *love* throughout the play (“I have a world of Love in store—Wou’d you would be good-

natur'd, and take some on't off my Hands") underscores its insignificance as representative of a deep interpersonal bond.

Wilmore's link to *Thomaso's* underlying ideology is revealed through the motif that he carries over from the earlier play—love as consumption. In *Thomaso*, men become “plums” and women are symbolized by food in general. Prostitutes are referred to as partridges and puddings. Their bodies and their sexuality are described metaphorically through the image of the meal:

I never found myself grow greater, or less in my mind, when
[whores] were pleas'd, or angry, unsavory, flat, insippid beauties,
good meals meat, but no Feasts . . . (I.ii)

Angelica's bed is referred to as “the Table where Love banquets,” and the sexual marketplace itself is referred to as a “Feast.” The image of the body as an item for physical consumption is a continually recurring metaphor for the marketplace nature of love in the play. Everyone seeks to “surfeit” in the sexual marketplace. Wilmore carries this imagery over into *The Rover*. When Hellena informs him that she wishes to cast off her virginity as a means of escaping the convent, Wilmore bawdily replies, “Oh, I long to come first to the Banquet of Love; and such a swinging Appetite I bring” (I.ii.184). He goes on to suggest that if they do not soon commence their meal, he will die. Hellena's response, however, wittily undercuts his urgency: “Why must we be either guilty of Fornication or Murder, if we converse with you Men?” (I.ii.187-188). While Hellena has been engaging Wilmore on an intellectual level, his reaction—embodied by his turn to the low physical imagery of eating—reduces their relationship to the physical alone.

Behn adopts Killigrew's sex/food metaphor, then, to undercut this treatment of sexuality. The only instance in the play, besides Wilmore's banter, where food imagery is used with the frequency and intensity of that in *Thomaso* occurs in Blunt's prelude to his attempted rape of Florinda. When the unassuming young woman attempts to assuage Blunt by explaining that she

knows his companion, Belvile, the enraged man's response resounds with Killigrewian food imagery:

Belvile! why, yes, Sweeting, we do know Belvile,
and wish he were with us now, he's a Cormorant at Whore
and Bacon, he'd have a Limb or two of thee, my Virgin

Pullet: but 'tis no matter, we'll leave him the Bones to pick . . . (IV.iii.669-672)

By recontextualizing this motif within the expressly evil context of this scene, Behn underscores the oppressive ideology behind it. As Hutner suggests, Blunt represents maleness unmasked of its patriarchal, phallogentric garb. He has been tricked, by the skilled jilt, Lucetta, not only out of money but also of his clothing and (significantly) his sword. By placing this "masculinist discourse" (Hutner 110) in Blunt's mouth, Behn draws upon the dramatic irony of his nature as a duped fool to undercut this discourse (Hutner 110); thus, the motif of the body as a site of consumption is undercut as well.

While food images are Killigrew's key sexual metaphor in *Thomaso*, Behn's treatment of sexuality is linked more closely to the motif of masking. Significantly, Part I of Behn's play occurs during carnival, a locus of physical and ideological transgression. Wilmore describes the carnival as a ground which levels desire and sexual ethics: "'tis a kind of legal authoriz'd Fornication, where the men are not chid for't, nor the Women despis'd" (I.ii.237). The carnival, which links sexuality and social anonymity through masked revelry, levels the sexes and ejects traditional sexual moralizing.¹³ More significant than the presence of the carnival as a site of transgression, however, is Behn's refusal, at times, to locate her social subversions within this site. Not all of Behn's masking and unmasking in this play is authorized by the carnival setting. Nor does all transgression occur upon a masked carnival site. Behn's transformation of Killigrew's Helena exemplifies an unmasking of the ideology which necessitates the elderly prostitute's mask of ugliness in his play. As Hutner suggests, Killigrew's Helena symbolizes the

pathologization of female desire, held as threatening and repugnant within patriarchal thought. Behn removes the mask and, by placing the old Helena's desiring spirit within the new Hellena's beautiful body, renders Killigrew's symbolic image invalid. Significantly, Hellena's virginal beauty does not hide her subversive desiring spirit, for she connects most intimately with her love interest, Wilmore, when her beauty is masked. Wilmore himself, in fact, suggests that it is Helena's discursive strength, and not her external appearance, that most strongly attracts him: "if she should change [her costume], it is impossible I should know her, unless I should hear her prattle" (II.i.6-7). Even Helena's mask, then, goes unmarked by Wilmore in the face of her discursive power.

Significantly, both Hellena's desire to subvert authority and her discursive transgression occur long before she masks herself and enters the carnival world. Her argument with Don Pedro, her rejection of the convent and of her father's will, her desire to experience physical and emotional love and her comic mastery all occur before she ever leaves her home. For Hellena, the carnival is simply a logistic necessity: it allows her to enter the public world without her brother's notice. She still lives, after all, in a world in which any rebellion may be legally punished with physical confinement and/or economic severance.

If Behn uses the relationship between Hellena and Wilmore to respond to patriarchal notions of sexual politics with a discursively powerful "other" voice, the discursive relationship between Angelica and Wilmore reveals the vast rift between patriarchy and Behn's vision of both female desire and love itself. Behn's characterization of Angelica is complex, and many scholars identify the courtesan as Behn's problematic self-representation in the text.¹⁴ From the point of view of discourse, however, Angelica's function is clear: she, like Hellena, is an "other" voice, a voice through which Behn negotiates with patriarchy.

While Wilmore is characterized as a rake, his libertine discourse reflects the oppressive and commodifying patriarchal reality upon which notions of female honour, sexuality and love

were founded in Behn's day. Angelica is a woman who attempts to use this ideology against itself, for her own gain. Strangely, however, Angelica Bianca, whose profession relies upon the sale of love as a merely sexual element, cannot speak Wilmore's mercantile language. The two characters constantly confuse one another when they discuss the topic of love. Wilmore initiates their relationship by stealing one of three portraits of Angelica advertising her sale and price. Wilmore's companions assume that Angelica will respond to such an affront with murderous rage. Wilmore, however, not only avoids the courtesan's fury but also connives his way into her lodgings by means of his flattering discourse:

'Tis true, I did [remove the portrait], if you call it Insolence for a
Man to preserve himself; I saw your Charming Picture,
and was wounded; quite through my Soul each pointed
Beauty ran; and wanting a Thousand Crowns to procure
my Remedy—I laid this little Picture to my Bosom. . . . (II.i.224-227)

Wilmore's metaphorical representation of death and wounding as a result of unsatisfied sexual desire recalls his earlier conversations with Hellena. While the young heiress scoffs at such old Petrarchan clichés, however, and refuses to succumb, Angelica is love-stricken. She allows Wilmore to keep the picture, then invites him into her home. Initially, she feigns outrage: "Insolent Sir, how durst you pull down my Picture?" (II.i.274). Wilmore responds by reversing her logic; "Rather, how durst you set it up, to tempt poor amorous Mortals with so much Excellence?" (II.i.275-276). Wilmore is constantly able to lay the fault for his actions upon her shoulders, and his linguistic tactics are successful. His power over her is primarily discursive: "His words go thro me to the very Soul" (II.i.342). The two characters engage in an ideological debate in which they attempt morally to berate one another. Wilmore insists that he cannot reconcile his admiration for Angelica's beauty with his condemnation of a mind that allows her to engage in prostitution. At the same time, he cannot deny his desire to enjoy her, and he

laments the poverty which prevents him from paying her required price. In spite of the self-contradiction evident in Wilmore's remarks, however, Angelica is deeply affected.

Angelica's response to Wilmore is difficult to reconcile with her relative self-awareness throughout the play. Indeed, she has little difficulty responding to his chastisement rationally and succinctly:

Pray tell me, Sir, are not you guilty of the same
mercenary Crime [i.e. prostitution]? When a Lady is proposed to
you for a Wife, you never ask, how fair, discreet, or virtuous
she is; but what's her Fortune—which if but small, you cry
—She will not do my business—and basely leave her, tho
she languish for you. (II.i.357-361)

In spite of her rational rejection of Wilmore's argument, however, Angelica falls in love.

When Angelica reveals the fact of her love to Wilmore, their linguistic comprehension of one another utterly breaks down. Finding herself unable to resist the strange power that Wilmore has established over her, Angelica vows her love:

Thou'rt a brave Fellow! put up thy Gold, and know,
That were thy fortune large as is thy Soul,
Thou shouldst not buy my Love,
Couldst thou forget those mean effects of vanity,
Which set me out to sale, and, as a Lover, prize My [sic] yielding joys.
Canst thou believe they'I [sic] be entirely thine,
Without considering they were Mercenary? (II.i.364-370)

In this passage, Angelica subverts Wilmore's mercantile alignment of love and sex. While Wilmore, who refers to himself as a "Merchant of Love" (II.i.313), cannot separate love and sex, Angelica cannot unite them. The two characters' linguistic base is thus divided, for they

associate the signifier *love* with opposing signifieds. When Angelica seeks a response to her vow, Wilmore is utterly confused: "What can she mean?" (II.i.382). Angelica responds with anger, assuming that Wilmore simply mistrusts her ability to love. Significantly, Wilmore responds to her anger with a call to "shew the Power of Love," to throw off her pride and make love to him. In the end, their misapprehension remains intact. When Angelica insists that her payment be his love for her, meaning that she seeks his devotion and constancy, Wilmore proposes to give her his love entirely. His love, however, translates into physical passion, as suggested by his passionate assertion that, in the sex act, he will "breathe [vows] with such Ardour" that she will never "doubt [his] Zeal" (II.i.420-421).

They make love. Wilmore, however, who aligns sex and love, assumes that he has fulfilled his part of their bargain: by giving himself to her sexually, he has traded his love for hers. Having made his payment, Wilmore returns to the carnival to seek Hellena. Angelica, by contrast, is sorely disappointed; in her view, he has betrayed her. Disguised, she pursues Wilmore with the intention of killing him. Becoming a "Virago" (V.i.210), an avenging force for love and constancy, Angelica seeks to murder Wilmore for ravishing her "Virgin heart," claiming that she has vowed his death "by all that's sacred" (V.i.217). Wilmore's greatest crime, she asserts, is in teaching her heart to love. Wilmore's response to her accusations is surprised realization that she has been hurt by him, that her definition of love included something beyond just the physical. In spite of this realization, however, Wilmore remains unchanged. Unaffected by what he has wrought upon the courtesan, Wilmore frets over the possibility of missing his "assignation" with Hellena. In the end, the two lovers part without (linguistic) reconciliation. Angelica's final words in the play form a curse:

Live where my Eyes may never see thee more,
Live to undo some one, whose Soul may prove
So bravely constant to revenge my Love. (V.i.335-337)

The fate into which Behn casts Wilmore, however, is even more effective than that which the avenging Angelica attempted: ultimately, he will vow constancy to a woman who cannot be undone, a prostitute (La Nuche of Part II), who succeeds in teaching Wilmore the language of love.

In *The Rover*, then, Behn grants discursive power to the desiring female through both Hellena and Angelica, even if the language spoken by the latter remains too cryptic for Wilmore's comprehension. Angelica embodies the negated voice of love which tries in vain to act against the dominant ideology. In the end, she must revert to passive assertion, by withholding herself and her love from the man she desires. Hellena, by contrast, is an active force. She enters into the world in order to seek satisfaction for her desires, and in the end she gains Wilmore's devotion. Whether Hellena would have succeeded where Angelica has failed—in teaching Wilmore to speak her language—remains unknown, for, by the end of the opening scene of Part II, we find that Hellena has died at sea.

Part I does end, as Hutner argues, with a reassertion of the forms of patriarchal control over (female) desire, as it is channeled into the appropriate form of expression—marriage. However, the ideological power of these forms is undercut by Hellena's discursive power throughout the play. Behn's exploration of alternative modes of female identity leads the playwright into shadowy places perhaps too narrow and tangled by the complexities of her age and its problematic paradigms to allow for a clear vision. Nevertheless, her quest itself remains significant.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Purdie's linguistic analysis of comedy is drawn primarily from the theories of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan. In *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), she asserts that comedy also requires "the necessity of a joking intention within the process that produces funniness" and the necessity that the audience "reproduce" the teller's social and linguistic transgressions (12-13).
2. For the sake of uniformity, I will refer to the first part of the play as *The Rover*, Part I, and the second as *The Rover*, Part II.
3. Heidi Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II," in *Rereading Aphra Behn* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993) 102-120.
4. Hutner's comparison of the two parts of *The Rover* is founded upon the evolution of Behn's treatment of the prostitute as a locus for female desire in both plays. While Hellena's desire to marry marks, for Hutner, her inability truly to "transgress class and gender boundaries," in Part II, "men and women are matched as equals, and the body of the other woman ... resists patriarchal control. Behn's resistance to repressive strategies of control is evident in the two parts of *The Rover* in the move from the prostitute as outsider to the prostitute as heroine: Angelica loses Wilmore to the virgin heiress Hellena in part I, but La Nuche wins Wilmore over Ariadne in part II" (103).
5. Libertinism is a complex phenomenon of the seventeenth century. I draw my understanding of libertinism from several sources, including Maurice Ashley's *England in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1980); Christopher Falkus's *Charles II* (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1975); Angeline Goreau's *Reconstructing Aphra Behn: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (New York: Dial Press, 1980); Christopher Hill's *The World*

- Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1972); Patrick Morrah's *Restoration England* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1979); David Ogg's *England in the Reign of Charles II*, vol.2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934); Susan Staves's *Players' Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) and Harold Weber's *The Restoration Rake-Hero: Transformations in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).
6. Betty Radice, ed., *Lysistrata and Other Plays* (London: Penguin, 1978).
 7. The Benjamin Blom version of *Thomaso*, to which this paper refers, makes no reference to line number and the play is, in fact, written in prose. Thus, I will refer only to act and scene numbers for *Thomaso*.
 8. Purdie is referring specifically to carnival, but also explains that "as modes of social signification, carnival and joking are virtually identical, and so are the most evident effects of both on the ideological systems of political control with which they are involved" (126).
 9. The two plays spell this name differently, or occasionally use the two forms interchangeably. To differentiate, I will refer to Killigrew's character as "Helena" and Behn's as "Hellena."
 10. All references to *The Rover*, Part I are taken from Janet Todd's version of the play in *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992).
 11. Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body," 109-111.
 12. In *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, Sylvia voices a diatribe against marriage as a legal and spiritual system, the tone of which resounds with sentiments similar to those expressed by Behn through Hellena:

'tis fine divinity they teach that cry—Marriages are made in Heaven—
folly and madness grown into grave custome; shou'd an unheedy youth

in heat of blood take up with the first convenient she that offers . . . and . . . [in]
the sober morning wakes him to see his errour, he quits with shame
the Jilt, and owns no more the folly; shall this be call'd a Heavenly con-
junction? . . . 'twere blasphemy to lay this fatal marriage to Heavens
charge—curse on your nonsense, ye imposing Gown-men, curse on your
holy cant; you may as well call Rapes and Murthers, Treason and Robbery,
the acts of Heaven; because Heaven suffers 'em to be committed, is it
Heaven's pleasure therefore, Heaven's decree? (Todd 111)

Sylvia goes on to define a truly sacramental union, characterized by clear conscience,
freedom of expression, equality, reason, joy and general satisfaction:

that's a heavenly match when two Souls toucht with equal passion
meet (which is but rarely seen)—when willing vows, with serious
consideration, are weigh'd and made; when a true view is taken of
the Soul, when no base interest makes the hasty bargain . . . when
equal judgments meet that can esteem the blessings they possess
. . . whom not a formal ceremony binds (with which I've nought to do,
but dully give a cold consenting affirmative) but well considered
vows from soft inclining ears, utter'd with love, with joy, with
dear delight which Heaven is call'd to witness . . . (Todd 111-112)

In a direct inversion of contemporary theological and legal notions of marriage, Behn
suggests through Sylvia that a true marital bond links lovers in an almost prelapsarian state
of divinely-ordained mutual affection. Economically-oriented Church marriages, by contrast,
oppose God's design of the relationship between man and woman (references to *Love Letters
Between a Nobleman and His Sister* are quoted from Janet Todd's *The Works of Aphra Behn*
(Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993).

13. In *Oroonoko*, Behn contrasts these two economies, explicitly outlining the superiority of the “natural” as embodied by the native peoples of Surinam:

And these People represented to me an absolute *Idea* of the first State of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin: And ‘tis most evident and plain, that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and virtuous Mistress. ‘Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the World, than all the Inventions of Man . . . (Summers 131-132)

In this portrayal, the Indians become a group of Edenic innocents whose every look and action reflects an innate state of honour. These natural figures are qualitatively superior to “civilized” man, and their superiority is founded upon their distinctly non-aggressive relationship with the natural world. The gendering of Nature as female, while historically commonplace, is discursively significant in the work of Behn, partaking of a general economy, in her work, of difference. The generic contrast between “Mistress” Nature and the “Inventions of Man” underscores the categories of this economy. For a detailed study of Behn’s ideology regarding Nature, see Robert Markley and Molly Rothenberg’s “Contestations of Nature: Aphra Behn’s ‘The Golden Age’ and the Sexualizing of Politics,” *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993) 301-324; Laura Brown’s “The Romance of the Empire: *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slaves,” *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987) 41-61; and Anita Pacheo’s “Royalism and Honour in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” *SEL* 34.3 (1994): 491-507.

14. Many critics, however, view the play’s carnivalesque setting, and particularly its use of masking, as a shutting down of Behn’s subversiveness, for she thereby creates a site of transgression which is paradigmatically acceptable. In one sense, Hutner’s analysis answers

this complaint by suggesting that, in Part II, Behn transfers the same transgressive mode to an unauthorized, more realistic site. Nevertheless, Hutner agrees that Behn's themes ultimately revert back to patriarchal control in Part I.

15. See Catherine Gallagher's analysis of Behn's textual self-representation in "Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993) 65-85.

Chapter 2

The Lucky Chance:

“O How Fatal are Forc’d Marriages!”—Desire and Independence

Aphra Behn devoted much of her comic drama to challenging contemporary notions of matrimony. Particularly harsh were her attacks on forced or arranged marriages, especially those conjoining dependent young girls and wealthy old men, that were stringently supported by the Church and state. Her major complaint revolved around the “property-marriage system” (Goreau 74-87), which she viewed as an impediment both to love and to honour. So sharp and persistent is her critique that many Behn biographers today believe that perhaps she was writing from personal experience; the elusive Mr. Behn, they suggest, may indeed have been an “old coxcomb” whom Behn married under financial duress (Goreau 86; Woodcock 28-29). *The Lucky Chance* (1686) represents a critique of marriage as voiced by Behn towards the end of her life, at a time when her personal vision was becoming increasingly complex. In one sense, her satirical treatment of marriage appeals to the rebellious sexual libertinism that had come to dominate Behn’s social sphere—the king, the literati and the upper classes. At the same time, however, Behn’s understanding of romantic love diverges radically from libertine (anti-)principles, and she portrays true marriage as a holier, more substantive bond than her materialistic culture would allow. Although her ideas remain to some degree trapped within available paradigms, she opens up the possibility of personal choice, particularly for women but also for anyone involved in a love relationship.

Behn's social vision in this play is aimed at her culture's ideological boundaries, rather than its centre. Particularly through the strange and unique character of Lady Fulbank, Behn presents a new idea of love as a mutually-chosen bond and, most importantly, offers a new vision of self-defined, self-authorized womanhood.

The Lucky Chance, like all of Behn's comedies, is composed of an intricate series of interwoven plot strands. Dominating the plot are three love triangles. The chief action revolves around the young and beautiful Leticia, who is in love with the gallant Bellmour, but is contracted to marry the wealthy, elderly and ridiculous alderman Sir Feeble Fainwood. A second triangle comprises Lady Julia Fulbank who, like Leticia, loves a young man (Gayman, who is also known as Wasteall) to whom she once promised herself. Like Leticia, Julia has been enticed by circumstance to marry an old man—the miserly Sir Cautious Fulbank. Finally, there remains the tertiary and less significant triangle of Diana (Sir Feeble's daughter), her beloved Bredwell (Leticia's brother) and Bearjest (Sir Cautious' nephew), to whom her father has promised her. In all three triangles, the woman has vowed herself to her lover, but marries or is about to marry a man whom she despises. Sir Feeble marries Leticia only after falsely telling her that Bellmour—exiled for having illegally killed a man in a duel—has been hanged in Holland. Sir Cautious, while having gained Julia through the channels of arranged marriage, has been plotting to impoverish and ruin her beloved Gayman. The three young lovers, Bellmour, Gayman and Bredwell, work to steal back their lost women; and in the end the old men realize what presumptuous fools they've been both to take a vigorous young wife and to attempt to outwit young lovers. Each youth (with the significant exception of Gayman) reacquires and marries his betrothed and the play ends comically, with order and mirth having been generally restored.

Its elaborate plot augments the play's comic action, but its commentary upon Restoration culture remains quite serious. Behn's most explicit targets are threefold: arranged marriage, licentious old men and the privileging of wealth before love. Behn's portrayal of arranged

marriage as a form of glorified prostitution partakes of a comic tradition dating back at least to the Renaissance. Enraged by the news that Leticia has accepted Sir Feeble's proposal, Bellmour accuses her of having "Grown confident even to Prostitution" (I.i.153).¹ In the scene which follows, Julia Fulbank expands this critique of forced marriage, lamenting the pain caused to herself and others by a system which tethers individuals to undesired mates:

Oh, how fatal are forc'd Marriages!

How many Ruins one such Match pulls on! (I.ii.34-35)

These sentiments, which would have been quite familiar to Behn's audience, underscore the emotional devastation of this marriage system. The ruin caused by arranged marriages was all-encompassing.

In addition to lamenting the destruction of love created by the forced marriage system, however, Behn also attacks the blind adherence to arbitrary traditions which lurks beneath the maintenance of such a system within her culture. An exchange between Bearjest, Sir Feeble and Sir Cautious, which follows from the announcement that the latter two men have decided upon Feeble's daughter as a wife for the former, would undoubtedly have been received with little surprise by Behn's audience:

Sir Feeb. Enough, enough, Sir Cautious, we apprehend one another. Mr. Bearjest, your Uncle here and I have struck the Bargain, the Wench is yours with three thousand Pound present, and something more after Death, which your Uncle likes well.

Bea. Does he so, Sir? I'm beholding to him; then 'tis not a Pin matter whether I like or not, Sir.

Sir Feeb. How, Sir, not like my Daughter Dye?

Bea. Oh, Lord, Sir,—die or live, 'tis all one for that,

Sir—I'll stand to the Bargain my Uncle makes (I.iii.140-149)

While Bearjest's complaisance in accepting his Uncle's will may not be entirely representative of the reality of Restoration youth, his reasons for this complaisance are quite realistic. He accepts the bargain, regardless of his inability to choose, because he has been taught to accept the dictates of tradition over those of reason and emotion. Weighing heavily upon him is the authority of hereditary culture, in which status and lineage are of the utmost importance. He is the only means by which the family name can be passed on. In this system, then, he is as objectified as his wife-to-be. His lackadaisical response to the old men's decision ("die or live, 'tis all one for that" (I.iii.148)), while humorous in its language-play, is also profoundly troubling. In fact, Bearjest's passivity, reinforced by his feeble attempt at self-assertion ("then 'tis not a Pin matter whether I like or not, Sir" (I.iii.146)) would, doubtless, have been received by Behn's audience as distinctly unmasculine. Behn's satire, then, is directed not only at the institution of arranged marriage but also in a more general sense at those who passively obey the dictates of tradition.

As will be examined in more detail in my study of *The Widow Ranter* in Chapter 3, it is possible that Behn is critiquing much more than the arranged marriage system with this commentary. This attack on one aspect of her culture can also be seen as an example of her growing political consciousness, displayed in its greatest complexity in *The Widow Ranter*. This consciousness is informed primarily by the mood of political confusion about the nature of political authority and its relationship to monarchy that was coming to a head in England at the time. It is likely that Behn penned this play around the same time as *The Widow Ranter*, although it is possible that she wrote the latter much earlier—in the mid-1670s, during or after Nathaniel Bacon's rebellion in Virginia. Regardless, the play was staged during an era of increasing political instability, when England was becoming increasingly distressed by James II's support

of Roman Catholicism and his growing refusal to involve Parliament in government or justify his leadership decisions (Ashley 178). The significance that Behn's critique of arranged marriage bears in light of this political issue is related to her abhorrence of passive obedience of tradition. Whether Behn is displaying a frustration with the obeisance of her countrymen in the face of James' arbitrary government, or is expressing her disappointment with a populace that was giving in to the rebelliousness of those who opposed James, is uncertain. However, that a royalist like Behn began to reflect the general political mood of her peers as they moved towards the Glorious Revolution of 1688/89 is significant, for it illustrates the increasing malleability of political ideals in her era.

Bearjest reveals the extent of his passivity as he explains to his future wife his projected vision of the life they will have together. The absurdity of this vision and his unquestioning faith in its propriety are used by Behn to exemplify, in its extremity, the utter absence of moral obligation in matters of marriage that characterized her times:

Dia. And are you sure, Sir, you will venture on me?

Bea. Sure!—I thank you for that—as if I could not believe my Uncle; For in this case a young Heir has no more to do, but to come and see, settle, marry, and use you scurvily.

Dia. How, Sir, scurvily?

Bea. Very scurvily, that is to say, be always fashionably drunk, despise the Tyranny of your Bed, and reign absolutely—keep a Seraglio of Women, and let my Bastard Issue inherit; be seen once a Quarter, or so, with you in the Park for Countenance, where we loll two several ways in the gilt Coach like Janus, or a Spread-Eagle. (II.ii.157-168)

Bearjest's account of matrimony summarizes the reality of marriage for many at this time. That he has no vision beyond this reality shows him to be a fool. As will be illustrated in *The Widow Ranter*, any refusal of action in the face of inequality or injustice was viewed by Behn as dishonourable, and therefore devoid of moral or social weight and authority.

Despite the likeliness that Behn is using her play to make a larger political statement about authority in general, Behn's ridicule is also unquestionably aimed at a very specific target: old men. Old men—the very embodiment of the status quo in a patriarchal culture—have been a common comic target throughout the history of drama itself, and were one of Behn's favourite subjects of ridicule. Particularly abhorrent for Behn were those who were foolish and presumptuous enough to attempt to own and abuse the vigour of youth by marrying young wives or, worse still, by stealing them from young men. Sir Feeble's relationship with his wife, Leticia (who is the same age as his own daughter), is portrayed as, if not suggestively incestuous, at least highly unhealthy. Comments such as Leticia's exclamation that, "Heavens, what a nauseous thing is an old man turn'd Lover!" (I.iii.60-61) underscore the noxiousness, for Behn, of the notion of sexual union—particularly forced union—between the old and the young.

The old men's fault lies not only in the presumptuousness of their desire to possess young wives, in both the literal and sexual senses, but in their acceptance of these women and their vitality as property to be bought, sold and traded. Nowhere does Behn portray this notion more clearly than in the scene in which Sir Cautious greedily gambles away his wife's honour, and his own dignity, for three hundred pounds. In an attempt to gain sexual access to Julia, Gayman, having just won one hundred pounds from Sir Cautious in a card game, offers to gamble it back threefold if the latter would wager one night with her. When Sir Cautious laments that he wishes he could gamble "Nothing" (a contemporary euphemism for female genitalia) for the three hundred pounds, Gayman replies that he wishes that Julia were "worth nothing," for he would "set all this [money] against that Nothing" (IV.i.403-409). Not surprisingly, Sir Cautious

accepts the wager, proving that Julia's value lies in her ability to bring him wealth through her sexuality. The objectification of woman as financial property in the property-marriage system is thus extended beyond the engagement period and into the marriage itself by Sir Cautious. Having gained Julia and her familial assets as property at marriage, Sir Cautious now renders his wife sexual property in a more general sense. Like the prostitutes of *Thomaso*, Julia's sexual identity is melded with the economic world of the public. But this similarity between the two plays is belied by a profound difference in authorial purpose. While Killigrew's purpose is masculinist mirth at the cost of private values, Behn's is the ridicule of any economy that devalues these values.

Gayman—the man who is supposed to be Julia's true love—contributes to her unwitting prostitution in both his attitudes and his actions. For Gayman, as for Sir Cautious, Julia is a commodity. Inevitably, she is reduced in their exchange to a collection of parts:

Sir Cau. Hum, my Wife against three hundred Pounds!

What, all my Wife, Sir?

Gay. All your Wife! Why, Sir, some part of her wou'd
serve my turn. (IV.i.412-415)

This exchange chastises Gayman, a representative of libertinism in the play, as thoroughly as Sir Cautious, who embodies Restoration England's establishment. While playing upon his understanding of Sir Cautious' materialism, Gayman simultaneously reveals his own. Julia's value is reduced, for him as for Sir Cautious, to her identity as a sexual object. When Julia castigates Gayman at the end of the play for his participation in this wager, he admits his preference for his desire above her will and dignity:

L. Ful. If [Sir Cautious] cou'd be so barbarous to expose me,

Cou'd you who lov'd me—be so cruel too?

Gay. What—to possess thee when the Bliss was offer'd?

Possess thee too without a Crime to thee?
Charge not my soul with so remiss a flame,
So dull a sense of Virtue to refuse it. (V.vii.60-65)

Like Blunt in *The Rover*, these men seek to make up their loss on Julia's body. Behn's critique of marriage translates into a commentary upon the continued acceptance of women as property (and as relatively valueless property, unless traded for items of value) by members of all shades of the political spectrum. As in most of her work, so here this ideological issue is fundamentally linked to the issue of authority and its relationship to identity.

The two men throw their dice and, naturally, the youth wins. Gayman's prize is a single night with Julia, and Sir Cautious will aid him in conniving his way into the woman's bed without her knowledge. When their game of dice is over and Sir Cautious faces the inevitability of his loss, Julia approaches to ask him what he has lost that makes him so upset. His response is portentous: "A bawble . . . Only a small parcel of Ware that lay dead/ Upon my hands" (IV.i.482-483). Gayman's bawdy rejoinder that he "shall improve" this valueless ware underscores his own implication in her degradation. Sir Cautious' sexually suggestive soliloquy at the scene's close applies the moral dynamics of this pimpish card game to his society in general:

Who of this City-Privilege are free,
Hope to be paid for Cuckoldom like me;
Th' unthriving Merchant, whom gray Hair adorns,
Before all Ventures wou'd ensure his Horns;
For thus, while he but lets spare Rooms to hire,
His Wife's crack'd Credit keeps his own entire. (IV.I.514-519)

While Sir Cautious pushes the corruption of the marriage to the extreme, Behn's critique remains poignant. For Behn, Restoration woman's credit was, indeed, anchored in her sexual parts—not her human whole.

The social criticisms Behn offers in this play can only be fully understood within the larger cultural context of the era. In terms of the relationship between the sexes, the Restoration was marked by extreme and opposing views of subjects such as female honour and identity, sexuality, family relations and marriage itself. As in most of Behn's work, so in *The Lucky Chance* she represents her reaction not simply to one or two particular ideologies but to the pragmatic implications—especially for women—of this clash between ideologies itself. As Lawrence Stone observes in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a significant decline in the status of women in terms of their authority in the household, social stature, independence and legal rights.² The causes of this decline are difficult to pinpoint, but, as he suggests, they are connected to conflicting trends within English society in general. These centuries were marked by a generally decreasing sense of kinship as the social system moved from feudalism towards a more “civilian” system (Stone 93-104). Wrongs to one member of the family were viewed less stringently as wrongs to the extended family, leaving wives relatively unprotected from cruel husbands. At the same time, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a significant rise in the presence of patriarchal and autocratic familial structures. As Miriam Slater outlines in *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century*, it was the reassertion of patriarchy which, in the face of a century of critical attacks on the stability of the “great chain of being,” became “the social reality which made . . . family structure viable” (Slater 7). Fathers exerted powerful economic and social control over their married children at this time, enforcing unwanted marital unions and often creating profound feelings of resentment within arranged marriages. A wife's vulnerability was particularly compounded by this movement to reassert patriarchy, for it led to increases in the acceptable level of her husband's power over her. While a man gained, at marriage, any debt incurred by his wife, he also “acquired absolute control of all his wife's personal property, which he could sell at will” (Stone 136). Husbands retained full physical and economic control of their wives in the

eyes of the law. Women were instructed throughout these centuries to submit to their husbands' will, and even their cruelty, with as much meekness as was possible.

Marriage in the seventeenth century, then, was about enforcing the rule of order in the family, in the same way that other institutions became increasingly more concerned with this goal. As Susan Staves outlines in *Players' Scepters*, the concept of the universe as a great chain of static hierarchies was still retained throughout the seventeenth century, in spite of both the chaotic upheaval of civil war, revolt and rebellion, and the increasing influence of scientific and religious skepticism. According to this view of the world, the relationship between husband and wife was analogous to that between sovereign and subject. Charles II's ascension to the English throne in 1660, reinforced this ordered view of the cosmos, which had been understandably shaken by the events and, indeed, the existence itself, of the Civil Wars. For a wife to kill or abandon her husband in response to his rule, regardless of his harshness, was for her to commit petit treason. Treason, on any level, was intolerable. Justice Hyde, quoted in Staves' study, explains the rationale by which this metaphorical relationship was justified:

When the wife departs from her husband against his will, she forsakes and deserts his Government; erects and sets up a new jurisdiction; and assumes to govern herself, besides at least, if not against, the law of God and the law of the land. Therefore it is but just, that the law for this offence should put her in the same plight in the petit commonwealth of the household, that it puts the subjects for the like offense in the great commonwealth of the realm. (Staves 111)

The fear of disorder that dwelt deep within Englishmen is evident in this analogy. The violence of the suggested punishment for this crime: burning the perpetrator alive, reflects the intensity of this fear.³

Interestingly, however, Hyde misses a critical fallacy in his own analogy. While subjects were allowed to own property, participate in the nation's political control, and move freely from one district to another, from one political affiliation to another, wives were allowed no such powers. In the petit monarchy of the domestic realm, they incurred all of the moral responsibility of the subject without being granted any of his rights. It is fascinating that, in most public discourse, those who produced such delineations of female subjectivity missed the implications of their own analogy between woman and subject. If there was one lesson taught to those who had survived the century's many conflicts, it was that individuals who are utterly oppressed, or who sense that they are being oppressed, will eventually rebel. But the drive to establish and reinforce inarguable models of order was too strong for Hyde, and those who thought like him, to see the irony that lurked within their own arguments.

In *The Lucky Chance*, Behn does not neglect to outline this irony. The notion is expressed, for example, by Diana as she elopes with Bredwell:

Father, farewell—if you dislike my course,
Blame the old rigid Customs of your Force. (V.i.26-27)

Diana knows her father to be a man “whom Interest sways, not Honour” (VI.i.). He takes advantage of his patriarchal authority to give his daughter to Bearjest for the sake of reinforcing the alliance between himself and Sir Cautious, but is not motivated by the sense of familial honour which supposedly supports his authority. By the end of the play, Sir Feeble does indeed recognize that he is implicated in her rebellion, and acknowledges his contribution to Leticia's abandonment of him. He has acted dishonourably, has attempted to assert power on the basis of title, not merit. His friend, Sir Cautious, concurs:

I find, Sir Feeble, we were a couple of old Fools
indeed, to think at our Age to cozen two lusty young
Fellows of their Mistresses; 'tis no wonder that both

the Men and the Women have been too hard for us;

we are not fit Matches for either, that's the truth on't. (V.vii.215-219)

For the oppressed young lovers, and for the Restoration woman in general, there were but two means available for self-assertion: flight and retaliation. *The Lucky Chance* offers a comical look at the profoundly sad results of social oppression.

If the psychological reality of oppression and rebellion was missed by those who had pathologized disorder in the century's turbulence, it was acknowledged, if only subconsciously, by the Restoration's rising Protestant forces. While the Catholic church had historically glorified celibacy above marriage as an ideal of holiness, Protestants portrayed matrimony as divinely-ordained and even spiritually superior to celibacy (Stone 136-142). While marriage had traditionally been understood as a necessary economic exchange, it was increasingly touted as a duty of spiritual and moral responsibility as well. This ideological evolution bore serious consequences for the notion of female virtue. While the legacy of celibacy's veneration had created an image of femininity that idealized sexual innocence, this new esteem for marriage required that a woman gain sexually experience and be biologically reproductive. The overlap of these two ideals placed women in a paradoxical moral position. Woman's sexuality, her honour and her identity became increasingly difficult both to define and to uphold.

As Stone observes, this sanctification of matrimony thus "facilitated the subordination of wives," for not only did it entrench conventional female behaviour more deeply within confused notions of sexuality, but also women

were now expected to love and cherish their husbands
after marriage and were taught that it was their sacred duty
to do so. This love, in those cases where it in fact became
internalized and real, made it easier for wives to accept that
position of submission to the will of their husbands upon which

the preachers were also insisting. By a paradoxical twist, one of the first results of the doctrine of holy matrimony was a strengthening of the authority of the husband over the wife, and an increased readiness of the latter to submit herself to the dictates of the former. (Stone 142)

While marriage came to be commonly understood as a holy bond between man and woman, not simply an economic or reproductive union, it did not increase woman's autonomy. Instead, it reinforced the need for feminine submission, insisting that such submission was divinely-ordained.

The alternatives to marriage were often much worse for women than union with an unwanted partner. In the seventeenth century, unmarried women had few employment options.⁴ Those who refused to earn a living through prostitution could otherwise support themselves through thankless, enslaving positions as underpaid teachers, menial labourers, spinsters and servants. Most historical data indicates that women generally earned less than half of what men earned for the same work. Their meager pay and merciless hours caused them to become totally dependent upon their employers, who understood this fact and, more often than not, counted upon it (Goreau 70-74). Women who chose labour over marriage were publicly scorned. Any unmarried women over the age of twenty-five was viewed with suspicion and risked never being married. Most women chose at least to attempt to marry in the face of such alternatives. Marriage, touted as a holy and life-fulfilling union, often became merely the lesser of two evils.

In spite of historical accounts of female oppression, the increase in social doctrine regarding female submission may also reflect a felt need for social reinforcement, indicative of an increase in woman's attempt to assert her own will in public life. Certainly, the scandalized reaction to the cultural oddity that was Aphra Behn is reflective of such a phenomenon. Even the libertines, who claimed to celebrate the demise of female virtue, as well as love and marriage,

were probably more strongly motivated by a desire to contain and control women than to allow them freedom as they proposed. Rather than representing an attempt to liberate women from oppressive moral expectations, the liberal stance blinded itself to the repercussions of free love for women (pregnancy, damaged reputation, disinheritance, and unmarriedability) in its male-centred drive for sexual satisfaction. As Goreau outlines, this outward call for an end to puritanical notions of virtue was often accompanied by a perverse abhorrence for female sexual desire:

The libertine bent every effort to seduce a lady to his bed,
but once she was there, he despised her for it. The expression
of desire on the part of a woman still violated too many
taboos [. . .] the influence of modesty had far from departed.
It had, in a sense, gone underground. (Goreau 178)

The reaction of contemporary critics to Behn's work (including many whom she numbered among her close friends) underscores this hypocrisy. In spite of their encouragements to women to be "free," they relentlessly attacked Behn because of her gender, scoffing at the presumptuousness of a woman who freely expressed her own ideas, let alone her sexual will.

The social criticism which Behn offers regarding marriage in *The Lucky Chance* translates into a commentary upon the problematic authority of understood concepts of female honour which underpinned the age's views of marriage and sexual relations in general. As a supporter of Charles II and his libertine rule, Behn moved among those who embraced the Restoration's sexual revolution, and probably accepted many of their ideas. As a woman, however, and a thinker, Behn apparently had great difficulty with the consequences of libertine philosophy for the status of women. At the same time that Behn could not wholeheartedly accept libertinism, neither could she countenance the conservative ideal of femininity which had arisen over the centuries within the seats of political and religious power. For women, it seems, these

two opposing political poles were essentially identical, and their philosophies amounted to the same thing: oppression.

In her work, Behn continually attacks the traditional translation of “virtuous” female behaviour into obedience and submission. In *The Lucky Chance*, this ideal is embodied by Leticia, who swears absolute obedience both to Bellmour and to Sir Feeble, regardless of her own will. In spite of her abhorrence for the old man (at one point, she responds to the idea of physical intimacy with him by stating, “I die but to imagine it, wou’d I were dead indeed” (I.iii.19)), Leticia crumbles under the pressure of Sir Feeble’s emotional torment. Accounts provided throughout the play of Feeble’s relentless courtship of Leticia indicate that she has accepted him without ever strongly questioning his claims about Bellmour—his most obvious rival for her hand. At their wedding feast, Leticia responds to Sir Feeble’s degrading prattle (“Dear’s its nown ear Fubs; buss again, buss again, away, away—ods bobs, I long for Night...” (I.iii.29-31)) by promising that she will remain “all Obedience.” Sir Cautious, who is married to a woman who vastly differs from this submissive ideal, envies Feeble and praises Leticia for her honour: “A most judicious Lady; would my Julia had/ a little of her Modesty; but my Lady’s a Wit” (I.iii.45-46). Cautious’ lament reflects the ideology that Behn is undercutting in this play. Within the comic unfolding of the scene, Sir Feeble looks like a perverse old fool and Leticia like an opinionless victim. Even more ridiculously, however, Sir Cautious venerates this exchange as not only desirable but also ideal. In the end, the scene acts as a powerfully comic statement about the vacuity of commonplace notions of female virtue.

The theme of sexual liberty in *The Lucky Chance* is complicated by the presence of Lady Julia Fulbank. The play’s most explicit divergence from the moral systems both of libertinism and conservatism occurs within the character of Julia herself. Through this self-authorized woman, Behn subversively suggests and supports the notion that a woman’s identity can be defined and authorized by the individual woman herself.

In *The Lucky Chance*, a play about comic types and their antics, Julia is strangely out of place. While the play's other characters are easily definable, even by their very names, Julia remains elusive, problematic. Her husband, Sir Cautious, refers to her as a "wit." Her rakish lover, Gayman, worships her as a sexual object and berates her as an honest wife. Ultimately, however, it is Julia's self-definition, expressed through her words and perhaps more importantly by her actions, which most clearly delineates her character.

One of Julia's most attractive characteristics is her resourcefulness. In her first appearance in the play, this quality is quite disarming. The scene opens with Julia lamenting her marriage to Sir Cautious and its effects upon her beloved, after reading a love note sent to her by Gayman:

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—Consumptions, Coughs. (I.ii.36-39)

In this passage, Julia appears the picture of selfless feminine virtue. Her tone and diction are evocative of the qualities of the tragic heroine. Julia's softness, however, is undercut by the efficiency with which she extracts from Bredwell the details of Gayman's suffering, and by the self-confidence with which she bribes Bredwell to assist her in regaining her lover. "You too must assist me," she tells Bredwell, "as e'er you hope I should be kind to you in gaining Diana" (I.ii.29-31). Against Gayman's explicit wishes, Bredwell describes the former's poverty, frequent drunkenness and gambling, claiming that they are the sad results of Julia's marriage to Sir Cautious. Julia remains skeptical nonetheless, astutely suggesting that Bredwell add "wenching" to his list of Gayman's lovelorn undertakings. The scene closes with Julia contriving to steal money for Gayman from Sir Cautious' counting-house—an act which must have stricken horror into many a husband's heart amongst Behn's audience. Lady Julia thus represents a

deeply transgressive type of femininity. She maintains the emotions attached to intense romantic love, but refuses the passivity required of women in love relations. She is a love-struck woman of action, and thus a dangerous collection of contradictory terms.

Julia's complexity is intrinsically linked to her self-defined concept of honour. If the combination of emotional tenderness and decisive activity renders her a highly unusual figure of womanhood in Restoration drama, her assertion that she is also a fundamentally honourable woman makes her enigmatic. As mentioned earlier, enterprising women were viewed with suspicion and reproach in Behn's era and Julia's primary enterprises—namely, to financially support, morally test and sexually enjoy her unwitting lover—cross all boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour. Paradoxically, however, Julia's veneration of honour above "Life" itself (I.ii.16) qualifies her as a heroic figure.⁵ According to the morality of the age as it was frequently portrayed on stage and in contemporary discourse, honour and love formed a binary. The comic hero was required to privilege the former above the latter. To reverse this order was to create tragedy or to descend into farce. Like the hero, Julia fundamentally privileges honour. It is to her honour that she sacrifices her love for Gayman. It is her honour, or its abuse, that persuades her finally to reject both Gayman and Sir Cautious. Unlike the typical heroic figure, however, Julia's honour does not necessitate her stifling her love or desire for Gayman; nor does it require her faithfulness to her unwanted, geriatric spouse. Indeed, Julia continues not only to love Gayman in spite of her marriage, but she also makes love to him. A lengthy exchange between Julia and Sir Cautious, in which they discuss her novel stance on love and honour, summarizes her views. In this exchange, Sir Cautious wonders at Julia's liberal views and suggests that her attitude gives him "shreud suspicions" (V.iv.14) that she is not faithful to him. Julia's response, and subsequent discussion with her husband, articulate her self-created honour system:

L. Ful. What, because I cannot simper, look demure,
and justify my Honour, when none questions it?

—Cry fie, and out upon the naughty Women,
Because they please themselves—and so wou'd I.
Sir Cau. How, wou'd, what cuckold me?
L. Ful. 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. (V.iv.15-22)

When Sir Cautious, shocked by his wife's honesty, suggests that he would consider turning a blind eye if she took a lover, Julia's response represents a full movement outside of the seventeenth century's paradigm of femininity:

L. Ful. I'd do't without your leave, Sir.
Sir Cau. Do't—what, cuckold me?
L. Ful. No, love discreetly, Sir, love as I ought, love
honestly. (V.iv.33-36)

This discussion takes place as Sir Cautious attempts to explain to Julia the fact that he has gambled her away to Gayman. The dramatic irony of this fact undercuts Sir Cautious' pretenses to "good nature" as expressed in this passage, for the audience knows the full extent of his abuse of his wife's precious honour. Julia, by contrast, speaks honestly and poignantly, answering all of the standard arguments for wifely submissiveness invoked by Sir Cautious. For her, love and honour are not mutually exclusive terms, nor are they limited to matrimonial confines. In fact, as she suggests by her further assertion that she can simultaneously love Gayman and keep her virtue intact, virtue and cuckoldry may also be coincident. Her subversiveness, then, is based not on privileging love above honour or heart above head, but on her absolute disregard for these binaries themselves.

Julia's most significant act in *The Lucky Chance* is her testing of Gayman. Her bed-trick is straightforward. Learning from Bredwell that Gayman has lost his estate and fortune in his

attempt to gain her love, Julia decides to repay her lover from her husband's coffers.⁶ While she refuses, on the basis of social propriety (I.ii.112-115), to reveal her identity to Gayman, Julia sees in this circumstance an opportunity to test his constancy and his personal integrity. Sending Bredwell disguised as a devil to Gayman's chamber, she has the former invite her lover to an "assignation" with his financial saviour, who remains unknown to Gayman. When Gayman accepts the invitation, Julia has him brought in secrecy to one of her chambers, where her attendant, Pert, and a figure dressed as a shepherd entice him with erotic dance and song. In a strange emulation of marriage, Pert has Gayman put on Julia's ring and swear fealty to her mistress. Finally, Gayman is led to a veiled bed where his unknown protectoress lies waiting for him. The purposes of all this mysterious temptation are threefold. Primarily, it is a test of Gayman's own honour, which is judged according to his willingness to prostitute himself to an unknown woman. It is also a means by which Julia may measure Gayman's loyalty (a test which Gayman sorely fails, long before he is led to the enchanting chamber). Finally, this event allows Julia to make love to Gayman anonymously, and thus avoid both his demands and public censure.

This event is fundamentally significant to Behn's larger issues of love, honour and authority in the play. The bed-trick acts as an informing precedent to the similar trick that Gayman and Sir Cautious play upon Julia later in the play. The relationship between these two scenes is founded upon their contrasting moral dynamics. While Julia does trick Gayman, he is given a choice between prostitution and constancy. He chooses the former and is morally responsible for his choice. At the same time, however, his choice is informed by financial necessity. Sir Cautious and Gayman deceive Julia, however, making her believe she is making love to her husband when, in fact, her husband has smuggled Gayman into their bed.⁷ In addition, while Julia's motives for testing Gayman are generally to test his honour, Sir Cautious' motives

for giving his wife away are founded upon greed. Gayman's motive for deceiving Julia, sexual desire, is more difficult to assess morally, for Julia is in part guilty of the same crime.

What Behn underscores through the complex relationship between the two scenes is the issue of personal choice. What offends Julia most deeply about the trick played on her is the men's disregard for her honour, and, as Catherine Gallagher suggests in *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670-1820*, the fact that she has unknowingly "given over [her] public representation" (Gallagher 80)—an act which dishonours her as a self-authorized figure. However, as Gayman points out, she is an "innocent Adultress," for she believed she was with Sir Cautious. Julia accepts this point, but still insists that her honour has been violated by both men. Her continuing anger suggests that, for her, honour is not founded simply upon her implication in sexual transgression, but upon something utterly non-sexual: personal choice, and the freedom to be known on her own terms. That a woman's honour could be defined outside of her sexuality or sexual behaviour was a radical sentiment for Behn's day. Through Julia Fulbank, then, Behn offers a vision of female self-authorization which not only locates virtue within a woman's mind and heart, but which also rejects the alignment of a woman's identity with her sexual behaviour alone.

While Julia Fulbank is an impressively subversive figure from a modern feminist standpoint, she is by no means entirely liberated. The most obvious flaw in Julia's philosophy of self-authorization is the fact that she is married in the first place. Presumably, her attitudes towards arranged marriage have always existed. Nevertheless, she chose to marry Sir Cautious and reject her true lover. This choice is never satisfactorily explained in the play. In "Who Was That Masked Woman?"⁸ Catherine Gallagher argues that this absence of any "exculpatory story of deceit or coercion" to explain Julia's marriage partakes of a thematic undercurrent in the play which explores self-sale as a means for female self-ownership (75-76). Julia's insistence that Gayman never learn her role in his restoration to wealth, on the basis that her action violates the

ethos of “nicety and virtue,” represents the inverse of this thematic strain: Julia gives her gold (an equivalent throughout the play of the sexualized body) to buy his favours. He is “bought” by her. Her anonymity, however, also reverses this dynamic, for in giving him gold as a sexual incentive (indeed, Gayman believes his unknown benefactress to be “Some Female Devil, old and damn’d to Ugliness/ And past all Hopes of Courtship and Address,/ Full of another Devil called Desire” (II.i.194-196)), she “sells” to him the body that she cannot freely give according to her ethos. Nevertheless, Julia’s inability openly to reveal and act upon her desire suggests that she remains to some degree trapped by the ideology of female submission that was required by her culture. Her independence and strength of will is undercut by such a reversion to the very ideology that she outwardly denies throughout the play.

In the end, in spite of her disregard for her own marriage and for the notion of arranged marriage in general, Julia refuses to operate entirely outside of its confines. She does not flee; she does not refuse to marry; she only denies her husband (and her lover) sexual access to her. Her power of self-assertion ultimately returns to passive resistance, and this power is fundamentally linked to her status as a sexual object. To some degree, the clearly uncomical results of women’s overt rebellion in Behn’s age explains Julia’s apparent loss of face in this matter. However, it is also possible that Behn portrays her as a married woman with anti-marital attitudes in order to represent a woman in a realistic situation making the best of her life circumstance. Or, perhaps Behn was merely attempting to avoid the public censure of portraying outright rebellion in a world which understandably detested the very notion of disorder. Gallagher looks to the maintenance of Julia’s deceit throughout the play as a problematic, yet somehow positive, empowerment. The fact that we never gain access to the heart of Julia, who has in fact enjoyed her lover and physically rid herself of her unwanted husband but not, significantly, financially, maintains this character’s independence of will:

It is, then, precisely through her nullity, her nothingness, that Julia achieves a new level of self-possession along with the promise of continual sexual exchange. But this, of course, is an inference we make from what we suspect Julia is hiding: her pleasure in Gayman's body, her delight that she now has an excuse for separating from her husband, her intention to go on seeking covert pleasure. All of this is on the other side of what we see and hear. (Gallagher 84)

Julia does, to some degree, represent the secret dawning of sentiments of rebellion within the Restoration woman. Perhaps she is meant to be a signpost in the evolution of Behn's own vision. In the final analysis, however, Lady Julia Fulbank remains one of Behn's most striking embodiments of an alternative, deeply subversive vision of authority—feminized self-authorization. Behn's characterization of Julia anchors her critique of marriage within a novel vision where honour and love are products of individual choice, not of economic necessity or social programming. Her play, like the life she chose to live in spite of public censure, remains a tribute to the possibility of overcoming—on an intellectual level, at the very least—oppressive ideologies.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. All references to *The Lucky Chance* are quoted from Maureen Duffy's edition of the play, *Five Plays* (London: Methuen, 1990).
2. For an alternative portrayal of female rights in the seventeenth century, see Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1972) 247-260. Hill's more positive portrayal of the quality of life of seventeenth-century women is linked to his particular focus upon political and religious radicals, who tended to give women more human rights, as well as greater access to property ownership, education and public self-representation.
3. Staves notes that this punishment was indeed known to be enacted, although judges often avoided its full gruesomeness by "executing women first and burning them only after they were already dead." The sentence was challenged in the eighteenth century and petit treason itself was abolished as an offense in 1828 (Staves 112).
4. Diverse sociological accounts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century domestic life are provided in several studies, including Antonia Fraser's *The Weaker Vessel* (London: Methuen, 1985); Miriam Slater's *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) and in most major Behn biographies: Maureen Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977); George Woodcock, *The English Sappho* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989); Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra Behn: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (New York: The Dial Press, 1980).
5. In one sense, Julia is a type of Bacon-figure (one of the key characters in *The Widow Ranter*). Her ideological battle-ground is not the public realm, but the domestic. Like Bacon, she rebels against the unfounded authoritarianism of a dominant cultural ideology as a means

of reinforcing her individualism. Her characterization as a figure of intense honour further aligns her with Behn's Bacon. However, this role, as will be examined, is problematized by her final reversion to feminine passivity. She is not a tragic hero, for she does not succumb to excessive passion (although she does fulfill her sexual desires). Nor, however, can she be labeled a comic hero, for she does not accept the resolution provided for her at the end of the play. Julia exists in generic limbo. Perhaps Behn deliberately blurs Julia's role in order to "challenge the very possibility of female self-representation," as Catherine Gallagher suggests in "Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," in *Rereading Aphra Behn* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993) 84.

6. While such a theft would be viewed by Behn's audience as an act of petit treason—and thus a serious crime—Julia is dramatically justified by the fact of Sir Cautious' role in Gayman's financial ruin, and by the former's eventual sale of his wife's body for three hundred pounds.
7. For an alternative comparison of these two bed-tricks, see Gallagher, "Who Was That Masked Woman?" 82-83.
8. Gallagher, "Who Was That Masked Woman?" 65-85.

Chapter 3

The Widow Ranter:

Old World, New World—Exploring an Era's Honour Paradigms

Aphra Behn's *The Widow Ranter* (1690) is one of the playwright's most complex and thematically mature comic dramas. Probably written towards the end of Behn's life, this play in many ways seems like a final glance back at her turbulent nation in one of its most chaotic eras. From Charles I's death, to his son's Restoration in 1660, to the Glorious Revolution, the notion and character of authority had been overtly challenged on regular basis for over 60 years. It is in this play, more than any other, that Behn explores the schism in notions of authority that arose as a result of the political turmoil of seventeenth-century England. Composed of numerous plot strands, the play as a whole rises in the end as a chronicle of and commentary upon what can be described as the broadest political battle of the era: the clash of Old World and New. In the end, it is the New World that prevails and along with it shines the triumph of comedy.

Behn's concern with fracture is manifest even in the generic fabric of the play itself. In fact, it is the interaction of tragedy and comedy, rather than the individual topics that Behn explores, which expresses most suggestively her thematic purposes in *The Widow Ranter*. In this chapter, I will examine Aphra Behn's portrayal of the problem of an authority paradigm that has begun to clash and crumble. I also seek to delineate the ways in which this play manipulates genre to turn the tragedy of the Old World past into a visionary movement towards a fundamentally "comic" New World order.

In its main tragic plot, *The Widow Ranter* presents a somewhat embellished rendition of the historical rebellion of Nathaniel Bacon in Virginia in 1676. Bacon, dissatisfied both with the corruption of the colonial government and the Crown's refusal to retaliate against the Indians who continually attack the colony at Jamestown, decides to declare war upon the Indians himself. From the point of view of the colonial government, Bacon is a traitor and a rebel, for he refuses to obey the Crown's dictates for peace. Many of his fellow colonists, however, view him as a hero who, in spite of the consequences of political disobedience, has chosen to defend the colony and all that the colonists have built. Within this tragic plot is a tragi-romantic subplot, in which Bacon falls in love with Semernia, the "Indian queen." This love interest provides Bacon with the downfall necessary for a tragic hero, as will be discussed below. Surrounding this tragic plot are the play's comic plots. The primary comic plot is the Widow Ranter's plot, or the comic love plot, in which the play's main comic figures pursue one another for the purposes of sex, financial gain or, in the Widow's case, true love and marriage. The secondary comic subplot reveals the antics of the play's fools, who are all councilmen for the Crown. Their story is a parody of colonial government which was notorious for its fraudulence and patronage.¹

The play opens comically with the introduction of Hazard. Having exhausted his supplies of money and opportunity in Europe, this Wilmore-type character has turned to the New World as his final hope of "beginning the world withal" (I.i.40). What is most interesting about Hazard is his symbolic value as a figure who is omnipresent in the play and, most importantly, introduces it. By using Hazard in this way, Behn immediately injects irony into her play, and this irony informs and clarifies her otherwise complex, even problematic, treatment of authority.

As his name suggests, Hazard's actions ideals are troublesome and even dangerous. Particularly problematic are his notions of authority and honour. For Hazard, the New World is an embryonic space to which he may transplant his mutated Old World ideologies in the relative comfort of an unformed and malleable social and moral system. Hazard recounts his financial

follies and losses for his long-lost companion, Friendly (whom he meets in a Jamestown tavern in the opening scene), in an account which exemplifies his ideological stance:

. . . ill Company, and that common Vice of the town, Gaming
soon run out my younger Brother's Fortune: for imagining,
like some of the luckier Gamesters, to improve my Stock
at the Groom Porter's, I ventur'd on, and lost all. My elder
Brother, an errant Jew, had neither Friendship nor Honour
enough to support me; but at last being mollified by Persuasions,
and the hopes of being for ever rid of me, sent me hither
with a small Cargo to seek my Fortune. (I.i.42-49) ²

Hazard's elder brother's refusal to support his younger brother's folly would be considered not only honourable but prudent to Behn's British audience, for the brother thereby underscores the priority of his family's wealth and reputation above any personal desire to help his foolish sibling. For Hazard, however, the term *honour* is used self-servingly; that which is honourable is whatever best serves Hazard's own needs. It is by this self-centered standard that Hazard measures his brother's moral integrity. Honour, then, acquires ironic resonance for the audience, who recognizes the fundamentally selfish motives which underlie Hazard's speech.

More significant, however, is the utter disrespect Hazard displays towards his brother's authority. Hazard's excess is the source of his current woes, yet he chooses instead to point the blame at his brother and the system of heredity that prioritizes him. At the same time, Hazard would gladly and parasitically cling to his brother and feed off the very system he denounces. Hazard is expressing a misshapen vision of traditional authority that would not have been unfamiliar to a seventeenth-century audience. It is his disregard for authority that will connect Hazard to Bacon. But, as with many aspects of the web of binaries that is this play, the two represent opposite sides of a similar coin. The question, of course, is whether Behn is suggesting

that one side is preferable, or whether she wants to throw the coin away altogether. In the eyes of many of Behn's contemporaries, the historical Bacon abused British authority in much the same way that Hazard is abusing his brother. As mentioned earlier, Bacon swore his allegiance to the Crown yet, when left to his own devices, chose to disobey the dictates of Virginia's government, which he felt were unjust. Like Hazard, Bacon is portrayed in both contemporary writings and the play as an individualist who grants himself the right to delimit the authority of a traditional power.

At the same time, however, there is an obvious contrast between Hazard and Bacon, and this contrast is as wide as the gap between comedy and tragedy. While Hazard is a rakish fop who is driven by self-interest, Bacon is a tragic hero who is motivated by the desire to protect his countrymen. This contrast would undoubtedly have been understood by Behn's audience even before the introduction of Bacon in the play for most were quite familiar with the Nathaniel Bacon of history. So where, then, does Behn draw the line between these two men? In fact, she takes pains to erase any line, and that is why she inserts the Semernia plot into the play. As will be discussed below, Behn's Bacon is initially driven to rebellion by a need to protect his fellow Virginians from Indian attacks. The Crown refuses to respond to Bacon's request for help because it has established financial and political ties with the natives. The sensitivity of this issue must have been quite troubling to Behn, for it presented the possibility that the Crown was acting improperly, and this possibility opened up a breach in the stability of the Crown's authority, particularly for Behn, who, as will be illustrated, viewed authority as a status that is earned, not inherited. As a result, Behn introduces a new motive for Bacon's rebellion: his love for the Indian queen. In this way, Behn sidesteps the authority issue and closes the gap between Bacon and Hazard, for now Bacon, too, is motivated by self-interest and like Hazard is merely an anti-authoritarian rebel. Arguably, her insertion of the fictional Semernia plot does call attention to itself, and thus weakens her attempt to evade the authority question. In the end, however, this

point is moot. Bacon is killed, and Hazard (somewhat) reformed. Behn's final purpose in the play is not to teach a political lesson through the negative example of either of these men, but to move away from the Old World obedience/rebellion binary altogether.

The irony associated with the notion of authority is compounded throughout the play not only by Behn's treatment of Bacon and Hazard, but also by Behn's treatment of figures of authority who are overtly dishonourable. Behn satirically attacks the association of moral honour with title and privilege which had become endemic in her culture. Amongst several of the play's fools, Lieutenants Dullman, Boozer and Timorous, honorifics flow more readily than brandy:

Dull. [to Timorous] Drunk last Night, and sick to day, how comes that about, Mr. Justice? you use to bear your Brandy well enough.

Tim. Ay, your shier Brandy I'll grant you, but I was Drunk at Coll. Downright's with your high Burgundy Claret.

Dull. A Pox of that paulter Liquor, your English French Wine, I wonder how the Gentlemen do to drink it.

Tim. Aye, so do I, 'tis for want of a little Virginia Breeding: how much more like a Gentleman 'tis, drink as we do, brave Edifying Punch and Brandy,—but they say, the young Noblemen now, and Sparks in England begin to reform, and take it for their mornings Draught, get Drunk by noon, and despise the Lowsey Juice of the Grape. (I.i.174-185)

By conflating the Lieutenants' discourse on drunkenness, their backwoods rejection of "noble" drink ("Burgundy Claret" and wine in general), and their tendency to refer to one another by honorifics, Behn implicitly undercuts the validity of the terms of honour themselves and challenges the right that such figures have to authority.

The notion of honour is stretched to the height of its ironic potential by juxtaposing the notion of title with men who are so obviously undeserving of it. Hazard encapsulates Behn's irony in a bewildered aside: "Honours! . . . I'd sooner take 'em for Hogerds" (I.i.194-195). Behn's ridicule, however, is not aimed solely at the colonial rustics who attempt to pass as men of circumstance. She also uses this conversation of fools to attack the honour of England's nobility. That Timorous considers the debauched libertine lifestyle of the "young Noblemen" a "reform" underscores the fundamental dishonour which characterizes the lives of her culture's rich young fops and sparks.

Whimsey, Whiff and Dunce demonstrate more explicitly the (ab)use of the term in a comic discussion of honour's nature. In this passage, the three men implicitly reveal their own foolishness in their dismissal of honour as a useless quality:

Whim. Honour, a Pox on't; what is that Honour that
keeps such a bustle in the World, yet never did good as
I heard of?

Dun. Why, 'tis a foolish word only, taken up by great
Men, but rarely practis'd. . . (I.ii.93-96)

Honour, then, is a quality dismissed by fools and abused by great men.

While it was not uncommon in comedies of this time to portray governing figures in this way, Behn's comical condemnation of them blurs the limits of when it is acceptable to challenge authority and when it is not. If these men could be granted positions of power by the Crown, then the Crown's judgment is questionable and its authority no longer absolute. The issue of absolute authority lay at the heart of the political reality of the day. What is strange is that Behn is the one offering it up publicly in the playhouse. It seems odd that a devout royalist would do so, particularly in her case, for the reigning monarch at the time of the play's publication was Catholic, as was Behn herself. In light of the end James tried to bring to the suppression of the

Catholic faith, it seems Behn should have been unconditionally supporting her king. But Behn's own politics seem to have shifted. The cause of Behn's problematic treatment of monarchy at a time when she should, from all external evidence, have been venerating it, is thus found not in the individual criticisms she puts forth regarding government and authority in the play, but in its final vision, which ultimately points away from Old World authority debates altogether.

Behn's manipulation of the notion of authority in the play is intrinsically linked to the politics of authority in her strife-torn era. As Susan Staves outlines in *Players' Scepters*, one major ideological transition which resulted from the civil wars in the 1640s was the shift of the seat of moral authority from God, as embodied by both the Church and the king, to the individual subject. As a result of this shift, political and legal authority began to be understood to "originate in the people or in the needs and ends of individuals" (Staves xi). The problem with this shift, however, was that there were now as many authorities as there were individuals. In addition, if authority both revealed and reinforced honour, honour itself became a matter of individual definition. Hazard embodies this transition and illustrates, through his self-centered moralizing, its problematization of the traditional honour ethos. In spite of the increasing influence of constitutional claims for the role of Parliament, individual interest—now a priority as never before—tended to obscure the concepts of justice and authority to which political resolutions had been historically tied.³

The revolt of Nathaniel Bacon in 1675 was a perfect story for Behn to seize upon for her thematic examination of the state of authority towards the end of the seventeenth century. Bacon embodied the willful individualism and relativist approach to justice that had been expressed over and over again by the nation's plethora of rebels from the time of the civil wars. At the same time, however, Bacon's motivations for his actions posed the problematic questions about the Crown's infallibility which were noted above. The issues that circled the Nathaniel Bacon story were the central issues of the day: the relationship between the monarch and the subject,

the characteristics that defined authority, the limitations of power. The years between Bacon's rebellion and the play's first showing in 1690 offered more examples of these issues. In the early- to mid- 1670s, tensions between Charles II and his parliament had risen to a feverish pitch, largely as a result of several secret treaties he had formed with France, England's historical enemy. By the latter half of the decade, tumultuous forces within the British government, channeled by the hysteria of Titus Oates, had begun to broach the subject of Roman Catholicism in the ongoing drama of the Popish Plot. Oates fabricated stories of plotting Jesuits and Council infiltration, terrifying the populace with the possibility of another great fire like that of 1666, of attempts to assassinate the King, and of the looming fate of Popish tyranny.⁴ The success Oates had in convincing people to entertain his accusations attests to their openness to terror at the mention of independent political action, and this terror was carried into social attitudes about family, marriage and friendship as well.

When, in 1685, Charles' brother James took the throne, this paranoia (which had been allayed to some degree by Charles' refusal to believe Oates) arose once again. Although he was an Anglican sympathizer, James II was a practicing Catholic. He took the mass at Westminster (Morrah 183), and did everything in his power to appoint Catholics to positions of authority. In May and June of 1685, the Earl of Argyll and the Duke of Monmouth (Charles' illegitimate son), led uprisings against James with the intention of making the Anglican Monmouth king. But their revolts were poorly timed (Ashley 177), for the King had to this point remained fully sympathetic to the Church of England, and the two men did not receive sufficient support.

What Argyll and Monmouth did succeed in doing, however, was to make James II harden his heart (Ashley 178) against any form of rebellion; he would be sure from that point on to reinforce Divine Right and royal preeminence at every turn. He laboured in 1686/87 to surround himself with a Privy Council of yes-men. He also tended, like his brother before him, to prorogue or dissolve parliament when it did not agree with his actions. This attempt to reassert

the absolute rule of monarchy eventually proved too much for England. As Ashley lucidly explains, James' hardline tactics proved fatal: "by preferring to smother discontent instead of removing its causes and by making such unscrupulous use of his prerogative powers King James not only alienated the normally ruling aristocracy but even excited the voteless mob" (Ashley 180). Bacon's relationship with the Virginian government, then, plays like the plot of the era. In the end, when William of Orange, husband of James' daughter, Mary, came to England to claim the throne, James had suppressed the will of the people enough that they had astounding support. In 1689, Mary and William became King and Queen.

It is within this political situation, then, that Behn chose to have her play staged. And it is with the purpose of making sense of her era that she wrote this context into her dramatic subtext. As a sociopolitical commentary, her treatment of colonial government suggests that, in Behn's interpretation of contemporary politics, established forms of authority were not only highly problematic, but were no longer valid. That men like Whimsey and his companions could attain such power suggests that, in its drive to present a bulwark to rising powers of democracy and individualism, the Crown was endowing political positions with authority despite the lack of merit in those occupying these positions. While Whimsey, Whiff and their fellow councilmen demand respect because of the honorifics they have been granted by the Crown, their revision of the notion of honour suggests that their loyalties are to themselves. Fealty to the Crown, then, is nominal in their ethos; it does not preclude the individualist economy which supposedly opposes royalism.

The social schism created by the factions within factions who had participated in Cromwell's revolution, the Popish Plot, Monmouth's rebellion and the Glorious Revolution, was reflected throughout the drama of the period, particularly in what Staves terms the period's "political tragedy," of which *The Widow Ranter's* tragic plot certainly partakes. This type of

play, Staves asserts, presents the crumbling of old forms of authority in the face of new movements towards more modern forms of government:

These plays . . . by focusing on situations where . . . traditional upper authorities are absent, by insisting on the failure of traditional sources of authority to create obligation, or by showing two upper sources of authority in hopeless conflict with each other . . . prepare the way for the early modern idea of political authority, authority coming from below, authority as the voluntary creation of individual men for their own self-preservation and betterment. (Staves 80)

The Widow Ranter exemplifies the second type of political tragedy, in which two well-established models of authority engage in an irresolvable conflict. More specifically, however, Behn critiques the problematic honour paradigms within each mode of authority which lead to this ideological deadlock. In *The Widow Ranter*, the debate is schematized by a conflict between heroism and royalism, where Bacon represents the new individualist hero and Colonels Wellman and Downright, representatives of the Crown, embody the traditional royalist front.⁵

On one level, Behn uses the events of Bacon's rebellion in Virginia to bring to the forefront of her play specific questions about legal authority. This legal debate is encapsulated in Act II, as Colonels Wellman and Downright confront Bacon with his refusal to obey their orders to halt his wars with the Indians. As representatives in Virginia of the Crown, the colonels are concerned primarily with maintaining their own authority and deflecting insurrection. Bacon, by contrast, is more pragmatic—he is interested only in saving the lives of his family and neighbours:

Should I stand by and see my Country ruin'd, my King
dishonour'd, and his subjects Murder'd hear the sad Cryes of
widdows and of Orphans, You heard it Lowd, but gave no

pitying care to't, and till the war and Massacre was brought
to my own door, my Flocks, and Heards surpriz'd, I bore
it all with Patience, Is it unlawful to defend my self
against a Thief that breaks into my doors? (II.iv.89-95)

Reminiscent of Christ's response to the Pharisees who confront him for healing the sick on the Sabbath, Bacon's appeal strikes a chord which would resound woefully for those members of Behn's audience who had lived through the sorrows of the last half-century. Oddly, however, Bacon's speech goes unacknowledged by the colonels. In fact, Wellman's only response is caustically to ask, "And you call this defending of [sic] yourself?" (II.iv.96). Harsh and illogical, the colonel's response points out the key shortcoming of the type of authority that he represents: its blindness to the needs and value of the individual. In this way, the colonels are as extreme and problematic as Bacon the arch-rebel. Through this characterization of the colonels, Behn suggests the royalist implication in creating a political mood which could lead to the overthrow of the Crown. This suggestion is supported, as described above, by historical experience. It is in this way that Wellman and Downright contribute to Bacon's rebellion in the play. Rather than examining the source of Bacon's felt need to rebel, the colonels simply deny the validity of his position. When Bacon hands them his Commissions, which request that he be allowed to lead an assault upon the murderous Indians, Wellman and Downright scorn him for his impertinent behaviour, tear up his papers and dismiss his perceived attempt to compel them to obey him. They effectively dissolve parliament. The colonels, then, while representing the royalist system to which Behn herself adhered, are nevertheless to be understood as imperfect examples of authority. They embody the royalist extremism and inflexibility which enabled the turmoil of the era.

This encounter with the colonels is the catalyst for Bacon's overt rebellion against the Crown. Initially, Bacon acts and argues from within the colonels' own system. When Wellman

suggests that, because some members of his own camp have acted dishonourably towards Bacon, he will pardon Bacon for using the “rabble” to defend his own life, Bacon cannot comprehend how, according to the colonel’s own code of honour, he is in any way in need of pardon, for he has “not offended Honour nor Religion” (II.iv.86-87). Appealing to the same code, the colonels capitulate with the response that, in acting without the Crown’s approval, Bacon has behaved as improperly as he would by acting contrary to the law. In both cases, Bacon’s offense is to challenge the order of authority that holds political chaos at bay. Unfortunately, this strict order of authority allows no space for Bacon’s life experience and effectively dismisses the conflict with the Indians which the colonists see as life-threatening. Bacon is, in this sense, driven to civil disobedience by the law itself. And the political resonance of such a situation would not be lost on Behn’s audience

The implication of Wellman and Downright in the revolt of their own subject, however, does not mean that Behn is portraying Bacon in a favourable light, nor does it signal a full betrayal of royalist sentiment on her part. Bacon has flaws of his own. From his first entrance into the action, he is haughty and irreverent, acting contrary to the hierarchic royalist system to which he claims obedience (“the height of my Ambition is to be an honest subject” (II.iv.109-110)). When Colonel Wellman explicitly accuses Bacon of treason (II.iv.122-124), Bacon is enraged and cuts all ties with the people who would accuse a man such as himself of treason—guilty, in his own eyes, only of not awaiting a royal commission before defending himself and the lives of his fellow subjects. “Go,” he cries, “Triumph in your short Liv’d Victor,/ the next turn shall be mine” (II.iv.129-130).

This “turn,” then, is a movement towards individualism. Behn does not attempt, however, simply to delineate the events of Bacon’s rebellion, raise issues of law reformation or even metaphorically recount the battles of the era. Instead, she is concerned with representing the ideological heart of England’s social and political instability. Bacon’s plot charts the tumult of

the era, not only showing the Old World battle between the monarchy and individualism but also pointing out the ultimate failure of both as models for political and social rule. The debate between these two fictions of authority, then, is irresolvable; both are founded primarily upon circular assumptions of their own validity rather than merit. To Bacon, the law is primarily concerned with the protection of British subjects. It is therefore subject to a higher authority: the people themselves. However, as an individualist, Bacon pushes this argument too far, so that order either becomes an impossibility, for there are then as many “authorities” as there are people, or it becomes embedded solely within his own will, making him the type of despot he rejects in the Crown. For Downright and Wellman, the law must be the primary concern of British subjects; the law itself is their authority. For the former, the spirit of law rules; for the latter, it is to be followed to the letter. In the end, however, the debate is itself moot, for both systems are doomed to failure and, as the comic plot will ultimately suggest, must succumb to time, progress and change.

Wellman’s charge of treason sets the stage for a tragic revenge plot. Bacon himself becomes the tragic hero—honourable, strong, but doomed. In *Restoration Drama*, John Harold Wilson outlines the character and concerns of the tragic hero, establishing this type of character as a hyper-individualist who answers only to his own innate code of honour. Attempting to act above and beyond the dictates of human law, the tragic hero is “royal by nature; his chivalric honour soars regally above mere common concepts of law or ‘justice’” (Wilson 72). Wilson’s adjectives in this description (“royal,” “regally”) betray the key conflict between this type of individualism and monarchy: the individualist, acting as his or her own authority, essentially usurps the monarch’s role.

The plot into which Bacon falls is a tragic love story. Falling for Semernia, the Indian queen, a woman he can never have, he eventually inadvertently kills her and ends up dead himself. In his final throes, he renounces his own rebellion. This plot and character development

follow to the letter the tragi-heroic dramatic format, where we find the “godlike hero in war, revolution, or palace intrigue, and [set] against powerful antagonists and seemingly hopeless odds” (Wilson 69). The key battle faced by the tragic hero, however, is not with these powerful antagonists, but with his own passion. And, in the end, if the hero cannot bring his heart into check with his reason, he is doomed. Love *versus* honour is the key conflict of the heroic tragedy, and so it is fitting that Bacon ultimately forfeits his life for forbidden love.

But Bacon’s tragic heroism is also evident on other levels. The tragic hero exceeds in honour the bounds of law and exists as a monarch in his own right. As Wilson points out, Dryden’s Almanzor in *The Conquest of Granada*, exemplifies this new age monarchism (Wilson 72). And Almanzor would have been a natural brother, in the minds of Behn’s audience, to Bacon. Indeed, one line spoken by Almanzor carries particular resonance in Bacon’s tragic plot as he aligns himself, the hero, with the noble savage:

[I am] as free as Nature first made Man,

Ere the base laws of servitude began,

When wild in woods the noble savage ran. (*Conquest of Granada* I.i)

While Bacon’s character is not quite as flamboyant as Almanzor is, Bacon expresses a similar attitude in his actions and in his choice of a native woman as his love interest.

This alignment of the hero with the noble savage is particularly interesting in Behn’s play, in which native Americans figure largely. Apart from Semernia, it is Cavarnio, the Indian King, to whom Bacon relates most closely on a moral level in the play. We see this commonality, for example, in Act II, which brings together Bacon and Cavarnio at the latter’s pre-war religious feast. The scene opens with Cavarnio’s interesting observation that they were once close friends:

I am sorry Sir, we meet upon these terms, we who so often have
embraced as friends . . . (II.i.20)

As he and Bacon discuss the war that has broken out between them, Cavarrio, hesitant to wage battle with his companion, brings Bacon even more fully into the realm of the noble savage by overtly describing him as “noble.” Both figures proceed to briefly discuss their respective right to the land for which they are fighting. Significantly, the moral system to which they appeal—native inheritance—is identical. In this way, Bacon is also aligned with another of Behn’s heroes: Oroonoko. *Oroonoko* is the tale of an African prince whose beloved is stolen from him by his own father, who, in turn, then sells both of them into slavery in Surinam. The novella details the story of Oroonoko’s reunion with his love in the colony and his ultimately tragic rebellion against the heartless slave owners who keep him in captivity. Like Bacon, Oroonoko finds a merciless adversary in the British colonial government. And he, like Bacon, loses his love and his life to them. But there are key differences between these two figures that problematize what Behn is saying, through Bacon, about authority. Unlike Bacon, Oroonoko actually is a prince. He thus carries some natural claim to his rebellion against England’s Crown. Bacon, by contrast, is a common man. His rebellion is thus not as justifiable as Oroonoko’s. Also, Oroonoko is savagely abused by his British enemies. He does not rebel on grounds of principle so much as necessity. While Bacon fears for his life at the hands of the Indians, he is never directly abused by the Crown; they merely deny him protection. Nevertheless, it seems that, while Behn grants unconditional authority to “natural law” in the case of Oroonoko, who is actually a prince, she cannot grant authority to the “natural law” that rules Bacon’s conscience. This discrepancy explains, in part, her need to make Bacon a victim of unmitigated passion; her authority code is too carefully balanced to accept the possibility that any common person has the right to rebel against unjust authority without due cause, and “due cause” is either the natural right to ascend to authority, or the suffering of excessive oppression. This ideological paradox is common in Behn’s work and she is famous for it among modern scholars.

In spite of Behn's problematic thematic logic, the historical Bacon did provide fertile grounds for Behn's adoption of him as a figure of the tragic hero. In his *Manifesto Concerning the Present Troubles in Virginia*,⁶ Bacon answers to similar accusations of lawlessness as those leveled at Behn's Bacon. Like the Bacon of *The Widow Ranter*, he insists that he has acted within the Crown's honour paradigm, remaining obedient to the dictates of virtue, piety and "all the Principles of morality goodness and Justice" (*Five Plays* 141). However, he also exposes his more ominous, controlling and intensely individualistic side as he asserts, for example, that his violence has been directed only towards Indians, and that he has "never subverted or threatened any member of government, or any private individual, *other than those who have censured [him] or questioned [his] motives*" (*Five Plays* 141, emphasis added). Here, the historical Bacon comes dangerously close to tyranny and reveals the attitude that labeled him a traitor. His judgment of others, his guide for behaviour, is not the law, the monarch, or even religion, but his own innate sense of right and wrong.

Behn seems, ultimately, to manipulate the historical Bacon's fate as a means of supporting the royalist cause, but her political and thematic purposes are actually more complex. The historical Bacon died in bed, probably of natural causes. In Behn's rendition, however, Bacon not only dies as a result of his rebellion but also renounces his own political convictions at his death. His last breath, in fact, is spent delivering a royalist panegyric:

... Now while you [Dareing and Fearless] are Victors make
a Peace—with the English Councel—and never let Ambition—
Love—or Interest, make you forget as I have done—your
Duty—and Allegiance—farewel—a long
farewel—. (V.iv.31-35)

There is no indication that the real Bacon ever renounced his political opinions. In fact, according to the *Commissioner's Report* (1676) in which Bacon's rebellion was recounted,

Nathaniel Bacon died shortly after developing and initiating a detailed plan to take over the governance of Virginia. The *Report*'s author suggests that Bacon's last words, quite unlike those spoken by Behn's Bacon, were inquiries about the status of his revolution: "Hee dyed much dissatisfied in minde inquiring ever and anon after the arrival of the Friggets and Forces from England, and asking if his Guards were strong about the House" (*Five Plays* 215). Behn's treatment of the events in Virginia, then, seems completely to discount historical reality, and one is tempted to suggest that she is writing Bacon's story as it "should have been." Her true purpose, however, is linked more closely to genre and to what she is saying about the state of Old World authority—both the authority of the state *and* the authority of Bacon's brand of individualism.

Bacon's love for Semernia brings about his demise, and this death represents the death, or ultimate impracticability, of the individualist attitude that Bacon represents. In symbolic terms, Semernia, as a woman, a native and a pagan, represents the alterity which any political rebel embraces and supports. Bacon's love for this other is destructive to his rational faculty in the same way that, a royalist would suggest, a rebel's devotion to non-traditional forms of authority and honour destroys and disrupts right rule. Bacon's love damns him profoundly in the eyes of the Council, for they understand that his need to defeat the Indians is not simply driven by a desire to preserve his fellow colonists or even by self-preservation, but by his profoundly dis-orderly love for the Indian queen. That he would be so full of pride and self-interest as to forfeit the law for the sake of his passion condemns Bacon and undercuts his honour system. Love, then, or its debased equivalent within the heroic honour code, is used by Behn as a means of illustrating the heroic/individualist paradigm's own tragic flaw: the individual, driven only by his own desire, refusing to abide any external authority, is a profoundly unstable source of authority and offers as a leader only the prospect of tyranny, even as he himself is tyrannized by the passions of his heart. Colonel Downright, in fact, suggests that if Bacon's passion is fulfilled

and he gains Semernia, the resulting alliance would give Bacon the potential to become "a more formidable Enemy, than the Indians are" (I.ii.28). Authority, in this view, would be granted to a two-headed monster: individualism and the dreaded "other." While the key problem of monarchy for those who revolted against the king in Behn's day was its potential for tyranny, Behn's portrayal of Bacon suggests that the alternative which was offered was perhaps just as flawed.

Bacon's love for Semernia also degrades the moral order of the monarchist ideology, which was founded upon Christian tenets. Semernia is another man's wife, a pagan and the enemy of England. She is also the cause of Bacon's abandonment of his religious and moral principles. The individualism that Bacon represents, then, is at odds with Christianity itself. Indeed, Bacon repeatedly aligns himself with pre-Christian classical heroes such as Caesar, Cassius and Hannibal. His actions are not simply traitorous, then, but heretical as well. For Behn, then, as for most royalists, political individualism not only challenges the order of society, but also threatens the stability of their perception of the universe and its creator.

The historical Bacon, of course, bore no such affiliation with any Indian. When questioning Behn's motives for adapting Bacon's character, we must keep in mind the social and historical context in which *The Widow Ranter* was written. When Behn penned her play, probably in 1687 or 1688, the historical rebellion upon which she drew was only twelve years in the past. Most of Behn's audience, especially the upper classes, would have had at least some knowledge of the events in Virginia and the character of Bacon, there being in circulation at the time at least ten documents, both anonymous and state-sanctioned, describing the events of Bacon's rebellion. The historical Bacon was known to be a man of aristocratic honour. He was witty, wealthy, well-bred, well-born, and worldly. Nor was Behn the only writer to cast him as a tragic hero. The anonymous author of *Strange News from Virginia*, for example, describes him as a victim of the tendency towards ambition which characterizes the tragic hero:

Having obtained these large Civilities of the Governor, etc.
one would have thought that if the Principles of honesty
would not have obliged him to peace and loyalty, those of
gratitude should. But, alas, when men have been once
flushed or entered with vice, how hard it is for them to
leave it, especially if it tends towards ambition or greatness,
which is the general lust of a large soul . . . (*Five Plays* 169)

Bacon, then, was seen by some as a man of greatness who was trapped by the faults which lay at the logical limits of this greatness. This relatively positive depiction of Bacon, however, was countered by the Crown. In the Crown's *Commissioner's Report*, Bacon is characterized as a seditious libertine with little ethical integrity:

Hee was said to be . . . of a pestilent and prevalent Logical
discourse tending to Atheism in most companyes, not given
much to talke, or to make suddain replyes, of a most
imperious and dangerous hidden Pride of heart, despising
the wisest of his neighbours for their Ignorance and
very ambitious and arrogant . . . (*Five Plays* 186)

This passage reverses the characterization of Bacon in *Strange News*. For the Crown, Bacon was simply a heretic, a traitor and a rebel and the paragon of rudeness and self-concern. The Crown's version of Bacon's character reflects a drive to maintain the royalist status quo. As an "imperious" and "dangerous" villain, Bacon is a usurper, taking on the power of the monarch through self-rule. Like Cromwell before him, Bacon is an individualist and thus a threat to the precarious order and authority of the royalist system. Behn's version of Bacon, then, lies somewhere between sympathy and damnation. He is, ultimately, defeated by his own nature, but

the representatives of the Crown, such as the foolish councilmen, are themselves not much more favourably presented.

Interestingly, it is Semernia—a woman and a foreigner—who explicitly voices the era's ideological and moral problems. Her soliloquy, in which she frets over the conflict between her desire for Bacon and her desire to uphold her own honour code, can be read as not only the thematic “voice” of the play but also the voice of Behn herself, and of England more generally:

Alas! What pitty 'tis I saw the General, before my Fate
had given me to the King—but now—like those that change
their Gods, my faithless mind 'twixt my two opinions wavers;
while to the Gods my Monarch I commend; my wandering
thoughts in pitty of the General makes that zeal cold, declin'd—
ineffectual; —If for the General, I implore the Deities,
methinks my Prayers shou'd not ascend the Skies since
Honour tells me 'tis and impious zeal

Which way so ever my Devotions move,

I am too wretched to be heard above. (IV.i.52-61)

Semernia's inability to decide between “The King” and “The General” can be read allegorically. In one sense, Semernia represents the objectified other that entices Bacon into rebellion. In this passage, however, she embodies the post-revolutionary subject, the being who is caught between the two camps of the old fictions of authority but is herself a “foreigner” within the old system. She sits on the outskirts of the status quo, a part of it yet excluded from it; she remains affected by it, but is essentially incapable of acting within it. She grapples with the new possibilities offered her by Bacon's love, but realizes that to accept him is to lose her ties to all she knows and understands. In a strange inversion of Behn's portrayal of Semernia as Bacon's tempting other, Bacon himself becomes this other for the perplexed Indian queen.

Semernia's final frustration, and her assertion that she is now separated even from her God(s) underscores the significance of her internal battle. Her understanding of the world is fundamentally undercut. All is chaos. The soliloquy also outlines the deep significance of the notion of honour to the Restoration mind. Honour is aligned with the will of the Divine and conscience is the manifestation of Divine authority within the individual soul. Semernia's conscience tells her that she is obliged to uphold her vows to Cavarnio, regardless of her own will, much in the same way that the royalist honour paradigm requires its subjects' allegiance to the king and his laws, regardless of individual desire. In the end, Semernia's internal struggle must end in tragedy, for she has no means of escaping this dichotomy from within the Old World order. Having become ideologically separated from her king, Semernia's only options are rebellion or death. Ultimately, she chooses death.

In the end, then, Bacon's revenge plot ends in tragedy. Bacon, mistaking the disguised Semernia for an Indian soldier, accidentally kills her. His fellow rebels flee and he himself is ultimately killed. Interestingly, however, his death does not play like a glorious victory for the Crown, or even as a re-establishment of order. Instead, Wellman and Downright are absent from the scene, while the play's comic protagonists, Fearless and Dareing, are present. Their very names signal a radical shift away from what is known and towards the adventure of the unknown, while, like the Crown that is absent from its warring colony, the Crown's representatives are absent from this significant moment. The end of Bacon's story, then, is strangely anticlimatic, and particularly with the continuance of the play with Ranter's comic plot, seems to fade into insignificance. Bacon, the Crown, the high-flown elements of the Old World battle, are simply passing memories.

* * *

In spite of Semernia's fate, the final vision of authority and honour in *The Widow Ranter* is far from tragic. In fact, through the Widow herself, who is the play's comic heroine, Behn is able to negotiate with both Old World "fictions of authority" from a perspective outside of the Old World paradigm. As suggested in the introduction to this study, Behn occupied a strange political and ideological space in her day. Politically, she was a devout royalist and her portrayal of the battle between Bacon and the Crown, with its propagandistic overtones, reveals and underscores this position. Aphra Behn, however, was also a woman and a writer—two identities that placed her outside of the political status quo. It is in her treatment of *The Widow Ranter*, and the comic plot in general, that this other identity reveals itself, transgressing and subverting the royalist themes of the tragic plot.

We are first introduced to Ranter in Act I.i., when Friendly gives Hazard an account of her history and character:

. . . a Woman brought from the Ship by Old Colonel Ranter,
she serv'd him half a year, and then he Marry'd her, and
dying in a year more, left her worth Fifty thousand Pounds
Sterling, besides Plate and Jewells: She's a great Gallant, But
assuming the Humour of the country Gentry, her Extravagancy
is very Pleasant, She retains something of her Primitive
Quality still, but is good-natur'd and Generous. (I.i.82-93)

Friendly's description of Ranter as "primitive" is significant, for she acts as the generic counterpart to another "primitive" woman in the play—Semernia. While Semernia's life ends in tragedy as a result of her inability to deny the Old World honour paradigm, Ranter always acts from a position of ideological alterity. Although Semernia is literally a creature of the New World, and Ranter is simply an immigrant, the latter is much more distinctly "New" in Behn's treatment. Ranter's name associates her with the religious sect that fled England in political

rebellion. As Maureen Duffy suggests in her introduction to the Methuen version of the play, this word became associated with a “thoroughgoing rejection of social and political structures, and even with free-love relationships” (*Five Plays xxiv*). Interestingly, Behn and her thespian contemporaries were characterized in a similar fashion, particularly in London in the “sexual revolution” of the 1660s.⁷ Ranter, then, embodies the new free-spirited gallantry that dominated the fashionable quarters of England in Behn’s day. A drinker, a smoker and a reveller, she is a product of the post-Cromwellian New Age, in which the British subjects who had been morally constrained under the Puritans, and the Church and Crown before them, began to explore experiential avenues which had been previously forbidden. The Widow belongs intrinsically to this New Age, and thus to Behn’s ideological New World.

The Widow’s marital status is significant, for widowhood was one of the only states in which a woman could remain financially independent and self-sustainable in seventeenth-century England. Widows were looked upon with fear and mistrust because they were financially independent and sexually experienced, two facts that defied contemporary notions of female honour.⁸ Because female identity was conflated with chastity, an honourable woman was either a virgin or a wife, for sexuality was sanctioned only within the confines of marriage. Women who knew men sexually, yet were not currently married (either because of widowhood or extramarital sexual activity) were seen as unchaste or at least morally questionable. As Angeline Goreau notes in her Behn biography, *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn*, women had only two legal identities: wife or daughter. An unmarried, sexually experienced and financially independent woman was not received as a legal “reality,” even in the eyes of the law. The “Lawes Resolution of the Rights of Women” (1632) states that, “All of them [women] are understood either married or to be married . . . The Common Law here shaketh hand with divinitie . . .” (Goreau 78). Behn, a widow herself, experienced firsthand the social censure that arose as a result of her misunderstood sexual and social identity. Her literary career—a most

public occupation—only augmented her dishonour, for women were to remain quiet and private, as well as chaste, in order to possess honour.⁹ Throughout Behn's drama, particularly her comic drama, the widow appears as a type of avenging feminist force, a foil to these gender conventions. *The Widow Ranter* is one of her strongest and most lively widows.

Ranter plays a key role in Behn's exploration of New World and Old World authority in this play. She acts as the ideological counterpart not only to the Crown, with its excessive legalism, but also to Bacon himself who, in spite of his political and ideological sedition, is as fundamentally Old World as the Colonels themselves. While both Bacon and the Crown view authority as a quality that, to a great extent, precedes its merit, Ranter sees it as an earned quality. For a woman, such a notion contradicts all understood conceptions of femininity. According to the Old World paradigm, Semernia embodies the feminine ideal: sexual chastity and the ability to accept male activity with passivity and grace. According to the sexual politics of Behn's culture, in fact, a woman's identity was founded upon this passivity. For the Widow, such a notion is ridiculous. She will fight for what she wants and for what she believes is right.

While the play's representatives of Old World economies of authority seek absolute power and control, the Widow seeks what Restoration scholar Donald Bruce terms *eminence*: relative power that arises from personal merit.¹⁰ Staves suggests that this new relativist notion of authority, combined with the disillusionment with idealized heroism created by the seventeenth-century experience, led to the creation of a new type of hero in the minds of Restoration dramatists:

Of the surviving writers, many seem to have been left with the strong suspicion that there were no heroes, or at least that whatever heroes there might be were really only imperfect men. (Staves 40)

The new Restoration hero, then, was the “good fellow” and the “Gentleman,” whose faults and imperfections were admitted, even as his attributes were praised. A “regular” person could thus be viewed as heroic within a specific dramatic situation, yet could also be portrayed as a patently imperfect being. The new hero rose to and fell from eminence in various situations; there remained few idealistic portrayals of the all-powerful heroic being. Ranter exemplifies the Restoration’s imperfect hero with a gender twist.

While Semernia, the tragic heroine, remains trapped within the standard love-honour debate of Restoration tragedy, Ranter settles the issue with action. In the wake of Bacon’s death, the plot turns more fully to its comic concerns with love. Ranter has for some time been in love with Dareing, one of Bacon’s men. Unfortunately, Dareing loves Colonel Downright’s daughter, Crisante, who, in turn, loves Friendly. Realizing that it is not in her nature to pine for any man, Ranter decides to attempt to gain Dareing by force and trickery. Donning men’s clothing, she and her attendant, Jenny, present themselves as suitors to Crisante in an attempt to throw Dareing from his desired mark. The ensuing scene is not only comical but thematically poignant. Most significant is Ranter’s discussion about love with Jenny, in which the former delineates her practical approach to love. When Jenny expresses surprise at Ranter’s assertion that she “dies for” Dareing, Ranter is indignant:

Ran. Pox on’t no, why should I sigh and whine, and make my self
an Ass, and him conceited, no, instead of snivelling I’m
resolved—

Jenny. What Madam?

Ran. Gad, to beat the Rascal, and bring off Crisante. (IV.ii.173-177)

Jenny is flabbergasted at Ranter’s boldness. The notion of a woman beating not just a man but a military man would have seemed ludicrous to Behn’s audience. Ranter, however, remains

steadfast in her self-confidence, believing that passion and will can allow a person to act beyond their known capacity:

Hang 'em, they get a name in War, from command, not
courage: but how know I but I may fight, Gad I have known
a Fellow kickt from one end of the Town to t'other,
believing himself a Coward, at last forc'd to fight, found he
could, got a Reputation and bullied all he met with, and
got a name, and a great Commission. (IV.ii.179-184)

The very act of comparing herself with this hypothetical coward-turned-bravo is surprising and transgressive. Ranter does not simply cross known boundaries of female aspiration, however; she also subverts firmly entrenched ideals like the notion of military bravery. Her suggestion that soldiers “get a name in War, from command, not courage,” though a gross generalization, is interesting. She suggests through this comment that honour requires volition and action. Soldiers who fight because they are commanded to do so are not brave according to Ranter’s conception of bravery. Instead, they only act out of necessity. Her critical assessment of the military is supported by the actions of both the Indian and English soldiers in the play’s tragic plot, who abandon their leaders at the first signs of defeat. Ranter, by contrast, is seemingly doomed to defeat in her venture to overcome Dareing by force because she herself is a woman, and because he loves Crisante. However, she insists upon fighting in spite of these odds. She is an ordinary woman showing extraordinary strength and self-possession. She is a Restoration New Age hero.

In spite of her bravado, the Widow has no intentions of carrying her pretensions of strength to the excessive limits often visited by the heroes who adopt similar attitudes in Restoration drama. She will never, for example, fight to the death for that which she desires so greatly. When Jenny suggests that Dareing may retaliate and kill Ranter, the Widow speaks with the wisdom of the comic spirit:

I'll take care to make it as Comical a Duel as the best of 'em,
as much in Love as I am, I do not intend to dy its Martyr. (IV.ii.186-187)

This passage underscores the depth of Ranter's transgressiveness as a female character. The Widow knows her heart and the depth of her feelings for Dareing, but she also understands the necessity of reason—and survival.

Ranter's suggestion that she will "take care to make it as Comical a Duel as the best of 'em" also aligns her with the playwright herself. Not only is Ranter an independent, sexual and self-aware widow like Behn herself but, like the playwright, she claims power over the plot. She will control her own fate in the same way that Behn controls the fates of all of her characters. Here, then, Behn plays upon the notion of author(-ity). The Widow, as designer of her own fate, is self-author(ized). She controls and creates her own identity. Significantly, the Widow has chosen to plant this identity within comedy, the genre which allows for greatest openness in terms of its themes, characters and conclusions.¹¹ Behn thus creates a forum wherein individual integrity can be created and maintained by that individual. This ground is established, in *The Widow Ranter*, as distinctively "new," and is intrinsically comical, as the Widow herself suggests.

In the end, the Widow gets her man, after much beating, swordplay and even participation in warfare. Again, her success results from eminence in battle, and she earns her position as Dareing's wife by her actions rather than through feminine passivity: "Now," states Dareing, "I find that you can bear the brunt of a Campaign [,] you are a fit Wife for a Souldier" (V.v.26-28). In fact, all of the comic characters are blissfully united at the end of the play. Wellman's closing speech, with which the play ends, presents a visionary look at the future which carries Ranter's theme of self-authorization to larger political levels:

Come, my brave Youths, let all our Forces meet,
To make this Country Happy, Rich and great;

Let scanted Europe see that we enjoy

Safer Repose, and larger Worlds than they. (V.v.70-73)

Europe is viewed from a New World perspective in this final passage; the Old World's hold upon the Colony is released. Bacon is defeated, but Wellman and Downright do not simply attempt to reinstate the Crown's power. Instead, they are ideologically defiant, seeking to surprise the soon-arriving Governor with their self-sufficiency. They pardon Bacon's fellow-rebels and replace the foolish and cowardly councilmen with "Gentlemen of Sense and Honour" rather than noblemen of birth and patronage.

While the play's final vision opens up the possibility of a new public order for the King's subjects, the transgressive and subversive new vision expressed by Behn in the person of Ranter can be interpreted as ultimately falling short of its ideological potential. In the end, she and all of the women in the play are answerable to Wellman and Downright, who authorize the women's marriages to the men they love. In the end, they are only granted the authority to choose the men they will wed, a limited power at best. That men once again control the women's fates is ominous, particularly in light of Ranter's strength of character. It is only marriage that will fully ensure Ranter's claim to Daring. In the end, Behn has difficulty fully abandoning her own social paradigm and defining female honour from within the individual woman herself and apart from her sexual role in marriage. The play's final political vision is entirely subversive of Old World paradigms, then, but its treatment of sexual politics is less than satisfactory for the modern reader. Still, Behn opens up a space for the discovery of self-authorization and, throughout her life and her writing, seeks to negotiate with the dominant paradigms of her era, to create for women and men alike the possibility of independence, wit and purpose.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. See Aaron Walden's Introduction to the Garland edition of the play, especially pages xvi-xviii; see also Bacon's 1676 "Manifesto Concerning the Present Troubles in Virginia," in *Five Plays*, ed. Maureen Duffy (London: Methuen, 1990) 141-143, which affirms the notion that the corruption of colonial government was commonplace knowledge.
2. All references to *The Widow Ranter* are drawn from Aaron R. Walden's edition (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993).
3. I am referring to the gradual ideological shift in this era towards granting subjects greater legislative and executive rights, as expressed, for example, in the political theory of John Locke.
4. This overview is admittedly skeletal and does not do justice to the vibrancy of this period. Because I am concerned primarily with Behn's literary-philosophical interaction with dominant political and social discourses, however, I have chosen simply pass over, in my discussion, the multitudinous historical, revisionist and counter-revisionist debates about the sociohistory of this period.
5. Interestingly, Wellman only embodies this political position in the tragic plot. By the end of the play, which is comically resolved, Wellman voices a vision of colonial independence, encouraging his Virginian countrymen to "make this country happy, rich, and great" and to defend a stance of political and economic superiority above "scanted Europe." This doubleness in Wellman's character represents Behn's desire to maintain a link between the Crown and the New World. Wellman acts as an ideologically more acceptable counterpart to Hazard. While the latter represents the turning to the New World as a means of putting off

the authority of the Old, the former embodies a type of transition which allows for a gradual shift in authority—one which respects the Crown, but which also predicts the inevitability of its alteration.

6. Bacon's "Manifesto," in addition to several other contemporary articles dealing with the topic of Bacon's rebellion, are included as appendices in the Garland edition.
7. In *Reconstructing Aphra Behn: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (New York: The Dial Press, 1980), Angeline Goreau presents an interesting study of the nature and effects of this revolution, which resulted largely from Charles II's return to the throne, as he "effected an abrupt and deliberate reversal of [the] Puritan ethic" (165). As Goreau argues, Charles even went so far as to institutionalize "promiscuity, systematic frivolity, and extravagance" by insisting, for example, that his noblemen keep mistresses: "Francis North was advised that his sobriety might call his political sympathies into question and was counseled to "keep a whore," because he was 'ill-looked upon [at Court] for want of doing so'" (166). This "movement," Goreau asserts, "primarily affected the fashionable society of London—the court and aristocratic circles, the playhouse, the taverns, coffeehouses, and ordinaries . . ." (166).
8. Antonia Fraser provides a thorough historical and anecdotal survey of the social position of widows at this time in *The Weaker Vessel* (London: Methuen, 1985). She draws attention to the role of class in the treatment of widows in her sixth chapter, "Poor and Atrabilious": "where the 'masterlessness' of the wealthy widow was her opportunity for independence, the unsupported state of her poorer contemporary could all too easily mean suffering, if not actual destitution" (100). Behn, who was most likely a gentlewoman herself, is often criticized by modern feminist scholars for her tendency to avoid this type of class issue, or its related topic, race. See Heidi Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II," *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University

- of Virginia Press, 1993) 102-120; and Ros Ballaster, "New Historicism: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: The Body, the Text, and the Feminist Critic," *New Feminist Discourses*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (New York: Routledge Press, 1992) 292. See also Mark Lussier, "'The Vile Merchandize of Fortune': Women, Economy, and Desire in Aphra Behn," *Women's Studies* 18.4 (1991): 379-391.
9. Catherine Gallagher looks in detail at the relationship between public activity and female honour in Behn's day in her article, "Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993) 65-85. The only public position available to women within the Restoration cultural ethos was that of prostitute; thus, any woman who adopted a public persona was labeled as such: "The woman who shared the contents of her mind instead of reserving them for one man was literally, not metaphorically, trading in her sexual property" (69).
 10. Donald Bruce, *Topics of Restoration Comedy* (London: Gollancz, 1974), Chapter 3.
 11. The significance of the comic genre as Behn's forum for social and political exploration is discussed in greater detail above, in Chapter 1 of this study. Recently, many critics have begun to approach drama's traditional comic plot as a manifestation of an oppressive patriarchal ethos, in which any transgression which has occurred within the plot is revealed as the product of temporary play and is thus implicitly not practicable or encouraged in the "real" world. Hutner poignantly voices such a criticism in her study of *The Rover*. While I will not here embark upon a full discussion of genre, I will suggest that such theories are at the very least problematized by Behn's position as a female writer within her particular social context. For a woman of her day, the very act of writing undercut the patriarchal ethos. Like Susan Purdie in *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), I tend to approach this critical point discursively rather than formalistically.

Comedy's openness, in spite of its potential to reinforce dominant ideology, is largely founded upon its tendency to provide a forum for "other" voices.

Epilogue

Opening Up A Space For Aphra Behn

It seems strange that many critics today deny Behn's presence in the Restoration literary canon. In "The Female Will in Aphra Behn," David M. Sullivan argues that in spite of the fact that "it is no longer believed . . . that Aphra Behn is an entertaining but shallow artist," she is not "a major writer of the Restoration."¹ Why Behn is excluded from this category and what constitutes a "major" writer remains unspecified. While critics wish to grant Behn new dignity as an author and a thinker, they remain hesitant to place her within the canon, regardless of her popularity in her own day.

Perhaps, as Heidi Hutner suggests in her introduction to *Rereading Aphra Behn*, it would be fruitless to attach Behn's work to a body of literature that she explicitly "challenges . . . and destabilizes" (1). In addition, much of Behn's work centres on her own need constantly to negotiate between her gender and her occupation, revealing a distinct awkwardness suggestive of her attempt to insert herself into a foreign and dominant literary tradition.² But does this mean, as Sullivan asserts, that she is not a "major" force? Davis Langdell's evaluation of Behn's precarious literary position assesses her role more accurately. Langdell looks at Behn's own critique of the standards of the Restoration literary canon (including the insistence upon strict dramatic forms, temporal and spatial unities, and classical allusions) as a marker of her relationship with this canon. On the second page of her "Epistle to the Reader," which prefaces her play *The Dutch Lover* (1673), Behn summarizes her stance:

In short, I think a Play the best divertisement that wise men
have: but I do also think them nothing so who do discourse as

formallie about the rules of it, as if 'twere the grand affair of
humane life.

While she does not imply that the stage is no place to address social themes or that these themes cannot be significant, Behn questions the privileging of form over content. As a woman, she was denied the classical education allowed her fellow writers. However, as a writer, she chose to provide a voice for those who were denied access to public discourse. While she thus cannot be examined according to the same literary standards of such writers as Dryden and Otway, her themes must be explored within their shared social and literary context. It is within this context—in her exclusion from it, as well as in her attempt to find a place within it—that Behn's work is informed at its most basic level.

As a force of alterity, Behn is indeed a “major” voice in British literature. Indeed, by studying Behn's work more closely, we will not only gain insight into the works of those who have been granted “major” status, but into the complexities of an era and the power of the desire for change. More significantly, however, Behn's work encourages us to review the ideological economies which define us, to seek out new modes of self-representation and to reinvent our methods of self-exploration.

Notes to Epilogue

1. David M. Sullivan, "The Female Will in Aphra Behn," *Women's Studies* 22.3 (1993): 335-346.
2. Davis Langdell, "Aphra Behn and Sexual Politics: A Dramatist's Discourse With Her Audience," *Themes in Drama: Drama, Sex and Politics*, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 109-128.

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