Chapter IV
MARRIAGE AND SEX

MARRIAGE

Behn and Sheridan have similar attitudes towards the value of marriage which is a major theme in their plays. Marriage in Behn’s plays forms a crucial issue of a woman’s future and marriage in Sheridan’s plays is important for men to marry their lovers and get their wealth. In the plays of Behn and Sheridan, women largely depend on men to facilitate the process of marriage. At marriage, both men and women become dependent on each other, in particular, women secure their futures. It is also noticeable that the marriages of the main characters in the plays often coincide with issue of wealth.

Two examples of marriage are discussed here – forced marriage and marriage between different social classes. Before that, such a background study of the ways of marriage during Restoration period is necessary to make the presentation as authentic as possible.

The late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century were known for their various developments in political, social, cultural and literary spheres. Behind these developments were the two English revolutions. The first revolution was when Charles II restored the throne in 1660, and the second revolution was called the “Glorious Revolution” in 1688. Among these developments, there was something to say about English marriage in the seventeenth century. In most cases, women’s marriage was subjected to economic, social, political and religious considerations. The status of women during the Restoration period was better than the status of women under the rule of the
Commonwealth. Nevertheless, women remained facing many obstacles in their ways of marriage.

During the Restoration period, finding a husband was of great importance for a woman. The woman who did not find any source of sustenance could find it through marriage. In general, many women were not allowed to work, and when they worked, their work was drudgery or demeaning. Therefore, women turned to find appropriate husbands. Unfortunately, to find a husband was not an easy task.

Despite the fact that forced marriage was significantly less in the late seventeenth century than it was in the beginning of the century or the centuries that preceded, it was still spreading in England. Therefore, many literary writings including Behn’s plays had dealt with this social dilemma. At the time when there were many women who could not marry for many reasons, there were many marriages which were often arranged by parents while their children were still very young. Couples were allowed to marry when the girl was twelve years old and when the boy was fourteen years old. They were also allowed to get engaged at the age of seven (Stone, The Crisis of Aristocracy 652). After marriage, the woman did not have any financial rights. All the business was run by her husband including her inheritance if she had any. Worse than this was the fact that the husband had the right to beat his wife since the law supported him. The husband controlled his wife, subjected her to his desires and treated her as if she was a servant. The husband’s domination over his wife, children and servants was similar to the reign of the King over his citizens. He felt that his wife was inferior to him, so she had to obey his orders silently.
Ironically, poor girls were more fortunate to marry their lovers than rich girls. A rich girl had to marry according to the wishes of her parents and relatives especially when she had inheritance or when her parents intended to bestow her and her husband some property. Pretty women and handsome men were lucky since pretty women could attract rich suitors and handsome men could also attract rich women.

Meanwhile, there were some conditions behind every successful marriage – the couple had to be of same religious belief, of similar financial condition, of similar social background and of similar age. They did not think about love because they believed that love would come after the wedding. The best example of this type of marriage was the marriage of the Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell to his wife Elizabeth who did not marry for love but were able in the course of time to develop a deep and sincere love for each other. This is clear in one of Elizabeth’s letters. She wrote to her husband, “Truly, my life is but half a life in your absence, did not the Lord make it up in himself, which I must acknowledge to the praise of his grace” (Costello 51). During that time, romantic love, had played important roles on all social levels though many lovers were not allowed to marry for their love. In fact, individuals in the late seventeenth century had the independence and opportunities to form relationships with the opposite sex. Some of them fell in love, but they did not marry; others married, but they were not in love. Behn had her own way of presenting love. In her plays, the need for marriage, sex and money had received more discussion than the theme of love.

In the seventeenth century, the normal tradition was that, love came first, then came marriage and then sex, and Church adopted this order. However, Behn had violated this custom by inviting women to have the freedom either to practise sex before or after
marriage. She called women to do something which was strictly prohibited during that time. In that time, the adulterer was severely punished. For this, Behn felt of the lack of justice especially when a man was not judged for committing adultery as strictly as it was with women. Also, it was well known especially among the Puritans that a woman had to keep her virginity until marriage. After her marriage, the husband was responsible for preserving his wife’s fidelity including keeping her at home. Further, he did not allow her to meet men. Nonetheless, twenty five percent of seventeenth-century Englishwomen had already been pregnant at the time of the wedding (Stone, *The Crisis of Aristocracy* 664).

To avoid all these violations, Behn instigated women to search for suitable husbands and marry them even if it took them to get married without the wishes of their parents. Meanwhile, Behn did not prefer the secret marriages but preferred the declared ones; if necessary, a woman had to elope to be able to marry her lover. In reality, the Church court recorded many marriages which had concluded secretly without parental knowledge.

A woman in the seventeenth century did not have the right to choose her husband. She had to marry according to her parent’s wishes; most often, the marriage was for economic or political reasons, and a woman did not have the right to object. Even Behn, who revealed the sufferings of women in her plays, suffered in her marriage. In her introduction to *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, Janet Todd states, “As a woman, Behn was one of its scapegoats” (2-3). Behn’s failed marriage was perhaps the reason behind her open discussion of women’s freedom in marriage and sex. Mendelson argues that a woman was of two choices – marriage or sex, “Thus there was a fundamental asymmetry in the way the two sexes were perceived. Matrimonial status or sexual activity was a
relatively minor addendum to a man’s occupation, whereas it designated the core of a woman’s being” (10). Behn was married out of her hometown and since her marriage did not last for long, she turned to discuss women’s sufferings in her plays. In particular, Behn attacked the arranged and forced marriages in her debut play *The Forced Marriage*. Angeline Goreau notes that *The Forced Marriage* “. . . evokes the violence that the custom of arranged marriage wrought on the lives of Aphra’s contemporaries and demonstrates the terrible effects of “the interest of a father” on his daughter’s fate” (*Reconstructing Aphra* 128). Elaine Hobby also asserts that *The Forced Marriage* “. . . initiates what was to be the dominant theme in Behn’s plays: the actual meaning of courtship and marriage for women, and the fact that male power is an inescapable component in such relationships and has to be negotiated with” (120).

Behn discusses forced marriage in her play *The Forced Marriage* and the solutions proposed for it in her next plays: *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesans*. In these two plays, women decide to face forced and arranged marriages by resisting men, disguising themselves, attending carnivals and searching for husbands. As it is stated in *The Feigned Courtesans*, Susan Owen summarises the role of women in avoiding the arranged marriage by “. . . plotting to take control of their lives, civilizing rakes and winning marriage choice and freedom of sexual manoeuvre. When necessary these heroines dress as men and fight alongside men” (“Sexual Politics” 16).

The marriage of Erminia to Alcippus in *The Forced Marriage* is an example of forced marriage; therefore, the title of the play conveys the same theme. It is obvious that when a father forces his daughter to marry someone she does not love, her marriage is bound to fail and then her life would be destroyed. Erminia requests her father to allow
her to marry the man she loves and not force her to marry Alcippus. In reality, she considers Alcippus a brother and a friend, and not a lover.

The basic condition of marriage is the consent of both parties: the boy and the girl. The parents do not have the right to force their children to marry someone whom they do not want. Yet, the interferences of parents in their daughter’s marriage are almost remarkable in the day-to-day life. In this play, the former General Orgulius forces his daughter Erminia to marry Alcippus despite her fervent love for Philander. With regard to her father’s justification, preventing her from getting married to Philander is a mistake committed by him. He has to realise the need of his daughter to get married to the person she loves as not less than her need for food and shelter.

Erminia is well aware of the negative aspects of the forced marriage. Therefore, she stands firm in defending her love with Philander and refuses, at the same time, to marry Alcippus. She derives her power from her true love for Philander as she tells her father, “I borrow’d Courage from my Innocence, / And my own Virtue, Sir, was my defence. / Philander never spoke but from a Soul” (F.M.1.3.26). Unfortunately, her father neither listens to her entreaty nor feels her sufferings but prefers to go on in the process of marriage under the pretext of his prior approval to the King and to Alcippus. However, her lover is now the Prince and the King in the future, but Orgulius’s negative subordination to the King, the father, makes him unaware of the disastrous results on his daughter. He is ready to destroy the life of his daughter in order to please the King. Therefore, his daughter Erminia reveals her agony directly to him, “Alas Sir, I can be content to die, / But cannot suffer this severity” (F.M.1.3.27).
In case the woman obliges to give her body to the undesired husband, her heart, soul and mind will remain with her lover. In such cases, forced marriage is sometimes worse than that of a rape because rape may happen once in the life of a woman, but forced marriage means that the woman will live her life as if she is in a constant state of rape. Robert Hume claims that Restoration comedies are not hostile to the institution of marriage, but they are “... quite definitely hostile to marriage of economic convenience, and especially to ‘forced’ marriage. Both were serious problems in upper-class seventeenth-century society” (*The Rakish Stage* 142).

In *The Rover*, for example, Behn’s ideal hero Willmore is about to rape Florinda twice, yet she depicts him in a way that none of the audiences hates him. He remains loved by all. In contrast, Behn heavily criticises Pedro who forced his sister Florinda to marry one of the arranged husbands.

In *The Forced Marriage*, Erminia’s marriage to Alcippus has received bitter criticism and severe censure. From this point, Philander calls Erminia’s marriage as a rape. He asks her, “Will you Erminia suffer such a Rape” (*F.M.*1.4.29). Later, Philander warns Alcippus, “Alcippus, touch her not,” but no one can prevent the husband from having sex with his wife. Alcippus replies, “Not touch her! by Heaven, I will, / And who shall hinder me? /Who is’t dares say I shall not touch my wife?” (*F.M.*2.7.64). At this time, Alcippus may have the right to speak in this way since Erminia is actually his wife.

As Erminia tries her best to convince her father of the illegality of her marriage to Alcippus, she also explains to Alcippus that she is in love with Philander and hopes to get married soon. Unfortunately, Alcippus does not listen to her. Hence, she decides to prevent him from having sex with her. She tells Gallatea, “But if I must th’unsuit
Alcippus wed, / I vow he ne’er shall come into my Bed” (F.M.1.2.22). Essentially, her rejection stems out from her sincere love for Philander. One may wonder about why Erminia does not allow her husband to sleep with her. Some scholars argue that if she decides to prevent her husband from having sex with her, she should have prevented the marriage at first. After marriage, she becomes his wife according to the law. In fact, she tried to prevent her marriage to Alcippus, but her father and the King determined it, so there was no way to resist. She openly confesses, “I obey a King and cruel father too, / . . . / To force an heart you know can never love” (F.M.2.3.45). Alcippus tries to please and convince her to sleep with him. When he fails, he attributes her refusal to her desire to marry Philander in order to get glory and wealth since Philander will soon be the King. Then Alcippus chides her for preferring to marry the Prince rather than the General. At the same time, he reminds her of his important position as the General. According to him, the General is the nearest position to the position of the King. Yet Alcippus does not think that love is something more valuable than glory and wealth.

In fact, Behn is not against the marriage for glory or wealth if a man and a woman love each other, but she is completely against forced marriage. At the end, Philander marries Erminia and Alcippus marries Gallatea. Thus, both Alcippus and Erminia seek glory. By this way of marriage, the General Alcippus who marries Princess Gallatea becomes equal to the position of Prince Philander who married the daughter of the former General.

Alcippus does not love Erminia as much as Philander loves her. Therefore, his marriage has failed. Alcippus married Erminia since he did not know that Gallatea was fond of him. Meanwhile, he did not dare to think of Gallatea as a wife, but at the time he
makes sure of her love, he leaves Erminia, asks her for her forgiveness and congratulates her on her marriage to Philander.

If Alcippus is really in love with Erminia, he will not have left her for any reason. However, Pisaro advises Alcippus to leave Erminia and to marry Gallatea. To marry Gallatea means that Alcippus will get half of the kingdom and it is the dream of every person. He also tells him that it is better to marry the daughter of the King than to spend his life with a woman that does not love him. Pisaro advises Alcippus:

Set Galatea's charms before your eyes,

Think of the glory to divide a Kingdom.

And do not waste your Noble youth and time,

Upon a peevish heart you cannot gain. (F.M.3.1.71)

Alcippus also talks about the glory he will get if he marries Princess Gallatea. He says, "Pride, Honour, Glory, and Ambition strive / How to expel this Tyrant from my soul" (F.M.4.5.107). Hence, Alcippus determines to leave Erminia and to marry Gallatea.

On the contrary, Philander is a true lover and Erminia's marriage makes him love her more and more. Therefore, he is ready to fight against the world for her sake that is why he decides to kill Alcippus in order to get her back.

An example of the mutual love between Philander and Erminia is Philander's response to Erminia's demand. When once Philander and Alcippus indulged in fighting, Alcippus was wounded and Philander was about to kill him, but Erminia intervened and prayed Philander to stop. Philander replied, "I cannot hear that voice and disobey" (F.M.2.7.64). This incident indicates his fervent love. Surely, if Erminia did not intervene, he might have killed him. From the beginning of the play until the end,
Philander talks about nothing except about his love for Erminia. Their conversation with each other, their praise of the virtue of each other and their sufferings when she has married Alcippus indicate their sincere love. Their love seems to have been built up on a solid foundation and through complete understanding and harmony.

In turn, Gallatea, Philander’s sister, loves Alcippus deeply and she is ready to sacrifice her life to save him, yet she is sad to see him marrying Erminia. She reveals her anger to her friend Aminta, “You cannot guess the torments I endure: / Not knowing the Disease you’ll miss the Cure” (F.M.I.2.19). Meanwhile, she is blamed for the reason that she does not tell Alcippus about her love for him and therefore remains alone burning in the fire of love. Surely, if she told Alcippus of her love, he would betroth her instead of Erminia and her position as the daughter of the King allows her to speak frankly.

Gallatea is overjoyed to hear Erminia’s assurance that she would never share Alcippus’s bed. Gallatea praises Erminia’s deed as “That’s bravely vow’d, and now I love thee more, / Then e’re I was obliged to do before” (F.M.I.2.22). Then she also encourages Erminia to resist Alcippus’s attempts to have sex whatever be the temptations. In this regard, one can understand the feelings of Gallatea. She is worried of the virginity of Alcippus. She believes that if Erminia and Alcippus have sex, they may start loving each other, which means, she would lose Alcippus forever. In reality, there are many stories which confirm her worries that love sometimes comes after marriage; by marriage, the two souls are merged into one.

In the same vein, Philander and Alcander are worried that Erminia may subject to Alcippus’s sexual demand. If they have sex, she will lose her virginity. They believe that when young couples get married, they will celebrate their marriage by sexual activity;
therefore, Alcander states, “She’s where she ought, abed with young Alcippus” (F.M.2.4.50). Alcander intends by this statement to encourage Philander to liberate Erminia from Alcippus before taking away her virginity and he should not be worried about the sin of taking another man’s wife. He encourages him to “Do that which may preserve you; / Do that which every man in love would do, / Make it your business to possess the object” (F.M.2.4.51). Altogether, Erminia’s persistence to marry Philander is a good example of a woman’s struggle to get her spouse.

It is very important to note that Gallatea stands firm in her defence for Alcippus either against her brother or against Orgulius, Erminia’s father. She warns them of the dire consequences if they kill Alcippus. It is the highest point of love to see her challenge her brother. She warns him, “dear Philander, do not threaten so, / Whilst him you wound, you kill a Sister too . . . remember that his life is mine” (F.M.2.1.31-32). When she feels that Philander does not give any consideration to her love and considers only his love for Erminia, she intelligently understands his weakest point; it is Erminia, her friend. So, she threatens to “. . . send this dagger to Erminia’s heart” (F.M.2.1.33) if he kills Alcippus. By her threat, she postpones Philander’s revenge. Then both Gallatea and Philander decide to help each other to find solution for their dilemmas.

At the end, Gallatea’s father and Orgulius threaten to kill Alcippus since they consider him as the source of danger for both Philander and Erminia. Yet Gallatea warns Orgulius and tells him, “And will you by his death Sir, murther me? / In dear Erminia’s death too much is done, / If you revenge that death, ‘tis two for one” (F.M.4.7.120-21). Gallatea does not tolerate their threat. So, she boldly accuses them of forcing Erminia to marry Alcippus. She reminds them that if they had let Erminia marry Philander, she
would marry Alcippus. So, the conflict between Philander and Alcippus would not happen. By saying so, she gives them an important lesson on remorse. Unquestionably, Gallatea's defence is justifiable because she loves Alcippus as Philander loves Erminia.

Undeniably, the King does not know that his son Philander is in love with Erminia. Therefore, Philander becomes the main reason of his suffering. If he had informed his father at the beginning, his father would have granted him to marry Erminia. It seems that Behn has deliberately delayed the match between the father and his son to enable the play to go in its attractive scheme. Naturally, if the King and his son Philander had met at the beginning of the play to discuss the matter of the marriage, the plot of the play would have been different.

It is worth mentioning that Alcippus is a man of strong personality. He leaves Erminia, the daughter of the General, at the time of getting Gallatea, the daughter of the King. Meanwhile, Philander regains Erminia by giving Gallatea. To consider the matter from the point of glory, Philander marries a married woman. Some might say that there was no physical contact between Erminia and Alcippus. However, this matter has been seen as honourable glory in the case that Erminia is regarded as a married woman, and Alcippus is considered to be her first husband. Honourably, Alcippus has married two virgins while Philander has married a married woman. By marrying Gallatea, Alcippus gets more glory in which he becomes the second most important figure in the kingdom.

Marriage during Sheridan's time was nearly similar to that of the late seventeenth century except that forced marriage was prevalent during Behn's time as explained above, but it was rare during Sheridan's time. The issues of the arranged marriage and marriage between the upper class and the lower class were the prominent events during
Sheridan's time. An example of marriage between different social classes can best be studied in the light of marriage between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*.

Eighteenth century saw a gradual change for better in various fields including political, cultural and social spheres of life. The century was also so famous for its development in the field of industry. However, no one could ignore the fact that the way of marriage had developed to a better state especially by the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century. Sons and daughters were given more freedom to choose their future spouses. From this time onwards, choosing a partner was more and more by children rather than by their parents. Lovers did not think too much about financial, social and political considerations as they thought too much about their love. This was sometimes opposite to the wishes of their parents. So, the conflicts between parents and children took place, and each party wanted to impose opinions on the other party. Sons were more assertive in decision-making than the girls who still allowed themselves to be guided by their parents in choosing their future husbands. In fact, the insistence of choosing a partner was different from one person to another, and the interference of the parents also varied from one family to another. But what was generally interfered by the parents was the marriage of heiresses and heirs. Actually, children suffered from the interference of their parents when the marriage concerned the property of the family. David McDowall states, “Parents still often decided on a suitable marriage for their children, but they increasingly sought their children’s opinion. However, sons and daughters often had to marry against their wishes” (119).
Though marriage was often based on the account of economics, there were some other motives behind the success of marriage as narrated by Stone. The boy and the girl decided to get married when they felt that they had exchanged personal affection based on a lengthy period of courtship, friendship and companionship. Their marriage was sometimes based on physical attraction, but mostly, love played the major part in the marriage (Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England* 271-73).

The way of marriage as described by Stone consisted of one of the four options. The first option was that the parents or relatives decided the marriage. The bride and the groom had nothing to do about their marriage, but they had to accept this kind of marriage especially when there was inheritance and financial obstacles. This kind of marriage was still used mostly in the upper classes. The second option was that the parents had to choose the appropriate partner, and then the children had the right to accept or to object. Sons had more freedom to object, but when the daughters objected, their parents tried to convince them to marry the chosen husbands. So, the daughters found themselves compelled to accept what their parents had chosen. This kind of marriage was prevalent in the eighteenth century. The third option was that the marriage had been decided by the children and then they asked their parents for the approval. Sons often had the consents of their parents, but daughters did not often get the consent of their parents. The fourth option was that the bride and the groom decided to get married even if it was out of their family's wishes. Their marriage was completely based on love and personal understanding. This kind of marriage was very rare in the eighteenth century especially among the upper classes (Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England* 270-71). Nevertheless, Stone asserts that there were many changes in the views about the
nature of the marital relations that took place in the eighteenth century. Many children of
the aristocratic families (upper classes) insisted to marry according to their emotional
satisfaction and mutual affection. They started neglecting the matter of increasing their
income or status (Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England* 303).

Meanwhile, the eldest son suffered in his marriage especially when he came from
a rich aristocratic family. The parents did not allow him to marry according to his wish.
The situation would be worse when the eldest child was a daughter. The family had to
search for an appropriate partner. Consequently, the eldest child had to marry the partner
who was chosen by the parents. In fact, the family thought that the eldest child had to live
under the parental control; otherwise, his/her marriage would influence the future of the
family. Ronald Fletcher affirms, “The aristocratic family was certainly based upon long
founded traditions, and rested fundamentally upon the custom and law of primogeniture
whereby the family property – essentially the landed state – was kept intact, and
perpetuated in the family by passing to the eldest son” (57-58).

However, Sheridan criticises the ways of marriage which were conducted in his
period especially when the parents intervene in the marriage of the children. Jack Davis
Durant states, *The Rivals* “exposes with splendid comic insight the outrage of eighteenth-
century marriage customs, where parental tyranny rules the choice of mate and where
wealth and high birth count for everything” (74). Because he was a dramatist of keen
observation, Sheridan has composed *The Rivals* to depict his own life especially his
marriage to Elizabeth Linley. He regards marriage as a sacred bond; to keep it and avoid
negative consequences, a man should marry the woman he loves.
This topic has always been an important matter of debate. Due to the parental interference, the young couple may get divorced and this is the beginning of all their problems. Thus, the desires of the parents and guardians clash with the strong resistance of the girls who insist on marrying only their lovers. As an example of the interference of the guardians, Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals* takes the spotlight. She compels her niece to marry according to her choice, but Lydia refuses her aunt's offer and insists on marrying her romantic knight even if he is poor. She frankly tells her aunt in front of Sir Anthony, "I must tell you plainly, that had I no preference for anyone else, the choice you have made would be my aversion" (*Rivals*.1.2.49). She prefers to remain single instead of achieving her aunt's will of marriage. Her inflexible opinion of marrying no one except Beverley makes Mrs. Malaprop confine her in a room, and then she threatens to disinherit her from her inheritance. Moreover, Sir Anthony is worst in his preconception against Lydia than Mrs. Malaprop. He unfairly advises Mrs. Malaprop to "keep a tight hand: if she rejects this proposal, clap her under lock and key: and if you were just to let the servants forget to bring her dinner for three or four days, you can't conceive how she'd come about" (*Rivals*.1.2.52).

In Sheridan's time, women were mostly married for money or fame. So, women found themselves obliged to marry undesired men. In many cases, those cruel actions pushed women to find other ways of marriage and the most common way was to elope. Eloping was spread all over England at that time and it was regarded by many people as a vent for women's sufferings. Sheridan and Linley eloped to France in 1772, and when he came back, he was challenged into a duel with Mathews. In his second duel, he was seriously wounded. Joyce Moss and Lorraine Valestuk state:
Sheridan and Mathews fought two duels over Linley later that year; during the second, both men sustained serious wounds. Sheridan's wounds were the more severe; he was carried from the field covered in blood, his face badly beaten from the hilt of Mathews's sword, and with part of Mathews's blade sticking through his ear. (371)

Further, a successful marriage was thought to be among the same social classes. Marriage between different social classes rarely happened, and if it happened, it was mostly for economic reasons. Thus, the marriage between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle in The School for Scandal is an example to be taken here. In fact, wealth plays an essential part in this play. The play reflects the importance of wealth in the eighteenth century society where people were divided into upper classes, middle classes and lower classes. In reality, the English society was divided into three primary classes: the aristocrats, the bourgeoisie and the peasants. The upper classes had lived in luxury and opulence. The middle class did not suffer, but they did not have the plenty of the finest things that the upper class enjoyed. Only the poor families suffered silently. So, they found themselves obliged to work even as servants. Poor women sometimes sold their bodies to get food. Many families suffered because of hunger, so women did not mind if they got married for money. Big cities like London had become a sanctuary for all villagers. So, those cities were divided between the excessive opulence and extreme poverty. Poor people had to live a miserable life and in every populated area and that was the reason why they suffered from different diseases.

From this point, it is important to see how Sheridan tackles the marriage between different social classes. This can be studied through the marriage between a poor young
woman Lady Teazle and an elderly rich man Sir Peter. Lady Teazle is a young "daughter of a plain country Squire" (Sch.2.1.207) who marries Sir Peter, an elderly wealthy man. In fact, there is no other consideration in this marriage except wealth. After marriage, Lady Teazle intends to imitate the fashion of the upper class though she came from a poor countryside family. During Sheridan's time, the rich families, especially the aristocrats, were recognised by their clothes, expensive ornaments and valuable materials. Since Lady Teazle is young, she wishes to be like them. She is also attracted to scandal and hypocrisy and considers them the prevailing fashion of the day.

Sheridan's The School for Scandal has many central characters and Lady Teazle and her husband Sir Peter are important players. Lady Teazle is an example of the most fashionable young woman in Sheridan's plays. She becomes a maniac of fashion of London. Thus, she and her husband engage in several witty disputes. J. L. Styan notes:

Sheridan's object is to give us a magnified, preposterous portrait of how quarrels may come and go in married life. In particular, he wishes to pass comment on the marriage of a young lady who has tasted the freedom of town life and an older gentleman who is rather too set in his ways adequately to compromise with her demands. (The Elements of Drama 155-56)

After six months of their marriage, Sir Peter appears complaining about his marriage to a young woman, "When an old bachelor marries a young wife, what is he to expect?" (Sch.1.2.202). He believes that his quarrels with his wife are because of his age, that is why he calls himself "the miserablest dog" (Sch.1.2.202). In his reply to Rowley's question whether he is happy with his wife or not, Sir Peter confirms that he meets "...
with nothing but crosses and vexations" (Sch.1.2.203). Sir Peter continues to grumble about his wife and states that he has done his best to please her, but his efforts are in vain, "But faults is entirely hers . . . I am myself the sweetest-tempered man alive and hate a teasing temper" (Sch.1.2.203). In one of their witty disputes, Sir Peter reminds his wife of her birthplace and she reminds him of his age.

SIR PETER . . . ‘Tis evident you never cared a pin for me and I was a madman to marry you – a pert, rural coquette, that had refused half the honest squires in the neighbourhood!

LADY TEAZLE. And I am sure I was a fool to marry you – an old dangling bachelor, who was single at fifty only because he never could meet with anyone who would have him. (Sch.3.1.227)

In addition to Sir Peter’s unceasing grumbles about his wife, he scolds her for her past life. He regards his marriage to her as a favour, for he has dragged her out of the gutter to become one of the wealthiest women in the society. It is true that she might be born to a poverty-stricken family, but she is now his wife, so it is illogical and irrational to despise her for her birthplace. As a normal reaction towards his unceasing complaint, she candidly requests him to divorce her.

He also complains of her to his friend Joseph and tells him that he believes "... the difference of our ages makes it very improbable that she should have any very great affection for me" (Sch.4.3.249). In fact, he commits an error by telling it to Joseph. Joseph is a young sentimental hypocrite who exploits the misunderstanding between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle to render himself as a fashionable lover to Lady Teazle.
One can argue that if Sir Peter is uncomfortable with her, he can simply divorce her or, at least, he can sue her. In fact, he wants to sue her, but people would hold him responsible because he has married a young woman, “... the town would only laugh at me – the foolish old bachelor who had married a girl” (Sch.4.3.249). Thus, he has nothing to do except nagging about her behaviour though he is the one who starts the quarrel. Therefore, most of the audiences are in support of Lady Teazle.

If Sir Peter feels that he is an old man, he should not have married her. He should have kept his promise with Sir Oliver when they decided that they would never marry. Sir Oliver “has been steady to his text” (Sch.1.2.204) while Sir Peter marries a young woman. To win her heart, he has to be more aware of how to deal with a young woman. To add to this, it is better not to think about her extravagance since they do not have children and his money would go to her sooner or later. Therefore, it is better to leave her to enjoy her time while he is still alive.

At any point of time, human beings seem to be so weak in front of sweet words. This is what really happens between Sir Peter and his wife in Act III, Scene I. They start flattering each other. Lady Teazle assures him, “Sir Peter, good nature becomes you.” Sir Peter also tells her that she is a “kind and attentive,” so they “shall certainly now be the happiest couple” (Sch.3.1.226). After a short time of compliment, they again indulge in reproaching each other and everyone thinks that he has the right. This indicates their volatile moods in which both husband and wife are of different attitudes. Sir Peter wants her to be obedient, and she wants him to provide her with money to be able to cope with the fashion of the city. Sir Peter feels troubled about her temper, and she is unhappy about his nagging. He accuses her of extravagance, and she accuses him of miserliness.
He is worried about his wealth, and she is worried about her fashion. He wants to control her behaviour while she wants to practise her fashion out of his authority. He often praises Joseph as "a man of sentiment" while she praises Lady Sneerwell and her group as "people of rank and fortune, and remarkably tenacious of reputation" (Sch.2.1.298).

Nevertheless, Sir Peter is a man of a good nature and Lady Teazle is a woman of wit. These two positive traits can never be available in one person according to Lady Sneerwell. A person might have got either a true-witty trait or a good-natured trait. In her talk to her group, to Joseph and to Maria, Lady Sneerwell avers, "there's no possibility of being witty without a little ill nature. The malice of a good thing is the barb that makes it stick" (Sch.1.1.195-96). Then, she argues with Sir Peter about wit and good nature.

SIR PETER. Ah, Madam, true wit is more nearly allied to good nature than your ladyship is aware of.

LADY SNEERWELL. True, Sir Peter, I believe they are so near akin that they can never be united. (Sch.2.2.214)

According to Lady Sneerwell's division, Sir Peter is a good-natured character while his wife is a true-witty character and that is why she beautifully reacts against anything she does not like.

To be a fashionable woman, Lady Teazle spends money extravagantly without thinking about the efforts of her husband in gaining that money. He has left no stone unturned to gather money, unfortunately, she spends it on fashion. Nevertheless, it is only after their marriage that she regards him as an unfashionable man. If she regards herself as a fashionable woman, she should have chosen a fashionable husband at the beginning. Fashion is not how to practise and how to use accessories and equipments in life, but it is
also a kind of choosing a fashionable husband. However, when she becomes the wife of a rich man, she changes her life to suit the fashion of the city which Sir Peter does not like. Her obsession to fashion can best be understood in her response to her husband when she says, "... I know very well that women of fashion in London are accountable to nobody after they are married" (Sch.2.1.206). Then she boldly reminds him, "to be sure: if you wanted authority over me, you should have adopted me and not married me" (Sch.2.1.206).

Lady Teazle needs money to be able to practise fashion, but her husband does not tolerate to see all his wealth to be wasted on fashion. So, he sorrowfully notifies her, "though my life may be made unhappy by your temper, I'll not be ruined by your extravagance" (Sch.2.1.206). Her repartee comes as it is expected, "My extravagance! I'm sure I'm not more extravagant than a woman of fashion ought to be" (Sch.2.1.206). Hence, Lady Teazle considers her practice of fashion as a part of freedom especially in a city like London, the city of fashion.

In contrast, Lady Teazle's excessive fashion can be forgiven at the time of listening to her intelligent repartee, self-defence and her well-made excuses. Her repartees are attractive and produced in a beautiful sophisticated way and this is the reason why audiences like her more than they like her husband. Actually, Lady Teazle is the main source for Sheridan's wit. Thus, the play becomes tedious if it does not contain Lady Teazle's "daily jangle" with her husband. In one of her "daily jangle," she asks him to blame winter for spending money instead of blaming her. She thinks winter is the main reason for spending much money in purchasing flowers to decorate her dressing room. Her reply conveys too much wit as she says, "... am I to blame because flowers are dear
in cold weather? You should find fault with the climate and not with me. For my part, I am sure I wish it was spring all the year round and that roses grew under our feet!” (Sch.2.1.207). To practise fashion in a rational and logical way is acceptable, but fashion does not mean to have a new lover. In short, her craving for fashion guides her to commit such errors just like her extravagance, her ill-treatment towards her husband, her relation with the scandalous group and her sexual affair with Joseph.

Nevertheless, Sir Peter finally reconciles Lady Teazle and determines to “be the happiest couple in the country” (Sch.5.2.269). Further, the Epilogue, which is spoken by Lady Teazle, emphasises their reconciliation. In the Epilogue which is written by George Colman, Lady Teazle promises her husband to dedicate her life in serving him, “Bend all my cares, my studies, and my vows, To one old rusty weathercock, my spouse” (lines [3-14]).

However, Sir Peter does not give time to his wife. He is the guardian of Maria, the overseer of Charles and Joseph, the friend of Sir Oliver, the employer of Rowley, the visitor of Lady Sneerwell and the husband of Teazle. He is in short “... a nexus for all of them within the world of the play” (Jordan 32). One may argue that if he spent enough time with his wife, she would feel overwhelmed by his constant love and compassion and then she would never have fallen into the trap of fashion, scandal and Joseph’s sentiment. To keep her out of these, he should also educate her about all the activities that she did not learn at home such as gossip, visiting, clothes, city life, fashion, etc. Unfortunately, he is too busy about others’ affairs, so his wife becomes an easy prey to the fashion of the city, to Lady Sneerwell’s gossip and to Joseph’s sentiment.
Towards the end, it can be said that forced marriage, arranged marriage and marriage between different social classes are intensively discussed in the plays of Behn and Sheridan. In her plays, Behn stands firmly against forced and arranged marriages. In contrast, Sheridan criticises the arranged marriage and discusses the marriage between different social classes from the point of view of the understandings between lovers. If lovers decide to marry even if they are from different classes, it is up to them. When a person prefers to marry only from the same class especially for financial reasons, he/she should not be prevented. In short, Sheridan encourages the marriages which depend on love and financial interests.

In general, Behn and Sheridan favour the marriage which is based on true love. True love will surely be rewarded by a successful marriage alliance. By marriage, lovers can bring together their fortune and enjoy their own life including sex. Yet, Behn and Sheridan prefer sex after marriage. Sex before marriage was sinful in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries even if a man and a woman were in love with each other. Being in love did not alter the reality that the sex outside of marriage was called fornication by Christians and condemned in Bible. According to Behn and Sheridan, when people cannot control themselves and intend to have immoral sex, it is preferable to get married. Then they can fulfill their passion in a moral way. The next section discusses this aspect.

SEX

Human beings have always been obsessed by the power of sex and as innate instinct, they are always attracted to the opposite sex. Sex is a salient theme in Behn’s plays and a minor theme in Sheridan’s play, The School for Scandal. In Behn’s plays,
characters think too much of having sex instead of thinking of marriage. Hence, sex has been changed into lust as it happens in *Abdelazer* and *The Rover*.

Though Behn was famous during her time for her various literary works, she was forgotten in the next two centuries. Nowadays, Behn has regained her fame and has caught the attention of all critics. Anannya Dasgupta remarks, "The reclamation of Behn properly picked up only in the twentieth century, because the preceding centuries had increasingly stressed on her disreputable image and used it as an excuse to ignore her works as well" (142). Indeed, the more ceaseless attack on Behn by her contemporary writers and the writers that follow, the more praises and glory she has received in the twentieth century. Feminist scholars shed light on the works of Behn and her spectacular life. They study not only Behn’s interest in sex and women’s issues but there is also a call to study her other social, political and religious interests. All scholars and writers are racing to discover something new out of her ambiguous life, and all of them try to defend her from the previous accusations and try to justify and rationalise all her faults if there is any. It is worth mentioning that modern critics, especially feminist critics, have become her lawyers in defending her from all charges.

As a matter of fact, Behn was criticised for her bold discussion of writing about women’s issues like sexual freedom. As some claim, it is from the point of wisdom that she had to consider the tastes of her contemporary writers in writing her plays, but Behn infringed this rule by writing according to her understanding of life. She did not care whether her contemporary critics liked her writings or not. However, she had received heavy criticism from her contemporaries and was attacked in many ways, but she did not give them any consideration. Pope who came later criticised her in his poem 'Imitations
of Horace, "The stage how loosely does Astræa tread, / Who fairly puts all characters to bed!" (Pope, lines 290-91).

Despite these charges, Behn had paved her literary way in the prominent time of famous male writers. She simply wrote "for bread" as she said. Meanwhile, she did not pay attention to the negative campaign of her contemporaries, but she was looking forwards, passing the obstacles and writing many plays, novels, poems and translations with the same energy. From time to time, she defended her career with all possible means, but her remarkable defence could be seen in her continuous writing until her last breath. If she was weak, she would have been ruined at the very beginning of her writing, yet it did not happen. However, she spoke at a time when her contemporaries did not speak about women's rights.

In her plays, Behn has particularly discussed women's sexuality as one of the most important social problems of her era. She also discusses some other women's rights like liberty, politics and freedom. During those days, the role of woman in a society had received many interpretations, but woman's sexual identity was ignored, and theorists were busy quoting women's domestic roles which were clearly distinguished as "child care, cooking, dressmaking, brewing beer, making butter, housekeeping and bartending; men's jobs included politics, military service, priesthood, secretarial work, fishing and hunting, and other forms of hard labor" (Dickman n. pag.). Women in the era of Behn were of course different from the women in these days. In today's society, women have been empowered more than the women during Behn's time. In short, they are able to do whatever they like. The works that have been done by women today were done only by
men in Behn’s time; nevertheless, the moral standards of both societies remain nearly equal.

Behn had infringed the negative norms that were prevailing in the seventeenth century society by calling women to participate in and to do what men do. In her plays, she has attempted to find another way to make women powerful. It is, for example, the way of changing the female identity into male identity, as a positive result of this step, women have the rights to be courtesans as men have the rights to be rakes. According to her, women should be equal to men even in practising sexual activity. In other words, women should indulge in all the men’s activities. They have rights to choose their works that suit them whether to be writers, spies, actresses, politicians or even prostitutes.

Behn reveals her real desire to do the roles of men in her Preface to the play, *The Lucky Chance*. She writes, “All I ask, is the privilege for the masculine part the poet in me . . . If I must not, because of my sex, have this freedom . . . I lay down my quill, and you shall hear no more of me” (lines 127-33). Behn’s expression, “masculine part” opens the door wide for further discussion in which Behn sees her ability, capacity, and creativity more linked to masculine rather than to feminine. In the same Preface, Behn complains:

... I have writ come forth under any man’s name, and never known to have been mine, I appeal to all unbiased judges of sense, if they had not said that person had made as many good comedies, as any one man that has writ in our age; but a devil on’t, the woman dams the poet. (lines 94-98)

Kate Aughterson points out that Behn, in her comedies, focuses on two issues:
The first is female empowerment and the social and economic constraints working against such empowerment, such as arranged marriages and the intersection of patriarchal family arrangements with those of a wider society. Secondly, she clearly places masculinity, rather than femininity, under critical scrutiny: most particularly the philosophy and actions of the cavalier rake (217).

By this, Behn intends to say that her body has the feminine specification, but her mind, heart and all senses are dominated by masculine capacities. In her article, "‘1 By a Double Right Thy Bounties Claim’: Aphra Behn and Sexual Space," Jessica Munns claims that Behn’s masculinity is clear when she “gives her females energies, powers, and possibilities that were only allowed to men,” however, Behn “writes as a woman in presenting images of women released from the constraints of a male-inscribed femininity” (201). Women’s power is only to “elevate womanhood in terms of its conventional attributes: domesticity, softness, chastity, modesty and fidelity” (Munns 205).

Though Behn’s insists that she has masculine abilities, it proves just the opposite that she is weak since she is a woman even if she claims another identity. Nonetheless, Behn’s writings seem to be at the first glance as if they are produced by a male writer especially her open discussion of the sexual secrets of women. Therefore, Behn is accused of spreading pornographic texts in her plays. On this subject, there lies another question, if Behn’s plays contain sexual activity, then why were they performed in her time! During those days, the Puritans were in powers and could have easily prevented the display of her plays on stages. Furthermore, it is only Behn who was charged of adopting
sex although there were many male dramatists who used to write about sex in their plays. It is because Behn shows in her plays the private wishes and needs of women. Hence, her sex helps her to reveal the secret sufferings of women and depict them in her literary works. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright assures that "Aphra Behn and Anne Finch, took up the subject of female friendship, and wrote in passionate terms about their relation-ships with other women" (11). Actually, Behn was the first professional woman who revealed women's desires in the form of a drama.

Furthermore, Behn exposes men's impotence, assuming that men cannot satisfy women sexually. She believes that as men want to be sexually satisfied, they should also be able to satisfy women physically and mentally. In The Rover, Behn states that men are not blamed if they want to be sexually satisfied with prostitutes, yet they are glorified. Women are blamed when they want to satisfy their sexual needs although both sexes are human beings! Further, in spite of the bitter reality that men have the rights to search for prostitutes, women are not allowed to search for good husbands.

When men run after prostitutes to satisfy their sexual desires without searching for wives, it means women can search for men to satisfy their sexual desires. It means that both sexes would indulge in immoral promiscuity. As Behn suggests, men as well as women should spend their time in search of the appropriate ways of getting married just like Hellena and Florinda from the female side and Belvile from the male side. Unfortunately, women hardly find husbands because men are too busy entertaining themselves with prostitutes. If men continued in their immoral acts, women of quality would find themselves obliged to become whores. Therefore, men should not blame women, as they blame Angellica, rather they should blame themselves.
Behn is also called a feminist. In the article “Early Feminism,” Stephanie Hodgson-Wright observes that Behn is a feminist heroine, “Aphra Behn was the only woman who achieved any sustained success in this arena during the 1670s and 1680s, and as such is rightly hailed as a feminist heroine” (12). Melinda Zook also describes Behn as a “. . . thorough-going feminist, a libertine and an opponent of the domestic tyranny of patriarchy . . . with a strong political vision” (“Contextualizing Aphra Behn” 75). Zook adds, “This is particularly surprising for a rare female voice in the loud political cacophony of the 1680’s. No other woman writer was as public, vocal, or prolific as Aphra Behn in the pre-Revolution era” (“Contextualizing Aphra Behn” 76). Jacqueline Pearson shares Zook’s view and states that Behn is a “feminist . . . with unique vision” (167).

Some others criticise Behn for her bravery in discussing women’s needs for sex as if she wants to reveal her own lust. It is because she highlights Willmore’s sexual energy more than expected. Meanwhile, she presents other men in the play as impotent. That is why Belvile and Frederick, for example, do not get the same importance as Willmore, it seems as if they are sexless. Behn presents Willmore in a way as if women are racing for his sexual capacity. By glorifying Willmore’s lust, Behn appears as if she dreams of a man like him. Unfortunately, Behn did not meet this sort of man, so she turned to justify lesbianism instead. She has rendered many erotic descriptions of such cases which convey the idea that women have to titillate women. Her lesbianism is significantly discussed in her poetry. Bonnie Zimmerman reports, “Most of her poetry originally published in two collections, deals with her own lesbian relationships, as well as heterosexual romances and such taboo subjects as rape, impotence, and male
homosexuality" (99). It is worth noting that lesbianism was forbidden in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Emma Donoghue writes, “In texts circulating in Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women who had sex with women were often denounced, mocked, and exiled from womanhood; one of the most common strategies was to call them hermaphrodites” (199).

In addition, Behn is seen to be notorious in discussing women’s sexual abuses like rape and sex with a group of people or sex with a brother. Roberta Martin declares, “Aphra Behn, already notorious because of her “unladylike” profession, may have distinguished herself as a libertine as well, although most of her actual sexual activity is a matter of conjecture” (197). Todd also states that Behn’s plays were rejected by critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the reason that they contain sexual issues. Todd writes, “The combination in her work of much condemned Restoration excess and femaleness ensured that she became a bye-word for lewdness and dissipation” (Aphra Behn Studies 1). Riwako Kaji also points out, “. . . Aphra Behn was a woman who pursued her profession, enjoying and simultaneously suffering from her author’s vocation, receiving insults as a prostitute” (49).

However, to discuss the roles of prostitutes and female sexual demands are not only Behn’s job. They are also discussed in the plays of some other famous authors. Catherine Gallagher argues, “Like her contemporaries, she [Behn] presented her writing as part of her sexual property, not just because it was bawdy, but because it was hers” (Nobody’s Story 25). The Gentleman Dancing Master (1672) and The Country Wife (1675) by William Wycherley, and The Man of Mode, or, Sir Fopling Flutter (1676) by George Etherege are examples of the plays which deal with sexual matters in which even
married women secretly practise sex. Shyamala A. Narayan asserts, “All four leading playwrights of the age – Etherege, Farquhar, Wycherley and Congreve, and a host of lesser playwrights all had plots centred around cuckoldry, whether real or imagined by a jealous husband” (131-32). Despite this, Behn receives fierce attacks. The answer seems to be very clear that she is a woman, and some men, especially her contemporaries, did not believe that a woman dared to speak openly about her sexual desires and her secret affairs with other women. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies state:

It was not, then, the nature of the writing, whether ‘political’ or ‘spiritual’, ‘public’ or ‘private’, that determined this response. It was the very existence of writing by women that offended men – not only because it broke the bounds of modesty and silence, but also because even the most ‘private’ of texts had overtly ‘public’ and didactic ends. (207)

In *The Rover*, Hellena reveals her admiration for Willmore. She tells Florinda that she loves him for his “disobedience” and “mischief,” “Now hang me if I don’t love thee for that dear disobedience. I love Mischief strangely, as most of our sex do, who are come to love nothing else . . .” (*Rover*, 1.1.22-24). Behn has a negative view towards rustic men. This is the reason why in her plays she prefers the rake as a beloved character. Behn wants to say that the man who tries to seduce women sexually is better than the one who is rustic and stick-in-the-mud. For example, Blunt is hated by all for his uncouthness while Willmore is loved by all in spite of his mischief. Thus, Hellena and Angellica love him for his mischievous sense of humour. Anand Prakash affirms that:

The thematic centrality of Willmore should not be missed in *The Rover*, with Aphra Behn intending to provide through the play an alternative
paradigm of love based on recognition of the male and female body as a means through which intimacy between lovers can be achieved. That is why Willmore is brought into the play as raw and untamed, as a projection of the natural human being. (178)

It is for his humour that Hellena attempts to attract his attention. It would make no difference whether a man or a woman would begin to love, but in that time, and as a conventional method, men were often the ones who started searching for wives. Yet, Behn as a dramatist makes her female characters search for husbands.

Hellena tries her best, endangers herself and challenges all those around her in order to get Willmore. As an example of her readiness to do anything to win him, she frankly tells him in one of her witty speeches that she will wait for him for years until he himself decides to marry her, “you see, captain, how willing I am to be friends with you, till time and ill-luck makes us lovers” (Rover.3.1.161-62). Then, she confidently declares her intention to win him even if that takes long time, “I declare, I’ll allow but one year for love, one year for indifference, and one year for hate – and then – go hang yourself – for I profess myself the gay, the kind, and the inconstant – the devil’s in’t if this won’t please you” (Rover.3.1.175-78).

Willmore is the only man who attracts Hellena because he is able to say what usually makes women happy by cunningly describing their beauty, dress, speech and behaviour. When he feels that a woman is influenced by his sweet words, he turns to speak about love and then shows his love of her body.

Willmore intends to seduce Hellena once while she is trying to reveal her disappointment of becoming a nun. He responds to her narration in an unexpected
manner, "There's no sinner like a young saint" (*Rover.1.2.167*). From his speech, one can infer that Willmore does not respect the preaching of the Church. He is of the opinion that there is no difference between a nun and a prostitute in the matter of sex. According to the audience, he should at least have some sympathy towards her, yet he resolves to have an affair with her. After praising Hellena's beauty, he starts talking about love. He declares his love for her although he does not spend much time with her. He tells her, "... give me credit for a heart, for faith I'm a very honest fellow. Oh, I long to come first to the banquet of love!" (*Rover.1.2.183-85*). By showing love, he intends to have an affair. Hellena is overjoyed to hear his praising words. Hence, his desire for sex changes to lust, "And such a swinging appetite I bring – oh, I'm impatient – thy lodging, sweetheart, thy lodging, or I'm a dead man!" (*Rover.1.2.186-87*). His lust is seen to continue throughout the play.

Willmore's mind is actually programmed to fit his lust, so he commits many mistakes. He actually becomes a slave for his sexual desire that is the reason why he obeys orders coming from the desired woman. Hellena requests him to "kneel – and swear" (*Rover.3.1.251*). Then she orders him to "kiss the book" (*Rover.3.1.255*) as a sign of holy religious oath. To get her admiration, he responds subserviently to all her orders.

In reality, there is no place in Willmore's heart for love, but he attempts to satisfy his sexual desire. Willmore is able to sleep with Angellica for two hours despite his solemnly affirmed faith for Hellena. The turn is now on Hellena, but Hellena is not Angellica. Hellena firmly stands against the illicit desires of men. However, he assures Hellena for the second time that he is loyal and again promises her not to sleep with any other woman. Not too long of his promise, he attempts to coax her into sharing his bed,
“let’s retire to my chamber.... Come – my bed’s prepared for such a guest, all clean and sweet as thy fair self” (Rover.5.1.418-21).

His speech “my bed’s prepared for such a guest” indicates his lust because his bed is prepared well to receive any woman and at any time. Significantly, he always makes his bed ready for any new victim and this reminds us of his first reaction towards women when he hears Blunt talking about “Roses for every month” (Rover.1.2.80). He immediately inquires, “where do these roses grow? I would fain plant some of ‘em in a bed of mine” (Rover.1.2.83-84). Roses mean courtesans as Belvile defines them, “They’re courtesans, who here in Naples, are to be hired by the month” (Rover.1.2.81-82). Paradoxically, roses do not grow in the bed, but he uses the term ‘roses’ in its figurative sense in which it really reflects his lust. Therefore, he imagines, “I’ll be baked with thee between a pair of sheets, and that’s thy proper still; so I might but strew such roses over me, and under me – fair one... I would go near to make some body smell of it all the year after” (Rover.1.2.86-90). At the time when he sees a woman throw herself into a man’s hands, he murmurs, “Death! Just as I was going to be damnably in love, to have her led off! I could pluck that rose out of his hand, and even kiss the bed the bush grew in” (Rover.1.2.95-97). As it is clear, he interprets every beautiful thing or action, he sees in a woman, into a kind of sex because of his unbridled lust.

Quite simply, his talks from the beginning to the end of the play are only about sex. It is noticed that in all circumstances, he does not talk about day-to-day issues, and when there is such a talk about daily life, he changes it into sexual orientation. Anand Prakash examines the importance of Willmore’s presence in the play:
Aphra Behn has added to love a spontaneous natural dimension as well as a strongly physical (sexual) aspect through the character of Willmore. It may titillate some but should actually compel us to think since Willmore is largely devoid of what are traditionally the essential ingredients of love—sentiment and feeling. (177)

Love often leads to marriage which Willmore does not like. Hellena once asks him to go to Church to get married, but he rejects the idea of marriage and considers it “an old, out of fashion thing” (Rover.3.1.152). Ironically, Frederick has clarified earlier the reality of Willmore’s love which is “like a long voyage at sea” (Rover.1.2.98). Frederick’s statement indicates that Willmore spends most of his life on sea in an unknown task, so he does not want to distract himself in love because love is fruitless. According to Willmore, it is sex which is really lucrative. At the end of the play and only a short time before his marriage with Hellena, he frankly tells her that he is “parlously afraid of being in love” (Rover.5.1.399). In fact, he earlier describes himself as “a rampant lion of the forest” (Rover.1.2.101). He means he is ‘a rampant lion’ in sex but he is afraid of being in love. In her article, “Designing’ Women Socially and Market-Wise: Glimpses of the Restoration Strategy in The Rover,” Anand Prakash writes, “Willmore, the rover, is initially far from being a lover – he has also no capability of, or inclination for it. As his name suggests, he (Will-more) is to wish for more and more of gaiety and enjoyment” (177).

At the end of the play, she crowns her efforts by marriage, but her following speech proves that she is the one who imposes love on Willmore. She frankly tells Willmore that she decides, “to find out all your haunts, to rail at you to all that love you,
till I have made you love only me in your own defence, because nobody else will love you” (*Rover*.5.1.401-04). Hellena persists to win Willmore as a husband while he only wants to have sex with her. Indeed, her desire to get Willmore even if he does not love her is exposed by her when she stresses, “I don’t intend every he that likes me shall have me, but he that I like” (*Rover*.3.1.37). However, her quick love has been mocked by her sister Florinda. Florinda asks her, “I wonder how you learnt to love so easily ... thou art too rash, to give a heart at first sight” (*Rover*.3.1.49, 52). In order to get the admiration of Willmore and then to be able to marry him, Hellena uses her intelligence, wit and spiel. She is witty enough to hold Wilmore’s mind. She pursues him and tries many ways to attract his attention. Because of her continuing effort, she wins him finally. Annette Kreis-Schinck remarks that Hellena’s “victory over the rover requires the temporary freedom to follow him, to rove like him, even to meet with her rival” (160).

Hellena’s pursuit for Willmore has been criticised. Some critics believe that she behaves like a “hunter.” It is because she surpasses Angellica’s pursuit for Willmore although Angellica is a known prostitute. Hellena hotly pursues Willmore while Angellica does not impose herself on him. It is he who visits Angellica and tries to attract her. When Angellica really falls in his love, he leaves her and marries Hellena. On the contrary, Hellena is the one who pursues Willmore. She attends every occasion he goes and she has nothing to do except pursue him. Kreis-Schinck confirms that Hellena “breaks the rules of the amorous chase by envisioning herself in the position of a hunter” (158). Therefore, she may subject to Willmore’s sexual desire if there is a chance, yet circumstance does not leave them to be alone with each other. It might be that if they
remain alone for a while, she would fulfill Willmore's demand of having sex. In this regard, the behaviour of Hellena is not different from that of the behaviour of a prostitute.

Nevertheless, Hellena is a woman of broad knowledge who understands the negative consequences of having sex with him. For this reason, she despises the man who speaks gently with a woman in order to have sex with her. She chides him, "why must we be either guilty of fornication or murder if we converse with you men -- and is there no difference between leave to love me, and leave to lie with me?" (Rover.1.2.188-90). She tries her best to marry Willmore but refuses to hand him her body before marriage. In fact, Willmore is unable to tempt her to have sex since she is a woman of respect.

Angeline Goreau remarks, “Sexual experience reduced the value of a lady even as it served to make a gallant more charming. Too many love affairs inevitably branded her a whore” (Reconstructing Aphra 175). If Hellena submitted herself to his desire, he would be sexually satisfied and then he would not marry her as it happens with Angellica. Anand Prakash discusses the “notable discordance” between Hellena and Angellica, “... that of sex as a commodity practised by the latter alone. Hellena may be amoral and sensual but she doesn’t represent, as Angellica does, the crass nature of acceptance of sex as a commodity that demeans the woman in every female” (185). W. R. Owens also states some intriguing links and parallels between Hellena and Angellica:

Both of them express ‘libertine’ sentiments, acknowledging and acting upon their sexual desires. There is also an important financial connection. Both women have come into the possession of money from the same source. The old man who formerly kept Angellica is also the uncle who has left Hellena ‘two hundred thousand crowns’... This means that the
gold Willmore receives from Angellica. . . . Both women also engage in battles of wit with Willmore, taking on a ‘masculine’ assertiveness as they do so. Both, too, advertise their charms to him, Angellica by means of her picture, Hellena by revealing her face to him. (“Remaking the Canon” 160)

In this sense, one can say that there is no intimate love between Willmore and Hellena as the sincere love between Florinda and Belvile. However, they get married at the end not because they are emotionally and spiritually harmonious but to be able to satisfy their sexual desires. In other words, Willmore’s marriage to Hellena can be interpreted as a way to have sex but not to culminate their love into marriage. This can be known by the following conversion between Willmore and Hellena:

WIL. But harkee – the bargain is now made; but is it not fit we should know each other’s names, that when we have reason to curse one another hereafter (and people ask me who ‘tis I give to the devil) I may at least be able to tell what family you came of.

HEL. Good reason, captain; and where I have cause (as I doubt not but I shall have plentiful) that I may know at whom to throw my blessings–

I beseech ye your name.

WIL. I am called Robert the Constant.

HEL. A very fine name; pray was it your falconer or butler that christened you? Do they not use to whistle when then call you?

WIL. I hope you have a better, that a Man may name without crossing himself, you are so merry with mine.
HEL. I am called Hellena the Inconstant. (*Rover*, 5.1.458-70)

Throughout the play, they do not know each other’s name. They introduce their names only before celebrating their marriage. Hence, their marriage can be seen as unnatural. Willmore ends the play with three lines that indicate his lust. In these lines, he thanks Hellena for her courage to insist on marrying him in spite of the many difficulties she has faced. He thanks her not because she insists to be his wife but because he would have sex with her. He concludes, “Egad thou’rt a brave girl, and I admire thy love and courage / Lead on, no other dangers they can dread, / Who venture in the storms o’th’ marriage bed” (*Rover*, 5.1.551-53). According to this, one can argue that he simply marries Hellena at the end of the play because he cannot find any other whore; and this notion has been confirmed in *The Rover II*. In *The Rover II*, Hellena does not appear since she died in a voyage only after a few months of her marriage to Willmore. So, Willmore returns to his old habit of searching for whores.

In this regard, a question can be raised. If Willmore does not think of Hellena as a wife, then why does he marry her at the end? However, it can be noticed that the couple—Willmore and Hellena—are seen to have similar attitudes and behaviours. Anannya Dasgupta denotes their relation, “What Willmore does to Angellica, Hellena does to Willmore. She arouses and frustrates his desire, leads him on with the promise of one thing and lands him in a situation quite beyond his bargain” (148). Dasgupta also notices that there is a match between Willmore and Hellena, “Willmore can put the blame of his unruly sexual appetite on nature and carry on considering every woman a whore, till of course he meets his match in Hellena whose equal claims to sexual liberty and inconstancy” (147).
Hellena and Willmore seem to be the same image especially in their lust. Willmore is known as a rake and a man of sexuality and his rush to sex seems to be equal to Hellena. Willmore always tries to have sex in illegal ways whereas Hellena tries to get a husband. Yet, Hellena observes Willmore’s sexual desire as hers, “we are both of one humour; I am inconstant as you . . .” (Rover.3.1.170). Then she confidently assures him, “I see our business as well as humours are alike . . .” (Rover.3.1.182).

When a man is under the influence of lust, he interprets every allusion from a woman as a flirtation. On this subject, Willmore considers even the normal makeup of a woman, her dress, her perfume as signs to her desire to have sex. Worse than this, he regards the scent of perfume on a woman as a sign to her prostitution. In his argument with Florinda in the garden, Willmore declares, “‘t’s a delicate shining wench – by this hand she’s perfumed, and smells like any nosegay” (Rover.3.5.24-26). Thus, he forcibly grabs her, intends to rape her and murmurs that he would be a “wicked man” if he “saw those eyes of thine” without having an affair (Rover.3.5.44-45). Dagny Boebel states that male motivation for rape in Behn’s plays is an expression of misogyny and not because of the beauty of a woman:

Behn’s rapists are not aroused by the beauty of their victim; drunken, in the dark, they may not even see her very clearly. Rape, far from being an expression of uncontrollable sexual desire, may be an act of violence to punish, for the crime of being female. (64)

Jean I. Marsden believes that the motivation for rape is a male appetite for sex, “The origin of these rapes, however, is male sexual appetite, a characteristic most visible in
Restoration serious drama, where rape is portrayed as a simple matter of evil versus good, and where 'bad' sexual desire results in sexual violence” (187).

Willmore also interprets even the unconscious behaviour of Florinda as an invitation to have sex. He interprets Florinda’s sitting alone at the garden, at night and in night dress as a direct invitation to him to have sex and that is the reason why he tries to rape her when she threatens him of crying “rape,” he indifferently replies, “A rape! Come, come, you baggage, you lie. What, I’ll warrant you would fain have the world believe now that you are not so forward as I . . . . Why, at this time of night, was your cobweb door set open, dear spider – but to catch flies?” (Rover.3.5.52-55). Willmore again meets Florinda in the street, so he considers her a whore. However, Florinda is disguised like other women, but when she sees her brother approaching, she tries to leave the place to avoid him. She looks backwards lest her brother may follow her. Willmore interprets her quick glance as a matter of courting. Unfortunately, her innocent allusion takes the attentions of all even her brother Pedro who, in turn, tells Willmore, “She throws a kind look back on you” (Rover.4.3.33). Willmore replies, “Death, ’is a likely wenches, and that kind look shall not be cast away – I will follow her” (Rover.4.3.34-35).

Florinda’s behaviour raises the lust of Willmore, so he states, “she looks backs as she were willing to be boarded” (Rover.4.3.64-65). Willmore seeks pleasure, yet he causes pains to others. Florinda seeks freedom; however, she finds herself confined to the world of men. Warren L. Chemaik elucidates, “The contradictions of libertinism, as a philosophy of pleasure leading to pain and a philosophy of freedom leading to imprisonment . . . .” (18). Chemaik adds, “. . . desire is fuelled by the presence of obstacle, and the lure of freedom is all the greater because it appears unattainable” (21).
Willmore is unable to get Hellena, so he searches for another woman. Unfortunately, he finds Florinda. Florinda is not like Hellena. She is simple and kind, and her target of life is to get Belvile but not to play the game of cat and mouse as Hellena and Willmore. Florinda is also not like Angellica. Willmore is unable to confront with Angellica. He simple uses his false tongue and sweet words to convince her to agree to sleep with him. To prove that Willmore is a monster with Florinda and a lamb with Angellica, it can be seen in the warnings of his friends towards his behaviour with Angellica. Belvile warns him of “... the danger of entering the house of an incensed courtesan” (Rover.2.1.258). When Angellica hears the turmoil in her house, Frederick murmurs to Willmore, “... death, man, she’ll murder thee” (Rover.2.1.264). This is reinforced by Angellica when she discusses the matter of taking her picture with Willmore. He starts rendering some excuses, but she interrupts him, “I send for you to ask my pardon sir, not to aggravate your crime – I thought I should have seen you at my feet imploring it” (Rover.2.2.8-9). Later, when Belvile, Frederick and Blunt come to Angellica’s house to fetch Willmore back, Belvile wonders, “I rather think she has cut his throat and is fled” (Rover.3.1.75). By looking at the behaviour of Willmore with Angellica and Florinda, common sense dictates that he is like a cat with Angellica and a wild lion with Florinda.

Since he is libidinous, he spends his time in courting women and making love with them. Hence, he is completely different in his lust from his friend Belvile. Their behaviours with women especially with those who are disguised like courtesans are completely different. Willmore insets himself in direct flirtation with them while Belvile remains away and mocks Willmore’s act.
Willmore’s lust in *The Rover* is attacked, but he remains lovable. Meanwhile, Abdelazer in *Abdelazer* is heavily criticised because he has greatly been benefited from the Queen’s excessive lust to serve his wicked ambition. Nevertheless, the sexual desires of these two men for women are to some extent acceptable. On the contrary, a woman’s sexual appeal for a man is also permissible, but a woman’s clearly visible lust is unacceptable by the society. Queen Isabella in *Abdelazer* is libidinous, so everyone hates her, while the sexual behaviours of Hellena and Angellica in *The Rover* are eligible. Queen Isabella’s lust makes her a slave to Abdelazer. Chernaik reports, “Though men and women are shown in Behn’s writings to have ‘equal desires,’ the libertine ideology, in which the sex act is an assertion of power, entails a fundamental inequality, with one partner reducing the other to a ‘Convenience’ or a ‘Slave’” (211).

Queen Isabella’s role in the play is silly and unbearable. She plays a major role in the play which is designed very strangely. Her role adds weirdness to the plot and gives a negative impression about the value of motherhood in general. In short, Behn is able to present her as a beautiful queen but a suffering wife whose act is almost good for Abdelazer.

Queen Isabella is undoubtedly eccentric in her love for Abdelazer. Her sexual lust has been presented in a way where there is no parallel for it in the other plays of Behn. At the time when Behn exposes the Queen, she, in contrast, advocates women’s rights in having sex with the desired men in her comedies. Women and men could get illicit sexual relationship without the knowledge of the spouse and this happens most usual. But it is unaccepted to find a woman sacrificing her husband, children, family and country in order to have sex. One can argue that the reason of such a crime like this in the time of
Behn was that the woman did not marry the man she loved, so she turned to sacrifice many things for the sake of acquiring a lover.

Lust is destructive, but love is constructive. In this regard, Queen Isabella’s lust makes her forget her position as a queen and a mother of three. Melinda Alliker Rabb notes, “The play [Abdelazer] asserts rather than analyses its conflated categories. Love does not complicate lust. The lascivious queen commits adultery, incest, and murder, yet survives and is pardoned” (143).

Abdelazer’s love for Queen Isabella is just a pseudo-love. He only pretends to love her to be able to use her as he likes. Love has no meaning in his life, so he facilitates the murder of his honest wife to achieve his ambition. Unfortunately, the Queen thinks that he loves her; therefore, she reproaches him at the beginning of the play for his negligence and his lukewarm love, yet he frankly reminds her, “Love and ambition are the same to me” (Abd.2.1.17). Sneidem points out, “. . . Abdelazer sacrifices ‘love and pleasure’ to his ambition to regain his crown and avenge himself on his tormentors” (109).

However, she does not understand the deep meaning of his response since she is obsessed with his love. If she had thought for a while about his comparison between ‘love’ and ‘ambition,’ she would have discovered the bitter reality that the ambition has no limitations. The man who pretends of love to fulfill his ambition cannot be trusted because when he gets something, he will surely seek for something else.

It is what happens in the play. Abdelazer facilitates the murder of his wife to get the throne and the Queen, when he nearly gets the throne, he orders Roderigo to murder the Queen in order to get her daughter. Then he himself murders Roderigo to conceal his
crime. Ann Marie Stewart also clarifies, "The Moor Abdelazer is duplicitous, ambitious, and full of rage. His goals, which he pursues without conscience, are to regain the Spanish throne that was taken from his father by King Philip, then win the heart of Lenora the Spanish Princess" (68). Hence, their interpretations of their relationship are strange paradoxes. He boldly calls her love for him a kind of lust while she regards it a kind of love. He mentions the word 'lust' three times in one occasion, "And thou shalt see the balls of both those eyes / Burning with fire of Lust. . . . Decay'd my Youth, only to feed thy Lust! . . . This many-headed-beast your Lust has arm'd" (Abd.1.1.3). Then he openly tells her that he is not ready to spend his "hours in idleness and Love" (Abd.1.1.3) because love according to him is useless for the reason that he is busy with something more valuable, it is how to take a revenge and then to be a king. Abdelazer with a political tact accuses Queen Isabella of spoiling his youth and destroying his future although it is he who ruins her life. Since the Queen is blindly subjected to him, she does not refute his claim but she replies in a way which suggests as if she is responsible of destroying him. Indeed, her lust affects her mind from understanding Abdelazer's rejection at the beginning of the play especially when he openly refuses to sit with her to discuss love, "Away, fond woman . . . Away, away, be gone" (Abd.1.1.2). Joyce Green MacDonald explains the reason beyond Abdelazer's distaste for Queen Isabella's sexual appetite, "Recall that Abdelazer, a prince in his own country, humiliatingly believes that others will see him as having been reduced to the status of the queen's "Minion" by his sexual subjection" (154). MacDonald adds:

Behn's usage both underlines Abdelazer's sexual servitude, and characterizes the state as an unnatural and unjust effeminization: in the
eyes of the world, he will be seen as someone capable of providing only
"lazie" sexual pleasures, rather than performing acts more worthy of his
royal blood. (155)

In The Secret Life of Aphra Behn, Janet Todd finds out another reason behind
Abdelazer's aversion to Isabella's lust:

... he is bored by her demands, for the woman he will desire sexually will
not display her sexuality. The Queen killed Abdelazer's desire when she
revealed her own, so becoming for him the ultimate whore and threatening
an effeminizing in himself. (The Secret Life 188)

According to the audience, reality can be seen in the opposite; it is he who ruins
her life to achieve his wicked ambition. Ann Marie Stewart observes, “Abdelazer is ruled
by his sexual urges and lust for domination” (68). Unfortunately, his desire for crime
matches with a stupid lecherous woman who only thinks of how to satisfy her lust. In this
regard, Abdelazer is able to change the reality upside down for his favour as he uses his
best political technique at the appropriate time. Certainly, the Queen loved him for his
strong personality, so he intentionally and repeatedly shows her some of his dogmatism
to ignite her lust for him. Meanwhile, when he sees the Queen becoming angry for his
dereliction, he shows her such considerations and numbs her with his fake speech. He
knows well that he cannot go forward in his revenge if she does not stand by him. So, all
his success and progress are undoubtedly credited to her support and his wonderful
policy. In this respect, Abdelazer dominates the Queen not because he forces her but
because he is able to adapt her sexual temperament to be commensurate with his desires.
In brief, he exploits the Queen’s lust to fulfill his wicked aims and he is not shy about telling audience the truth that he exploits her:

That this same Queen, this easie Spanish Dame
May be bewitcht and dote upon me still:
Whilst I make use of the Insatiate flame
To set all Spain on fire. (*Abd.1.1.6*)

The Queen does not care about the problems that are surrounding her on all sides, but she cares only about her lover Abdelazer. Since Abdelazer knows well her weak point, he intends to expose her to the core by asking her reason of poisoning her husband, the King. Her answer comes in a dramatically halting manner meant to show up her lust to an unexpected degree, “To make thy way more easie to my arms” (*Abd.2.1.16*). At this moment, he exploits her lust to the fullest, as it can be seen in his demand, “Not marry me, unless I were a King” (*Abd.2.1.16*). To be a king becomes Abdelazer’s persistent goal. Melinda Alliker Rabb assets, “Behn insists on the exploitation of female desire by the Moor Abdelazer, who feels nothing for the Queen (who passionately loves him) and only wishes to use her to gain political power” (143). To achieve Abdelazer’s goal, she poisoned her husband and she is ready to kill her son Ferdinand. Hence, she asks Abdelazer to help her to kill him. In fact, Abdelazer does not like to kill King Ferdinand without an acceptable excuse lest the Spanish people may revolt against him. So, he insincerely reminds her of the Christian religion, “What, kill a King! forbid it Heav’n! / Angels stand like his Guards, about his Person” (*Abd.2.1.16*). Then he sarcastically adds, “The King! / He loves my wife Florella, shou’d he dye / I know none else durst love her” (*Abd.2.1.16*).
In turn, she murders Florella and leaves the murder of her son to Abdelazer. When Abdelazer enters, Queen Isabella advises him to take care and to be patient with her son. Yet, she deliberately leaves the crime scene to enable him to kill her son, the King. Abdelazer does not care of his wife’s murder since her murder is not important; the most important task is to get rid of the King. When he kills the King, she comes back murmuring, “Oh Heav’ns! my Son the King! the King is kill’d! / Yet I must save his Murderer: Fly, my Moor” (Abd.3.3.37). It is really unexpected to see the mother take too much care of the murderer of her son and tries to save him. Further, the mother celebrates the murder of her son Ferdinand and the imprisonment of her second son Philip by inviting Abdelazer to her lodging to have sex. She urges him, “Make haste, my dearest Moor, whilst I retire, / And fit my soul, to meet thy kind desire” (Abd.5.1.55). This reminds us of her talk to Abdelazer at the beginning of the play when she discloses her intention to destroy the Kingdom in order to get Abdelazer. She tells him, “My gentle Abdelazer, ’tis thy Queen, / Who ’as laid aside the bus’ness of her State, / To wanton in the kinder joys of Love” (Abd.1.1.2). Melinda Alliker Rabb claims, “The Spanish monarchy is weakened by the royal family’s sexual incontinence” (143).

The Queen oddly sacrifices everything in order to make Abdelazer the king. No one can believe that her love would push her to poison her husband, to share in one way or another in killing her son Ferdinand, to murder Florinda, and to conspire against her second son Philip. In short, the kingdom is about to be collapsed just because of her lust. Derek Hughes and Janet M. Todd assert, “She dies wishing she had more sons to kill for Abdelazer and just as she is expecting sex with her lover, a fitting end to a career which has mixed extravagant savagery with farce” (The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn
90). Janet Todd also points out the Queen in *Abdelazer* is “... a kind of mother to the court, must prove her love to Abdelazer alone by killing husband and sons. She becomes then a mother only for the Moor, who wishes to placate her because she still has power at court” (*The Secret Life* 188). Meanwhile, one can argue that the Queen’s libido for Abdelazer is not normal. It has been changed into a sexual disease. She has been changed into a wild animal that preys on her dearest relatives in order to please Abdelazer. Impulsively, she commits the most wicked and ominous acts in order to appease Abdelazer, but Abdelazer murders her after performing the appointed tasks and in turn aspires to marry her daughter instead. Ann Marie Stewart illustrates, “Abdelazer commodifies both Spain and Lenora as Objects he should rightfully possess as a conqueror in a political war” (69).

In short, the Queen is a vivid example of women who uses her position as a queen in a wrong way. She becomes a slave to her sexual lust, thus she surrenders to Abdelazer to use her as he likes. However, audiences expect her to behave in a powerful way with Abdelazer. She has to use him in serving the kingdom instead of turning herself to serve him. Her weakness is to the degree of silliness, and it can be seen when Abdelazer raises his voice on her, she turns to weep.

Sheridan, on the other hand, did not openly discuss sex in his plays as Behn though there was more freedom in various fields in his time. Women also enjoyed considerable freedom than the women of the seventeenth century. Black et al write about Sheridan’s ‘sexual politics’:

Richard Brinsley Sheridan emerged as the quintessential voice of the late eighteenth-century English theater. Writing in the style that had been
pioneered a century earlier by Restoration playwrights (though without the overtly sexual innuendo that permeates many of the plays of the earlier period), Sheridan created light yet pointed comedies of sexual politics.

(970)

English women first appeared on the stage at the Restoration, yet they were called whores. By the eighteenth century, women had more freedom to act female roles on the stage. Women joined men even in their sitting and drinking coffee in the playhouse. Women’s presence became important to attract customers and female bodies on stage became necessary in order to entertain audiences. Sheridan did not discuss these topics in his plays.

Most women at marriage in the eighteenth century put themselves and their properties, if they had any, at the disposal of their husbands. The husband considered his wife as nothing more than his movable property. She had to be loyal, to obey her husband, to carry out his orders and to take care of the children and house. The husband had to protect his wife, and to provide food, drink and all the requirements of the house. To consider The Rivals, Sir Anthony considers Lydia and her wealth as property in which his son has to marry her in order to get her wealth.¹⁵ What is important here is that some unmarried women lived in low social and economic conditions. Thus, marriage gave women a recognised position in the society. Therefore, a married woman could talk freely about sex and no one could blame her. It is true that the talk about sex was spread among women especially in their private chatting, but the sexual behaviour was still not allowed.

¹² Importance of wealth has been discussed in Chapter V.
Sex outside marriage was punished by Church. A female adulterer faced many difficulties. One of the difficulties was that the parents and husband might disown and disinherit her. Then, she had to live her life in contempt. Women in general did not have the sexual freedom that men had. Nevertheless, sexual innuendo is underlying theme in Sheridan’s plays *The School for Scandal*, the role of Joseph and his attempt to seduce Lady Teazle sexually contain such sexual innuendo. Hence, Patricia Spacks is of the view that "*The School for Scandal* substitutes verbal for sexual behavior, and rules of conduct for moral imperatives..." (145).

*The School for Scandal* tackles some important issues in regard to the roles of youths, old age and women, particularly to question their behaviours, relations and sexuality. Women in *The School for Scandal* are depicted as if they do not have any restrictions on their sexuality. Their talks about sexual matters are more likely to be widespread in the eighteenth century where women of higher class, of prestigious social status, or of rich family had got much freedom to talk about sex. Nevertheless, Lady Teazle’s behaviour with Joseph is not just a sexual talk but exceeds to the verge of committing adultery. So, she has been condemned and accused by everyone for the reason that she intends to have sex out of wedlock.

At any rate, this part is not intended to examine the theme of sex in eighteenth century drama but to discuss briefly the sexual encounter between Lady Teazle and Joseph. Joseph openly reveals his intention to marry Maria for her fortune; meanwhile, he needs to have sex with Lady Teazle. He intentionally pretends in front of everyone except Lady Teazle that he loves Maria. In reality, he loves her wealth no less no more. If he is a true lover, he will inform Lady Teazle too, but he intentionally keeps it secret in order to
con both. By pretending of love, he also deludes Lady Teazle in which she is about to fall in an immoral relation with him. His weapon is a pseudo-love. However, his wicked decision can be seen in his speech, "I wanted at first only to ingratiate myself with Lady Teazle that she might not be my enemy with Maria; and I have. I don't know how, become her serious lover" (Sch.2.2.217).

In the meantime, Joseph exploits his friendship with Sir Peter to instigate him against his brother Charles and to have a relation with his wife, Lady Teazle. In turn, Sir Peter attempts to persuade Maria to marry Joseph instead of Charles. He does not understand that his friend Joseph is the one who has a relation with his wife while the suspected Charles is innocent. In contrast, Joseph's friends like Lady Sneerwell and her group know well about Joseph's wicked personality. For example, Joseph hypocritically claims that if he did have the ability to help his brother, he would have helped him, but Lady Sneerwell reminds him, "O lud, you are going to be moral and forget that you are among friends" (Sch.1.1.194). Her speech denotes the fact that if someone does not know the character of a person, he can know his character through his friends. Hence, Joseph has only friends of his own type.

Lady Sneerwell commits a big error at the time of regarding Joseph as a lover for his sentiment. According to her, fashion is not only what to dress and how to dress, but it is also how to behave and how to get many friends. To be a woman of fashion, she has to visit her friends at any time even if the friends are notorious. She considers her relation with a young man a kind of fashion although she is married. In fact, she sees some fashionable qualities in Joseph, which are not available in Sir Peter. Joseph is a young, hypocrite and sentimental figure, so he is able to attract her attention. Sir Peter is, on the
other hand, a reasonable person who does not fool anyone. He tries his best to satisfy her by all means, but he is not a young sentimental hypocrite. In fact, she only admires Joseph for his fashion but not for serious love. She tells him, “you know I admit you as a lover no farther than fashion sanctions” (Sch.2.2.216). Joseph replies, “True – a mere Platonic cicisbeo – what every wife is entitled to” (Sch.2.2.217). His reply implies that a woman of fashion should have a relation with a man out of the married life. Through his speech, he intends to have an affair. He exploits her emotional weakness to satisfy his lust. So, he is not only a hypocrite, but he is also a wicked person.

Indeed, Joseph exploits the emotional weakness of Lady Teazle to satisfy his overwhelming lust. To achieve his wicked goal, he invites her to visit him. Before her arrival, he orders one of his servants to draw the screen for the fear of being seen by a parasitical person, “draw that screen before the window. . . . My opposite neighbour is maiden lady of so curious a temper” (Sch.4.3.245). This act indicates his wickedness and sinister intention. Thomas Moore states:

Joseph, at the commencement of the scene, desires his servant to draw the screen before the window, because his opposite neighbor is a maiden lady of so anxious a temper; yet, afterwards, by placing Lady Teazle between the screen and the window, he enables this inquisitive lady to indulge her curiosity at leisure. It might be said, indeed, that Joseph, with the alternative of exposure to either the husband or neighbor, chooses the lesser evil; but the oversight hardly requires a defence. (250)

He waits anxiously for Lady Teazle. When she enters and sees him lost in his contemplation, she considers it a kind of “Sentiment in soliloquy” (Sch.4.3.245).
Noticeably, his ill intention and wicked contemplation are regarded by Lady Teazle as a sentiment indicator. She is deceived by his appearance and sweet words. It does not come to her mind that he is preparing a wicked surprise. One can say that there is no end to Joseph's deception. He exploits Lady Teazle's love for fashion to direct her to the point he likes. He describes her lateness as "a very unfashionable quality in a lady" (Sch.4.3.245) in responding to her apology for being late. By praising her fashion, Joseph wishes to attract her attention and to pave the way to what is coming next. Indeed, Lady Teazle is overwhelmed to hear such praising words since she has never used to hear fascinating talk from her husband as she hears from Joseph. Then she informs him that her husband suspects Charles of having a relation with her. On hearing this news, he joyfully reacts, "I am glad my scandalous friends keep that up" (Sch.4.3.245). When she becomes torpid of his sweet speech, he incites her to commit adultery as a normal reaction against her husband's suspicion of being in sexual relation. Lady Teazle does not object, yet she responds positively to his request. She reacts, "Indeed! So that if he suspects me without cause, it follows that the best way of curing his jealousy is to give him reason for it?" (Sch.4.3.246). Then she decides to "... part with my virtue to preserve my reputation" (Sch.4.3.247). He is pleased to see her ready to commit adultery with him and considers it a way to preserve her honour. Lady Teazle knows well the great value of honour, so she replies, "Don't you think we may as well leave Honor out of the argument?" (Sch.4.3.247). She is really amazed to hear him talking about honour while he is trying his best to convince her to abandon her honour by committing adultery. Ultimately, she realises his wicked personality only when she listens to his discussion
with her husband from behind the screen. He craftily defends her ‘honour’ while he mainly leads Sir Peter to suspect Charles of having a sexual interest in her.

Joseph cunningly leads Sir Peter to suspect even his wife. In Joseph’s library, Sir Peter starts accusing Charles, but Joseph intelligently responds in the form of an exclamation; a way which increases the suspicion of Sir Peter. Then, Joseph pretends, at the same time, as if he has not any idea about the affair between Lady Teazle and Charles. He craftily assumes that he does not believe the rumour against Charles, yet in fact, he is a mastermind of defaming his brother. Under the influence of Joseph’s shrewdness, Sir Peter praises him, “Ay, my dear friend, the goodness of your own heart misleads you. You judge of others by yourself” (Sch.4.3.249). Joseph feels proud to hear such compliments. He assures, “Certainly, Sir Peter, the heart that is conscious of its own integrity is ever slow to credit another’s treachery” (Sch.4.3.249). Sir Peter, however, realises Joseph’s real wicked personality quite later.

New surprises emerge out when Charles visits his brother and both indulge in a debate concerning the honour of Lady Teazle. Sir Peter and his wife are listening to the debate between Charles and Joseph. Charles is serious in his discussion with his brother regarding Lady Teazle’s case despite the fact that he is known as a careless joker. He confidently refutes Joseph’s accusation and reveals the truth that Lady Teazle tried once to attract him, but he neglected her because she is the wife of his guardian, and he is also in love with Maria.

After a while, Charles pulls Sir Peter out from his hiding. Sir Peter discovers the reality that he wronged Charles. Naively, he is still conned of Joseph’s sentiment even at this time when he makes sure of Charles’s innocence. This is clear in his response to
Charles, “Yes, yes, I know his honour too well” (Sch.4.3.254). Then he praises him, “He is a man of sentiment. Well, there is nothing in the world so noble as a man of sentiment” (Sch.4.3.255). He remains to call Joseph as “the man of sentiment” while Lady Teazle is still hiding in the cupboard.

In fact, Rowley advises Sir Peter many times of the false honour of Joseph. According to Rowley, honour is not what people say about others, but it is how to behave and how to raise the standards and maintain the morality of the society. Unfortunately, Sir Peter does not listen to any advice regarding Joseph’s false sentiment. He believes that he is a man who does not judge wrongly in his life especially on “Joseph’s honour” (Sch.2.3.219).

This phrase ‘a man of sentiment’ has been repeated many times in the play. Sir Peter utters this phrase shortly before discovering the reality that his wife is hiding in the same library. Sentimentally, Sir Peter admires Joseph and considers him as “a man of sentiment” although he hears Charles accusing him of having a relation with Lady Teazle. It seems that his excessive trust on Joseph makes him deaf. Charles replies to Sir Peter’s praising statement in a spiteful tone, “he is too moral by half – and so apprehensive of his good name, as he calls it, that I suppose he would as soon let a priest into his house as a girl” (Sch.4.3.255). Sir Peter replies in a way that confirms beyond doubt that he does not understand what is going on around him, “No, no! . . . you wrong him. No, no, Joseph is no rake . . .” (Sch.4.3.255).

Everything is exposed to view, so Charles gives them all moral lessons. He blames Sir Peter for suspecting him and reproaches his brother for behaving immorally. He even rebukes Lady Teazle for denigrating herself by making a sexual relation with
Joseph. In fact, he is shocked to see all his relatives trying to entrap him without any real reason. He reminds them all of their suspicions and their tricks especially when the two are hiding, and Joseph is trying to entrap him by speech. He amazingly exclaims, “you seem all to have been diverting yourselves here at hidden and seek – and I don’t see who is out of secret . . . I suppose you perfectly understand one another, so I will leave you to yourselves” (Sch.4.3.256). He rebukes them all, but the last bitter admonition is directed at Sir Peter who wrongs him too much. Charles cynically calls him, “Sir Peter, there’s nothing in the world so noble as a man of sentiment!” (Sch.4.3.256). Alicia Lefanu, Sheridan’s niece, defends The School for Scandal from the attacks of those who say that there is no “moral tendency” in this play. Yet, she has her view about Charles. Lefanu states, “Certainly, those who seek for morality in the character of Charles Surface, will be disappointed, but if they look for the moral tendency of “The School for Scandal” in the proper place, it will be found to be excellent” (407).

In this critical situation, Joseph tries to pacify Sir Peter, nullify his anger, and calm the situation. He humbly prays him, “I confess that appearances are against me, if you will afford me your patience, I make no doubt – but I shall explain everything to your satisfaction” (Sch.4.3.256). Joseph attempts to find an excuse to discharge himself, but Lady Teazle cannot keep silent more. She bursts out to call him, “Hypocrite.” She reveals the truth that she “came seduced by his insidious arguments, at least to listen to his pretended passion” (Sch.4.3.257). Then, she adds that she does not believe such a “smooth-tongued hypocrite who would have seduced the wife of his too credulous friend.” She concludes that she “. . . behold[s] him now in a light so truly despicable that I shall never again respect myself for having listened to him” (Sch.4.3.257).
At this discovery, Sir Peter changes his point of view towards Joseph, rebukes him and calls him “you are a villain!” (Sch.4.3.257) instead of calling him “a man of sentiment.” Confidently, Sir Peter insists at the beginning that he cannot be mistaken in judging people, but he at the end realises the fact that ‘appearances are often deceptive,’ so he painfully tells Sir Oliver that “we live in a damned wicked world, and the fewer we praise the better” (Sch.5.2.268). Sir Oliver and Rowley tease Sir Peter by reminding him of his opinion about Joseph. Sir Peter does not get angry, but he laughs and affirms, “Yes, yes, his sentiments! . . . A Hypocritical villain” (Sch.5.2.268).

Moreover, Sheridan indirectly discusses such sexual behaviours in The Rivals. The unheeding behaviour of Sir Anthony with Mrs. Malaprop likewise refers to as sex appeal. Sir Antonio is happy and in a nice mood to know that his son is not a romantic character, but he has done his way to woo Lydia. He tries to calm Mrs. Malaprop who is conned by his son. So, he invites her to leave the room, where Lydia and Absolute are in, to give them a chance to discuss their matters. He leaves the room humming a romantic song and holding Mrs. Malaprop’s hands. His act, singing and holding Mrs. Malaprop’s hand, regards to be an act of sex appeal. He would surely not to do it with a man, but because she is a woman, he unconsciously holds her hands. This is regarded, in fact, as the first step to what will follow! The play ends with their marriage.

In the same play, O’Trigge’s behaviour with Lucy can be seen as a sexual behaviour. Lucy acts as a go-between for O’Trigge and the supposed Lydia. O’Trigge rewards her service by kissing her many times. It is because he is happy to receive a letter, so he rewards her by giving her money and kisses. Since this act is done by a man, Lucy urges him to kiss her as much as he can to feel his sincere love for Lydia. It is rare
to find a man kissing fifty times the hand of another man, but it often happens among opposite sexes. Moreover, Lucy warns O'Trigger of Lydia's anger if she knows that he kissed her servant. Yet, he reassures her that Lydia would not be angry because his behaviour suits the psychology of women as he believes. Thus, he urges Lucy to convey his act to Lydia which is "... a quality in a lover more praised by the women than liked; so, if your mistress asks you wither Sir Lucius over gave you a kiss, tell her fifty" (Rivals.2.2.69). He thinks that his act would be praised by Lydia and all women in general. His opinion might be correct as Lucy reacts, "What, would you have me tell her a lie?" (Rivals.2.2.69). O'Trigger kisses her once, and she asks him to give her fifty kisses as he wants her to tell Lydia. So, he decides to "... make it a truth presently" (Rivals.2.2.69). When he is about to make it real, they are interrupted by Fag. However, his act with Lucy does not happen among the same sexes but usually happens among the opposite sexes.

The above examples regarding the theme of sex in Sheridan's plays prove that Sheridan does not include in his plays explicit sexual innuendo like Behn. Behn discusses the concept of sex openly in her plays while Sheridan discusses the sexual seduction and his plays mostly focus on the influence of love and wealth on marriage. Behn also discusses the importance of love and wealth in the process of a successful marriage. Thus, the next chapter makes an attempt to discuss the role of wealth as an important factor in the success of marriage.