Chapter VII
CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, an attempt has been made to summarise, highlight and interrelate all the observations that are made in the earlier chapters. Various thematic paradigms have been discussed in depth in the last five chapters. Each chapter discusses a specific rubric but all the chapters are interconnected as they tackle different but related thematic paradigms in the plays of Behn and Sheridan. Despite the fact that Behn and Sheridan belonged to different historical eras, they shared general preoccupations and held similar attitudes towards certain issues of their societies. Consequently, their plays have conveyed similar literary themes except that Behn’s attitude over sex is more open. Given these facts, the study has focused on such thematic paradigms as Politics, Religion, Morality, Honour, Marriage, Sex, Importance of Wealth and Women’s Freedom to determine the attitudinal universe of Behn and Sheridan which is the subject of the research.

Behn and Sheridan homogenise different issues in each of their plays. Thus, a single character may assume multiple roles and, consequently, represents different perspectives of interpretations in the study. In this light, Philander, Alcippus and Erminia in The Forced Marriage; Willmore, Hellena, Florinda and Angellica in The Rover; Abdelazer and Queen Isabella in Abdelazer; Absolute, Lydia, and Mrs. Malaprop in The Rivals; and Joseph, Lady Sneerwell and Lady Teazle in The School for Scandal have been thoroughly discussed as polyphonic characters that reflect different perspectives.
Actually, in Behn and Sheridan's plays, the character is a vehicle that brings forth the dramatist's message addressing contemporary manners.

Behn and Sheridan use respectable women to raise issues of love, marriage and patriarchal society. The uses of disreputable female characters like prostitutes, sensualists and thieves in Behn's plays, and scandalmongers, liars, bribe givers and bribe takers in Sheridan's plays raise issues of immoral acts and dishonourable deeds. Similarly, they use desirable men and heroes to raise issues of manhood, magnanimity, honour and morality, while secondary male characters are used either as foils to the main characters or to show the negative behaviour of individuals in the society. Moreover, non-English characters are presented as wicked and rude who mostly behave in crude ways.

Both dramatists use a stereotypical balance of power between men and women. Their attitudinal universe is exhaustively inclusive. In their universe, men and women play equal roles and have similar importance so that when one side has such a kind of advantage, the other side has an equivalent advantage. In this regard, for example, a man is humorous and a woman is witty; a man has power and a woman has beauty; a man is brave and a woman is fair; a man is patrician and woman is wealthy; a man thinks about wealth and sex and a woman thinks about love and marriage; to be able to marry, a man offers love and a woman offers money; a man is physically powerful and a woman is cultured. Men may wrong women and women overturn the parental control. In Behn's plays, the prostitute who is in need of money can get it from the rake who wishes to have sex.

Behn has explored the inheritance of respectable women and the sexual economics of prostitutes and cross-dressed women who are, in fact, desirable women. All
women have their own merchandise of becoming recognizable and important subjects in
the society. They become equal to men in the process of the play. Sheridan has also
explored the inheritance of the heroines. Women's wealth in the plays under study
becomes the talk of men and only those who are rich can approach rich women and marry
them. In short, marriage is bound by economics. Thus, the rich women can easily marry;
but sometimes women's wealth is the reason for their sufferings since men want to marry
them for their wealth. When women are not rich, they face many obstacles, but at the end,
they marry the men who are in true love with them. To be more pronounced, Behn and
Sheridan, in a subtle way, portray women as the ones who are supposed to solve the
economic matters through their inheritance. For shortage of money, men in the plays
become idle and are unable to meet the demands of women. Women's fortune, therefore,
becomes a sign of victory over men.

Nevertheless, women characters of Behn and Sheridan become subservient to
men who have special attributes. Men who are handsome, wealthy, humorous, powerful
and faithful are desired by most women. Yet, it is rare to find a man who has all these
characteristics. In contrast, a woman who is young, pretty, witty and rich has many
suitors. So, she finds herself in an unexpected critical situation due to conflicts between
rivals.

All women characters in the plays of Behn and Sheridan are individually trying to
clear their paths whether positively or negatively, but men are often seen to stand against
their desires and wishes and try to subjugate them to their narrow interests. However,
women still struggle to get equal freedom to that of men. Women's struggle for this
identity is not only the topic to be discussed in the present scenario, but it was also the
topic of discussion from many centuries.

Women characters in the plays of the seventeenth century were meant just to give
some interest to the plays either emotionally or sexually. Women started playing their
roles on the stage only when Charles II ascended the throne. Yet, the roles assigned to
women characters in the plays remained auxiliary and secondary. In her reading of
women’s position in the society, Behn obviously infringes that tradition and makes her
women characters more powerful in their roles, in their speeches and conversations with
men, in their opinions and even by letting women play the central roles, breaking rules
followed by her contemporary dramatists. Behn’s women characters appear rebellious
against the norms of a patriarchal society. This rebellion manifests itself in their sexual
liberty where while men are rakes, women are courtesans. Whereas a man has the right to
search for a woman to marry or to have sex, a woman, too, has the right to search for a
man for the same reasons. As men have the right to go out to enjoy themselves in a
carnival, women have the right to attend it, if necessary, by disguising themselves. At any
rate, the roles of Behn’s women characters are pivotal in the success of the play, the
feature that owes much to the broader changes in the theatrical traditions of the
eighteenth century. Women in the eighteenth century were better in exercising their
freedoms than the women of the seventeenth century. With respect to drama, the roles of
women on the stage were acted by women without masks. In addition, women in the
plays got important roles.

Apart from the customary practice, Behn and Sheridan endow their women
characters with the power of legitimacy in getting their freedom. However, it is found
that in the representational and attitudinal universe of the two playwrights, women characters still suffer from three weaknesses: inability to argue, inability to take apt decisions and incomplete interaction in public life. Some women are unable to express themselves especially when they are in critical situations. They become unable to the point that their speech gives the opposite meaning of what they intend to say. To say that some women characters are unable to argue their freedom and identity does not mean that the plays of Behn and Sheridan are without wit and humour. In fact, wit and humour are essential characteristics in their plays. Their plays are also characterized by the brilliance of dialogue and the witty repartee of the characters. All lines are written beautifully in such a way that most of them convey wisdom; even the lines which are spoken by the secondary characters and foils have their special tastes and profound meanings.

When the women characters of Behn and Sheridan are in a comfortable position, they can make decisions and develop plans either to face men or to do something concerning their futures. Nonetheless, they cannot take correct decisions in the most difficult situations when they are under pressure. With all of these difficulties, Behn and Sheridan, in most cases, arm women in their plays with attractive rhetoric and stunning beauty. If these two traits are useless, women use their other weapons: love and weeping. If they do not succeed, they then turn to use money. If they fail, they seek help from such men. However, men wrong them in many ways but they are not destroyed.

With regard to the third point, women’s incomplete interaction in public life, it is found that the struggle between human nature and human culture is the scope of the two dramatists’ investigation. Their women characters are moving between social codes and individual’s desires. They search for their freedom from the imposed conventions.
However, women of quality in Behn’s plays appear as if they face social constraints that limit their interaction in public life. They have to wear masks and need to ask for permissions even from a servant if they want to go out to attend a carnival. Even when they want to monitor and watch the behaviour of a lover, they have to disguise themselves as boys or courtesans. Being in disguise gives women characters such freedom to move beyond the restrictions and norms of the society. By masking themselves, women intend to save themselves from the patriarchal pursuits and sexual attacks, yet it hides their real identities and hence they are called courtesans. Further, the charm of the mask provokes men to attempt to discover the hidden beauty of the masked women. Therefore, mask sometimes jeopardizes them instead of saving them. In short, wearing masks means that women do not get their real freedoms. Consequently, they suffer in both ways – whether they are disguised or they are not.

Sheridan and Behn based their representational universe on worldly affairs and every day activities that dominated their societies. Patriarchal society inevitably led to excesses, particularly in the seventeenth century where conservative families could not accept the idea of womenfolk being free even to leave homes and attend carnivals which are depicted in Behn’s plays as a kind of freedom for women. However, Sheridan’s women characters have more freedom to act as they choose, to participate in activities and to work alone or in a teamwork environment. Hence, Sheridan does not discuss disguise and women’s confinement at home like Behn. Nevertheless, women in his plays are presented as if they do not leave homes which indirectly means that they are confined albeit differently than in Behn’s. Sheridan’s women characters have nothing to do except stay at homes and waste time in fruitless activities as scandal and gossip which means
that they cannot positively interact in public life. In view of that, they receive criticism instead of praise.

In the main, the plays of Behn and Sheridan are an outcry against all that is bad in society. The stage for them is not mainly designed to entertain audiences. It is an expose of human vanity, fallacies and oppression. It is a mirror that shows people’s mistakes and misdeeds as clearly as it shows their good behaviour. To Behn and Sheridan, drama is the best way to correct human failings. They see the representation of politics in the drama and its influence on an individual level as an interesting adventure. Despite the fact that the plays under study deal with some issues of politics, the theme of the pure politics cannot be easily observed due to the overshadowing of the customary themes. Behn and Sheridan are aware of the negative consequences of discussing heavy political issues. Consequently, their political lessons are always embedded in their satirically didactic and humorous laughter. In other words, the most profound inter-relations between the theme of politics and the other themes culminate with great dramatic actions. Hence, the audiences wonder whether the themes of the plays of Behn and Sheridan are about politics, wealth, love, marriage, morality, etc. It is, in fact, one of their dramatic techniques to make their plays appropriate for multiple interpretations.

Nevertheless, the plays of Behn and Sheridan contribute in one way or the other to revising our views about the realms of politics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their plays give us an epitome of the political conflicts that arose between the personal desires and the legitimate demands as in The Rover. It also gives us a dissection of the pure politics and the “theatrical politics” as in The Critic. Though both dramatists
have worked in the political field, they are mostly and eternally remembered for their literary works.

Behn’s political acquaintance either through her works as a political spy or through her relationship with the monarchy enabled her to portray all those political issues in her dramatic work. Thus, all Behn’s plays, in general, and her three plays under discussion, in particular, establish her loyalty to the Stuart monarchy. In her plays, she criticises those who are against the monarchy, or at least, she ignores them. Being Tory supporter, Behn, in her plays, praises Tories, Royalists and Cavaliers who combined strong support for the Stuart monarchy. Meanwhile, she criticises all Parliamentary supporters, Whigs, Dissenters and Roundheads who revolted against the Stuart monarchy. As an example of praising the Cavaliers, Behn creates the character of Willmore to show Charles II’s personality. *The Rover* highlights the behaviour of Willmore who is the parallel character to Charles II. Many writers criticise Willmore for his libertine, recklessness and carelessness. In general, Willmore often receives more criticism than praise, and it is done out of Behn’s desire. In fact, Behn intended to make women desire the sexual behaviour of Willmore, yet she aimed through the discussion of his character to raise women’s awareness of how to love and be loved instead of running behind fleeting pleasures.

In *The Critic*, Sheridan reveals the correlation between the pure politics and the “theatrical politics,” both of which are of a great significance in his life. He believes that these two fields complement each other, yet the “theatrical politics” is the initial stage before entering the field of the pure politics. Sheridan’s popularity in the field of literature helped him to get a seat in the Parliament. In *The Critic*, he clarifies that the
dramatist has the ability to be a politician, but the politician can never be a dramatist if he does not have a special literary sense. Since many people are interested in theatre while others are interested in politics, Sheridan classifies the characters of the play according to their interests. What is important for him is that the person either in the field of theatre or politics should do his/her work in a proper way and should recognise the merits of a well-done work and the value of a big effort. Meanwhile, Sheridan satirises the unskilled dramatist who injects much politics in his play without trying to understand its meaning and significance. According to Sheridan, the job of the dramatist is to depict the issues of society in the form of literary presentations, yet some dramatists shift from writing literary texts to writing silly political issues that distort the play from its main function. As an inverse result, the play destroys not only the morality of individuals, but also the literary value in general. For him, the plays, which entertain audience, convey the values of the society and educate individuals about morality and attempt to mould public opinion, are the only ones that should be taken into account and performed on the stage.

In many cases, the political attitude is influenced by the religious attitude, and vice versa. Behn and Sheridan lived in times when there were political and religious conflicts especially during the time of Behn. Consequently, they adopt politics which are associated with their religious beliefs. Conflict is a natural product of social, political and religious interactions in public life, but when conflict turns to be violent and then changes into armed conflict, it becomes destructive for social peace. It is worth noting that all political and social conflicts in the world can be solved whenever the causes are removed except the religious conflict as it is inherited from generation to generation. Hence, Behn and Sheridan intend to say that when there is a harmony between politics and religion,
many social problems would have been solved, and with the passage of time, the social problems would completely disappear. Since they dream of a perfect society, Behn and Sheridan discuss and look to the themes of politics and religion from the point which builds a unified society but never to the point which creates a divided society. Therefore, they, as dramatists, attempt to educate individuals and civilise the society through discussing these two themes in the form of a dramatic art.

Both dramatists found in the dramatic art an appropriate vector that brings people face to face with their social ills and vices. The message of the stage, unlike that of narrative, is clear and immediate even to the ordinary, uneducated audience. The act of reading is not so immediate and inspiring as the act of seeing.

Religious conflict dramatically disrupts development and reduces growth and prosperity not only in the region of the conflict but also across the entire region. Thus, religious conflict has been viewed as a motive of the English conflict in the seventeenth century. In fact, it was one of the main reasons for the English Civil War. English societies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were religious, but the worst disadvantage of those religious societies was the conflict between the Christian sects in addition to the conflict between different religions.

Sheridan is known for his Catholicism, but Behn's Christian sect whether she was a Catholic or a Protestant is still a conundrum. In this thesis, many hypotheses regarding Behn's sect have been studied. Before telling her sect, there is a quick review of the points which lead to know her preferred sect. In all her writings, Behn supported the Stuart monarchy and when James II, the Catholic King, ascended the throne, she became more catholic in her writings, that is why she dedicated her play *The Rover II* to him.
Behn's most emotional attachments and friendship were with the Catholics. During Behn's time, Puritans prohibited writing and discussing sexuality in the plays while the Catholics were more open, and Behn's writings were known for their sexual orientation. It is also known that Protestants oppressed Catholics in many ways at that time, and as part of her personality, Behn was always on the side of the oppressed and not on the side of the oppressors. In addition, the majority of scholars believe that Behn was a Catholic and she might have concealed her Catholic belief like Charles II who concealed his sympathy for Catholics though he openly converted to Catholicism on his deathbed. These hypotheses lead to a conclusion that Behn was a Catholic.

Behn and Sheridan sneer at the Puritans who pretend in front of others to be spiritual, models of virtue and as if they know everything that is going on around them while they are in reality blemishes in the moral affairs of the community. Blunt in The Rover and O'Trigger in The Rivals are examples. Blunt is presented as a dull Whig who decides to take revenge on women for the sins that he himself committed, and O'Trigger is presented as a conceited coxcomb who deems himself an eligible suitor and a man of fashion while he is the butt of his own antics. As Christians, Behn and Sheridan do not criticise the religions of Muslims and Jews, but they criticise their wrong works and their negative behaviours. Behn criticises the behaviour of Muslims through Abdelazer and Sheridan criticises the Jews' usury through Moses.

In terms of morality, both dramatists have shown delicate sensibility to the moral standards of their societies. In all Behn's plays, the theme of morality revolves around its importance in facilitating the process of love, marriage and sex. Behn classifies the characters who attempt to get married, facilitate the process of marriage of others and try
to have sex in legitimate ways as moral characters. The characters who hinder the
marriage of their relatives and try to have sex out of marriage by using money, power and
rape are presented as immoral characters.

Sheridan criticises bitterly the immoral behaviours of the individuals in the
English society. He believes that a good relationship in the society stems out from a sense
of moral responsibility. At the time when the society is dominated by bad habits such as
scandalous gossip, hypocrisy and falsehood, the moral relationships among individuals
would be in danger. These negative habits of the immoral people create serious conflicts,
as for example, between a husband and his wife, between a fiancé and his fiancée,
between brothers, and between friends. As in *The School for Scandal*, the brotherly
relationship between Charles and Joseph comes to the breaking point, and the marital
relationship between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle reaches the brink of divorce.

In this regard, both dramatists adopt certain moral standards towards the negative
behaviours of individuals in the society even though the two dramatists differ in their
subjects and in the resolutions that they propose. They believe that the immoral
behaviours of the individuals disrupt the security and safety of the ideal society. In
particular, both dramatists agree that the wrong behaviour of such male characters
especially towards women either to push them to marry undesirable men, to take away
their money and heritance, or to oblige them to do wrong works are all immoral and
condemned by all. The characters who try their best to marry their lovers and try to earn
money through legitimate ways are categorised as moral characters. The characters who
attempt to earn money illegally either through insisting on marrying rich and inherited
ladies or through marrying their female relatives to rich men for the benefit of money are
all presented as immoral characters. It is worth mentioning that women are often represented as moral characters. The immoral women in the plays are only those who impose their love on men. For the sake of marriage, they sacrifice all good values and commit some mistakes.

To move to the theme of honour, both Behn and Sheridan have discussed this topic in their plays, but it is extensively emphasised in Sheridan’s *The Rivals*. In Behn’s plays, men and women get involved in the matter of honour while honour mostly revolves around men in Sheridan’s plays.

When honour and sexual desire coincide in Behn’s plays, women choose honour but the honour that they understand. Angellica is proud of her honour in spite of being a prostitute. Hellena is proud of her honour despite behaving like a courtesan. Queen Isabella considers herself a woman of honour though she is a lustful and criminal mother. Behn discusses two aspects of honour: legitimate honour as in *The Forced Marriage* and illegitimate honour as in *Abdelazer*. Legitimate honour can be given as a reward for virtue especially in the fields of love and marriage. As much as a person loves his/her partner and then tries to get married, as he/she maintains honour and deserves appreciation.

In the same pattern, Sheridan presents the concept of honour in a way where a man overturns his rivals in the field of love. Love and honour complement each other, and if one of them is lost, the other is lost as well.

In short, Behn and Sheridan link the value of honour to the value of love and marriage; the more one loves his partner, the more one has honour. Identically, the value of honour in their plays is directed to glorify marriage. According to them, honour is a
way to marry the lover at any cost even by using swords. Hence, all the plays under study discuss the matter of duel. For instance, Philander in *The Forced Marriage* and Absolute in *The Rivals* challenge the difficulties they encounter in order to marry their lovers. So, they are called men of honour. Meanwhile, the honours of Abdelazer and the Queen in *Abdelazer* and Acres and O'Trigger in *The Rivals* are false.

Despite the fact that their plays contain many love affairs, Behn and Sheridan do not idealise love because many forces keep the lovers apart. The main acting force either in the way of love or marriage is wealth. Behn and Sheridan, who earned their living by pen, had suffered from shortage of money and were imprisoned for debt. In this regard, they present wealth in all their plays as a means to live, but when it is being used in wrong ways, it becomes useless. In particular, Behn and Sheridan discuss the importance of wealth and its influence on the married life. They intend through their discussion of the importance of wealth to strengthen the idea that wealth is an important factor to live, but it is never an inevitable goal. There is no doubt that wealth is essential for people in order to carry out the burdens of life and its requirements, but when wealth overtakes the goal of gaining it, it loses its value and then becomes the reason for many troubles.

According to Behn and Sheridan, as poverty is an obstacle in the way of marriage, wealth is also an obstacle in two ways. Its first hurdle can be seen in the interference of the rich families and relatives who are engaged in parental practices to prevent their daughters from marrying a mate of their choice under the pretext of preserving wealth. The second hurdle of wealth is traceable in the way when respectable women offer wealth in order to marry. They find men whom they want to marry in love not with them but with wealth.
Behn and Sheridan find a way to get out of this entanglement. They believe that love leads to marriage. Through marriage, men and women can satisfy their sexual needs and get money from the rich partner. If both lovers are rich, as in Sheridan’s plays, it will be more lucrative.

Behn does not oppose marriage for wealth, but she is completely against forced and arranged marriages. Therefore, most of her plays deal with these issues. In reality, forced marriage was widespread in the seventeenth century, but in the late eighteenth century, especially with the developments in various fields, forced marriage gradually started to disappear while arranged marriage was still taking place. Marriage between people of different social classes was also still unacceptable. Therefore, Sheridan deals with arranged marriage and marriage between different social classes. Like Behn, Sheridan assert that the successful marriage is based on love with the help of wealth. Accordingly, forced marriage, arranged marriage and class discrimination that hinders love marriage are dealt with in their plays as social ills and constructs that ossify human interaction.

In many cases, the ultimate goal of marriage is to get sexual pleasure. Therefore, sex is always linked with marriage. If there is no marriage, the person may resort to illicit affairs which are often related to victimization of women through rape and prostitution. Prostitution and rape have been intensively discussed in Behn’s plays. Behn’s contemporary dramatists discuss in their plays different kinds of infidelity and represent women as passive participants while Behn has discussed sex, prostitution, rape, etc, and represents women as assertive and active participants. Sexual promiscuity was one of the characteristics of the Restoration drama, but Behn was accused of being a prostitute,
lesbian and lustful character when she reverted to discuss this issue. As it is displayed in her writings, Behn believes that the practice of sex is a legitimate right for women as for men. She encourages women to attempt to attract men for the sake of marriage. She also supports the woman who sells her body to earn her livelihood. Thus, she appreciates Angellica’s prostitution. Angellica asserts her autonomy and right to work as a prostitute. Yet, she does not realise the fact that the person who gives her money and enjoys her body is a man and not a woman. Hence, Angellica does not succeed in getting full freedom despite the great support of Behn. In contrast, Behn does not support lustful women who sacrifice their families, husbands, children, country, reputation or positions in order to have sex with their lovers, but she bitterly criticises them as it happens with Queen Isabella.

Since women had more freedom in the eighteenth century, the crimes of rape became less prevalent than in the seventeenth century and, in turn, Sheridan does not address this topic. It is right that his plays are similar in their style to Restoration drama, but he does not discuss sexuality openly. He believes that drama should give moral lessons in addition to entertainment. Nevertheless, Sheridan does it in a different way. He substitutes the open discussion of sexuality by intimations of sexual seduction while Behen demonstrates sexuality by using physical violence and verbal debates between men and women.

From the issues of politics and religion, to social codes of morality and honour, to sensuality of love, marriage and sex, the two dramatists hold mirror to human nature and universe. Their concern is to show that both men and women belong to the same world, the world of emotions and relations. Their main goal is to highlight human nature in its
pure form, and to read men and women in terms of interrelation and human contact not in terms of victim/victimizer or oppressed/oppressor relationship.

It can be concluded that Behn and Sheridan share common attitudinal universe which revolves around important issues including Politics, Religion, Morality, Honour, Marriage, Sex, Importance of Wealth and Women’s Freedom. They are famous dramatists and politicians. So, they do not mind to homogenise politics with drama. They are religious, but they are not bigots, yet they cope with all the changes that have taken place around them. They believe in morality of society and honour of individuals and consider them as an important framework of community cohesion. To love and being loved is the most frequent theme in their plays, and it is the subject which interests everyone. But they believe that love is a way to a successful marriage and it is not a way to unlawful sex. Behn and Sheridan desire two things which are socially compatible – marriage and wealth. Marriage leads to sex and sometimes to wealth.

Marriage is the most important theme in their plays. Therefore, all the other themes that are discussed in the thesis are in support to the theme of marriage in one way or the other. To consider the themes of politics and religion, they revolve around the charter of rights and freedom of marriage. Morality and honour are presented in the plays as to be in the service of marriage. Those who facilitate the process of marriage and support the freedom of choosing the partner are the models of morality. Those who sacrifice themselves in hope of creating a better life and overcome all the obstacles that stand in their ways in order to marry their lovers are praised for honour. Wealth also plays a pivotal role in the success of marriage. Women sacrifice many things in order to marry their desirable partners. For the sake of marriage, men and women, in the plays of
Behn and Sheridan, become friends with each other, love each other, desire each other and pursue each other. In sum, many social problems and all various types of sexual harassments disappear after marriage.