Chapter V

IMPORTANCE OF WEALTH

From the beginning of civilization, humans are seen to be obsessed with wealth. Empires have flourished and ruined in the fight over this single possession. Most of the people equate happiness with wealth. Even though one cannot deny the fact that wealth brings a lot of benefits, one can also say that wealth is not everything. Further, wealth does not absolutely ensure happiness as most people imagine; nevertheless, it creates many fallacies which become very apparent in daily hassle.

It can also be said that the theme of wealth has been discussed in most plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Accordingly, it is also discussed in the plays of Behn and Sheridan. It can be noticed that the rich characters in the plays under study can get whatever they want including earthly pleasures. Through money, they can also enjoy their lives, boast before others, get respect, etc., but wealth is sometimes useless in case of marrying an inamorata.

In all the plays under study, wealth becomes a persistent theme especially with women who are forced by their parents to marry rich men. In turn, men think much about the rich women, and if there is a kind of love, it is just a decoration for marriage. The marriages of the main characters in the plays are not only for the sake of love but also for wealth. This is clear in their talks which mostly revolve around the financial matters which in turn suggests that the characters value wealth no less than marriage.

In these plays, rich men get richer by means of marriage. Other rich men spend their money in their earthly desires while women, in contrast, remain disenfranchised
either rich or poor. In short, all problems and obstacles, which the characters have been facing, are related to wealth even if the dramatist emphasises to show other social issues like forced marriage and arranged marriage.

Since Behn had suffered too much from poverty in her life, she reflected her sufferings in her plays. Behn’s poverty is still one of the factual disputes for the reason that she had lived in poverty despite her famous works in favour of the monarch either as a spy or as a dramatist. Actually, Behn used to work as a spy and she had done her best to serve the kingdom, yet she was not rewarded. In one of her appealing letters to Mr. Killigrew, she explained her condition and asked him to help her by releasing her money:

Sr.

if you could guess at the affliction of my soule you would I am sure Pity me ‘tis to morrow that I must submitt my self to a Prison the time being expird & though I indeauerd all day yesterday to get a few days more I can not because they say they see I am dallied wth all & so they say I shall be for euer: so I can not reuoke my doome I haue cryd myself dead & could find in my hart to break through all & get to ye king & neuer rise till he weare pleasd to pay this; but I am sick & weake & vnfitt for yt; or a Prison; I shall go to morrow: But I will send my mother to ye king wth a Petition for I see euery body are words: & I will not perish in a Prison from whence he swears I shall not stirr till ye uttmost farthing be payd: & oh god, who considers my misery & charge too, this is my reward for all my great promises, & my indeauers. Sr if I have not the money to night you must send me som thing to keepe me in Prison for I will not starue.
Her pathetic appeal in this letter reveals Behn’s extreme sufferings of poverty and the unjust treatment of the monarchy. In spite of the unexpected rejection, she had continued to support the King in one way or the other. In her plays, she praises the Stuart monarchy, and this indicates her honesty to the kingdom. However, Behn was put in debtor’s prison since she could not pay her debts and was released only after paying the debts from an unknown person in 1669. This matter receives different interpretations. Some scholars say, it was the King who paid the debt, but if he was the King, then why he kept it secret? Others say, it was one of her lovers who paid her debt; therefore, he kept it unknown (Todd, The secret life 119).

After leaving prison, Behn started writing her literary works, and her first play The Forced Marriage was produced in 1670. Writing drama was the only way to reveal her sufferings and earn her livelihood. Indeed, she mainly wrote to survive. Hence, Behn is regarded as the first professional female playwright who earned her livelihood through her writings. According to Montague Summers, Behn was “… the first Englishwoman to earn her livelihood by authorship. . . . We cannot but admire the courage of this lonely woman, who, poor and friendless, was the first in England to turn to the pen for a livelihood . . .” (The Works of Aphra Behn n. pag). In the article “The Restoration Drama,” F.E. Schelling observes that “Mrs Behn was a very gifted woman, compelled to write for bread. . . . Her success depended on her ability to write like a man” (142). Melinda Zook, in her turn, considers Behn a writer who intends to entertain herself and
get her livelihood. Zook writes, "Behn used her pen to entertain and earn herself a living, mastering numerous literary styles along the way" ("Religious Nonconformity" 99). Virginia Woolf beautifully illustrates how Behn made her living, "...a woman forced by the death of her husband and some unfortunate adventures of her own to make her living by her wits, she had to work on equal terms with men. She made, by working very hard, enough to live on" (63-64) Behn became an example for women of her time. Many women were inspired by her work, so they decided to earn their livelihoods through their writings. Virginia Woolf reports that "For now that Aphra Behn had done it, girls could go to their parents and say, You need not give me an allowance; I can make money by my pen. Of course, the answer for many years to come was, Yes, by living the life of Aphra Behn!" (64). When she left prison, her writings mainly focused on livelihood, marriage, patriarchal control and on analysing women's sexual desires. Melinda Zook states, "Behn drank life deeply. She partook in and celebrated worldly living, including rakish men and cross-dressing women. She wrote about youth, beauty, and sexual adventure" ("Religious Nonconformity" 99).

Behn suffered from poverty not only when she was working as a spy but also at the end of her literary profession. Once she sent a message to the bookseller Tonson, asking him for additional sum of money for a book of her poetry.

good dear Mr. Tonson, let it be 51b more, for I may saify swere I have lost ye getting of 501b by it, tho that's nothing to you, or my satisfaction and humour: but I have been without getting so long yt I am just on ye poynt of breaking, especiall sincea body has no credit at ye playhouse for money as
we used to have, fifty or 60 deepe, or more; I want extremly or I wo'd not urge this.

Yors, A. B.\textsuperscript{16}

According to Janet M. Todd, Behn suffered from poverty in her earlier life more than in her final years of life, "... Behn was probably not as poor in her final year as she had been earlier; she had something to lay out on physicians and quacks" (\textit{The Secret Life} 432).

In general, women of the late seventeenth century depended on their husbands, but if they did not get married, they worked in particular fields in order to provide for their livelihoods. They worked as writers, actresses, shopkeepers, shepherdesses, farmers, midwives, peddlers, etc. As the eighteenth century drew on, many women tried to imitate Behn. They started earning their pin money and supporting their families by the way of making translations and writing even bad novels. Thus, Virginia Woolf acknowledges the first professional female dramatist who wrote to get money, "Aphra 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" (64). Further, women worked as prostitutes through which they earned their income. In case a woman did not find any work, she sold her body which in fact was the greatest risk either on her future or on her reputation. Antonia Fraser writes about the issue of prostitution in the late seventeenth century, "In the late seventeenth century what is sometimes described ... as the oldest profession was not

\textsuperscript{16} "Memorials of Literary Characters – No. XIV. Letters of Mrs. Aphra Behn, the Poetess, to Tonson the Bookseller." \textit{Gentleman's Magazine} 5 (May 1836): 481-82.
necessarily the most disagreeable one for a woman to adopt — provided she was able to adopt it at an economically high level” (444).

With regard to Behn’s work, Behn was not only accused of writing sexual texts, but she was also accused of selling her body as Angellica Bianca in The Rover. W. R. Owens in the article “Remaking the Canon: Aphra Behn’s The Rover” states, “Perhaps one link, whether conscious or not, is that, like Angellica, Behn as a woman writer is selling her wares – ‘exposing’ herself publicly for money” (160). Behn does not, however, sell her body, but she sells herself in the form of words. Some women may sell their bodies if they are in need of money like Angellica, but Behn is not that sort of a woman. Catherine Gallagher explains how a female writer sells sexual acts:

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. If she was married, she was selling what did not belong to her, because in mind and body she should have given herself to her husband.

(Nobody’s Story 23)

To enroll sex in her plays does not mean she is a prostitute, it is just an intelligent strategy to get two things at the same time — food and fame. Moreover, to discuss sex in literary text was common during Behn’s time.

One might raise a question as to how Behn was able to get her food and fame through her writings! At the beginning, she starts writing to get food. She mentions this in her Preface to her play Sir Patient Fancy (1678) when she pathetically says that she is “forced to write for Bread and not ashamed to owne it” (line 23). Later, in her play The Lucky Chance (1686), she admits that she writes for fame, “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” (lines 137-38). So, the only way to get both food and fame at the same time is to expose women’s secret conducts and their desire for sex. Including sex in the plays is certainly one of the characteristics of Restoration drama. Consequently, Behn is intelligent enough to create her own style in drama which ascertains that she sells her thoughts and ideas but not her body. If she had sold her body as some scholars say, it would have been documented, yet no biographer until now gives a real proof. In addition, Behn proves that she is a significant dramatist and not a prostitute by her insistence in writing literary works even in her last years when she was suffering from severe illness. This is the reason why she once describes her hands as lame. In one of her letters to Waller’s daughter-in-law, Behn complained indirectly about her illness, “I humbly beg pardon for my yll writing Madam for tis with a Lame hand scarce able to hold a pen” (Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn* n. pag.). Dolors Altaba-Artal also confirms, “In the late 1680s, Behn was sick and poor but was constantly writing in ‘the unmistakable voice of the Restoration period.’ She was dialogizing with more strength, and was using a new literary language that had just appeared” (147). So, if she was a prostitute, as some say, she would not continue her literary mission since she had another source of income. Nevertheless, all these predictions are only mere conjectures.

In light of *The Rover*, the importance of wealth is discussed through two points: The correlation between money and prostitution, and the correlation between wealth and marriage.

17 Behn’s sexuality has been discussed in Chapter IV under the sub-title of ‘Sex.’
18 Edmund Waller (1606-1687) was an English poet and politician.
In some cases, prostitutes are rich; hence, they have become the talks of cavaliers and rakes. This issue is well stated in *The Rover* where Willmore, Belvile, Frederick and Blunt hope to get Angellica to have sex, but they cannot because they are unable to pay the money required. In this sense, the cavaliers of the play praise the luxurious life of Angellica as if she is not a prostitute but a woman of high quality.

**BLUNT.** A whore! Yes, with such clothes! Such jewels! Such a house! Such furniture, and so attended! A whore!

**BELVILE.** Why yes, sir, they are whores, though they’ll neither entertain you with drinking, swearing, or bawdry; are whores in all those gay clothes and right jewels; are whores with those great houses richly furnished with velvet beds, store of place, handsome attendance and fine coaches; are whores, and errant ones. (*Rover.2.1.66-72*)

Willmore and his friends indulge in discussing poverty. All of them are nagging about poverty which is a major obstacle in their ways of entertaining themselves. Blunt nags, “let’s begone, I’m sure we’re no chapmen for this commodity” (*Rover.2.1.98-99*). Willmore curses poverty since it becomes the main hindrance in winning Angellica. He grumbles that if he is rich, he can win her, “... a plague of this poverty – of which I ne’er complain but when it hinders my approach to beauty which virtue ne’er could purchase” (*Rover.2.1.102-05*). He adds, “... how sweetly they chime! Pox of poverty, it makes a man a slave, makes wit and honour sneak, my soul grew lean and rusty for want of credit” (*Rover.3.1.112-14*). Willmore does not care about how much to pay to get a prostitute but thinks too much about the lack of money. According to him, the money required is “a mean trifling sum” (*Rover.2.2.62*), yet he cannot pay it. Since they are
suffering from shortage of money, they seek other ways to satisfy their lusts. Blunt stupidly rushes to Lucetta's house. The result is shameful, he is being tricked and stolen by her, so he determines to take revenge on her by raping the first woman he will meet. Susan Owen points out, "Lucetta, who dupes Blunt, seems a typical cheating whore. Yet the play resists denigrating her as a prostitute. The audience is invited to enjoy Lucetta's humiliation of Blunt. Indeed her mistreatment of him is gleefully anticipated by the other men in the play" (Perspectives on Restoration 70). In turn, Willmore has spent two hours with Angellica for free, yet his feeling of shortage of money pushes him to try to rape other women. Surely, if he had enough money, he would enjoy himself with Angellica or some other prostitute at any time and would not think of raping women.

When the cavaliers want to win Angellica, they find themselves in a critical situation since they have not enough money. Therefore, they wait anxiously to see if someone is able to pay the money required. When Don Pedro comes, the cavaliers take a step backwards to avoid embarrassment. Angellica asks her servant about the reason why the cavaliers have gone away. The servant explains that "the first were admirers of beauty only, but no purchasers; they were merry with your price and picture laugh at the sum, and passed off" (Rover.2.1.117-19). Ironically, Angellica is pleased to see those people leaving her gate. She thinks that if she does not get money, she gets something more valuable, it is fame. She remarks, "No matter, I'm not displeased with their railing, their wonder feeds my vanity, and he that wishes but to buy gives me more pride than he that gives my price can make my pleasure" (Rover.2.1.120-22). Anita Pacheco explains the inner conflict of Angellica, "Behn depicts Angellica Bianca as a woman torn between immense pride and an equally formidable psychic burden of disempowerment - an inner
division that dissociates her sexuality from her sense of self-worth" ("Rape and the Female Subject" 340). Meanwhile, she is glad to see her old customer Pedro paying the money she requires. She likes his money more than his personality and this is clear in her comments about him, "Don Pedro! My old gallant’s nephew! When his uncle died he left him a vast sum of money; it is he who was so in love with me at Padua, and who used to make the general so jealous" (Rover.2.1.125-27). Angellica does not care for anything else other than getting money, "nothing but gold shall charm my heart" (Rover.2.1.134-35). This is the reason why she estimates the presence of Pedro and Antonio and neglects, meanwhile, the presence of some other people. Laura Brown evaluates Angellica’s work in a patriarchal society:

Our evaluations of and expectations for Behn's independent women are directed by our recognition of the pressures of a corrupt, materialistic world upon the relatively helpless individual; society operates in such a way that if this noble women (Angellica) fails to conform and attempts to substitute romantic for economic values, she will be broken. (English Dramatic From 60-61)

For the sake of money, she does not realise the fact that selling her body to Pedro means she being like a commodity in his hands. He has the right to do whatever he likes with her as she is paid for it and she cannot say no! In this regard, though Angellica gets money, it is at the cost of her personality, humanity, dignity and honour. She grudgingly points out, "I have had no time for love; the bravest and noblest of mankind have purchased my favours at so dear a rate as if no coin but gold were current with our trade" (Rover.2.1.140-42). Although she sacrifices the best of what she has possessed, she still
believes that her customers are silly people because they are easily ambushed by her “net.” She assures, “here’s Don Pedro again, fetch my lute – for ’tis for him or Don Antonio the viceroy’s son, that I have spread my nets” (Rover.2.1.142-44). Accordingly, Pedro and Antonio spend their money in vain. Audiences believe that it would have been better if these two rich friends search for respectable women to marry them instead of spending their efforts in searching for a whore. They would surely be much benefited and would have spent less money. In addition, they would relieve their minds from fruitless thinking about whores to forming happy families.

Ironically, these two friends cannot sleep with Angellica while Willmore is able to sleep with her. He uses an intelligent strategy; it is the strategy of flattery instead of paying money, and this way supports the opinions of those who believe that money is not everything in life. However, he tactfully blames her for asking too much money which he cannot pay. He also reprimands the poverty which is the main reason for not getting her though he is a man full of sexual desire. Then he claims that since he cannot get her real body, he takes her picture from her house.

Regarding Behn’s picture, Behn has revealed this social dilemma in The Rover in which a man substitutes his sexual desire by watching some porn photos. When men cannot go to brothel to have sex, they buy magazines and posters which contain pornography. Spreading sexual activity through either prostitutes or pornography negatively affects the youths, which, in turn, leads to many crimes. In fact, all conflicts in The Rover from the beginning to the end revolve around sex and money. If one wants to have sex and has enough money, he can quietly go to brothels and quench his thirst for sex. Yet, the problem manifests itself in those who have excessive sexual desires and
want to go to brothels but do not have enough money. This makes them more furious against the society and then turns them into criminals.

Angellica has a sense of self-respect despite being a prostitute. Willmore is able to gain her heart not because he has money but because he numbs her by his sweet words. It is shown here that the affectionate and tender talk is sometimes more effective than money and sword. Angellica is pleased to hear such sweet words of endearment. Hence, she interprets Willmore’s speech as a magnificent piece of melody, “His words go through me to the very soul” (Rover.2.2.70). Willmore asserts this concept when Angellica threatens him with a pistol for his negligence. He openly reminds her of her foible, “... nothing makes a woman so vain as being flattered” (Rover.5.1.259). Willmore would not have got Angellica if he had used force. If he used money, he could get her body and not her heart. Since he uses sweet words, he gets all that she possesses, heart, body and money. Later in the evening, Angellica gives Willmore five hundred crowns because she falls in love with him. By this act, Behn indirectly portrays Willmore as a prostitute. Laura J. Rosenthal asserts, “Willmore’s combination of penury, sexual attractiveness and sexual appetite end up making him quite similar in some ways to the prostitutes in this play” (101).

Willmore’s sole purpose in life is to have sexual pleasure. When a woman rebukes him for his misbehaviour, he considers her the cause of all his errors. For example, when Angellica scorns him of intending to seduce a woman in order to get her body and fortune, he simply replies in a way as if he has the right to do so. He says, “It is a barbarous custom, which I will scorn to defend in our sex, and do despite in yours” (Rover.2.2.90-91). In order to get her body, he pretends to love her. Then he asks her to
prove her love for him by practising sex. "Throw off this pride, this enemy to bliss, / and show the pow’r of love; ’tis with those arms" (Rover.2.2.121-22). Paradoxically, he starts abusing her sex and then requests her to have sex with him.

It is known that Angellica is ready to leave her work as a prostitute. Indeed, she is ready to alter her life style completely in order to please Willmore. She then states her view towards love and money by saying that she appreciates love more than money, though she works as a prostitute to earn money to be able to live. She frankly tells Willmore that she despises her work, but she is obliged to do so. At the time when love stands against money, she chooses love. Love is a holy incorporeal gift, and it is divine and eternal spirit while money is earthly and mortal object. She feels so because it is the first time she falls in love. Therefore, she asks him to keep her worth mentioning trait—her true love for him. He should not think to buy it as he intends to buy her body. Unfortunately, when she loves him, he starts mocking her in many ways. She reveals her fervent love for him, but he murmurs to himself, "Ha – death, I’m going to believe her" (Rover.2.2.99-100). Willmore does not want her heart, but he wants only her body and this is the reason why he always tries his way to seduce her. He intends to numb her by his words to be able to have only sex and not to marry her. She tells him about her love, but he scorns it and speaks to himself, "Curse on thy charming tongue! Dost thou return / my feigned contempt with so much subtlety?" (Rover.2.2.103-04). Further, when she asks him to swear to love her forever, he complains, "Death, how she throws her fire about me soul!" (Rover.2.2.133). Worse than that, he has a notion that women do not have human values unless they leave all virtues and honour. Then he accuses them of speaking about virtue and honour in order to hide their wrong doings. In his conversation with Angellica,
he professes, "Why what the devil should I do with a virtuous woman? A sort of ill-
natured creatures, that take a pride to torment a lover. Virtue is but an infirmity in
women, a disease that renders even the handsome ungrateful . . ." (Rover.4.2.175-80).

After some time, Angellica regards his pretence of love as a way to have sex but
not to marry her because she does not have "fortune, and honour" (Rover.4.2.362-63).
Willmore insults her honour and avers, "I hate it in your sex, and those that fancy
themselves possessed of that foppery are the most impertinently troublesome of all
woman kind . . ." (Rover.4.2.364-66). Willmore’s repartee may be understood in terms of
his own definition that she is a woman without honour for her work. If he really means
what he says, his honour too is ruined. It is he who tries his best to sleep with her, takes
her money and brags of the honour of sleeping with her. Nonetheless, he accuses women
of not keeping their honour simply because they have minds of women. He directs his
speech to Hellena, yet his speech can be taken as a general attitude towards women. He
says, "I am of a nation that are of opinion a woman’s honour is not worth guarding when
she has a mind to part with it" (Rover.5.1.513-14). Willmore does not only speak of his
mind, but also speaks on behalf of English nations. Thus, in view of the audience, it is
unacceptable to dishonour Angellica especially after he has been sexually satisfied.

In The Rover, Behn exemplifies and stresses the value of money in the sense that
if one wants to marry a woman, he marries her for her money. Angellica affirms the
reality that a man may sell himself for a wife who can pay the most. She scolds
Willmore:

tell me, sir, are not you guilty of the same mercenary crime? 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, though she languish for you.

(Rover.2.2.85-89)

When men have money, they make attempts to buy women’s bodies but not marry them. Prostitutes do not allow men to have sex for free, however, men do not have money to afford them. In such a case, the importance of money for a man like Willmore is to get a prostitute, and the importance of money for a prostitute like Angellica is to survive instead of dying of hunger. Nonetheless, many characters do not accept the work of Angellica though she works as a prostitute only to continue living, whereas the work of Willmore is praised despite the fact that he and all his ilk spend money to satisfy their sexual desires. Hence, money becomes the reason for the rise of many social problems. Thus, women have been wronged in both cases – whether they are rich respectable women or prostitutes. Anannya Dasgupta makes a comparison between the dowry of a woman of quality and the price of a prostitute, “By equating the system of dowry with the price that a prostitute demands for her services, Angellica reveals the essentially commercial nature of the sexual unions sanctioned by marriage, which gets subsumed by a rhetoric of love” (146). Moretta, Angellica’s woman, is an experienced woman of men’s deceptions. She advises Angellica at the beginning to be careful about Willmore, yet Angellica does not listen. But when Angellica and Moretta come to know that Willmore is interested in Hellena, Moretta blames Angellica for giving him her money. She reminds her, “I told you what would come on’t . . . Why did you give him five hundred crowns, but to set himself out for other lovers? You should have kept him poor if you had mean to have had any good from him” (Rover.4.2.142-45). This is exactly what
happens. Willmore leaves Angellica after satisfying his sexual desire and getting all her money. It is then that Angellica realises Willmore’s disingenuous personality. Anand Prakash presents a beautiful comparison between Angellica and Hellena, which helps us to understand why Willmore prefers Hellena; Hellena is simply a rich woman. Prakash writes:

If Hellena is the deprived younger sister meant to accept the Church, Angellica is the woman who stands totally unprotected because poor in a world constituting buyers. Angellica’s only value or power is her charm and youth. Lack of financial or social support is the fate they share. Then, both are beautiful and vivacious enough to attract general attention. Thirdly, both are capable of a new kind of love — that recognises the existence even celebration of female desire. Lastly, both are the focus of Willmore’s interest. (184)

Willmore finally prefers Hellena and marries her for two reasons — for her fortune and also to satisfy his sexual desire. If he had enough money, he would have enjoyed himself with prostitutes instead of being married. On the other hand, Angellica actually intends to collect money through her prostitution in order to live but not to satisfy her sexual desire as Willmore. Behn discusses the topic of prostitution in The Rover to justify Angellica’s work by saying that Angellica should live and has no way except to sell her body instead of dying of hunger. This becomes clearer when Behn attempts to make a comparison between the prostitute Angellica and the respectable lady Hellena.

If one reads the role of Angellica more closely, one can say that she enters the field of prostitution since she is all alone in the society without mercy. When she feels
that her work as a prostitute is profitable, she aspires to collect large amounts from her clients. She appears as a whore who requires “a thousand crowns a month” (*Rover*.2.1.107). According to Heidi Hutner, Angellica’s “desires and her political and economic control of her body lie in the reversed double gaze – watching men watching her” (“Revisioning the Female Body” 106). Angellica asks for such a large amount of money that the cavaliers cannot afford to pay. In this regard, there are two points which can be clarified. First, Angellica gathers money through selling her body. In order to increase her money profit, she raises her price. She deliberately increases the amount when she sees the crowds of customers at her gate. Surely, if there had been none, then she would have never imagined about a high price as this. Second, people who are rich and want to satisfy their sexual desires can go to Angellica’s house. Angellica benefits by collecting money, and in turn, men are also sexually satisfied. As a result, the two distinctive problems of society sex and money are solved in a way that those in need of money would get it from those who are in need of sex. Accordingly, Angellica can lead a normal life rather than stealing as in the case of Lucetta who stole Blunt. Meanwhile, those in need of satisfying their sexual desire can find places such as brothels instead of raping innocent women as it happens with Florinda.

In this section, the correlation between wealth and marriage is discussed from the viewpoints of the two sisters Florinda and Hellena. Marriage for wealth has widely been discussed in Behn’s plays especially in her comedies which are dense with the concept of money because “Money came first in real life; love always triumphed on the stage” (Vernon 386). Thus, marriage for love in Behn’s plays does not happen without wealth. Jeremy Treglown asserts, “Her stories and plays are full of traditional attacks on financial
inequality and particularly how it interferes with love" (134). Louis Kronenberger also states, “A woman had to find security and happiness in marriage, or had – for so long as she was able – to gather guineas and sovereigns” (111).

The Rover opens with two sisters discussing the notion of arranged marriage. They are of an idea that love marriages solve social problems while arranged marriages are reasons for social conflict. Thus, the first line of the play conveys the real sufferings of women especially when they are prevented from their freedom to get married to men they love. Florinda exclaims, “what an impertinent is a young girl bred in a nunnery! How full of questions!” (Rover.1.1.1-2). They hope to exercise their lives freely in the patriarchal society, at least, they want to get married to the men they love. Anand Prakash clarifies the difficult situation of women:

I conclude by saying that Aphra Behn’s The Rover should be read as a statement of criticism of the mid-seventeenth century English society from the point of view of women vying for equality with men in day-to-day dealings as well as long term association of friendship, love and marriage.

(186)

In this regard, the whole play, as Behn has tended to use it to strike the rigid norm of her society, deals with the problematic issues which has been established due to the arranged marriage. As soon as the play ends with multiple celebrating marriages, all problems vanish. Behn intends to say that by marriage all social problems will be solved. By marriage, those who are in need of sex would be satisfied, those who are in need of money would get it, those who have nothing to do except passing their times in vain
would spend their time with their partners, and those who are suffering from family problems would get kind hearts to depend on.

In *The Rover*, Behn states three options for women. These three options are marriage, monasticism or prostitution, so the women in the play are one among the three. If a woman wants to get a respectable position and a decent life, she has to marry her paramour. Unfortunately, it is always not easy for a woman to marry her lover. In this play, all women dream to marry their desired men, but they face many difficulties, and one of these difficulties is finding appropriate husbands. Until they find lovers who are willing to marry them, they again encounter with the interference of the parents and the norms of the society. However, Florinda and Hellena stand firm against the wish and decision of their father and brother in which the first girl should marry for wealth even if the man is old and the young girl should go to nunnery. Shyamala A. Narayan observes that "The heroine rebelling against an arranged marriage to an old man was a stock situation" (126).

In both cases – to marry an old man or to be a nun are completely unacceptable by these two young women. To choose the last option – prostitution means that women would destroy their reputation and future since it is a work that is restricted and forbidden or in some cases hated by all. Therefore, Behn has boldly stated that women should be given absolute freedom to marry an old man, to marry her lover, to be a nun, or to be a prostitute. In fact, the three options, stated above, overlap with wealth. Thence, wealth in all the cases becomes a main obstacle.

In *The Rover*, Don Pedro regards wealth better than honour. So he advises his sister Florinda to marry "the rich old Don Vincentio" (*Rover* 1.1.16). He also praises Don
Vincentio as "... a man of so vast a fortune and such a passion for you" (*Rover*.1.1.56), then he orders her to consider, ". . . Don Vincentio's fortune, and the jointure he'll make you" (*Rover*.1.1.72-73). According to Florinda, being rich is not a desired trait in a man. The desired trait of the spouse is his true love. She also comments on her father's wish to marry her to a rich old husband by noting that she is a woman of quality, "my beauty, birth and fortune, and more to my soul" which are all important to attract any good man (*Rover*.1.1.18-21). A woman with these important attributes can marry a respectable man without difficulties. Anita Pacheco also comments on Florinda's status:

> However, the properties which sustain Florinda's status as an autonomous subject free to choose her own marriage partner are largely those for which her father and brother cherish her: it is her beauty, rank and fortune that make her such a prized asset on the marriage market. ("Rape and the Female Subject" 325)

Though Florinda does not want to marry Vincentio for many reasons, Pedro thinks of him as a suitable husband and sees his stature in the form of material gains. He confesses "'Tis true, he's not so young and fine a gentleman as that Belvile - but what jewels will that cavalier present you with?" (*Rover*.1.1.76-77). Elin Diamond illustrates:

> ... the commodification of women in a male-controlled marriage market is Aphra Behn's first and most persistent theme ... all of Behn's seventeen complete plays deal to some extent with the fact that women, backed by dowries or portions, are forced by their fathers into marriage in exchange for jointure, an agreed-upon income to be settled on the wife should she be widowed. (*Unmaking Mimesis* 62)
When Hellena sees her brother force Florinda to marry Vincentio just for his wealth, she sarcastically asks him about the source of Vincentio's wealth. Hellena knows well that Vincentio's wealth is illegally acquired. Thus, she asserts that to marry Florinda to Vincentio, Vincentio “... may perhaps increase her bags, but not her family” (Rover.1.1.84). This fervent talk between Hellena and Florinda on the one hand and Pedro on the other hand gives a comparison between wealth and other valuable qualities in a husband. Remarkably, Hellena's above statement raises an important attack concerning her brother's obsession for money and all of his ilk who value money more than anything else. Her repartee may convey two meanings. The first meaning is that if a man is respected for his wealth and not for his virility, then the woman will suffer due to the case of marrying an impotent man. She would not be sexually satisfied and hence would look for someone else to satisfy her. The second meaning is that the woman can get money, but she may not conceive if the man is impotent for his age. In turn, the money she gets is useless if there are no children.

Hellena firmly stands against Pedro's desire to marry Florinda to his friend Don Antonio though he is the son of the viceroy. It is also worth mentioning that many women may accept Pedro's offer to marry his sister Florinda to his friend Antonio; at least, he is a rich young son of the viceroy. However, both Florinda and Hellena stand firm against the arranged marriage. Hellena proudly prefers the monastic life instead of marrying her sister to the man she does not love. She tells her brother, “is't not enough you make a nun of me, but you must cut my sister away too, exposing her to a worse confinement than a religious life? (Rover.1.1.88.90).
Hellena is also bound by her father’s wish to be a nun. In fact, she is between two hells either to go to nunnery or to reject the role assigned to her by her father. Heidi Hutner argues that “The assumption of a new and different identity, as Hellena suggests, will bring the women together in an act of rebellion against those aspects of patriarchal law that they experience as repressive” (Rereading Aphra Behn 107). Neither submitting herself to the wish of her father to be a nun nor waiting for her brother to marry her according to his wish, she decides to try her own way of finding a good husband during carnival time. Heidi Hutner observes, “Behn’s Hellena appropriates the bawdy language of the carnival when she dons the mask. . . . Hellena’s donning of the mask is a form of resistance to the repression of feminine desire” (Rereading Aphra Behn 106). During the carnival and from the first look, Hellena and Willmore desire each other. The audience believes that she finds in him an escape out of her own dilemma of being a nun. So, she interjects herself in his way to attract him and then to marry him. By this way, she can get a husband by the means she has used.

The marriage of Willmore and Hellena is not built on love and complete understanding, it is just a deal in the “marriage market.” Heidi Hutner states, “While Hellena wins the Rover, believing she will achieve her freedom through him, he has chosen her at least in part for her money, and their union is short-lived” (Rereading Aphra Behn 111). Alan D. Schrift assures that men still tend to regard women as their property:

Woman’s price is not determined by the “properties” of her body – although her body constitutes the material support of that price. But when women are exchanged, woman’s must be treated as an abstraction . . .
woman has value on the market by virtue of one single quality: that of being a product of man’s “labor.” (177; italics in orig.)

Indeed, Willmore agrees to marry Hellena in order to have sex\(^\text{19}\) and to get her money in order to spend it for his pleasures. Shyamala A. Narayan points out, “Typically, the comedies portray the life of hedonistic young men who fill their leisure with drinking, whoring, theatre-going, and wit. They need money, but have no resources for earning it except though marriage to an heiress” (126). Hellena intends to marry him to get freedom especially to stop the interference of her family on her private life and to avoid the sexual male attack on the other hand. Angeline Goreau observes, “Such experiences were a strong argument for marriage. If one had to choose between wage slavery and the slavery of marriage for money, at least the latter kept the wolves from the door, in one sense if not the other” (Reconstructing Aphra 74). Elin Diamond also reports, “Women through marriage had evident exchange value; that is, the virgin became a commodity not only for her use-value as breeder of the legal heir but for her portion which, through exchange, generated capital” (Unmaking Mimesis 62-63).

The dramatists of the Restoration mock the “marketplace values of marriage,” yet “Behn concentrated her energies on decoding the exploitation of women in the exchange economy, and added vividly to contemporary discourse protesting women’s oppression in the marriage market” (Diamond, Unmaking Mimesis 63) At the end of the play, Hellena marries Willmore without her family’s wish. She explains the real reason behind her father’s and brother’s insistence on her to be a nun because they think too much about her inheritance. She tells her brother, “I have considered the matter, brother, and find the three hundred thousand crowns my uncle left me (and you cannot keep from me) will be

\(^{19}\) This topic has been discussed in Chapter IV under the sub-title of ‘Sex.’
better laid out in love than in religion, and turn to as good an account” (Rover. 5.1.502-05). They also intend to confiscate her dowry. This is contrary to what has been the custom where “Brides’ fathers were forced to pay more in order to find acceptable husbands for them – and at the same time to accept less by way of jointure for their daughters in return” (Okin 129).

Behn does not attack marriage for money like the contemporary writers do, but she is against the forced marriage and the “exploitation of women” through marriage. Behn has a long experience in a life of poverty, so she does not mind whether a woman marries a rich man to overcome her poverty, or a man marries a rich woman in order to get her money but not to use her as a commodity.

It is ironic to find a man feel that he can marry any girl by using his money even if she does not love him. Under the influence of money, he forgets the role of love. So, if any man marries the woman he desires and the woman is forced by her parents to marry him for his wealth, it means that the woman is just looked upon as a commodity. In this case, there is no meaning for love because the one who has money can marry the woman he likes and then he can divorce her and marry another woman. Meanwhile, the one who is not rich but has the best features of humanity, may not marry at all. Behn is against this social issue, and in all her plays, she stands firm against the phenomenon in which a woman is obliged to marry a rich one. In her plays, she instigates women to seek for their own spouses, no matter whether they are rich or poor.

In The Forced Marriage, Falatius feels that he can win Aminta’s heart and then marry her simply because he is rich and “. . . she was poor” (F.M.1.1.16) as he tells his sister Labree. He believes that if there is not a rich rival for Aminta’s hand, she will
marry him. However, Alcander is richer than him and Aminta loves him too. Thus, Falatius looks to her love for Alcander as an inclination for his wealth. In fact, Aminta does not love Alcander for his wealth but for his kindness, manhood and personality. Labree is wiser than her brother Falatius. She knows well that wealth is not everything, so she reminds her brother, “Know’st thou not the difference yet, between a / Man of money and Titles, and a man of only Parts, / As they call them; poor Devils, of no mean nor Garb” (F.M.1.1.16). Towards the end of the play, Alcander marries Aminta, and Falatius’s wealth becomes useless because no woman accepts him as a husband except Isillia, a maid to Erminia. Falatius is ready to marry Isillia, but he does not like her poverty; it is Erminia who exposes him, “Yet all the fault he finds is that she’s poor” (F.M.5.5.159). At last, he reluctantly agrees to marry her because he cannot transgress the King’s orders.

Florinda in The Rover is like Erminia in The Forced Marriage. Florinda encourages Frederick to marry Valeria who is “a maid that does not hate you, and whose fortune (I believe) will not be unwelcome to you” (Rover.5.1.153-56). It is clear that Erminia and Florinda want to say that men only think of marrying rich women. This is really what happens in the play – rich ladies are only for rich men. Falatius and Frederick are not rich and are not the main characters, that is why they agree to marry poor women.

Marriage in Sheridan’s plays depends more on the value of wealth than on the value of love. He deliberately intends to discuss the influence of wealth in everyday life especially in the process of marriage, thus, wealth is a salient theme in his plays even if he tries frequently to show love.
However, Sheridan suffered due to poverty especially at the beginning and at the end of his life. Before becoming a well-known dramatist, he once wrote to his father revealing indirectly to him his financial difficulties, “I beg you will not judge of my attention to the improvement of my hand-writing by this letter, as I am out of the way of a better pen” (Moore 34). The early years of Sheridan were marked by debts. He spent his time in gala parties and playing games. He was also in need of money after his marriage, so he “. . . turned to journalism and playwrighting” (Elizabeth LeFanu 3). Brander Matthews avers, “Sheridan had to live on his wit; and he wrote his plays to make money by its display” (68). At the time of staging his debut play, The Rivals, his financial condition became more stable. In this play, he presents his own sufferings in the field of love and in the field of money. So, the play is considered a true copy of Sheridan’s life. However, “the success of his plays took him half-wittingly into his father’s footsteps in the theatre” (Elizabeth LeFanu 3). Drury Lane Theatre became the constant source of Sheridan’s income. Lewis Gibbs confirms, “He [Sheridan] depended on the theatre: it was his only source of income and his only means of raising money” (124). Meanwhile, he could not save the Drury Lane Theatre from financial ruin because he was “altogether careless; invited into society by those who were delighted with his gaiety and his talent, he plunged into expenses for entertaining others, which very rapidly absorbed large sums of money . . .” (Sigmond 90).

During the time of his work as a dramatist and a manager of the Drury Lane Theatre and the time of his work in the Parliament, he led a comfortable life without any shortage of money. In 1812, Sheridan failed to be re-elected in the Parliament and then he suffered from poverty. It is worth mentioning that Sheridan refused to accept an offer of
twenty thousand pounds for his defence on the side of the American colonials. He insisted that his support had been a matter of principle. Hugh Chisholm illustrates, “His first speech in Parliament was to defend himself against the charge of bribery, and was well received. Congress recognised his services in opposing the war in America by offering him a gift of £20000 which, however, he refused” (846). Sheridan faced serious financial difficulties and was arrested in August 1813 for not paying the debt. It was his wealthy friend Samuel Whitbread who paid the debt. He started drinking heavily and then his health was seriously affected. Then he was unable to handle the diseases and the problems that surrounded him from all sides. In short, his work as a politician or a dramatist had nearly stopped. He died in severe poverty on 7 July 1816. Donald Brook states, “It is said that just before he was put into his coffin a stranger rushed into the apartment in which he was lying in state, and formally arrested the dead man on behalf of a money-lender for a debt of five hundred pounds. Lord Sidmouth and George Canning paid the money between them” (98).

In this regard, all the conflicts in Sheridan’s plays are because of wealth. In The Rivals, for example, the meeting and conversation between Absolute and Lydia revolve around wealth. In The School for Scandal, Charles and Maria do not meet until nearly the end of the play. Even when they meet, they do not talk about love, and their love is just a talk of other characters. The reason behind their sufferings is wealth. Also, the marriage of Sir Peter and Lady Teazle revolves around the issue of wealth.

The Rivals starts by discussing wealth and ends when Absolute and Lydia celebrate their marriage by combining their wealth. Absolute and his father are aristocrats with lands while Lydia and her aunt are heirs to a businessman. It seems that the
correlation between different social classes has taken its importance in Sheridan’s plays. John Loftis writes, “The old antagonism between citizen and gentry had long since outworn its usefulness as a subject for comedy, and Sheridan knew it” (Sheridan and the Drama 51).

At the very beginning of the play, Thomas, the coachman of Sir Anthony, asks Fag about Absolute’s beloved woman—whether she is rich or not! Absolute is known for his richness, so the servants would like to know the financial position of his future wife. Their inquiry is a precursor to what is really going on in the society where the rich women are only for rich men. Fag assures him that she is a rich baronet with an income worth 3000 pounds a year. He adds, “she owns half the stocks! ... she could pay the national debt as easily as I could my washerwoman! She has a lap-dog that eats out of gold—she feeds her parrot with small pearls, and all her thread-papers are made of bank-notes” (Rivals. 1.1.42). This speech proves that wealth was a dominant obsession at the time of Sheridan and hence forms one of the salient themes of The Rivals. The talk of Fag and Thomas about the richness of Lydia proves the idea that if she is not rich, the rich Captain Absolute will not marry her. For her richness, Absolute pretends to be Beverley. Actually, it is ridiculous to find Absolute changing his appearance to suit the taste of Lydia who dreams of a half-paid lover. Absolute’s pretence of being Beverley and Lydia’s dream of a romantic poor husband are purposely generated in the play in order to ridicule the misery of life and make the audiences feel at the same time that they can do whatever they like when they are rich. Therefore, wealth plays a very pivotal role in the play.
No one of the characters of the play wants to be poor except the romantic Lydia Languish. She is obsessed with romances and wants to imitate them in her love with Beverley. Meanwhile, she never says anything about her hatred of money. It seems that everyone in the play is enticed with the world of money which becomes a dynamic engine of the society, while Lydia is busy with her romances.

Actually, it is exciting to see Lydia deciding to marry a half-paid soldier in order to live a romantic life. It can be called as a life of extreme excitement of poverty! One may also argue that she decides to marry a poor man because she has lots of money and lives in luxury. Thus, she wants to try the other misery of life which she has not experienced.

_The Rivals_ is a comedy which has been designed in a way to expose such manners in the society. In the play, the careless men and women concentrate on earthly means to satisfy their own desires. They spend their money carelessly in silly flirtation and frivolous intrigues. They do not care for their wealth since they do not shed sweat in gaining it, they have just inherited it. Some others want to leave their wealth to try and enjoy another life called poverty. Surely, when they are at the brim of poverty, they come back with strong desire to maintain their wealth and sometimes to plunder weak citizens in order to increase their wealth even on the account of those impressed people.

Julia, the ideal female character of the play, affirms that the rich one is only for the rich one. She asks Lydia, “Lydia, you tell me he is but an ensign, and you have thirty thousand pounds!” (Rivals.1.2.47]). This is asked by Julia who is known for her realistic and sober personality. If Julia thinks of money in this way, then others surely adore it. So, there is no meaning in Lydia’s romantic whim and in her pretence of leaving her fortune.
Furthermore, Mrs. Malaprop refuses to marry Lydia to a pauper. She dreams to marry her to a rich one. When Sir Anthony visits her, she complains about Lydia’s decision to marry none except Beverley, though he is poor. She ironically points to Lydia and says, “there sits the deliberate simpleton, who wants to disgrace her family, and lavish herself on a fellow not worth a shilling!” (Rivals.1.2.49). Mrs. Malaprop thinks that the family would be disgraced only when Lydia marries a poor man. Her speech underlies social discrimination. It seems that the rich people have lived in a closed circuit, so it is a shameful act if a rich woman marries a man belonging to a poor class. Hence, Mrs. Malaprop compels her niece to abide by the norm of the society. In fact, she zest to marry Lydia to Absolute in order to jump to the level of aristocracy. She knows well that Absolute is a Captain in army and an heir of a rich baronet father.

O’Trigger, likewise, wants to marry Lydia for her wealth but he fails. The apparent reason of his failure is because his letters have been sent to Mrs. Malaprop instead of Lydia. Actually, he fails to marry Lydia since he is not as rich as Absolute. Therefore, he is not even allowed to contact her. In addition, he is the most hated character in the play because of his conceit and rudeness. All these negative features make him an unbearable character, so he is unable to approach Lydia.

Sheridan intends to say that everyone should marry his/her appropriate match which means that rich people should marry rich people, and vice versa. On the other hand, Sheridan’s sufferings due to shortage of money during his marriage to Linley have affected his writings. Therefore, the marriages in all his three plays do not include a successful marriage between a pauper and a rich one.
In the case of Faulkland and Julia, they are neither rich nor poor. They are equal, so they succeed in their marriage in spite of the many obstacles that they face. To shed more light on this issue, Absolute does not think of Julia as a wife despite being lived in the same house. She too does not consider him a husband because they are financially at different levels. He considers her as a sister and she considers him as an appropriate husband for Lydia. In this case, there might be a question as to why he persists in marrying Lydia though Julia is more realistic and attractive? The answer lies on the matter of how much money she has got and not on how much moral value she has.

In addition, Lydia hopes to elope and leave her property as it happens in romances, but Absolute in the disguise of Beverley refuses her offer, assuming that if she elopes, she will lose her fortune. Absolute also refuses Faulkland’s suggestion to elope. He tells him, “What, and lose two thirds of her fortune? You forget that, my friend. No, no, I could have brought her to that long ago” (Rivals.2.1.56). Even when Absolute is in a critical situation especially when Lydia discovers his real personality, he remains thinking about her wealth. He reassures her that her wealth would be under her disposal after her marriage. He then tells her that he is looking for a lawyer to help them to get her fortune and to quicken the formalities, “come, come, we must lay aside some of our romance – a little wealth and comfort may be endured after all. And for your fortune, the lawyers shall make such settlement” (Rivals.4.2.98).

In the same field, all characters praise and talk about Lydia’s wealth and one of them is Sir Anthony, Absolute’s father, who has taken an irreversible decision that Absolute should marry the woman he has chosen even if she is the ugliest woman. He fiercely declares:
The lady shall be as ugly as I choose: she shall have a hump on each shoulder; she shall be as crooked as the Crescent; her one eye shall roll like the bull's in Cox's museum; she shall have a skin like a mummy, and the beard of a Jew – she shall be all this, sirrah! – Yet I'll make you ogle her all day, and sit up all night to write sonnets on her beauty.

(Rivals.2.1.65)

The father indeed wants to marry his son to a woman who has lots of wealth. So, he threatens to disown and disinherit him if he does not marry the girl whom he chooses. Then, he encourages his son to take the two fortunes: his inheritance and Lydia's fortune; otherwise, he would lose both. He tells his son that the wealth he is looking for would come with Lydia, “the independence I was talking of is by a marriage – the fortune is saddled with a wife” (Rivals.2.1.64). Also, he openly advises Absolute to have both – wealth and a wife, which can be had through marriage. He regards Lydia as a land property and her wealth as cattle; to take the property means to take the cattle. Sir Anthony advises his son, “If you have the estate, you must take it with the live stock on it, as it stands” (Rivals.2.1.64). Absolute refuses his father's choice for the reason that he himself has found a rich woman. He does not know that his father has chosen Lydia, the same girl whom he loves.

On the whole, both the father and the son are searching for the wealthy girl and have fortunately found her, she is Lydia. This indicates their similar minds, the minds which always think about money. At the time when the father feels he cannot convince his son, he gives him the last chance to rethink in about six and a half hours. Absolute has to think wisely over this matter before taking the decision which could be destructive.
During this time, he has to decide whether to marry the woman who has been chosen by his father or not. If not, he will be punished severely. Sir Anthony warns him:

  don’t enter the same hemisphere with me! don’t dare to breathe the same air, or use the same light with me; but get an atmosphere and a sun of your own! I’ll strip you of your commission; I’ll lodge a five and threepence in the hands of trustees, and you shall live on the interest. I’ll disown you, I’ll disinherit you, I’ll unget you! And damn me, if ever I call you Jack again! (Rivals.2.1.66)

Absolute now becomes sure enough that his father has chosen Lydia but tries to pretend to obey his father and respect his choice by marrying the woman whom he has chosen. This means that he is also ready to marry an ugly-looking woman in order to get money. This can best be understood in his approval to his father when he tells him, “I am come, sir, to acknowledge my error, and to submit entirely to your will” (Rivals.3.1.71-72). Then, he ironically inquires, “Which is to be mine, sir, the niece or the aunt?” (Rivals.3.1.73). Even though he is joking, it can also be understood as a tacit approval to marry Mrs. Malaprop since both of them are rich. Indisputably, he repeats the same speech of his father regarding the ugliest woman which indicates his readiness to marry any lady for the sake of wealth. Then for the second time, he asks his father whether he is going to marry Lydia or Mrs. Malaprop. He wonders, “If you should think of addressing Miss Languish yourself, I suppose you would have me marry the aunt; or if you should change your mind, and take the old lady — 'tis the same to me — I'll marry the niece” (Rivals.3.1.73-74).
At the end of the play, when Absolute is about to celebrate his marriage with Lydia, Sir Anthony announces his marriage to Mrs. Malaprop although there was no love noticed between them. This is an indication to their love for wealth.

The debate between Sir Anthony and his son takes our attention to Rosalind J. Gabin's observation. Gabin believes that "Humor construes 'reality' inversely, for it sees the real as the direct opposite of the ideal on which its gaze is firmly fixed" (35). Sheridan obviously intends to render Sir Anthony and his son Absolute in a strikingly dramatic way. Sir Anthony is a man of humour but a tyrannical father. He appears in a good mood with Mrs. Malaprop but in a bad mood with his son. Thus, he does not expect any refusal from his son. Fag describes him as "hasty in everything; or it would not be Sir Anthony Absolute" (Rivals.1.1.41). However, both the father and the son indulge in a minor dispute and each one of them wants to pass his opinion on the other. These two obstinate characters are so kind with other people and they are only hardheaded with each other.

To study Absolute's marriage, one can infer that the marriages during those days were built around the interest of wealth and not on love. It is important to notice that the entire conversation concerning Lydia in The Rivals revolves nearly around her wealth and not on her love with Absolute. Therefore, if Beverley is a different character and not Absolute himself, Lydia will marry Absolute for one reason or the other. But Sheridan intelligently alters Beverley into Absolute at the right time or, one can say, merges both characters into one. By this act, Sheridan controls the situation and satisfies the two desires. If Sheridan would have made Beverley another character, surely Beverley and Absolute would confront each other, and Lydia inevitably would choose the richest one.
This is what really happens at the end of the play. All critical issues have been solved and Absolute and Lydia have crowned their victory by marriage along with both their fortunes. However, Sheridan is so intelligent to render the play in a way where love triumphs at the end, but in reality, Sheridan deliberately scatters the concept of money in all parts of his play. The play opens with two servants talking about the rich woman Lydia and the incomparable baronet Absolute and ends with the integration of their property.