

DOWNLOAD PDF APHRA BEHN STAGES THE SOCIAL SCENE IN THE RESTORATION THEATRE

Chapter 1 : Restoration comedy - Wikipedia

And in almost all her plays Aphra Behn was showing the restoration audience their own lives and behaviour writ large. This is an important book for those in theatre, literature, and women's studies.

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Chapter 2 : The Aphra Behn Page

In her recent Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene in the Restoration Theatre, Dawn Lewcock sets out to redirect attention away from trends that attempt to read Behn as a culturally revealing personality or a politically significant figure - for instance, an early feminist or a proponent of antiracism.

The scanty evidence of staging in most play texts may provide a distorting mirror of actual practice, and as a tyro playwright it certainly seems possible that Behn would be following stage fashions in her first staged play, rather than leading them. Yet, the impression gained from the tone and detail of her ample stage directions is quite the opposite. Indeed, Lewcock argues that Behn exploits the dramaturgy of the play to manipulate likely audience reception, suggesting that even at this early stage Behn was remarkably assured in her control of dramatic and theatrical resources. An unusual feature of the play text is that while Behn provides only nine explicitly located scene headings plus two implicitly stated she numbers all 28 of her scenes. The lack of scene headings may again reflect some uncertainty about LIF stage management in her first production, or, more likely, she generally does not restate a heading once supplied. These comprise three shutter scenes: These settings account for the majority of the locations. The scene keeper had only to supply one setting not accounted for, namely a formal stateroom for some neutral scenes within the general setting of a palace. Behn represents the wedding ceremony of the titular marriage by an elaborate and large-scale tableau set in a temple. The Curtain must be let down; and soft Musick must play: The King sitting on a Throne, bowing down to joyn the Hands of Alcippus and Erminia, who kneel on the steps of the Throne; the Officers of the Court and the Clergy standing in order by, with Orgulious. This within the Scene. Without on the Stage, Phillander with his sword half-drawn, held by Gallatea, who looks ever on Alcippus: Erminia still fixing her eyes on Phillander; Pisaro passionately gazing on Gallatea: Aminth on Fallatio, and he on her; Alcander, Isillia, Cleontius, in other several postures, with the rest; all remaining without motion, whilst the Musick softly plays; this continues a while till the Curtain falls; and then the Musick plays aloud till the Act begins. It seems more appropriate in 1. As with other plays, the 14 or so fictional locations in this play would need to be reduced to a more theatrically manageable number. The scenery plot shows how these settings are accommodated within the LIF model. As all the fictional chambers are rooms within the same palace and the explication of plot is not at issue in this play, as it is in *The Adventures of Five Hours*, there seems little point in adding to these seven settings. The presence of a particular character together with the dialogue provides sufficient indication of place in this play. A bed in 4. It is the first LIF play to make more than an isolated use of discoveries as a means of speeding up the stage action. An excellent example of this occurs in 2. He exits and the immediate discovery allows the onstage music to begin straight away, rather than having to pause while the musicians get into position they may even be playing before the end of 2. The only difficulty is that this discovery tends to stretch perceived spatial locations. However, at the start of 4. Unless the musicians at the start of 2. However, with the temporal separation between 2. It seems to me that this is a highly effective theatrical cheat of a type similar to those encountered in *Elvira*, *Mustapha*, and *Juliana*. The implied use of doors in this play does not present a problem for the two-door model. Specifically, the multiple use of practical doors “the key contra-indicator” is never implied. The final scene heading in the play is unusual: Clarendon Press, , p. Phaeton Press, reprint of ed.

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Chapter 3 : Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene in the Restoration Theatre By Dawn Lewcock

Aphra Behn is known for being the first woman to make a living through writing. After a short time as a spy for England, Behn made a living as a dramatist, novelist, translator, and poet. She is known as part of the "comedy of manners" or restoration comedy tradition. Almost nothing is known.

Behn states that Behn was born to Bartholomew Johnson, a barber, and Elizabeth Denham, a wet-nurse. He was said to die on the journey, with his wife and children spending some months in the country, though there is no evidence of this. There is little evidence that this was the case, and none of her contemporaries acknowledge any aristocratic status. Writer Germaine Greer has called Behn "a palimpsest ; she has scratched herself out," and biographer Janet Todd noted that Behn "has a lethal combination of obscurity, secrecy and staginess which makes her an uneasy fit for any narrative, speculative or factual. She is not so much a woman to be unmasked as an unending combination of masks". He may have been a merchant of German or Dutch extraction, possibly from Hamburg. She once commented that she was "designed for a nun," and the fact that she had so many Catholic connections, such as Henry Neville who was later arrested for his Catholicism, would have aroused suspicions during the anti-Catholic fervour of the s. As political parties emerged during this time, Behn became a Tory supporter. Scot was believed to be ready to become a spy in the English service and to report on the doings of the English exiles who were plotting against the King. Behn arrived in Bruges in July , probably with two others, as London was wracked with plague and fire. One month after arrival, she pawned her jewellery. It may be that she was never paid by the crown. A warrant was issued for her arrest, but there is no evidence it was served or that she went to prison for her debt, though apocryphally it is often given as part of her history. She had, however, written poetry up until this point. Behn wrote for a livelihood. After her third play, *The Dutch Lover*, failed, Behn falls off the public record for three years. It is speculated that she went travelling again, possibly in her capacity as a spy. In all she would write and stage 19 plays, contribute to more, and become one of the first prolific, high-profile female dramatists in Britain. The inscription on her tombstone reads: After John Dryden she was the most prolific writer of the English Restoration. This changed the nature and themes of Restoration theatre. The performance ran for six nights, which was regarded as a good run for an unknown author. Again, Behn used the play to comment on the harmful effects of arranged marriages. Behn did not hide the fact that she was a woman, instead she made a point of it. When in the Dorset Garden Theatre staged *The Dutch Lover*, critics sabotaged the play on the grounds that the author was a woman. Behn tackled the critics head on in *Epistle to the Reader*. After a three year publication pause, Behn published four plays in close succession. In early *Sir Patient Fancy* was published. This succession of box-office successes led to frequent attacks on Behn. She was attacked for her private life, the morality of her plays was questioned and she was accused of plagiarising *The Rover*. Behn countered these public attacks in the prefaces of her published plays. In the preface to *Sir Patient Fancy* she argued that she was being singled out because she was a woman, while male playwrights were free to live the most scandalous lives and write bawdy plays. The King associated with playwrights that poured scorn on marriage and the idea of consistency in love. Like her contemporary male libertines, she wrote freely about sex. Critics of Behn were provided with ammunition because of her public liaison with John Hoyle , a bisexual lawyer who scandalised his contemporaries. Her plays were staged frequently and attended by the King. Behn became heavily involved in the political debate about the succession. Because Charles II had no heir a prolonged political crisis ensued. Mass hysteria commenced as in the rumoured Popish Plot suggested the King should be replaced with his Roman Catholic brother James. Political parties developed, the Whigs wanted to exclude James, while the Tories did not believe succession should be altered in any way. Behn supported the Tory position and in the two years between and produced five plays to discredit the Whigs. The London audience, mainly Tory sympathisers, attended the plays in large numbers. Nevertheless, Behn published *The Luckey Chance* in In response to the criticism levelled at they play she articulated a long and

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passionate defence of women writers. Her play *The Emperor of the Moon* was published and staged in 1697, it became one of her longest running plays. Today she is mostly known for the novels she wrote in the later part of her life. The novels were inspired by a contemporary scandal, which saw Lord Grey elope with his sister-in-law Lady Henrietta Berkeley. At the time of publication *Love Letters* was very popular and went through more than 16 editions. The novel became a great success. In 1749 it was adapted for the stage by Thomas Southerne and continuously performed throughout the 18th century. In 1752 the novel was translated into French, going through seven French editions. As abolitionism gathered pace in the late 18th century the novel was celebrated as the first anti-slavery novel. Until the mid-century Behn was repeatedly dismissed as morally depraved minor writer. Alexander Pope penned the famous lines "The stage how loosely does Astrea tread, Who fairly puts all characters to bed!" Cameron and Frederick Link. In the late 18th century the novel is regarded as one of the first abolitionist and humanitarian novel published in the English language. This led to the reprinting of her works. *The Rover* was republished in 1749, *Oroonoko* was republished in 1752, *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sisters* was published again in 1752 and *The Lucky Chance* was reprinted in 1753. Summers was fiercely passionate about the work of Behn and found himself incredibly devoted to the appreciation of 17th century literature. One critic, Alison Conway, views Behn as instrumental to the formation of modern thought around the female gender and sexuality: All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn Behn proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice, perhaps, of certain agreeable qualities; and so by degrees writing became not merely a sign of folly and a distracted mind but was of practical importance. This section needs additional citations for verification. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed.

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Chapter 4 : Women In Restoration Theatre

Note: Citations are based on reference standards. However, formatting rules can vary widely between applications and fields of interest or study. The specific requirements or preferences of your reviewing publisher, classroom teacher, institution or organization should be applied.

The apron stage at the front which allowed intimate audience contact is not visible in the picture the artist is standing on it. Charles II was an active and interested patron of the drama. Their next priority was to build new, splendid patent theatres in Drury Lane and Dorset Gardens, respectively. Striving to outdo each other in magnificence, Killigrew and Davenant ended up with quite similar theatres, both designed by Christopher Wren, both optimally provided for music and dancing, and both fitted with moveable scenery and elaborate machines for thunder, lightning, and waves. There was no untapped reserve of occasional playgoers. Ten consecutive performances constituted a smash hit. This closed system forced playwrights to be extremely responsive to popular taste. Fashions in the drama would change almost week by week rather than season by season, as each company responded to the offerings of the other, and new plays were urgently sought. The production of new plays dropped off sharply in the 1670s, affected by both the monopoly and the political situation see Decline of comedy below. The influence and the incomes of the actors dropped, too. Rich attempted to finance a tangle of "farmed" shares and sleeping partners by slashing salaries and, dangerously, by abolishing the traditional perks of senior performers, who were stars with the clout to fight back. Their dash to attract audiences briefly revitalised Restoration drama, but also set it on a fatal downhill slope to the lowest common denominator of public taste. Restoration comedy was strongly influenced by the introduction of the first professional actresses. Samuel Pepys refers many times in his famous diary to visiting the playhouse to watch or re-watch the performance of particular actresses, and to how much he enjoys these experiences. Daringly suggestive comedy scenes involving women became especially common, although of course Restoration actresses were, just like male actors, expected to do justice to all kinds and moods of plays. Their role in the development of Restoration tragedy is also important, compare She-tragedy. A new speciality introduced almost as early as the actresses was the breeches role, which called for an actress to appear in male clothes breeches being tight-fitting knee-length pants, the standard male garment of the time, for instance to play a witty heroine who disguises herself as a boy to hide, or to engage in escapades disallowed to girls. A quarter of the plays produced on the London stage between 1660 and 1700 contained breeches roles. Playing these cross-dressing roles, women behaved with the freedom society allowed to men, and some feminist critics, such as Jacqueline Pearson, regard them as subversive of conventional gender roles and empowering for female members of the audience. Elizabeth Howe has objected that the male disguise, when studied in relation to playtexts, prologues, and epilogues, comes out as "little more than yet another means of displaying the actress as a sexual object" to male patrons, by showing off her body, normally hidden by a skirt, outlined by the male outfit. Susanna Verbruggen, who had many breeches roles written especially for her in the 1670s and 80s. During the Restoration period, both male and female actors on the London stage became for the first time public personalities and celebrities. Documents of the period show audiences being attracted to performances by the talents of particular actors as much as by particular plays, and more than by authors who seem to have been the least important draw, no performance being advertised by author until 1670. With two companies competing for their services from 1660 to 1670, star actors were able to negotiate star deals, comprising company shares and benefit nights as well as salaries. This advantageous situation changed when the two companies were amalgamated in 1670, but the way the actors rebelled and took command of a new company in 1673 is in itself an illustration of how far their status and power had developed since 1660. Betterton played every great male part there was from 1673 into the 18th century. Comedies[edit] Variety and dizzying fashion changes are typical of Restoration comedy. Even though the "Restoration drama" unit taught to college students is likely to be telescoped in a way that makes the plays all sound contemporary, scholars now have a strong sense of the rapid evolution of English drama

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over these forty years and of its social and political causes. The influence of theatre company competition and playhouse economics is also acknowledged. Restoration comedy peaked twice. The genre came to spectacular maturity in the mid-17th century with an extravaganza of aristocratic comedies. Twenty lean years followed this short golden age, although the achievement of Aphra Behn in the 1690s is to be noted. In the mid-18th century a brief second Restoration comedy renaissance arose, aimed at a wider audience. The comedies of the golden age and 18th century peak times are extremely different from each other. An attempt is made below to illustrate the generational taste shift by describing *The Country Wife* and *The Provoked Wife* in some detail. These two plays differ from each other in some typical ways, just as a Hollywood movie of the 1950s differs from one of the 1930s. The plays are not, however, offered as being "typical" of their decades. Indeed, there exist no typical comedies of the 17th or the 18th; even within these two short peak-times, comedy types kept mutating and multiplying. Aristocratic comedy, "[edit] The drama of the 17th and 18th centuries was vitalised by the competition between the two patent companies created at the Restoration, as well as by the personal interest of Charles II, and the comic playwrights rose to the demand for new plays. They stole freely from the contemporary French and Spanish stage, from English Jacobean and Caroline plays, and even from Greek and Roman classical comedies, and combined the looted plotlines in adventurous ways. Resulting differences of tone in a single play were appreciated rather than frowned on, as the audience prized "variety" within as well as between plays. See illustration, top right. Such incongruities contributed to Restoration comedy being held in low esteem in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, but today the early Restoration total theatre experience is again valued on the stage, as well as by postmodern academic critics. The unsentimental or "hard" comedies of John Dryden, William Wycherley, and George Etherege reflected the atmosphere at Court, and celebrated with frankness an aristocratic macho lifestyle of unremitting sexual intrigue and conquest. William Wycherley, *The Country Wife: Come in with me too*. William Wycherley, *The Country Wife* [edit] *The Country Wife* has three interlinked but distinct plots, which each project sharply different moods: The upper-class town rake Horner mounts a campaign for seducing as many respectable ladies as possible, first spreading a false rumour of his own impotence, to be allowed where no complete man may go. The trick is a great success and Horner has sex with many married ladies of virtuous reputation, whose husbands are happy to leave him alone with them. Horner never becomes a reformed character, but keeps his secret to the end and is assumed to go on merrily reaping the fruits of his planted misinformation, past the last act and beyond. Pinchwife is a middle-aged man who has married an ignorant young country girl in the hope that she will not know to cuckold him. However, Horner teaches her, and Margery cuts a swathe through the sophistications of London marriage without even noticing them. She is enthusiastic about the virile handsomeness of town gallants, rakes, and especially theatre actors such self-referential stage jokes were nourished by the new higher status of actors, and keeps Pinchwife in a state of continual horror with her plain-spokenness and her interest in sex. Decline of comedy, "[edit] When the two companies were amalgamated in 1700 and the London stage became a monopoly, both the number and the variety of new plays being written dropped sharply. There was a swing away from comedy to serious political drama, reflecting preoccupations and divisions following on the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis. The few comedies produced also tended to be political in focus, the Whig dramatist Thomas Shadwell sparring with the Tories John Dryden and Aphra Behn. Comedy renaissance, "[edit] During the second wave of Restoration comedy in the 18th century, the "softer" comedies of William Congreve and John Vanbrugh reflected mutating cultural perceptions and great social change. The playwrights of the 18th century set out to appeal to more socially mixed audiences with a strong middle-class element, and to female spectators, for instance by moving the war between the sexes from the arena of intrigue into that of marriage. The focus in comedy is less on young lovers outwitting the older generation, more on marital relations after the wedding bells. All the humour of this "comedy" is in the subsidiary love-chase and fornication plots, none in the main plot. The give-and-take set pieces of couples still testing their attraction for each other have mutated into witty prenuptial debates on the eve of marriage, as in the famous "Proviso" scene in *The Way of the World*. A woman may have a gallant and a separate maintenance too. He comes home drunk every night and is continually rude and insulting to his

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wife. She is meanwhile being tempted to embark upon an affair with the witty and faithful Constant. Divorce is not an option for either of the Brutes at this time, but forms of legal separation have recently come into existence, and would entail a separate maintenance to the wife. Such an arrangement would not allow remarriage. Still, muses Lady Brute, in one of many discussions with her niece Bellinda, "These are good times. The bad example of the Brutes is a constant warning to Heartfree to not marry. The Provoked Wife is a talk play, with the focus less on love scenes and more on discussions between female friends Lady Brute and Bellinda and male friends Constant and Heartfree. These exchanges are full of jokes, but are also thoughtful and have a dimension of melancholy and frustration. After a forged-letter complication, the play ends with marriage between Heartfree and Bellinda and stalemate between the Brutes. Constant continues to pay court to Lady Brute, and she continues to shilly-shally. End of comedy[edit] The tolerance for Restoration comedy even in its modified form was running out at the end of the 17th century, as public opinion turned to respectability and seriousness even faster than the playwrights did. When Jeremy Collier attacked Congreve and Vanbrugh in his Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage in , he was confirming a shift in audience taste that had already taken place. The comedy of sex and wit was about to be replaced by the drama of obvious sentiment and exemplary morality. After Restoration comedy[edit] Stage history[edit] During the 18th and 19th centuries, the sexual frankness of Restoration comedy ensured that theatre producers cannibalised it or adapted it with a heavy hand, rather than actually performed it. Today, Restoration comedy is again appreciated on the stage. Aphra Behn, once considered unstageable, has had a major renaissance, with The Rover now a repertory favourite. Literary criticism[edit] Distaste for sexual impropriety long kept Restoration comedy not only off the stage but also locked in a critical poison cupboard. Victorian critics like William Hazlitt , although valuing the linguistic energy and "strength" of the canonical writers Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve, always found it necessary to temper aesthetic praise with heavy moral condemnation. Aphra Behn received the condemnation without the praise, since outspoken sex comedy was considered particularly offensive coming from a woman author. At the turn of the 20th century, an embattled minority of academic Restoration comedy enthusiasts began to appear, for example the important editor Montague Summers , whose work ensured that the plays of Aphra Behn remained in print. Hume as late as A broad study of the majority of never-reprinted Restoration comedies has been made possible by Internet access by subscription only to the first editions at the British Library. List of notable Restoration comedies[edit].

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Chapter 5 : Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre | Great Writers Inspire

Aphra Behn painted by Mary Beale[Public Domain], via Wikimedia Commons
A Brief History of the Restoration Theatre
In Parliament gave its first ruling against stage plays, which effectively suspended theatrical activity in England during the Civil war and Interregnum.

Charles II was welcomed back with open arms, the theatres were reopened and for the first time women were invited to take the stage. With women now representing themselves it opened up a world of scandal for the stage, appreciated by audiences from all levels of society; from merchants to nobles and even King Charles II himself. The introduction of women onto the stage in London brought with it a variety of changes to the theatre. The immediate impact was an increased interest by the public in all the playhouses operating in London. Women on stage aroused curiosity in the audience, and they were eager to see women on stage and the sensuality they brought with them. This objectification of women induced an evolution in the writing of plays during this time that led female actors to be sexual props on the stage, as opposed to equals with their male peers. In the past, playwrights would refrain from describing the appearance of female characters. The presence of actual women on stage brought with it the inclusion of erotic descriptions of these female characters and older plays were rewritten to include such language. Even female writer Aphra Behn altered prior plays to include erotic language depicting the undressing of women in previously vague moments. In such a scene, an attractive actress was placed at center stage on a bed or couch, with the scene calling for her to be asleep and in a state of undress. The scenes were designed to sexualize even the most pure of female characters. As rape scenes became more anticipated in the plays, the scenes themselves became more and more explicit. Playwrights would incorporate scenes where women would have reason to dress up as men, wearing tight pants that exposed their legs. The prevalence of rape and other compromising situations for the female parts on the stage gave an ironic spin to the admittance of women into the theatre. Instead of being a positive development, it served only to further objectify the gender. And yet, even amidst this exploitive sexuality, certain actresses of the time garnered acclaim despite the social limitations. The most famous of these actresses is Nell Gwyn. With the theatres closed, there were no outlets for Mrs. Nell and Rose also worked as street venders, which is where Nell learned to project and use her voice. Nell got her break from a lover by the name of Duncan or Dungan. After spending two years together, Duncan grew sick of her. However, in one last parting gesture, Duncan provided her with an in to the stage, most likely as an Orange Girl. An Orange Girl or Orange Wench, stood in the pit with their backs to the stage and sold oranges in between acts. Orange Girls also acted as liaisons between audience members and actresses, running back stage to deliver messages for later rendezvous. List of Roles Nell Performed Nell began acting at around 13 or 14 years of age. While her exact start date is unknown, there is evidence to support that Nell was an established actress by the year , when the theatres closed briefly due to plague. Moll and Nell would have been roughly the same age and played similar parts on stage. In his December 8th, entry he did comment that Nell was better than he expected. While Nell is known to be one of the first female actresses, she perhaps is better known for her affair with King Charles II. Charles and Nell began their affair around when Nell would have been roughly 20 years old. While Nell and Moll may have been perceived as sex objects more than respectable actresses, their accomplishments on stage marked the beginning of women actors, a precedent that continues today.

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Chapter 6 : Index | Restoration & Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research

Aphra Behn stages the social scene in the Restoration theatre / Dawn Lewcock. and disclosure, disguises and dark scenes. The audience's.

Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre by: Click here to see the first, or here to see a brief bibliography of Aphra Behn. Aphra Behn and Restoration theatre This next installment on the series about Aphra Behn will examine Behn as a dramatist. What was the restoration theatre like? Although there were companies who continued to play before the exiled cavalier court at Oxford, and at popular fairs in London, this was not a period in which new plays were written. Many actors went abroad to look for work, and what drama was performed was on the whole occasional and illicit, and not an integral part of London life. This squashing of the theatres was dramatically reversed at the accession of Charles II. These patents did not restore the same sort of theatre that had existed in London before the Civil War. They both set up shop in converted tennis courts, which provided a good space for theatre since they were enclosed spaces with galleries and boxes for spectators. Custom-built theatres later replaced the makeshift spaces: The small, new theatres were built in reputable areas, probably because they anticipated a small, aristocratic audience that would prefer intimacy. In Killigrew boasted: Now, wax-candles, and many of them; then, not above 3lb of tallow. Now, all things civil, no rudeness anywhere; then, as in a bear-garden. This suggests the importance of visual spectacle, that the lighting effects and music and their splendour were as important to the dramatic experience as the plays itself. It also suggests a level of cultural superiority: These theatrical effects were destined to make the most of the opportunities offered by the new theatres established by Davenant and Killigrew after the Restoration. This engraving depicting the interior of Drury Lane gives a sense of the structure of Restoration theatres[Public Domain], via Wikimedia Commons Restoration theatres had a proscenium arch, with entrance doors for the players, and the part of the stage on which most of the acting took place stuck out into the auditorium. Above there was a balcony, good for scenes of coquetting and eavesdropping. The main effect of this structure was that it allowed for a combination of very different modes of representation: In this way the sudden sense of wonder would have been palpable to both character and audience. The seating in the theatre was made up of boxes, galleries and the pit, which was not, as it had been in the Renaissance theatre, the place for the rabble, but was now a very fashionable and desirable place to be, and be seen. The audience capacity was about , and prices of plays varied a bit, but were mainly fairly high. Surviving anecdotes suggest that people came to the theatre to socialize as much as to see plays. Prologues and epilogues of the time refer to members of the audience chatting or making assignations throughout the play, and those watching would often shout out witticisms or even climb onto the stage. They became familiar with the players in the company, both in that they expected them to play particular roles, and in that they were aware of their known reputations offstage. Cibber describes a performance he attended in the s, when the audience sat patiently through three of four acts, waiting for him to be revealed as a villain. Behn and the New Theatre Greater knowledge of the workings of the restoration stage helps to debunk one of the common criticisms of Aphra Behn: But Behn was a canny woman and a skilled dramatist. She rose to fame through her numerous and successful comedies by responding to the changed nature of the theatres after Behn drew on the established reputations of famous stars as she wrote her plays. A good example of this is the way in which she developed roles for Elizabeth Barry, one of the most famous actresses of the Restoration stage. In the s Barry was known for her portrayal of tragic women, who were marked by their sexual passion, either in the form of the lustful villainess, or as a heroine torn between sexual desire and duty. In the s Behn wrote a series of heroines, prostitutes, and mistresses for Barry, all of who are passionate, seduced, and ultimately doomed to unhappiness. The re-opening of the playhouses after the Restoration brought with it one hugely significant innovation in staging – the introduction of women on stage. It certainly marked a big change from earlier English dramatic tradition. Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences had seen female parts played by young boys, but audience of

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the s could see those same parts played by grown women. So why did it happen? One reason is that the year-lapse in theatrical tradition during the civil war period had created a shortage of trained young boy actors to play the female parts. Stuck with a series of roles for young women, Davenant, Killigrew and others were forced to allow women on stage. The introduction of actresses was also dependent on the Stuart Court. The type of drama found on the Restoration stage was expressly designed to appeal to the court and its followers. Both the king and many of his courtiers had seen women onstage in their exile in Paris, and had come to expect that women be played by women. Moreover, there was already a Stuart tradition of female performance: Charles II adopted a whole series of the most famous actresses of the period, like Nell Gwynne, as his mistresses. But far from reforming the stage, the effect of the introduction of the first actresses was to create a highly sexualised and voyeuristic drama. Dramatists exploited the sensational impact of the female body on stage in no uncertain terms. Acting was not deemed a job for any respectable woman. Society, on the whole, assumed that any woman who displayed herself on the public stage was probably a whore. She was paid to feign desire for designated men, and by playing a number of roles, she was in effect, selling whichever version of her self most pleased her punters. We can see this identification between the actress and the prostitute very clearly in the prologue introducing the first woman to act on the stage. The playwright Thomas Jordan writes: An unprotected woman would have been constantly open to sexual advances while working in the theatre. Men were able to go in and out of their changing rooms as they pleased, watching them dress. Those few actresses that were considered respectable were usually those who were married to fellow actors. The rest, regardless of how well established they were in their profession, were seen as kept women. In a theatrical culture in which all women who performed on stage were necessarily seen as prostitutes, it was an easy step to see a female playwright like Behn as a woman for sale. In many ways, Behn takes the image of the writer-whore and tries to use it as an enabling form of self-advertisement. One very famous way in which she seems to both invite and resist authorial identification is through her character of Angelica Bianca, the whore with a heart of gold in *The Rover*. In the play, Angelica Bianca hangs a picture of herself outside her house to advertise her trade. Yet just as the sign of Angelica is not the same as the real Angelica, so the fictional Angelica is not the same as Aphra Behn. Behn teases us with the possibility of authorial identity, but ultimately resists that identification by revealing that what we thought might be her is only one of a number of masks or personae. At one level the uses of actresses on stage could be exploited for comic potential: So we get a comedy that is obsessed with female reputation, and with the distinction between true and feigned virtue. This meant, literally, creating characters and scenarios that allow the maximum amount of titillating exposure of women in various states of undress. For example, in *The Luckey Chance*, a play that revolves around the intrigues arising from unhappy marriages, we see a number of scenes in which the female characters appear either in bed, or preparing to go to bed. In many of the heroic tragedies written by her contemporaries, one well-established way of creating the sexualized spectacle was through the rape scene. Rape scenes were popular because they enabled a dramatist to maintain an idealised sense of the woman as virtuous and chaste, while at the same time exploiting their sexuality. While they stopped short of actually simulating a rape, they attempted to excite their audiences with spectacles of ripped clothes and bared breasts, and the imaginative anticipation of further violence. These scenes were not just included into new plays – they would be added to adaptations of old plays by Fletcher or Shakespeare. Various other dramatic conventions grew up around the need to exploit the visual potential of the actress. By wearing the stockings and very short breeches that men wore, actresses exposed legs and ankles otherwise covered by long skirts. Again, the crossover between acting and prostitution was made clear: The focus on intrigue, adultery and conflict that we find dominating so many of the plays of the time was clearly partly a result of the need to create situations, in bedchambers and balconies, with women in a state of undress. But one of the interesting ironies of these Restoration plays is that the drama that emerged out of these visual demands frequently ended up interrogating, albeit in a very conservative way, the rigid hierarchies of gender that they were based on. There were ladies, their companions and maidservants, female relatives of MPs, professional men and merchants, royal mistresses, duchesses and

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wives of the aristocracy, and prostitutes. On one hand the drama encouraged subjectivity: Yet on the other they were witnessing the objectification of women on stage, through the visual exploitation of the actress.

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The novelty of having women on stage created something of a stir, but for the most part the reaction of the public was positive, especially that of the young men who regularly chose their mistresses from the ranks of the new professionals. Many of the new actresses were women who intentionally used their position to achieve liaisons with titled gentlemen and thus increase their meager income. Another, Elizabeth Barry, outlived her noble patron the Earl of Rochester by several decades, and later enjoyed the reputation of being one of the greatest actresses of the age. Not all actresses used the stage as a market, however: Despite their popularity, women did not enjoy the same status as men in the theater. Their pay did not equal that of their male colleagues, and while many male actors became playwrights, very few women made the transition. One of the few who did, Charlotte Charke, wrote a total of three plays. Aphra Behn, never an actress, may have possibly made her way into the world of Restoration theater through family connections. Her forte was comedy, often revolving around a plot of "forced marriage" -- which was also the title of her first produced play in . Over the course of her nineteen year career, Behn probably wrote over twenty plays, as well as several novels and volumes of poetry. The most well-known female dramatist to follow Behn, Susanna Centlivre, wrote nineteen plays during her career, beginning in . She was very popular in her time but has since been forgotten more effectively even than Aphra Behn. In addition to actresses and playwrights, there were several women during this period who managed theaters, for example Charlotte Charke, who followed Henry Fielding as the manager of the Little Theatre in Haymarket. Under her management, the Dorset Garden Theater, where Aphra Behn produced her plays, was the most successful theatrical company in London. Women also exerted considerable influence as playgoers, not always in support of their own sex. Aphra Behn complained bitterly in her preface to *The Lucky Chance* , one of her more bawdy plays, how the "Ladies" cried it down. But this defense of her writing did lead to one of her more memorable forewords: I am not content to write for a Third Day only. I value Fame as much as if I had been born a Hero; and if you rob me of that, I can retire from the ungrateful World, and scorn its fickle Favours. For further information see: Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel*. Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists* David Roberts, *The Ladies: Female Patronage of Restoration Drama* Oxford University Press, For comments on this page, please contact webmaster at lit-arts.

Chapter 8 : blog.quintoapp.com:Customer reviews: Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene in the Restoration

By Aphra Behn (September ; pub) Dawn Lewcock and Lee J. Martin offer detailed analyses of the staging of this play. In an important Theatre Survey article Martin focuses on scenery, while Lewcock examines Behn's dramaturgy in relation to narrative and audience reception.[1].

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