Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The title of the thesis merits an explanation. Taking cue from the meaning given to ‘attitudinal’ in *The Merriam Webster Dictionary*, this thesis attempts to study the attitudes of two of the well-known playwrights Aphra Behn and Richard Brinsley Sheridan towards certain issues in their societies. Accordingly, eight prominent thematic paradigms in six selected plays are taken for study. These thematic paradigms are Politics, Religion, Morality, Honour, Marriage, Sex, Importance of Wealth and Women’s Freedom. To be able to study them along with other controversial issues needs a flexible and comprehensive title and this is what has been done. Thus, all the thematic paradigms of the plays under study fall within the scope of the title which intends to locate the attitudinal universe of Behn and Sheridan with a more encompassing reality and definition. Broadly speaking, the research restricts the study to eight thematic paradigms, but the thematic and textual analyses highlight some of the most important aspects of Behn and Sheridan’s attitudinal universe.

In spite of the discrepancies in their sub-themes, almost all plays under study meet at many thematic junctures as they tackle themes which can be found in the works of any time and in any society. They, therefore, have a point of convergence in terms of the eight thematic paradigms mentioned above. In the whole of the research, these thematic paradigms are defined more precisely and their functions with respect to the title of the research are extensively discussed. The theme of love, which is also one of the most important themes in the plays under study and in the plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has been discussed simultaneously with the other eight themes since
it is correlated with all of them. To discuss it as a separate entity might lead to a monotonous repetition.

To make the present study more accurate and to provide a succinct discussion of all these themes, seven chapters have been taken into consideration. In these chapters, the ambiguous ideas and the controversial issues have been clarified by supporting quotations either from the texts of the plays or from the studies of literary critics. Further, to study the plays of Behn and Sheridan, one from the seventeenth century and the other from the eighteenth century, seems to be interesting in the sense that these two dramatists belong to opposite sex, different political parties and different literary periods. These three arguments are briefly discussed as follows:

Firstly, bearing in mind the arguments of those who assert that the attitudes of people are completely different from one another especially when they belong to different sex gives an impression that the study of the plays of Behn and Sheridan cannot be studied together since these dramatists are of opposite sex. To take into consideration the personal attitudes, it would be hard to find two persons having similar attitudes especially when they are from different regions of the world or belong to different centuries. However, the study is not about the psychological and physiological differences between Behn and Sheridan, but it is about their common literary attitudes in their plays. In other words, the study does not reflect their mental states, but it is about how they discuss their sufferings and tackle the problems that are of concern to them which can be achieved through the study of the themes of their plays.

The attitudinal universe of a person influences his behaviour and beliefs and then tends to influence him in evaluating people, things, issues, objects or events. It is true that
there are some external factors which influence the attitude of a person; however, his attitude, whether influenced or not, remains his own. Nevertheless, a person can develop his attitude better through education and experience. The attitude of an illiterate person is surely different from that of the attitude of a dramatist, poet, politician or an intellectual. In this regard, although these two dramatists are also poets, the study only focuses on their plays. In brief, the study is on the literary attitudinal universe of the two dramatists.

Non-feminists believe that men and women are fundamentally different and have different attitudes (Paludi 7), especially their attitudes towards sexuality (Barlow 349). In fact, most researchers agree on the physiological differences between men and women but they do not agree on the idea that these differences affect their behaviour; accordingly, men and women should receive different treatments in the society (Ferraro 258). On the other hand, the views of feminists must also be kept in mind especially when they strongly state that “There is no difference between men and women in their strength or prudence” (Pateman 44). Kennedy also affirms that “there is no difference between male and female except the sex organs, and that all those physical, cognitive, and emotional differences you think are there, are merely the result of centuries of restraints imposed by a male-dominated society and sex – stereotyped schooling” (573).

In reality, the physiological differences between men and women are held as a justification for forcing women to do particular roles in the society under the pretext that such roles are only limited to women and their nature. However, these issues are not the goal of the study. The focus of the study is on the literary attitudes of Behn and Sheridan which can be found in their plays. Since there lies no difference between men and women in the skill of writing, the study of their plays can be done together successfully. Eliot, in
his practical studies, proves that there is no difference between men and women in “all verbal skills”:

Women are also slightly better at writing. But importantly, there are no differences between men and women in reading ability or vocabulary size, and when you put all verbal skills together, women’s advantage turns out to be a mere one-tenth of a standard deviation (meaning the average woman outperforms 54 percent of men). (174)

Further, the study is not about gender but attempts to analyse the plays of the two dramatists regardless of their gender. Hence, the above quotations are just an indication of the different views of the writers on the attitudes of men and women.

Secondly, Behn and Sheridan belong to different political parties. By studying their political attitudes through their plays, it opens the door for a wider discussion and then one acquaints more with the different political roles and practices in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Behn was a member in the Tory Party, which is today known in England as the Conservative Party. She worked as a political spy and was close to the royal family. She had also many political friends who helped her in many ways. On the other hand, Sheridan was a member in the Whig Party which later developed into the Liberal Party in England. Particularly, he was a Whig Member of Parliament for around thirty-two years and had many political friends who helped him in his crisis. Despite their political works, Behn and Sheridan are mostly remembered for their dramatic works.

Thirdly, Behn and Sheridan were from different literary periods, Behn belonged to the Restoration period while Sheridan belonged to the time when the Sentimental drama was still popular. To be specific, both dramatists belonged to the same
Neoclassical period (1660-1785). However, the Neoclassical period can be divided into three main periods.

First, the Restoration period (1660-1700) was the period during which Behn wrote her plays. It is marked with the restoration of Charles II after a long period of Puritan domination over England. Some critics call this period as the period of John Dryden (1631-1700). John Dryden and Aphra Behn had in common a literary trend of writing tragicomedy and comedy of intrigue.

Second, the Augustan Age or Age of Pope has started from 1700 and continued till 1745. During this period, there was a sort of a political revolution, especially when James II was replaced by his daughter Mary and her husband William. So, the writers of this age like Thomas Shadwell, Thomas D’Urfey, John Crowne and Elkanah Settle adapted their writing styles to suit the new age and to cope with the considerable changes in the mood of the society. Hence, writing both comedy and tragedy became more sentimental and more moral in tone. Jane Spencer in her article ““Deceit, Dissembling, all that’s Woman”: Comic Plot and Female Action in The Feigned Courtesan” declares, “Comedy becomes increasingly sentimental in the 1690s and after, and Behn’s successors tend to create their women’s viewpoint on the basis of a sentimental view of womanhood” (90).

Third, the age following the Augustan Age was the Sensibility Age or the Age of Johnson which ranged from 1745 to 1785. Some say that this Age continued until 1798. This literary period was politically known as the Georgian era. The Georgian era ranged from 1714 to 1837. It was the time of the reigns of the four kings of Great Britain: George I, George II, George III and George IV. However, Sheridan’s plays were

1 Alexander Pope (1688-1744) is considered as the greatest poet of the Classical period.
2 Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) is known as Dr. Johnson. He was a poet, critic, author of fiction, essayist, biographer and lexicographer.
produced during the reign of George III (1738-1820). So, Sheridan can be regarded as a dramatist in the Georgian era. To be more specific, Sheridan had written his three plays between 1775 and 1779 which is politically called the Georgian Age and literally known as the Sensibility Age or the Age of Johnson. This period was still famous for the plays that had the features of the Sentimental drama. It is right that the heyday of the Sentimental drama was at the time when Richard Steele wrote his play _The Conscious Lovers_ in 1722, but Sheridan wrote his plays when Sentimental drama was still prevailing. Nevertheless, his three plays under study have the features of the Restoration drama and not the Sentimental drama. It was because Sheridan and Goldsmith wrote plays that revived the spirit of the Restoration comedy but in a gentle and less satirical fashion. Hence, Sheridan had lived in a completely different period from that of Behn, but in some ways, his plays looked back to the Restoration period.

In order to study the attitudinal universe of Behn and Sheridan, six plays have been selected. Instead of studying and analysing every play in a chapter, the general themes that are common to all the plays are being studied in five chapters, in addition to Chapter I which is the Introduction and Chapter VII which is the Conclusion. In other words, this study does not discuss the specific thematic structure of each play but studies the themes which are universal among Behn and Sheridan in order to ascertain their attitudinal universe. The amount of importance and presence of each theme that is discussed in the thesis differs from one another. For example, the theme of religion is present more in _Abdelazer_ than in the other plays either in Behn's plays or in Sheridan's plays; while the theme of morality is discussed more in Sheridan's play, _The School for Scandal_. Further, the themes of forced marriage and sex are extensively discussed in
Behn’s plays, whereas the theme of money is significantly discussed in Sheridan’s plays. Regardless of the significance of each studied theme, the study covers them all adequately and fairly.

The broad objective of this research is to make a thematic analysis of the six selected plays with the purpose of ascertaining the commonly shared literary themes of Behn and Sheridan. The specific objectives are devoted to many issues: to survey the social, political and religious spheres in the societies of Behn and Sheridan and then to find out how much Behn and Sheridan tackle and criticise the negative behaviour of their societies; to scrutinise the themes of politics, religion, morality and honour through the plays under study in order to state the public life of the two societies in general and the lifetime of Behn and Sheridan in particular; to examine love, marriage and sex in Behn’s society which may or may not be different from those in Sheridan’s society; to scan the brilliance of dialogue and the witty repartee of the characters especially the female characters; and to draw attention to the way in which Behn and Sheridan represent their male and female characters and whether they are prejudiced against particular gender or not. The most remarkable thing is that Behn is bold enough to discuss women’s private issues. Both Behn and Sheridan manage to make their women characters powerful and have equal importance to men, yet they still suffer in the dominant patriarchal society. Moreover, the present research attempts to fathom out the importance of wealth and its impact on the lives of Behn and Sheridan and on the process of the events of the plays. One can notice that wealth plays an important role in most of the plays of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and is also a vital theme in the plays under study.
The rationale of the study is that, some may say, many scholars have studied the plays of Behn and Sheridan, but it would be illogical to say that the last word on their plays has already been said. In spite of such studies, no detailed and systematic study has been attempted to study the universal themes of their plays. Moreover, to choose a dramatist from the seventeenth century along with a dramatist from eighteenth century is a challenging task. But what makes the study easy to be applied is the style of Sheridan’s three plays. Since the plays of Behn and Sheridan were written in the style of Restoration drama, an in-depth study of the general themes of their plays offers more clarification about the attitudinal universe of Behn and Sheridan.

The study is important for it discusses the plays of the first professional female dramatist whose yet another talented dimension is explored. To choose a dramatist from among Behn’s contemporary dramatists would bring in nothing new since the thematic structure of the Restoration drama is similar, but to choose a dramatist from the next century gives the study a certain amount of uniqueness. Thus, the researcher believes that, though her plays were written in the late seventeenth century, their subject matter remains interesting even today and remains to be a controversial issue. Nowadays, most of the studies on Behn’s plays are feminist studies. In fact, Behn’s plays are also rich in their social, political and cultural issues. Therefore, it is actually interesting to study them since they were written by a woman who devoted her entire life to advocating women’s issues.

On the other hand, Sheridan’s three plays are often satirical, humorous and witty. The first interpretation of his plays has been chiefly concerned with the social manners, yet the plays are rich in their ideological discourses about morality, money, marriage and
language. Further, the focus on rhetoric, the richness of the wordplay, the probe of the situation, the differentiation between appearances and reality and the soft satire are remarkable characteristics in his plays. *The School for Scandal*, for example, is a satire not only on the social behaviour in Sheridan's time but also on the contemporary scandal-mongering, hypocrisy and journalism of the day-to-day life.

However, each of the six plays under study has been subjected to an extensive study mainly to explore the main themes and sub-themes even if they are insignificant. The themes of Behn's plays are matched up to the themes of Sheridan's plays. The themes that are discussed by both dramatists have been taken into consideration. The themes that are discussed by only one dramatist, like prostitution, rape, infidelity, feminism, etc in Behn's plays, and deception, falsehood, fashion, sentimentality, etc in Sheridan plays, have been ignored. The selected themes are then subjected to a comparison with many critics' writings. Next, the selected themes are measured up to the most prevailing themes of the seventeenth and eighteenth century dramas to ensure consistency.

Within the scope of the thesis, six plays of Behn and Sheridan have been selected to provide a comprehensive study about their attitudinal universe. Behn's plays are *The Forced Marriage*, *Abdelazer* and *The Rover*, and Sheridan's plays are *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal* and *The Critic*. Through these plays, the general themes, as stated before, shall be examined. The political, religious, cultural and social histories of the times of the two dramatists would not be discussed in detail for the reason that these topics serve history more than literature. Since the study examines the literary attitudinal universe of Behn and Sheridan through their plays, the theoretical history shall be
recalled and mentioned when needed. Some other themes like gender, feminism, class, rape and fashion are excluded. Moreover, the quotations that support the discussion have been quoted from two branches. In Chapter I, the quotations are mainly taken from the studies of the critics while the quotations in the next chapters are extensively taken from the texts of the plays and supported by quotations from the studies of critics wherever necessary.

Chapter I has been designed to discuss the background to the fundamental issues that underlie the entire thesis. In this chapter, there is an important review of the critical stages of the lives of Behn and Sheridan. There is a succinct discussion of the political, social and religious backgrounds of the times of Behn and Sheridan with special reference to Restoration period. The theatre of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is also briefly recounted. Further, there is a brief discussion of the distinctive features of Restoration comedy and Sentimental comedy. At the end of the chapter, the plays of Behn and Sheridan are reviewed from the point of views of the critics. There are many quotations which prove that Sheridan's plays are the finest examples of the Restoration comedy or the Comedy of Manners (an alternative name). Moreover, Sheridan himself has repeatedly stressed his preference for writing in the form of the Restoration comedy. Hence, it can be concluded that the implications of the most important themes in the plays of Behn and Sheridan stand identical.

The next chapters are dedicated to the study of the plays and not the lives of Behn and Sheridan. The first part of each theme contains a short theoretical description of the social background. There will then be an analysis on either a suitable selected plot or suitable characters which are compatible with the theme.
The division of the chapters is based on the themes that are nearly close to each other. Since the themes of Politics and Religion are interrelated, they have been discussed in Chapter II. Under the theme of politics, there is a succinct discussion about Behn’s desirable character Willmore who can be seen as a parallel to King Charles II. With regard to The Critic, the analysis is mainly devoted to the study of theatrical politics and satire on newspapers. Under the theme of religion, the behaviour of Blunt who is from the other political Party to that of Behn and the behaviour of Abdelazer who is not a believer according to the belief of the Christians shall be examined. There is also a short analysis on O’Trigger’s pretence of Christianity in The Rivals and Jews’ usury in The School for Scandal.

Chapter III is dedicated to discussing the themes of Morality and Honour. Under the theme of morality, the absurd behaviour of the Spaniards in The Rover shall be examined. It also includes an analysis on the moral and immoral behaviour of characters in The School for Scandal. The theme of honour will be discussed from three angles: the value of honour from the viewpoints of Philander, Alcippus and Erminia in The Forced Marriage, the dishonourable behaviour of Abdelazer and Queen Isabella in Abdelazer, and the different interpretations of honour from the points of view of Absolute, Acres and O’Trigger in The Rivals.

Chapter IV presents a comprehensive yet concise discussion of Marriage and Sex. There are two examples stated under the theme of marriage: the forced marriage in Behn’s play The Forced Marriage and the intermarriage between different social classes in Sheridan’s play The School for Scandal. Under the theme of sex, there is an analysis of
how Behn presents the theme of sex in *The Rover* and *Abdelazer*. Also, there is a reading of the sexual behaviour of Joseph towards Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*.

Chapter V provides a sufficient discussion of the Importance of Wealth in the light of *The Rover* and *The Rivals*. It is mainly assigned to discuss two points: the correlation between money and prostitution and the correlation between wealth and marriage.

Chapter VI is about Women’s Freedom: A Struggle for Identity. The chapter focuses on three interrelated difficulties that faced women and arise from women’s struggle for their identity. They are: inability to argue, inability to take apt decisions and incomplete interaction in public life. The women who are unable to argue are Florinda in *The Rover* and Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals*. The women who are unable to take apt decisions are Florinda and Angellica in *The Rover*, and Lydia Languish in *The Rivals*. Examples of women’s incomplete interaction in public life circle around the masquerade of women in *The Rover*, role of Lady Sneerwell in *The School for Scandal* and role of Mrs. Dangle in *The Critic*.

Chapter VII covers the Conclusion which mainly recapitulates, emphasises and interconnects the observations made in the six chapters and offers a final analysis and assessment.

However, the researcher reserves the right to solicit specific materials from critics and scholars and is indebted to them. In the pages ahead, there are some of the materials which have been used in the thesis. Ever since Virginia Woolf (1882 – 1941) invited “All women together” in her book *A Room of One’s Own* “to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn . . . in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak
their minds” (66), Behn has been a favourite subject for many studies especially the feminist studies. *A Room of One’s Own* is the most readable book of Woolf. It discusses women’s issues with special reference to the history of English women writers. In this book, Woolf believes that women were discouraged from writing as they received little education. Woolf raises a debate against men who have all the rights. They have power, wealth, fame and freedom while women have nothing to do in the dominant world of men. Thus, she encourages women to struggle to get their rights and to stand equal to men.

In the twentieth century, Behn’s literary works received different studies, but the majority of these studies concentrated on the themes like feminism, gender and class. These studies are mostly in the form of articles. Often, the articles are edited in books as in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism* which was edited by Heidi Hutner. The book gives a lengthy critical work on Behn and her works from a range of contributors. Authors of the articles in this book discuss several aspects of Behn’s dramatic works. Besides exploring the ways of how Behn entered the world of English literature, it also examines the significance of her writings in the seventeenth-century English literature. The book also contains critical feminist debates regarding Behn and her works.

In general, books which cover Behn’s life and her works are few. Some of the recent biographical books on Behn’s life are Kate Aughterson’s *Aphra Behn: The Comedies*, which provides readers with a fascinating analysis of Behn’s dramaturgical abilities in composing remarkable dialogues, witty conversation, humorous characters, striking plots, etc. In this book, the author also focuses on Behn’s ability in interpreting
gender and sexuality from her viewpoint and in making her plays to be more witty and accessible among the audiences not for her generation but for many generations ahead. Jane Spencer’s *Aphra Behn’s Afterlife* analyses Behn’s career and gives an intensive discussion of Behn’s poetry, novels and plays with special reference to gender perception. It talks about Behn’s influence on later writers. It also examines Behn’s desire to present her women as though they have the same masculine features of that of men. Jane Todd’s *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* discusses the secret and ambiguous life of Behn especially the issues which received different interpretations. This definitive biography draws the attention to the prevailing themes of Behn’s literary works. It also studies Behn’s role and activity in the Tory Party. Further, it renders a substantive analysis of Behn’s courage in discussing sex. In short, the book deals with many issues concerning Behn. Angeline Goreau’s *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* discusses Behn’s life depending on her literary works. The book deals with Behn as a novelist, playwright, poet, translator and spy. Goreau praises Behn to be the first woman who challenged men in the seventeenth century.

On the other hand, since the time of his death, Sheridan’s plays have been a favourite subject, yet have received relatively little research attention. After Sheridan’s death in 1816, Thomas Moore wrote Sheridan’s biography in a book entitled *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Richard Brinsley Sheridan* which is mainly devoted to narrating Sheridan’s life as a dramatist and a politician. It deals with the life and work of Sheridan in the form of a narrative and not in the form of analysis. So, all facts and historical background regarding Sheridan are available in this book. The book includes
many letters from and to Sheridan, and these letters denote Sheridan's real life and his works.

Some of the recent books which are dedicated to the study of life and works of Sheridan are Jack Davis Durant's *Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (1975), Mark S. Auburn's *Sheridan's Comedies: Their Contexts and Achievements* (1977), John Loftis's *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England* (1977), and James Morwood's *The Life and Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (1985). Jack D. Durant's *Richard Brinsley Sheridan* is regarded as a biography of Sheridan. It also presents criticism on history and the plots of Sheridan's comedies. Mark S. Auburn's *Sheridan's Comedies: Their Contexts and Achievements* deals with the achievement of Sheridan's plays in the society especially his discussion of certain social affairs just like scandal, gossip and hypocrisy. It also discusses Sheridan's plays mainly *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* and draws attention to some drawbacks and positive features in the plays. In this book, the author discusses Sheridan's plays from the points of view of some different critics. Many critics classify Sheridan's plays as Restoration drama, others classify them as Sentimental drama and while some others believe that Sheridan's plays show a combination of Restoration and sentimental attitudes. John Loftis's *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England* includes comprehensive content and analysis of Sheridan's drama. It discusses the correlation between Sheridan's plays and some plays by other critics. James Morwood's *The Life and Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* intensively discusses Sheridan's early life and his plays. Morwood believes that Sheridan was born with considerable talents which enabled him to write his best plays while he was still in his twenties.
A. M. I. Fiskin’s The Rivals & School for Scandal: Notes presents a critical study on The Rivals and The School for Scandal. It starts with narrating the events of each scene followed by a succinct commentary. The characters of the two plays are also analysed. Lewis Gibbs’s Sheridan: His Life and His Theater gives a complete biography of Sheridan, especially his works as a dramatist and a manager for Drury Lane Theatre. It also sheds light on the characteristics of the eighteenth century drama with special reference to Sheridan. It gives information about his childhood, his relation with his family, his education, his relation with Miss Linley and her family, and his duel with Mathew for preserving the honour of Miss Linley who became his wife. Alice Glasgow’s Sheridan of Drury Lane states the biography of Sheridan especially his time as a dramatist and as a theatre manager. It discusses the Drury Lane Theatre and Sheridan’s management of the theatre. Brander Matthews is the editor of Sheridan’s Comedies: The Rivals and The School for Scandal. In this book, Matthew writes an important introduction to Sheridan’s life and his plays The Rivals and The School for Scandal.

In addition to these sources, the researcher has also looked into a number of works in British history and mainly on the lives and plays of Behn and Sheridan which the researcher will cite throughout the text.

APHRA BEHN

Little is known about Behn’s life especially her early life, education, parentage, family and married life because they are not documented. Goreau points out, “Aphra’s biography lay buried all those years under the weight of history’s dismissal and then forgetfulness, the facts of her birth, parentage, and ancestry gradually grew into a tangled fiction” (Reconstructing Aphra T). In their writings about Behn’s life, critics and
biographers depend on her literary works and some information from her contemporary writers. Anannya Dasgupta outlines, "... only the authorship of seventeen plays is a definite biographical detail of Behn’s life" (142). Janet Todd in her introduction to *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* writes about Behn’s ambiguous life. She states:

> The playwright, poet, fictionist, propagandist and spy, Aphra Behn, born some time and somewhere before or during the Civil War and dying in 1689, has a lethal combination of obscurity, secrecy and staginess which makes her an uneasy fit for any narrative, speculative or factual. She is not so much a woman to be unmasked as an unending combination of masks.

(1)

Names and backgrounds of her parents and the place of her birth have received various speculations among biographers. It is also not known as how Behn started writing plays, or why she became a writer. Some critics believe that she found herself obliged to write to claim her ‘identity’ as a writer. Even the spelling of her name appears ambiguous:

- Aphra, Ayfara, Aphara, Aphora, Afra, APharra, Afara, or, more fantastically, Aphaw or even Fyhare. One can see why Mrs Behn, Bhen or Beene, Nee Johnson or Amis, somewhere near Canterbury in Kent, should so readily have substituted that further variation upon a theme, the romantic Astrea, for the more prosaic Aphra, patron saint of prostitutes, a name associated with sin and penitence. (Woodrough 34)

However, she is known as Aphra Behn, the name which has always been used, in addition to her pseudonym, Astrea.
The ambiguous phases of her life give rise to many speculations. Hence, it is very
difficult to find an authentic document recording her early life, but it is agreed on the
following details. Behn was born on July 10, 1640 at Wye near Canterbury (in Kent). Her
father was Bartholomew Johnson, a barber, and her mother was Elizabeth Denham, a
nurse to the wealthy Culpepper family. Behn had spent her childhood with the children of
that family. Thomas Culpepper, the younger child of the wealthy family, described Behn
as his foster sister, and this is regarded as an answer to those who are wondering about
where Behn grew up and received her education (Owens and Goodman 133).

Some scholars believe that Behn had married Johan Behn, but they do not know
whether the marriage took place on board of the ship during her voyage to Surinam or in
Surinam. Others believe that Behn did not marry at all and her husband did not exist, but
Behn spread the so-called marriage to gain the status of a widow since a widow during
those days was free to have sexual relations with men without planning on marriage.
Jonathan Goldberg argues that Behn did not marry and “. . . her husband may well have
been a fiction that gave her the right to claim the privileges of a married woman or the
independence of a widow” (47). Montague Summers also believes that Behn “. . . was a
figure of some note, and even if we had no other evidence it seems impossible that her
contemporaries should have glibly accepted the fiction of a voyage to Surinam and a
Dutch husband named Behn who had never existed” (*The Works of Aphra Behn* n. pag).

Behn’s husband remains a historical mystery. However, Janet Todd renders the
ideal interpretation for this matter. She believes that Behn might meet Johan on her return
from Surinam. The marriage was short and Johan might have died from the plague in
1666 (*The Secret Life* 74). Other writers say that she had only indulged in a sexual
relationship with Jack Hoyle for a long time though they did not get married. Todd also writes about Behn’s relationship with Hoyle and considers him as “. . . Behn’s main lover” (The Secret Life 175). Hoyle was accused of sodomy, involved in many duels and was then killed in a knife fight. However, Behn was famous in her time for her literary works, yet it was rare to find her contemporary men writers praising her. Women writers who praised her talents and one of them was, for example, Ann Finch – Countess of Winchilsea (1661-1720) and one of the first English women poets in England. Finch mentioned Behn by name in her famous poem “The Circuit of Apollo” and eulogises “Her superiour in fancy, in language, or witt” (Finch, line 13).

In the seventeenth century, women were all trying to write for one reason or another. Moira Ferguson wrote about the women of the mid-seventeenth century who entered the literary field, “Whether they lauded liberty, female friendship, and the right to write, or criticised male privilege and the injustice of a woman’s lot, they were fashioning a public self that advertized female resistance to anything short of equality and full humanity” (18). It is unanimously agreed that “Aphra Behn was not only the first woman to succeed as a professional playwright, she was also in many ways the first modern – the first exponent of the revolutionary idea that men and women are created with an equal aptitude for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Gilder 174).

Before Behn, there were German female playwrights: Nuns Hrotsvitha (c. 935 - c. 1002) and Hildegard (1098 - 1179) who wrote some plays. The plays were written for entertainment and their themes were mainly about religion. The plays were not performed during the lifetimes of Hrotsvitha and Hildegard for the reason that they were not famous. Today, very few scholars remember these plays (Weaver 49).
The most well-known female dramatist who followed Behn was Susanna Centlivre (1667–1723). She wrote around nineteen plays. Most of her plays were comedies of intrigue. She was popular in her times. However, she had been forgotten in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries even more than Behn.

Behn’s life and works have been ridiculed, lamented and praised. Nevertheless, no woman in the seventeenth century composed important literary works like her. She surpassed some famous dramatists in the number of writing plays in which “Her eighteen certain plays (there are others of doubtful attribution) . . . make her one of the most prolific Restoration dramatists” (Spencer, *Aphra Behn’s Afterlife* 4). Behn’s ability to summarise the range of human emotions and the social affairs of her society in simple yet profoundly eloquent plays is perhaps the greatest reason for her enduring popularity. Allardyce Nicoll writes about the importance of Behn’s plays and ranks her as one of the best playwrights in Restoration period, “Of all the dramatists of the Restoration, Mrs. Behn is probably the best known. . . . The fact is that she is no worse, and is often a great deal better, than the average playwright of her age” (*A History of Restoration Drama* 208-09).

Behn’s plays were somewhat popular in her time; nevertheless, they were neglected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Behn’s plays in particular and her works in general have received great admiration especially from feminist scholars who have advocated her works and praised her frank writing about daily life issues like love, marriage, sex, fortune etc. Nowadays, her subject-matter and her style of writing dramas have been interpreted widely for their arguments and satires. Her plays are characterised by wit and humour. Dialogues are
sometimes short, but they convey wisdom with a delicate humour. Politics, for example, is a general theme in Behn’s plays. Thus, D. Susan Kendrick observes, “The first recognized professional woman writer in English, Behn was popular during her career, and her plays and poems represented the Restoration ideals of political expediency and sexual frankness” (25). Despite the criticism from Pope, Collier and others, her plays continued to appear on the theatre of the eighteenth century even though it was not in the same coverage as it was in the Restoration theatre. The popularity of Behn’s plays was because of their comic negotiation, their desirable women, and their sexual orientation (Anderson 75).

Behn’s plays are fertile for discussion. Thus, they have received different interpretations from different standpoints. The feminist writers believe that Behn is a feminist writer. Money admirers regard Behn as a needy writer who lived entirely by her pen. The fashion admirers describe Behn as a fashionable person in which her plays reflect the fashionable attitude of her time. The pornographers think that Behn’s works are full of sexual innuendo. The political supporters regard Behn’s writings as a tool to please and praise King Charles II and King James II. These interpretations indicate, however, her productive works. Thus, Margaret Walters reassures, “More recent readers have taken what Behn ‘actually wrote’ much more seriously – she was a skillful and often challenging dramatist – while some critics have found her life almost as interesting as her plays” (24).

Nowadays, Behn’s plays regain their fames and paramount importance. Misty G. Anderson denotes the importance of The Rover in the twentieth century, “The Rover, Or, The Banish’t Cavaliers (1677), the biggest commercial success of Behn’s early career, is
also one of the most discussed Restoration plays in late-twentieth century criticism” (78). Furthermore, Behn is not only famous for her plays but also for her novels and poetry. Connor observes, “Though known primarily as a dramatist, Aphra Behn was also one of the earliest English novelists, writing her fiction between about 1669 and 1688” (68). Virginia Brackett also states, “By the mid-20th century, feminist scholars revived her works, and her poetry became widely anthologized” (112). She is also a translator and a spy. Despite her work as a spy, she did not receive her well-deserved reward. So, she returned from her voyage to London in 1667 heavily in debts. Therefore, she was arrested and put in prison in 1668.

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN

Sheridan, a man of fashion, was born in 1751 in Dublin, Ireland. His parents moved to England when he was seven. He was sent to Harrow School and remained there from 1762 to 1768. Thomas Moore writes about Sheridan’s time at Harrow School:

At Harrow, Richard was remarkable only as a very idle, careless, but, at the same time, engaging boy, who contrived to win the affection, and even admiration of the whole school, both masters and pupils, by the mere charm of his frank and genial manners, and by the occasional gleams of superior intellect, which broke through all the indolence and indifference of his character. (4-5)

Moore adds, “One of the most valuable acquisitions he derived from Harrow was that friendship, which lasted throughout his life, with Dr. Parr . . .” (6). Sheridan was unhappy at Harrow School for he did not have enough money, so he lived at Harrow as “. . . the son of a poor player” (Gibbs 24).
His father, Thomas Sheridan, was Irish and his mother Frances was of English ancestry. His mother, Frances Chamberlaine Sheridan (1724-1766) was the daughter of a Dublin archdeacon. Sheridan’s mother died in 1766 when Sheridan was fifteen, so he “… was so shocked by what had happened to his brave and clever mother” (Glasgow 44). His grandfather was a friend of Jonathan Swift. Sheridan’s father was an actor and a theatre manager. His mother was a playwright and a novelist. Laura Holloway opines, “… the Sheridans have been as rare a family as can be found in the literary biography of any country.” She continues in her description, “For three hundred years, and for eight generations in direct descent, they have been distinguished in authorship” (363). Thus, Sheridan inherited his literary creativity from his ancestors. Since the family was of a great literary background, Sheridan was a famous playwright, poet, theatre-manager and political orator for reform in Parliament who could not forget his Irishness but left Ireland and settled in England.

It is worth mentioning that Sheridan moved to Bath in 1771 at the age of 20 along with his father who moved to Bath for economic reasons. However, Bath was famous for pleasure in different forms, including beautiful ladies. Women and men met there from all over England. “All kinds of people, men and women . . . notable and notorieties, quacks, members of Parliament, rakes, duchesses, usurers, brokers, bishops and gossips” (Sherwin 65) had paid visits to Bath, and each one had his own purpose of the visit. Sheridan was also attracted to this fashionable city, so his plays have conveyed enough fashionable attitudes. In Bath, Sheridan made a close relationship with the family of Thomas Linley and had a good relationship with their daughter, Elizabeth Ann Linley.
Elizabeth was a sixteen-year old accomplished singer. She was being harassed by many young admirers. Mathews, for example, threatened to kill her and then kill himself if she did not marry him. Therefore, Elizabeth decided to commit suicide. Glasgow asserts, “She would say her prayers and commend her unquiet soul to God” (78). In due course, she was saved by Sheridan. Then they decided to elope to France in 1772 when Sheridan was 21. In France, they decided to get married, yet the parents of the new couple were very displeased with the idea of marriage since each family considered the other inappropriate. In turn, Elizabeth gained notoriety for her elopement. Alice Glasgow writes:

"The breath of scandal had never before blown across Elizabeth’s path; now she was surrounded by a miasma of the foulest and most lurid lies . . . Worst of all, the playwright Foote grasped the opportunity afforded by the moment and produced a comedy called The Maid of Bath. (71)"

When the couples came back, they got married officially. As a result of the marriage, Sheridan was challenged to a duel with Mathew in 1772, and in the second duel, he was seriously wounded. This story and his near death stimulated him to depict his adventures in his comedy, The Rivals. Miriam Gabriel and Paul Mueschke refer to the views of some critics who consider The Rivals as a reflection of “. . . Sheridan’s own experience. According to this view, Captain Absolute’s pursuit of Lydia Languish was suggested by Sheridan’s courtship of Miss Linley, and the duel scene by his own combats with Matthews” (237). After the duel, the couples were separated under the pressure of both families, yet they got married again on 13 April 1774. Sheridan’s father was in Ireland at the time of wedding and was angry to hear of his son’s marriage (Glasgow 105).
In 1775, his comedy *The Rivals* was produced at the Covent Garden Theatre, but its first performance was unsuccessful. The second revised version of the play was completely successful and was ranked as one of Britain's most famous comedies. Shortly after the success of *The Rivals*, Sheridan produced his comic opera, *The Duenna*. Along with this opera, he wrote *Patrick's Day* which was somewhat successful. In 1776, Sheridan became a partner at the Drury Lane Theatre with his father-in-law Thomas Linley and Dr. Ford. In the end, he became a sole owner of the theatre. In 1777, Sheridan wrote a wit-comedy, *The School for Scandal*, a masterpiece in English literature. This play was produced at the Drury Lane Theatre. However, the play lacks the unity which marks *The Rivals*, but it is still the best play written by Sheridan. In 1779, he wrote *The Critic*, one of the Wittiest farces in the language. In 1780, Sheridan entered Parliament as the ally of Charles James Fox, a prominent British Whig statesman. Hence, he became a powerful speaker on the side of opposition. He obtained a reputation as one of the best orators in Britain. Sheridan remained a devoted follower of Charles Fox until his death in 1806. In 1792, Sheridan's wife Elizabeth died at the age of thirty-eight years, and after three years of her death, exactly in 1795, Sheridan at the age of forty-four married Miss Ogle.

Sheridan had spent his life as a playwright and a politician, yet he was lucky enough to spend 32 years in Parliament. His major plays were all written when he was in his twenties and he "... could write high comedy with wit and brilliance ..." (Oscar Campbell xiv). His comedies are designed to make fun of the foibles of the society but without hurting anyone's feelings. Mark S. Auburn points out, "Indeed, in avoiding satire
of any definable external object, Sheridan the monetarily motivated playwright avoided offending anyone" (Sheridan's Comedies 58).

Furthermore, A. M. I. Fiskin observes that Sheridan is not a destructive satirist but a constructive dramatist. His satire is gentle but is everywhere in his plays. He satirises scandals, gossips, hypocrisy, sentimentalism and newspapers. Many different degrees of intensity have been used in his plays, yet they differ from one play to the other. His satire is strong as Swift's Gulliver's Travels or Jonson's Volpone, or sometimes even more subtle, as in Jane Austen's novels. Jane Austen satirises the sentimental heroine in her novels, and Sheridan satirises sentimental comedy in his plays especially in The Rivals (Fiskin 17). Leigh Hunt also points out, "Mr. Sheridan has been justly called 'a dramatic star of the first magnitude:' and, indeed, among the comic writers of the last century, he 'shines like Hesperus among the lesser lights'" (xiv). However, Sheridan’s reputation as a playwright is mainly based on his three well-known plays: The Rivals (1775), The School for Scandal (1777), and The Critic (1779). These three plays have their own significant and unique place in the theatre of eighteenth century. In their introduction to The Plays of Frances Sheridan, Robert Hogan and Jerry C. Beasley refer to Sheridan’s “consummate use of quirky, mangled language” in his three plays: “A chief glory of Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s three great comic plays is a consciousness of language that is comic by its divergence from a civilized norm” (24).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of this section is to shed a little light on the social, political and religious background of the periods of Behn and Sheridan with special reference to the
theatre of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Restoration comedy, the Sentimental comedy, and the nature of the plays of Behn and Sheridan.

Behn lived in the late seventeenth century and Sheridan in the late eighteenth century. In those two eras, Britain had been ruled by hereditary monarchs, so every kingdom had its own literary characteristics. Behn lived under the reign of four kings, but all her works were produced under the reigns of two kings, Charles II and James II. Although she was born nine years before the execution of Charles I in 1649 and lived during the time of Interregnum, her first play appeared in 1670 in the reign of Charles II.

Charles II (1630–1685), the King of Great Britain, Scotland, and Ireland, was the eldest son of the executed King, Charles I. He was restored to the throne in 1660 following the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658. The Restoration period (1660-1700) was famous for great drama which coincided with Charles II's restoration. Some writers think that Charles II ruled his country with a French mind, “A long residence till the age of thirty abroad, together with his French blood, had made him politically more of a foreigner than an Englishman” (Chisholm 913). Lopa Sanyal also mentions that “French drama, French dramatic period, and French romance . . .” affected English Restoration drama. English drama was almost similar in its nature to French drama. It was because “Charles II and his followers returned from Cavalier exile on the Continent dominated by French Dramatic standards which forthwith gave to English drama its primary stimulus and determined its content, form, and general character” (Sanyal 28). Indeed, English literature during the Restoration period was influenced by foreign literature especially by the French and Italian comedians who came and performed their plays on the stage of London. They greatly influenced “the direction of pantomime . . . the reams of the regular
drama. . . . Their repertoires of comedies and fares taught the English dramatists many a stage trick, stage character and stage situation” (Nicoll, *A History of English Drama* 146).

It is remarkable that literature in the Restoration period had been changed to suit the mood of the King and to satisfy the desires of the upper-class audiences. One of Charles II’s literary developments was the change of the style of drama. Charles II intended to distinguish himself from his predecessors even in the field of literature. He was actually able to create his own inner circle which was distinguished with a systematic frivolity, extravagance and a life of promiscuity. He had many mistresses. Hence, he bestowed them with titles, estates and fortunes. He dressed in French dress and often spoke French as if he never lived in England. This affected the fashionable society of London. Therefore, the lords and retinues imitated the King and lived in their world of bawdiness (Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra* 165-66).

In reality, this kind of life came as an inverse reaction to the rule and ethic of Puritans who were “English Protestants” (Queen 800). Puritans opposed the monarchy and supported, meanwhile, the Parliament. Marcel Danesi states, “In seventeenth-century England there existed a bitter conflict in social ideology between two forces – the Royalist “Cavaliers,” who were faithful to King Charles I, and the Puritans, who were followers of Oliver Cromwell (1599-166)” (187). The King and his court had indulged in a life of pleasures and licentiousness. Hence, the theatre was reopened and prepared mainly to entertain the King and his court. Rebecca D’Monte points out that “Charles II returned from exile abroad and established himself as the head of a court composed of aristocratic, libertine rakes who were devoted to hedonistic debauchery and sensual wantonness and wrote graphic accounts of their sexual conquests” (809). Derek Brewer
also writes about Samuel Pepys\(^3\) who "... was shocked by the corrupting lechery of Charles II, and attributed much of the further lechery and corruption in the court at large to Charles's gross neglect of his duties for sexual self-indulgence" (70). Hence, the practice of sexual freedom was widespread in Restoration society as a whole (Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra* 166). Because of this dissipated life, Charles II was in need of money, so he sought help from Louis XIV, the King of France. Albany de Grenier Fonblanque and William Andrews Holdsworth point out that "Charles II. was the first king of Great Britain who borrowed money on the national credit; this began in 1660" (57). The debt put more pressure on King Charles II. The citizens were being infuriated by his stray conduct. The resentment against him increased at the time when he dissolved Parliament in 1679, and when he announced his Catholic brother James II as his successor.

During his rule, Charles II faced many problems regarding his Catholic successor, James II. Therefore, Earl of Shaftesbury, "... a leader of the more radical wing of the Whig party" (Cox 66), strongly encountered the idea of crowning James II with the throne and suggested instead the King's illegitimate son, The Duke of Monmouth - William III. Because of this ideological conflict, a heated disagreement arose to the extent in that the country was about to enter into a new civil war, so Charles II imprisoned the Earl of Shaftesbury for treason. Behn's point of view towards the act of Shaftesbury was decisive in which she portrayed him as "a greedy lecher" (Amore xxxv). However, Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin refer to Charles II's religion, "To ensure the return of order, Charles II concealed his own Catholic

\(^3\) Samuel Pepys (1633 - 1703), a Member of Parliament and an English naval administrator under both Charles II and James II, is most famous for his *Diary.*
sympathies, reestablished the Anglican Church, and barred Protestant dissenters and Catholics from public life” (155). However, he surprised all by his conversion into Catholicism on his deathbed. Patrick Allitt asserts, “Charles II converted to Catholicism on his deathbed in 1685. His imprudent brother, James II, had converted earlier . . .” (20).

James II (1633-1701) was born in London and died in his exile in France. After the death of his brother Charles II in 1685, he became the King of England and Ireland, and ruled Scotland under the name ‘James VII.’ His rule continued from 1685 to 1688. James II became the King though there was a decree, called Test Act, issued by Parliament in 1673, which stated that the person who offered to fill a job in the state should be a Protestant. Gustave de Beaumont states, “This party [Tory] cannot conceive a Protestant society unless with a Protestant government, a Protestant king, a Protestant parliament, Protestant judges and functionaries, Protestant citizens and soldiers” (253). This law was, however, repealed in 1828. From the beginning, Whig Protestants stood against King James II’s inauguration. When he became the King, he could not improve his relation with the Parliament, so he had faced rebellious movement. The situation became worse when he had a boy. In fact, Englishmen were divided among themselves in that time. Some of them did not like the illegitimate heir of Charles to follow him to throne while others feared the legitimate heir of James to be the succeeding King. In this complex political situation, the political battle between Whigs and Tories, Behn “. . . found herself part of for a while, and the political intrigues dramatized on the Restoration stage were all part of a social and political pattern of events that pitted countryman against countryman” (Amore xxxv).
In addition, James II tried to infiltrate Roman Catholics into some high positions like army, church and his administration. All these actions infuriated his enemies who were mostly Protestant politicians. Therefore, they invited William III to invade England and remove James II from the throne. William III was the son-in-law and the nephew of James II. He landed an invasion army from the Netherlands and forced the King to step down from the throne and then to flee to France. James II attempted to get back the throne, but he was defeated in 1690 in the Battle of the Boyne. Then, William III and Mary, both Protestants, became the joint rulers.

When William III and Queen Mary inaugurated the throne, the trend in Europe was to separate politics from religion and to give complete freedom of expression to the people. Before this time, the men of Church were the sole authorised people who could give and decide freedom of expression; therefore, the writings were mostly in support of the rulers. Indeed, authors were influenced by religious and political conflicts, so they were divided into supporters and opponents.

Sheridan's three famous plays were produced in the reign of George III who was the King from 1760 to his death in 1820. George III's reign was marked by military conflicts with other countries like some parts of Europe, Africa and Asia. He defeated France in the Seven Years' War. He was also the King of North America, but he lost American colonies in the American Revolutionary War; and this war marked the birth of America. So, George III was the last King of America. Reign of George III showed immense developments in various fields of literature, scientific researches and inventions in many fields of human endeavor, which were the prominent achievements of the era.
Theatre either of Restoration drama or of Sentimental drama was not completely different from each other. Yet the eighteenth century theatre was a little developed in order to keep pace with the times. However, theatre might have changed according to the changes of the social, political and economic developments in addition to the development of the plays. As soon as there are new forms of plays, theatre would be changed to suit them. English theatre was famous in Elizabethan period, yet it was closed in 1642 and remained closed for eighteen years due to the English Civil War. It was re-opened when Charles II ascended the throne. The restoration of Charles II signalled the re-birth of drama after the prominent Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Charles II’s restoration brought the theatre back in fully modernised style. In the Restoration period, there were only two companies which received licenses to set up theatres. The King’s Company was established under the sponsorship of Charles II in 1660 and was managed by Thomas Killigrew. Then Killigrew opened a larger playhouse, the Theatre Royal, on Drury Lane in 1663. The second company was known as the Duke of York’s Company (Duke’s Company) which was based in Lisle’s Tennis Court in Lincoln’s Inn Field and later moved to Dorset Garden in 1671. This theatre was managed by William Davenant under the sponsorship of the Duke of York – James II. Thus, the two stages Drury Lane and Dorset Garden had the right to perform plays in the Restoration period.

Both theatres were designed according to Charles II’s wish. Charles admired Louis XIV’s theatre in France during his exile and wanted the two theatres in England to be similar to that in France. However, the building of the English theatre cost more money than the Elizabethan and the Jacobean theatres since Restoration theatre was built in a new shape.
Theatre in Restoration period had some new features when compared to the Elizabethan theatre. It had an indoor stage. The old platform stage was removed while the back and the front stages remained. The new theatre had proscenium arch, doors, balconies, an extended apron, perspective painting and backdrop scenery. The size of the auditorium was large and the price of the seats was more expensive because the audiences were from upper classes and were wealthy, but sometimes the middle class especially the merchant class attended the theatre. They sat in the dark and usually went to the theatre to be amused. They expected to watch sexual innuendo, fashion, wit, humour and elegance.

Performances on the stage had been banned by Puritans in the period of Interregnum. On the contrary, the theatre managers especially William Davenant was more influenced by the French theatre, as he allowed women to act and dance on the stage. Actresses were employed on the stage for the first time. King Charles II did not object but encourage women to act their roles. Some known actresses of the time were Mrs. Knepp, Mrs. Grey, Elizabeth Farley and Nell Gwyn (Ahluwalia 16). The appearance of women on the stage was regarded as a modern fad. Most spectators attended theatre to enjoy watching the alluring women. Actresses and their roles in the Restoration stage are mentioned in the *Encyclopaedia Perthensis; Or Universal Dictionary of the Arts, Sciences, Literature* as follows: “Actresses are not to have been introduced on the English stage after the restoration of Charles II. who has been charged with contributing to the corruption of our manners by importing this usage from abroad” (150). Before the Restoration period, young men were trained to perform the roles of women on the stage
and that was one reason for using masks. Wearing masks continued in Restoration period, particularly when the actresses had to play sexually seductive roles.

On the other hand, Drury Lane Theatre in the eighteenth-century was not completely different from the seventeenth century theatre. Yet, the eighteenth century theatre had some developments to suit the new era. The stage was similar to an Italian stage with an exception that the English Theatre had "apron"; where audiences could surround actors on three sides. Vera Mowry Roberts states, "This Drury Lane Theatre... was an intimate playhouse with three galleries opposite the stage, the lower two of which had been converted from boxes, and three rows of boxes along the sides" (266). The size and breadth of the theatre increased in eighteenth century. Spectators were around 500 in 1674. The theatre was developed in 1775 at the end of David Garrick's reign and held over 2000 spectators. Under Sheridan's reign exactly in 1794, it held around 3600 seats.

David Garrick decided in 1775 to sell his share of the Drury Lane. George Colman offered to buy it, but Carrick's partner, Willoughby Lacy, refused. Garrick offered it to Sheridan who became a partner at the Drury Lane Theatre by purchasing Garrick's share in 1776, but from where Sheridan got the money, no one can tell. Oscar Sherwin points out, "Much mystery is made of how a young author of twenty-five could raise the funds for so large a purchase. Sheridan's' contribution is £1300 in ready money, one twenty-seventh of Garrick's half share in the property, totally valued at £70,000" (123). Drury Lane Theatre was twice rebuilt during Sheridan's proprietorship, the first time was in 1791 and the second time was in 1809 after had caught a disastrous fire. The burning of the new Drury Lane Theatre in 1809 virtually ruined Sheridan financially. Therefore, he was arrested and imprisoned for debt in 1813. In this century, women were
doing all their roles on the stage. Although women started acting in seventeenth century, 
they had got more freedom in this era.

Comedy is more famous than tragedy in Restoration drama or in Sentimental 
drama. Hence, a brief description of the Restoration comedy and the Sentimental comedy 
allows us to distinguish between the two genres. In fact, this part intends to show 
Sheridan’s plays as those having the features of the Restoration comedy, but it is not 
intended to discuss in detail the similarities and contrasts between the Restoration 
comedy and the Sentimental comedy.

Restoration drama meant both tragedy and comedy and referred to the historical 
period in England which coincided with the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 to the early 
eighteenth century. This period had new forms of drama in which old forms were altered. 
Restoration drama covered many genres like heroic drama, tragedy, tragicomedy and 
comedy. However, Restoration drama is remembered today for the comedy. Stanley 
Hochman asserts, “The three chief genres of Restoration drama were opera, tragedy, and 
comedy, the latter being the type for which the period is best known . . . Restoration 
tragedy, although popular with its original audiences, is generally viewed today as the 
nadir of English drama” (1: 251).

Restoration Comedy or the Comedy of Manners are names applied to the same 
period. Nowadays, some critics prefer to call the period the ‘Restoration’ since it refers 
back to the historical period of Charles II’s restoration. The Comedy of Manners 
originated in France when Molière wrote Les Précieuses Ridicules. in 1659, a one-act 
farce. Molière wanted to correct the ‘social absurdities’ through the comedy. In England, 
William Wycherley’s The Country Wife (1675), George Etherege’s The Man of Mode
(1676) and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) are best examples of the Restoration comedy.

Restoration drama was of course different from that of the Elizabethan drama. Elizabethan playwrights created original characters. Restoration playwrights imitated the French style and Spanish plot but they were able to preserve their national character. Elizabethan drama was imaginative, so this type of drama was replaced by reason in Restoration drama. The change of taste in Restoration period affected even the language of the drama. Elizabethan drama was mostly in the form of poetry while the tragedies of the Restoration drama were in the form of blank verse and comedies were mostly in the form of prose. During Restoration period, the playwrights were mostly men and the plays dominated by male characters. Behn, the female dramatist, departed from this tradition to create strong independent female characters in her plays.

It has to be noted that the heroes of the Restoration comedies are libertine gentlemen. Female characters, meanwhile, are beautiful, lovely, attractive and loved by all men. Fathers and brothers are dull and stupid. The plays of the period convey the major themes – the themes of marriage and love. Marriage is shown sometimes without love. Love sometimes fails or is shown facing many obstacles. Some critics regard the plays of the time as somewhat immoral because of the way of marriage and infidelity. The plays are also characterised by much wit and humour. Furthermore, the plots mostly depict the behaviours of the upper class. Sometimes, however, they deal with the middle class too. Therefore, the characters of a play are of two types: the young aristocrats and the middle-class characters. The aristocrats are well educated and know the rules of the society, but they, to some extent, deviate from the correct path in order to satisfy their
personal desires. The middle-class characters are witty. They dream of fashion and seek
their rights which were plundered by the upper class. In general, the middle-class
characters play minor and vile roles in the plays. To be more pronounced, most plays
address mainly the upper class and neglect the lower classes. The plays are also about th
manners of the characters rather than about the punishment of the immoral character.
They show the negative manners of individuals but in the most funny and dramati
manner. Thus, the audiences left the theatre having laughed at themselves.

On the other hand, English Sentimental Drama means both tragedy and comed;
but Sentimental drama is more famous for comedy rather than for tragedy. Sentiment;
comedy established its manner as a reaction against the obscenity of the Comedy o
Manners. The Comedy of Manners adopted the obscenity as a reaction to the Puritanist
of the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell.

Richard Steele’s The Conscious Lovers (1722) is a typical example of Sentiment;
comedy. The play evokes excessive pity rather than engendering laughter and it does n
contain obscene scenes. However, the remarkable difference between the Restoratio
comedy and the Sentimental comedy is that the Restoration comedy engenders hilario
laughter whereas Sentimental comedy thrills the feelings. In other words, Sentiment;
comedy is to make audience shed tears and not to entertain them by making them laug
Heroes often triumph over the moral trials but they are not humiliated. Audiences ma
smile at some silly tricks of life, but they do not make their laughter audible as in th
Restoration comedy. In the Sentimental comedy, characters emphasise pity and stron
moral tone, and they uphold virtue and avoid vices. The plot rises and falls to su
magnanimous men. The theme is circled around ‘love-making’; it is sometimes about th
heroine who is loved by most men, and every man tries his best to marry her. In his article “Sentimental Comedy in the Eighteenth Century,” Frederick T. Wood states that a woman in the Sentimental comedy is besieged by many suitors “... who all desire her for different reasons. One wants her for her beauty, another for her money, and a third for her reputed wit; but she finally bestows herself on him whose only desire is her virtue” (281).

Sentimental comedy sheds light upon the private lives of people and exhibits the relationship between a wife and a husband, between parents and children, and among friends, but it does not expose the vices of those relationships. In the Sentimental comedy, the wrongdoings of some characters are fairly treated, and audiences are given moral lessons. However, the difference between the Sentimental comedy and the Comedy of Manners is well explained by Oliver Goldsmith in his article “A Comparison between Sentimental and Laughing Comedy.” Oliver Goldsmith, for instance, writes:

... a new species of dramatic composition has been introduced under the name of sentimental comedy, in which the virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed; and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the piece ... In these plays almost all the characters are good, and exceedingly generous; they are lavish enough of their tin money on the stage; and though they want humor, have abundance of sentiment and feeling. (524)

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Sentimental comedy became boring; meanwhile, the manner of the Comedy of Manners was undesirable for its obscenity. To resolve this issue, Sheridan (1751-1816) and Goldsmith (1728-74) revived the Comedy of Manners. Both dramatists returned to the tradition of the Comedy of
Manners but removed obscenity from their plays. In other words, the Comedy of Manners was developed in a way to suit the eighteenth century theatre and audiences. Both Sheridan and Goldsmith longed for the previous literary values of the Restoration; however, Sheridan was more influenced by Restoration style, and Goldsmith was more influenced by Shakespeare’s style.

After a succinct discussion of the three categories: the political and the social development, the development of the theatre, and the characteristics of the Restoration comedy and the Sentimental comedy, it is now essential to have a glimpse on the nature of the plays of Behn and Sheridan. The nature of Behn’s plays is similar to the nature of Restoration drama. However, her plays have their special characteristics in which they give more importance to the issues of women. In particular, her plays mainly revolve around forced marriage, female freedom, and sexual desire. Mary Baine Campbell opines that “Restoration culture was cynical, degraded, and fearful. But it allowed Aphra Behn to laugh at it, get famous in it and participate in it. After her death, English readers grew ashamed of her and of her wanton energy” (507).

Behn’s plays are categorised as intrigue drama. The comedy of intrigue was borrowed from Spanish drama. Intrigue drama began with the exile of Charles II and many of his followers who were known as cavaliers and royalists. They emigrated in “...series of overlapping waves, with major surges and fluctuating currents, lasting for almost twenty years” (Geoffrey Smith 4). They fled the country because of the civil war which began in 1649 at the time of Charles I’s execution and ended in 1660 at the time of Charles II’s restoration. This period was known as Interregnum and was ruled by Oliver Cromwell (1599 – 1658). Among the exiles were many famous literary figures like the
two famous theatrical managers of the two theatres in the era of Charles II, William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew.

Charles II influenced the drama to be in a different style from the Elizabethan drama. Thus, the Restoration drama was famous for the comedy of manners and the intrigue drama. Allardyce Nicoll avers, “The popularity of the intrigue style in the earlier years of the period must have been influenced considerably by the tastes of Charles” (A History of Restoration Drama 207). The first famous intrigue play was Samuel Tuke's The Adventures of Five Hours, written in 1663. Thomas D’Urfey was also famous for his comedy of intrigue. In volume I of McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama: An International Reference Work in 5 Volumes, Stanley Hochman states, “Mrs. Aphra Behn (1640-1689) and Thomas D’Urfey (1653-1723) were among the successful practitioners of comedy of intrigue” (251). William Wycherly’s The Country Wife and Behn’s The Rover are considered to be the models of the Restoration comedy but with a slight difference that The Country Wife is wholly a comedy of manners while The Rover tends to be more in the style of intrigue comedy. Both plays hold the same features of the Restoration comedy. It is worth mentioning that the comedy of intrigue fades away in accordance with the comedy of manners. Allardyce Nicoll notes, “These comedies of intrigue present no features differently from the elements already noted in the type during preceding years” (A History of English Drama 165). Nicoll adds, “Intrigue comedy had a great influence on the theatre of the Restoration: intrigue plays a great part in the structure of the comedy of manners ...” (A History of English Drama 225).

Today, Behn’s The Rover is perhaps the best known of all intrigue dramas. Behn popularised the intrigue drama and played a huge role in developing this style of comedy.
However, the obvious difference between the comedy of manners and intrigue drama is that the scenes of the comedies of manners are set in London. The scenes of the intrigue plays are set in foreign locations especially those places which were visited by exiled cavaliers between 1642 and 1660, particularly, France, Spain and Italy. However, both comedy of manners and intrigue drama give a lively picture of British city life during the time of Charles I, the father, and Charles II, the son.

*The Rover* or *The Banished Cavaliers* is a popular Restoration comedy. It appeared on stage in 1677 and was acted for long run that Behn had earned fair income from this play. King Charles II attended a private rehearsal of the play. The presence of the King to watch the play was an indication to its success. Actually, *The Rover* is regarded as the best play written by Behn. Behn presents the play in two dramatic definitions of women: whores act like respectable women and respectable women act like whores; nevertheless, arranged marriage, love, rape and female subject are significant themes in this play. However, the importance of the play can be seen in Elin Diamond’s viewpoint. Diamond writes, “Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* not only thematizes the marketing of women in marriage and prostitution, it ‘demonstrates,’ in its gestic moments, the ideological contradictions of the apparatus Behn inherited and the society for which she wrote” (“Gestus and Signature” 519). In his turn, David Sullivan argues that the play indicates Behn’s feminism and her dealing with the theme of “politics of sexual desire”: “. . . this play is perhaps Behn’s most feminist treatment of the will, it is just one example among many where the politics of sexual desire surfaces as an important theme” (336).

The episode at the end of *The Rover* seems to be tragic especially when Angellica “. . . offers to shoot Willmore, she intrudes an incongruous element of tragedy into an
otherwise light-hearted comedy” (Sullivan 344). Indeed, it comes to mind that *The Rover* is a tragicomedy for its fighting, fencing, and bleeding. It seems as if it contains many tragic issues, but they are adjusted by heavy comic incidents. This technique is well used by Behn. She is able to overwhelm the tragic issues or incidents by turning them into comedy in an appropriate time. For instance, the play includes duels and hand quarrels, but these issues turn to be comical events. To shed more light in this issue, it is possible to consider the fight between English people and Spaniards. Antonio and the other Spaniards fight Willmore in Angellica’s house. The other English men Belvile, Frederick and Blunt join Willmore in his fight and push the Spaniards out, but Willmore returns with a bloody shirt. In spite of the blood, the play remains a comedy.

Dramatically, there are many arguments regarding the source of *The Rover*, whatever they are, the play is actually based on Thomas Killigrew’s *Thamoso*. In her Postscript to *The Rover*, Behn confesses that she might

have stolen some hints from it . . . but I, vainly proud of my judgment, hang out the sign of Angellica (the only stolen object) to give notice where a great part of the wit dwelt. . . . I will only say the plot and business (not to boast on’t) is my own; as for the words and characters, I leave the reader to judge and compare ’em with *Thamoso*. . . . (lines 6-18)

Brian C. Lockey also writes, “Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1677) drew heavily from an earlier source, Thomas Killigrew’s *Thamoso* (1664), a closet drama supposedly based on Killigrew’s life as a royalist exile when he made a brief visit to Madrid” (161). In turn, Shyamala A. Narayan affirms that the source of *The Rover* is *Thamoso*, however, the play has its own characteristics, “Behn’s play is shorter, and more dramatic and actable”
(129). In fact, Behn is able to use her own technique and style in composing The Rover. A profound analysis of Thomaso and The Rover shows that The Rover is Behn's own flavour. Montague Summers, for example, states that Behn has her own play because she is "Correcting, pruning, augmenting, enlivening, rewriting, she may indeed . . . be well said to have clothed dry bones with flesh, and to have given her creation a witty and supple tongue" (The Works of Aphra Behn n. pag). However, The Rover is a stereotypical impression of Behn. It is true that there are similarities between the two plays, but each play has its own different style and technique either in plots, episodes, action, characters, pun, or in the form of the play. Jane Spencer clarifies that "Thomaso is two-part, and ten-act drama"; nevertheless, Behn’s “reshaping of his work, though, makes The Rover very much her own play” (Introduction xiii). In her article, “Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn’s The Rover,” Elin Diamond agrees with Behn’s self-acquittal in her Postscript to The Rover when she believes that she is charged of plagiarism because she is a woman (536).

Even though there were many dramatists who had based their plays on other sources, they were not accused of being plagiarists. For example, Shakespeare’s play The Merchant of Venice is a play based on three sources. The chief source is a tale in an Italian collection which is entitled Il Pecorone. The second source is Gesta Romanorum, a medieval collection of stories translated by Richard Robinson and published in 1577. The third source is The Jew, and this name was inspired by Gosson in his book Schoole of Abuse (1579). John Dryden’s All for Love is also considered to be an imitation of Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra. Sheridan is also regarded as a copyist, yet he does not receive huge criticism as Behn. The field of literature has many examples where
dramatists rely on other sources. Regarding this topic, Kate Aughterson lists some of the contradictions:

Although on occasion she was accused of plagiarism by her critics, such borrowing was common practice amongst dramatists of the period, and indeed, of the earlier seventeenth century. None of Shakespeare's plays was 'original': he always used other sources, either a combination of earlier plays and histories, or prose romances. Equally, Dryden, Shadwell and other Restoration writers adapted many Jacobean plays for the stage and the taste of Restoration London. (216)

However, these dramatists are not criticised simply because they are male dramatists, but Behn is bombarded with huge criticism. The male critics have nothing to do except criticising the female authors and praise the male authors at the same time. Behn had reported the attack of the critics in her letter to her friend and actress Emily Price, who was working at the Duke's Theatre from 1676 to 1682 and was playing secondary parts. In her defence to the charge of plagiarism especially on her play Abdelazer, Behn wrote:

My dear [Price], in your last [letter] you inform'd me that the World treated me as a Plagiary, and, I must confess, not with injustice: But that Mr. Otway shou'd say, my sex wou'd not prevent my being pull'd to Pieces by the Criticks, is something odd, since whatever Mr. Otway now declares, he may very well remember when last I saw him, I receiv'd more than ordinary Encomiums on my Abdelazer. But everyone knows Mr. Otway's good nature, which will not permit him to shock any one of our sex to their faces. But let that pass: For being impeach'd of murdering my
Moor, I am thankful, since, when I shall let the World know, whenever I take the Pains next to appear in Print, of the mighty Theft I have been guilty of. (Brown, *Familiar Letters of Love* 31-32)

Nowadays, many contemporary critics defend Behn, exonerate her from all the unfounded allegations and eulogise her as a unique professional female dramatist of the seventeenth century.

*The Forced Marriage* or *The Jealous Bridegroom* was Behn’s first play. It was produced by the Duke's Company on 20 September 1670 and was well received by audience, so its success encouraged Behn to write her other plays. The play is an interesting romantic tragicomedy in spite of its redundancy. It is overloaded with dull and confusing exposition, endless characters, and many unnecessary activities. One of its redundancies is the story of the ghost which is actually absurd and unsuccessful. In short, the play is regarded as Behn’s weakest play though it has an important theme and an interesting interaction. Janet Todd writes about the play:

The story of *The Forc'd Marriage* was not complicated but, like other dramas of the time, it had multiple pairings. There were mistakes and night encounters but little intrigue in the play, which was rather lacking in tension. Yet the sex struggle was there in embryo and a shrewd reader might have discerned Behn’s future preoccupation. *(The Secret Life* 139)

*The Forced Marriage* is a tragicomedy discussing social affair of a French kingdom while *Abdelazer* is a pure tragedy discussing revenge and ambition of a Spanish kingdom. Behn preferred to write her first play about the King of France, the country where Charles II had sought refuge in. The main theme of this play is clearly
comprehensible from the title; it is about the forced marriage and about, however, the subjugation of women.

Abdelazer or The Moor’s Revenge is Behn’s only tragedy. It was performed in 1676 at the Duke’s Company, Dorset Garden. To study Behn’s only tragedy is an opportunity to know more about Behn’s attitudinal universe. The only tragedy is “... due to the fact that Behn’s works are mostly comedies, she has entered the canon as a comedy writer, with her fame resting squarely on the remarkable dramatic achievement of The Rover” (Cuder-Dominguez 2). Anyhow, Behn presents her play Abdelazer in the same manner of the tragedies of her contemporary dramatists like Dryden’s The Conquest of Granada, Nathaniel Lee’s Nero and Elkanah Settle’s Empress of Morocco (Todd, The Secret Life 185).

Abdelazer in general discusses the role of Abdelazer who feels that he has been unjustly deprived of his right. He feels that he deserves more than what he receives from the Spanish King. Therefore, he has committed many crimes under the pretext of searching for his identity. However, the play has been historically seen as an imitation of Lust’s Dominion, or The Lascivious Queen, an English Renaissance tragedy, written probably by Christopher Marlowe. Melinda Alliker Rabb affirms, “Behn’s Abdelazer draws for its source on an earlier play called Lust’s Dominion or, the Lascivious Queen: A Tragedy . . .” (142). In fact, Behn has her own significant play which is different from Lust’s Dominion in many aspects either in language, style, incidents or in the number of characters. Rabb writes about Behn’s some alterations, “... the dialogue is improved; the characters . . . [are] more credible. But the most pertinent change is the representation of the Queen: she is still ‘lascivious,’ but her sexuality is frustrated rather than grotesquely
satisfied” (143). In fact, the purpose of this study is not to discuss the differences between
the two plays but to study the attitudinal universe of Behn in the light of the content of
Abdelazer and her other two plays.

To move to Sheridan’s plays, perhaps it might be said rightly that Sheridan had
lived in the time where Sentimental drama was prominent, yet his plays are more related
to the style of Restoration drama. His plays are marked by wit, repartee and humorous
scenes. In his introduction to Chief Plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan, Oscar James
Campbell states that the Sentimental comedy during Sheridan’s day “... was a species of
drama almost devoid of laughter. It was named comedy only because it had a so-called
happy ending” (v). Meanwhile, Campbell acclaims Sheridan’s comedy and observes that
“Sheridan was well fitted to give the English drama of his time the thing it most needed –
a commanding tradition of pure comedy” (xxiii). Sheridan’s plays were considered to be
in the tradition of British comedy from William Wycherley (1640-1715) to Oscar Wilde
(1854-1900). However, Sheridan’s plays are mostly categorised as the comedies of
manners. A. M. I. Fiskin states that, “Sheridan is generally treated as a dramatist in revolt
against the dominant sentimental comedy of his day, sometimes called weeping comedy.
From this point of view, his comedic art is a return to the comedy of manners” (9).
Sheridan in his three plays dislikes Sentimental comedy and attacks it everywhere in his
plays; for example, he praises the old comedy and attacks the new one in the second
prologue of The Rivals. As Behn, Sheridan is accused of committing plagiarism, yet the
criticism on him is not in the same intensity to that of Behn.4

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4 Sheridan’s plagiarism has been discussed in Chapter II under the subtitle of ‘Politics.’
Sheridan wrote his first play *The Rivals* when he was twenty-three years old. Before producing *The Rivals* on the stage in 1775, he wrote to his father-in-law, telling him about his first dramatic work and when the play would be staged.

There will be a Comedy of mine in rehearsal at Covent-Garden within a few days. . . . Mr. Harris's (the manager's) . . . and some of his friends also who have heard it, assure me in the most flattering terms that there is not a doubt of its success. It will be very well played, and Harris tells me that the least shilling I shall get (if it succeeds) will be six hundred pounds. (Moore 122-23)

In this letter, Sheridan was sure of the success of his first play. Unfortunately, the play failed at its first opening at Covent Garden on January 17, 1775. The reason of its failure was that the play was dense with unnecessary events and acted by awkward actors. Joyce Moss and Lorraine Valestuk state, “In Sheridan’s first version of *The Rivals*, his Irish character, Sir Lucius, was a coarser, less attractive man, and more mercenary and bloodthirsty. The opening-night audience reacted negatively, many feeling this portrayal to be a slur on the Irish” (372). In his article, “‘Future Retrospection’: Rereading Sheridan’s Reviewers,” Richard C. Taylor states another reason behind the failure of the play. He believes that “. . . the evidence of critical response suggests that audiences and reviewers were unprepared for a new play about newness” (57). Eleven days later, the play opened again. Under the observations of the critics and audiences, Sheridan rewrote the play to be suitable for the stage. He shortened the running time of the play to be about three hours and a quarter. Substantially, the role of O'Trigger was acted by a new actor Lawrence Clinch. In its second performance, the play succeeded and “When the curtain
descended the audience was wild with delight. *The Rivals* was a sensation; its author was a success” (Glasgow 114). So, it had run on the stage of fifteen consecutive days which did not happen with the other plays of the contemporary dramatists.

*The Rivals* is regarded by many as one of the finest examples of comedy in the history of the theatre. In other words, it is praised as a masterpiece of comic style which can continue to interest the modern audiences. David Bowman in his article “Sheridan’s Comedy of Rhetoric” states, “*The Rivals* has left English comedy an unusually large number of fine characters. A great part of their characterization comes from the comparative brilliance or ineptness of their rhetoric” (31). In his turn, Thomas Moore illustrates some features of *The Rivals* “. . . from the liveliness of its plot, the variety and whimsicality of its characters, and the exquisite humor of its dialogue, is one of the most amusing in the whole range of the drama.” Moore believes that even if Sheridan has only this play, it “. . . would have placed Sheridan in the first rank of comic writers” (144). However, “Sheridan’s *The Rivals* is a comedy of manners” (Lowe 156) and is praised as a masterpiece of comic style. David Thomas points out that *The Rivals* depicts Sheridan’s own life, “In *The Rivals*, Sheridan took the living flesh of his own thoughts, experiences and disappointments, and transformed them into a high comedy of manners . . .” (5). In contrast, some critics just like Mark S. Auburn find no seriousness in the play. Auburn points out, “The striking success of *The Rivals* is somewhat puzzling. Clearly the comedy lacks real moral seriousness or high aesthetic design . . .” (“The Pleasures of Sheridan” 256).

Further, Sheridan’s *The School for Scandal* is “. . . the finest example in the eighteenth century of the comedy of manners” (Tatlock 700). In fact, many critics
categorise the play as a comedy of manners, "Sheridan's *School for Scandal* is exactly such a work as best illustrates what a true comedy of manners or society should be" (*The Ladies' companion, and Monthly Magazine* 104). Nettleton also says, "*The School for Scandal* marks the height of the development of the comedy of manners" (306). He adds, "*The School for Scandal* is not merely the redemption of the artificial comedy of the Restoration from its grossness, but the triumph of the comedy of manners over sentimental comedy" (306). Due to its importance, it has been translated into many languages (Moore 261). Indeed, Sheridan reached the height of his dramatic fame in May, 1777 at the time of producing *The School for Scandal*. The play remarks both Sheridan's brilliant career and the prime time of his theatrical success. It is regarded as the most brilliant comedy which had been given to the world in eighteenth century. The play was not only famous at the time of its production, but it would be famous for many generations to come. It is Sheridan's masterpiece. It has strong satires on the manners of the individuals especially on scandal-mongering and hypocrisy.

The play satirises the behaviour and customs of upper classes through witty dialogue and an intricate plot. Certainly, the emergence of *The School for Scandal* on the stage astonished the spectators for its new sense of dramaturgy and its dialogue, which is chiefly interesting. Moore praises the dialogue and the personage of the play, "... the dialogue, from beginning to end, is a continued sparkling of polish and point: and the whole of the Dramatis Personae might be comprised under one common designation of Wits" (247). Moreover, Sheridan has boundless energy and enthusiasm to write drama in his own style which is characterised by wit, humour and wordplay. In addition to his beautiful lines, he is able to give every character a shining side. Percy Fitzgerald
observes, “Sheridan was gifted with a sort of mental alchemy, which gave all the characters of the drama on which he exercised its power a golden hue” (126). For example, Lady Sneerwell who is the leader of the school for scandal has the ability to use appropriate puns to attract audience or to attack someone including her friends like Joseph. She is also intelligent enough to keep many characters under her control and to direct them to the point she likes, yet her intelligence is useless in the eyes of the audience because she uses it to destroy and not to build, to separate families and not to join them, and to spread evil and not to spread goodness.

Diametrically speaking, the play is small in size, but it is surely rich in content. It has serious plot, amazing dialogue, extraordinary characters, prevailing and manifest wit and humour. Though Sheridan has many brilliant literary achievements, he has some shortcomings at the same time. His elaborations of the episodes in detail, his flat characters and the ambiguity of emotions of the characters are some shortcomings. The characters and the plots are sometimes deviated from their targets because they start to deal with something then change to something else. Thomas Moore mentions some defects of The School for Scandal in which the play consists of “... amalgamation of two distinct plots...” and the “... dialogue is overloaded ...” (246-47).

The Critic, or A Tragedy Rehearsed was staged at Drury Lane Theatre in 1779. The Critic received little impression at its first production, and London press had not paid much attention to the play as they did with The School for Scandal and The Rivals. Nowadays, The Critic regains its importance because of its amusing burlesque, wit and satire. It is the last famous satirical play written by Sheridan. Brander Matthews states, “The ‘Critic’ remains really Sheridan’s latest contribution to the stage” (40). Sheridan’s
dramatic technique stands unique. The form of his two plays, *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* are relatively similar in style and in the number of acts while *The Critic* is somewhat different. It has only three acts. Act I and II consist each of two scenes while Act III has only one scene. Sheridan told his friend Michal Kelly “that he valued the first act [of *The Critic*] more than any thing he ever wrote” (Kelly, *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly* 322). In general, the play is dense with satire and allusion especially the first act which is admired by critics. The second and third acts are somewhat tedious. The act division of the play seems abnormal if it is compared to the method of writing dramas during the time of Sheridan. The normal division of a play would have five acts. However, some critics acknowledge that Sheridan wrote *The Critic* as an outlet to say all what he had faced during his works as either a dramatist or a manager, of Drury Lane Theatre.

A wise comparison between Sheridan and the main characters of his three plays gives an idea that Sheridan reflects himself in their personalities. Sheridan is like Mr. Dangle in his criticism. He is like Absolute in defending the honour of his lover. Absolute is about to fight two duels in order to defend his honour and love with Lydia and Sheridan has indulged in two duel fights with Mathew in order to defend Elizabeth Linley’s honour. Sheridan may be regarded as Charles for his extravagance and as Joseph for being in suspected relation with other women especially with the luminary Mrs. Crewe.

To conclude, this chapter introduces briefly some important topics which are meant to facilitate the discussion of the themes and issues that have been analysed in the next six chapters.