Chapter II
POLITICS AND RELIGION

This chapter intends to investigate two thematic paradigms: politics and religion. These two themes, which the researcher has questioned and, simultaneously, scrutinised, have formed the mainstay of the research. Behn and Sheridan use the theme of politics to discuss and criticise such social behaviours. They include the theme of religion in order to spread and glorify religion or to reveal its negative impact on the society. In short, Behn and Sheridan have depicted the conflict that resulted under these themes as real social involvements of their societies. However, these themes have to be examined from a literary perspective. Franco Tonelli denotes some important issues that serve the power of any community. He states:

Sexual, religious and political restrictions are the actual mechanisms of power as well as the condition of its visibility. . . . To speak of power is to speak of the strategies by which it makes itself visible, and of the means by which it stages itself for its captive audience. (39)

Politics and religion have different fluctuations from one play to the other. Regardless of their viability and intensity, the researcher illustrates two examples of each one of these themes; the first example deals with Behn’s plays and the other example deals with Sheridan’s plays.

POLITICS

Generally, the plays of Behn and Sheridan do not only deal with political issues but have also dealt more broadly with different kinds of social and economic issues.
Many of these political issues are discussed throughout the thesis, but the focus in this chapter, particularly under the politics section, is on two aspects of politics: to interpret Willmore, Behn’s desirable character, who bears a resemblance to Charles II, and to examine Sheridan’s point of view towards politics and theatrical politics.

Drama is a very important literary genre whose functionality in society is to depict what is going on in that society. Since politics is a renewed and active issue, it takes space in the events of the drama. It does not mean that politics affects the dramaturgy; however, it gives it extra flavour. So, all actions in the play whether they are political or social are just illustrations to what are really going on in the society at best. In fact, politics is a major part of the social conflicts in society, so it is difficult to separate politics from drama especially in Restoration drama. Naomi Jacobs states, “. . . politics and sex were inextricably intertwined in the metaphors of Restoration literature . . .” (397).

The dramatist whose play discusses politics may include it with the hope of changing the affairs of state in his ailing society, or, on the other hand, to praise the political system of the society. Behn and Sheridan are unusual dramatists in English literature who have contributed immensely to the flourishing of literature that touches even the brains of the political thinkers. They feel that the ordinary people are suffering in all corners of society and drama has to bring it out. The benefit of including politics in drama is to enable audiences to have a political understanding of what is going on around them. Dramatists know well how to change people by discussing political issues in drama. This way is more effective than the gun of a fighter. They know also that the dramatist’s only missile is the pen and they can do much with it.
It is unreasonable to say that politics has deformed drama. Drama is assumed as a reflection of society. Thereby, to gather dramatic actions with political issues in one play is completely mesmeric. Politics in drama does not mean only to depict the political process regarding government and kingdom, but this term is also a reference to rights and freedom of individuals. In other words, all the problems of any society caused by corruption of the political elite are treated under politics.

Behn dedicated herself as a self-styled defender of women's rights. Therefore, she mainly focused on the politics that would concern women and their rights in marriage, sex, inheritance, etc. She also incited women to face the domination of their parents. Jacqueline Pearson contends, “She [Behn] is unusual in her period for using the word 'Politicks' to mean not only Whig and Tory, but more broadly any kind of relationship based on a struggle for power, which for Behn meant almost any relationship” (150-151). Mary Ann O’Donnell also writes about Behn’s “major accomplishment”:

She wrote about what concerned her politics, sexual freedom, imbalances in the power structure. She spoke to her late seventeenth-century audiences with power and vigour in a voice no less powerful and vigorous than she addresses us with today. (“Aphra Behn” 11)

The political issues in Behn’s plays are mainly used to defend women’s rights. Behn also praises the Stuart monarchy and mocks the politics of Whigs in her plays. Melinda Zook points out, “Behn’s plays are very good at satirizing, ridiculing, and railing against the politics of the opposition; they are less useful at establishing Behn’s political aesthetics” (“The Political Poetry” 48). Nowadays, Behn’s dramatic politics are praised by many critics. Marilyn L. Williamson asserts, “In our time commentary on Behn’s poetry and
drama is beginning to appreciate how thoroughly political much of her work is. . . . Continued historical study of Behn’s writing will doubtless reveal more ways in which it is implicated in the public life of her time” (282).

During the time of Behn and Sheridan, there were only two main political parties: Tory and Whig. Yet Gustave de Beaumont notes that there was no big difference between them, “Tories, Conservatives, Whigs, are only different shades of the aristocracy, and the same thing may almost be said of the radicals themselves” (251). Douglas Coombs also points out other differences between Tory and Whig, “As an explanation of Dutch prosperity the Whig might point to the ‘frugality’ and ‘parsimony’ of the inhabitants, where the Tory would speak of their ‘avarice’ and ‘greed’” (14). Before the Restoration, England was suffering from civil war between the Cavaliers (Royalists) and Parliamentarians (Roundheads). Whig and Tory “. . . were formed in the reign of Charles I. The king’s friends were called cavaliers, which name was afterwards changed into that of Tories. Those of the parliament, who were then called roundheads, afterwards received the appellation of Whigs” (Urban 483). In the case of the political and sexual ideologies, Marilyn L. Williamson states that “Cavaliers might be politically conservative and sexually radical, and dissenters might be politically Williamite and sexually conservative” (135). However, cavaliers are Behn’s desired characters and her heroes in her plays.

As a result of the political and religious conflicts from the time of the execution of James I in 1649 until 1660, the young people in the late seventeenth century were caught up in constant conflict and suffered from its devastating impacts. In the religious field, the people were largely divided into Catholics and Protestants, and in the political field,
they were divided into Tories and Whigs. Therefore, they were spiritually and politically damaged. Janet Todd refers to the report of Edward Hyde which was about the negative consequences resulting from that conflict:

Later, in the Restoration, Edward Hyde, Charles II’s Lord Chancellor, looked back at the generation of young people born during the troubled years and noted their spiritual damage: ‘All Relations were confounded by the several Sects in Religion, which discountenanced all Forms of Reverence and Respect, as Reliques and Marks of Superstition. . .’ (The Secret Life 19)

Behn was also born in 1640 on the verge of great political, social and economic changes that had been taking place. So, she was affected by the events. She was hostile to what she saw as a new world of opportunistic politicians and religious fanatics. However, Behn had her own interpretation of what was going on around her. To save the country and to be out of indulging in the same conflict again, she completely supported Charles II. She believed that King Charles II had the right to rule because he was the legitimate son of the executed King Charles I. Melinda Zook states, “Aphra Behn was an equally firm supporter of England’s traditional order. . . Although neither Behn nor Astell⁵ were truly members of an elite class, they placed a high value on the old social hierarchy” (“Religious Nonconformity” 105).

In spite of the various developments and changes that had taken place during the eighteenth century, the government was still divided into two main political parties – Whigs and Tories. Each party had its own supporters, media, activities and celebration. Tories were able to have the upper hand on the Church. They were even able to control

⁵Mary Astell (1666 - 1731) is considered as the first English feminist writer.
one of the most famous universities – Oxford University. On the other hand, Whigs were able to control the Cambridge University from about the late 1720s. Whigs mostly worked as businessmen, naval officers, civil servants and financiers, and they were more sympathetic to religious minorities (Olsen 1-2).

Tories believed that the King would govern by divine right. Behn was in this party, so she attacked parliamentary Whigs in her writings including her poetry. Janet Todd points out:

As a jobbing poet, Behn appeared both as a staunch Tory and as a political opportunist swaying with her times; consequently, the subjects of most interest today – gender, race, and class – were of concern to her, as well, but were usually inflected according to political need. (The Critical Fortunes of Aphra Behn 112-13)

Susan Owen provides clarification about Behn’s political party, “Aphra Behn was a staunch Tory at the time when Toryism first developed. . . . As the political balance shifted to and fro, many dramatists shifted their allegiance with it; but Behn was a more fervent Tory than the rest” (“Behn’s Dramatic Response” 68). Owen further asserts that Behn was a Tory but was no ‘fanatic,’ “. . . though Behn was a fervent Tory all her life, she was no fanatic and should not be seen simply as a Tory ideologue. She was a consummate professional who always had an eye for what might be ‘good box office’” (“Behn’s Dramatic” 79). Undeniably, Behn stood firm against the roles of the Whigs. She believed that Whigs were conspiring against the King. Melinda Zook illustrates:

For Behn’s audience the joiner’s mishmash of Whig slogans was not only amusing, it firmly linked the Roundheads and Puritans of the 1650s with
Whigs and Dissenters of the 1680s. The Whigs of the Exclusion Crisis were simply, ‘playing the old game over.’” (“Religious Nonconformity” 105-06)

Melinda Zook also refers to the political orientation of Behn’s Tories, “Behn’s Cavaliers and Tories hate dissimulation, hypocrisy, and falseness. . . . Behn’s aristocratic heroes love mirth, wit, generosity, and maintain the old ethos of chivalry and unwavering loyalty to the monarchy” (“Religious Nonconformity” 107).

Whether Behn was a Catholic or a Protestant, she completely remained loyal to the monarchy. For example, she has discussed the topic of her day, the Popish Plot, in her play *The Feigned Courtesan* (1679). The Popish Plot was fabricated by Titus Oates in the time of unrest between 1678 and 1681. Oates assumed that there was a Catholic conspiracy to kill Charles II. This false story led to the execution of around 15 men. Accordingly, from 1679 to 1682, Behn was recognised as an active political dramatist. She wrote many plays in support of kingship. Kate Aughterson states, “She wrote nine plays in three years, all of which to a greater or lesser extent support authoritarian monarchy and configure parliamentary democracy as the threat of mob rule” (210). In her introduction to *Aphra Behn Studies*, Janet Todd writes:

*The Revenge* and *The Feign'd Curtizans*, staged early in the Crisis, have a large component of royalist satire of Whigs and their manic fear of popery; in them the satire coexists with Behn’s brand of feminism which tends to destabilize male assumptions and stereotypes of women. (5)

Ros Ballaster reveals Behn’s view towards the Popish Plot:
Behn approaches here the more explicit analogy between the Civil War years and those of the Popish Plot that she makes in her 1681 comedy *The Roundheads* in which the Popish Plot is presented as a creation of Whig Protestants in order to discredit James, Duke of York and lay the ground for a repetition of the Civil War overthrowal of the Stuart monarchy. Focusing on a supposed Catholic threat deflects attention from and enables the resurgence of republican revolution. (61)

The political nature of Behn’s plays during the Exclusion Crisis and the Popish Plot reveals how Behn copes with the events of the day and how she changes the components of her plays according to political needs. During the Exclusion Crisis, the conflict between Catholics and Protestants was at its height. Each Church claimed that its religious teachings were the only true ones and the others were sacrilegious. When the people knew that the Popish Plot was not true, they sympathised more with the Catholics. Adelaide Amore asserts that Behn “... dedicated The Second Part of *The Rover* to James. She continued her attack on the Whigs in *The Roundheads* by portraying the Whigs and Tories of her day” (xxxv). Accordingly, her writings were written in style to suit the mood of the new King and to portray his Catholicism. To write in support for the monarchy was a general trend in Behn’s time, for it was a part of national identity. Nigel Smith argues that “... to speak or write a literary work in early modern England usually meant expressing part of a national or social identity” (5).

On the other hand, Behn’s espionage is still controversial. She is known to have spied for the English government, but there is no authentic documentation explaining the nature of her spying task. There are many hypotheses about the nature, the place and the
time of her espionage. Some writers believe that Behn at the age of 23 went to Surinam River with a relative where she supposedly met an African slave leader who became her inspiration for writing her novel Oroonoko. Rebecca Wolsk reveals some information about Behn’s task in Surinam. She writes:

During the Second Anglo-Dutch War in 1666, she travelled to Antwerp at the request of Charles II’s intelligence officials, who had asked her to question dissident and spy William Scot about the community of exiled conspirators who had found refuge in the united Provinces. (5)

Even her shift from espionage to literature raises speculations and some scholars consider it another task of espionage on intellectuals.

Behn was a political spy and dramatist as Christopher Marlowe. The apparent difference between them is that the early life of Marlowe was known while Behn’s early life was not. On the contrary, the late life of Behn was known while that of Marlowe was not. Yet both dramatists served the kingdom as spies. Marlowe was a spy in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and his plays in one way or another exposed those people who were conspiring against the Queen; one of those conspirers was the Queen’s Jewish physician, Roderigo Lopez, who wanted to poison the Queen. So, Marlow wrote The Jew of Malta, two years later Shakespeare produced The Merchant of Venice and both plays were written to expose the role of Jews. The same thing happened with Behn but from a different angle. Behn’s writings were to praise, to celebrate in love dramas, and to rhapsodise about the gallantry of King Charles II especially his exile in France. In her last couplet in the Prologue to The Young King, Behn praises the King in a way as if God has
blessed him. She writes, "Heaven bless the King that Keeps the Land in Peace, / Or he'll be sweetly served by such as these."

At any rate, Behn had lived in a time where there were many political issues just like the restoration of Charles II, his exile, his personal dialectic, his magnanimity, his courtship and perhaps lechery with women, and his struggle in order to rule, in addition to the political debate about his successor, and the political conflict about the rule of James II. All these issues have taken place in Behn's literary works. Kate Aughterson states, "It is clear, then, that both the genre and content of Behn's writing was dependent upon the political climate, available patronage, and the literary market" (210).

In The Rover, Behn makes Willmore similar in his behaviour to that of King Charles II. Through Willmore's behaviour, she intends to discuss the King's behaviour but in the form of a comic dramatic attitude. The rover in the title of the play is Willmore and Willmore denotes Charles II, the King. However, it is Belvile, his friend, who starts calling him rover. When Willmore appears for the first time, Belvile welcomes him, "Welcome ashore, my dear rover!" (Rover.1.2.56). This epithet is a praise and it shows Belvile's friendship with Willmore. Later Belvile forgives Willmore's sexual harassment against Florinda. Then he praises him as "a rover of fortune, yet a prince aboard his little wooden world" (Rover.5.1.493). Blunt also calls Willmore at the end of the play, "my little rover" (Rover.5.1.536). Shyamala A. Narayan states, "The word "rover" had multiple connotation in Aphra Behn's time; it had not only the modern meaning of someone who wandered around the world, but also a sea-robber (pirate) and someone with a roving eye, an inconstant lover or male flirt" (131). These attributes can also be applied to Charles II.

---

6 These issues regarding Charles II and James II have been discussed in Chapter I.
David Sullivan has his own interpretation of Willmore's name. He believes that "in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the word "will" was synonymous with sexual desire. . . . Willmore's name, in this sense, is perfectly apt. It characterises him, as it would have Rochester, as over-sexed" (335). Sullivan is also one of those who believe that Willmore is not a reference to Charles II but to John Wilmot, "Willmore was meant to recall Wilmot – John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, the dashing poet / rake who at that time was having an affair with the woman who was playing Hellena, Elizabeth Barry" (335). In turn, Susan Owen considers Willmore as bearing a resemblance to many political figures during Behn's times. Owen states, "He [Willmore] bears a resemblance to the libertine Earl of Rochester, to Behn's own lover John Hoyle, to Charles II and to Charles's brother James. Willmore is intensely desirable, but the presentation of his character is not entirely positive" (Perspectives on Restoration 68-69). The hypothesis, which says that Willmore's role in the play is similar to that of Charles II, is the closest to the truth. Adam R. Beach affirms, "This playful historical revision of the exile must have appealed directly to Charles II for a number of reasons, including the fact that he was well known as a lover of both boats and sailing" (12).

Behn intelligently presents Willmore in an image which is considered a metaphor for Charles II who was known for his relationships with women. Therefore, scholars call him a rake. Owens and Goodman observe, "... Willmore is a rake, and to that extent he is a stock figure in Restoration comedy" (Shakespeare 161). Indeed, "Charles himself was considered a 'rake,' a successful and skilled pursuer of women, and he boasted a string of beautiful mistresses throughout his reign" (Galloway n. pag.). Behn followed the same pattern of the Restoration period of including rakes in her plays. A rake in
Restoration comedy is a “libertine hero; he is witty, extravagant, irresistibly attractive to women, and promiscuous” (Goreau, *Restoration Literature* 226).

Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the ages of knighthood and manhood. This is clear in the plays under study where the domination of the concept of duel takes a distinguished space. In this vein, the main characters of the plays are surely the best in fencing. It seems that the whole community during that time had glorified the brave people and detested the cowards. Then women had to choose their future husbands according to chivalry and manliness. In short, the witty rake-hero was loved by most women. In *The Rover*, the two main women – Hellena and Angellica compete to win Willmore.

Although Willmore is a rake and a careless character, his loyalty to his friends in particular and his country in general cannot be questioned. In addition, he is kind, loyal, and brave as King Charles II. One of the similarities between Charles II and Willmore is that, *The Rover* part I ends in an ambiguous resolution. Audiences do not know whether Willmore would succeed in his marriage or not! Yet, the beginning of *The Rover* II opens in a way where he recounts about his wife Hellena who died in a voyage. Thus, Willmore returns to his old habit of searching for prostitutes which means that he does not beget an heir. This is an implicit innuendo to the real story of Charles II who did not have an heir, so the future of the kingdom would be mysterious as the marriage of Willmore.

Consequently, Willmore’s duty in the play is how to enjoy himself in a day or two as he declares, “my business ashore was only to enjoy myself a little this carnival” (*Rover*.1.2.65). He also tells his friends that “... the wine and women-love and mirth are
my business in Naples” (Rover.1.2.70-73). In fact, Willmore’s family, work and residence are not known. What is known is only that he comes from sea.

Willmore’s behaviour with women disgusts and provokes even his friends. When Willmore informs Blunt that he is not married, but he prefers to have sex with the pretty prostitutes, Blunt calls him “a fortunate rogue!” (Rover.3.1.111). Moretta, Angellica’s woman, calls him “swaggerer” when she and Angellica see him with Hellena only after a short time of leaving Angellica’s house. Then Moretta reminds Angellica of her warning. She tells her, “What could you less expect from such a swaggerer?” (Rover.3.1.156). Moretta’s question indicates that they can expect more from Willmore because he is only running after his sexual desire. Actually, Willmore does not respect his promises or consider the feeling of others. Nevertheless, Angellica still loves him and considers him worthy of her respect. When she makes sure that Willmore has left her to marry Hellena, she grumbles, “Perjured man! How I believe thee now” (Rover.3.1.181). Then she adds, “And broke his word last night – false perjured man!” (Rover.4.2.137). Also, she affirms, “Thou, perjured man” (Rover.5.1.241). Further, his close friend Belvile rebukes him in many ways and calls him on different occasions, “a mad fellow” (Rover.2.1.243-44) and “this mad fellow” (Rover.3.5.68-69). When he hears the fight between Willmore and Antonio, he rumbles, “The mad rogue’s engaged in some unlucky adventure again” (Rover.3.5.53). Noticeably, when Belvile is angry with Willmore, he calls him “mad rogue” otherwise; he calls him “mad fellow.” When Frederick sees Willmore, he says, “the old complement, infinitely the better to see my dear mad Willmore again” (Rover.1.2.60-61). Hellena also knows well his personality. Therefore, she tells him frankly, “there be men too, as fine, wild, inconstant fellows as your-self . . .”
Hellena does not only call him "wild" and "inconstant," but she also calls him mad, she tells Florinda, "I had never seen my mad monsieur" (Rover.3.1.13), and she adds, "I cannot choose but be angry and afraid when I think that mad fellow should be in love with any body but me" (Rover.3.1.22-24). This word 'mad' is mostly used to describe Willmore. In turn, Florinda calls him, "filthy beast" (Rover.3.5.32), and he assures, "I am so" (Rover.3.5.33). In her introduction to The Rover, The Feigned Courtesans, The Lucky Chance, The Emperor of the Moon, Jane Spencer considers Willmore "a bemused bungler than a clever plotter" (xiii). Moreover, Willmore is also regarded to be perfidious for he once stabs Antonio by surprise. Belvile has been held responsible. Belvile denies the charge of Antonio to be the attacker. He insists that he is not the man who may stab someone by surprise. All these negative descriptions, which are narrated by the characters, are applied to Willmore.

In addition to his mischief, he spends his time in vain. He frankly reveals how he spends his days and nights, "Love does all day the soul's great empire keep / But wine at night hulls the soft god asleep" (Rover.3.1.284-85). So, Willmore's life has been spent uselessly. He spends the days searching for women and nights in drinking. As an example of his miserable life, he sees the gate of the garden open, so he decides to sleep there and considers it as "A very convenient place to sleep in . . ." (Rover.3.5.14-15). This is an example of his unstable life and miserable condition. It is surprising to see the representative of Charles II walking at night while drunk, hallucinating to get a prostitute and ready to sleep in a garden.

Nonetheless, his love for women is not to marry one but to have sex with the largest possible number of women. When he has sex with one, he dreams of the next.
When he meets Hellena, he desires to have sex with her instead of Angellica because he spent around two hours with her. He affirms, “For though to worse we change, yet still we find / New joys, new charms, in a new miss that's kind” (Rover.4.2.390-91). Willmore immorally behaves with both Hellena and Angellica. He perjures the vows he has made to Hellena by looking for Angellica to satisfy his physical desire. When he is with Angellica, he promises her to keep his love forever and he will not look for another woman. Yet, this promise is because he is under the influence of his sexual desire. He makes two vows until now, one for Hellena and one for Angellica. This means he will ultimately perjure one vow if he does not infringe both vows at all. In the second meeting with Hellena, he denies his match with Angellica although Hellena heard him brag about having sex for two hours. Then he again promises her and swears the third time to be alone for her. At this time, Angellica, who is in disguise, hears him promise Hellena of the same promise he had made for her. She realises that he betrays her and he only exploits her love to have sex with her.

When a man wants to seduce a woman, he swears many times and gives heavy oaths of being a true lover. Men feel that women are only there to satisfy their sexual desires. When they face difficulty in winning women, they start using different strategies as giving oaths. A man swears of marrying a woman; insolently, he leaves her after satisfying his bodily hunger and then accuses her of infidelity and dishonesty.

Belvile's conduct is morally better than Willmore. Willmore perjures three times while his friend Belvile remains loyal to his fiancée. Belvile does not run after courtesans as Willmore. Anand Prakash observes that "Aphra Behn deliberately poses the contrast between Belvile who is unconcerned about the carnival except the way in which it can
help him unite with his beloved and Willmore who is a participating entity in society” (183). In order to recognise his morality more, Florinda tries to seduce him with the help of her niece, but he is not affected by their allurement because he is wholly in love with Florinda. However, he does not realise that the woman, who tries to seduce him, is Florinda. This indicates his noble morality. Belvile is also disgusted to see the pictures of Angellica hanging on her balcony and at each side of the door. The pictures are used as a sign of prostitution, so he scorns this act. He believes that the immoral activity of a prostitute may spoil the society. It is worth mentioning that Belvile does not intend to have an affair with Angellica like Willmore but accompanies his friends to Angellica’s house as a kind of curiosity.

Through the above discussion, it can be said that Behn has included the theme of the politics in her play to the extent that serve her understandings of what was really going on in her society. Behn was mostly interested in defending women’s rights and freedom, and hence her literary politics often revolve around these thematic axes. Nevertheless, the above political discussion regarding Willmore seems as if it is about the character of King Charles II who is presented as a stalker of women. Willmore in the play, or it might be said, Charles II in reality desired to satisfy his sexual urge even on the account of the respectable women, yet no one dared to question his lechery since he was the king.

On the other hand, Sheridan aims through discussing politics in his plays to expose the immoral implications of the upper class society. In this part of the study, the focus is on Sheridan’s theatrical politics. However, Sheridan aspires in his play The
Critic to be a well-known politician. Luddy points out, “From the disreputable theater class, he had aspirations to become a gentleman and a political figure” (84).

At any rate, it comes to mind that politics is the struggle of the one who can rule and change the lifestyle of the community. It is true that a politician is someone who is concerned with the science, organization and activities of the government. However, a dramatist can also be a seasoned politician. James Morwood and David Crane indicate Sheridan’s politics:

As a politician Sheridan was . . . part of what appeared to be a large world, but that world is now past and its battles are over. Even at the time Sheridan was hardly centre stage, since in a political career lasting more than thirty years he held minor office for a total of barely two. (Sheridan Studies 2)

There were two principal reasons marked and facilitated Sheridan’s entrance to the world of Whig politics. First, his marriage to Elizabeth Linley, “. . . who was much sought after for private recitals in the homes of the nobility, obtained for Sheridan an entry to Devonshire House society, at the heart of the Whig elite” (Clayton 134). Subsequently, Sheridan met “Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, a member of the Spencer family” who helped him to be elected in the House of Commons (Clayton 134). The second reason was when Sheridan developed a friendship with Charles James Fox. Hager states, “In 1776 Sheridan met Charles Fox, the leader of the radical Whigs in the House of Commons and was convinced to join that party” (224).

Sheridan had famous friends like Richard Burke (1758–1794), Charles James Fox (1749–1806), Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), and Lord John Townshend (1757-1833).
Burke and Fox were the ones who encouraged him to enter the world of politics. As soon as Sheridan succeeded in his literary work and in managing the theatre, he aspired to enter Parliament. According to Laura Holloway, Sheridan “... yearned to sit among the politics; the songs and the jests of the nation interested him no longer, since he was eager now to pass upon its laws” (133-34). In fact, Sheridan “... had achieved brilliant success in one career he should have so abruptly turned to another, and set his heart and hopes on that in preference to every other path to distinction” (Morley 120).

Sheridan had served in Parliament from 1780 to 1812. He was in the Whig Party, which was ruling under the guidance of Charles James Fox. In Parliament, he proved the opposite of his earlier negative view towards politics. He had become an excellent political speaker, as he had already been a professional dramatist. Brander Matthews confirms, “Sheridan was a popular speaker; he spoke well and he was listened to with expectation and pleasure” (43). Brander Matthews adds, “Sheridan was a better speaker than Burke admits of little doubt. Burke bored his audience; Sheridan charmed, captivated, converted” (44).

However, his work in politics had become at the expense of the theatre and his family. He began to neglect the Drury Lane Theatre though he was still the manager. In addition, he neglected his family and barely saw his son Thomas. Therefore, his wife Elizabeth had a love affair with Lord Edward Fitzgerald who made her pregnant, and then she gave him a daughter on March 1792. Philip H. Highfill and others state:

At the age of 37 she [Elizabeth Linley Sheridan] had a daughter, Mary Sheridan, born on 30 March 1792 at Cromwell House, Brompton, probably the child of Lord Edward Fitzgerald. Elizabeth seems to have
engaged in an affair with Fitzgerald in retaliation for Sheridan’s years of philandering. (317)

In his plays, Sheridan as a satirical dramatist portrays the corruption of individuals, the notoriety of hypocrisy, the attack of scandal and the negative effect of the newspapers. In addition, deception is the implicit theme that Sheridan usually discussed in his plays. These issues are discussed in the entire thesis.

In this section, the correlation between politics and theatre is examined in the light of the arguments of the characters of The Critic. In addition, the gossip of newspapers about writers gets a succinct mention. Sheridan wrote his last famous play The Critic a year before entering Parliament. Brander Matthews, in his biographical sketch of Sheridan, points out that Sheridan’s “...‘Critic’ was brought out near the end of October, 1779, and before the end of October, 1780, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, as one of the members for Stafford, had taken his seat in Parliament by the side of his friends Charles Fox and Edmund Burke” (40).

Through The Critic, “Sheridan” as Mark S. Auburn claims, “was laughing at his audience and their desires, that he was saying in effect ‘Here you have it, and you have nobody to blame but yourselves if you fail to see the self-satisfied stupidity of your tastes’” (Sheridan’s Comedies 165). According to Glasgow, Sheridan’s The Critic is “a perfect satire” (132). Arnold Hare also points out that “The Critic is part farce, part burlesque, part satire” (264).

In The Critic, Sheridan apparently criticises politics and considers it as crap in which he has to sort it out in order to find its benefit. In contrast, he believes that literature develops creativity, shows the beauty of nature and increases the culture of
human beings. This is obvious at the very beginning of the play when Mr. Dangle the critic hates “all politics” and prefers to read The Morning Chronicle\textsuperscript{7} for its “theatrical politics” (Critic.1.1.133). One can argue that Sheridan is right in his favoritism to the theatrical politics at the beginning of his career. His age at the time of writing The Critic is appropriate for literary fun instead of political crisis. In this period, Sheridan beeps for love, respect, entertainment, luxury, fame and money. To get them all, there is only one way, it is the way of being a well-known dramatist. Thereafter, the next step throws him to the field of pure politics.

Since Mr. Dangle is interested in literature, he praises the play of Puff as, “this piece abounds with the most striking and received beauties of modern composition” (Critic.1.1.133). Then he clarifies the importance of the theatre, “. . . the stage is ‘the mirror of Nature,’ and the actors are ‘the abstract, and brief chronicles of the time’ – and pray what can a man of sense study better?” (Critic.1.1.135). In contrast, Mrs. Dangle is not interested in her husband’s work. She views his work as nonsense. However, she has nothing to do except to rebuke her husband for indulging in theatrical activities instead of politics. She believes that to be a politician means to be famous and then to make many aristocratic friends. At least, she would be known by the most important figures of the community, and this would satisfy her desires for fame. Mr. Dangle is interested in the theatrical politics, so he does not even like to read and to know the political affairs concerning his country. Therefore, his wife criticises him, “you hate to hear about your country; there are letters everyday with Roman signatures, demonstrating the certainty of an invasion, and proving that the nation is utterly undone. But you never will read

\textsuperscript{7} The Morning Chronicle was a newspaper founded in London in 1769 and published under various owners until 1862.
anything to entertain one" (Critic.1.1.134). She adds that her husband likes theatre more than anything else. In the following speech, Mrs. Dangle clarifies her husband’s unchangeable love for theatrical politics. She believes that “if the French were landed tomorrow, your first enquiring would be, whether they had brought a theatrical troop with them” (Critic.1.1.135).

In contrast, Puff, who is a professional dramatist and a famous literary figure, considers himself a politician and a professional dramatist. Through Puff’s speech, it seems as if Sheridan considers himself not only a man of theatre but also a man of politics. Puff proudly boasts of his multi-works especially his work in “ART OF PUFFING.” Doris Feldman points out, “The discourse produced by Puff establish significant parallels between the theatre and politics by basing both on the democratization of voices in a commercialized popular culture and on the forging of a sense of British national identity” (88). As stated above, Mr. Dangle appears as a critic who likes theatre and hates politics and his wife has the opposite view, she hates theatre and likes politics. This is clear in their mutual questions. Mr. Dangle asks his wife a question that she answers it by directing the same question to him.

Mr. DAN. What has a woman to do with politics, Mrs. Dangle?

Mrs. DAN. And what have you to do with the theatre, Mr. Dangle?

(Critic.1.1.134)

In fact, Sheridan wished to be remembered as a politician, yet he is mostly remembered as a dramatist. Margaret Drabble avers, “He [Sheridan] wished to be remembered as a man of politics and to be buried next to Fox, but he was laid near Garrick instead. He is
remembered chiefly as the author of two superb comedies, but his speeches and letters have also been published" (928). Fintan O'Toole writes about Sheridan's *The Critic*:

In *The Critic* Sheridan went further than ever before in blurring the boundaries between the stage and the world, between theatre and politics. He placed theatre and politics side-by-side, so that they could contaminate and subvert each other. (*A Traitor's Kiss* 148)

According to Mrs. Dangle, to be a politician means to be rich and powerful. In fact, Mr. Dangle's work as a theatrical politician is important, but it does not provide money. Instead, he gets something else, "From lords to recommend fiddlers, from ladies to get boxes, from authors to get answers, and from actors to get engagements" (*Critic*.1.1.134). His wife also adds that he does not get any financial return from his work. So, she sneers at his interest, "yes, truly; you have contrived to get a share in all the plague and trouble of theatrical property, without the profit, or even the credit of the abuse that attends it" (*Critic*.1.1.134). In reality, Sheridan did receive the necessary livelihood through his work as a dramatist and as a manager of the Drury Lane Theatre, but he was not satisfied with the income, for this reason, he raised the concept of the shortage of money in his plays.

Sheridan has his view about literature and politics, and therefore he classifies people according to their wishes and preferences. Hence, Mr. Dangle, in *The Critic*, is a literary critic who is continuously busy with literary works even at his home. His home, which is a place for rest, has been changed to a literary place for meeting all those who are interested in literary affairs. At his home, he receives four visits in one day which demonstrates his importance in the literary field. Sneer, a fellow critic and a friend, visits
him to solicit his patronage in order to be able to produce his two plays in one of the two theatres, Drury Lane Theatre or Covent Theatre. Metaphorically, this means that Mr. Dangle is the principle advisor for both theatres although they are running under competitive conditions. Sir Plagiary, a talentless playwright, pays the second visit. He seeks Mr. Dangle’s criticism on his play. Italian opera singers pay the third visit. They hope to get Mr. Dangle’s approval and patronage on their works. Puff, a well-known playwright, pays the fourth visit. He seeks Mr. Dangle’s observation on his tragedy, *The Spanish Armada*.

As Sheridan is a political veteran, he is also a professional dramatist who satirises society and individual’s misbehaviour. In *The Critic*, Sheridan renders a vivid example of how to criticise the others. He devoted most of the play to criticising the poor plays and reviewing the relationship between the critic and the dramatist, yet his criticism does not harm or offend someone. Hence, Sheridan presents Mr. Dangle as a critic who criticises the deficiencies of the playwrights without offending them. Mr. Dangle knows well that Sir Plagiary is an unskilled dramatist as he tells Sneer, “he allows no merit to any author but himself, that’s the truth on’t – though he’s my friend” (*Critic*.1.1.138). Meanwhile, he appreciates his tragedy in order to lift his spirits. He, for example, welcomes him warmly and regards him as a ‘friend.’ He repeats the word ‘friend’ many times despite the fact that he is a well-known critic while Sir Plagiary is an incompetent playwright. Through the friendship between Mr. Dangle and Sir Plagiary, Sheridan wants to say that the enmity and envy between the critic and the dramatist lead the critic to criticise bitterly the works of the dramatist as revenge. The dramatist would not benefit from the criticism, but he would remain writing silly plays. Therefore, Sheridan suggests that the relationship
between the critic and the dramatist should be based on understanding and respect. The critic should not criticise to hurt but rectify the mistakes. In contrast, the dramatist should benefit from the observations, apply them in his work and thank the critic for his guidance.

Sheridan portrays Sneer in a different way from Mr. Dangle. Sneer has bitterly criticised the weak plays of the unskilled dramatists. Hence, he satirises Sir Plagiary's play. However, it is Sneer and not Mr. Dangle who frankly accuses Sir Plagiary of plagiarism, but even his plagiarism was done in a bad way as Sneer mocks him, "... you are so unlucky as not to have the skill even to steal with taste" (Critic.1.1.143). He also denounces Sir Plagiary's poor language, "In short, that even the finest passages you steal are of no service to you; for the poverty of your own language prevents their assimilating ..." (Critic.1.1.143). Paradoxically, Sheridan criticises plagiarism while he was accused of the same. Holloway observes, "People are always discovering that Sheridan's plots are not original, that his characters and situation are 'stock'" (133). Percy Fitzgerald also observes that Sheridan "... was a most inveterate plagiarist, and yet to the casual observer, he scarcely ever appears to have borrowed an idea" (27). James Morwood affirms that "Sheridan borrowed from many sources but, with his abundant verve and humour, he made what he borrowed his own" (The Life and Works 37). Morwood contends that Sheridan has taken the role of Faulkland from his mother's novel. He states, "The name and refined nature of Faulkland ... are taken from his mother's novel, The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph" (The Life and Works 36). There is also similarity between Frances Sheridan's Mrs. Tryfort in A Journey to Bath and Mrs. Malaprop in The Rivals. John Clyde Loftis points out, "If he [Sheridan] imitated dramatists of the
preceding century, he did so... with such audacity and ingenuity of execution that the
conventionality, far from being a liability, becomes in its allusiveness a source of delight"  
(Sheridan and the Drama 43).

Sheridan depicts himself as if he was in a dramatic confrontation with Sir Fretful
Plagiary. Sir Plagiary has already sent his play to the manager of the Covent Garden
Theatre instead of Drury Lane Theatre lest Sheridan, who is the manager and who used to
perform his works there, may steal his work. Sir Plagiary complains, “A dexterous
plagiarist may do anything... he might take out some of the best things in my tragedy,
and put them into his own comedy” (Critic.1.1.140). Sir Plagiary does not realise the fact
that he criticises himself because his tragedy is plagiarised from some other plays. To
make Sir Plagiary in The Critic suspect Sheridan may indicate that Sheridan had indeed
stolen some literary works. Indeed, the real reason of mentioning his real name by Sir
Plagiary, the known plagiarist, is still confusing. It may indicate two points: either to
confess of plagiarism or to deny it. It seems that Sheridan denies it because those who
used to accuse him are just like Sir Plagiary. The plagiarist may feel that the other
dramatists are plagiarists like him. Therefore, Sheridan uses Sir Plagiary to defend
himself. The character of Sir Plagiary “... is supposed to have been intended for
Cumberland” who was a contemporary playwright to Sheridan (Hunt xiv). Whatever the
reason, Sheridan has been accused of plagiarism.

The Critic explores the correlation between the critic and the dramatist. Some
playwrights benefit from the critics’ observation either on their current works or on their
future works. This is regarded as the best adequate understanding between the playwright
and the critic. Nevertheless, some playwrights do not care for the critic’s observation, so
their dramas would ultimately face failure. Sheridan wants to say that the poor plays may succeed and talentless playwrights may gain huge money from those flimsy plays for one reason or another, but surely, they would never be immortal. On the other hand, the names of the professional playwrights, who take great care of the observations of the critics and audiences, will be immortal. In addition, their works will get valuable popularity in the future even if their plays are not known at the time of their productions. Meanwhile, Sheridan suggests that there is no matter if the playwright intends to write a play to gain both money and kudos, but he should take into his account the observation of the critics. Doris Feldman stresses the importance of Puff's job, "Through Puff, whose writing is based on purely mercenary consideration, Sheridan exemplifies the theatre's need to make money by dealing in topical jokes and in the political scandals of the day" (92). Mr. Dangle clarifies that the dramatist has sometimes clashed with the tastes of the audiences, so he has to write the play according to their desires and not in accordance with proper standards. These kinds of plays may not convey moral lessons, however, they receive a wide welcome among viewers.

When Sir Plagiary visits Mr. Dangle in his house to get his wise counsel, Mr. Dangle and Sneer suggest some reformation, but he does not respond to them. It is known that Sir Plagiary is a talentless dramatist. His play is filled with absurdity, yet his play suits the tastes of some audiences. Mr. Dangle criticises this kind of work. He tells his wife, "Now, Mrs. Dangle, Sir Fretful Plagiary is an author to your own taste" (Critic.1.1.138). Sheridan intelligently uses the connection between Mrs. Dangle's dislike for her husband's literary work and her interest in Sir Plagiary's nonsensical play as a way to imply that the play of Sir Plagiary is bad but liked by some audiences. Mrs.
Dangle confesses, "I confess he is a favourite of mine, because everybody else abuses him" (*Critic.*1.1.138). Besides, although Sir Plagiary is not a professional author, he is "so covetous of popularity" (*Critic.*1.1.138) as Sneer assures. In brief, Sheridan intends to say that some plays might be weak and nonsensical, but they are produced on the stage, it is because they suit a segment of audience. They are not being criticised in case the dramatist has a strong friendship with critics.

Sheridan is not a critic as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson; however, he criticises the roles of the critics and playwrights in *The Critic.* Sheridan renders two types of the playwrights: the first type is represented by Sir Plagiary who does not accept any critical observation on his work and the second type is represented by Puff who accepts all observations and applies them in his play.

At theatre while Puff, Mr. Dangle and Sneer are watching and criticising *The Spanish Armada,* they have been informed that the play was shortened because some texts were "... found heavy or unnecessary to the plot" (*Critic.*2.1.156). So, the actors have cut the unnecessary parts without getting permission from the dramatist Puff. Puff does not impede the shortcut but praises it. Nevertheless, *The Spanish Armada* has received great admiration by Mr. Dangle and Sneer and it succeeds at the end in spite of the changes that have taken place; this is what has really happened with Sheridan's *The Rivals.* Hence, it can be said that Sheridan's scenes in *The Rivals,* like Puff's in "The Spanish Armada," often go "... entirely for what we call SITUATION and STAGE EFFECT," by which the great applause may be obtained, without the assistance of language, sentiment, or character" (*Critic.*3.1.179).
On the other hand, Sheridan has criticised the negative job of the newspapers in his plays especially in *The School for Scandal*. In *The Critic*, he discusses the unlawful attack and fierce campaign of the newspapers on the dramatists. This sort of attack adversely affects the work of the dramatists. Sheridan believes that the criticism in the newspapers should be to evaluate the dramatic work but not to frustrate the dramatist. The press sometimes defames the dramatist’s reputation and smashes his future especially if it is directed in wrong way. However, the dramatists should behave wisely if they have been attacked. The suitable solution to newspaper’s vitriol is rendered by Sir Plagiary.

DAN. Well, Sir Fretful, I wish you may be able to get rid as easily of the newspaper criticisms as you do of ours.

PLAG. The Newspaper! Sir, they are the most villainous – licentious – abominable – infernal – Not that I ever read them. No I make it a rule never to look into a newspaper.

DAN. You are quite right - for it certainly must hurt an author of delicate feelings to see the liberties they take. (*Critic*.1.1.142)


On the other hand, *The School for Scandal* deals with a political issue that concerns newspapers. Sheridan has criticised scandal and gossip either they are spread through people\(^8\) or through newspapers. Fintan O’Toole asserts that *The School for Scandal* “. . . concerns – reputation and reality, appearance and emotion – were vital not just to private behaviour but to political life” (121). During the seventeenth and

---

\(^8\) The issues of gossip and scandal have been discussed under ‘Morality.’
eighteenth centuries, men had used to gather in coffeehouses to chat about their daily issues whereas women were tattling in private gatherings. It is believed that their conversations centered around scandal and gossip.

Scandal and gossip were spread through newspapers, magazines, poetry and novels; therefore, it became a social problem. In this regard, Molière (1622 - 1673), for example, preceded Sheridan in discussing scandal. He wrote *Le Tartuffe* in 1664 which is known as the most scandalous comedy. Behn also discussed scandal in her literary works especially in her novel, *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*. Bonnie Zimmerman states, “Considered a scandal in her life and her writings, Behn was known for her close friendship with the king’s mistress, Nell Gwyn (1650-1687), and for her long-standing liaison with John Hoyle (d.1692), himself notorious for his gay affairs” (99). J. Paul Hunter affirms that the scandal in print coheres with oral scandal. He remarks, “By the 1690s, the world of print had joined the world of conversation, gossip, and rumor in a single devotion to issues of the moment” (498). Sheridan has followed Behn in attacking scandalous gossip that spread either through people or through newspapers. He uses *The School for Scandal* as a vehicle for exposing this habit which has become a part of the daily activities. In the Prologue to this play, David Garrick also depicts the scandal of the eighteenth-century women in a way as if they enjoy spreading scandal as they enjoy drinking tea.

Lady Sneerwell used to spread scandal with the help of her people and even by writing in newspapers. At the beginning of the play, she opens the session by asking Snake whether he secretly articulated the malicious paragraphs in the newspapers or not! Sheridan has used Mr. Snake to satirise his contemporary journalists especially those who
used to publish scandalous gossip. In the old version, Snake was a journalist, but in the new version, Snake is only used as a vehicle to attack journalism and he is not a journalist himself. Through Snake, Sheridan compares the role of journalism with the role of the scandalmongers in the play.

An example of the relation between the work of the scandalmongers and the works of newspapers can be seen in the behaviour of Mrs. Candour, a member in the scandalous group, who uses newspapers to spread poisonous gossip. Mrs. Candour pays a visit to Lady Teazle ostensibly to console and comfort her after her last exposure with Joseph. In fact, she wishes to get some new information about her exposure to be able to add fabrication. Her wicked intention is exposed in her soliloquy, “We shall have the whole affair in the newspapers, with the names of the parties at length, before I have dropped the story at dozen houses” (Sch.5.2.262). On the above extraction of her soliloquy, she indirectly compares the role of the newspapers to the role of the scandalmongers. Before publishing a false story about the current situation, she would do her best to add new fabrications and spread them at least to a dozen families. She really intends to spread rumour in her area, yet she aspires to cover a large sphere. Thus, the newspaper would take its turn. This is a painstaking evidence of the severe damage that was caused by those idle people as well as by the articles in the newspapers.

Sir Peter is also frustrated from the attack of newspapers. He is afraid that his marriage to a young woman and his quarrel with her would be a fertile ground for newspapers to attack him. He painfully remarks, “aye, and make ballades and paragraphs and the devil knows what of me” (Sch.4.3.249). In this particular part, Sheridan suggests that Sir Peter lives a normal life without the rumour of the newspaper. He has many
friends and can go wherever he likes. In short, he loves and is being loved. But at the
time when his reputation is being ruined by those newspapers, he would surely be
confined to his home because he cannot tolerate the looks of people. Worse than this, the
society would discard him for his notoriety. Therefore, Sir Peter is only worried about the
negative results of the rumour of the newspapers and not of something else. He tells Sir
Oliver and Rowley about his agony, “and then of a morning to read the paragraphs about
Mr. S-, Lady T- Sir P -, will be so entertaining” (Sch.5.2.268). John Brewer remarks,
“The public’s appetite for news, gossip and scandal about the stage was insatiable” (340).

At the end of the politics section, it might be said that the concept of politics is
interconnected with the concept of religion and they cannot be separated especially in the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In general, politics and religion are dramatically
affected by each other, yet both of them attempt to express nearly unanimous favour for
having the social moral code of the society even if they differ in using methods and tools.
Behn’s plays seem as if they revolve around political and religious issues whereas
Sheridan’s plays seem to be more about political and social issues. However, the next
section discusses religion.

RELIGION

It can be argued that the dramatist intends to discuss religion in order to seek the
attention of the audience to the importance of religion in creating a moral citizenry but
not the religion which spreads discord among people. In this regard, though Sheridan in
his plays devotes less space to discuss religion, it remains as a constant theme in Behn’s
plays, and it pops up a lot in her play Abdelazer. It is important to notice that many plays
of the seventeenth century depicted religious conflicts between different religions like
conflicts between Christianity and Islam or between Christianity and Judaism. In fact, there were some differences and changes during sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the way the Muslims and Jews were portrayed in the drama. English Christian attitudes towards Muslims and Jews were unstable. Thus, Muslims and Jews were often represented as cruel and revengeful in the English drama. Robert Crocker illustrates the strained relationship between Christians and Jews:

Extremely negative views about Jews had been pervasive in the late middle ages and during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Jews were seen as most dangerous menaces to Christian society, but were also expected to play a critical role in the culmination of the Christian historical drama. (181)

Examples of the sixteenth century plays which conveyed the traditional sense of Christian antipathy toward Jews were Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London* (1584), Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1589) and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596). In early seventeenth century drama, William Heminges's *The Jews' Tragedy* (1626) was an attempt to portray Jews on the stage. During the Restoration, John Crowne wrote a two-part drama on Jews, titled *The Destruction of Jerusalem* (1677). In eighteenth century drama, the Jew continued to be portrayed as evil and depraved as in *The Jew and the Doctor* (1788) and *The School for Prejudice* (1801), which both written by Thomas Dibdin (1776-1847).

Further, the conflict between Catholics and Protestants had taken remarkable space in the Restoration dram. In the Restoration period, the Tories, Royalists and Cavaliers grouped together to support the Stuart monarchy whereas the Whigs,

---

9 The image of Muslims in the British drama has been discussed in the ensuing pages 93 - 100.
Parliamentarians, Roundheads and Dissenters worked together against the Stuart monarchy. In terms of religion, Tories were only supported by Protestants and Whigs were mostly supported by Catholics and many Protestants. Gustave de Beaumont points out, “Although profoundly Catholic, many Protestants belong to this party [Whig], whilst there is not a single Catholic in the Protestant Tory party” (254). Sylvanus Urban (the pen name of Edward Cave) also states:

At this day, a Whig is considered as a political party man, who is friendly to the Catholics, and generally opposed to Protestant and Monarchical influence. The Tory, on the contrary, is a zealous opponent of what is called Catholic Emancipation, and usually a staunch supporter of Protestant ascendancy in Church and State, as established under the house of Brunswick. (483)

The conflict between the different Christian sects and between the two main political parties was the main reason for sliding into the English Civil War (1638-60). Gustave de Beaumont illustrates the strained relationship between Protestants and Catholics:

This party, which for more than a century trampled the Catholic people under foot, has still more contempt than hatred for this people; when it speaks of “good society,” it always means a society of Protestants; in its mouth everything that is Protestant is called respectable, in opposition to everything Catholic. (253)

Behn had suffered a lot due to the conflict, yet she was not a religious bigot against the other Christian sect though her plays were in the support of the monarchy. Behn did not criticise the Whigs as religious people, but she did so as political people. When James II
was crowned, she turned to support Catholics openly in her writings. Mary Ann O’Donnell points out, “Behn’s dramas become increasingly political, satirizing the emerging anti-royalist Whigs as greedy, sexiest ‘cits’, especially in her great London plays, *Sir Patient Fancy, The Roundheads,* and *The City-Hetress*” (“Aphra Behn” 11).

Regardless of time, the religious sect of Behn is still a topic for discussion today. Critics are unable to prove her preferred church. No one is sure whether she was a Catholic or a Protestant. Since there is no documented record revealing Behn’s mysterious life, her life in general and her Christian sect in particular have received different interpretations. Janet Todd states:

> The story of Aphra Behn, Ann Behn as she is sometimes called by contemporaries, Mrs Bean or Behn, Astrea as she wished to be known, European or American, aristocrat or plebeian, wife or whore, Catholic, Protestant or atheist, must, however, be constructed from the works, for there is almost nowhere else to search. (*The Secret Life* 1)

Todd also wonders, “Whether or not she married is unclear, whether she had an abundance of lovers, male or female, whether she bore children as Wycherley said she did, whether she was a whore or just a scribbling woman, all this is opaque” (*The Secret Life* 7). Regarding her religious sect, it is still a mystery, thus there are many speculations. It is agreed that she was a Christian, but scholars do not know the exact church which Behn preferred. Writers like Jane Jones in her article “New Light on the Background and Early Life of Aphra Behn” believes that Behn was of a Protestant family (288). Some others writers like Goreau in *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (13) and Maureen Duffy in *The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn 1640-"
89 (92-3) suggest that there might have been a Catholic influence on Behn’s upbringing, so she was more inclined towards Catholics. These scholars strengthen their hypotheses by Behn’s many Catholic connections as with Henry Neville Payne. Maureen Duffy states, “There’s some evidence for Catholic connections among her friends. I’ve already mentioned Henry Neville Payne. . .” (101). Her sympathy with the Catholics is also noticed in some of her literary works as in her play The Rover II which has been dedicated to the Catholic King, James II. It is worth mentioning that Behn became more Catholic in her writings especially when James II became the King. Jane Spencer states, “Behn, supporter of the Catholic James, may have been Catholic herself, either by upbringing or conversion. Some of her dedications are to prominent Catholic noblemen, and some plays express sympathy with Catholicism” (Introduction x). Some other scholars suggest that Behn had converted to Catholicism nearly at the time of Charles II’s conversion. In fact, Charles II had concealed his Catholicism in order to rule the country. He converted to Catholicism on his deathbed. Todd writes about Behn’s religious motive that makes her devote her life to God, “. . . she was an enthralled spectator of the magnificence of Catholic ritual, ceremonial, erotic and aesthetic displays that led to ecstasy and tied her more to the theatrical arts of this world than to the mysteries of the other” (The Secret Life 33-34).

To be more specific, Behn’s religious orientation has been discussed here in two categories: First, Behn sneered at the Whig/Puritan associations and the best example is Blunt in The Rover. Second, Behn expressed her scorn towards the misbehaviour of Muslims through Abdelazer. These topics have been discussed in detail in the pages ahead.
Behn had lived in a time where the conflict between the Tories and Whigs was at its peak, however, she criticised Puritan Whigs in her plays. Naomi Jacobs says, "Throughout her career, Behn wrote against both the traitorous politics of the Whigs and what she called "Foolish Politics in Love" (399). In The Rover, Behn criticises Blunt and praises the cavaliers like Willmore, Belvile, and Frederick in spite of the fact that all of them are English Christians. It is because Blunt is a puritan-Whig member while the other cavaliers are tolerant Tories, and Behn is of course a member of the Tory Party. Susan J. Owen outlines the roles of Willmore and Blunt:

Willmore is a cavalier in political terms, as well as being cavalier in the (a)moral and sexual sense. . . . The play's Toryism is clear in the treatment of Blunt. . . . Blunt's wealth is intact because his estate has not been sequestered by the parliamentarians, and he may even be a supporter of the Commonwealth. ("Behn's Dramatic" 71)

Susan Owen in Perspectives on Restoration Drama indicates the real difference between Willmore and Blunt, "The difference between Willmore and Blunt is political . . ." (69). In turn, Robert Markley finds that Willmore " . . . embodies the good nature and loyalty that endear him to Royalists" (120). Further, Behn's favouritism towards Willmore can clearly be seen when both Willmore and Blunt attempt to sleep with Angellica and brutally attack Florinda. She only criticises Blunt. In this case, Dagny Boebel distinguishes between the assault of Willmore and Blunt, "The assaults of Willmore the Cavalier and of Blunt the Whig on the sign of Angellica symbolically represent, or foreshadow, their later sexual assaults on Florinda . . ." (61-62). Politically, Behn presents the cavaliers as witty, smart and attractive while she portrays Blunt as a dull-
witted and narrow-minded man, hypocrite and liar. In brief, Blunt in *The Rover* and Sir Signal Buffoon in *The Feigned Courtesans* are presented as foolish persons who have "... many of the same Whig/puritan associations" (Burke 131).

Blunt and Lucetta are running after satisfying their sexual desires and their despicable purposes. Lucetta is experienced in her work as a prostitute. She knows her client from the first look. To trick men becomes her favorite business as she once remarks, "This is a stranger, I know by his gazing; if he be brisk, he'll venture to follow me, and then, if I understand my trade, he's mine" (*Rover*.1.2.194-95). Blunt praises Lucetta as "a person of quality" (*Rover*.2.1.48) while she is a prostitute and a thief. Blunt's praise for Lucetta confirms his declaration about himself that he is "a dull country rogue" (*Rover*.2.1.55), and he is really that man because he trusts Lucetta from the first meeting. He does not listen to his friends' advices that this woman is a thief and a whore.

Overall, some people, and one of them is Blunt, do not think for a while that the woman who is going to sell her body can do worse, she may cheat, steal or even kill. The woman who sells her body is not trusted; surely, she would harm or destroy the silly men who do not take too much care of her. Of course, this kind of women is out of respect and her reputation is at rock bottom. So, if she commits any crime against the man who tries to approach her, she is not blamed, it is the man who has to be blamed.

In the same vein, Blunt does not listen to his friends to avoid Lucetta, but he wants them to teach him the sweet words to be more attractive to her. He wishes he asked Frederick to teach him the principles of courtship. When he is in Lucetta's house, he rebukes himself, "I am transported! Pox on't, that I had but some fine things to say to her, such as lovers use – I was a fool not to learn of Frederick a little by heart before I came –
something I must say” (Rover.3.2A-6). Ironically, he does not seek learning of how to deal with women and how to secure himself from treachery of time, yet he wants to speak sweet words to Lucetta although she is a prostitute; and a prostitute needs money not sweet words.

In this regard, Lucetta steals and cheats Blunt and he has merely left her house through sewage and without clothes. Blunt is blunt in reality, that is why he is tricked by Lucetta. Then he can do nothing except to curse himself, “What a dog was I to believe in woman! ... oh, I'm a cursed puppy! 'Tis plain, 'fool' was writ upon my forehead! ... oh, dull silly dog! ... I am a dull, believing, English country fop” (Rover.3.4.5-14).

Accordingly, Blunt takes a negative impression about women in general for he has experienced a loss in his match with Lucetta. Being tricked and stolen at her house, he decides, from this time onwards, to revenge on the first woman he would meet. He does not decide to take his revenge on his enemy Lucetta or on prostitutes, but he holds all women responsible, so he plans to take revenge on “... all womankind hereafter!” (Rover.4.5.12). This, however, is unjust and his desire to revenge is wrong because he should blame himself first. Susan Owen assures that Behn deliberately appoints Blunt to attack women since he represents Whig Party, “Blunt then vows revenge on women and initiates an attempted gang-rape of Florinda which is foiled only at the last moment. Behn characteristically equates parliamentarian sympathies with nastiness towards women” (Perspectives on Restoration 69).

Blunt’s negative impression about women is due to Lucetta’s treachery, but his exclamation “What a dog was I to believe in woman” indicates misogyny and it can also be held as a common concept of men towards women. However, it is men who wrong
women, violate their honour, take away their rights, accuse them of immorality and distort their reputation, yet men pretend as if they are victims of women's tyranny.

It is worth mentioning that Behn presents Blunt as a Puritan in Whig Party. Despite being a Puritan, he is a man of weak religion. He pretends to be a pious follower of the faith while he is doing the opposite. So, his religious pretence is only a mask to conceal his infirmities. He once boasts of his Christianity which taught him the ability of how to tolerate all kinds of sufferings. In reality, he cannot even afford the reproofs of his friends Frederick and Belvile. He states, “. . . but Frederick, that rogue, and the colonel, will abuse me beyond all Christian Patience . . .” (Rover.3.4.17-18).

After he has been tricked by Lucetta, he does not like to leave his chamber and to go out lest his friends see him stark naked. Fearing disgrace, he gives them a silly excuse that “I am – at – my devotion . . . will you not allow a man time to pray?” (Rover.5.1.18-19). Audiences know the reality that he is not praying, but he does not like to show himself. Because his friend Belvile knows well that Blunt is not purely religious, he mocks him, “Turn religious! A greater wonder than the first, therefore open quickly . . .” (Rover.5.1.20-21). When they do not believe him, he tells them another excuse, “I have a wench with me” (Rover.5.1.23). Willmore within states, “How, a wench! Nay then, we must enter and partake no resistance . . .” (Rover.5.1.26-27). Interestingly, Belvile and Frederick want to meet him in order to reassure him, but Willmore wants to have his affair with the wench. This issue shows both characters Blunt and Willmore as alike in seeking for whores. The difference between them is that Behn has praised Willmore and vilified Blunt. In other words, Blunt is the perfect foil for the attractive Willmore as Lucetta is the foil for Angellica. Susan Owen contends, “Willmore would scorn to be
likened to Blunt, a comic butt among the other men who speaks in a crude and old-fashioned country style. Yet Willmore shares with Blunt a preference for women of easy virtue and predisposition to rape" (Perspectives on Restoration 69). After the exposure, Frederick advises Blunt to keep his immoral misfortune with Lucetta secret in order to preserve the reputation and prestige of the English nation:

Harkee fool, be advised, and conceal both the ring and the story for your reputation’s sake. Do not let people know what despised cullies we English are, to be cheated and abused by one whore, and another rather bribe thee than be kind to thee is an infamy to our nation. (Rover.5.1.75-79)

To sum up what has been discussed above, Behn uses Blunt as a tool to criticise Puritans especially those who supported Whigs against the Stuart monarchy. Puritans were known for their bigotry against literature – chiefly drama. They believed that drama would spoil the religion and morality of people for including sexual innuendo. Meanwhile, some of them ran after prostitutes. In front of others, they prohibited prostitution but they visited brothels as soon as given a chance. When they were exposed, they turned to rape innocent women as a punishment. The best example of this sort of people is Blunt.

In this regard, there is a question why Willmore is not criticised like Blunt! It is because Willmore’s behaviour is clear and he does not pretend to be devout. He openly talks about his desire to have sex and rushes to achieve it. In contrast, Blunt pretends to be devout, yet he attempts his way with Lucetta despite the warnings of his friends. Then he is about to commit the crime of rape against a woman who sought refuge in his
chamber. Therefore, his attempt to rape Florinda is unacceptable while Willmore’s attempt to rape her is regarded as an indiscretion.

To add to this, Behn’s play *Abdelazer* represents a rift in the relations between different religions – between Christians and Muslims. Every religious believer had believed that he/she was fulfilling the teachings of God. So, whatever was allowed in one religious community was banned by the other. As a result of this conflict, every religious community initiated a legislation and established laws in order to maintain the cultural and religious identity of that community. While talking about the polarization between Christianity and Islam especially in the seventeenth century, Janet Todd states:

Christendom used alien Islam for a variety of purposes, from erotic titillation to religious historiography, but, in the seventeenth century, there was a growing scholarly interest in the social and ideological aspects of the faith. (*The Secret Life* 185)

However, Muslims invaded Spain and were able to set its destiny quite apart from the rest of Europe for centuries. By the middle of the fifteenth century, Spain was able to restore its identity. The conflict between Islam and Christianity was still ongoing. Hence, English dramatists started criticising Islam in their plays. The vitriol grew more vicious after the negative reputation of Islam. Islam as a religion was wrongly narrated to the Europeans. Oueijan points out, “In the thirteenth century Mathew Paris circulated in England distorted ideas current in medieval Europe about Islam. John Lydgate (1370-1451) presented a false account of Mohammed’s life and doctrine in the *Fall Of Princes*, which was based on Boccaccio’s *De Casibus Illustrious Virocum*” (11). Therefore, Muslims were portrayed as barbarians, villains and black Moors in literary works. Roger
Day defines the Moors, "The Moors were Muslim inhabitants of North Africa, mainly Morocco and Algeria. In the eighth century they conquered Spain and were not completely driven out until the middle of the fifteenth century" (90).}

To get acquainted more about the aversion towards Muslims in the English dramas, it is reasonable to look at the story of *The Battle of Alcazar*, a play attributed to George Peele and written probably in 1591. *The Battle of Alcazar* tells the story of a battle in Morocco held between King Sebastian of Portugal (1554 - 1578) and a Moroccan Muslim leader Abd Al-Malik. Sebastian or Philip, the alternative protagonist was known for his courage, but he was being duped by the Muslim leader. Against the advice of his commanders, Sebastian marched into the interior of the Moroccan country. His army was defeated and he was killed. From this time, Muslim leaders were then presented in many plays as Machiavellian villains. Most often, Moors were presented in the plays as black villains. However, *The Battle of Alcazar* is regarded as "the first full dramatic treatment of a black Moor on the English Stage. . ." (Logan 146). Hostility against Islam has been reflected in the literary context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the light of the historical background, examples of Islamophobia can be detected in the works of the most important dramatists and poets in the history of English literature. Marlowe and Shakespeare were from the sixteenth century, Heminges and

---

10 Nabil Matar has discussed in his book, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, the relationship between Muslims and Christians which started in 15th century and continued into the early 17th century. In *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685*, Matar also states the way of how English writers presented Islam in their writings. This book covers five literary periods starting from the time when Elizabeth I became the Queen in 1558 until the death of King Charles II. In *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance*, Chew studies the cultural relations of England with Islam during the renaissance. In *New Turkis: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England*, Dimmock examines the writings of the sixteenth century in order to evaluate English conceptions and the changing political climate between the Englishmen and the Turks.
Brome were from Caroline period, and Congreve and Dryden were from the Restoration period.

Christopher Marlowe heavily criticised Muslims in his play, *Tamburlaine the Great*, which written around 1580s. This play was based on the life of a Central Asian Emperor, Timur. It contains vitriol on Muslims and their world. William Shakespeare also criticised Muslims in his plays *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *Othello* (1603). In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare criticises the prince of Morocco, "the prince of Morocco is presented as a lascivious and greedy Prince who chooses the golden casket and loses Portia" (Nicholson 73). In *Othello*, "Othello, a Moor, commits the barbaric act of murdering his wife" (Oueijan 16). In the Caroline period, William Heminges wrote *The Fatal Contract: A French Tragedy* (1653) which is a Caroline era stage tragedy. In this play, Heminges criticises Muslims. For example, he creates "... a female character, Chrotilda, who disguises herself as a black Moorish eunuch ... and instigates most of the play's murder and mayhem" (Vaughan 121). Virginia Vaughan also states that "By 1638 the disguised Moor had become a theatrical convention" (122). Hence, Richard Brome wrote *The English Moor*, or *The Mock Marriage* (1659) which is a Caroline era stage comedy, revolved around the vices of Moors.

In Restoration drama, "The availability of Islam to dramatists as a means for critiquing their own ideologies and public positions becomes increasingly important with every change in the political scenery" (Birchwood 14). Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar point out the reason behind the criticism of Muslims by English writers, "... because it was here that large numbers of Britons were taken captive by 'Barbary' pirates. Captives
who returned home, while denouncing Muslims and Islam, told and wrote about the brutal conditions they had endured” (6).

In this regard, William Congreve and John Dryden, who were the most famous restoration dramatists, criticised Islam and Muslims in their works. William Congreve in his play *The Way of the World* (1700) attacked Muslims especially Turks. Congreve, for example, wrote:

> Your Turks are infidels, and believe not in the grape. Your Mahometan, your Mussulman, is a dry stinkard . . . . My map says that your Turk is not so honest a man as your Christian. I cannot find by map that your Mufti is orthodox—whereby it is a plain case, that orthodox is a hard word. (51)

Then he followed this offensive speech by a song as a response to Muslims who brought with them coffee to the English society. In this song, Congreve presented Muslims as “fools” who live by “heathenish rules.” Then he considered wine as the traditional drink of Christians, but Muslims, as he said, banned it and used instead coffee.

> To drink is a Christian diversion,

> Unknown to the Turk and the Persian:

> Let Mahometan fools

> Live by heathenish rules

> And be damned over tea-cups and coffee.

> But let the British lads sing,

> Crown a health to the king,

> And a fig to your sultan and sophy! (51)
In turn, John Dryden in his poems ‘Astræu Redux’ (1660) and ‘The Hind and the Panther’ (1687) criticised Muslims and considered them antiquated and indolent religious people. Particularly in Astræu Redux, Dryden projects the images of the Turks as cruel, impolite and licentious barbarians. William Congreve criticised Muslims because they did not drink wine while John Dryden in his long poem ‘Astræu Redux’ accused Turks of drinking wine in order to forget their awful crimes. Their views towards Muslims drinking wine were different, yet they shared the same hatred against Muslims. Dryden wrote:

> And as devouter Turks first warn their souls
> To part, before they taste forbidden bowls:
> So these, when their black crimes they went about,
> First timely charm’d their useless conscience out. (Dryden, *The Poetical Works* lines 187-90)

Dryden did not only criticise Muslims in his poetry but also in his plays. For example, Dryden’s *Aureng – Zebe, or The Great Mogul* (1675) is a heroic tragedy which criticises a Muslim Monarchy placed in Agra in India. The Muslim monarchy is described as cruel, tyrannical and sensual in which the Mughal King, Shah Jahan (Emperor of India) and his sons fight with each other over silly matters as to marry the same woman, Indamora. In short, the play presents them as if they destroy one another for sexual pleasure. Moreover, John Dryden wrote *Don Sebastian* (1689) on the same subject of criticising Muslim. The historical background of this play is based on *The Battle of Alcazar*.

It is important to note that the above-mentioned authors in addition to Behn are not fundamentalist. However, they bitterly criticise Muslims. Hence, the worse can be
expected from those who are fundamentalist theologians. Their criticisms and attacks on Islam are more severe. Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar mention some writers who have different views about Islam and Muslims:

Theatrical representations of Muslims by dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Greene, Thomas Heywood, John Massinger, Elkanah Settle, John Dryden, and Aphra Behn . . . differed in their purview of Islam from writers like Alexander Ross and Humphrey Prideaux, and in their conception of the Islamic world from geographers and cartographers with access to the most up-to-date atlases and Portolan maps. (4)

The examples in this quick narration are taken from the works of some famous English dramatists whose attacks against Muslims are merely for religious reasons. If English dramatists had only focused on Moorish Muslims, it might be said that they were discontented of the Moorish invasion on Spain and Europe. Yet English dramatists had criticised Islam in general and Muslims from different parts of the world as for example the Islamic Monarchy in Agra who had not invaded Spain, yet criticised.\textsuperscript{11}

In her plays, Behn presents Christianity in its purest form. Those who are Christians are the best-desired characters while those who are not Christians are considered to be criminals. In \textit{Abdelazer}, Behn presents Abdelazer as an unbearable character while his opponents Philip, Ferdinand, Mendoza, Alonzo, Leonora and even his wife Florella are presented as the best models of Christianity. It seems that Behn used Abdelazer as a way to attack Moors. The alternative title of \textit{Abdelazer} is \textit{The Moor's}

\textsuperscript{11} D'Amico's \textit{The Moor in English Renaissance Drama} is one of the first books which focused on the context of Islam and race. D'Amico observes that the term "Moor" refers to Muslims wherever they are from and even if they are of different colour skins, whether they are African, Ethiopian, Moroccan, Algerian, Indian, etc.
Revenge, but the play is mostly known as Abdelazer and Abdelazer is a Muslim name. Abdelazer’s father Abdela was the King of Fez. Queen Isabella clarifies how her husband, King Philip, invaded Abdelazer’s country and killed his father, “King Philip made a War in Barbary, / Won Tunis, Conquer’d Fez, and hand to hand / Slew great Abdela, King of Fez” (Abd.5.1.53). According to Behn, Abdelazer is an infidel son of a Muslim King who pretends to belong to Christianity in order to get the Spanish throne. In turn, Abdelazer is fully aware of the role of religion to achieve political goals. He confesses, “The giddy Rout are guided by Religion, / More then by Justice, Reason, or Allegiance” (Abd.4.1.47). In this regard, Behn wrote Abdelazer in order to portray the misbehaviour of Muslims. Janet Todd clarifies:

Like Dryden’s great political drama, The Conquest of Granada, Behn’s tragedy was set in Spain and turned on the hatred of Muslim and Christian. It had, however, a very tenuous connection with history, converting as it did the excessively pious fifteenth-century Queen Isabella into a lust-crazed murderer. Far more it drew on literature, and Behn’s Moor came from a Renaissance theatrical tradition of rationally villainous Muslims. (The Secret Life 185-86)

---

12 Jedidiah Morse defines the kingdom of Fez as “The kingdom of Fez is united to the empire of Morocco. Its capital, of the same name, is considered by the Moors as a sacred asylum, and an object of devotion” (348). In turn, William C. Woodbridge states that “Fez, the capital of the kingdom of Fez, is a large city, the principal resort of the Berbers and Arabs for trade. Both this city and Morocco are great marts for the trade to Soudan” (323). In Encyclopaedia Britannica; or A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature. 6th ed. Vol. 11., the kingdom of Fez is also defined as the kingdom which “is seated at the mouth of a river of the same name, with a good harbour. It was once in the possession of the Spaniards; but the Moors took it from them” (558).

13 Mazour et al state, “The term Barbary means ‘of the Berbers’ — a people of North Africa who had converted to Islam during the 600s. Four Muslim states — Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli — made up the so-called Barbary States” (602).
With regard to this, *Abdelazer* or *The Moor's Revenge* has historically been seen as an imitation of *Lust's Dominion* or *The Lascivious Queen* which is considered to be Behn’s source. Thus, *Lust’s Dominion* concentrates on Spain at the time of the “reconquista,” the name of the action that the Spaniards achieved to reclaim Spain from the Moors. Hence, Behn’s *Abdelazer* (1676) “... is set in the late Middle Ages, when Spain was acquiring its permanent territorial shape by displacing the Moorish and Portuguese presences on the peninsula” (Cuder-Dominguez 68). Whatever has been said or written, Abdelazer is the villain of the play and is hated by all for committing great crimes.

In line with Behn, Abdelazer would not commit heinous crimes if he fears God. Therefore, Mendozo, the Cardinal of the Spanish kingdom, declares at the beginning of the play that Abdelazer should be deprived from his posts simply because he is an unbeliever. Mendozo decides, “And (as an Unbeliever) from the Church, / I utterly deprive thee of that Greatness, / Those Offices and Trusts you hold in Spain” (*Abd.*1.2.9). Abdelazer tries to defend himself by ascertaining that he should not be questioned in his religion. Yet, Mendozo accuses him of using religion as a cover to commit not only crimes but also treason. Therefore, Mendozo does not like to trial him but to punish him as soon as possible, “It needs no tryal, the proofs are evident, / And his Religion was his veil for Treason” (*Abd.*1.2.9). Alonzo intervenes and asks them, “Why should you question his Religion, Sir? / He does profess Christianity” (*Abd.*1.2.9). Alonzo’s brave behaviour stems out from his duty towards the husband of his sister Florella. However, the Spanish Lords insist that if Abdelazer pretends to be a Christian, he should be punished severely. In his defence, Abdelazer criticises those who suspect his Christianity, insisting of his unmatched faith and interpreting their charges as a kind of jealousy.
Philip, the Prince, the General in army and the second son of the old Philip, intervenes to support Mendoza and insists on punishing Abdelazer if not for his blasphemy, it is for his other crimes, "Damn his Religion, he has a thousand crimes / That will yet better justify your sentence" (Abd.1.2.10).

Behn presents Abdelazer as an unbeliever and an undesirable person in the Christian community. In fact, he is an unbeliever according to the Christian belief. To consider the views of Muslims and Christians towards each other’s religion, it can be said that both sides accuse each other of blasphemy. According to Behn, Abdelazer is an unbeliever because he defies God many times. Since he is an unbeliever, he is without morality and honour despite his insistence that he is a man of great honour. Being a man with these negative traits, he is a person who does not believe in love but uses it as a means to achieve his narrow interest. By pretending to be in love, he uses Queen Isabella as a tool to subdue the Spanish reign and then to grab the rule. He also uses his marriage with Florella as a way to facilitate his wicked ambition.

Abdelazer is infidel despite his attempts to show himself as a pure Christian. It seems that he has converted to Christianity to cover his malignant crimes, and this is clear in his words and behaviour and in the reactions of Christians towards him. Christians are often using religious discourse in their speeches especially in the critical situation while Abdelazer uses it in the needed time. For instance, when Abdelazer furnishes his wife Florella with a dagger and commands her to kill King Ferdinand if he approaches her, she disagrees to commit this crime not because she is afraid of the King but because "Heaven forbid[s it]" (Abd.3.1.29). Meanwhile, she really wants to keep her chastity and to be faithful to her husband. So, she is ready to defend herself by all available means even to
commit suicide except killing because it is forbidden by Heaven. Virginia Woolf asserts that in Behn’s time “Chastity” was “a religious importance in a woman’s life” (49). Unfortunately, her spiritual morality turns on deaf ears, and he sees himself above Heaven. In his response to her, he considers himself more qualified than Heaven. He insists that “No matter what Heaven will, I say it must” (Abd.3.1.29).

Moreover, Abdelazer employs religion only to support him politically or socially. Otherwise, he does not believe in God; it is because he renders himself equal to God, so no one on earth should infringe his order. When he nominates Leonora to be the Queen of Spain, he declares, “She must be Queen, I, and the Gods decree it” (Abd.5.1.86). In some other occasions, he challenges the divine teaching especially when something he needs conflicts with his whim and desire. This can be clearly seen in his insistence to prevent Leonora from marrying her lover Alonzo because he wants her for himself. He orders her, “But Heaven and I, am of another mind, / And must be first obey’d” (Abd.5.1.55). At the times when he is in need of something, he curses Heaven for not bestowing him what he wants. He does not realise that he puts himself in comparison with Heaven in some other situations, so why it is now he blames heaven; he is really a whimsical person. Hence, he admits of his harshness in dealing with others when he tries to persuade Leonora to love him. He blames Heaven for not taming and outfitting him with sweet talk, “... Heaven ne’re gave me so much tameness ...” (Abd.5.1.62). When Leonora does not listen to his temptation, he shifts to praise himself and to advise her that she will never find a man like him. Abdelazer resorts to the carrot and stick approach to convince Leonora to marry him. When he fails, he tries to rape her. Ann Marie Stewart states:
Abdelazer pursues Lenora and the crown, and in the process kills Florella, Prince Ferdinand, and queen. He then attempts to rape Leonora.

The near rape scene between Abdelazer and Leonora clarifies the difference in their class, race, and ideological perceptions of love and sex.

(68)

Leonora and Florella are friends as well as women of pure Christian religion. They are also women of virtue and honour. Both of them defend their spouses. Florella has done her best to save Abdelazer’s life by seeking help from the King. She remains faithful to him until her murder. Leonora has also done her best to save Alonzo and to release him from the prison. As the best example of Christianity, Leonora stands firm against Abdelazer’s desire to marry her. She defends her love with Alonzo for the sake of God’s satisfaction. In her argument with Abdelazer, she reminds him of “Heav’ns will I’m not permitted to dispute” (Abd.5.1.60), and “Heaven forbid that you, Who can so generously give Liberty, Should be depriv’d of it! It must not be whilst Leonora lives” (Abd.5.1.62). Actually, she derives her strength from her religion, so she is able to face the tyranny of Abdelazer. Because she is spiritually related to Alonzo, she refuses to marry Abdelazer although he has the power. Yet, she prefers to marry Alonzo, a Christian nobleman.

No one can ignore the fact that Abdelazer is a rhetorical speaker and a brave colonel. He also uses his mind, sweet words, and courage to get the throne. Nevertheless, he is a man of egotistical nature who feels all his actions are correct even if they are inconsistent with the teachings of the Christian religion. At the beginning of the play, when lords and soldiers try to enter his apartment to search for Queen Isabella, he shows himself above all. He feels that no one dares to enter his house without his permission
whether they are kings, lords or even God. This arrogance can be seen when he pacifies
the Queen, “Oh, do not fear, no Cardinal enters here; / No King, no God, that means to be
secure” (*Abd.1.1.4*). To personify God as a man is considered a direct underestimation to
God. It is worth mentioning that Spanish Christian Lords consider Abdelazer a villain in
the kingdom of Spain. In his turn, Abdelazer knows well that they hate him, so he reveals
this bitter reality to the Queen when he nags of “... thousand eyes / Throw killing looks
at me” (*Abd.1.1.3*). Christians’ apartheid instigates Abdelazer to go on in his plan of
revenge. Ann Marie Stewart states, “Psychologically, the Moor is plagued by an
inferiority complex based on what he perceives as racial discrimination from others.
Although this discrimination may be real, he is hated mostly for his violent behavior and
desire to overthrow the throne” (68). However, he substitutes the looks of contempt by
praising himself. Accordingly, his view of himself as a superman is already affirmed by
the Queen at the beginning of the play when she compares him to God. She tells him,
“Smile whilst a thousand Cupids shall descend / And call thee Jove, and wait upon thy
smiles” (*Abd.1.1.2*).

To compare the story of Abdelazer and how he is able to use religion to cover his
villainy to what is going on in reality, one can notice that the religion is a double-edged
sword, so it can be used in good or evil. In fact, many people use religion as a means to
achieve their wicked desires. Others use it to improve the moral attitudes of the society.
Abdelazer uses religion to get victory over his enemies. Philip and Mendozo, on the other
hand, avoid certain death by using religious means. They disguise themselves in the
friar’s clothes to be able to escape. The disguise in the friar’s clothes is regarded to be an
allegory to do whatever they like under the cloak of the friar. Surely, Philip and Mendozo
would not be able to escape if they were not dressed in the priest’s dress. Ironically, it is Abdelazer who criticises this act, “That case of Sanctity was first ordain’d, / To cheat the honest world” (Abd.3.1.25), although he himself is the first beneficiary of a cloak of religion. The dress of priest can also be used in evil as it happens with Roderigo. Abdelazer orders Roderigo to go to the Queen’s lodging to murder her. Roderigo is disguised in the friar’s clothes and because he is in religious dress, he is able to enter the Queen’s lodging to kill her. Surely, if he does not wear the friar’s dress, he will not be able to kill her and even to enter her lodging. These two incidences: the escape of Philip and Mendozo in the friar’s dress and the murder of the Queen by the way of the friar’s dress prove that by the cloak of religion one can achieve and get what one can never get by normal ways.

As Behn criticised Muslims, Sheridan satirised the way of earning money through usury and used Moses, a Jewish character, as a tool. As Behn criticised the Puritan behaviour of Blunt, Sheridan criticised the rude behaviour of O’Trigger. O’Trigger’s misuse of religion in his daily life in The Rivals and Moses’s usury in The School for Scandal have been discussed in the coming pages.

At the beginning, it can be argued that religion is a system of belief in society, each society has its religion, and each religion has its own inscription for its group. In fact, religion is a very difficult term to be defined; even religious scholars find it hard to explain in a convinced way what religion is. Therefore, this section is not about discussing religion in general, but it is a brief remark to the religion in Sheridan’s plays. Sheridan was a follower of Christianity, so this section is neither an exhaustive survey of the Christian religion nor does it follow his religious life, but it examines some textual
sketches from his plays to offer a critical literary understanding of his religious dramatic style.

Sheridan had lived in a time where there was no religious conflict as in the time of Behn. Behn had lived in a time when there was religious contest, so it was reflected in her plays. Sheridan was a Catholic and his orations in religion or politics are famous until today, yet he was not a religious bigot. Linda Kelly asserts that “Sheridan, from a family which had been Protestant for at least five generations, could speak for Irish Catholics, who still made up three quarters of the population, without such reservations” (Richard Brinsley Sheridan: A Life 125-6). Jonathan David Gross acknowledges, “... Sheridan’s support for Catholic emancipation as his last will and testament...” (10). Gross adds that Sheridan along with his friend Fox had politically supported Catholics, “Even Charles James Fox had subordinated his support for Catholic emancipation to his desire to serve in the Talents ministry” (19). Sheridan did not support a particular church in his plays under study. His plays convey a huge satire on the corruption of society, but they do not adopt religious intolerance. Nevertheless, Sheridan denotes sometimes to Christianity especially if he wants to talk about honour, morality, manhood or absurd works. In The Rivals, Lydia is heavily accused for her romantic whimsicality. To state the religious view about this issue, he enrolls Lucy to satirise Lydia’s romance.

Lydia is fond of reading romances, so she sent her maidservant Lucy to search for romantic books from the nearby libraries. Lucy comes with some unworthy books, but she could not get the required one. When Lydia admonishes her for not bringing that book, Lucy replies that the book had been “... so soiled and dog’s-eared it, it wa’n’t fit for a Christian to read” (Rivals.1.2.44). Lucy’s reply conveys a criticism that this book is
unworthy for being read by a Christian. It means that the content of this book is silly and out of Christian teachings. In particular, Sheridan criticises Lydia's excessive romance but not her Christianity; it is because Lucy's is not honest towards her master Lydia, so her remark to the teachings of Christianity has no meaning.

In contrast, Sheridan interrogates O'Trigger's Christianity since he is acting contrary to what he says. O'Trigger instructs Acres, his friend, of how to write a good letter to his rival, the so-called Beverley. Acres intends to start his letter with oath and damn, but O'Trigger instructs him to "do the thing decently and like a Christian. Begin now - Sir" (Rivals.3.4.88). Strangely, O'Trigger teaches Acres the art of salutation that Christians adopted while he himself is a rude man and out of decent behaviour. As a proof of his rudeness, The Rivals has failed at its first production because of his botch.

In the battlefield, Acres intends to abide by Christian teaching in which one should not fight his friend for nothing. Actually, Acres is overjoyed to know that his rival is Absolute his friend, so he decides to stop duelling under the slogan of "I'll bear my disappointment like a Christian" (Rivals.5.3.118). O'Trigger does not like Acres's decision to withdraw. Thus, he charges him of cowardice. It is surprising to see O'Trigger commit to the principle of Christianity in writing a letter while he does not adhere to the same principle which prohibits bloodshed.

Furthermore, Sheridan does not criticise any sect of Christianity as he criticises Jews. Behn criticises the misbehaviour of Muslims in her play, Abdelazer, and Sheridan criticises the usury of Jews in The School for Scandal.

The works of usurers and brokers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were hated by Christians. Also, the dresses of Jews were designed in a particular style, so
one could differentiate between Christians and Jews simply through their dresses. Sir Oliver tells Moses that he cannot behave or dress like a Jew. Moses, the actual Jewish broker, pacifies him by telling him that he should act the role of the broker but not to be a Jew.

SIR OLIVER... .How the plague shall I be able to pass for a Jew?

MOSES. There's not need — the principal is Christian. (Sch.3.1.222).

Through this speech, it is obvious that the Christians did not work as usurers since “usury is condemned in the Bible” (Stiansen 72). Jews appear in many plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as usurers who made their money through interest. Thus, the most well-known dramatists Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* and Marlowe in *The Jew of Malta* discuss the roles of Jews and how they earn money.

In *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan is also disgusted at the Jews’ incomes, and therefore, he uses Moses to criticise usury and the wrong ways of earning money. The word ‘usury’ is mentioned around five times in the play and all of them denote Jews. However, Christian business men in the plays of the eighteenth century are mainly merchants. John Loftis states, “‘Merchants’ in the eighteenth century meant business men. . . . There are in early-eighteenth-century plays many forthright discussions of the importance of merchants and of trade to the nation” (“The Social Milieu of Early-Eighteenth-Century Comedy” 100). In *The School for Scandal*, Sir Oliver and Sir Peter are working in trade. Therefore, Sheridan praises their works and criticises Moses’s work.

The hero of the play, Charles, criticises usury though he borrowed money from the usurer Moses. Charles’s dislike to the way of earning money through usury can be
seen when he pays unexpected visit to his brother Joseph. Joseph takes time to open the
door for his brother until Sir Peter hides in the cupboard. Charles relates Joseph’s delay to
open the door for two reasons. Charles rebukes him, “What, have you had a Jew or a
wench with you?” (Sch.4.3.252). Charles’s charge conveys a sarcastic deep meaning that
Joseph does not like to open the door for fear of exposure either for sitting with a Jew or
with a wench and both are shameful. Nevertheless, many characters have also criticised
Charles for his extravagance in which he has put himself under the mercy of the usurer
Moses. So, his reputation as a Christian has been harmed by scandalmonger. In fact,
Charles knows well that his dealing with Moses is unpleasant, but he is obliged to do so
because he is in need of money.

Moses has developed his wealth through usury. He appears to be a man who takes
advantages of the bankruptcy of others in order to grow his money even if the victim is
his close friend. If a person is in extreme need of loan, he gives him a loan with an
interest rate of 100%. To support the idea that Moses is a professional usurer, his
instruction to Sir Oliver must be considered. Sir Oliver in disguise of Mr. Premium
decides to ask Charles to give eight to ten percent as an interest for the loan, but Moses
objects and instructs Oliver, “If he appears not very anxious for the supply, you should
require only forty or fifty percent. But if you find him in great distress and want the
moneys very bad you may ask double” (Sch.3.1.223). This is an evidence of how Moses
 earns his money.

Charles offers the interest rate before others ask for it. His dealing with Moses
indicates that he is accustomed to being in this condition. Indeed, he has a very good
experience about the dealings of brokers and how they grow their money. Since he is a
candid person, he does not like to talk unnecessarily about the loan. This is the reason behind offering the interest rate before others ask for it. In contrast, his statement "... I am blockhead enough to give fifty per cent sooner than not have it; and you, I presume, are rogue enough to take a hundred if you can get it" (Sch.3.3.234) indicates Charles's financial collapse. Charles in a certain period of his life was in the lowest degree of poverty. To be able to get money, he decides to sell all his possessions including the valuables, the pictures of the family and all the books which are regarded to be valuable heritage from one generation to the other. To sell everything including the valuable portraits of the ancestors is just like to sell flesh and blood according to Sir Oliver. Sir Oliver is really infuriated to see Charles in this miserable condition, so he compares himself and Charles to Shylock and Antonio in The Merchant of Venice. He painfully asks him, "do you take me for Shylock in the play, that you would raise money of me on your own flesh and blood? (Sch.3.3.236)

Since Moses has good relationships with Christians, Sheridan does not curse or criticise him as Shakespeare criticises Shylock and Marlowe criticises Barabas, but he presents him as a professional Jewish usurer, leaving criticism for the audience. Therefore, Sheridan's audiences do not convey hatred against Moses for the reason that he is able to render him in an acceptable manner. Moses cooperates with Sir Oliver in lifting Charles from his inevitable fall, so this is considered a shining side in his doings. Some others say, Moses helps Sir Oliver in order to get back his money from Charles and he frankly reveals this issue to Sir Oliver. Whatever may be the reason, his job is disgusting but not detestable. Nevertheless, Moses's usury is one of the reasons of the bankruptcy of the ideal Christian man, Charles. In order to give more clarification about
the legal and illegal livelihood, Sheridan praises Sir Oliver and Sir Peter as the best Christian merchants who live by earning through legitimate ways. Since they follow the same Christian moralities, they help each other and remain friends despite the obvious difference in their respective views towards what is going on in their society. In the same way, Sir Oliver gives his wealth to Charles and Sir Peter gives it to his Christian wife.

At the end of the chapter, it is worth noting that the themes of politics and religion in the plays of Behn and Sheridan affect and are being affected by the themes of morality and honour. The interrelations between the themes of politics, religion, morality and honour can clearly be seen in their plays. For example, when a person is not a pure Christian believer, it means that this person is serving in the wrong political party, and then his/her behaviour is characterised by immorality and dishonour. To take this further, morality and honour are discussed in the ensuing chapter.