

**RISKY BUSINESS: THE DISCOURSE OF CREDIT AND EARLY MODERN
FEMALE PLAYWRIGHTS BEFORE DEFOE**

A Dissertation

by

COURTNEY BETH BEGGS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2010

Major Subject: English

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Defoe

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ABSTRACT

Risky Business: The Discourse of Credit and Early Modern Female Playwrights Before
Defoe. (August 2010)

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This dissertation shows that early modern female playwrights were shaped by and helped to shape commercial literary marketplaces that were increasingly affected by the rise of credit, shifting exchange values, and unstable notions of trust, interest, and economic motivation. By looking at how their plays appropriated and responded to financial language present in popular forms of publications such as pamphlets, ballads, and accounting guidebooks, we find that female playwrights understood the discourse of credit in ways that were particularly important for female readers and theatergoers and employed it in their writing for the stage. My study illustrates how their plays represent credit as always inherently tied to the potential risk involved in the “business” of being a woman on the marriage market, a mother with a fortune to pass on, or a widow with a business to maintain. In this project, I analyze the city comedies of Aphra Behn, the pseudonymous Ariadne, Mary Pix, and Susanna Centlivre and conclude that their works constitute a narrative bridge between the financial discourse that appears before them in

conduct books and advice manuals of the Restoration and after them in the eighteenth-century novel.

Making these women and their London comedies a focal point, we can see how they employed the period's financial discourse to highlight the problems associated with broken promises, counterfeit wills, and the supposed power of contract. My research demonstrates how these playwrights and their works play a critical role in accounting for the trajectory of financial discourse in eighteenth-century culture and literature prior to the "birth" of the English novel. "Risky Business" moves beyond a discussion of female investors or money in literature and, instead, offers a more nuanced understanding of the ways women writers were impacted by the rise of paper credit outside of and prior to fiction. The research presented in this project offers a new account of the way early modern female readers, writers, and theatergoers, were influenced by an increasingly complex financial discourse, a more detailed understanding of the relationship between economic and literary history, and a new way of conceptualizing the commercial female playwright.

For my family

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This work is a direct result of the credit extended to me by invaluable friends, family, mentors, and colleagues. The Texas A&M English Department funded several trips to conferences, at which I was able to share portions of my dissertation, a research trip to England, and a non-teaching fellowship over a summer, which allowed me time to focus on this project. Financial support I received from the Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research granted me the opportunity to conduct research at the British Library and present my work at national and international conferences. The Women's Studies Program at Texas A&M also awarded financial support for my work, for which I am grateful. To know one's research, writing, and intellectual participation are encouraged at the departmental and college level and across disciplines is a rewarding benefit, and I am thankful to have enjoyed it during my time as a graduate student at Texas A&M.

I would also like to thank my committee members for their time, assistance, and the invaluable feedback they have offered over the past years. Robert Griffin has pointed me in helpful directions throughout the research process. Jim Rosenheim ensured that my attention to historical context was ever present, and his friendship and collegiality was always a refreshing advantage to working with him. Mary Ann O'Farrell has, from the beginning, asked difficult questions and insisted upon quality answers. Because of this, both my writing and thinking about literature are better than they ever would have

been without her. Her willingness to ask about things *other* than the dissertation has been appreciated more than she can know.

A special space must be given to my advisor, Margaret J.M. Ezell. As I have said to many colleagues over the years, she is what I want to be when I grow up. She allowed me the time and space to explore a genre that was previously outside my comfort zone and gave me the assistance I needed to conduct the relevant research successfully. She read my writing at all stages, no matter how rough, and encouraged me at every step, until I eventually believed that I could, indeed, write a dissertation. Her willingness to share her own experiences of writing, research, and the importance of doing the work that one believes is needed (regardless of whether or not others share this belief) inspired me on more than one occasion. For her time, her feedback, and her guidance, I am ever grateful.

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his constant support and complete understanding of the physical, emotional, and intellectual energy it takes to write a dissertation, I offer my deepest and most sincere thanks.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: GENDER, GENRE, AND GESTURES IN ECONOMIC AND
LITERARY HISTORY

Credit is the exchange of two deferred promises: I will do something for you, you will pay me later. (358)

—Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* (1973)

Money—whether paper or coin—constitutes one of the earliest, and most important, forms of representation in relation to which it seemed crucial to make and reinforce a distinction between fact and fiction. (4-5)

—Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy* (2009)

Long before Mary Poovey’s claim that “economics and Literary studies have some special relationship to each other,” (5) literary scholars were studying connections between money and fiction, money and language, character and credit, and writing (of all kinds) about money. For example, James Thompson’s work, which links changes in eighteenth-century economic discourse in England to shifts in the English novel, focuses on the transformations of value that took place in financial history as they manifested themselves in fiction from Daniel Defoe to Frances Burney. Catherine Ingrassia’s work, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England* successfully demonstrates the way the novel helped to domesticate the credit system that developed at the end of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries by linking it to the epistolary process. Similarly, Marc Shell’s *Money, Language, and Thought* and *The*

This dissertation follows the style of the *MLA Handbook*.

Economy of Literature illustrate the ways that not only literature, but also language itself, is embedded with economic representation and systems of exchange. Additionally, Mona Scheuermann, Terry Mulcaire, Ann Louise Kibbie, and Sandra Sherman have each offered specific analyses of Defoe's writings, discussing the ways in which they were shaped by and directly helped to shape the discourse of credit and debt in the eighteenth century. And, while recent work from Craig Muldrew has provided a thorough account of the related cultural structures and attitudes that developed *before* the 18th century, Margot Finn's study investigates the connection between literature and the "character of credit" well into the early twentieth century. Collectively, these studies have shown that the connection between economic history and literary studies is a complicated but essential part of understanding language, literature, and writing. Furthermore, they have opened the door for scholars working in genres other than fiction to make similar interrogations and expand the initial lines of inquiry.

To be sure, this project began with my interest in the eighteenth-century English novel and the obsession with money demonstrated by so many fictional characters, particularly women. After surveying the scholarly work described above, however, it was clear to see that others had already covered that ground quite well. The entirely practical need to think about what might have been left out of their accounts led me to ask two initial questions, which now ground this dissertation: What about the relationship between commercial writing and credit before the novel? And, where do professional women writers, dramatists specifically, fit into such a relationship?

This project responds to three significant gaps in current literary scholarship and socioeconomic history. The first of these is a lack of attention to prolific and commercially successful female authors between 1660 and 1722, with the exception of Aphra Behn. While many of the literary critics I just mentioned take occasional notice of women's writing in their work, the primary focus of their studies remains on the male novelists of the eighteenth century, generally Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. When women writers are considered, in Thompson's work for example, it is usually the later eighteenth-century novelists (Burney, Inchbald, and Austen), who receive attention.¹ The second gap in critical analysis is the period of literary history left out of current scholarship. For example, Craig Muldrew concludes his project with the end of the seventeenth century, while most of the other projects begin—as if by rule—with Defoe.² Thirdly is the absence of a book-length study on the function of drama within the narrative of financial discourse. Making commercially successful female dramatists and their London comedies my focal point, I illustrate how they employed the period's financial discourse to highlight the problems associated with broken promises, counterfeit wills, and the supposed power of contract. I suggest that Behn, Ariadne, Pix, and Centlivre and their works play a critical role in accounting for the trajectory of financial discourse in eighteenth-century culture and literature prior to the “birth” of the English novel.

My goal is to move beyond a discussion of female investors or money in literature and, instead, offer a nuanced understanding of the ways women writers were influenced (directly and indirectly) by the rise of paper credit outside of and prior to

fiction. The majority of the plays studied in the subsequent chapters have heretofore received little or no critical attention, and it is my hope to provide a more complete reading of them, especially within the historical and economic context of their performance and publication. At stake in this project is a more thorough account of the way early modern women, as readers, writers, and theatergoers, responded to an increasingly complex financial discourse; a more detailed understanding of the relationship between economic and literary history; and a new way of conceptualizing the commercial female playwright. I contend that these plays constitute what Marc Shell has described as “larger literary structures of exchange that can be comprehended in terms of economic form” (*Economy* 7).

This dissertation studies the discourse of credit in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, specifically as employed in the comedies of Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Mary Pix (1666-1709), the pseudonymous Ariadne, and Susanna Centlivre (1667-1723). It begins by asking how professional female playwrights were shaped by and helped to shape commercial literary marketplaces that were increasingly affected not only by the rise of credit and unstable standards of value and exchange, but also by contradictory representations of gender, wealth, and economic motivation. To answer this question, I investigate the use of financial discourse in the comedies of these female dramatists and consider how their plays appropriated and responded to discourses of credit in ways that were particularly important for women. My project demonstrates the ways female playwrights represented credit in forms that are at once literal and symbolic, emotional and sexual, and always inherently tied to the potential risk involved

in the “business” of being a woman on the marriage market, a mother with a fortune to pass on, or a widow with a business to maintain. Specifically considered in this project are Behn’s *The Rover* (1677), *The Second Part of The Rover* (1681), and *The City-Heiress* (1682); Ariadne’s *She Ventures, and He Wins* (1696); Pix’s *The Different Widows* (1703); and Centlivre’s *The Gamester* (1705), *Love at a Venture* (1706), *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), and *The Artifice* (1722). Ultimately, I argue that these plays present a narrative bridge between literary representations of financial discourse that appear in print before and during the Restoration (i.e. in conduct books and advice manuals) and the later representations of financial discourse that we find in the eighteenth-century novel.

Why Women Writers?

More than a few scholars have illustrated how women, though their names are often left out of the indices of economic history, were active participants in the early modern financial world.³ For example, Amy Froide’s study on single women during this period deftly reveals the ways women inherited, maintained, and passed on various forms of wealth and concludes that they “played an important role in urban communities as property holders, as private and public creditors, as householders, as tax- and ratepayers, and as philanthropists” (117). The economic activity and financial competence of these women suggests that they gave serious attention to texts designed to help readers account for their credit and debt, income and payments, assets and liabilities successfully. It is these women, among others, who would visit the theatre to see the comedies of Aphra Behn, Ariadne, Mary Pix, and Susanna Centlivre.

As scholars such as Nancy Howe, Jacqueline Pearson, Deborah Payne-Fisk, and Jean Marsden have demonstrated, the Restoration represents a critical time for women in the history of English theatre. Most recently, Gilli Bush-Bailey's *Treading the Bawds* (2006) has challenged the traditional divide between studies of actresses and studies of playwrights, in order to show how women—actresses, playwrights, co-managers, and wives of managers—influenced almost all elements of the theatre world. Moreover, the period studied in this project, 1677-1722, features some of the most prolific playwrights (of either sex) in English dramatic history. As women who were writing for their livelihood, and as dramatists whose success on the stage depended upon the tastes of an often fickle audience, the female dramatists included in this project had enormous stakes in their efforts to secure economic independence. With their personal reputations frequently circulating in the public eye, their credibility as women writers was always on the line.

Compared to their male counterparts, female playwrights were better able to understand and articulate the economic struggles women faced, especially in relation to the marriage market. While the works of Dryden, Congreve, and Etherege frequently featured fortune-hunting men and rich widows, the perspectives offered in their plays is usually that of the male characters. Conversations between women are limited, if present at all, and the language they use to discuss their financial struggles does not reflect the contemporary discourse of credit. In the comedies of Behn and the other women writers discussed in the following chapters we find female characters who employ language similar to that found in financial literature of the period. Indeed, in many of the plays I

explore, the female characters participate in the discourse of credit with much more success than the male characters, who are often shown to be financially incompetent and ignorant in all matters associated with the protection and transmission of wealth. Moreover, they repeatedly fail to “bail each other out”—literally or metaphorically—while women work toward the shared goal of economic security by “managing” the business of marriage together.

Why Drama?

The most likely reason for the lack attention to writers prior to Defoe is the assumption that it was not until the publication of works like Defoe’s *Anatomy of Exchange Alley, or A System of Stock Jobbing* (1719) that financial discourse became a clear element of the popular literary imagination. Similar to the importance J. Paul Hunter places on understanding cultural and literary forces that took place “before novels” is the need to understand the cultural and literary forces that shaped women’s participation in the financial discourse of credit *before* Defoe.⁴ Drama was a commercially-lucrative and important form of popular entertainment following the Restoration of Charles II. It was in this genre that the period found its first commercial writer in Aphra Behn. Moreover, as Lisa Freeman has suggested, Restoration and eighteenth-century drama can be understood as “[the] medium through which authors could attempt, under the epistemological and formal constraints of genre, to engage with, represent, and make sense of the changing literary and socioeconomic landscape of English life” (*Character’s Theater* 5). Each of the writers included in this project went on to write prose fiction after they stopped writing for the stage, a turn which has

important implications for the very early presence of financial discourse in the novel. Finally, not only were several of the plays studied here featured throughout eighteenth-century English theatre repertoire, but also many elements of dramatic plot were transplanted into the eighteenth-century novel.⁵

Another concern of this project is the connection between studies such as this one, which focuses on drama, and similar or related scholarly work on the early development of the novel. That is, almost all of the scholarly work in this area begins with Defoe. And, while I agree with Thompson's claim it is nearly impossible to do a study on eighteenth-century economics without mentioning Defoe, I would argue that seeing Defoe as the only or obvious starting point for such a study is misleading.⁶ In light of scholarly work that has re-shaped our understanding of the canon of the novel and shown how prose fiction before Defoe blurs novelistic conventions, it is important that this literature be included in the scope of this study. Such an inclusion will help us to ask: In what ways did an earlier (pre-Defoe) relationship between women and credit continue and transform financial discourse of the seventeenth century into a discourse that is later developed, changed, responded to by the eighteenth-century novel (*Robinson Crusoe*, *Pamela*, or *Evelina* for example)? What narrative links serve for women as road signs to the changing economic system?

In terms of methodology, I see this work contributing to the larger body of scholarship recognized now as feminist literary history. My work involves "re-visioning" a wide variety of texts, most of which are written by women.⁷ These female authors, however are not presented as idealized readers or writers; nor will they be

discussed as representative of any specific social class. I take a historicist approach to the literature discussed in the following chapters, as my aim is to offer a cross-sectional study of the dominant ideas and conversations about credit at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century and to consider the ways commercial female dramatists represented and responded to them. In addition, I will provide some initial ideas about why women's comedy of this period has gone virtually unnoticed in combined studies of literary and economic history.

The first chapter provides a historical and economic context for financial discourse, women's writing, and economic activity after the Restoration. I begin by surveying a wide variety of texts that I term financial literature between 1600 and the early 1700s. With titles ranging from *Loves better then gold: or Money's an ass* (1676) and *No money, no friend* (1680) to *The importance of public credit* (1699) and *The new art of thriving* (1700), these texts emphasize the main threads of financial discourse, reveal authors' assumptions about those who might read financial literature, and illustrate the emerging anxiety that permeated early modern English culture and print. I look specifically at advice literature, pamphlets, broadside ballads, formal economic guidebooks, poems, fictional dialogues, and essays in order to study the ways early modern writers represented money, credit, and problems concerning financial activities and economic change in multiple print formats.

The second chapter, "'You Women have all a certain Jargon': The Language of Credit in Aphra Behn's Comedies," traces the ways Behn represents the economic motivation and financial success of two of the main female stock figures on the

Restoration stage: the whore and the virginal heiress. I argue that Behn draws specifically on the connection between broken vows and the problems associated with credit to suggest that the language of credit is something that women, ultimately, cannot avoid. Furthermore, Behn makes it clear that women seeking the economic security of marriage are just as “mercenary” as her most famous whore, Angellica Bianca. The main difference between the two is not self-interest itself, but which kind of self-interest: emotional or financial. Behn’s female characters are forced to reveal what it is they value—love or money.

In the third chapter, “Ariadne, Mary Pix, and Ideal Ventures,” I suggest that the speculative discourse of credit enables women dramatists to explore the concept of the “ideal” investor. In the case of the pseudonymous Ariadne, this takes place at the level of authorship as well as plot. Through both her anonymity and a reliance on the language of speculative investment, Ariadne creates what I argue is a “risk-free” investment in terms of commercial writing for the stage. The effect of this process is further supported by her creation of a brother/sister pair whose particularly striking concept of women’s economic freedom is held up as a radical but ideal model for her audience. In Pix’s case, she uses the figure of the widow/mother to highlight the connection between mothering and finance, juxtaposing an ideal widow (one who plans for the future and secures her son’s inheritance) with a reckless widow (one who manipulates her children in order to feed her lifestyle). The result, I contend, is an explicit connection between the discourse of credit, the “business” of mothering, and the implicit link between networking women and financial competence.

Chapter IV considers the ways in which Susanna Centlivre's comedies go beyond the function of reform to respond directly to competing ideologies of gender and economic discourse associated with the rise of paper credit. This chapter—"The 'New' Economic (Wo)Man?: Susanna Centlivre and the Promise of 'Black and White'"—explores the period's significant concern with women's participation in the distribution and circulation of wealth made possible by the presumed power of "black and white," the contract. Centlivre draws on the period's assumption that economic agency increased with the rise of credit contracts, and that the power of contract enabled economic autonomy. Focusing largely on the role and function of paper credit in Centlivre's plays, I argue that her female characters mirror early modern women's unavoidable concern about the reliability and value of symbolic credit, especially as figured in the egalitarian promise of the marriage contract. Rather than working with other women, Centlivre's heroines negotiate with men for the best marital terms possible.

The concluding chapter suggests that this genre and these women writers significantly helped to shape the climate in which financial discourse appears in the eighteenth-century novel, beginning with Defoe. I argue that Defoe's development of characters who are obsessed with the accumulation of wealth should not stand apart from a consideration of their theatrical counterparts. Without a doubt, Behn, Ariadne, Pix, and Centlivre were influenced by the financial literature that preceded them and the frequently negative associations their contemporaries made between women and money. Furthermore, we can reasonable speculate the early eighteenth-century novelists like

Defoe are indebted to these playwrights' representations of women's economic activities and the period's financial discourse.

The Financial Revolution: From the Bank of England to the South Sea Bubble

In a period when England saw the formation of a national bank in 1694 and the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720, it also witnessed a financial revolution that would give birth to modern economics as a science and subject to be analyzed. One of the most critical changes in England's financial and cultural history is the gradual shift from a coin-based economy to that of a credit or paper-based system, a system that was increasingly seen in symbolic terms.⁸ While the immediate economic effects of this change have been the subject of academic discourse for quite some time, it is only in the recent past that critics have started taking a closer look at the ways this transformation also directly affected discourses of morality, gender, class, and sentiment. Literature of all types—periodicals, sermons, ballads, and plays, for example— demonstrates the large-scale public concern with paper credit and also helps us to see why this project is a literary as well as historical matter of interest. The shift from a coin-based system to one centered on credit not only signaled a financial revolution, but also a cultural change, the effects of which are reflected in the literature, both fiction and nonfiction, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Because economic changes are inherently connected to and manifested in a culture's language, conversations about problems concerning value, wealth, and exchange are necessarily complicated. Though I will delineate the differences between

money and credit, my project is not concerned with the history of money per se. Indeed, England found itself in short supply of coin throughout the seventeenth century, but this is not to suggest that coin disappeared from the market and was no longer an important factor in either daily practice or economic discourse. Despite the shift to an economic system largely based on credit, coin remained in circulation throughout the period, varying in its value and worth on the market. Coin, and ready cash and goods in general, continue to be material objects that require efficient management, as can be seen in the large number of advice manuals and essays that treat the subjects of accounting and bookkeeping. In addition to coin, other commodities, moveable goods, and women's jointures held real (i.e. cash) value for those who participated in the complex social network that lay at the foundation of the period's financial discourse, and they must be considered alongside the symbolic forms of credit previously described.

The shift to a credit-based economic system was a slow process that started well before the seventeenth century.⁹ Craig Muldrew has extensively described the problems with coinage prior to 1696, explaining that while the number of coins produced by the mint increased throughout the 1600's, the practice of clipping, the changing value of metals, and the phenomenon of people hoarding "good" silver or gold coin worked together in preventing money from being used "on a large enough scale in a simple instrumental fashion to alienate economic exchange from social exchange" ("Hard Food" 97-98). Even before the coin-based system shifted to one based on paper, symbolic credit—trustworthiness and character, for example—had taken on a much more important role in financial relationships. Bills of sale and investment, paper notes

such as letters of personal credit that ‘spoke’ on behalf of someone’s reputation, all took on significant symbolic worth.

Terms of emotion and terms of finance became blurred as words like trust and interest indicate. Giving someone credit became a way to describing an emotional investment in them, via belief, as well as providing an economic advantage, the ability to borrow or receive goods now while making payment later, for example. Indeed, simply having a friend who could provide a reference of character could sometimes prove to be a matter of life and death or, more often, sin and virtue. Reputation, long considered a valid means of measuring a person’s worth and potential for economic honesty, comes to be seen in terms that exceed one’s name. That is, a name, an occupation, or the name of a family friend alone is not enough. The idea of reputation continues to be tied to these sources, but is also linked to the physical and sexual space of the body as well as professional authorship, especially for women. As Margaret Hunt has skillfully shown, the separation between the public discourse of finance and the presumably private sphere of the family was by no means clear, and the financial revolution at the end of the seventeenth century had a wide range of effects on the lives of individual family members throughout England.¹⁰ In the case of women, these effects can largely be seen in their relationship to the marriage market. As I suggest in the following chapters, the marriage market and the stock market often employed the same language, which was saturated with anxieties about investment, trust, credibility, wealth, and value.

It is my hope that this project will offer a more complete picture of the period’s economic discourse, one that sheds light on women’s writing about and representation of

their financial lives, as well as their contributions to a conversation that, in many ways, we are still having today.

Notes

¹ The exception to this is Edward Copeland's *Women Writing About Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. While Copeland's study includes less canonical writers and writers of magazine fiction, the focus remains on literature of the very late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

² Though Defoe began publishing in 1697, Muldrew does not provide extensive discussion on him, or any other significant literary figures or texts from the period. There are a few similar article-length studies on Renaissance literature and some that consider Shakespeare's plays. Also, Catherine Ingrassia's work is an exception in her starting point, as she begins her study with discussions of Eliza Haywood and women involved in the South Sea Bubble during the 1720's. Her overall project, however, remains different from mine, both in scope and goals.

³ On women and property ownership, see *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England*, Eds. Nancy Wright, Margaret Ferguson, and A.R. Buck, Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2004; Amy Erickson's *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993; and Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990. For the nature of women's wealth and its transmission, see Elizabeth Mazzola's *Women's Wealth and Women's Writing in Early Modern England*, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009. For a study of women's ownership of South Sea Company stocks, see Ann Laurence, "Women Investors, 'That Nasty South Sea Affair' and the Rage to Speculate in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *Accounting, Business & Financial History*, 16.2(2006): 245-264.

⁴ Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*, New York and London: Norton & Co., 1990.

⁵ See Samuel Macey, "The Comedy of Manners: Dowries as the Mercenary Motivation" in *Money and the Novel: Mercenary Motivation in Defoe and His Immediate Successors*, Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1983, 87-98.

⁶ James Thompson, *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel*, Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1996, 87.

⁷ I use the term "re-vision" in the same vein as Margaret Ezell, who cites Adrienne Rich's definition in her call for feminist literary historians to question the preconceptions and "backward projections" we bring to our investigations of early modern women's writing, "Re-Visioning the Restoration," 138.

⁸ While P.G.M. Dickson discusses this shift in terms of the creation of a national credit and debt system, my work here focuses on the simultaneous shifts taking place at the local and personal level. For additional studies on England's economic history during this time, see Joyce Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978; John Brewer, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982; C.G.A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England, 1500-1700*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984; D.C. Coleman, *The Economy of England, 1450-1750*. London: Oxford UP, 1977; Martin J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1700-1850*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995; J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985, and Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of Consumer Society in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. 37-54. There are numerous article-length studies that supplement this list quite well, many of which I refer to throughout the remaining chapters. I have, however, listed only the most important book-length works.

⁹ Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*.

¹⁰ Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780*. Berkeley: UC Press, 1996.

CHAPTER II

“DEBTOR AND CREDITOR MADE EASY’: FINANCIAL DISCOURSE AND THE LANGUAGE OF CREDIT, 1670-1725

Permit one of your Sex to give you, as far as her small Knowledge will reach, some Hints to the right understanding and use of Account: An Art so useful for all sorts, sexes and degrees of Persons, especially for such as ever think to have to do in the World in any sort of Trade or Commerce, that next to a Stock of Money, wares, and Credit, this is the most necessary thing. (Z1)
—Stephen Monteaige, *Debtor and Creditor Made Easy* (1708)

In Stephen Monteaige’s *Debtor and Creditor Made Easy* (1708), the author includes the section, “Advice to the Women and Maidens of London,” which is purportedly written by a woman, though it could just as easily be that Monteaige created the female persona. Among the hundreds of texts published between 1670-1725 that make use of financial discourse to address issues such as the state of national credit, personal debt, bankruptcy, and the importance of accurate accounting practices, this is the only one, to my knowledge, that specifically addresses a female readership. This is not to say that women were not reading such documents. Rather, as is the case with many studies of early modern women’s reading practices and literary activities, we lack the records to tell us with certainty exactly what women were reading. We can, nonetheless, determine what texts women had access to during this period, which will help indicate the ways women—female playwrights in particular—may have been influenced by the increasing presence of financial discourse in print. As Julian Hoppit notes, conversations about borrowing and lending practices increased between 1680-

1790, as both the British government and economy grew (“Attitudes to Credit” 306). To more fully understand the literature produced during this time, one must account for this extensive, complicated, and important cultural conversation which was on the minds of many English citizens.¹

The difficulty of accomplishing this task should be acknowledged from the beginning. Hoppit’s bibliographic survey of economic literature from the Restoration to 1760 suggests that much of what was published was “short, ephemeral, unacknowledged, polemical, and legislatively oriented” (79). The imprecise nature of this work is underscored by uncertainties about what made up the canon of economic literature and inability of dictionaries and histories to make sense of that literature. The result is a body of texts that are ambiguous and in constant flux. While this makes the study of economic literature more difficult, it also points to the benefits of examining more specifically women’s dramatic writing of the period with this particular cultural context in mind.

Within the first two decades of the eighteenth century, the subject of credit—how to raise and protect it—and debt—how to avoid it and/or repay it—continued to be a source of interest for writers and readers. In his *Essay on Publick Credit* (1710), Defoe maintains that credit is the thing that “...all People are busie about, but not one in Forty understands: Every Man has a Concern in it, few know what it is, nor is it easy to define or describe” (6). Such a characterization is important to keep in mind as we survey the financial literature of the period, as well as the plays that are discussed in the following chapters, because it reinforces the argument that women’s dramatic writing contributed

significantly to contemporary conversations about credit, specifically its impact on women.

Many of the publications concerned with credit went through multiple editions, and the language and practices associated with the rise of credit began to appear in popular literature, drama, and eventually the novel. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, roughly the 1760s forward, a good number of guidebooks were available that offered both sexes adequate instruction on understanding bills of exchange, promissory notes, and general customs of trade and business.² It is no surprise, then, that so many scholars have already provided us with useful studies of the connections between money, language, and literature of the mid- to late-eighteenth century and the Victorian period. As some, like Deidre Lynch and Catherine Ingrassia,³ have suggested, there is something about the novel in particular that lends itself to such a study. For Lynch, it is the concept of character—which is so deeply intertwined with the development of the novel—that connects the genre to economic analysis. For Ingrassia, the association between fiction and paper credit was an important component of early eighteenth-century fiction and its reception. Indeed, my work here would be impossible without the foundation these critics have provided, but the question that has yet to be fully explored is: What about connections between writing and credit before the novel?

In this chapter, I rely on the work of economic historians such as P.G.M. Dickson, J.G.A. Pocock, Julian Hoppit, and Craig Muldrew, among others, who have provided in depth studies of the major changes in England's financial system in the early modern period. Their work provides the historical and economic context for the plays

studied later, while scholars like Marc Shell and Patrick Brantlinger supply the theoretical framework from which I proceed. I draw on the foundation provided by these critics not to disagree with any of their major premises, but rather to build upon them by looking at literature (drama) and writers (female playwrights) that have largely been excluded from literary and economic history.

Prior to the formation of economics as a scientific field of study, arguably with Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), financial literature took various forms, and much of the material remains difficult to categorize. Even the task of choosing what criteria to use in determining what counts as financial literature is a complicated one. Mary Poovey for example, in her study on genres of the credit economy in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England, starts by first using the broad categories of imaginative writing, financial literature, and "monetary" genres.⁴ The latter of these are then divided further into subcategories so as to make distinctions between texts that offer financial commentary and those that offer formal economic information, or the difference between monetary instruments that embody valuable material (coin), the paper credit that stands in for coin, and documents like insurance papers, which only become valuable if a prior instrument is lost or fails (30-36). Yet further sorting must be done in the case of paper credit, which begins to suggest the challenge facing scholars trying to account for its various roles in English history and culture.

Because my goal is to determine how professional female playwrights appropriated the language and messages of these texts in their writing for the stage, I begin by asking: What do these texts say about money and credit? What do they have in

common, or what sets them apart from each other? What attitudes or assumptions do they reflect? What kind of information, assistance, or guidance do they offer readers? And most importantly, what kind of context might they provide that would offer a fresh study of Restoration and early eighteenth-century female playwrights? I define financial literature loosely as being any text that is primarily concerned with or speaks to issues related to money or credit and the language used to discuss either. I have cast a wide net in my survey of texts printed roughly between 1605 and 1715 so as to trace shifts in attitudes towards credit, changes in the ways writers talk about money and the nation's financial problems, and draw connections between texts that do not traditionally fall within the same disciplinary field of study. This approach not only provides a rich textual history of the discourse of credit, but also uncovers the ways the language of money and value saturated the lives of early modern English men and women.

During the first fifteen years of the seventeenth century, the language of real money, rather than symbolic credit, dominates the titles and imaginations of these early texts.⁵ This means that works generally tend to have one of two purposes. The first is practical in nature, helping readers understand how to calculate the true cost of a loan or annuity or determine the value of certain commodities. The second is moral in nature, mocking usurers, avarice, and those who place an excessive value on money (even in small amounts). Early seventeenth-century English broadside ballads and works like Richard Barnfield's epistle *Lady Pecunia, or The Praise of Money* (1598, 1605) focused on the value and use of gold and other physical forms of wealth (silver, plate, jewels,

etc.) and the moral issue of the love of money, which came to be figured in terms that opposed both masculinity and honesty.⁶

More than 100 years before Defoe, the figure associated with money and financial value is gendered female, and the writer takes time to explain why in the address “To the gentlemen Readers”: “I have given Pecunia the title of a Woman, Both for the termination of the Word, because (as Women are) shee is lov’d of men” (A3). As this epistle and other early seventeenth-century texts suggest, loving women and loving money too much can have dangerous consequences. Barnfield conflates the two—woman and money—in the figure of Lady Pecunia and in the subtitle describes her praise as “A Combat betwixt Conscience *and Covetousnesse*.” Though the purpose of his work is to praise Lady Pecunia, in so doing he reveals the consequences associated with attempts to gain wealth:

For her, the Merchant ventures on the Seas,

For her, the Scholler studies at his booke;

For her, the Userer (with greater ease)

For silly fishes, layes a silver hooke;

For her the Townesman leaves the contry village

For her the Plowman gives himself to Tillage.

For her, the Gentleman doth raise his rentes,

For her, the Servingman attends his mayster: (stanzas 17-18)

In this account, the implication is that money motivates every man’s actions. It is the end goal, transcending both class and geographical distinctions to reach rural as well as

urban citizens, gentlemen and servingmen. Barnfield suggests that, as a result, other values such as honesty, which has previously been defined as uprightness of disposition and conduct, integrity, and truthfulness, have been pushed aside. The consequence of figuring money as woman, then, is the creation of a battle of the sexes:

The time was once, when Honestie was counted
 A Demie-God, and so esteem'd of all:
 But now Pecunia on his Seate is mounted;
 Since Honestie in great disgrace did fall. (26)

Here, honesty is figured in masculine terms and replaced by the feminine figure of Lady Pecunia. Honestie has lost the dominant position as a measure or standard of value “because he is so poore,” and poverty is not only disrespectful but also the first step toward a life overcome by vice (27.1-6).

The instability of the value placed on honesty manifests itself in dramatic writing by both men and women throughout the Restoration and early eighteenth century. I would suggest that the female playwrights who are the focus of this project, however, use their comedies to consider the consequences this instability has on women in particular. For example, how can women gauge the value of relationships that do not exist outside of economic motivation? What consequences are women faced with as a result of this motivation? And, is there any way for women on the marriage market to reconcile economic motivation with romantic desire? With the possible exception of Willmore, who chooses a libertine ethics of desire with the prostitute La Nuche over the

fortune of the virtuous Ariadne in Behn's *The Second Part of The Rover* (1681), rarely does a male character forego money in favor of either sexual desire or virtue alone.⁷

In the 1620s, an interesting paradox develops as texts illustrate a simultaneous concern with debt (its causes, its consequences, and how to prevent it) and one of the most frequent causes of debt, usury. The interest in debt as a primary topic results from the increase in the number of people forced to take out loans and the extremely high interest rates at which those loans were made.⁸ While the government implemented legal restrictions on the rates moneylenders could charge, enforcing the restrictions proved to be nearly impossible. Henry Wilkinson's *The Debt Book* (1625) claims to be the first treatise to take up debt as a primary topic. Wilkinson, a Church of England clergyman and ejected minister, specifically considers how accumulated debt affects a man's conscience and estate. A renowned preacher, Wilkinson responds to Romans 13.8: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law."⁹ Drawing on the Bible's connection between Christian obligation and money, Wilkinson criticizes ministers for not speaking on the topic sooner. The result, he suggests, is people thinking they are justified in living in a constant state of debt or thinking nothing of the sinfulness of those who do not pay back their debts. Wilkinson is careful to distinguish those who, with no other resources, borrow out of true need and those who simply live off the credit of others. Ultimately, Wilkinson's goals are to attack usurers and scold those who do not pay their debts, while helping his readers by providing a categorization and explanation of different kinds of debts and their moral, religious, and economic justification (or lack thereof, in some cases).¹⁰ Offering advice,

first, on how to avoid going into debt and, second, on how to get out of debt once in it, the treatise relies on the rhetoric of a Protestant charity and work ethic to guide readers' understanding of money and debt in moral terms.

Wilkinson's moralizing work on the notion of debt can be seen as a precursor to the kinds of moral connections being made in many of the plays that feature fortune-hunting suitors, stock-jobbers, and men who redefine the relationship between morality and debt. In the cases of the fortune-hunters and stock-jobbers (almost always represented through male characters), both behaviors come to be seen as immoral because of their predatory nature. That is, their actions are not a result of the need to survive, but rather an excessive greed. A similar connection between morality and debt is made more explicitly in early eighteenth century comedy than in that of the Restoration. In Centlivre's plays, for example, debt alone is less important than the type of debts owed. Valere's father in *The Gamester* (1705) makes a point of classifying his son's debt based on the notion of honor. Money owed to merchant-creditors is paid back, while money owed to those associated with vice (usurers, mistresses, other gamblers) is not. Wilkinson's treatise laid the groundwork for the attacks on stockjobbers that appeared in Restoration drama and contemporary literature.

His writing also signaled a transition in the language of financial literature, as the texts that appeared over the next ten years consistently contained less religious rhetoric and instead provided more formal professional assistance and advice to lenders and borrowers. Such literature was much needed as the number of English men and women who relied upon networks of credit increased throughout the seventeenth century. Craig

Muldrew explains that, with less currency to be had, “What existed was a credit economy in which everything was measured by monetary prices, but where money was not the primary means of exchange” (“Hard Food” 84). Keeping track on one’s financial transactions then became not only more complex, but also more necessary.

Financial literature of the 1620s played an important role in attempting to educate a general readership about systems and methods of accounting for their resources in general and their finances in particular. The texts published in this decade reinforced the need for men and women to connect things to set values, specifically in monetary terms. The idea was that, by giving each thing a monetary value and accounting for all exchange-based transactions, an individual could gain a certain amount of control over his financial future. In 1626 and 1627 respectively, *The Money Monger. Or, The Usurers Almanacke* and *The Treasurers Almanacke, or The Money Master* were published in London.¹¹ Both were published anonymously and sought to provide tables to help readers understand the true cost of loans, rents, leases, annuities, etc. and the gains and losses associated with them. The earlier work claims it will be of use to borrowers, lenders, traders, and usurers and includes explanations of how to use the tables and the benefits of doing so. Mainly providing instruction on how to calculate simple interest on various financial transactions, *The Money Monger* seems to have offered the starting point from which *The Treasurers Almanacke* begins.

The expected audience for *The Treasurers Almanacke* was broader than that of its predecessor, identifying potential readers based on trade or profession. It worked to be useful to those in the military ranks (general, colonel, commander), the merchant-

class (mercator, draper, fishmonger, and clothier), and the husbandman, as well as those typically associated with money (usurer, borrower, lender, and artificer). With such an extensive audience in mind, the almanac aims at both practical and grand goals. It not only offers to help a man know “how hee parts from his Meanes, and to thrive at the Yeares ends,” but also that a “Generall may know how to maintaine an Army, a Merchant to discharge Sea business & a Nobleman to measure his layings out, or expences to profit” (A2). Such works provide step-by-step instructions for readers to help them better understand their financial pursuits, whatever they may be and, as Elaine Hobby has noted, almanacs were “among the best-selling books of the mid and late seventeenth century, sales in the 1660s averaging about four hundred thousand copies annually” (180).

Few texts were published between 1640 and 1660 that focused on money in any way other than the English army’s need for it.¹² Despite the fact that hundreds of works instructed—in some cases, demanded—the advancement of money to the army, these exchanges were not framed within a discourse of credit. Rather, the need was for real wealth: coin, plate, gold, silver, etc. There were, however, a few exceptions, several of which offered advice on how to keep money. For example, Henry Peacham’s *The Worth of a Penny: or, A Caution to keep Money* (1641) anticipated the need for commiseration about the “hard and merciless Times” and gave readers suggestions for how to save money in their “Diet, Apparell, Recreations, &c.” The fact that it was published in seven subsequent editions is significant because, unlike Wilkinson’s work, this was not an almanac. Peacham’s work provided more than mere commentary on the impoverished

state of things and maintained a popularity that extended beyond the Civil War years.¹³ As Peacham made clear, war alone was not the sole, or even primary, cause of poverty. A gaming or drinking habit, a careless servant, a natural accident, or an act of crime had reduced many a man to nothing long before the nation found itself in want of money (8-13), and Peacham's caution sought to have more sway on readers by illustrating that thriftiness and financial prudence were qualities to practice at all times. The image Peacham paints of young men is one that would be familiar to Aphra Behn's audiences of the late 1670s and 1680s. Her most famous rover, Willmore, is penniless first because of his service to the crown, but his drinking and whoring certainly do not do anything to reverse his fortune.

Popular forms of financial literature had sketched out some of the ways men and women would be impacted, in different ways, by the increased reliance on instruments of credit. Images like the ones we see in Peacham's work and the anonymously-written *A Caution To Keepe Money* (1642) are ones that will be developed further in the dramatic works of Behn, Ariadne, Pix, and Centlivre. Contemporary responses to credit, as Julian suggests,

...demonstrate the existence of a level of discourse about economic issues which though less than fully theoretical was far from being random or arid. Such ideas [about the use and abuse of credit] appear to have impinged deeply and profoundly on the consciousness of polite society and illustrate therefore some key aspects of their economic mentalité. Indeed, to the ordinary literate citizen it

was through issues such as the use and abuse of credit that broader aspects of economic activity at the time were considered and articulated (“Attitudes” 306).

By using these texts (among others) to frame the plays studied later in this project, we can see how female dramatists expressed their own concerns about the financial revolution and its impact on women’s lives.

Offering images that would re-emerge in Restoration and early eighteenth-century comedy, *A Caution To Keepe Money* aimed to show the “miserie of the want” of money not only for the kingdom during a time of war, but also for “younger Brothers pawning their Lands,” “Shopkeepers wanting Stock to Supply,” and, interestingly, “Handsome and honest Maidens, wanting Portions.” Here, the lack of money has caused such extensive poverty that it is likened to a disease that has spread “over the whole land, all from the highest to the lowest feeling the misse of it” (2). Though the writer illustrates how everyone from tradesmen to servants have been affected by this “Epidemicall disease,” the conclusion suggests that women inevitably faced an impossible end by pointing out, “What multitudes of beautifull and honest maides in this Land which the world cannot match againe for good qualities and handsomenesse, are undone for want of portions to preferre them, for now...they are constrained to turne druges and slaves so long as they live...” (8). Paying attention to characterizations of women and the effect that financial changes have had on them enables us to see more clearly the literary and cultural underpinnings of the virginal heiress, mercenary whore, and wealthy widow, each of whom find representation of the comedies discussed in the following chapters.

The *Caution to Keepe Money* foreshadows the absence of ready money, and the implications for women in particular have useful connections to the female characters found on the Restoration stage. Given the overwhelmingly negative accounts of the situations in which young women without money were finding themselves, representations of women choosing to forego financial security are noteworthy. As we will see in Chapter II, for example, the prostitute La Nuche in Behn's *The Second Part of The Rover*, chooses to follow Willmore and "live and starve by turns as fortune pleases" (5.4.504) rather than continue being a high-priced courtesan. If we are to believe accounts such as those provided in *A Caution to Keepe Money*, then the credibility of choices like the one La Nuche makes must be questioned. The circumstances described in the text offer additional context for understanding female characters other than the virginal heiress. Most often, these roles are that of the widow and the prostitute. The plays studied in this project frequently characterize these women as having to find other ways of maintaining themselves aside from marriage (i.e. pawn broking, lending, and prostitution). I argue that their presence, even if in the form of minor roles, reminded viewers of the particular pressures women faced in trying to secure their economic independence.

Women did not appear to fare much better in the financial discourse of the 1650s. John Marius's *Advice Concerning Bills of Exchange*, one of the first books to deal specifically with the issue of paper credit. Originally published in 1651 and republished three more times during the decade, Marius's work offered extensive information on the exchange and management of bills of exchange. Though he claims in his address to the

reader that his work is a “publique benefit,” the guide explicitly leaves women out of the realm of financial activities. Focusing specifically on paper bills—when they will fall due, their value in sterling, and proper accounting practices—his instructions and advice extend to the methods people should use to secure loans and their repayment, as well as how to protest unpaid bills. Aside from the gendered language (“he/him”) Marius uses throughout, which establishes the arena of financial discourse and activity as a masculine domain, he makes it a point to advise men that wives should not be allowed to accept a Bill of Exchange on their husband’s behalf without the authority provided by a “Letter of Attorney” signed in their husband’s hand (47). The impracticality of such a limitation is implied in changes to later editions. In the 1674 and 1684 editions, this section is more detailed in its attempts to recognize the various circumstances under which a wife might need to act on behalf of her husband in his financial affairs. In the later versions of the text, Marius acknowledges that, “It is true, if the Wife or Servant have formerly accepted several *Bills of Exchange* in the like kind, and when the party on whom they were drawn hath come to town, he hath approved thereof, and paid the bills at the time, and so the Wife, or Servant are wont to do from time to time, and that this can be proved, I conceive it will come very close to him (105).¹⁴ It is only with some reluctance that Marius seems willing to bend the rules. Both later editions, however, are also more specific about additional limitations. For example, the 1674 edition explains that “a mans word...if not sufficient, neither will a bare Letter serve, written to his Wife...but there must be band and seal, and witnesses, which (if occasion be) may prove his legal consent to such acceptance” (105).

Financial literature of the first half of the seventeenth century begins with money figured as female, then goes on to recognize women as particularly vulnerable to the effects of the shortage of specie. By the end of the century, printed financial literature has implicitly elided women, their economic agency, and their financial activities. They do not act as economic agents on their own behalf, but rather are represented as having limited authority to act only on behalf of their husbands. Nowhere in these phases are women linked, in a positive way, to money, financial practices, or the discourse of credit. Collectively, these texts set the stage for negative connotations as Defoe's *Lady Credit* in the early eighteenth century.

For Marius, in his *Advice Concerning Bills of Exchange*, neither word nor paper is a sufficiently stable signifier of value. As we shall see in the following chapters, each version of the text, in its implicit assumption of a male audience, contradicts much of what we find in the comedies of Behn, Ariadne, Pix, and Centlivre. These playwrights developed female characters who demonstrated an awareness of the discourse of credit and sometimes used it to their advantage. In *The Second Part of The Rover*, for example, it is Ariadne who serves as a source of financial discourse, prompting Willmore to conclude that it is a "jargon" peculiar to women alone. Additionally, Marius's work does not foresee the successful strategies early modern women and, to some extent, their dramatic counterparts, would use in working to protect their financial interests and develop a useful understanding of the power of credit.

In the 1660s, questions about how to define credit specifically in terms of economic discourse emerge in *A Description of the Office of Credit* (1665). Published

anonymously, it is one of the earliest works to consider at length the economic and social function and necessity of credit, anticipate readers' objections and questions about how credit functions in both large-scale trade and daily exchanges, and detail the public and private advantages of credit. The Office of Credit was actually a credit bank designed primarily for the use of the mercantile community (Scott 280). What we find, however, is that most of the objections considered in the *Description* are ones that would continue to be leveled against credit throughout the next sixty years. Examples of these objections include the idea that credit is not "practicable" (14), that "it will be a Discredit for the Credible Merchants to Mortgage their Goods" (16), and that "Credit cannot answer small and Countrey Occasions" (24). The last objection helps us to understand a further connection between Restoration theatre and credit. The plays studied in this project demonstrate that the form which most explicitly highlights the problems associated with the rise of credit is city comedy. Even in the case of Behn's *The Rover* (parts one and two), which is set in Madrid, the characters are overwhelmingly English men and women, representing the life of typical English citizens of a certain class.¹⁵ In the case of the female playwrights whose works are discussed later, their plays suggest that they saw the rise of credit—its advantages and disadvantages—as a concern primarily for urban women, especially those living in London.

One of the primary objections against credit was that, "Men will have Money and not Credit" (19), which implies a value greater on the latter than the former. I would suggest that, up to this point, the relationship between the money and credit had not been

clearly articulated, but this precise objection and the extensive reply that follows it implies an anxiety about the two terms and the value each carries. In fact, this is one of the first texts, to my knowledge, that sets out to explicitly define both credit and money and distinguish them from one another, leaving “it to the understanding of the Reader to judge, whether credit or Money be most useful, alluring or Inviteing” (18). Money is characterized more than it is defined and set against credit. The main benefits of money, according to the writer, are that it is “durable” and its value is generally fixed, “though there be never so great or small quantity of it in the Country” (22). Describing another benefit of money, however, the writer reveals the problematic relationship between money and the value placed on it: “Money is known by all, and therefore used by all, that’s the reason a man is said to be worth 1000 l. more or less, when it may be, he hath not 10 l.” (22). Though the value of money is alleged to be a stable gauge of a person’s wealth, this characterization exposes money as an unreliable standard of measurement. The writer’s claim to let the reader decide which form of wealth—money or credit—is the most useful is a bit deceptive, as we can see by the following definition. The author ultimately defines credit as “the reputation of a Mans honesty, or abilitie, or of a things instrinsick value” (18). This definition, the latter part of it at least, is in sharp contrast with what we find in popular literature in the early 1700s.

The notion that things have intrinsic value is contentious, and it is directly challenged in Bernard Mandeville’s *The virgin unmask’d* (1709). Containing ten dialogues between an elderly maiden and her niece, the work is largely focused on issues related to money, marriage, and virtue and the problems women faced as a result of

fortune-hunting men. Recounting the story of a young lady and her money-hungry husband, the elderly aunt describes his attempt to prostitute his wife after he realizes her family fortune will not be passed on to his wife or himself. His obsession with money is, by now, a recognizable trope, but his words to his wife are notable. Trying to convince her that virtue and love for her husband should not hold her back from sleeping with another man, he explains that, “there is no Instrinsick Worth in any Thing but Money...This is the Standard, without which no Value can be set upon any Thing: It is in the World, what a Figure is in Arithmetick; the only Thing that standing by itself has any Signification; to which all the Vertues and Good Qualities are meer Cyphers, that are never to be used but to advance the Figure” (64). This example suggests that, despite the large number of pamphlets, advice literature, proposals, and essays published in the forty years after *A Description of the Office of Credit*, attempts to define credit and clearly distinguish its value, especially in comparison to ready money, remained a struggle. Moreover, works like Mandeville’s indicate that this struggle had important implications for early modern women’s lives, ones that, as I illustrate in Chapter III, are played out on the stage in the comedies of *Ariadne* and *Mary Pix*. The women in their comedies detect the instability inherent in the earlier definition of credit. Relying instead on the idea that only money carries intrinsic worth, they work together to secure and protect it by passing it on to each other.

The complexities of credit and its literal, social, and linguistic associations continue to be echoed in popular literature of the period. The 1670s, in particular, featured several ballads that highlighted the inherent connections between money, paper

credit, and conduct. Even when writers referred to money in terms of gold and silver, readers were inevitably forced to think about credit in terms of reputation, credibility, and competing value systems. John Marius, who began publishing on the topic in 1651, continued the success he had with his previous two editions of *Advice concerning bills of exchange* by releasing another copy of the second edition in 1670, followed by a third edition in 1674.¹⁶ Despite the claim on the title pages that each work was very much enlarged upon and “like never before published by any,” the subsequent editions remained largely unchanged. The number of reprints and editions, however, indicates a relatively stable and consistent demand for and interest in literature on the topic.

One unique feature of popular literature that depicted the role and influence of money and credit in the 1670s is the extent to which gender became a distinct factor in the moral lesson or message of a text. That is, prior to this point, the audience addressed or assumed by most financial literature was by default male. Though money was traditionally figured in gendered terms or embodied as woman (i.e. *The Death and burial of mistresse Money*, published first in 1664 and again in 1678), the primary purpose of these representations is less about the different ways men and women use money than it is about the excessive love of money. Women and money occupy the same place and fulfill the same function: they are things to be had, stored, and used in an exchange-based society. This feature remains throughout the century and can be seen in much of Restoration and early eighteenth-century comedy written by men.¹⁷

In the mid-1670s, however, gender added yet another feature, one that complicated the discourse surrounding money, credit, and value, as the messages that

appeared in ballads such as *The new made gentlewoman or, The dishonest lady* (1674) and *The Alewives Invitation to Married-Men, and Batchelors* (1675) are different for men and women.¹⁸ The first of these texts offers the stereotypical representation of woman as mercenary whore by describing the rags-to-riches story of a young lady from the country who is “taught” how to gain money from men by using her beauty. The speaker describes herself as being orphaned by parents, who had conceived her in a barn, and taken in by a London gentlewoman. Learning how to use her beauty to her advantage, she gets money from men by making them think that she loves them. Only guilty of “playing of the private whore,” she works her way up the social scale of men. Earning money for simply smiling at men, she describes her enterprise as “a fine spring that runeth so clear, / that it bring me as good as two hundred a year.” After six months in London, she is wealthy enough to retire to the country. Though the speaker never presents her particular brand of fortune-hunting as wicked or akin to whoring, the subtitle—*The dishonest lady*—sufficiently brands her as immoral, thus leaving readers to understand that her example should not be followed. What I find most interesting about this text, in relation to similar literature of the period, is the way in which the primary title implies a “new” way of becoming a gentlewoman. The “new” gentlewoman, the title suggests, is “made,” offering female readers a sense of individual agency and responsibility for their social and economic fate. Rather than being born or married into the status, the “new made gentlewoman” capitalizes on her most valued asset—her beauty—and retires comfortably without penalty.

The speaker in *The new made gentlewoman* suggests that women could secure their economic survival, but only at the risk of being “dishonest,” pretending to love in order to gain money. However, *The Alewives Invitation to Married-Men, and Batchelors*, published a year later, suggests that a woman who came by economic security honestly still faced criticism. Structured as the story of “How a Good Fellow is slighted when he is brought to Poverty;” the ballad attempts to show men how to be good husbands and criticizes alewives for “inviting” honest men into poverty. The speaker explains that, “...so long as my credit and stock it would hold, / Come early or late, I might have what I would.” Once his money is gone, however, the alewife refuses to lend him money or serve him on credit:

But when I had wasted and consum'd my store,
 And had nothing to mortgage, or sell to make more,
 Unto my fine hostess I then told me my tale,
 She must lend me some money, or I go to' the' Goal:
 Nay tarry, said she, I don't see it to rise,
 I'll not lend you a penny, if 'twould save your life:
 This was all the comfort that I got from she
 That always pretended my friend for to be.

Rather than concentrating either on the vice of drinking or of seeking credit unnecessarily, as we often see in texts that take poverty as a main subject, the moral blame here is placed on the alewife's sound financial decision making. That is, women who successfully negotiate exchange relations within a credit-based system, such as

securing a loan prior to lending or refusing to lend money to a person who clearly has nothing of value, are represented as mercenary. As we will find later, this is the beginning of a specific trope used to describe one of the ways women participated in economic activity in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century. To make matters worse, the text presents the consequences of the “Alewives Invitation” as a slippery-slope of disastrous events for men, leading first to poverty and then to the loss of reputation, credibility, and sociability.

Single-sheet, illustrated broadsides, like *Loves better then gold: or Money's an ass* (1676), which advocates love over money and criticizes those who sell themselves out for a woman's fortune, and *The Mystery of Mony-catching, or The Character of an Importunate-Dunn* (1678), which explores the methods of debt collectors, underscored the growing presence of financial discourse in the popular literary imagination. Though both debtors and duns are depicted as hypocrites of the same mold, the debt collector is described in the harshest terms as “the Quintessence of Vexation; a *single* Plague, worse than all *Egypt's Tenn...*an *Horse-leech* that always Cries---*Give, Give*; Or rather a *Cuckow* that has never but one Note---*Pay, Pay, Mony, Mony, Mony...*An *Evil Spirit* whom no *Musique* but the sweet *Gingling* of Coin can Charm” (3). Lenders and borrowers are depicted as deceitful by nature, employing all methods available to keep up false appearances for each other, yet they are caught up in an inescapable chain of financial exchange and obligation. Comparatively speaking, the number of writers publishing these types of works was relatively low. The next two decades witnessed an explosion in texts that sought to account for money lent and borrowed, offer guidance to

merchants, accountant, and clerks on the proper ways to manage ledgers and account books; sing the praise of money, decry the growing number of problems associated with money, and defend the rise of new forms of paper credit.

By the beginning of the 1680s, money simultaneously made the man and turned the world upside down. John Wade's *Tis Money That Makes a Man* (1680) and the anonymously-published *The World Turn'd Up-side Down or, Money Grown Troublesome* (1684) are just two examples among dozens of broadsides and ballads that expressed what seemed to be common knowledge at the time: without money, one had nothing. Works like these endlessly repeated the warning to men to avoid wasting their estates on drinking and whoring. Using speakers who claimed to have been undone in this way, they often illustrated the ill consequences that followed poverty: loss of friends, mockery, and the fear that poverty was somehow contagious.¹⁹ Yet the temptation to throw ones estate away on drink and sex seemed unavoidable, leading young gentlemen inevitably to "suttle shirking Sharpers," as one anonymous writer put it in *Money makes the Mare to go* (1680). Sharpers were criticized for deceptive practices and preying on young men who had spent all their fortune, but men from all classes and trades were shown as unable to live without money and willing to lie to get it. As we will see, such representations were repeated in Restoration comedies, which depicted men as concerned first and foremost with women's fortunes.

In addition to the colorful and entertaining popular broadsides and pamphlets, professional or formal economic advice literature also proliferated in the 1680s, as seen by the publication of multiple editions of texts such as John Hawkins's *The Young*

Clerk's Tutor (first published in 1662, followed by four editions in the 1680s), *The Compleat Clerk* (first published in 1677, then again in 1683),²⁰ Robert Chamberlain's *The Accomptant's Guide, or, Merchant's Book-keeper* (first published in 1679, then again in 1686), and John Hill's *The Young Secretary's Guide: or, A speedy help to learning* (1687). Practical manuals sought to explain and illustrate the best accounting practices and the most efficient ways to keep track of merchants' daily transactions. They offered extensive tables to help readers understand exchange rates among different currencies, various book-keeping practices in other countries (usually Holland, Flanders, France, and Spain), and the rates at which interest should be calculated on loans, mortgages, annuities, etc. Their scope was enormous as writers worked to anticipate and address every possible situation their readers might encounter, and one of the first goals each text seems to have kept in mind was making sure their audience was familiar with the language of financial discourse. That is, most formal financial advice literature included some sort of dictionary or index to explain important terms, transactions, and even the most basic mathematical tasks. The presence of these tables is a strong indicator that economics was, from the beginning, a "new" and tricky language.

These texts were not exclusively addressed to other professional accountants, clerks, and merchants. Rather, as in the case of Chamberlain's *Accomptants Guide*, the works were intended for readers, including both men and women, who were fundamentally literate and somewhat familiar with exchange-based culture. Exposure to these works might have helped women understand their own financial situations better and provided them with a linguistic framework for recognizing and responding to a

system of value that was shifting from coin to paper. As I discuss in the next chapter, this might perhaps help explain Willmore's accusation in Behn's *The Second Part of the Rover* (1681) that it is women who "have all a certain Jargon, or Giberish...of Value, Rate, Present, / Interest, Settlement, Advantage, Price, Maintenance, and the Devil and all of / Fopperies, which in plain terms signifie Ready Money" (2.1.93-97). His charge necessarily implies that women were quickly learning how to master the financial discourse of the period.

Though the exchange relations illustrated in financial advice literature are clearly operating on a credit-based system, transactions are described in monetary values and presuppose transfers of real coin (gold and silver) or merchandise. It would be the next decade that witnessed the first large wave of texts that concerned themselves with the rise of credit and made use of its discourse. The Glorious Revolution in 1688 and the subsequent succession of William of Orange brought with them a critical need for increased financial support of the military. As J.S. Peters explains, William was a "financial-military monarch," and his taking of the throne was accompanied by "...the erosion of class and paternal authority through the establishment of money as the principal authority (William and the Bank of England are one)" and "the repositioning of money as a great equalizer (unequal equalizer though it may be)" (366-67). Given these events, along with the founding of the Bank of England in 1695, it is no surprise that many of the works published in the 1690s manifested the questions and concerns English citizens had about how the Bank would operate, how national debt and credit affected

private exchange-based relations, and what changes would occur in their daily lives as a result of proliferating instruments of exchange, especially new forms of paper credit.

Joyce Appleby's assessment of financial literature supports such a conclusion, as she observes that, "Money gave contemporary writers a great deal of trouble, for it presented both real and conceptual problems" (199). In the first few years of the 1690s, most of the financial literature consisted of essays on the scarcity and debasement of money in England, primarily coin and plate, and proposed ways to remedy the problem. Mostly written anonymously, these texts offered various solutions, ranging from polls and taxation to raising the price of metals, or in some cases writers lamented the fall of a society that was everywhere tainted by a lust for money.²¹ By the end of the century, money had become "an extension of personal authority, an economic tool, a means of organizing other people's activities, an allocator of resources, a claim upon goods, and a good in itself. Money was wealth—something fixed—as well as a measure for determining values in exchange—something fluid" (Appleby 200).

As the shortage of coin grew, so did the sense of urgency behind developing a long-term solution to England's financial crisis. In chapters three and four, we will see how, at the same time, female playwrights like Mary Pix, Delariviere Manley, and Catherine Trotter flourished, and women in general gained unprecedented access to the stage. Lyons and Morgan note that, "More than fifty plays attributed to female playwrights appeared in print during the half century from 1660-1710" (xi). As members of the theatre community, a collective business effort from which all members hoped to

profit, these women staked their financial security on their ability to please a fickle crowd.

Part of the early discourse of credit was the debate surrounding the benefits of stocks vs. trade. The former, broadly defined as funds in which capital might be invested, was seen as a form of symbolic credit, a form less real than the latter. Trade was a process in which real commodities were exchanged for other real goods or money. In a way that echoes earlier arguments about the differences between coin and paper credit, stock and trade become associated with opposing sides of a financial revolution. In the anonymous *Plain Dealing* (1691), which is structured as a dialogue between Mr. Johnson and his stock-jobbing friend, Mr. Wary, the debate centers around stock-jobbing, a practice that continues to be associated—in negative ways—with the rise of credit. Generally speaking, stock-jobber was a pejorative term used to describe brokers who were not sworn officials of the Stock Exchange. Rather, they dealt in stocks on their own accounts. The term stock-jobbing was frequently used, however, to deal not only with the buying and selling of stocks by unsworn agents, but also to a wide range of suspicious and often fraudulent financial speculation (i.e. intentionally spreading rumors about a drop in the value of a stock in order to profit from those selling the stock).

Set in the Exchange, the conversation between Mr. Johnson and Mr. Wary attempts to represent some of the most common concerns about the shift toward a credit-based economy. Trade is seen in virtuous terms, as something that helps benefit the public good, while stock (especially stock-jobbing) is a despised, dishonest, and inequitable practice. The reasons behind this view are, among other things, that stock-

jobbing is practiced upon those who do not know any better, those who do not truly understand what they are getting into or how the process of investing and borrowing on credit works (2). At the same time, brokers and accountants have specialized knowledge that helps them better understand how to take advantage of the “innocent” and “unsuspecting” (3). This characterization is not unlike contemporary representations of women as skilled in the art of cunning and deceit.

Moreover, victims of the stock-jobber’s practices are left to cope with the loss of entire estates at the drop of a hat, usually as a result of mere rumor or worse, a deliberate lie told to force the price of stocks to fall (3). And finally, according to Mr. Johnson, this new system operates under no system of logic. But rather, it is based on the private choices of individuals which ultimately hurt the public good (9). As Johnson explains, “...Profit or Loss made or sustained by these Trades, or the Advantages and Difficulties that attend them, are not at present the Motives which govern their Actions, but they rise and fall as the humours of the Buyers increase or abate...” (3). Implicit in this logic is that the very foundation of symbolic credit is based on deceit.

One of the restrictions Mr. Johnson wishes would be placed on stock-jobbing is “every Member’s taking an Oath and entering into Bonds never to suffer another’s Stock in his name, nor to Buy nor Sell Stock without its being actually transferred” (9). That is, this would prevent people from starting rumors about the mass selling or buying of stock, which in turn causes people to react accordingly. Mr. Stock-jobber is represented as nothing more than a “word and a blow” (13), a description that portrays credit as chimeric in nature and one that would become quite familiar to readers in the early

1700s. For example, in Susanna Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), the harshest criticism of the four guardians who hold Anne Lovely's fate (and fortune) in their hands is reserved for Tradelove, a deceptive, frantic exchange broker.

Julian Hoppit notes that, "in no decade between 1680-1790 were there more [economic] crises than in the 1690s" ("Attitudes" 308). The year following the establishment of the Bank of England saw the period's sharpest increase in the number of publications designed to enter into what I would broadly term popular financial discourse. It is somewhat difficult to determine exactly who was contributing to this discourse because so many of these publications were anonymous. Those authors who signed their names came from a wide variety of backgrounds and trades, including but not limited to merchants, farmers, clerks, and civil servants. Naturally, finding other forms of money or wealth went hand in hand with the rise of a new language or way of speaking about money and value. It could no longer be taken for granted (not that it ever was) that everyone was using the language of finance in the same way. Where wealth once meant, almost exclusively, coin, gold, or silver, it came to signify multiple measurements of value, including credit. This change in scope meant that,

a reputation for honesty, trustworthiness and good neighbourliness became an attribute of wealth... This meant that reputation was no less a part of someone's 'value' than any monetary calculation of their alienable property. Wealth was a much more complex and volatile condition than what is implied by the possession of large amounts of cash or savings in a stable banking system" (Muldrew, "Hard Food" 98)

The expansive scope of credit that Muldrew details points to the difficulties men and women faced in determining how to invest their money as well as their trust. It is fairly easy to see why women, especially those who brought large amounts of wealth with them into marriage, would be deeply invested in understanding how these changes affected their economic security. The plays studied in the following chapters make this investment discernible and create a space for the stage in the narrative history of economic discourse.

The theatre was directly impacted by the historical and economic changes at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. Speaking of comedy in particular, John Loftis claims that “English comedy of the early eighteenth century reveals an intense preoccupation with the social result of economic change—and for good reasons” (1). Following the establishment of the Bank of England, a system of national credit and debt, and the rise of joint-stock companies like the South Sea Company, tropes associated with speculative investment and stock-jobbing became more prominent in comedy, the most popular form of drama during the period. At the same time, the new instruments of paper credit being used in England multiplied, creating no small amount of difficulty for all forms of exchange relations. This did not stop English men and women, however, from relying on such instruments, largely because they were unavoidable. John Carswell accounts for the confusion that resulted by explaining that, “There was no accepted grammar of negotiable paper. Stock, bonds, notes, bills, receipts—all participated in the general pool of paper currency which had undergone uncontrolled expansion during the boom, and now could only be negotiated with

difficulty, if at all” (192). It is this difficult negotiation that many of Centlivre’s female characters, for example, are faced with as they work to gain or maintain a sense of economic and legal security.

The anonymously-written *A Discourse of Money* (1696) offers an example of the way some writers worked to clarify the language of finance for their readers. Structuring the essay as a letter to a nobleman, the writer proposes to discuss the history and antiquity of money; show the reasonableness and utility of money; show how/when money may be useful and “Currant”; and explain the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic value and their respective uses (5). One of the interesting features of the work is the “Question and Answer” section, which attempts to cover everything from “Why is coin called sterling?” to “What is your Opinion of Banks?” (79-204). The writer ultimately believes in one main principle or solution: all the money should be re-coined in order to balance the proportion between the “Real and Nominal Value” (185) of English currency.

One of the problems associated with the shortage and debasement of English coin was the rise in deceptive or abusive money-lending practices. While usury was never really considered an honorable trade, it suffered even worse vilification in the 1690s, as it became synonymous with extortion and stock-jobbing. In *The Extortioners and Stock-Jobbers, detected* (1696), the anonymous writer pleads for laws to be enacted to prevent money-lenders from taking advantage of the nation’s economic crisis by charging excessive interest rates and hoarding money. The importance of such regulation is demonstrated in the conclusion that, “...if our laws did not protect and prevent the

Corruption of Coin, Weights, and Measures, we should soon be in confusion, and should not know how to deal with one another” (4). The instability of traditional forms of wealth left exchange relations in chaos, and people were forced to find other ways of determining the value of goods. What is interesting to note is that, even as the writer describes and criticizes a practice that is inherently a credit-based form of exchange, the word “credit” is found nowhere in the text. In some ways, then, the discourse of credit begins to take shape even before the term is part of a contemporary vocabulary.

Next to the high rate of interest being charged, the writer’s biggest complaint is the unreasonable demands for security now expected: land or plate. Without these, “middle Trading men of the Nation” are unable to borrow money or get payment for the debts owed to them, and all friendships are destroyed (4). While this might suggest that only the landed gentry were able to avoid the problems caused by the shortage of coin, popular literature—plays in particular—suggest otherwise. In the next chapter, I will be investigating several of Aphra Behn’s comedies of the 1680s, which demonstrate that being a landed gentleman did not guarantee good credit with money-lenders. At the turn of the century, Mary Pix’s *The Different Widows* (1703), which is featured in Chapter III, reveals that male characters are often unable to borrow, especially from other men. In fact, when they do borrow money or are extended credit, it is usually a female character who serves as the lender or creditor, as is the case with Mrs. Security in Centlivre’s *The Gamester* (1705).

The distinctions made between monied men and tradesmen of the middling sort became a prominent element of financial literature in the second half of the 1690s.

J.G.A. Pocock describes the ways the financial revolution helped to create a new model for civic humanism, one that was pitted against the image of the merchant and consumer, who were, on a daily basis, caught up in the nexus of a credit-based economy. The danger did not lie with the merchant per se, but with the “the owner of capital, great or small, who invested it in systems of public credit and so transformed the relations between government and citizens, and by implication those between all citizens and all subjects, into relations between debtors and creditors” (*Virtue* 110). Those writers engaging in the popular financial discourse were keen to study and illustrate how changes in exchange relations would affect different classes of men and women in different ways. In *A Discourse on the Late Funds of the Million-act, Lottery-act, and Bank of England* (1696), John Briscoe criticizes each of these financial schemes, but claims that the Bank of England is the “most detrimental of the three” (22) and joins the attack against the “monied man,” who benefits from these schemes, while the gentleman and merchant go broke (22-23). Briscoe’s overall goal is to show how these schemes will ruin the nation, but he is especially successful in showing how tradesmen, in particular, have been negatively affected by the discourse of credit. Instead of trying to figure out honest ways to improve their business and trade, they talk of nothing except lottery-tickets, annuities, and bank bills and how they might draw their money out of trade and put it into one these projects (24). Briscoe seems a bit ahead of his time in his ability to recognize these schemes as what Patrick Brantlinger has termed “fictions of state.”²² For Briscoe, tradesmen are giving up the real value of trade for the imagined value of new forms of paper credit, the promise of a return that never comes to fruition.

The result is a ripple effect that damages trade as the nation's economic foundation.

Briscoe's logic represents one of the prominent threads in the debate surrounding the rise of new forms of credit that followed the founding of the Bank of England.

On the opposite side of the debate, other writers expressed support for the extended use of credit. In *A Sure and Effectual Method, for the Recovery of Credit and Making Good the Deficiency of Parliamentary Funds (1696)*, a broadside written by a "Merchant of London," we find an argument in support of credit for restoring the 10 million pound debt of the government. The writer argues that circulating credit is better than isolated, hoarded-up coin and other forms of ready money. The merchant's feelings about credit are shared by John Cary in his *Essay on the Coyn and Credit of England as They Stand with Respect to its Trade*, also published in 1696. Perhaps foreseeing the inevitable, Cary suggests that the shortage of coin, problems with clipped money, and the unstable value of metals have already led to a dependence on credit in English trade. He argues further that the continued use of credit is necessary to regain national wealth and enable the progress of trade. Cary is more specific in his essay about the *kind* of credit that must be established, as he explains that:

It must be such a credit...that the Nations Debt may be as punctually paid as Forreign Bills, and all Men who trust the Government as well assured of their Money when due, as they are now from the most reputable Merchants; then the King will buy cheap, when all who serve him are paid exactly, and the meanest Trades Men will not be afraid to deal with the Publick, when they are sure to be paid according to their Contract, which now none but large

Stocks can adventure to do, and therefore make their own Terms...In a word,
It must be a Credit settled on an unquestionable Foundation... (26)

The desire or impulse articulated here is the need for credit to be stable if it is to be successful. The problem, of course, is that credit is inherently unstable, even when people are allowed to make their own contracts.

Exploring proposals, pamphlets, and practical manuals in the late seventeenth-century helps us to contextualize the ways women playwrights of the period used their plays as a site for responding to popular financial discourse. In his work on credit and Jacobean theater, Richard Waswo points out that, while everything fluctuates, “Nothing fluctuates more, and more terrifyingly, than values, which are gradually, throughout the seventeenth century, coming to be conceived of as being created in the process of exchange itself, having nothing intrinsic nor permanent about them” (59-60). By developing female characters who often had to weigh the economic and legal promise of marriage against the price of financial independence, among other things, the dramatists studied in this project reiterate the cultural urge to account for shifting values, as they combine the humor found in ballads and broadside tales with the practical concern for the ability to tally one’s emotional and financial credit and debt.²³

By the end of the seventeenth century, one thing seemed clear: improving the credit of the nation was synonymous with improving private and social credit-based systems of exchange. Pamphlets taking the form of letters from concerned members of the public and essays concerning the credit of the nation made explicit the connection between public credit and debt and the private individuals who comprised extended

networks of obligation throughout the country. Because of this connection, it was important that credit be established as something that would benefit everyone. Toward the end of the 1690s, the issue became less one of whether or not credit was beneficial to the public and private good, but rather how credit could be centralized so as to best serve the public and private good. In *A Letter to a Friend Concerning Credit* (1697), an anonymous writer, who claims to be a member of the Bank of England Corporation, explains the need for centralizing the financial system through the bank. He argues that, if the Bank of England were the only bank to be used, then it would be easier to ensure that notes and bills would be founded upon secured funds. According to him:

Men will not trust their Money any where, nor with any Person against their Inclination: But Whilst Men believe their Money is safe in a Bank, and will be paid them when they demand it, they will chuse to lodge it there, rather than at Home, on account of those Conveniencies I mention'd before; but if either of those things be questioned they will be their own Cashiers, and not trust their money in such a Bank. (4)

Without restoring credit, the nation suffers because of the lack of money, which only serves to drive up interest rates, in turn discouraging people from buying land or houses when they could make “double the Advantage by lending...Money upon Intrest, buying Tallies, Bank-Stock, or Bank-Bills” (10).

By the end of the century, there seems to be a consensus in the popular discourse of money: credit is not only advantageous for both public and private interests, but also inevitable. I would go so far as to suggest that credit was being welcomed as much as

warned against and, in some instances a celebrated element of economic life. As evidence of this we find a good number of texts in the end of the 1600s and the early 1700s that focus primarily on how to gain, multiply, and retain the riches that a credit-based system promised. The anonymous 1699 essay, *The importance of public credit* offers an example of this last strategy. It seeks not to repeat discussions of the advantages of credit, but rather to point out the negative consequences that would follow the “destruction of Publick Credit” (1). Effects of the loss of public credit include the inability to survive, much less financially compensate for, any future emergencies because of the nation’s inability to raise a great sum of money on short notice. In addition, there was the problem of the increased cost that would come with trying to secure future credit, especially from foreign countries which would essentially be helping England regain a power of influence over them (3). In essence, the writer suggests there is no return to a time before public credit that would not result in the country’s disgrace and decline.

Another important aspect of this essay is the way it represents credit as an agent of egalitarianism, the promise of which held crucial implications for women. The work is aimed at those who might be persuaded by the “enemies” of credit, and the writer argues that one of their motives is simple envy. It is easy enough to see this as a viable possibility when one considers the gains in stock and lands some people, particularly stock-brokers, enjoyed as a result of profitable trades and investments. The writer’s response to this is a version of ‘everybody had the same chance’: “...since all men had the same liberty of gaining by them [public funds], no man can have any reasonable

ground for Envy or Ill-will, for it is entirely owing to his own misfortune, or folly, that he did not make the like advantage” (4). In this representation, credit offers the same possibilities for everyone, and it is merely a matter of either foolish decisions or bad luck if one does not fare well.

The idea that with credit came equal economic opportunity for all must be considered alongside accompanying historical and material circumstances. For example, Misty Anderson and Margot Finn have illustrated how the increased use of paper credit actually limited the economic autonomy of female characters in eighteenth-century drama and fiction respectively. What I will explore in Chapter III, however, is what I see as a brief space opened for some female characters in women’s dramatic comedy between 1696, when Ariadne’s play was produced, and 1725, when Mary Davys’ *The Self-Rival* appears, during which time the egalitarian promise of paper credit is largely fulfilled. Women are represented as working together to protect and secure their financial interests, while men are shown as financially incompetent and unwilling to extend credit to each other.

Representations of women’s financial competence offered in the plays of Ariadne, Pix, and Davys are in contrast to those found in poems at the turn of the century and the early 1700s. This is a critical point for literary representations of women’s financial activities because, as I illustrate in my final chapter, subsequent representations are significantly changed. Drawing on the writings of high-church Tory and satirist Edward (Ned) Ward (1667-1731), we can see that poetry added another cultural and literary dimension to the contemporary anxieties surrounding the discourse of credit.

Ward wrote frequently on the issue of money, the use of bank-credit, and the moral decay of the English merchant as a result of changes in the world of finance.²⁴ His representations of women as either inactive and unaware figures in a larger economic system of exchange or as hysterical participants in a stock market gone mad are some of the most derisive images of the time. His poems, “The Wealthy Shop-keeper” and “A Picture of a Coffee-House,” both published first in 1700, vividly paint the scenes of Exchange Alley and Jonathan’s Coffee-House as sites of economic exchange, moral corruption, and greed. In the former, the speaker describes the life of a shop-keeper, following him through his training as a youth, marriage, rise to wealth and fame, decline in health, and his “conversion” to charitable giving at his near death. The birth of public credit is represented as being one of the main causes of financial greed, which in turn leads to the decline of church influence and power and the decay of social relationships such as marriage.

As Ward illustrates, people have come to be seen only in terms of their financial value. The shop-keeper’s wife functions first and foremost in terms of what her portion can do for his earning potential: “The Coin she brings sets up the craft Blade,” and she is “Careful t’improve th Int’rest of his Trade” (4). She is just as much an investor in his business and reputation as he is, but the return is unequally distributed. While he reaps the rewards of a good reputation, she is left alone in bed each night to be killed “with the want of due Benevolence” (7). She does not even get what can be reasonably expected from a husband: sexual relations. Demonstrating the ways domestic life has been disrupted by changes to the financial system, he spends most of his time at the *Change*,

the Coffee-House, and his counting house. His value is based only on his financial worth, and his values do not extend any farther than those things which will increase in financial standing. One of these things happens to be his reputation: “His Word goes current now the City round, / Reported worth at least Ten Thousand Pound” (9). Ward concludes with the point that money, like health, fades, and what matters is how one’s wealth is spent or distributed after death. In drawing up a will that offers directions for the charitable distribution of his wealth, the shopkeeper is somewhat redeemed for his greed and avarice during his lifetime.

While the wealthy shop-keeper uses his last will—a form of paper credit—as a way of compensating for his obsession with money, the stock-jobbers described in “A Picture of a Coffee-House: Or, The Humour of The Stock-Jobbers” (1700) enjoy no such redemptive qualities. Ward equated the mayhem at Jonathan’s Coffee-House with Bedlam, except that he portrayed the residents of Bedlam as wiser than the crazed masses at the coffee-house. Designed as instructions to a painter on how to accurately represent the image of Jonathan’s in a painting, the speaker reveals that the “diff’rent Passions moving ev’ry way” will no doubt challenge the artist’s skill (1). Describing the scene, where everyone gets in for free but must pay to get out, Ward illustrates the centrality of financial discourse and activity to contemporary culture (2). The coffee-house is “A Receptable for all sorts of Men,” but my feeling is that “men” is used in the universal sense here, as women are specifically mentioned later in the work. Included with those “That run to venture all their *Stock* at one stroke” is the lady who “pawns her Plate and Jewels too, / To buy some *Shares* in *Bank*, or *Old*, or *New*” (3). Women are no

different than the other fools who are represented as giving up the stability and value of real treasure (“Plate and Jewels”) for the instability and uncertain value of paper credit. The worst criticism, of course, is reserved for the stock-jobbers themselves, whose physical complexions change with the rise and fall of the stock market (4).

Because coffee-houses were often used as places of financial business, images of economic activity (i.e. stock-jobbing, insurance transactions, and auction sales) taking place in the Exchange, Lloyd’s Coffee-House, or Jonathan’s Coffee-House featured prominently in popular literature of the period. As Dickson observes, they were frequently used to depict the hysteria associated with the rise of credit, especially following the South Sea madness of the 1720s (490-505). For Ward, even as early as 1700, one could do little to avoid what was quickly becoming a culture that made all important decisions, and some quite minor ones, on the basis of financial risk or, rather, the potential for financial profit. Ultimately, Ward’s poem represents the participants as complete fools, devoid of all wit and virtue, and suggests that his culture is increasingly driven by an unstable discourse of credit.

Conclusion

Surveying broadsides, ballads, advice literature, poetry, formal economic treatises, and essays throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries lays a critical foundation for the female dramatists whose work makes up the focal point of this study. Financial literature during this period exposes the variety of writers who gave voice to concerns about the rise of credit, allows us to trace the subtle shifts in attitudes over time about changing notions of value and wealth, and demonstrates the complicated

and often contradictory language that developed as a result of economic change. With the birth and rise of public credit and the proliferation of instruments of paper credit came a promise of expanded economic opportunities for women. This is reflected in the financial literature we have surveyed as well as the plays we will examine later, which take particular notice of the ways this promise concerned women with money. As W.A. Speck has observed, “Side by side with the rise of the financial market rose a new marriage market” (103), as the portions brides brought with them became part of the printed news. As wealth came to be seen as capital, these portions gave women cause to understand themselves as investors in the marriage market and take notice of contemporary financial discourse and practices.

At the same time, some of the most prolific female playwrights in the history of English theater made their way into London’s literary marketplace, and one the most important links between them is their awareness of and response to the relationship between women, the discourse of credit, and the marriage market. In some ways, the financial revolution and concurrent development of a “new” marriage market signaled a greater potential for women’s financial independence, especially when it came to matters of professional writing, business, and contractual agency. Women, married and single, found themselves able to earn a living by writing, especially for the stage, and in some cases, added to their wages by participating in the management of theaters. With the establishment of the Bank of England, women also found opportunities to become active and profitable economic players.²⁵

This survey leads us to conclude that English men and women of the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century were driven by a need to find stable signifiers of value in an economic system that offered nothing but unstable signs. More importantly, the review indicates that women always occupied an uneasy space in financial literature. When present, they are connected at various times to avarice and deceit. At other times, the image of woman as Lady Pecunia is invoked as a way of calling attention to the threat to a previously masculine system of value. These texts, the language used to represent economic changes, and the images created throughout the period were inherited by the female dramatists discussed in the following chapters. Studying this literature improves our understanding of the ways these writers saw the discourse of credit, including its legal, ideological, and economic implications, affecting the lives of many English women, who frequently looked to the stage for real-life solutions to marital and personal problems.²⁶ One of the things made clear in the comedy of Behn, *Ariadne*, *Pix*, and *Centlivre* is that promises are not always kept, even those secured by paper.

Because the domestic sphere of the family was always linked to the discourse of finance vis à vis the marketing of marriageable young women, the use of credit in metaphoric and symbolic terms is equally appropriate for a study of its relationship to dramatic writing of the Restoration and early eighteenth century. It is to this specific period and genre I would like to turn now, beginning with Aphra Behn. Like Behn, contemporary male playwrights such as Dryden, Congreve, and Etherege consistently employed the tropes of fortune-hunting young men and women and rich lusty widows,

all of which played on the moral decay associated with financial greed. The difference between much of Behn's work and the comedies of her male contemporaries, however, is the extent to which Behn specifically used the language of credit to represent women's precarious relationship to money, the shifting values of the period, and the marriage market. That is, what we find in women's dramatic writing between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, beginning with Behn, is the use of female characters who make financial discourse a language of their own. In forms that are at once literal and symbolic, emotional and sexual, and always inherently tied to the potential risk involved in the "business" of being a woman in the marriage market, these characters exemplify the ways in which women were increasingly affected by the rise of credit, changes in systems of economic value, and unstable notions of trust, interest, and financial motivation.

Notes

¹ Hoppit's work on this subject is extensive, but the very useful summary provided in "Attitudes to Credit in Britain, 1680-1790" is a good starting point for those interested in a brief account of contemporary reactions to the discourse of credit. Unfortunately, the article is somewhat limited in its scope, as it makes no gesture toward accounting for the role of women in this discourse. See also Hoppit's "The Contexts and Contours of British Economic Literature, 1660-1760," *The Historical Journal*, 49.1 (2006): 79-110; *Risk and Failure in English Business, 1700-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987; "Financial Crises in Eighteenth-Century England," *Economic History Review*, 39 (1986): 39-58; and "The Use and Abuse of Credit in Eighteenth-Century England" in *Business Life and Public Policy: Essays in Honour of D.C. Coleman*, eds. Neil McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986, 67-78.

² For example, Peter Hudson's *A New Introduction to Trade and Business, Very Useful to Both Sexes...*, published first in 1761, followed by a second edition in 1775.

³ Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning*, Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1998, and Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit*, Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge UP, 1998.

⁴ Included in the first category are, among others, various forms of histories (private, natural, and secret), romance, meditations, and allegories. For Poovey, these forms share the common goal of providing readers "an imaginative relationship to the economic, social, and (increasingly) ethical and aesthetic issues raised by Britain's maturing credit economy (30). Financial writing refers to the texts that united economic commentary to financial information (i.e. news sheets that responded to bankruptcies, prices of commodities, staples, and securities). For Poovey, monetary genres are equivalent to monetary instruments such as coins, paper credit, and insurance documents, to name only a few.

⁵ This is based on searches using the ESTC and EEBO, both of which databases do not return one title using the word credit in the financial sense. The term is used in five titles, which appear in EEBO, in the sense of its earliest definition (to put faith in, believe, or trust).

⁶ For example, see *A proper new ballad, shewing a merrie iest of one Ieamie of Woodcock Hill, and his wife, how he espied through a doore, one making of him cuckold, and how that for lucre of money, he was well contented therewith. To be sung to a new tune, called Woodcocks Hill*, London, 1610, and *A merry progresse to London to see fashions by a young country gallant, that had more money then witte. To the tune of, Riding to Rumford*, London, 1615.

⁷ Of course, we should also remember that Willmore has previously married Hellena, who died soon after their nuptials and whose entire fortune he managed to spend immediately thereafter.

⁸ This is especially the case in rural England, where rents were on the rise and land holdings were down. Farmers were particularly vulnerable, as C.G.A. Clay notes, because they inevitably needed cash to carry them through in tough harvest times, 232-233.

⁹ This passage is taken from the *King James Bible*.

¹⁰ For example, Wilkinson has sympathy for those who have inherited debt from previous generations, but he considers “debt to ourselves” to be unnecessary (55).

¹¹ The 1627 copy of *The Treasurers Almanacke* indicates that it is “The second Edition” on the title page, but no previous edition is found in either the ESTC or EEBO.

¹² This is not to say that credit was not a prominent part of economic life, however. As C.G.A. Clay notes, many landowners found themselves needing credit more than ever, as they “faced run-down estates, an accumulation of debt, and (if they had been active royalists) the need to pay composition fines to recover their estates from sequestration (271).

¹³ Later editions were published in each decade, with the exception of the 1650s, until 1695.

¹⁴ From the 1674 edition. The section can be found on pages 25-26 of the 1684 edition.

¹⁵ Though the term usually refers to drama of the Elizabethan period, I am using city comedy here to refer to comedies that take place primarily in London and/or are focused on characters within an urban setting. While Davys’ work is set in York, I think it is appropriate to include it in this category because of York’s thriving theatre community, a factor which would have added an element of urbanity to the town.

¹⁶ It continued to be published until 1700.

¹⁷ A prime example can be found in Leonard Welsted’s comedy, *The Dissembled Wanton; or, my son get money* (London, 1726). Answering a young suitor who is interested in his daughter, Sir Humphrey Staple explains: “my daughter is as my merchandize, and I’ll not part with her upon credit...” (33).

¹⁸ The second text was published anonymously, while the first is attributed only to an L.W.

¹⁹ For example, see *The Crafty Maids Approbation* (1678-1680), *No Money, No Friend* (1680), and *The Wonderful Praise of Money* (1685).

²⁰ For *The compleat clerk*, only the writer's initials—J.H.—are given.

²¹ Examples include *The True Causes of the Present Scarcity of Money: and the Proper Remedies for It...* (London, 1690), *England Must Pay the Piper Being a Seasonable Discourse about Raising of Money This Session* (London, 1691), and Robert Gould's *The Corruption of the Times by Money, A Satyr* (London, 1693).

²² While the work as a whole is helpful in studying the connection the relationship between credit, literature, and nation building, Brantlinger's first chapter, "Debt, Fetishism, and Empire: A Postmodern Preamble," most clearly articulates how he uses this term.

²³ This instability can be seen in other contemporary texts such as *A Good-work for Bad Times, or, A way to Make England Rich and Happy* (1696) and *A Letter to a Member of Parliament: Shewing How Probably the Credit of the Nation may be Speedily Raised*, published the following year. The former encouraged the issuance of paper money (bills) to be issued by the bank and made to pass current by the King and Parliament, claiming that this would help England as a nation, as well as each of its citizens. It was, according to this proposal, simply a matter of determining by law that paper bills would circulate as currency and be regulated as money that was as good for use as gold or silver. Thomas Houghton's *Letter to a Member of Parliament* (1697) further demonstrates how this kind of naïvete, mixed with hopefulness and a strong desire to see quick economic success, was consistent in much of the financial literature that discussed the advantages of credit between 1695 and 700. In it Houghton seems to promise readers that credit will "free others as well as the Creditors from the Difficulties that the Deficiencies of Funds, and Scarcity of Coin have occasioned" (1). How does he get away with this kind of promise? By proposing that everyone be allowed to have "Bank Stock bills for his whole Stock" (2). Houghton insists that measures can be taken to ensure the validity of the bills (i.e. assigned in front of two witnesses), and applauds their convenience, concluding that only "Enemies of the Government and the Enemies of Mankind" would dare argue otherwise (3). He briefly acknowledges the inevitable problem of forged bills, but suggests that the resulting damages would be much less than what the Bank has been subjected to with existing currency.

²⁴ Ward published hundreds of poems, ballads, satires, and letters that directly make use of the negative stereotypes associated with stock-jobbers, fortune-hunters, and the proliferation of credit. To my knowledge, the only book-length account of Ward's career is Howard William Troyer's *Ned Ward of Grub Street: A Study of Sub-Literary London in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard UP, 1946.

²⁵ See Laurence, "Women Investors."

²⁶ See McLaren, 86.

CHAPTER III
“YOU WOMEN HAVE ALL A CERTAIN JARGON”: THE LANGUAGE OF
CREDIT IN THE COMEDIES OF APHRA BEHN

I begin this chapter with the assertion that Aphra Behn’s interest in exploring women’s economic conditions comes, in part, as a result of her own position as a commercial writer, but also as a result of contemporary attitudes toward money and women. The crisis over money, as Joyce Appleby terms it, resulted in wealth, credit, and reputation becoming fluid, followed by the development of a new social reality:

Money represented values in the calculation of the equivalents upon which all exchange depended...Each participant was an independent exchanger vulnerable to the decisions of others. The act of exchanging was a voluntary one but, as all aspects of economic life became commercialized, most people were forced to seek the gratification of their need through the market. (200)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Behn’s contemporaries were increasingly anxious about this unstable financial system. It had been nearly depleted of its ready coin, and what coin remained was frequently debased. As new forms of paper credit appeared, the discourse of credit became part of popular culture and writers utilized it for their own purposes. Likewise, though Behn’s Tory loyalties often inclined her to criticize new Whig economic policy, she remained a writer who worked for her bread and thus, to some extent, always had money on her own mind.¹ Behn’s dramatic writing most clearly demonstrates the complicated nature of being a commercial female writer, dependent

upon the credit of an audience. To please politically and socially mixed crowds in order to earn a living, while also working within the generic traditions of Restoration drama and often critiquing contemporary attitudes toward women and money, was certainly no small task. However, it was one that, as we shall see from looking further at certain details of her life, she accomplished nonetheless.

Most scholars continue to note the fact that little is known about Aphra Behn with any certainty.² She is generally acknowledged to be the first commercial female playwright in England, and it can be argued that she was the first writer of either gender to produce the novel.³ Like most other early modern women writers, her personal life was just as much commented on as was her writing, leaving accounts that are simultaneously scandalous, contradictory, and infamous. She was likely born in the 1630s or 1640s, but to what kind of family is unknown. She may or may not have been married to a Dutch-born London merchant, but she later had a long-standing and somewhat public affair with John Hoyle, a bisexual lawyer (Todd *Secret Life* 67, 175). There is some reason to believe she traveled to Surinam around 1663-1664, a trip referred to in the first pages of *Oroonoko*. She returned to England with an impressive account of her travels, and in 1666 she was employed by the state to serve as a secret agent in Antwerp.⁴ Not only was she not paid for her services, but she was left in such debt that she resorted to sending desperate pleas for money to Thomas Killigrew and Lord Arlington, Secretary of State (94-97). Though she borrowed enough money from a London merchant to pay her debts abroad, upon Behn's return to England in 1667, she remained in debt and was ultimately placed in debtor's prison (Woodcock 43). It is

unclear how or when she was released, but by 1670, she emerged with key connections to important political figures, popular writers of the period, and well-known players in the theater world such as Edward Howard, Edward Ravenscroft, and Thomas Betterton (*Secret Life* 136-138). By the end of the year, Behn had made her official entrance into the theater with her first play *The Forced Marriage; or, The Jealous Bride-groom*.⁵

While there remains some debate on how Behn got her start in theater—some say through her connection to Killigrew, who was manager of the King’s Company at the time—what we do know is that Behn was one of the most prolific playwrights of the Restoration. She wrote seventeen existing plays, two additional plays have been lost, and four others are believed to have been Behn’s.⁶ This magnitude of dramatic writing in the Restoration is second only to John Dryden. Like many of her contemporaries, she catered to the demands of a public literary market, writing according to the tastes of the time. Unlike some of her contemporaries, such as the Earl of Rochester, who had a steady source of income from family and patrons, Behn wrote for her survival. In 1669, she returned to England widowed and poor. Sometime around 1674, she met the notable John Hoyle (Duffy 133). The two maintained a relationship throughout the rest of her life, though the nature of this affair is in some ways unclear. Most biographers concede to an early phase of passion and erotic longing between the pair, which manifested itself frequently in Behn’s poetry.⁷ One contemporary account mentions that it was public knowledge that Behn was “kept” by Hoyle for some time. The economic connotations of the term are obvious, and Janet Todd suggests that the failure of Behn’s play, *The Dutch Lover*, in 1673 “made a keeping arrangement desirable” (*Secret Life* 182).

Unfortunately, there is no way to know conclusively what type of financial arrangement the two may have agreed upon. Whatever economic support the relationship was (or was not) intended to provide, Behn was nonetheless left to rely on her writings as the main source of income for the rest of her life. Indeed, it was her writing that she used as security for a £6 loan she took out in 1685, just four years before her death.⁸

While her prose fiction, specifically *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1683) and *Oroonoko* (1688), is the primary source of her literary fame, the theater was “her most lucrative” source of income (Todd, *Secret Life* 274). A fervent Tory, Behn wrote plays for a largely royalist audience, a strategy that worked well under the Restoration rule of Charles II. Plays like *The Roundheads* (1682) and *The City-Heiress* (1682) appealed to theatergoers who, profiting from their loyalty to the King, sympathized with her disdain for Whig interests that, she felt, “put a price on everything and saw politics simply as opportunism, an extension of commerce and a chance to exploit selfish interests” (Todd, *Sign of Angellica* 72). For Behn, the effects of such a system could easily be seen in the period’s practice of forced marriages, or those designed with mercenary motives, which were a main theme throughout her career. On one hand, she despised the mercenary connotations of marriage for money, but on the other hand she had a “sharp sense of a need for money to support [the] leisure and status” of her audience (Staves, “Behn, Women, and Society” 16). Much of her dramatic work followed in the tradition of intrigue plays, but was also representative of the “dramatic social satire” that developed in the Restoration.⁹ Laura Brown compares

Behn's work to that of her contemporaries in a way that is particularly useful here when she notes that:

Because of Behn's particular interest in the problems of women, her concern with marital relationships, her unusual sensitivity to poverty and individual suffering, and her sympathetic evocation of romantic love, *The Rover* is significantly different from Etherege's and Wycherley's social satires. But those differences are only the local details of a form essentially similar—in its disjunction of social and moral values as well as in its problematic reconciliation of libertinism and royalism—to the dramatic satire of *The Man of Mode*, *The Country Wife*, or *The Plain Dealer*. *The Rover* derives its power from the seriousness with which Behn presents the contradictions most visible to her in Restoration society. (60)

One of those contradictions stems from the economic ideology of the period, which “understood women as instruments for the transmission and increase of family property” (Staves, “Behn, Women, and Society” 15). Thus, Behn's work participates in a generic coherence at the same time that it focuses especially on the unique experiences of women and their struggles with financial inequity.

One could, perhaps, argue that Behn is also interested in the financial struggles of young men, especially those who lost fortunes and estates during the English Civil War. The heroes of her plays are often penniless young cavaliers who curse poverty and the economic system that seems to work against them.¹⁰ Separated from their estates, they

are left to rely on credit to support themselves and their vices. I think Behn's plays make it clear that this argument can only be taken so far, as the rovers are time after time rewarded by a legal system that puts them in control of the fortunes their new wives bring into marriage.¹¹ They are rarely left unmarried at the end of a play, and it is Behn's female characters that face the economic risk of losing their estates by marrying gambling, drinking rovers.

As a commercial writer during a period in which there was no system of royalty payments, Behn's overwhelming success as a playwright is significant. She did not have the benefit of royal patronage, but she enjoyed a close relationship with Thomas Betterton and his Duke's Company theater (Todd, *Secret Life* 128, 210). Betterton and his wife, who were often cast in Behn's plays, likely understood well that her economic livelihood depended largely upon the popularity of her plays in performance and, to some extent, in print. While playwrights sometimes sold the publication rights to their plays, this exchange produced only a one-time profit.¹² Oftentimes, this sum was much lower than what could be gained through a benefit night at the theater. As Shirley Strum Kenny notes, "play publication from 1660 to 1800 was not, as a rule, remarkably lucrative for playwrights, although it yielded enough return to authors and booksellers to interest both" (309).¹³ Because both patronage and publication sales were unreliable, the main source of income for a dramatist in this period was the benefit (Avery and Scouten, *The London Stage, 1660-1700* lxxx). Most often taking place on the third night, the dramatist received whatever remained of the profits less the house charges. Because profits were determined by how many people attended the play, the popularity of plays

directly affected the playwright's income. Thus, it was common practice for playwrights to "puff up" their plays between the first and third nights. In comparison to Renaissance dramatists, for example, "Restoration playwrights were far more dependent financially on the success of individual plays" (Gallagher 11). In Behn's case, she "had to subsist on the proceeds from third-night receipts, the sale of her play scripts to booksellers, demand performances of her plays at court, fees for prologues and epilogues (typically £10), and later in her career the sale of her translations, poems, and novels" (Markley 144).

As Lisa Freeman explains, "Unlike tragedy which was called upon in the eighteenth century to produce an ideal vision of national posterity," comedy has a longstanding tradition of functioning as "the dramatic genre most concerned with representing and scrutinising contemporary social conditions" ("The Social Life" 74). In addition to this impetus, my project focuses on drama by women because, as Annette Kreis-Schinck has suggested,

the drama of the period helped to shape and to resist, to contain and to transform, the dominant constructions of gender relations. It reflected produced, and subverted the struggle to establish new gender boundaries. The theater of the time was awash with controversy, and right at the center we find women's plays—plays that reflect all the frictions gender relations entail. (32)

More specifically, I limit my scope to comedy because it has long been considered to be a genre in which playwrights employ subversive strategies that often go unnoticed because the audience is too busy laughing. This logic suggests that the success of

comedy is intended to mask any dissident voices in the playwright's work. In choosing which of Behn's plays should be included in this study, I rely on those plays which most prominently highlight and employ the financial language of the period. In addition, each of these plays features some configuration of the "triple concept of virgin-wife-widow and its dark underside, the whore, which unifies all early modern discourse on women" (Kries-Schinck 21). Finally, I should acknowledge that while many of Behn's contemporary male playwrights made use of similar plotlines that criticized the problems associated with forced marriage, marriage for money, and fortune-hunting men and women, their plays rarely utilize the discourse of credit to the extent we find in the plays of Behn and, later, Ariadne, Mary Pix, and Susanna Centlivre.

Broken Promises: Verbal Credit in *The Rover*

First published in 1677, *The Rover* is Behn's most popular play, and it remains the one most scholars consider her best dramatic work. Set in Naples during carnival, the play is based on Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso, or, The Wanderer* (1654), though Behn condenses the original, reshapes the roving Willmore for consistency, and introduces Hellena, with whom Willmore is paired in the end.¹⁴ The play follows Willmore, a bankrupt cavalier constant to the King's cause but not to the women he pursues, as he struggles to maintain his freedom as a rake, yet secure the sexual favors of the beautiful women who surround him. A man who loves a challenge, Willmore meets his match in the young virgin Hellena. Designed for a nunnery, Hellena has no intention of giving herself up to a convent without first experiencing love on her own terms. She is witty and precocious, understanding that her value as a woman is directly linked to her virtue

and reputation. Her sister Florinda faces an equally unhappy fate, as she has been contracted by her father to marry a wealthy old man, despite being in love with the noble English colonel Belvile, Willmore's friend and colleague. The obnoxious Ned Blunt accompanies Willmore and Belvile, essentially serving as their bank since he is the only one of them who has not lost his estate in service to the crown. The character who stands out most in the play, however, is the notorious Angellica Bianca. A courtesan widely known for her beauty and her high price—"a thousand crowns a month"—Angellica is too expensive for the penniless Willmore (2.1.110). This does not, of course, prevent him from pursuing her. He is merely forced to rely on his wit rather than money, which Angellica is quite capable of procuring from her customers. Willmore's attraction to Angellica is clearly represented in terms of sexual appeal, while his desire for Hellena, in addition to her beauty, is a result of her wit.

Despite continued warnings from her woman, Moretta, Angellica finds herself falling for Willmore. His repeated attacks on her profession highlight the value system Behn holds up for attack: the consequences of a marketplace in which everything is for sale to the highest bidder. Angellica ultimately gives in to Willmore's chase, emotionally investing in a love from which she expects an equal return. Having only his word to give, however, and this being worth nothing, Willmore wastes no time in disappointing Angellica and uniting with Hellena. Although Angellica thinks he has chosen Hellena because of "fortune and honor," Willmore explains that should he ever marry, he will choose "some kind young sinner" with "wit enough to manage an intrigue of love" (4.2.366-78). By the end of the play, Angellica has become the "unresolvable

contradiction” that Laura Brown refers to in her description of dramatic social satire (60). She is what Link refers to as “the problem of Angellica,” and she has not yet been solved (xv).

Indeed, many scholars studying the play have referred to Angellica in similar terms, with varying results. Heidi Hutner argues that she “attempts to turn sexual politics...on their head” (107). Useful for my purposes here, Derek Hughes claims that she “even reverses the economics of prostitution by giving the impoverished Willmore money” (90). Without doubt, Angellica’s function within the sexual marketplace of the play is one to be taken seriously. She comes to exist outside of the comic ethos of the play, and the description of her rejection is presented in a way that allows us to sympathize with her situation.¹⁵ What *is* her situation exactly? To be sure, she remains a prostitute and, as we see in the sequel to the play, she continues selling sex for money. But what, if anything, has she learned along the way? What would Behn have her audience do with the lessons Angellica is taught about being a woman in a world of shifting values?¹⁶

In the opening scene of the second act, Willmore and his cavalier friends stand outside Angellica’s house, gazing at her infamous portrait. With no money, Willmore cannot afford Angellica’s price of a thousand crowns a month, so he hopes to glimpse the one thing he can afford: a free look at the picture. As Angellica and her woman, Moretta, enter the balcony, they discuss her success and how she can manage to stay at the top of her profession. Speaking of the potential client Don Pedro, Angellica’s exchange with Moretta echoes the period’s concern with shifting values:

ANGELLICA. The man is brave and generous, but of a humor so uneasy and inconstant that the victory over his heart is as soon lost as won; a slave that can add little to the triumph of the conqueror. But inconstancy's the sin of all mankind, therefore I'm resolved that nothing but gold shall charm my heart.

MORETTA: I'm glad on't; 'tis only interest that women of our profession ought to consider, though I wonder what has kept you from that general disease of our sex so long; I mean, that of being in love.

(2.1.142-50)

In many ways, Angellica embodies the “new made gentlewoman” I spoke of in the previous chapter, as she recognizes her own responsibility for securing her economic survival. Though her line of work is anything but dishonest, in the sense that she does not pretend to be anything other than a whore, Angellica verbalizes the debate we find in popular broadside ballads and pamphlets of the 1670s (i.e. *Loves better then gold: or Money's an ass* [1676]). Contemporary financial literature advocated love over money and criticized those who placed economic interest above genuine emotion. Behn's play juxtaposes these same values, yet recognizes the difficult situation women found themselves in when their relationships with men were compromised by “the sin of all mankind,” inconstancy. While she is confident in her ability to gain a “victory of Don Pedro's heart,” Angellica recognizes how useless such a victory would be because he cannot be faithful and, without fidelity, the emotional tie loses its value to her.

Angellica's ability to anticipate the inevitable failure of men's words suggests a larger problem for relationships built upon the symbolic credit of verbal promises.

Marc Shell's work is particularly useful here, as it draws on the relationship between language and money, figuring language as a form of symbolic credit that is always both informed by the language of economics and inherently unstable (*Money, Language, and Thought* 99-111). Seeming to recognize the instability of the symbolic credit associated with language, Angellica initially asserts that only 'real' money, gold, will win her heart. Within Shell's framework, Angellica's choice—whether to rely on 'real' money or the symbolic credit of language—can be seen as a no-win situation. Both systems of value are essentially empty. Behn seems to recognize this, though, as she explores the consequences of each decision through her female characters.

Once Willmore gains admittance to Angellica's chamber, he uses the opportunity to attack her trade, an episode often cited as evidence of Behn's opposition to Whig commercial values. According to Willmore, sex is a sin when it is "meanly bartered for" (2.2.14-15). Commodified and sold, rather than exchanged in the name of sexual pleasure, sex is the vile merchandise of the whore. On one hand, through Willmore, Behn offers a critique on the commercial ideology of the period. On the other hand, some might say that he helps Behn provide a libertine rationale for being penniless, one with which her audience would have been familiar. Willmore has no money because he has lost his estate in service to the crown. In contrast to Willmore is Blunt, who has maintained his estate and functions as a walking bank for his rover friends. Unlike Willmore, Blunt seems to have no problem with the idea of buying the goods women

have to offer. This is evidenced by his willingness to pay Lucetta, posing as a woman of quality stuck in a loveless (and sexless) marriage, for her services. He is duped in the process when Lucetta and her pimp strip him naked, steal his clothes and money, and turn him out into the sewer, but his punishment does not result from a willingness to participate in the commodification of women's bodies. After all, Lucetta herself takes advantage of this system to her benefit and seems to suffer no criticism from Behn. In Blunt's case, I think Behn justifies his fate along the lines of politics rather than economics. Behn's response to the late seventeenth-century financial revolution, I would argue, is placed primarily within the exchanges between Willmore and Angellica and, to some extent Moretta.

Behn's critique, however, extends beyond a capitalist marketplace that offers up women's bodies for sale. As Willmore and Moretta illustrate, the traditional system of exchange has been complicated by the language of credit,¹⁷ which accepts partial payment in return for immediate—if limited—goods:

WILLMORE. I grant you 'tis here —— set down a Thousand
Crowns a Month —— pray, how much may come to my Share for a
Pistol.— Bawd take your black Lead and Sum it up, that I may have a
Pistols worth of this vain gay thing, and I'll trouble you no more
(2.1.305-08).

Since he can neither pay the thousand crowns nor give up his attraction to Angellica, Willmore attempts to buy a mere "share" of her. In his configuration, Angellica functions like the East India Company as something that one can invest in by purchasing

smaller parts or shares of the whole (Staves, “Behn, Women, and Society” 25). Moretta is quick to point out that women do not function like stock, explaining to Willmore that they “only sell by the whole piece” (2.1.310). Unwilling to give up, Willmore offers to find other potential investors. His failure to understand the limitations of the new capitalist marketplace, one that can seemingly break everything except people into pieces or shares to be sold, has thus far gone unnoticed in the play’s critical history. By bringing it under closer scrutiny and placing it alongside a study of the way Behn’s heroines talk about money and economic survival, we can compare men’s and women’s attitudes toward money, credit, and debt during a period of significant economic change.

Angellica is quick to return Willmore’s attack by revealing society’s double standard, which not only expects but also teaches men how to secure their financial status, while attacking women who do so. In this way, Behn’s work reminds us of contemporary ballads such as *The new made gentlewoman* (1674), which explicitly characterizes women who use their beauty as a means of gaining economic security as “playing the Whore.”¹⁸ At best, even women who were not in the business of prostitution or simple seduction were depicted as dishonest, as we saw in the case of *The Alewives Invitation to Married-Men, and Batchelors* (1675), in which women who wisely refuse to give men credit are attacked as being mercenary. Refuting the idea that she should suffer any moral blame for struggling to secure her economic survival, Angellica asks,

——Pray tell me, Sir, are not you guilty of the same Mercenary Crime,

When a Lady is proposed to you for a Wife, you never ask, how fair—discreet— or virtuous she is; but what’s her Fortune—which if but small, you cry——she will not do my business——and basely leave her, thou she languish for you——say, is not this as poor [as prostitution]?¹⁹ (2.2.357-61)

By illustrating the mercenary nature of men’s participation in the marriage market, Angellica leaves Willmore no room for defense. Further revealing her awareness of how the market works and the difference between selling one’s body and selling one’s emotional capital, Angellica explains,

Thou’rt a brave Fellow! put up thy Gold, and know,
 That were thy Fortune as large as is thy Soul,
 Thou should’st not buy my Love,
 Couldst thou forget those mean effects of vanity
 Which set me out to sale, and, as a Lover, prize my yielding joys.
 Canst thou believe they’l be entirely thine,
 Without considering they were Mercenary? (2.2.364-70)

Confused by the very idea that love cannot be purchased, and Angellica’s body cannot be offered even in love without being conceptualized as a commodity, Willmore has no answer.

Once Angellica reveals that she is in love with Willmore, she directly links her emotional investment in him to the discourse of credit by framing love in terms of vows, which are essentially verbal contracts: “I never lov’d before, though oft a Mistress. /

Shall my first Vows be slighted?" (2.2.380-81). Equated with a vow, the value of love is determined by both Angellica's credibility and the return promised for the future. By asking Willmore if her vows will be "slighted," Angellica signals an emotional investment for which she seeks reciprocation. It is unsurprising that Angellica's understanding merely baffles Willmore further.

Despite her pride, Angellica wants most to establish herself as credible in Willmore's eyes. After many years of business, she understands trade in terms of exchange and value. Knowing Willmore has no money and now valuing his emotional capital more than gold, Angellica seeks a new deal, one from which she has reason to believe she will profit.

WILLMORE. Take heed, fair Creature, how you raise my hopes,

Which once assum'd pretends to all dominion.

There's not a joy thou hast in store

I shall not then Command.

——For which I'll pay thee back my Soul! my Life! (2.2.406-10)

Changing her price from a thousand crowns to the emotional capital of love, Angellica clearly articulates the nature of their exchange: "The pay I mean is but thy love for mine. Can you give that?" (2.2.418-19). Completely informed of the terms, Willmore agrees, and Angellica gives up the goods—her body as well as her love—thinking that she is investing wisely and expecting an equal return. After they leave, Moretta's speech foreshadows the lesson to be learned by emphasizing the value of 'real' money over the symbolic credit of love.²⁰

Like Angellica, Hellena appears—at first—to value love over money. Making no mention of fortune, she explains to Florinda that she expects only “to love and to be beloved” (3.1.40-41). Having seen Willmore coming out of Angellica’s house, Hellena questions him about his whereabouts. Hellena is unaffected by his attempt to lie and not only fails to notice its connection to the “honor” on which he claimed to speak, but also recognizes that she is damning him when she asks him to swear that he will never again see Angellica. As we expect, his vow is worthless, and Angellica learns this as she and Moretta see and overhear Willmore courting Hellena. Angellica’s shock demonstrates the value of the emotional investment she has made in Willmore. Though Moretta points to his deception as something Angellica should have expected, she remains unable to understand a system wherein men do not keep their word:

ANGELLICA. Expect? as much as I paid him, a Heart intire
 Which I had Pride enough to think when ’ere I gave,
 It would have rais’d the Man above the Vulgar,
 Made him all Soul, and that all soft and constant. (3.1.154-57)

Angellica’s expectation was that the emotion she invested in Willmore would be returned. Her naivete lies in an idealized version of a system of exchange, in which words function like credit: extensions of promises for the future. Despite Moretta’s earlier warning that hers is a trade that “cannot live on credit,” Angellica continues to place her emotional capital in Willmore.

After finding out Willmore has lied to her, Angellica confronts him to determine whether or not he has already promised to marry another woman. Again, the emphasis

here is on the symbolic credit of a promise or vow. Willmore's inconstancy is threatening to Angellica if he has promised himself to another. Angellica will only be satisfied if Willmore vows not to marry Hellena. Angellica, again, fails to recognize the symbolic credit of the vow as unstable and by extension, the value of Willmore's word as worthless. Trying to anticipate the reasons why Willmore might not choose her, Angellica claims: "I know what argument you'll bring against me: fortune and honor" (4.2.366-67). This is a crucial turning point for Angellica, and she is right to understand these criteria as working in Hellena's favor rather than her own. Hellena comes with money, and she maintains her virtue by refusing Willmore's attempts at seduction. More importantly, highlighting the symbolic credit in "honor" enables Angellica to finally understand how the 'business' of credit works here in a two-fold manner: in terms of emotion (for Angellica) and in terms of honor (for Hellena). Her emphasis on the latter enables us to see how this form of symbolic credit is simultaneously a threat to men and a requirement for women:

WILLMORE.

Honour, I tell you, I hate it in your Sex; and those that fancy
 themselves possess of that Foppery, are the most impertinently
 trouble-some of all Woman kind, and will transgress Nine
 Commandments to keep one...(4.2.445-48)

Willmore is, for once, likely telling the truth in claiming to hate honor in women, but not necessarily for the reasons he cites. I would argue that his disdain results from knowing that honor in women is what stands between him and the particular woman he is trying

to seduce. While in his support of the defeated monarch Willmore follows the code of honor between men, he critiques the code of honor his society places on women in terms of their sexuality. Willmore's choice to marry Hellena, however, exposes his complicity with these cultural regulations. This is not to deny that Hellena's wit makes her more attractive to Willmore than Angellica. However, to claim, as Nancy Cotton does, that Hellena wins the "love game" is to suggest that Willmore marries her for love rather than her fortune (65), and *The Second Part of The Rover* convincingly illustrates that Willmore's love of Hellena lasted about as long as her fortune: approximately one month.

His attack, however, has the unintended benefit of convincing Angellica of Willmore's disregard for symbolic credit, in either terms of emotion or honor. Despite Angellica's insistence, Willmore is unable to swear *not* to marry Hellena. He can only swear that, if he *were* inclined to marry, he will only marry some "kind young Sinner" with "wit enough to Manage an intrigue of Love" (4.2.451-53). The vow, of course, is an indirect reference to Hellena and is the one time, albeit ironically, Willmore is telling the truth. By this point, though, Angellica has heard enough and realizes "there's no Faith in any thing he says" (4.2.455). Though the lesson comes too late, she has learned that her love for Willmore—which was based on the symbolic credit of honor—has left her emotionally bankrupt.

Her blind reliance on vows and oaths as indicators of Willmore's honor is emphasized throughout the play and receives specific attention in the final act. As Behn frames it, Angellica's fallen state²¹ is the direct result of Willmore's broken vows:

—Thou, Perjur'd Man, didst't this, and with thy Oaths,
 Which on thy Knees, thou didst't devoutly make,
 Soften'd my yielding heart—And then, I was a slave—
 —Yet still had been content to've worn my Chains:
 Worn 'em with vanity and joy for ever,
 Hadst thou not broke those Vows that put them on.
 ——'Twas then I was undone. (5.1.235-43)

Shocked by this logic, Willmore defends his deceit with what amounts to an early modern version of “everbody’s doing it”: “Broke my Vows? why, where hast thou lived? / Amongst the gods? for I never heard of mortal Man / That has not broke a thousand Vows” (5.1.244-46). The instability of symbolic credit—here figured as the broken vow—is common practice to him in his dealings with women.²² Moreover, breaking one’s word (to women especially) is simply part of life, for only in the realm of the gods are vows actually kept. Interestingly, it is not the commonality of broken vows Angellica finds fault with. Rather, she distinguishes this particular case from the others by emphasizing her participation in the exchange of symbolic credit. She explains to Willmore, “...had I repaid their [previous lovers] Vows, as I did thine, I / wou’d have kill’d the ingrateful that had abandon’d me” (5.1.253-54). The importance is placed on how Willmore’s vows secured Angellica’s investment in the symbolic credit of honor and emotion, an investment that she had never before made and without which she would have expected nothing.

Unfortunately, Angellica equated her very participation in this system of exchange with the security of a return in the future. What she fails to understand, however, is that no investment—financial or emotional—promises a return without some form of security. In failing to secure her emotional investment in Willmore by withholding the one thing he wants (sex), Angellica gives up any potential for financial or emotional return. She gains neither the financial security that is presumed to accompany marriage, nor the emotional return of Willmore’s love.

Hellena, however, at least recognizes the risk involved in the symbolic credit of love and honor. Despite falling in love with Willmore, she is careful to obtain the legal security of marriage before giving up the physical goods: her body. Hellena also reinforces Angellica’s earlier claim that marriage relies just as much on financial savvy as prostitution when she explains to her brother, Pedro, in the play’s final scene:

... I have considered the matter, brother, and find the
 three hundred thousand crowns my uncle left me, and you
 cannot keep from me, will be better laid out in love than in
 religion, and turn to as good an account,— (5.1.493-97)

By weighing her options in terms of risk management and recognizing marriage as a financial investment, however, Hellena clearly contradicts her previous claim to want nothing but to “love and be beloved.” Though she may not be naïve enough to believe Willmore will be constant once married, she believes she is securing her fortune through the investment of marriage. That is, she puts her faith in the legal value of the marriage contract. Thus, like Angellica, she fails to remember the instability of symbolic credit,

this time in the form of paper. While Angellica invests blindly in the symbolic credit of emotion, Hellena invests blindly in the symbolic credit of the marriage contract, leaving herself open to losing her entire fortune in *The Second Part of The Rover*. By highlighting the real problems of both broken vows and paper credit, Behn points to the ways Restoration culture and women's lives in particular are affected by the rise of symbolic credit. As a result, the play implies that neither prostitution nor marriage are systems that can live upon credit. Even the latter cannot escape the risk of venturing "the Storms o'th' Marriage Bed" (5.1.545).

Interest: Emotional Credit vs. Ready Money in *The Second Part of The Rover*

Four years after the first half of the play was published, Behn published *The Second Part of The Rover*, likely with the hopes of profiting from its earlier popularity. She must have been disappointed, then, when the play failed to attract the same large crowds as its predecessor. There are no contemporary accounts for its lack of success, and those that exist today are mere speculation. One possible reason is that audiences disapproved of the play's somewhat subversive ending, which turned the prostitute, La Nuche, into a heroine and sent the respectable virgin, Ariadne, back to a despised suitor. Unique even for Behn's repertoire, Willmore and La Nuche refuse the legal security and social conformity that marriage appears to offer in favor of libertine free love (Rubik 47). Equally lacking for the play is critical scholarly attention. Aside from the usual reference and plot summary offered in accounts of Behn's dramatic repertoire, almost no critical analysis of the play exists.²³ In addition to giving the play the literary study it deserves in its own right, I place it within the context of the original on which it is based

and the play published one year later (*The City Heiress*). As this chapter demonstrates, the three are closely connected in their relationship to a budding discourse of credit, which manifests itself in the plays' concerns about broken vows, mercenary self-interest, and the language of finance.

In many ways, *The Second Part of The Rover* continues the debate introduced by Willmore and Angellica in the first play. Their argument about Angellica's "mercenary" concern for money, especially her response to Willmore's attack, illustrates the impossibility for women to escape the financial concerns inherent in the marriage market. This theme is repeated in the second *Rover*, but it is addressed more explicitly, relying on a specific economic discourse that employs terms like interest, value, rate, and price. More importantly, this language is given not to Willmore or the other male characters, but to the primary female characters: La Nuche and Ariadne. As the language of credit takes a more prominent role in *The Second Part of The Rover*, Behn's female characters utilize the financial language and economic skill with which women in the audience could have identified.

Set in Madrid, the play opens with a widowed Willmore searching desperately for sex in the city. Hellena has died, and Willmore has already spent her entire fortune. Indeed, when asked about his late wife, Willmore can summon only a "sham sadness" and explain that she "was too good for Mortals" (1.1.24). He does, however, remember the famous courtesan La Nuche, who stands in for Angellica from the first *Rover*. Just as before, Willmore finds himself unable to afford La Nuche's high prices, forcing him to look elsewhere for pleasure. In place of Hellena is the rich and virtuous Ariadne, who

falls for Willmore despite her pre-arranged engagement to Beaumont, nephew to the English ambassador. The main plot surrounds Willmore's interactions with both women and his ultimate choice of one over the other—this time he chooses the prostitute over the heiress—and manages to escape the “formal foppery” of marriage.

The sub-plot returns to Killigrew's *Thomaso*, in which a mountebank cures two rich female giants so that the rover's friends can marry into money. In Behn's sequel, it is Willmore who pretends to be a mountebank and claims he can “transform” a woman giant and her dwarf sister—both “Jews of vast fortunes”—in an attempt to cozen his friends, Blunt and Fetherfool. The biggest difference between the two versions of this strange sidetrack is that Behn's play relies not on magic and mystery but on the success of Willmore's disguise and clear reference to the Earl of Rochester.²⁴

In the first act, Willmore wastes no time in attacking La Nuche and her line of work. From the start, the confrontation between the two centers on money, or in Willmore's case, the lack thereof. His assault on La Nuche begins with a critique on her trade, which offers little more than the “Mercenary gain” of “fine cloaths” and “some Jewels.” He goes on to claim that, “all the finery cannot hide the Whore!” (1.1.462-63). Noting his emphasis on the material rewards of the job, La Nuche is quick to realize that Willmore's worry is not about her lack of virtue or even the dissembling that comes with prostitution. Rather, the dispute becomes one of love vs. money:

LA NUCHE. There's your eternal quarrel to our Sex, 'twere a fine Trade

indeed to keep Shop and give our Ware for Love, would it turn to
account think ye, Captain, to trick and dress, to receive all wou'd
enter, faith, Captain, try the Trade. (1.1.464-67)

Just as Angellica did before her, La Nuche must remind Willmore that love—or the exchange of sex for love—does not pay the bills.

Though Willmore's attack begins with La Nuche, we soon find that Ariadne, too, is keenly aware of the importance of financial security. The second act opens to reveal Willmore swearing off women, but his oath is interrupted as Ariadne passes by.

Willmore cannot resist the temptation of a beautiful woman and thus compliments her on a “promising form, a tempting motion, clean Limbs, . . . and a most damnable inviting Air” (2.1.32-34). Distancing herself from the courtesan, Ariadne explains that she is “not to be sold,” which is just what Willmore needed to hear. Thinking he has found a woman who will not care that he is penniless, he continues the pursuit:

WILLMORE. Thou say'st thou'rt not to be sold, and I'm sure thou'rt to
be had—— that lovely Body of so Divine a form, those soft smooth
Arms and Hands, were made t'imbrace as well as be imbrac'd, that
delicate white rising Bosom to be prest, and all thy other charms to be
injoy'd. (2.1.46-50)

Seeing the chance to name her terms, Ariadne responds: “By one that can esteem 'em to their worth, can set a va[l]ue and a rate upon 'em.” Willmore's irritation cannot be contained, and his reaction frames the issue, again, in terms of love and money:

Name not those words, they grate my ears like Jointure, that

Dull conjugal cant that frights the generous Lover! Rate—Death, let the Old Dotards talk of Rates, and pay it t'atone for the defects of Impotence. Let the sly States-man, who Jilts the Commonwealth with his grave Politiques, pay for the sin that he may doat in secret; let the brisk fool Inch out his scanted sense with a large purse more eloquent than he: but tell not me of rates who bring a Heart, Youth, Vigor, and a Tongue to sing the praise of every single pleasure thou shalt give me. (2.1.53-60)

For Willmore, only old men, political cheats, and fools should be the target of Ariadne's discourse of credit. As a young, honest, virile lover, Willmore recognizes but refuses her terms.

When Ariadne questions Willmore about his encounter with La Nuche, she gets him to admit his desire for her. Though he tries to blame prostitution and the financial awareness it demands as the obstacle between them, Willmore reveals much more than this as he explains:

... my Soul was full
 as wishing as my eyes: but a Pox on't, you Women have all a certain Jargon, or Giberish, peculiar to your selves; of Value, Rate, Present, Interest, Settlement, Advantage, Price, Maintenance, and the Devil and all of Fopperies, which in plain terms signifie Ready Money, by way of Fine before entrance, so that an honest well-

meaning Merchant of Love finds no credit amongst ye, without his
Bill of Lading. (2.1.93-99)

Willmore's speech serves not as critique of prostitution, but rather as an insult to women, in general, who have learned how to speak the language of economics. Furthermore, by referencing the terms "Value," "Rate," and "Interest," he attacks women's appropriation of the language of credit specifically. He recognizes that women have learned the importance of a secure investment and the potential of profit in marriage—even without love. In fact, following Willmore's logic, women are no longer willing to accept the symbolic credit of emotion. Instead, value is placed on the symbolic credit of paper—the "Bill of Lading".²⁵ Functioning a bit differently than a bill of lading, which insures a ship's goods and their delivery, the bill to which Willmore refers offers itself as both security and proof. The bill simultaneously stabilizes the truth claims or promises made by a "Merchant of Love" and secures the delivery of the emotional 'goods': a man's love. Willmore equates women's demand for financial security with the credit-based commercial practices of shipping merchants. Relying on paper credit, Willmore argues, allows women the chance to secure their emotional investment in a man, even before marriage. Rather than seeing the common sense and practical benefit of this process, or its importance to women's survival (their happiness is altogether a separate issue), Willmore's point seems to be that women know *too much* about good business practice and the management of credit.

This passage counters the claim that, "Apart from the spoken word, *Rover II* is a play without signs...there is only one text, by an absent author: the bills of the 'true'

mountebank, promising reformation and restoration...” (Hughes 128). The problem with such a reading is twofold. First, it neglects to understand the spoken word as a sign system itself. The language Ariadne uses is a system of signs Willmore either cannot or will not recognize.²⁶ His refusal to participate in this system points to a larger fundamental difference in the ways women and men responded to the rise of credit. Secondly, the “text” and “bills” Hughes refers to are at the heart of the matter: they *are* the paper credit that provoked concern in English society. Behn’s play, like the mountebank’s counterfeit bills, is a paper fiction based on economic exchange. Furthermore, instead of linking the “Jargon” or “Giberish” of credit to merchants, or to good business practice in general, Willmore insists the language is particular to women alone. In this way, then, women pose a serious threat to those, including himself, unable or unwilling to understand and participate in a shifting financial discourse. Indeed, he goes on to claim that terms like “Profit” and “Present” are “hard words,” to which he has a “natural aversion” (2.1.117-18). What we see here is a very early form of the kinds of attitudes represented toward credit in the early eighteenth century, akin to Defoe’s derogatory allegory of Lady Credit and the feminine “stereotypes that jibe with a credit-based market which in variant versions is mystifying and irrational” (Sherman 41).²⁷

Despite the fact that *Ariadne* is the one who uses the formal terms of financial language of credit, it is *La Nuche* who bears the brunt of Willmore’s attack. In act three, Willmore’s criticism of La Nuche is based on what he calls her “Interest.” As he sees it, LaNuche wrongly places a greater value on money than she does on love. When he calls her a “slavish mercenary Prostitute,” La Nuche reminds him that she is not alone in her

concern for financial security, explaining: “all the Universe is sway’d by Interest” (3.1.198-99). Through these two characters, Behn is adept at articulating the ways contemporary financial discourse intersected with women’s lives. On one hand, Willmore reiterates the message in the 1676 ballad *Loves better then gold: or Money’s an ass* (1676), which promoted marriage based on mutual love and criticize matches that were based on fortune-hunting or financial interest. On the other hand, La Nuche’s perspective is reinforced by works like John Wade’s *Tis Money That Makes a Man* (1680), which suggests the centrality of money to all social relationships. Though it is unlikely that Wade had women’s interests in mind, his message was one, I would suggest, that was easily internalized by female readers and commercial female writers of the day. Willmore’s attack on La Nuche reveals the contradictory messages women received about marriage and money, as he provides a virulent criticism of a marriage market that has taught women to think in terms of financial security and prosperity, yet he also condemns the female character who sidesteps social norms in order to secure her economic survival.

Willmore repeatedly refers to La Nuche’s interest as “mercenary,” and the implications of this label are revealing. Going beyond an attack on La Nuche as someone who works merely for money or material gain, the insult suggests she does so at the expense of individual morality. Such an affront might seem commonplace in reference to a courtesan, but La Nuche—like Angellica before her—thoughtfully considers the issue of ethics and the double standard implied in Willmore’s speech. When she finds Willmore pretending to negotiate a marriage with one of the rich female “monsters,” La

Nuche points out his hypocrisy: “——you call me mercenary, but I would starve e’re suffer my self to be possest by a thing of horror” (4.1.302-03). The emphasis in La Nuche’s claim is on the difference between selling sex, which is purely a financial transaction, and marriage (especially to a “monstrous” woman), which she rightfully recognizes as a legal contract that reduces women to possessions. Though the former may be something she is forced to do to survive, the latter is an unacceptable option, even if refusing it means death. Her counterattack underscores the fact that, as a man, Willmore’s survival is never in jeopardy, thus his attempt to marry for money is unnecessarily desperate and immoral.

Echoing the scene from the first *Rover* in which Angellica does her best to take her mentor’s practical business advice, La Nuche and her bawd, Petronella, argue about the danger of mixing business and emotion. Once again, the prostitute has become vulnerable to love and lost focus on the more pressing matter of money. Despite Petronella’s argument that love will not “maintain” her, La Nuche claims that studying “‘gainst nature ... [the] dull precepts” of the business of prostitution has cost her something more important: “all the joys of human Life” (4.3.351-58). Interestingly, the debate about money and love here is framed in terms of natural vs. unnatural knowledge. La Nuche’s claim is that her sexual and, by extension, her commercial education has been unnatural. Despite her formal education, “Nature” teaches her to love, and she insists that she will “be poor and Love” rather than “be base and infamously rich.” Petronella is quick to point out the flaw in La Nuche’s plan: without money first, love is

not likely to follow: “But who will give you that [Love] when you are poor?”

Petronella’s logic is compelling as she continues:

Do you not daily see—fine Cloaths, rich Furniture,
 Jewels and Plate are more inviting than Beauty unadorn’d: be
 old, diseas’d, deform’d, be any thing, so you be rich and splendidly
 attended, you’ll find your self Lov’d and Ador’d by all— (4.3.369-72)

In this equation, the ‘real’ value associated with precious gems and china circulates as capital, which one uses to gain the investment of others. That is, in an age where investment in others is increasingly speculative, if one first *appears* rich, then love will follow, despite obstacles such as age, infirmity, and actual poverty.

What Petronella’s lecture indicates is that financial discourse and emotional discourse do not mix, or rather should not mix. Ultimately, the problem for women is not a lack of financial knowledge but a vulnerability to emotion. Behn seems far ahead of her time here, as conversations about women and money in modern society have long insisted that women are not as financially savvy as men because they are too emotional.²⁸ In her study of three women investors in the early eighteenth century explains that, in which she concludes that women’s financial activity differed little (if at all) from that of men involved in the South Sea scheme, Anne Laurence claims “there are no easy associations between gender and ideas of risk or of safe investment” (262). More thorough research, however, has shown that gender increasingly played a part in women’s economic security. Before the investment schemes of the South Sea Company, women were making other types of investments, one of which was the choice of a

husband. Women's economic security during this time increasingly depended upon the goodwill of their husbands (Erickson 19). Because of this, women's ability to determine the "goodwill" of potential husbands—gauging their symbolic credit, their trustworthiness—was crucial to their survival.

Petronella reinforces her argument by suggesting that Willmore will love La Nuche as long as she has money and then leave her as soon as it disappears. La Nuche is initially persuaded by the advice and seems to recognize the impossibility of Willmore's constancy. Convinced of the decision she must make, she explains

No more, I will be rul'd—I will be wise, be rich, and
 since I must yield somewhere and some time, *Beaumont* shall be
 the Man, and this the Night; he's handsom, young, and lavishly
 profuse: this Night he comes, and I'll submit to Interest.

Though she claims she will surrender to financial interest, the next (and final) act shows her still struggling with her love for Willmore.

The scene opens on La Nuche and Willmore in a chamber, the former in a state of undress. As she waits for the expected Beaumont, Willmore makes several last efforts to convince her of the moral implications of her decision. La Nuche fails to see why her love for Willmore should subsequently command such financial risk—"And must I be undone because I love ye?"—and instead implies that her business might benefit them both, as she persists: "This is the Mine from whence I fetcht my Gold!" Despite the claim that he would rather have her "poor and mine," the main concern for Willmore is not the virtue commonly associated with poverty. That is, his response joins poverty

with his possession of La Nuche rather than the honor of ‘natural’ affection. For him, her virtue is held intact because she would be with the man she loves, not necessarily because she (or they) would be poor.

Such a distinction is critical in light of the usual dichotomies that link landed wealth to corruption and poverty or wealth gained from industry to morality. The former frequently appears in Behn’s dramatic works, especially those with overt political themes such as *The City-Heiress*, where the wealthy Whig Timothy Treat-All is notoriously corrupt. This heralds the commercial ideology that took root during the Restoration, which perceived a commercial society and ideology in the opposition between “virtue” and “corruption” and “landed interests” and “monied interests” (Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment* 436-61).

Once Beaumond arrives as planned, the two men bargain for La Nuche, each of them pointing out what the other has to offer: Beaumond offers money, while Willmore offers love.²⁹ Caught up in the moment, La Nuche tries to reason that:

...when I’ve worn out all my Youth and Beauty, and
 suffer’d every ill of Poverty, I shall be compell’d to begin the
 World again without a Stock to set up with; no faith, I’m for a
 Substantial Merchant in Love, who can repay the loss of time and
 Beauty: with whom to make one thriving Voyage sets me up for ever,
 and I need never put to Sea again.

La Nuche acknowledges the two unavoidable issues—age and loss of beauty—both of which require her to have some sort of back-up plan. If she chooses Willmore, she

reasons, the misfortunes that accompany poverty will be unpleasant, but what is worse is that she would find herself back where she started: alone and with no “stock” to move forward. Here, La Nuche’s keen awareness of the way credit works underscores the extent to which Behn is relying on her female audience to understand and identify with the actresses they saw on stage. That is, the scene demands familiarity with the function of capital, the process of and risk associated with investment, and the expectation of a profitable return, each of which is here represented in terms of the marriage market. Despite La Nuche’s virtue, which would remain intact after a life with Willmore, a lack of capital would leave her bankrupt. If, however, she chooses Beaumont, she is to some extent insured against a total loss because he can “repay” the loss of youth and beauty. Investing her “stock” in someone who can provide an equal return means that she will only have to make such an investment once. A “thriving Voyage” is a profitable one, and obviously the smartest financial move.

Despite the logic of La Nuche’s argument, Willmore refuses to be a “mercenary Conquest” and leaves in search of Ariadne.³⁰ In the next scene, a series of mistaken identities leads Ariadne to believe she is being carried off by Willmore, though she is actually with Beaumont. Meanwhile, when Ariadne fails to meet him as planned, he considers it lucky that some other woman appears. Not recognizing La Nuche’s voice, Willmore quickly whisks her away to his lodging and consummates the intrigue without ever seeing her face. When he later returns with a light, he finds Ariadne and believes her to be his mystery woman. Ariadne is just as shocked as Beaumont, who is still

standing by, and it is not until La Nuche reveals her own identity that the confusion is resolved.

Going back on her own resolve, La Nuche declares her love for Willmore, who attributes her change of mind not to the sincerity of her love, but to their sexual encounter: “Nay, by this light, Child, I knew when once thou’dst / try’d me, thou’dst ne’r part with me—give me thy hand, no / poverty shall part us.” As he explains, their “bargain” has been made without the “formal foppery of Marriage” (5.3.505-08). La Nuche’s only accounting for her sudden change of plans is a reference to the value of another form of symbolic credit: language. In this case, it is Willmore’s word that, “Nay, faith Captain, she that will not take thy word / as soon as the Parsons of the Parish deserves not the blessing.” For Willmore, La Nuche’s acceptance of his word is proof that she has been “reform’d” of her mercenary concerns, but there is no evidence to suggest that La Nuche views her decision this way.³¹ Instead, she seems to simply assume the risk that comes along with an emotional investment in Willmore and knows that they will “live and starve by turns / as fortune pleases” (5.3.504). She is not unconcerned with money, but rather decides in favor of a different kind of self interest, that of the immediate emotional sort. Her decision, then, may be poor, but it is an educated one. She has at least considered all her options and decided that her love for Willmore is worth the risk of poverty. In this way, she is savvier than her predecessor, Angellica.

The contradiction between Ariadne and La Nuche is a critical one, and I think it points to a larger cultural and social discrepancy. La Nuche’s relationship with Willmore

represents libertine love, mutual affection free from the legal restraints, cultural conformity, and mercenary motives of marriage as the ideal relationship between men and women. While this may have been an option for La Nuche, “ideals of romantic love and conjugal affection” were allowed no part in the marriages of rich heiresses such as Ariadne (Chan and Wright 162). It is not Ariadne who gains our sympathy, but rather La Nuche, though both women are figured as part of a cultural system that demands their concern with economic survival. If Behn uses La Nuche to highlight the financial risks associated with the value of mutual affection, she uses Ariadne to emphasize the risks that remain despite the appearance of legal and economic security of marriage. That is, while Hellena was the clear heroine of the first *Rover*, her fate was nonetheless a troubled one: she died at sea and her husband spent her entire fortune within a month. In the second half of the play, Ariadne does not fare much better. She is the one woman neither Willmore nor the wealthy Beaumont want, which is somewhat surprising because Ariadne functions as the typical Restoration heiress and appears to bring both money and virtue to the bargaining table that is the marriage market. What the play demonstrates, however, is that Behn will not (or cannot) reconcile the two with the symbolic value and emotional credit of love. In one of her earlier exchanges with Willmore, Ariadne demonstrates an awareness of her own worth in terms of the marriage market, tempting him with the thought of “a hundred thousand Crowns, and a Beauty of sixteen.” Willmore admires the qualities, but is keen to anticipate the catch: marriage. Ariadne assures him that women of her “Quality expect better Jointures / than a Buff-coat, Scarf and Feather.” She is clearly worth more than him and is convinced in her

ability to ‘buy’ his affections. Using her own words against her, Willmore acknowledges that while he is “not fit” to marry Ariadne, he is more than willing to help her dispose of a “small Virgin Treasure” (4.1.259-81). The two are interrupted, however, before Ariadne makes the mistake of sleeping with him. The interruption thus preserves her virtue and maintains her marriageable status.

In the final act of the play, when Ariadne is carried away by Beaumont (rather than the expected Willmore), she makes one last attempt at a successful negotiation, one that would join money and virtue with mutual love and marriage. Believing that she is with Willmore, she offers herself, “...a Maid of Youth and Beauty, ten thousand Pound in ready jewels” and “three times the value in Estate to come,” in return for marriage. Once she identifies herself as the “Daughter-in-law to the *English* Ambassador,” Beaumont realizes who she is. There is no change, however, in Beaumont’s feelings—or lack thereof—for her, and the play ends with the two merely agreeing to give the marriage a try. Though she maintains her virtue and her fortune and gains the presumed security of marriage, Ariadne fails to obtain an emotional investment from either Willmore or Beaumont. She may have a husband and money, but her ‘safe’ investment in marriage leaves Ariadne emotionally bankrupt. By giving her character the fate of a loveless union, Behn reminds her audience that even marriage comes at a price that is calculated beyond the value of real money.

By the time of the sequel to *The Rover*, we see that La Nuche is, perhaps, no better off than Angellica. One of the few critics to look at *The Second Part*, Heidi Huntner argues that “men and women are matched as equals” (103) and La Nuche “is

ultimately united with Willmore...because she has chosen to love. If La Nuche is ruined by loving Willmore, it is not because she is sexually experienced but because she gives up her fortune for passion” (112). While Huntner’s reading is accurate if we look at the pairings along class lines, I think it falters when we concentrate on the female characters’ potential for economic security. As Huntner herself reveals, La Nuche must give up her economic security to be with Willmore. Though she “wins Willmore over Ariadne” (103), La Nuche picks up where Angellica left off in pointing out the similarity between prostitution and the marriage market, and she takes an obvious financial risk to escape both by running away with him. This could be considered a “win” by Behn for several reasons. First, because it follows in the tradition of a libertine economics of love: Willmore and La Nuche forego the material wealth of the world to delight in mutual desire. Second, La Nuche’s fate is contrasted with the more financially-sound decision Ariadne makes by marrying Beaumont. Ironically, the connotation of Ariadne’s financially-sound decision seems to merge with the terms of mercenary self-interest formerly associated with La Nuche, leaving the audience with little sympathy for her questionable matrimonial fate. In the end, Behn reveals that self-interest is about more than money for women. Self-interest is just as much emotional as financial, but it is the female characters—the landladies, prostitutes, wealthy widows—and contemporary women—the “alewives” and the “new made” gentlewomen—concerned with money who are consistently the target of criticism.

“The Necessary Vice”: Paper Credit in *The City-Heiress*

No account of Behn’s 1682 play, *The City-Heiress*, or Sir Timothy Treat-all, can

begin without acknowledging its primary function as political farce.³² As most Behn scholars have explained, the title character is modeled on the prominent Whig figure, the Earl of Shaftesbury and a 1675 episode in which he believed he would be offered the crown of Poland (Duffy 212). Annette Kreis-Schinck accounts for the play—and its failure—as a “selling out” that resulted from the theatrical and economic crisis of the early 1680’s. She goes so far as to call it “Behn’s bleakest and most desperate play, especially in terms of its representations of women, none of whom appear to come off happily at the end of the play.”³³ While Elizabeth Howe comments mainly on the effects of Elizabeth Barry’s performance of Lady Galliard’s role, her claim that, in the play the “only characters to benefit are the men” seems to coincide with Kreis-Schinck’s conclusion (136).

My approach to *The City-Heiress* departs from these discussions to draw on Mark Lussier’s claim that:

Behn’s sophisticated use of economic language constitutes, perhaps, as much of a mastercode within these plays as can be established or desired. It is a discourse that allows Behn to push in a variety of directions against the veil that covers or disguises phallographic discourse. (389)

I agree with much of what Lussier says about Behn’s use of economic discourse as a framework for critiquing contemporary social institutions, like marriage, which limit or deny women’s economic independence. However, my reading of the play differs from his in two important ways. First, I think Behn is drawing on the more specific discourse

of symbolic credit, which allows her to consider the impact this discourse had on women in particular. She draws not only on the language of money, but also on the value of paper credit, figured in such forms as wills and letters as well as marriage contracts. Secondly, I disagree with the conclusion that “Wilding’s marriage to Charlot is the only successful match” (388). I suggest, rather, that while Wilding’s mistress, Diana, may not be happy in the sense of romantic love, her decision is impacted by the limited options available to her. By the end of the play, she has devised a strategy that ensures a certain amount of emotional, legal, and financial security, and this might be considered the best a woman in her situation could do.

Surprisingly, in the few studies of this play no one has yet to study the importance and implications of the play’s title—*The City-Heiress: or, Sir Timothy Treat-all*—which clearly indicates a divided theme.³⁴ The double title is common for Restoration drama, most of which included quite lengthy title pages. What makes this double title interesting is the way it makes difficult any attempt to identify a title character, or rather that it provides two title characters: both the City-Heiress and Sir Timothy Treat-all. It is curious, then, that the few critics who discuss the play at length begin their accounts with the presumption that Treat-all is alone in the title role. The consequence of this is that most scholarly work examines the play primarily if not only in terms of its function as political farce.³⁵ In doing so, existing literary criticism fails to account sufficiently for at least half of the play. Not only does the title identify more than one leading character, but it also positions one before the other—the City-Heiress

literally comes before Treat-all—which, I argue, further suggests the importance of the role.

Unlike what we see in both parts of *The Rover*, this play is set in contemporary London and here Behn marries off each of her three main female characters. While the latter is in keeping with the tradition of Restoration drama, which often features one or more marriage scenes at a play's conclusion, Behn's work remains critical of arranged marriage as a social norm. Studying the play within the framework of this critique and contemporary financial discourse, I contend that Behn is doing more than offering a dramatic response to Restoration politics. Rather, the play responds to Restoration economics as well and, more specifically, women's relationship to financial discourse vis à vis the marriage market. Through the play's female characters, we find that Behn is no longer able to imagine that the financial and emotional risks associated with the libertine tradition of free love outside of marriage are worth the benefit of balanced and reciprocal emotional exchange.

The play opens with Sir Timothy Treat-all disinheriting his Tory nephew, Tom Wilding, largely because of his political beliefs, but also because of his habitual vice (drinking, whoring, gaming). The play's dual focus is on Wilding regaining his inheritance and his precarious position between three women: Charlot (the City-Heiress), his mistress Diana, and the widowed Lady Galliard. Wilding is less a rover than he is a libertine without a cause; he has put off the "Bugbear" of marriage for the promise of his inheritance after his uncle's death. Despite being in love with Charlot, he continues his affair with Diana and attempts a new one with Lady Galliard. Behn's emphasis on the

importance of Wilding's fortune (or lack thereof) echoes contemporary broadsides and ballads such as John Wade's *Tis Money That Makes a Man* (1680) and *The World Turn'd Up-side Down or, Money Grown Troublesome* (1684), which depicted the devastating consequences of poverty (loss of friends, mockery, and an increased vulnerability to usurious sharpers).

With his bad habits and no estate, Behn's Wilding is no different than the men offered up in this cautionary literature. What makes her dramatic response unique, however, is that it includes the perspectives of three female characters, each of whom is responding in a different way to the period's financial discourse. Wilding's relationship with each of the women is threatened once he is disinherited, and tricking his uncle into returning the inheritance becomes key. Both Charlot and Lady Galliard refuse to marry a rake with no money and a bad reputation. Diana, whose once-lavish trappings have dwindled, is invested in helping Wilding secure his inheritance because in doing so, she hopes to gain her own financial security. She comes to believe Wilding's claim that mistresses "ever thrive better by Adultery than Fornication" (2.2.59-60) and hopes to profit directly from his marriage to Charlot.

At odds with Wilding's future plans for marrying Charlot are his attempts to seduce Lady Galliard. Distinguished from the class-climbing and aged widows of some Restoration drama, Lady Galliard is not only rich, but also young and beautiful. Wilding's competition is the ridiculous Sir Charles, Tory nephew to Sir Anthony, a Tory mirror to Treat-all. Charles is initially unsuccessful in his attempts on the widow primarily because she is put off by his soft and honorable approach, but also because she

is in love with Wilding. For much of the play, Lady Galliard resists Wilding's thinly-veiled efforts to seduce her and reminds him repeatedly of the difference between her value and his. While she has "Fortune," "Youth," "Quality," and "Fame," he has only an "uncertain hope," a "life of scandal," and a "lewd Opinion" (1.1.298-309).

Wilding's plans to seduce Lady Galliard do not require ready money, but rather her investment in the symbolic credit of honor, which is signified by his word. By the time the two agree upon a midnight meeting at the widow's house, she is well aware that he has no money. When Wilding proposes marriage, Lady Galliard's attitude toward the value of both real money and symbolic credit echoes that of Angellica's in *The Rover*. She explains to Wilding: "...I'm not so fond of the offer to take you at your word. Marry you! a Rakeshame, who / have not esteem enough for the Sex to believe your own Mother honest--- / without Money or Credit, without Land either in present or prospect"...(4.1-134-36). Galliard initially appears, like Angellica before her, to be smart enough not to take a man at his word. Rebuked, Wilding explains what some might see as Behn's own take on marriage, that it is nothing more than a business, which serves the purpose of making fortunes not happiness. Using the logic of libertinism, he argues that the "strictest Rules of Honour" (4.1.164) allow a woman to maintain her virtue as long as she loves the man she takes to bed.

Despite the claim that her virtue, which acts as capital in this exchange,³⁶ is a "price too high" (4.1.194) to pay, Galliard ultimately gives in to Wilding's advances. Like Angellica, the widow offers sex as proof of her word and her emotional investment in Wilding. Furthermore, for Lady Galliard, being thought false by Wilding is worse

than being miserable without him. And while we might simply attribute her attitude toward sex as an example of the common equation of sex and love for women, I think the language she uses in this scene suggests it has at least a dual function. That is, she may indeed equate sex with love, but her response to Wilding indicates that her bigger concern is credibility. As Leslie Richardson notes: the “material value [placed] upon trust and reputation, demanded a heightened awareness of...mutual obligation and dependence” (22). So while Galliard has reason—within this discourse—to expect a return from Wilding, the value of one’s word as synonymous with honor and a means by which one could gain credit (financial or otherwise) was dwindling. As the demand for collateral more stable than one’s reputation was increasing, we see Behn responding to this change also in *The Lucky Chance* (1686) through the character of Gayman’s landlady, Gammer Grime, who demands money instead of manners for the payment of his rent (II.i.43-46).

After securing Wilding’s promise that he will “never, never love / Mrs. *Charlot*,” (4.1.271-72) the widow offers her body—via sex—as the collateral that stabilizes her claim to love him. It is this proof that she hopes will secure the expected return of love (for love is all she can hope to receive from Wilding). Thus, both Angellica and Lady Galliard are left emotionally bankrupt because they, like their counterparts in English society, either refuse to believe or fail to understand the consequences associated with the instability of symbolic credit. In this sense “they, like her audience, are complicit in the very practices and beliefs that frustrate their desires” (Markley 142). They are caught up in a nexus of financial discourse that increasingly demands a reliance on symbolic

credit, promises both economical and emotional. They are, in Behn's representation, at the mercy of credit, which "subverted commonplaces of truth, hence of trust" (Sherman, "Promises, Promises" 327).

Wilding's other love interest, Diana, has not honor but financial security in mind as she wonders what will become of her if Wilding fails to reclaim his inheritance and marry Charlot. When Diana refuses to hear his continued promises of a rich wife, whose fortune will benefit her directly, Wilding offers a different promise: "By Heaven, I love thee!" (2.2.75). His profession of love, however, matters little to Diana because she understands that not only does his promise carry little value, but also that emotion carries no value in a market that relies solely on the legal value of a marriage certificate: "Love me! what if you do? how far will that go at the Exchange for / Poynt? Will the Mercer take it for currant Coin?" (2.2.76-77).

With no money of her own, though, Diana is easily persuaded by the two hundred pieces of gold Wilding offers her in return for her assistance in carrying out a trick upon his uncle. Designed to reclaim his inheritance, Wilding's plot uses his mistress as a diversion at Sir Timothy's feast. He instructs Diana to pose as Charlot in the hopes that if he can show his uncle that he has managed to make himself "Master" of Charlot's great fortune, then Treat-all will return the inheritance. The plan goes awry when Wilding realizes Treat-all's reluctance to give him the papers, and Wilding is forced to devise an alternative plot to steal them. Once at the feast, Sir Timothy agrees to keep Charlot (Diana in disguise) under his protection, while Wilding gets things in order for their marriage. Of course, Sir Timothy simply uses the opportunity to advance his

own interests in the young woman, and Diana (as Charlot) plays along. Giving Diana an awful account of Wilding, his uncle explains that Wilding will be disinherited, and Diana continues the charade:

Undone, undone! Oh, with what Face can I return again!

What man of Wealth or Reputation, now

Will think me worth the owning! (3.1.145-47)

As Diana feigns to weep, Treat-all suggests that she marry him as the ultimate revenge.

Their discussion is suspended as the play moves forward, and it is not until the last act that we find Diana (still under the disguise of Charlot) pondering Sir Timothy's proposal. She and her maid, Betty, mimic a conversation similar to those seen in the previous two plays with Angellica and Moretta (in *The Rover*) and La Nuche and Petronella (in *The Second Part of The Rover*). Though Diana questions the prudence of marrying Sir Timothy for his money, while maintaining Wilding as a lover, her maid advises her that: "the way to keep your / young Lover, is to marry this old one: for what Youth and Beauty cannot / purchase, Money and Quality may" (5.3.229-31).³⁷ The implication is that, once age sets in, Diana will no longer be able to secure a lover such as Wilding if she remains alone. If, however, she is wealthy and seen as a woman of quality, lovers are likely to come on their own. Diana imagines the differences between the two men in terms of their physical and sexual appeal and asks Betty, "What fancy or what thought can make my hours supportable?" In short response, Betty explains that six thousand pounds a year, Treat-all's "quick death," and the resulting freedom to do as she likes should make the decision more than tolerable (5.2.234-44).

Framing Diana's options for her much as an economic advisor might, Betty considers the marriage to Sir Timothy in the sense of a long-term investment. That is, it may not be the happiest state in which to live on a daily basis, but the situation is only temporary. Eventually, the investment will provide a large return, and then Diana is free to do what she likes. The play's configuration is unique for Behn in that it places widowhood as a sort of goal, one that might allow women economic independence and sexual autonomy.³⁸ Betty's advice is also supported by late seventeenth-century common law which, as Amy Erickson explains, consistently gave widows back what goods they brought into or gained in marriage after their husband's death (122). Though Betty makes a strong case in favor of short-term unhappiness for long-term independence, Lady Galliard's example reveals the stereotypical disadvantages associated with widowhood. While Galliard's financial independence is secure, her sexual autonomy is limited by the consequences she must face if her romance with Wilding is revealed. Thus, the widow's problem is not how best to manage her "real" money, but rather how best to manage the symbolic credit of her reputation. And in the case of Lady Galliard, her efforts to keep her word—the claim to love Wilding—represent her attempt to manage symbolic credit.

The other main female character who must rely on her ability to understand and deploy the discourse of credit is Charlot, the City-Heiress. Arguably the more important title character, Charlot's character is Behn's slightly altered version of the wealthy, beautiful, and virtuous young heiress found in most Restoration comedies of manners. Pat Gill describes female characters in most Restoration comedies as falling into three

general categories: “sexually active hypocrites who scheme, betray, entrap, and deceive; naïve or ignorant young women who seem potentially amenable to seduction; and charming virgins who possess wealth and wit” (194). As we see in *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Curtizans*, among other, Behn’s heroines sometimes blur these distinctions. For example, many of them are determined to marry a man of her own choosing rather than someone selected by her father or another male relative, and I would not describe Charlot as witty. Further setting her apart from the traditional heroine is a sophisticated awareness of the instability of symbolic credit. Almost from the very beginning of the play, Charlot is well informed of Wilding’s shortcomings. When the second act opens, Charlot is quickly informed about Wilding’s affair with Lady Galliard and the loss of his inheritance. She has virtually no confusion about how to proceed, and when Wilding is late in visiting, Charlot wastes no time in confronting him with what she has heard. Though he tries to blame his blunder on business—“that Enemy to Love”—in the hopes that she will not pursue the issue further, she does not give up easily, accusing him of “that other Enemy to love, damn’d Wenching” (2.1.70-72). The exchange that follows is framed not merely in financial terms, but specifically within the discourse of credit:

WILDING. Wenching! how ill hast thou tim’d thy Jealousie! What Banker, that to morrow is to pay a mighty sum, wou’d venture out his stock to day in little parcels, and lose his Credit by it?

CHARLOT. You wou’d, perfidious as you are, though all your Fortune, all your future health, depended on that Credit. (2.1.73-77)

Charlot recognizes him for the poor investor that he is and understands that the symbolic credit of his “Vows,” “Sighs,” and “Eyes” is now simply “counterfeit” (2.1.133).

No longer able to rely on the language of love, which enables lovers to speak truth in looks and bodily expressions, Charlot turns to the language of business. She frames love in terms of trade—as a necessary, but bad practice—and resolves to negotiate with the best of them. Forced to employ the discourse of credit, Charlot explains that, “...since men are grown so cunning in their / Trade of Love, the necessary Vice I’ll practice too, / And chaffer with Love-Merchants for my Heart (2.1.140-43). As part of her struggle to haggle with “love-Merchants” over the value and sale of her emotions, Charlot demands that Wilding prove he is his uncle’s heir by producing the inheritance papers or will. Indeed, she goes as far to insist that he present them that very night. Since Wilding is determined not to lose his credit with her, he agrees to her terms.

Though it would appear that Charlot places the greatest value on paper credit alone, the following conversation with her maid reveals that she knows the risk involved in the investment she has made in Wilding.

MRS CLACKET. What if he should’ not chance to keep his word now?

CHARLOT. How if he shou’d not? by all that’s good, if he shou’d not, I am resolved to marry him however. We two may make a pretty shift with three thousand pound a year...(2.1.206-09)

Thus, Charlot’s resolution is somewhat confusing, as it indicates that she values neither the paper credit of Treat-all’s will nor the symbolic credit of Wilding’s promise to her. Her decision to marry Wilding even if he does not keep his word remains interesting,

however, because she specifically refers to money—her own fortune—rather than a mutual emotional investment.³⁹ The logic is that she and Wilding would have enough money to live on even without his inheritance. Because of her economic independence, she is not forced to rely on the value (or lack thereof) of Wilding's word. In this way, Behn creates an economically independent female character who is also responsible for the decision to marry (or not).

Though Charlot coins the phrase, “the Necessary Vice,” it turns out to be applicable to each of the main female characters as they struggle to gauge Wilding's value in financial, verbal, and emotional terms of symbolic credit. As *The Second Part of The Rover* suggested, and as *The City-Heiress* solidly demonstrates, the language of credit has become unavoidable for women. My purpose in this chapter has been to highlight the ways each of the women in the play manages to use the discourse of credit to their benefit by securing a husband and hoping for a profitable return on their respective investments. The consequence, I argue, is that these women have turned out to be better merchants than lovers. That is, they have done the best they could do at the time to secure a financial future (in the form of marriage), but they generally do so at the cost of any emotional return from their partners. Even though Charlot marries the man she loves, Behn makes it clear that Wilding may not necessarily love her, either now or later.⁴⁰ I would argue further that, with Behn's female characters, as opposed to Ariadne's lead female character (of the same name coincidentally), women cannot have both financial and emotional security. This is, I think, precisely what Behn is critiquing through each woman's fate. As Charlot's marriage to Wilding implies, only a fool

(Charlot) can afford *not* to care about symbolic credit. That is to say that since Charlot goes into the marriage with her own fortune, knowing and not caring about the instability of Wilding's symbolic value, she is quite likely to find herself without a penny not long after her marriage vows are taken.⁴¹

Ultimately, in her marriage to Treat-all, it seems that Diana makes the wisest financial decision, perhaps understanding that it is the easier, more stable one to make. She makes the decision La Nuche could not bring herself to make, and because she is not mocked, there is no impression that Behn disapproves of her particular decision or that her marriage is a punishment of sorts. Diana's may be a loveless marriage, but in this case, it seems a better option than being Wilding's unwitting cast off mistress.

Conclusion

In contrast to *The Rover* and its sequel, Behn marries all the women in this play rather than have any (or one of them, at least) offer a positive representation of mutual affection and libertine love. Such a shift in the fates of her main female characters suggests that Behn herself is no longer able to imagine that both the financial and emotional risks associated with free love outside marriage are worth the benefit of balanced and reciprocal emotional exchange. One might say this poses a problem because evidence suggests that Behn, in many ways, lived and loved within a libertine framework.⁴² I would argue that this change in perception makes a good deal of sense. Not only does it herald the consensus in contemporary financial literature that women cannot afford to ignore the rise of symbolic credit and its inseparable link to their lives, but it also supports Behn's "conviction that inclinations change" (Todd 393).

Furthermore, it is additional evidence for what Derek Hughes claims is a marker of Behn's late dramatic work: "the sympathetic interest in the amoral female manipulator" (176). Behn's personal life was not one the public would pay to see onstage, so while she could (at some point in her life) imagine possibilities for love outside the institution of marriage, her audience could (or would) not participate in imagining them in the cultural space of the theater. In the end, all evidence suggests that, like so many of her female characters, even Behn failed to get both emotional and financial security from her lover, John Hoyle.

Notes

¹ Susan Owen discusses the contradictions between Behn's political ties to the Stuart line and her precarious position as a commercial writer in "Behn's Response to Restoration Politics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, Eds. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, 68-82.

² Janet Todd's *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* has proven an indispensable resource for those studying Behn's biography. She not only draws on the previous work of Maureen Duffy's *The Passionate Shepherdess* and George Woodcock's *The Incomparable Aphra*, but also includes new historical and literary evidence in her very extensive project.

³ Todd, Janet. *The Sign of Angellica*, 69.

⁴ The records for her service in reprinted in J.W. Cameron's *New Light on Aphra Behn*. Auckland: University of Auckland Press, 1961.

⁵ Todd explains that Behn may have made between £15 and £25 for the play, which would have been persuasive enough to convince her to continue writing for the stage. This amount would have allowed her to support "herself and a few servants," *The Secret Life*, 146.

⁶ Cotton, 59-60. For a more thorough discussion of Behn's circle of theater friends, see Todd's *Secret Life*, 122-134.

⁷ Hoyle appears in her works as Amyntas, Lysander, and Lysidas, Duffy, 132.

⁸ In Behn's *DNB* entry, Todd notes that "Despite the arrival of a welcome new order and her considerable activity in prose and poetry, Behn remained impecunious and an IOU dated August 1685 (Folger Shakespeare Library) recorded a loan of £6 to be repaid from the proceeds of her next play."

⁹ Though many of Behn's plays make use of mistaken identities, accidents, and disguises to create complicated plot twists, as is typical of the intrigue play, they do not, I would argue, do so at the "expense of characterization of theme," which is how Laura Brown describes the intrigue in *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760*, p. 30. What she calls "dramatic social satire" is defined as "a generic rejection of the aesthetic premises of the earlier form and a turn instead toward clearly differentiated characters, toward conflict, and even toward unresolvable contradiction," 32.

¹⁰ This is in the sense that they are forced to rely solely on credit, as they have no ready money of their own.

¹¹ Take, for example, Willmore, in *The Second Part of The Rover*. Not only did he gain control of Hellena's fortune when marrying her at the end of the original *Rover*, but we find out in the second *Rover* that he managed to spend every penny of her fortune in just over a month's time (1.1.125-32).

¹² Behn is a bit of an exception here, as Janet Todd points out that almost all of her plays were published, which was a "considerable achievement" (*Secret Life* 147).

¹³ As we shall see, this changed by the eighteenth century, when such sales became quite profitable. For more, see Kenny's "The Publication of Plays" in *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800*, 309-336.

¹⁴ With regard to the play's popularity, it was performed seventy times between 1700-1725 and at least eighty-eight times between 1726-1760. See Link's introduction for a full account of the changes Behn made to the play. By all accounts, her changes were considered improvements on the original, xi-xiii.

¹⁵ Link describes this process in terms of how Angellica's reappearance at the end of the play as "an artificial and conventional type is remarkably unconvincing." As such, according to Link's logic, she is left a "believable and individualized woman," xvi.

¹⁶ I use this term as a reference to what James Thompson calls "a kind of crisis in the concept of value" placed both on various forms of money and individual subjects in the late seventeenth century. *Models of Value*, 15-39.

¹⁷ I am referring specifically to the change Susan Staves describes as a shift from "just price" to a "new capitalist regime of 'market value'" ("Behn, Women, and Society" 26).

¹⁸ This reference to the original work is interesting also because it plays on the longstanding link made between actresses and whores. Even though the "new made Gentlewoman" is not selling sex, she is playing the part of a woman who might.

¹⁹ Brackets my own.

²⁰ The last words of the second act are Moretta's, as she explains poor men as the "Enemy" to the trade of prostitution and falling in love as the unfortunate "Fate of most Whores (2.2.424-29).

²¹ I use the term "fallen" here not in reference to a loss of literal virginity or virtue, but rather a loss of innocence on Angellica's behalf. Her heart is undoubtedly broken, and our sympathy lies with her despite the fact that she is a prostitute.

²² The passage is ironic, though, as it implies that even men who are constant to the Royal cause will, at some point, falter, a suggestion supported by Derek Hughes claim that, while “Cavalier exiles are bound together by common cause with their king, and a shared—if sometimes strained or violated—set of distinctively male codes and loyalties, . . . [they] were just as subject to faction and in-fighting as any group” (*The Theater of Aphra Behn* 82-83).

²³ The few exceptions include Peggy Thompson, Closure and Subversion in Behn’s Comedies in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, Ed. Katherine M. Quinsey, Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 71-88; Lynne Taetzsch, Romantic Love Replaces Kinship Exchange in Aphra Behn’s Restoration Drama, *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 17.1(1993): 30-39; Heidi Hutner, “Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*, Parts I and II” in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993, 102-120.

²⁴ As Maureen Duffy explains, during one of his periods of exile, Wilmot pretended to be Alexander Bendo, a famous Italian mountebank, and secured some success and profit by prescribing medicine and telling fortunes, *Passionate Shepherdess*, 200.

²⁵ Normally used as a reference to the official, itemized receipt given by the master of a merchant vessel to the person consigning the goods. This document transfers responsibility for the goods and their safe delivery to the shipmaster. As the legal proof of ownership of the goods, the bill (or a copy of it) is often deposited with a creditor as security for money advanced.

²⁶ Here I am using the Saussurean framework established in *Course in General Linguistics*, Eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1966.

²⁷ For a full discussion of the work done on Lady Credit, see Sherman, *Finance* 40-54.

²⁸ Indeed, this seems to be the foundational premise behind the financial literature of one of today’s popular financial gurus, Suze Orman, whose works are geared largely toward women. Also see works like Hilary Black’s *The Secret Currency of Love: The Unabashed Truth about Women, Money, and Relationships* (2009); Daniela Drake and Elizabeth Ford’s *Smart Girls Marry Money: How Women Have Been Duped Into the Romantic Dream—And How They’re Paying for It* (2009); Liz Perle’s *Money, A Memoir: Women, Emotions, and Cash* (2006); Barbary Stanny’s *Prince Charming Isn’t Coming: How Women Get Smart About Money* (2007). This is only a short list of the

most recent popular literature concerned with women's "troubled" relationship with money.

²⁹ To be fair, Beaumont actually claims to love her as well, but stops short of offering a promise of marriage.

³⁰ This passage is a bit misleading because Willmore actually does take money from La Nuche at one point, thus making him a political mercenary (he has fought for the royal cause) as well as a sexual one.

³¹ In fact, La Nuche has only a few lines after this point, and they are only in reference to jewels that Petronella has stolen.

³² See especially Susan J. Owen, "Behn's dramatic response to Restoration politics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, 68-82; Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, New York: Palgrave, 2001, 147; and Robert Markley, "'Be impudent, be saucy, forward, bold, touzing, and leud': The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies", in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theater*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah C. Payne, Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1995, 114-40.

³³ *Women*, 117-120. As she explains, the King's Company and the Duke's Company joined together, with two important consequences. The first was the decreased ability for companies to advance loans to authors of forthcoming productions; the second was the increased, "reckless" competition between playwrights to have their work performed.

³⁴ Robert Markley, though, has recently approached the play by looking at the relationship between Behn's "feminism" and the contemporary success of her works, "Aphra Behn's *The City Heiress*: Feminism and the Dynamics of Popular Success on the Late Seventeenth-Century Stage," *Comparative Drama*, 41.2 (2007): 141-166.

³⁵ The one exception I have found is Lussier's "'The Vile Merchandize of Fortune': Women, Economy, and Desire in Aphra Behn," *Women's Studies*, 1991: 379-393. While Lussier relies on some of the same connections I am making about Behn's work, his primary concern is to explore the relationship between economic discourse and the psychological complexity of Behn's female characters in just two plays, *The Feign'd Curtizans* and *City-Heiress*.

³⁶ This scene can be linked to Craig Muldrew's claim that, by the mid-1600s, "credit became synonymous with reputation" (*Economy of Obligation* 149).

³⁷ I find it useful to point out here that in all the plays discussed in this project it is the maids who understand the need to keep concerns of love separate from concerns about money.

³⁸ Most of Behn's plays that include widows do not paint them in a flattering light. They frequently follow the early modern stereotype that Jennifer Panek studies in quite useful work, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

³⁹ The text of the play indicates that Charlot's father has left her sole heir of his fortune, which is not dependent upon her marrying.

⁴⁰ This conclusion may be drawn from the references Wilding makes to love early in the play. In conversations with both Charlot and Lady Galliard, Wilding repeatedly aligns marriage with business, which is required to make his fortune, while love is something that happens outside of marriage.

⁴¹ Much like Hellena did after marrying Willmore, who spent his dead wife's fortune in less than a month.

⁴² See especially, Todd's *The Secret Life*, 174-84; Duffy's *Passionate Shepherdess*, 130-40; Woodcock's *The Incomparable Aphra* 104-118; and Fidelis Morgan's *The Female Wits*, 21-22.

CHAPTER IV

ARIADNE, MARY PIX, AND IDEAL VENTURES

“The Art of laying out your Money Wisely must be one of a woman’s greatest cares.
—*The Whole Duty of a Woman... Written by a Lady* (1696)

At least two of the female dramatists who followed in Behn’s footsteps seem to have adapted the “amoral female manipulator” (Hughes 176) as a main character in their plays. The heroines of the plays discussed in this chapter appear on the stage during a time when the discourse of credit in England was at its peak. In fact, Julian Hoppit argues that “In no decade between 1680 and 1790 were there more crises than in the 1690s” (“Attitudes” 308). The traits these heroines embody represent a remarkable balance in the debate over the rise of credit in contemporary financial literature. These characters recognize creditability—whether in the form of reliable vows, stable contracts, or the value of character—as necessary to determine and work to do so successfully, yet they are not depicted as fortune hunters, whores, or greedy businesswomen who have been corrupted by the rise of paper credit.¹ The first of these playwrights, the pseudonymous Ariadne (c. 1696), develops the trope with one crucial difference: her heroine begins with economic independence. The second playwright studied in this chapter, Mary Pix (1666-1709), offers two versions of this character, both of whom also begin with economic independence. With their heroines, Ariadne and Pix seem to have emphasized manipulation over amorality, thus raising the question of the morality of manipulation. That is, their versions of this character are pictures of virtue,

manipulating men in order to test or reform their character rather than to swindle or cheat them. They maintain a shrewd sense of economics, pragmatism, and financial independence without appearing mercenary, something Behn's fallen heroines could not achieve. They also differ from Centlivre's heroines who, according to Misty Anderson, understand that the authority their "wealth brings in marriage does not translate into full subjectivity thereafter" (133).

This chapter focuses on the connection between the speculative discourse of credit and women's economic agency. I argue that the two were inextricably linked in women's dramatic writing in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century and that the connection is seen most clearly in the representation of women working together to ensure financial competence and a working knowledge of monetary functions. Dramatic writing during this time reveals the pressure English men and women faced to understand and respond to shifting concepts of wealth, value, and virtue. The economic context surrounding post-1688 playwrights was one in which "banks and books and bills of credit and cheques and the numerous similar objects that...in themselves concretize the historic relation between money and words" (Peters 367). The way female dramatists responded to this relation, however, differed significantly from their male counterparts. In Ariadne's work, we see a response in the characters as well as in the questions the play raises about the identity (or lack thereof) of the author. Ariadne did more than simply create female characters who talked about money. She not only created a play that allowed her to avoid the personal and financial loss that comes with a damaged public reputation, but she also developed one of the most financially savvy female

characters to be found on the Restoration stage. She is one of the only playwrights in the period to use both male and female characters to represent a radical possibility for women's economic independence within late-seventeenth century financial discourse. At the same time, she uses the language of speculative investment to secure her position as a commercial playwright.

To a large extent, each of the plays studied here responds to the issue of fortune-hunting, which was dramatized in popular literature throughout the early modern period. In *Female Grievances Debated* (1707), a fictional dialogue between two sisters, the sixth dialogue between Eliza and Mariana treats “the Unreasonableness and Injustice of Marrying for Money, and the great Misfortunes that frequently attend those that do.”² Though Eliza claims that both sexes could benefit from a resolution not to put “that Base Corrupter of Sorded Minds, *Interest*,” before love, she is also the one to explain that it is men who have “grown so very *Mercenary*, that a *Cobler* (if he has but the Vanity to think himself a good Workman) will “value his Auls and his Art, and every Grizly Hair of his Frowzy Party-colour'd Beard at such a rate, that a Fat-Sided *Hostess* would find it no little piece of difficulty to win his Favour so far, as to Noose him for a Cloak, without she can give him a Hundred Pounds or two, to sling away at *All-Fours*, *Shovel-Board* and *Nine-Pins*” (154). Evidence that women, too, were represented and stereotyped as fortune-hunters is cited in the example of a “Thousand Pound Lady, with a stinking Breath, and as Crooked as a *Rams Horn*, upon a *Marriage Treaty*, refuse to bait Ten Shillings a Year of her Jointure, in consideration of her Infirmities” (155). As these ladies see it, the problem has gotten so bad that “*Matrimony*, amongst Men, is become as

meer a *Money-getting-Trade*, as any they were Prentic'd to," and men now auction themselves amongst fathers struggling to make the highest bid (155-56).

Literary representation of marriage as a primarily financial enterprise is not new. Aaron Kitch and Richard Horwich have studied the function of economic discourse and ideology in Jacobean city comedies, and their work is useful in locating early criticism of the mercenary motives often associated with the capitalist pursuit of wealth.³ The economic and social context at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, including the founding of the Bank of England and the establishment of national debt and credit, imparts a greater significance to dramatic representations during the period studied here. Because this is a moment when ideas about wealth and value are shifting, because women at this time had a greater the potential freedom (practical if not always legal) to enjoy a certain amount of economic independence, and because of the link between commercial writing and new forms of paper credit, popular literature that frames marriage within larger cultural conversations about money are especially important. As we will see from the plays studied here, contemporary dialogues, such as the one between Eliza and Mariana, embody concerns unique to women's dramatic writing in the 1690s and early 1700s.⁴

Considered together, the heroines in Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins* (1696) and Mary Pix's *The Different Widows* (1700) serve as transitional figures between Behn's mercenary prostitutes and Centlivre's married women. Within their respective plays, they enjoy an economic freedom and subjectivity, which I argue is connected to the financial discourse at the turn of the century. Moreover, their financial

know-how is directly related to relationships they build with other women. In this chapter I consider the two female playwrights who best represented concepts of the “ideal” way women might respond to and successfully negotiate the discourse of credit. This is not to suggest a singular ideal existed, but rather to examine how female playwrights imagined the best possible scenarios for women in two of the most common life-stages: as young would-be brides, and later in life, as widows.

“Safely then She Ventures”: Ariadne’s Risk-Free Investment

While a growing number of early modern literary scholars have paid critical attention to the works of Delariviere Manley, Mary Pix, and Catherine Trotter, there remains a relatively small circle of critics who have commented on the work of one of their lesser-known contemporaries: a young woman known only as Ariadne.⁵ Like the Female Wits, Ariadne used her writing to address the challenges women faced in negotiating the late-seventeenth century marriage market and to critique the ways legal and social institutions worked to deny women’s economic agency and independence. Unlike her peers, however, Ariadne refused to reveal her identity, either by directly signing her name or by including identifying information in the prefatory material, both of which were common practice for male and female playwrights between 1660 and 1800. Also distinguishing Ariadne from her female contemporaries is her representation of early modern women as financially savvy subjects, capable of negotiating their own economic and romantic fates. Though her play has been nearly forgotten in most accounts of theater and literary history, Ariadne, the female characters she created, and the words they spoke, are worth further study, as they demonstrate a critical link

between gender, authorship, commercial dramatic writing, and the speculative discourse of credit. By investigating this link, I argue that Ariadne created both an “ideal investor” in terms of her heroine and a “risk-free” investment in terms of her authorship.

Though it may be an implicit presence in the preceding and following chapters, in this section I would like to more carefully consider the speculative nature of authorship. This entails thinking not only about the practice of writing as a commercially speculative venture, but also by necessity considering the writer as speculator. Catherine Ingrassia briefly traces this idea in her discussion of Eliza Haywood, the literary marketplace’s turn to fiction, and Alexander Pope’s suspicious attitude toward the rise of paper credit.⁶ The dynamics of her study, however, are different from my own because of her focus on fiction and other forms of prose writing. My focus on drama requires a consideration of similar elements (i.e. economic motivation of the writer, content, and popular and critical reception), but even those elements exist in a somewhat different context because of generic differences. Investigating the speculative nature of commercial dramatic authorship, especially in relation to gender, I consider the pseudonymous Ariadne, female theatergoers, and the discourse of credit in the 1690s.

The 1695 comedy, *She Ventures, and He Wins*, opened the season at Lincoln’s-Inn Fields and is the only known publication we can attribute to the pseudonymous young playwright.⁷ Though no contemporary descriptions of its production have been found, the general conclusion has been that the play failed to attract a large enough audience to secure a second performance. In fact, Max Novak speculates that this failure caused the theater to shut down until December. The few scholars who have studied the

play have focused mainly on the issue of the writer's identity rather than the play itself, and have each come to differing conclusions regarding the "true" Ariadne. Constance Clark relies mainly on contextual evidence from the play's preface and Prologue to suggest that the young lady might be Mary Pix (21-23).⁸ Gilli Bush-Bailey, on the other hand, suggests that Elizabeth Barry, one of the period's most famous actresses, is behind the pseudonym. She supports the claim by drawing on Barry's familiarity with Behn's writing style and structure; her upbringing in the Davenant house (which would have given her an education similar to the one Ariadne claims to have); her extensive knowledge and experience with the business of theatre; and the "teasing tone" of the Epilogue that indicates the playwright was well known to the audience (120). While I do not discount the possibility that Barry might have penned the play, several of the reasons offered for this conclusion are also applicable to other prominent women in the theatre business in the 1690s. Indeed, Bush-Bailey goes on to discuss Manley, Trotter, and Centlivre, each of whom had a great familiarity with Behn's style, the business of theatre, and the mechanics of either performance or production of plays. The fact remains, however, that none of Ariadne's contemporaries ever referred to her—directly or indirectly—in any of the writings they left behind.

The real identity of the playwright, however, is less critical to my task than is the question of what she is hoping to accomplish by *not* revealing her identity. Addressing the significance of women in the history of theatre—and specifically the possibility of an actress turned playwright—Bush-Bailey explains that, "The fusion of text and performance suggested by the creative engagement of an actress/playwright goes

directly against the grain of a theatre history that continues to struggle with the implications of women as a central force in the public sphere of the playhouse” (122). Regardless of whether or not Ariadne was indeed an actress herself, the implications of this claim underscore the importance of studying this play (and other anonymous or pseudonymous plays) in particular. Furthermore, if we understand that quite a number of plays—at least 20—had been published under a woman’s name between 1670 and 1695, what prompted Ariadne to veil herself?⁹ What did she hope to gain by protecting her identity? And finally, did she actually accomplish anything by taking on a pseudonym?

The comedy’s tight plot structure focuses on Charlot, a rich young heiress played by Anne Bracegirdle, and her efforts to find a husband who will love her for person as well as her fortune. The object of her affection is the likeable and honorable Lovewell, a younger brother whom Charlot tests in various ways to determine his value system and honesty. The play features Barry as a vintner’s wife, Urania, who works with her husband to expose the deceitful Squire Wouldbe to his own jealous spouse.¹⁰ While Urania’s husband helps her carry out the bedtricks repeatedly played on Wouldbe, he nonetheless harbors his own suspicion of his wife’s loyalties. He has no reason to doubt her, as “in this play every trick and disguise planned by the women, including the provocative breeches role, is designed to expose the duplicitous nature of men and affirm the honesty of women” (Bush-Bailey 121). Thus, while both men and women resort to trickery and various forms of disguise to hide their identity, the distinction is made between women, who do so to protect their interests (financial, emotional, or

moral), and men, who do so in order to seduce, cuckold, and defraud others primarily to satisfy their sexual desires.

Given the specific historical context during which this play was written and performed, I think it is more than a matter of coincidence that Ariadne's work is largely concerned with distinguishing the stable moral and financial values of women from the deceptive nature of men.¹¹ *She Ventures, and He Wins* was performed one year after the Bank of England was founded. It appeared on the stage at a time when the struggle to find fixed forms of economic value was at its height, especially in London, where "credit networks and flows of bills of exchange" were centered (Hoppit, *Risk and Failure* 70). Debates over coin, credit, and the establishment of national (and public) debt flourished in this moment, and dramatic literature was not exempt from the influence of this discourse. In fact, as J.S. Peters explains, dramatic literature was unique because it existed on the stage and in print. Because the playwright could sell the printed play, "the portable script" was as important a form of paper credit as checks and bank notes (373).

Popular literature such as ballads and broadsides, as well as drama, reinforced the anxiety over shifting systems of value. For women, this concern manifested itself in texts warning them about men's deceptive nature, as in the case of *The Womens just Complaint: or, Mans Deceitfulness in Love* (1670-1696). The ballad cautions women that: "They [men] breath false sighs to win us, / and Counterfeit Loves pain, / And into Bonds they bring us, / with flatteries so vain." While the "Bonds" mentioned in the ballad likely refer to matrimonial bonds, it is worth mentioning that a man's financial obligations transferred to his wife upon his death.¹² The author of this broadside seems

keenly aware that this was not the case, however, for any inheritance a man received: “All Wedlock tyes Defieing, / when once their Wills they gain.” This example is important not only because it speaks to the economic repercussions women faced as a result of men’s “false sighs,” but also because it exposes the theater as a site of circulation for such literature. The subtitle of the work describes it as “a most Pleasant new Play-house Song,” thus reinforcing the notion of the theater as a space where both social and economic meanings are constructed. In this case, a specific type of meaning, advice, is geared for a particular group of theatergoers—women.

While Behn’s heroines repeatedly faced the issue of money as a matter of survival, Ariadne’s heroine does not. In *The Rover* (1677), Hellena and Angellica epitomize the options available to female characters: either marry to maintain moral, legal, and (hopefully) financial security, or, as in the case of La Nuche, venture on mutual affection while living in poverty.¹³ Of course, the third option was to work as a prostitute, which was a profitable trade for La Nuche and her predecessor. Both, however, were economically ‘undone’ by their final acts. Behn’s Angellica and La Nuche appear to have the freedom to please themselves in their choices, but they must always consider the financial risk associated with those choices. In comparison, Ariadne’s Charlot stands out not only because of her ability to choose her own husband but also because she begins with economic, moral, and legal security. She has inherited a significant fortune, her virtue is never suspect, and she enjoys the support of a brother who trusts the honor of their family in her hands. Further comparison to Centlivre’s heroines, who are often under the authority of one or more male guardians or a spouse,

underscores the fact Charlot is recognized as “free and absolute” by her closest male relative (I.ii.13).¹⁴

From the start of the play, she has her own capital and is free to manage her fortune as she sees fit. Fully aware of the value placed on youth and money and the narrowly-defined role women were expected to perform, she defiantly proclaims to her cousin Juliana:

...I'm not obliged to follow the World's dull Maxims, nor will I wait for the formal Address of some Ceremonious Coxcomb, with more Land than Brains, who would bargain for us as he would for his Horse, and talks of nothing but Taxes and hard Times, to make me a good Housewife; or else some gay young fluttering Thing, who calls himself a Beau, and wants my Fortune to maintain him in that Character. (I.i.2)

Charlot refuses to play the part of “good Housewife” or fund a new husband’s lifestyle and instead resolves to marry only for real love. Though her cousin acknowledges the advantages Charlot has on her side—“Humour gay, and Wit refined, and Beauty enough to tempt a Hermit”—she is quick to remind Charlot of the difficulty she faces in “the business” of distinguishing men’s motives (I.i.2). Implied in Juliana’s warning, as well as contemporary advice for women, is that they must take seriously the task of determining men’s character, rather than let themselves be swept away by emotion, which is what frequently motivates heroines to pursue men other than those chosen by their parents or guardians.

Juliana's use of the word "business" reveals a keen perception of the stakes involved in the marriage market, which offers women up to the highest bidder and often leaves them with little say in the negotiation. The option to remain single did not always exist, and when it did, it sometimes came with serious consequences. If remaining single was not a viable option, then the best a woman could hope for was a companionable husband who could provide economic and legal security.¹⁵ Thus, it was not the business of married life but rather the business of choosing a husband where women could make decisions that most directly affected their futures. In *The Whole Duty of Woman ... Written by a Lady* (1696), the relationship between the language of business (especially economics) and that of marriage supports the kind of premise with which Charlot begins her search for a husband. Just as Charlot proceeds from the understanding that choosing a husband is careful business, particularly when one's fortune is at stake, contemporary conduct literature advised women to carefully balance their spending because they were accountable to their husbands. This connection speaks to the importance of women's ability to understand contemporary financial discourse and successfully manage their own as well as their husband's credit. Ultimately, both texts rely on demonstrating that reason should guide women's decisions in matters of money and men.

Also distinguishing this play from its contemporaries is the character of Charlot's brother, Sir Charles. As the double name (Charlot/Charles) implies, her brother shares many of his sister's beliefs regarding gender equity in the marriage market. He not only approves of Charlot's freedom to choose a husband for herself, but also supports her

managing her own fortune. Charles does not stand unchallenged in his attitude however, as his friend, Sir Roger, warns “what Assurance have you she will not blind with that mad Passion, be betrayed to match her self to one unworthy of her Merit, and bring an Alliance to your Family, you’d blush to own” (II.ii.13). His concern reinforces the stereotype of the hysterical woman, led blindly by emotion instead of logic (Laqueur 108) and anticipates the allegories of Trade (Defoe) and Public Credit (Addison), which linked new financial instruments with feminine excess (Clery 24-25).¹⁶ Charles stands firm in the trust he places in Charlot and is convinced that his family’s honor is safe. Important in his exchange with Roger is the logic Sir Charles uses when he explains that Charlot is “free and absolute, and has as much Right to dispose of her self and Fortune as I of mine” (II.ii.13). This is a remarkable distinction for a male character and, in creating the brother and sister pair, Ariadne represents a radical, if ideal, possibility for both men’s and women’s thinking about money and marriage

In many ways, Charlot can be seen as an ideal investor. The use of the term investor may at first seem anachronistic because the height of speculative mania and public stock frenzy coincided primarily with the rise of the South Sea Company in the first two decades of the eighteenth century. Conceptually, however, I think the term is appropriate to use in light of the longstanding history of cultural and social credit networks. Craig Muldrew traces what he calls “chains of credit” back to 1550 and grounds his argument in the claim that “most credit was extended between individual emotional agents” (3). Likewise, Fernand Braudel mentions that the idea of credit is actually quite old and that “as soon as men had known how to write and had had coins to

handle they had replaced cash with written documents, notes, promises and orders” (*Economy* 359). Contemporary advice books and financial literature of the late seventeenth century were concerned with accurate accounting practices (i.e. Chamberlain’s *The Accomptant’s Guide*), rather than describing to readers how to be a successful investor. The morality of borrowing and lending practices—stock-jobbing in particular—was a frequent topic for debate, as was the increasing debasement and scarcity of English coin.¹⁷

At the heart of the speculative discourse of credit, however, was the epistemological problem of truth. The struggle to determine a person or thing’s *real* value, then, was inherently a process of speculation. With the proliferation of instruments of paper credit came an increased potential for fraud, counterfeit documents, and forged identities. Though one of the more hopeful threads of discourse associated with the establishment of public credit was that such a system could avoid the debasement and scarcity of material associated with precious metals, it did not take long for the instability of credit to reveal itself. Within one year of the founding of the Bank of England in 1695, the problems associated with a credit-based financial system were a main concern of English citizens, especially the growing merchant class, whose livelihoods often depended upon extensive networks of credit and debt. The ability to effectively judge someone’s creditworthiness was an important feature of daily life. As Muldrew explains, the “increasing complexity of credit networks, combined with the need to compete for customers’ business to make a profit” resulted in the frequent

breakdown of trust, and despite its instability, trust is a required component of any social relation where exchange takes place (137).

Thus, prior to the establishment of national debt and credit, which included the formation of public stock companies, individuals concerned themselves with the investments they made in each other, promises to pay back money or goods borrowed from a neighbor, for example. Before the early eighteenth century, when potential investors would make judgments about the stability or worthiness of structured organizations (rather than individuals), household members and tradesmen were faced with judging the creditability of a friend, family member, or other member of a local community. Earlier models for determining a person's character included a reliance on name or rank, but by the end of the seventeenth century, a name was no longer sufficient and neither was the notion of honor. According to Muldrew, "...the most reliable means of judging someone's credit was direct interpersonal contact with the person who was to be trusted" (151). As people struggled for new ways to find proof of value and worth, they simultaneously confronted problems associated with representations of identity. One could not determine worth apart from a consideration of identity. The strategy of "direct interpersonal contact" might work in most cases, but it has specific problems when we consider women and the marriage market.

Part of being an "ideal investor" was an awareness of the difference between outside appearances and internal truth and an understanding of the process of determining character.¹⁸ Lisa Freeman's judicious study on the ways eighteenth-century drama used character as its rubric for representing identity is useful to consider here. The

ability to accurately determine character was important in almost all aspects of social relations. I would suggest, however, that nowhere could it be more important to women than in the selection of a husband. Women collide with the world of speculative investment in the realm of the marriage market, and the stakes involved in determining inner truth and intrinsic value of a person are never higher.¹⁹ Charlot's plan anticipates the failure of the three methods Fielding advised his eighteenth-century readers to use to determine a man's character.²⁰ Explaining her design, she tells Juliana that her plan is

...to ramble the Town till I can meet with the Man I can find in my heart to take for better for worse. These Cloaths will give us greater Liberty than the scandalous World will allow to our Petticoats, which we could not attempt this Undertaking in without hazard to our Modesty. Besides, any other means to discover his Humour; for they are so used to flatter and deceive our Sex, that there's nothing but the Angel appears, tho' the Devil lies lurking within, and never so much as shews his Paw till he has got his Prey fast in his Clutches. (I.i.1)

Charlot is aware that actions do not reveal a man's "Humour"—which I would suggest is synonymous with character—because they are mere theatrics designed to seduce women. The need for disguise underscores the material difficulties women faced in trying to speculate about a man's value as a potential husband. This strategy is all the more important when we consider that it did not have a counterpart in men's dramatic writing of the period.

Juliana indicates that Charlot's plan is necessary and wise, but wonders at Charlot's ability to carry it off without falling victim herself: "Methinks you that have so true a notion of that treacherous Sex, should be afraid to venter for fear of being your self deceived" (I.i.1). Juliana's concern gets to the heart of the matter for women—especially those with money—on the marriage market: If men are inherently the "false Sex," as she calls them later, then how is a woman to find "real love?" (I.i.2) For Charlot, the solution is a series of tests designed to reveal Lovewell's true character.²¹ In approaching Lovewell and the possibility of marriage in this way, Charlot's actions bear out a resemblance to the cautionary strategies and advice given to early modern English men and women who were faced with new opportunities of investing in the Bank of England, the South Sea Company, and other public stock options. That is, in the process of choosing a husband, Charlot employs investment strategies which demonstrate a concern for securing her finances as well as her marital happiness. She combines this approach with the epistemological concern of character in determining Lovewell's credibility. In doing this, Charlot represents a new way for women to negotiate the marriage market: like businessmen. Max Novak points out the feminist role reversal that results not only from Charlot dressing like a man, but also from the great extent of her "humiliation" of Lovewell (51). Charlot offers audience members—and readers of the published play the following year—a picture of a financially and contractually independent woman, something that may have ultimately been too subversive for its time.

The only reference to the play's reception after performance is a manuscript news report attached to *The Post Boy* issue for 17-19 September 1695, which reads:

The new playhouse in Lincoln Inns Fields is Shut up the last
New play Not taking brot. In by Mrs Barry called She ventures
and he Wins. (cited in Novak 51-52)

If we are to understand that the failure of the this play's performance was enough to shut down the theater for several months afterward, then it is important to remember that the play still managed to get published the following year in at least three separate runs.²² Despite the play's alleged inability to please audiences at the theater—or quite possibly the reason it did not please them—was that it provided a powerful image of a *kind of* woman not yet seen on the stage.²³ Charlot works with the support of another woman to ensure the character of her future husband, something that might lead audience members and readers to believe that her fortune would be 'safe' after marriage. In creating a female character who maintains her virtue while also calculating the risks involved in her marital prospects, Ariadne took a certain risk of her own, one that is highlighted in the Epilogue of the play.

The Epilogue written for *She Ventures, He Wins* is just as critical to my purpose as is the play itself. As theatre historians like James Thorson, Elizabeth Howe, and James Sutherland have shown, prologues and epilogues written and performed after the Restoration often took on a life of their own.²⁴ Sutherland has gone as far as claiming that, "Whatever value we may place on the drama of the Restoration period, there can be no question that this was the golden age of the prologue and epilogue" (37). In contrast

to pre-Restoration practice, prologues and epilogues came to be seen as important parts of the entertainment, and they enjoyed a much greater liberty with the audience, especially critics in the pit. These dramatic end-pieces did not, as before, serve merely to introduce a play or ask for approval from the audience. Rather, they interacted with the various categories of audience members in a familiar and conversational—even if sometimes critical—manner and relied on the great skill and wit of writers to create one of the seventeenth-century's most recognizable forms.

The form became highly personalized as playwrights began choosing specific writers to develop prologues and epilogues for particular players. Most often the writer based the work on a well-known player, someone whose personal reputation was equally famous. Howe explains, Restoration prologues and epilogues

...were generally more scurrilous, more satirical, and more wittily polished than their Renaissance predecessors and, most important of all, they were often tailored to the personality of the player who was to deliver them and could only be spoken by that player. Thus the new prologues and epilogues created theatrical moments when the players apparently abandoned their roles and stepped forward as 'themselves' to address spectators. (92)

Such intimacy helped to forge a link between player and spectator, or more often than not, actress and spectator. Another development was the privileging of the epilogue over the prologue. That is, the number of epilogues (versus prologues) that were given to actresses indicates that a much greater importance was placed on the epilogue and the

ability of an actress to leave a good final impression on the audience, perhaps even counterbalance the effects of a poor performance.²⁵ As Felicity Nussbaum has noted, women’s successful entrance on the London stage depended just as much upon “...women’s genuine entrepreneurial skill and increasing economic authority” as their erotic bodily presence (Nussbaum 138-39). With these points in mind, the epilogue for Ariadne’s work takes on even greater significance.

The play’s Epilogue was written by Peter Anthony Motteux, a relatively new member of the London literary circle who had high ambitions for becoming a professional playwright.²⁶ When the play was produced, Motteux was yet a novice writer, hoping to profit in the business of theater. His ambition and success was aided to some extent by the growing number of friends he had in London’s theater community. One of those friends, it seems, was our own Ariadne, who used the play’s Epilogue as a way of explaining her unwillingness to identify herself to her audience. The Epilogue, spoken by Mr. Dogget—“drest as a Beau”—is included here in its entirety:

*Our Poetess is troubled in her Mind,
 Like some young Thing, not so discreet as kind,
 Who, Without Terms, has her dear Toy resign’d.
 You all are wild to bring her to the touch;
 You beg, you press, you swear, and promise much; 5
 ’Twere well if your performances were such
 Our Authress now is in, at your Devotion,
 Tho’ she, perhaps to please you, want the Notion,
 Be gen’rous once, she’ll quickly mend her Motion.
 For, pray take notice, ’tis her Maidenhead, 10
 (that of her Brain I mean) and you that wed
 Feel seldom easie Joys, till that is fled.
 If you are kind, she’s willing to go on;
 But if you turn her off, the Nymph turns Nun;
 And what a scandal wou’d be to the Nation, 15
 Shou’d some for want of Trade leave their Vocation;*

*And, among Friars pray for Occupation?
 I'm much afraid a Woman's like a Play,
 You'd have 'em new and pretty ev'ry Day,
 Or, else, your Servant; 'gad I cannot stay. 20*
*'Tis true, you wait a while in expectation
 (When up the Curtain flies) of Recreation;
 But you all go, when ere the Play is done;
 Then down the Curtain drops, and whip you're gone,
 And thence to tell ungrateful Truths you run. 25*
*Be kinder; let our unknown Fair appease ye,
 Tho' you mislike her Play, her Face may please ye:
 She hides it now, yet she mislikes the Task,
 But knows how much you love a Vizard Mask.
 Yet sure she must-be safe among You here; 30*
*We Beaux can ne're be Criticks on the Fair:
 As for you, Judges, if I rightly know ye,
 You shou'd think that ungrateful Task below ye.
 Ye Braves, that made your Campaign at the Wells,
 Storming the Breach of some Fair Citadels, 35*
*If kind, may chance to find out where she dwells.
 Ladies, for your own sakes you must be kind;
 Lest, while we scarce one writing Beauty find,
 Vain Man deny your Sex the Graces of the Mind.
 Take you her part, the Men of course submit, 40*
*And so your Beauty shall secure her Wit.
 Let all these Reasons kindly draw you in,
 And safely then She Ventures, and we Win.²⁷*

Shortly after likening the playwright with the play and criticizing the audience for expecting newness and beauty in both each day (lines 18-24), the Epilogue teases the audience with the prospect of Ariadne revealing her face, which is not necessarily the same thing as revealing her identity.²⁸ Thus, it is important to note the distinction being made between face/beauty and identity/name. Ariadne's decision to hide her face is explained in terms of what she "dislikes," revealing her own physical person, and what she "knows," which can be taken in a twofold manner. That is, she knows (or at least *thinks* she knows) what her audience wants: to be able to put a face with the name.

Instead of the playwright's face, the audience gets the pleasure associated with "a Vizard Mask" and the beauty of something or someone other than the playwright herself: female theatergoers.²⁹

As we see in the rest of the speech, Ariadne's chance to profit commercially is framed within the discourse of speculative finance, which figures the female audience members as physical collateral and proof of the playwright's wit. In order for the play/playwright to succeed, women must work together. Women in the audience are doubly invested in Ariadne's "venture" because not only the failure of the playwright and her work, but also the fate of future "writing Beaut[ies]" is at risk. The speaker insists that the only way future female dramatists can exist is if the women—for their "own sakes"—receive the play well and allow their bodies to stand in for the Ariadne's, which will ensure submission from the men in the audience. Without this support, according to the logic here, men can easily "deny" the idea that women possess the skill to write. Although, "deny" in this case might also be taken as to prevent women from writing for profit. Neither is desirable, so the impetus is on women to look out for each other.

The risks associated with being a professional female writer were well known, and while some women writers (like Behn and Manley for example) responded to quite virulent criticism directly in their writing, others seem to have made efforts to avoid or lessen potential attacks.³⁰ Centlivre, for example, was fairly successful in avoiding the criticism of her male contemporaries.³¹ Professional writing, then, was a double risk for women in the sense that not only was their personal reputation at stake, but also their

potential for commercial success. One might say that dramatists of both sexes faced the greatest risk because the reception of a play was affected by theatre crowds as well as critics. The audience (or lack thereof) determined the immediate commercial success of a play's performance, while the critical reception that sometimes followed could determine the commercial success of a play's publication or performance revival.

Hoping to improve the chance of success, Ariadne and Motteux use the women in the crowd as security to ensure the safety of both playwright and play. Both her personal and literary reputation are thus protected from the darts of the male gaze and the critic's pen. In other words, through her refusal to connect her identity to the play and by employing the language of speculative investment—specifically in the Epilogue—Ariadne creates what I argue is a “risk-free” investment in terms of commercial drama.

Ariadne is situated between Behn, whose heroines are ultimately forced to choose between love, which means enjoying mutual affection and desire in poverty, or money, which comes in the form of the economic security promised by marriage, and Centlivre, whose heroines fare little better despite the promise of paper credit in the form of marriage contracts and wills. Ultimately, we can never know for certain who the playwright was or why her contemporaries never referred to her. What is important for this study, however, is that the play offers evidence that female dramatists continued to search for new ways to respond to the financial discourse of the period, represent the economic issues middle-class women faced as a result of the financial revolution, and manage the shifting values associated with paper credit and the commercial literary marketplace. As we shall see, Mary Pix's comedy continues the trope of the “amoral

female manipulator,” but contrasts it with what I would call a moral female manipulator. Drawing on another of the three main life-stages early modern women experienced, widowhood, Pix creates what might possibly be the most flattering dramatic representation of a widow on the early eighteenth-century stage.

The Different Widows: Mary Pix and the Business of Mothering

Nancy Cotton claims that, “Of the plays offered by women in the 1695-1696 season, Mary Pix’s are the most entertaining and stageworthy” (90). When she debuted her work in 1696, she produced a tragedy, a farce, and a novel, each of which were successful enough to establish her in the world of London theater.³² Relatively little is known of Pix’s life before her commercial career, but records suggest that she was born in 1666 to Roger Griffith and Lucy Berriman. There are no official records of formal education, but she seems to have been accepted easily into learned and polite company, and her writings suggest she received some education in languages and literature (Clark 187-88). After marrying the merchant tailor George Pix in 1684, she may or may not have enjoyed some financial security. She had turned to commercial writing by 1696 and became quite prolific, despite poor reception of her tragedies and an episode of having one of her plays significantly plagiarized by a contemporary male playwright the next year. According to her entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, she had written twelve plays by the end of her career, more than any previous female playwright except Behn. The year following her debut, she took what became her most popular play, *The Innocent Mistress*, to the Lincoln’s Inn Fields, where she remained an active contributor to the stage for the remainder of her career.³³

The Different Widows (1700) came as Pix's production began to slow, and she was well into her thirties. Trying to earn her living by writing for the stage, Pix's success depended upon her ability to please an audience whose tastes were quickly changing. One of the ways she tried to do this was by creating plays that were primarily about women and the problems they faced, a concern quite absent from the comedies of male contemporaries such as Thomas Southerne, Colley Cibber, John Dryden, and John Vanbrugh. As Juliet McLaren explains, women "were becoming more generally educated and more outspoken about their desire for personal freedom and recognition" (86). Pix's plays mirror this claim, and I would add that they are also connected to apprehensions women had about new forms of wealth, its distribution, and the ability to manage their own economic interests. In *The Different Widows*, this anxiety is framed, on one side, by a daughter whose mother has taught her nothing about portions and marriage settlements and, on the other side, by an "adopted" daughter who works with her future mother-in-law to protect both her own fortune and that which will be passed on to her rather than her husband.

Like *She Ventures, He Wins*, *The Different Widows* uses a comedic plot to highlight the importance of women's management of wealth within a credit-based financial system. When I use the term credit-based, here, I refer not only or even necessarily to a system of paper credit, but also to what Patrick Brantlinger describes in his work on "state fictions."³⁴ He explains that, whether financial, political, military, or social, systems of credit are inherently based on an imaginary future. This is to say that some "thing" (paper, promise, or other token) is offered in the present as a substitute for

a return framed in future terms. Pix's play is unique in that its primary focus is on widows who are left manage their children and their fortunes as they see fit. Other contemporary plays used the stereotype of the lusty, rich widow as a stock character merely to advance a subplot. Pix, however, takes the widow figure as her primary focus and, unlike Behn's *The City-Heiress* and Centlivre's *The Basset-Table* for example, Pix's play goes beyond the mere reformation of the widow character. Rather, it contrasts two widows in an effort to idealize one as a model for prudent moral and financial decision-making. By comparing two "different widows"—Lady Bellmont and Widow Gaylove—the play calls attention to the connections between domestic governance, financial discourse, and motherhood in the eighteenth century. I argue that the differences between the two widows emphasize the importance of women's economic acumen within a culture that is fixated on the speculative discourse of paper credit. Furthermore, Pix's depiction of women working together, in this case a mother and her soon-to-be daughter-in-law, underscores networking as an element critical to women's financial competence.

The main action of the play is split between the reformation of one widow, Lady Gaylove, and the efforts of another, Widow Bellmont, to marry off her debauchee son. Though they are sisters and thus come from the same class background, important distinctions between the two widows are made early. As we see in the *Dramatis Personæ*, the two women are distinguished from one another along class and marital lines, as Gaylove is described as a Lady, while Bellmont is described more simply as a Widow. This distinction comes as no surprise once we discover Gaylove's resistance to

marriage and her love of intrigue and gossip. Aside from these, she is concerned only with her reputation and preventing her children from obtaining their inheritance. Indeed, the ways the widows manage their children and money figure as the most important difference between them in the play. Lady Gaylove has tricked her children out of their rightful portion by lying to them about their respective ages. Wishing to marry her daughter, Marina, the young Valentine (Marina's suitor) carries the two off and reveals their mother's deceit.

Though they both enjoy financial independence, the two women come to do so in different ways. Gaylove maintains her economic security by essentially stealing from her children. Bellmont, however, is financially independent because of the death of her husband, an Ambassador to Spain (2.1.13). Widow Bellmont also controls her child's financial fortune, but she does so with his best interest in mind. Her son, Sir James Bellmont, is guilty of the typical male vices: whoring, drinking, and gambling, and gives no care to his mother, who has at least once bailed him out of debt. She has also previously arranged a marriage between her son and the virtuous young Angelica, who brings with her a fortune "at her own Disposal" (V.iv.58). Though we are never told what the source of Angelica's fortune is, it is cited as one of the reasons she will eventually succeed in reforming Sir James.³⁵

Widow Bellmont's happiness is not the only thing at stake in choosing a wife for her son. Equally important is the widow's ability to recognize the connection between parenting and careful financial management. It is revealing that she refers to her own good planning when she describes having set aside money in order to secure the young

man's future (V.iv.58). Though we cannot be sure for how long exactly, the play implies that Belmont has maintained an "independent existence" for some time, and the Widow's decision to choose her son's wife—especially one that is in possession of her own estate—offers an example contrary to Karen Gevirtz's claim that "...eighteenth-century thought excluded women from one of the primary principles of the new commercial society: that the individual is a subject with intrinsic value and has the right to look for his own best interests" (20). While the picture Gevirtz paints of widows may have been the case in the latter part of the eighteenth century and particularly manifested in the novel, this was certainly not the reality for widows at the turn of the century.³⁶

Granted, dramatic representations of widows during the Restoration and early eighteenth century frequently relied on the stereotype Gevirtz, Panek, and others have discussed. The business-minded landlady, Gammer Grime, in Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686) may not be a widow, but her attempts to conduct business without her husband's direction are undermined by the depiction of her character as nasty, smelly, and generally repulsive to the senses. Similarly, the class-climbing, hypersexual, wealthy widow, Mrs. Rich, appears in Pix's *The Beau Defeated* (1700), only to have her ambitions denied by male relatives who trick her into marrying a country squire. While these tropes remained part of dramatic conventions, Pix manages to resist them in her development of Widow Belmont, who demonstrates a sort of ideal widow without appearing prudish or overly sentimental. By situating maternal duties alongside economic concerns, Pix's play implies that the management of children and money are not or should not be thought of as separate concerns, but rather inherently connected.

While the play's action moves toward a conclusion based in the reformation of Widow Belmont's son and his happy marriage to Angelica, the play's title encourages us to focus our attention on the widows. Because the fate of each widow's children is ultimately linked to money vis á vis the inheritance they are supposed to receive from their respective mother, the play underscores the relationship between managing children and managing money. We never find out when Widow Belmont arranged the marriage between Angelica and James, but the play makes it clear that her plan was an effort to account for the unexpected, not unlike an insurance policy of sorts. Once she discovers that James remains a "Degenerate Boy," the "blemish" of his family, his mother explains that she has chosen for him a young lady who is "Nobly Born; and has a Fortune large enough to Retrieve" what he has lost, and "supply" his "Future Extravagance" (III.i.26). This description indicates that financial security (in both the present and future) is one of her primary concerns in choosing a wife for her son, and it reveals the responsibility of this choice as hers rather than his father's, which is unusual in its own right. That is, it is more frequently the case in Restoration and early eighteenth-century drama that marriages are arranged, for both daughters and sons, by the father or a male relative.

The economic prudence of Widow Belmont's choice is further highlighted by her continued description of Angelica as just pretty enough ("not enough to Tempt"), too smart to be "Deceiv'd," and she has "out-lived the Qualms of Love-Sick Girls" (III.ii.27). The Widow seems to have thought of everything except, perhaps, her son's stubborn determination to avoid marriage at all costs. The only way Angelica is able to convince James to marry her is by offering him a deal he cannot refuse. The negotiation

she proposes would oblige James to marry her, for this the only way she will lie with him, but then frees him in practice once the ceremony is complete. The bargaining process that ensues reminds us of Behn's *Angellica and Willmore* in its emphasis on vows and the value placed on the symbolic credit of a person's word or, more specifically, a man's word. When James asserts that "Rash Vows are better broke than kept," he implicates his own lack of character and credibility. We are to understand that his word will count for nothing. Angelica seems aware of this and counters with the suggestion that "It's but a trifle we Contend for; Marry, and when y're Cloy'd, forsake me, and be at Liberty, as great as Ever——" (IV.iii.45).

This temptation is too great to resist, and James gives in, but this is clearly not how Angelica plans for the marriage to work. Her offer functions more as a rhetorical trap rather than a representation of her feelings about how their marriage will or should work. Worth noting is the way Angelica responds to his concession. To confirm his acceptance of the terms, she asks "Then you will Venture——" (IV.iii.46). Marriage is no longer a gamble for the prospective wife, but instead the risk of the bridegroom. This is further evidenced by James's description of his surrender in terms of risk, gain, and loss:

I must; thou'st wound me up to the last eager Minutes, and — the
 Prodigal, I stake the All——I've lost my Liberty, for One Night's
 Happiness——Which if I Win——
 The cheerful Dawn, my Freedom shall Restore,
 Nor Love, nor Marriage, be remembered More." (IV.iii.46)³⁷

While James is uncertain that his “venture” will be a success, Angelica rests assured in the security of paper credit. As the wedding-night bedroom scene ends with James being carried off arrested, and blindfolded, Angelica justifies her actions to her maid by explaining: “Sure the just Powers will Prosper my Design, / Since this wild Reprobate by Contracts mine” (IV.iv.47). Her argument suggests that moral, if not legal, authority will support her plan because it is “just” or fair, and furthermore, that the fairness of her plan is a direct result of the paper contract. Her design is a bit different from Charlot’s test, though both women fake another identity to pursue their intended husband. Angelica’s strategy parallels contemporary concerns about how to stabilize financial transactions in an exchange system that has limited and debased currency but rapidly increasing forms of paper credit. By setting out to secure Sir James with the power of paper credit, she demonstrates just one of the ways women’s lives were influenced by the financial discourse and practices associated with the rise of credit at the end of the seventeenth century.

In act five, Sir James is arrested on charges of debt, and his mother visits him, hoping to see an improvement in her son. Though James continues to be ungrateful and obnoxious, Belmont not only remains unaffected, but seems to take pleasure in the fact that she has one final surprise for him:

...thy Estate is so Incumber’d, thou canst not raise another Penny, and
 what you might expect from me, I have put beyond your Reach and
 mine; that lady whom I mention’d to you for your Wife upon your
 Refusal, I have adopted for my Daughter, and upon her settled all the

Wealth I have within my Power; therefore never more hope the lest
Advantages from thy long Injur'd Mother. (V.ii.50-51)

The natural line of inheritance from parent to son has been challenged by Belmont's settling her fortune on Angelica, whom she claims as a daughter. Rather than being passed from father to eldest son, the inheritance is transferred between women unrelated by blood, indicating a critical financial practice for women in the late seventeenth century.³⁸ It also makes one question the claim that "women did not play any part" in marriage negotiations (Laurence, *Women in England* 232).

This type of financial bond between women is in contrast to the way men work with, or can rely on, each other for financial help. After his uncle (Sir Anthony) has James arrested for the £10,000 debt, Widow Belmont refuses to pay anymore of her son's debts (V.iv.56). James orders his servant to solicit each of his friends to help bail him out of jail, yet no one is willing to help. Each of them has some obviously false excuse for not being able to provide bail money. Pix uses this scene to contradict the gendered terms of credit typically found in financial literature of the period.³⁹ In Pix's representation, men are fickle when it comes to the business of borrowing and lending, and they obviously cannot be trusted. Men do not "bail each other out"—literally or metaphorically—while women work toward the shared goal of financial competence by "managing" the business of marriage together. By networking, Belmont and Angelica ensure the security of their respective fortunes, protecting them from an inept and immoral son/husband who must be properly reformed before he can be trusted with money. McLaren has pointed out that such "alliances among women" appear in all of

Pix's comedies (84) and, as we shall see, this strategy is much like the one adopted by the women in Mary Davys' *The Northern Heiress* (1716).

When the play concludes, Sir James is left with no one except his mother to depend upon for help, and with one last trick, she brings about her son's change of heart.⁴⁰ Once he comes to happily accept his marriage to Angelica, James expresses his anger about not having a fortune to bring to the marriage because he has gambled his money away. Once again, though, his mother has planned for the (un)expected and tells him: "No Money shall be wanting to tempt your Happiness, I have been a Careful Mother, in hopes one day to see you reclaim'd and have preserv'd enough to pay your Debts, and redeem your whole Estate" (58). Her preparation and planning ahead for her son's financial future is arguably the most important distinction between Belmont and her sister, Lady Gaylove. Being a "Careful Mother" then seems to require many of the same skills as being a careful investor, primarily speculation. That is, the ideal mother should be able to plan ahead, think of her children's financial needs for the future, and calculate the risk for loss and debt. In Belmont's terms, these are considerations a "Careful Mother" must make when raising her children and planning for their future. In the past, she has been an ideal mother by saving enough money to cover her son's future or potential debts and provide for his future happiness in marriage.

In contrast to the careful planning Widow Belmont demonstrates, Lady Gaylove's deception has resulted in a daughter who remains ignorant of financial discourse and the risks associated with the speculative venture that is marriage. In the fourth act, she and Valentine discuss her mother's deceit:

VALENTINE. ...are you Convinc'd your Mother wrong'd ye, as I Love
you——

MARINA. You're the first Person, in my confin'd Conversation I ever
heard speak Reason; therefore, 'tis Natural I shou'd believe ye.

VALENTINE. And can you Love me too, and will you Marry me, for
that's the Only way to be Secured against your Mothers Plots. I must
confess, I mention this abruptly, but I mean honestly, and Our time is
short; therefore Pardon due Forms——

MARINA. I have done so much already, to deny what Ever you with
Reason ask; I'm sure, I Love you; and I think, I'm sure Marriage will
not make my Portion less—— (IV.iii.46)

Marina does not doubt her mother's deception and, partly as a result of this deception, her claim that Valentine is the first person she has ever heard speak "Reason" is largely true. Valentine argues that marriage is the only way Marina can "secure" herself against her mother's plots, which validates his request that she "Pardon due Forms." While some might read "Forms" as a way of referencing formalities, I would argue that Valentine is referencing the marriage contract itself and other new forms of paper credit. This is to suggest that "Forms" have become the new formalities. Marina's response reveals her ignorance, as the obvious truth is that she cannot really know if marriage will make her portion less or not, because she knows almost nothing of her own portion to begin with, much less how a marriage settlement might or might not affect it. Valentine is all too happy to take advantage of Marina's generosity and laments the effect contractual

settlements—paper credit—had had on lovers: “Generous Maid! ‘twas so of Old, without dull Ceremonious Form, kind Lovers met——without long Settlements, and Joyntures made by the Scribling Scribe, the Consenting Pair was happy” (IV.iii.46). Valentine’s complaint is typical of the period’s male characters on the stage, as well as attitudes about contracts and other forms of paper credit in the early eighteenth century. That is, many people bemoaned the increased reliance on written contracts and settlements, at the same time such documents became increasingly necessary in legal and economic arenas. For every voice that cried out about how contract culture complicated matters, another voice demanded the contract as a measure of security against loss (usually financial).

While Widow Bellmont models for her “daughter” the ideal management of both children and money, Gaylove’s daughter, in particular, comes to represent the way mothers “teach” (or fail to teach) their daughters about financial management.⁴¹ Lady Gaylove remains unchanged at the play’s end, threatening to divorce the husband she has been tricked into marrying and spend the “Ready Money” of her children’s fortune (V.iv.60). When Valentine explains that she would need Marina’s permission to touch the fortune (because she is now married), Marina has the opportunity to turn the tables on her mother and demonstrate what her mother’s lesson has taught her. Unfortunately for Gaylove, the lesson was not a good one, as Marina explains: “Madam, I never shar’d your Kindness, nor your Love, therefore I hope providing for my self is no Fault.” Like mother, like daughter. Marina’s response to her mother’s situation is based on her mother’s failure as a parent, not unlike the failure of the parents described by Eliza and

Mariana in *Female Grievances Debated* cited at the start of this chapter. Thus, while Belmont is “the Wonder and Pattern of the Age,” Widow Gaylove is “the Shame” (V.iv.61). Because the primary difference between the two widows is centered on the link between how they mother and how they manage their independent fortunes, Pix calls critical attention to the importance of women’s ability to understand the period’s increasingly complex financial discourse and function successfully in a culture fixated on the new forms of paper credit such as wills, bank notes, bills of exchange, and contracts. Since this example is not an isolated incident in Pix’s repertoire, it is necessary to consider what this means for literary criticism that has heretofore left women’s dramatic writing out of the picture when considering the link between literature and the rise of credit at the end of the seventeenth century.⁴²

Conclusion

Ariadne and Pix use their plays to reinforce the idea that while marriage should be based on mutual affection, pragmatic concerns about money—its importance to women’s economic individualism—must be considered. These playwrights are connected to a specific moment in England’s economic and social history, writing plays that were performed and published during a time when the number of single women in London was on the rise, and the number of people marrying or remarrying was declining. As Helen Berry explains, the “reasons for remaining single were of course complex, and depended upon individual circumstances and constitution” (31).

Undoubtedly, economic security was one of the circumstances that weighed heavily on women’s decision to marry or not. That is to suggest that women with greater

financial independence would have less need to marry for financial reasons. With fortune comes fortune hunters, and Restoration drama took mercenary motivation for marriage as a frequent topic in works by both male and female playwrights.⁴³ What sets these women dramatists apart from their male counterparts is that they approach this motivation from women's perspectives rather than men's. Using the discourse of credit, specifically the language of speculative investment, they emphasize women's ability to maintain and protect their own economic interests. Their plays demonstrated to their contemporary female viewers and readers that women were just as able to speculate successfully as men, especially when they work together. The heroines in these plays bring their own fortunes into marriage, and we are assured that these are 'safe investments' because their spouses have passed their respective 'tests,' something that cannot be said about the marriages in Behn's plays.

Ultimately, Ariadne and Pix are, I think, very much concerned with revealing women's financial competence. Their depictions of women as capable of exerting sound and successful control of their capital and its distribution can be seen as a counterpoint to representations such as the one found in Ned Ward's "The Wealthy Shop-keeper" (1700), in which the wife is a passive onlooker as her husband uses her portion to set up his shop. The heroines discussed in this chapter also contrast clearly with those found in Susanna Centlivre's comedies. The former enjoy both the idea of marriage as optional and the liberty to pass along their fortunes as they see fit, while the latter never give serious thought to remaining single and have much more difficulty gaining and exerting control over their economic futures.

Notes

¹ The latter stereotypes are reflected in Ned Ward's poems, "The Wealthy Shop-keeper" and "A Picture of a Coffee-House," both published first in 1700.

² The text I refer to is the second edition; the first edition is not available, either in facsimile or manuscript form.

³ Richard Horwich, "Wives, Courtesans, and the Economics of Love in the Jacobean City Comedy," *Comparative Drama*, 7 (1973): 291-309; Aaron Kitch, "The Character of Credit and the Problem of Belief in Middleton's City Comedies," *SEL*, 47.2 (2007): 403-426. As Horwich explains, "marriage-seekers in dramatic comedy have always sought wealth...But the persistence with which certain Stuart playwrights dwelt upon economic theory and practice" goes beyond the characteristics employed by dramatists as far back as Terence and as recent as Shaw 291.

⁴ For another example, see Bernard Mandeville's *The virgin unmask'd: or, female dialogues betwixt an elderly maiden lady, and her niece, on several diverting discourses on love, marriage, ...* London, 1709, as well as Ned Ward's *Matrimony unmask'd:; or, the comforts and discomforts of marriage display'd...* London, 1714.

⁵ It is telling that her name/existence did not even make it into the massive collection, *British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*, ed. Janet Todd, (New York, Continuum: 1989). Other than Nancy Cotton's brief synopsis of the play, Clark and Bush-Bailey are two of the very few scholars who have published studies of the play and playwright in some detail. Other scholarly accounts of the play include Jenn Fishman's "Performing Identities: Female Cross-Dressing in *She Venture, and He Wins*," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 20.1: 36-51 and Jane Miller's entry on Ariadne in *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts in Print and Manuscript, 1550-1700*, Eds. Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer, New York: Routledge, 2004, 449-451; the latter goes over issues concerning identity and discusses the prologue and epilogue in detail. Also, Constance Clark's *Three Augustan Women Playwrights*, New York: Peter Lang, 1986 briefly mentions Ariadne's work in relation to the Female Wits.

⁶ See especially the first three chapters in *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

⁷ According to Nancy Howe's listing, the play was first performed in 1695. It was published the following year. Several copies were published the following year by the same printers: Hen. Rhodes, J. Harries, and Sam. Briscoe.

⁸ Clark's claim that Pix may have been the author does not hold up to the logic Bush-Bailey points out by arguing that it would have made little sense for Pix to first produce *She Ventures* for The Players' Company and then produce her next two plays with the rival Patent Company.

⁹ And only one of these plays was printed under a pseudonym, which was "Ephelia." Taken from Cotton's chronology of plays.

¹⁰ Curiously enough, his mother-in-law is a pawn-broker who frequently lends her daughter and Wouldbe expensive trinkets and housewares to use and display in their home, which echoes the play's interest in revealing false appearances.

¹¹ Though Charlot's love interest proves to be honest, the explicit motivation for her to test Lovewell is the overwhelming presence of fortune hunters.

¹² In many cases, however, women also found themselves in the position of being owed money upon their husband's death. Anne Laurence notes that between 1635-1735, inventories "suggest that on average about 16 per cent of the property of those men and women rich enough to leave wills was in the form of credit owed to them" 131.

¹³ I must acknowledge here the connection between Ariadne's pseudonym and Behn's heroine in *The Second Part of The Rover*. While Hellena was the clear heroine of the first *Rover*, the fate of the young heiress, Ariadne, is more complicated in the sequel. Ariadne first appears as the typical Restoration heiress, who brings both money and virtue to the bargaining table of the marriage market. Ultimately, though, Behn uses her character to emphasize the risks that remain despite the presumed legal and economic security of marriage.

¹⁴ Because the play's lines are not numbered, I provide the act and scene number followed by the page number from the British Library's copy of the play.

¹⁵ Amy Froide's study, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP), 2005, is very important in revising our current understanding of the lives of women who chose never to marry. She offers fascinating accounts of the ways singlewomen chose to live and often work independently and, in some cases, becoming invaluable members of their communities.

¹⁶ For a more thorough history of metaphors and tropes associate with women and the female body, see *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP), 1990. For work specifically on this stereotype in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, see Catherine Ingrassia's "Women, credit, and the South Sea Bubble" in *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit*, (New York: Cambridge UP),

1998, 17-39 and Paula Backscheider's "Defoe's Lady Credit," *Huntington Library Quarterly* (44.2): 1981, 89-100.

¹⁷ For the former, see *Plain Dealing* (1691); for the latter see especially John Briscoe, *A Discourse of Money* (1695), John Cary, *An Essay on the Coyn and Credit of England...* (1696), or any of the dozens of anonymously-published tracts such as *Divers reasons against lightening the coin of this nation* (London 1695), *The poor man's proposal, to supply the mint and prevent counterfeiting the coyn when mended* (London, 1696), and *Moneys mischievous pilgrimage* (London, 1697). For a critical discussion of the variety of concerns people had about money and its effect on the individual, see Deborah Valenze's "Quarrels over Money: The determination of an Acquisitive Self in the Early Eighteenth Century," in *The Social Life of Money in the English Past*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006, 145-178.

¹⁸ For a useful study of how this applies to the social history of truth and gentle society, see Steven Shapin's "A Social History of Truth-Telling: Knowledge, Social Practice, and the Credibility of Gentlemen" in *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England*, Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1994, 65-125.

¹⁹ Thus, Charlot's initial conversation with Juliana points toward the problem Henry Fielding would later describe in his "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." In this work, Fielding argues that men's action, rather than their words, are indicators of truth and character and thus should be the standard by which men are judged.

²⁰ Fielding's tests include surveillance of a man's outward appearance, observation of a man's actions while alone, and observation of a man's actions while in the company of others (particularly his friends), 284-301. As Freeman points out, Fielding is forced to admit that there is no real way to determine inner truth 26.

²¹ It should be noted that the literary device of women testing their lovers is quite old and not confined to a particular genre. Ariadne's use of this device carries additional meaning primarily because of the economic context of the late seventeenth century.

²² I have examined the three copies held by the British Library, and while the texts are identical, the bindings are not. One of the copies is actually part of a collection of other Restoration and early eighteenth-century plays, and it includes an inscription by an Elizabeth Ashley dated February 27, 1705.

²³ In most cases, the closest example to an economically independent woman on the stage would be the widow. Their economic independence, however, was usually undermined by either their hypersexuality or their victimization at the hands of fortune-hunting young men.

²⁴ The most recent collection on Restoration prologues and epilogues is *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain-Raisers, and Afterpieces: The Rest of the Eighteenth-Century London Stage*, Eds. Daniel J. Ennis and Judith Bailey Slagle, (Newark: U of Delaware, 2007). Also see James Thorson's "The Dialogue Between the Stage and the Audience: Prologues and Epilogues in the Era of the Popish Plot," in *Compendious Conversations: The Method of Dialogue in the Early Enlightenment*, (Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 1992), p. 331-345. For a good discussion of prologues and epilogues in relation to the link between actresses and the audience, see Howe's chapter "Life Overwhelming Fiction" in *The First English Actresses*, 91-107.

²⁵ As women proved to be more successful than men in gaining the audience's good humour, they were given an increasing number of prologues and epilogues to deliver. John Wilson notes that the number of women who were given one or more prologues or epilogues far exceeds the number of male speakers given this role, *All the King's Ladies: Actresses of the Restoration*, (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1958), 89-90.

²⁶ For full-length biographical information, see Robert N. Cunningham, *Peter Anthony Motteux, 1663-1718: A Biographical and Critical Study*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1933. For more on Motteux's work with the *Gentleman's Journal*, see Margaret Ezell's "The *Gentleman's Journal* and The Commercialization of Restoration Coterie Literary Practices," *Modern Philology*, 89 (1992): 323-340.

²⁷ I have taken the liberty of numbering the lines for ease of reference.

²⁸ We can only tentatively equate the two if we follow the logic that the playwright was well known to her audience. And while Clark and Bush-Bailey both argue that Ariadne must have been well known by her audience, Motteux nonetheless refers to her as an "unknown Fair."

²⁹ Janet Todd notes that the vizard mask—a sign of sexual looseness and ambiguity—was also the sign of the anonymous woman writer, *The Sign of Angellica*, 33.

³⁰ The concept of woman writer as prostitute, sexually loose, or merely immoral has been the topic of scholarly work for some time now. As Todd reminds us, the "writing lady could be equated with the Amazon, the whore or the witch, indulging in improper verbal freedom as well as or in place of a sexual one," *Sign*, p. 33. For more on contemporary attacks against women, see Ellen Pollak's, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (1985) and Felicity Nussbaum's, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660-1750*. Jacquelyn Pearson, Elizabeth Howe, and Kirsten Pullen have focused their studies on the criticism female dramatists and actresses in particular faced in the Restoration and eighteenth-century.

³¹ The worst insult she faced from Pope, for instance, was being called “the cook’s wife” in *The Dunciad*. Eliza Haywood, of course, fared much worse.

³² For example, her first play, *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperor of the Turks*, was revived in 1702, 1704, and 1715. In August 1696, *The Spanish Wives* was first performed, and it also was revived in the early eighteenth century (Morgan 44-46).

³³ What seems worth noting here is that, of the “three Female Wits,” Pix was liked most and criticized least by theater critics of the period, with the exception perhaps of Catherine Trotter. She managed to be a commercially-successful dramatist without suffering damaging personal attacks from either critics or her contemporary playwrights. This is not to say that Pix was completely free from insult, as she was still satirized in the 1696 production of the anonymous play *The Female Wits*. This is to say, rather, that the scrutiny did not seriously affect Pix’s ability to take her writings to Betterton’s group and continue her work.

³⁴ *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996. Discussing the difference between “national debt” and “public credit,” he explains that the latter has a broader meaning function beyond being synonymous with the former. Instead, public credit “refers to the faith a society or “public” has in itself to prosper or in the future—presumably eternal—power and glory of a given nation-state,” 29. For Brantlinger, the return that is promised is always fictive.

³⁵ Claiming she is just as smart as James, Angelica adds, “and I am sure I have more Money, and so have most likelyhood not to fail in my Design” (2.1.13).

³⁴ Gevirtz’s work focuses primarily on representations of widows in the eighteenth-century novel. While her work is useful for pointing out the ways novelists represented attempts to control women’s economic behavior, the “story” of widows and money is significantly different in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as evidenced by Jennifer Panek’s study, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP: 2004.

³⁷ Em dash between “and” and “the Prodigal” is my own, as the text is illegible here.

³⁸ This applies mainly to widowed and single women, who could own freehold land. For more on women passing wealth to other women, see Amy Froide’s “Women of Independent Means: The Significance of Never-Married Women” in *Never Married*, 117-153.

³⁹ See n. 12.

⁴⁰ It is the possibility that he has caused the death of his best friend Valentine that ultimately causes James's reformation

⁴¹ If only because Angelica remains an "adopted" daughter rather than a biological one.

⁴² A useful case in point is that of Mary Davys (1674-1732), a playwright and novelist who has received little critical attention, especially for her contributions to the stage. In her comedy, *The Northern Heiress* (1716), we find one of the last plays written by a female contemporary of Manley, Pix, and Trotter, in which the female heroines are represented as being active agents in their economic security as well as their own marriage plots. In particular, the play draws on the image of the wealthy would-be bride and the financially-careful widow in ways that challenge prescriptive attitudes toward women more explicitly than has previously been thought. The explicit concern with the necessity and ability of women to rely on each other is evident within the play and its paratexts, as Davys dedicates the play to Queen Anne and then addresses female theatergoers directly in the preface to the printed version. In addition, the prologue suggests that Davys can expect more support from female audience members than from men because "'Tis Womens Duty Women to Protect." Very much like Behn did before her, Davys uses the stage to criticize marriages based on mercenary motives. The play follows two young ladies, Louisa and Isabella, in their efforts to marry the man of their choosing. Like Ariadne's Charlot and Centlivre's Angelica, the heiress Isabella devises a series of tests to determine whether her lover, Gamont, is interested more in her fortune or her person. Important parallels can be made between Louisa and Isabella and the heroines discussed earlier in this chapter, as both girls begin the play with financial independence and relative freedom. Louisa has the security of eight thousand pounds that "an old Grand-mother" has left her (I.1.15), and Isabella is heiress to the fortune of her aunt, Lady Ample. Left to make her own decisions, Isabella chooses wisely and is rewarded at the play's end when Gamont finds out that he will receive his father's inheritance after all. Echoing the financial bonds women formed with each other in *The Different Widows* then, these female characters work together to protect not only their own financial interests but also that of at least one male relative. Not only is Gamont, who happens to be Louisa's brother, left out of his father's fortune, but his grandmother has made no financial provisions for him with her money. Louisa, however, "denies herself the Pleasure of the Town" and instead uses money from her estate to support her brother. It is only because of his sister's willingness to provide for him financially that he is able to maintain his "Figure" in the world (I.i.15).

⁴³ See Samuel Macey's brief discussion, "The Restoration Comedy of Manners Motivated by a Search for Dowries" in *Money and the Novel: Mercenary Motivation in Defoe and His Immediate Successors*, Victoria, British Columbia: Sono Nis Press, 1983, 93-98. In his attempt to establish the concern for money as a dominant trait of the

English novel, Macey acknowledges the origins of this element within Restoration theater. Unfortunately, he fails to reference a single female playwright.

CHAPTER V

THE “NEW” ECONOMIC (WO)MAN?: SUSANNA CENTLIVRE AND THE PROMISE OF ‘BLACK AND WHITE’

The women we see working together in the plays of Ariadne and Mary Pix are not to be found in the dramatic comedy of Susanna Centlivre (1667-1723). Instead, we find heroines who must work with men to gain control over the fortunes left to them (sometimes begrudgingly) by male guardians. To do this, Centlivre’s heroines are confronted with the conflicting values represented in the discourse of credit, and they are left to weigh the value of paper contracts (wills, marriage certificates, and letters) against the words, promises, and/or reputations of men. The financial competence of Centlivre’s heroines is more limited than that which we saw in the heroines discussed in the previous chapter, but it is nonetheless significant, as it is connected to the period’s economic anxieties about the rise of credit, transmission of wealth, and women’s financial activities (i.e. as investors in stock, money-lenders, and businesswomen). Through the lens of contemporary financial literature my analysis seeks to resolve some of the issues that other Centlivre critics have found contradictory in the different readings of her plays.

While some of the critics have suggested that her work reflects the early eighteenth-century concern about the increased use of credit, Centlivre’s comedies also represent fears that are more specific than this. I argue that Centlivre uses her female characters to express the apprehension women had about the instability of credit and its relation to their financial security. A close study of the major and the minor female

characters shows Centlivre's awareness of social judgments that distinguished merchant-class businessmen and women from parasitic 'Change' brokers and class-climbing widows. In this chapter, my analysis of Centlivre's female characters contradicts the claim made by at least one critic that her heroines risk "little by way of their...economic security" (Lowenthal 402). By viewing the decision to marry or not as a risk in itself, the heroines in these plays deal directly with their potential husbands to negotiate the terms of marriage. Moreover, the freedom to choose their husbands is complicated by the problems they face in determining the value of men's words and the 'black and white' of paper credit. I contend that what has previously been characterized as a "confusion of values" (Lock 18) in Centlivre's comedy was actually a problem characteristic of early eighteenth-century economic and literary culture. Centlivre is not alone in responding to these values, but the perspective offered in her plays is unique because it draws attention to the ways women were directly and indirectly affected by the complicated and competing discourses of finance and gender.

Susanna Centlivre entered London's theatre world immediately following Jeremy Collier's assault on the Restoration stage and found herself cautiously drawing from her female predecessors, while also trying to avoid the criticism of anti-theatrical writers and establish a profitable career as a commercial woman writer.¹ Centlivre's comedies illustrate the growing concern about the social changes that resulted from the expansion of paper credit.² Like Behn, Ariadne, and Pix, Centlivre suggests that women are uniquely affected by these changes. However, while Behn's heroines negotiate the discourse of credit in terms of broken vows, and Ariadne's and Pix's heroines highlight

women working with other women to maintain financial independence, the heroines in Centlivre's plays confront the discourse of credit, most frequently, at the level of the paper contract. In this chapter, I argue that Centlivre's comedies provide a careful response to a financial discourse that increasingly worked to align the instability of credit (particularly paper credit) with the feminine and, at times, elide women altogether. To be more precise, her work demonstrates how paper instruments like marriage contracts and wills no longer provide a stable link to the symbolic value of language and honor. Despite being caught up in a larger cultural conversation about women and money, one that frequently figured fortune and credit in gendered terms of hysteria and falsity, Centlivre managed to directly link *men's* false promises to the worthless commodity of honor, both of which can no longer be trusted. Though paper credit, figured as the power of "Black and White," is initially offered as "security" for the spoken word, it too proves to be unreliable. Moreover, because these particular plays focus on the problems that result from counterfeit documents and broken vows, they ultimately demonstrate that neither can stand alone, especially when offered by men. Instead, Centlivre's female characters secure their economic, social, and moral positions only as a result of confronting the instability inherent in all forms of symbolic credit and working directly with men (rather than other women) to negotiate the best possible terms for their happiness.

One of the most prolific writers of the period, Susanna Centlivre wrote and saw to publication at least nineteen plays, in addition to numerous published letters, pamphlets and poems. Her earliest success, *The Gamester* (1705), was performed for

fifty years, and later plays like *The Busy Body* (1709) and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718) secured a permanent place on the stage in England and America well into the 19th century (Cotton 122-123). Centlivre found her niche in comedy and despite the occasional quarrel with contemporary critics and competing playwrights, her plays were profitable enough on stage and in print that she was able to earn a living for more than twenty years as a commercial playwright in London. Her work, by most scholarly accounts, overlaps the end of Restoration theatre and the beginning of sentimental comedy of the early eighteenth century, often refusing to be pinned down to either tradition. According to Brian Corman, Centlivre “uses the comic conventions of the 1670s and 1690s, but creates from them a very different comedy from what pleased audiences a generation or two earlier” (*Genre* 127). Her plays cannot help but reflect on and make use of some Restoration traditions, yet Centlivre’s comedies are markedly different from Behn’s.³ Unable (or perhaps unwilling) to take some of the dramatic risks that Ariadne, Pix, and Davys took in representing women who worked together to secure and protect their economic security, Centlivre responded to critics’ calls for reformation on the stage by creating female characters who, through more subtle measures, worked to protect their financial interests.

While some details of Centlivre’s life cannot be established conclusively, John Bowyer’s biographical account of her life offers the seminary starting point for any study of the dramatist.⁴ As Bowyer and more recent Centlivre scholars have pointed out, accounts of her life—especially her early years—often bordered on fiction.⁵ Where concrete details were lacking, her contemporaries simply filled in the gaps with

romanticized possibilities. She lost both of her parents at a fairly young age and was left to manage whatever education she could receive on her own. Her first published writings appear in London around 1700, after which time she was quickly accepted into a circle of other writers, theater personnel, and dramatists.⁶ Centlivre made a modest living during her first years in London and had written her most commercially successful play, *The Gamester* (1705), before her marriage to Joseph Centlivre, a middle-rank officer in Queen Anne's private kitchen, in 1707. Her financial success prior to this marriage seems to challenge the assumption that she married for economic security. Though Pope mockingly referred to her as a "slip-shod Muse" in *The Dunciad* (3.141), her personal and sexual reputation suffered little compared to other women writers such as Behn, Delariviere Manley (1670-1724), or Eliza Haywood (1693?-1756). Most of the criticism was aimed at her plays rather than her personal exploits, and debates most often focused her ability to write reform comedy that was serious enough to be considered as promoting moral change. Critics like Collier demanded swift, sweeping, and clear changes in the moral content of English theater, as well as the reformation of manners in early eighteenth-century society. Though it is difficult to determine the extent of Collier's influence, his criticism reflected public sentiment about the immorality of the theater—the plays, the patrons, and the actors and actresses.

Many of Centlivre's plays are concerned with the reform of flawed stock characters such as the lusty widow, the spendthrift wife, the jealous husband, the social climber, or the young gamester. In some ways, these plays function according to the tradition of reform comedy, the main purpose of which is moral instruction. The main

characters follow the traditional marriage plot established in Restoration theater, overcoming their individual faults and the obstructions of older family members in order to find happiness together, usually in the form of marriage and money. Young women are quickly married off at the end of the plays, while rakes, gamblers, and foppish suitors are reformed, or taught a lesson at least, and order is restored to the lives of anxious fathers and guardians.⁷ Like Behn, Ariadne, Pix, and Davys, Centlivre demonstrates significant concern with the issue of forced marriage and its effects on women's economic agency. Compared to male contemporaries like Colley Cibber and George Farquhar, Centlivre "centered her material on marriage and marrying from a no-nonsense, pragmatic woman's point of view," while their work "tended to idealize women...convert wayward husbands...and to remark on the efficacy of both in a tone more sober than sunny" (Frushell, "Marriage and Marrying" 36).

A few Centlivre scholars have suggested, though, that concern for the reformation of her characters is somewhat secondary in the vast majority of her plays. Indeed, Centlivre's work is striking because it goes beyond the moral lessons of reform comedy.⁸ Many of the literary analyses of her plays aim to show a trajectory in her writing, which positions her early work as the product of a novice playwright, experimenting with form to determine what would please the public, and her later work as her effort to find the "kind of play that would satisfy both her artistic conscience and her desire for popular success" (Lock 32). Between these periods, according to such timelines, is when Centlivre's makes her most successful contributions to moral reform on the stage. I believe, however, that there is more to Centlivre's comedies than a mere

chronological account of her career and popular success seems to suggest. Following some of the same questions introduced by Misty Anderson's work on Centlivre's heroines and their negotiation of marriage plots on stage, this chapter considers Centlivre's comedies in a twofold manner.⁹ First, I compare her representations of women's participation in financial discourse to those of her predecessors, Aphra Behn, Ariadne, and Mary Pix. Second, I outline the ways Centlivre's heroines anticipated the financial discourse found in the early English novel. Unlike Anderson, I do not limit my study to Centlivre's most popular comedies. While it is outside the scope of my work here to consider each of her comedies, that concentrating only on those that were well received by theatergoers provides not only a small but also perhaps an inaccurate picture of the larger cultural engagement between Centlivre's work and early eighteenth century financial discourse. The plays I consider have been chosen based on the extent to which they highlight financial discourse in the characters' conversations and reflect the period's concern with the instability of credit.

Centlivre was no stranger to the political and economic discourses of the early eighteenth century, as evidenced by her letter to Charles Joye, Deputy-Governor of the South Sea Company in 1720, and her correspondence with Mrs. Wallup, a member of Princess Caroline's retinue.¹⁰ Throughout her life, she witnessed the rise of credit to its height in the early eighteenth century then saw it crumble in 1720, when the South Sea Bubble burst, a time that John Carswell claims "has perhaps no parallel in the history of England" (191). In contrast to some of Behn's characters (specifically Angellica and La Nuche), Centlivre's heroines have been described as "a practical lot, who know a good

jointure when they see one and who say ‘Hold!’ to lovers wanting to elope” (Frushell 17). Even when her work occasionally appears to focus on a young, rake, as in *The Gamester*, the dialogue, plot, and action of female characters in the play reveal the economic and emotional stakes women held in men’s seemingly harmless play with money. Moreover, in *The Gamester* (1705), *Love at a Venture* (1706), *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), and *The Artifice* (1722), the rich heiress, the female gamester, and the wealthy widow, each common tropes of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century stage, figure prominently as a way of representing the link between women’s financial activities and the discourse of credit. In each of these plays, Centlivre demonstrates the ways in which early eighteenth-century anxieties about gender—specifically women’s economic agency—collide with concerns about the instability of symbolic credit. As Anderson puts it, “Centlivre weaves stocks, bonds, lotteries, and other financial instruments onto her romance plots as a way to appropriate the egalitarian possibilities of commercial contracts for her heroines” (109).

The Gamester and the New Economic Subject

Centlivre achieved significant popular success in 1705 with the production of her fourth play, *The Gamester*. Though we do not know when the play’s first performance took place, the *Daily Courant* reported that a benefit performance was acted for the author on the twelfth night of its production, a notably long run for a play at the time.¹¹ The benefit night is also important to note because the play was later published anonymously, preventing Centlivre from receiving any popular recognition from the

printing.¹² Despite the benefits that anonymity may have held for the actors, Centlivre felt the injury of not receiving credit for such a theatrical success (Bowyer 59).

In the Dedication to the printed version of the play, Centlivre explains that she intends to “recommend Morality” against gaming, which was a “national problem” at the time.¹³ Taken at face value, the play can be seen generally to fit with the tradition of reform comedy. One of the main defining characteristics of reform comedy is a main character’s internal struggle to overcome a serious moral flaw.¹⁴ Indeed, we find some evidence of this element in Centlivre’s *The Gamester*. The play centers on the reformation of Valere, a young gamester who has lost all his money, run up debts all over town, and is on the verge of being disowned by his father, Sir Thomas, a man of solid reputation and wealth. Valere’s love for Angelica, worth a fortune herself, is the one thing Sir Thomas hopes to use as leverage for Valere’s reformation, telling him, “Well, Son, if you obtain her, I’ll forgive your Faults, and pay your Debts once more” (7). Angelica, too, has censured Valere’s behavior and has asked him to give up gaming, but continues to receive nothing but broken promises. Despite his most recent spell of losses, Angelica takes him back, this time giving him a diamond-studded picture of herself as a sign of his promise to give up gaming. This token, however, is given with condition:

ANGELICA. But mark, Valere, the Injunction I shall lay, whilst you keep
safe this Picture, my Heart is yours— but if thro’ Avarice,
Carelessness, or Falshood, you ever part with it, you lose me from
that moment. (25)

Valere no sooner parts from Angelica, than he is back at the gaming table, though this bout of gaming leaves him with wins rather than losses. After hearing about this, Angelica disguises herself as a man, goes to the gaming house where Valere is playing, and joins the men at the gaming table. Valere loses his previous winnings, and his luck turns against him. After he's run out of money, Angelica suggests that he find an alternative form of collateral. Pulling out the picture and kissing it, Valere eventually values it at 200 guineas and stakes it against Angelica's hand. Angelica wins the game and the picture and leaves without her identity being revealed. At this point, Valere vows never to step foot in a gaming house again and claims to see the "Monster this darling Sin" has made him (56).

Valere, however, is not the only character in need of reform in the play. Happy to hear of Angelica's trouble with Valere is her "very vain," "very rich," "coquettish" widowed sister, Lady Wealthy.¹⁵ Because Lady Wealthy is an independently wealthy, sexually aggressive single woman, her reformation becomes a subplot. Though she is pursued by Mr. Lovewell, who truly cares for her, as well as the Marquis of Hazard, a ridiculous French fop, Lady Wealthy is in love with Valere. To serve her vanity, however, she continues to toy with Lovewell and the Marquis, never refusing them directly. When Lady Wealthy sends Valere a letter, included with a bill for a hundred pounds to support his gambling habit, he reveals her deceit to his friend, Lovewell. Recognizing her handwriting, Lovewell returns the bill, along with a reproachful note, to Lady Wealthy, who is both ashamed and confused to hear about Valere's betrayal. When Lovewell appears at Lady Wealthy's house in the final act, however, he explains that not

only is he unable to be angry with her, but also that he has convinced Valere the letter and bill were counterfeit. Lovewell's ability to protect her honor and forgive her vanity moves Lady Wealthy to resolve to banish her "senseless Train of Fop Admirers" and to marry him (60).

In the final scene of the play, Angelica asks Valere to display the picture she gave to him. When he can neither produce the picture nor successfully account for its whereabouts, she presents him with it, rebuking his baseness at having exposed it to "a Crew of Revellers" (64). Sir Thomas enters within moments and immediately disowns his son. This punishment and Valere's submission moves Angelica to pity Valere once again:

ANEGLICA. Ha! This Usage shocks me.

VALERE. Sir, I promise you to obey you to a Tittle,— and this undutiful Child shall ne'er offend you with his Presence more.— You but Enjoin, but I before had Chose, for *England* now would be the worst of Fates.

ANGELICA: My Heart beats as if the Strings were breaking. - - [*Aside*]

(66)

Angelica negotiates an exchange of her forgiveness in return for Valere's promise to forsake gambling, then reveals herself as the player who won the picture in the gaming house. Sir Thomas follows her lead by forgiving Valere, and the two are married with his father's blessing and estate.

While F.P. Lock cites the play as Centlivre's most serious attempt at moral comedy,¹⁶ LuAnn Venden Herrell argues that the play goes beyond this categorization. As she points out, textual evidence reveals the play's capacity for moral reform as insincere at best and insufficient at worst (55-56).¹⁷ John Loftis' claim that Centlivre's comedies "represent only a gradual break with the dramatic tradition of the Restoration" (64) further supports my contention that Valere's history of failed promises throughout the play overwhelm his submissive reform in the last act. Historical and social contexts, as well as elements of theatricality, also work against the plausibility of his repentance.¹⁸ Ultimately, there is no more reason to believe Valere's final oath than there was to believe his previous ones, especially considering the recent inheritance of his father's estate and the fortune that Angelica brings. The play is certainly concerned with gaming, but its function is not merely to attack the vice of gaming and hint at Valere's reformation.

While Herrell goes to great lengths to illustrate the implausibility of Valere's reformation, her overall concern is with Angelica and the ways Centlivre "... introduces inescapable concerns about how the individual must function in the rapidly changing economic system of the day" (59-60). I agree with Herrell's claim that the play's characters reproduce the financial anxieties of an increasingly complex and symbolic economic system. As Valere's failed promises indicate, honor—traditionally a stable means of measuring value and trustworthiness—has become unstable.¹⁹ Valere's father adds to this instability when deciding which of Valere's debts to pay. Separating the money owed to the tailor, milliner, shoemaker and other merchant-class workers from

the “Debt[s] of Honour” owed to the usurer, mistress, and Lord Lovegame (another gamester) (28), Sir Thomas refuses to pay the latter. His decision reveals his sympathies toward the merchant-class and “revises the notion of honorable debts” in their favor (Herrell 54-56). Though his son signifies landed wealth, Sir Thomas recognizes the importance of keeping financial promises made to Valere’s merchant creditors. By linking the instability of honor to Valere’s failed promises, Herrell concludes that *Centlivre* reveals the period’s economic anxieties surrounding the proliferation of credit, especially as it relates to class structures.

The economic anxieties *Centlivre* represents in her play, however, are more particular than Herrell suggests. That is, they are not simply representative of the period’s concern about economic change. Nor are these anxieties merely representative of the individual’s unease with the growing instability of credit. As Misty Anderson’s work demonstrates, the play is largely immersed in and responding to the cultural unease over women’s financial activities.²⁰ Between 1690 and 1753, women controlled nearly 20 percent of the most important stock funds, and even this number is likely a low estimate.²¹ The consequences of women’s involvement in speculative investment are critical to consider because, as Anderson notes:

Stocks...were not yet taxed like land and, more importantly, because Chancery courts (also known as equity courts) upheld the right of a married woman to act as a *feme sole* with respect to these financial instruments, as long as they were purchased out of pin money or other designated personal property. Stocks and other short-term financial

contracts created highly mobile forms of ownership that subordinated other categories of legal identity to the functional and economic category of ‘shareholder’: the stock market welcomed men and women equally as contractual agents, provided they could pay. Stocks also bridged the gap in the legal identity of women who moved from the category of *feme sole* to *feme covert* by preserving a woman’s right of ownership in her married state. (109)

Thus, the economic anxieties Centlivre illustrates are connected to anxieties that women have about the stability of credit and management of their own wealth, as well as the anxieties men have about women and their control of finances. Angelica is not the only character to be rightfully suspicious of Valere’s promises. For related but different reasons, two other female characters—Lady Wealthy and Mrs. Security—are equally interested in Valere’s credibility.

Largely unnoticed in most accounts of the play is the character of Mrs. Security.²² Described merely as a pawnbroker and widow, she is introduced in the first act, as Valere is desperate for a loan so that he can return to the gaming house. Her husband, Zekiel, who evidently died suddenly while “sealing a Bond,” left the business to his wife. Valere compliments her beauty as a meager attempt at flattery, but it ultimately leads her to the memory of her husband, for whose death Valere and Hector feign sympathy. They quickly get to the real point of the visit when Valere asks to borrow fifty guineas, which he promises will be repaid. Just before this scene, we learn that Mrs. Security has previously lent Valere money, holding a gold ring as collateral

and establishing a brief credit history between the two. Despite the alcohol and flattery, Mrs. Security has not forgotten how to do her job:

MRS. SECURITY. I don't doubt it, Sir, in the least; for you know my way —— A Pledge ---- If it be not quite double the value, I won't stand with a Friend: And it shall be as safe as my Eyes, that I assure you. (13)

Clearly distinguishing her “way”—the practice of not making loans unless she holds collateral worth double the loan value—Mrs. Security hints at the importance of her name. She reminds Valere that he has no reason to mistrust her, as she returned the ring he had put up as collateral for his previous loan. The fact is, however, that this more than a matter of trust. In this short but critical scene of negotiation, the spotlight is cast on women's relationship to the management of credit:

MRS. SECURITY: You had your Ring again, Mr. *Valere*: And I hope you don't mistrust me Now.

VALERE: Mistrust you! No, no, Madam. *Hector*, fetch Mrs. *Security* a Pledge.

HECTOR: A Pledge, Sir? Bless me! What does he mean now? A Pen and Ink, Sir?

VALERE: Ay, ay, Mrs. *Security* shall have my Note.

HECTOR: As good as any Pledge in *England*.

MRS. SECURITY: It may be so —— But I promised good *Zekiel* to be wary of the Money he left me: Yea, and I will be very wary. (13)

Valere, relying on the value of paper credit, wants his paper “Note” to stand in for the physical “Pledge” Mrs. Security demands. Proving to be one of the only characters good to her word, Mrs. Security has promised her husband that she would be extremely careful with the money he left behind. She clearly recognizes a difference in value between a physical or real pledge and Valere’s symbolic note. That is to say that Mrs. Security understands the instability of paper credit and is unwilling to invest in Valere’s character.

After she refuses to lend him the money without an adequate pledge, Valere scorns her money. Seeming to know that she has plenty of business elsewhere, Mrs. Security is unaffected: “Nay, if you are angry for my fair dealing, good morrow to you” (13). While Mrs. Security sees her management of credit as “fair dealing”—good financial practice—Valere misses the point and sees her unwillingness to lend him money merely as a consequence of rudeness and disrespect. He then curses her, threatening, “May some Town-Sharper persuade that Sanctify’d Face into Matrimony, and in one Night empty all thy Bags at Hazard” (14). Valere’s threat makes clear that, as both widow and pawnbroker, Mrs. Security’s livelihood is at risk. For him, the best revenge is someone tricking her into marriage and spending her entire fortune. The implied threat, then, is the financially independent and adept woman. Even if in a limited way, Mrs. Security controls Valere’s access to credit. In her refusal to lend money to Valere on credit, and in mentioning the promise she made to her husband, Mrs. Security demonstrates women’s ability to keep their word and the importance of women learning how to make ‘safe’ investments. In this way, she is aligned with interests of the

merchant class, who were seen as productive members of society, rather than parasitic stock-jobbers. The distinction is one that Loftis draws attention to in *Centlivre*'s later plays, in order to support the idea that a change in social judgments appears in her work after 1709 (86). I think a willingness to look more closely at female characters, however, shows that *Centlivre* is aware of such differences early in her career as well.

Angelica and Lady Wealthy are struggling with this lesson as well. Lady Wealthy, in many ways, functions in accordance with the trope of the lusty, rich widow. The source of her inheritance is never explained. In a conversation between Wealthy and Angelica, her money is described as “entailed”—as opposed to Angelica’s “ready money”—in order to make the point that it cannot be lost upon marriage. And while Wealthy and Mrs. Security offer competing representations of women participating in a credit-based economy, I do not know that I would call them opposites. As indicated by Mrs. Security’s description of her “fair dealing” and Wealthy’s “entailed” fortune, they both seemingly realize the importance of a ‘safe’ investment and its consequences. At the end of the play, both women still have their money *and* their virtue. Lady Wealthy’s virtue has remained intact, however, not because of her own effort, but rather because Lovewell has intervened on her behalf. Wealthy’s highly speculative investment in Valere’s affections is represented most directly in her letter and bill for a hundred pounds. The value of these instruments change, however, the moment Valere shows them to Lovewell. Wealthy’s virtue is immediately threatened, and a critical link between women and paper credit is highlighted in the play. Lady Wealthy, along with

Centlivre's female readers, are reminded of the potential cost of her risky speculation, and the restoration of her virtue can be seen as the appropriate return for her reformation.

In what might seem to be the conventional model for speculative investment by women, Angelica hopes for an emotional return (a keeping of his promise) from Valere. Though we are never introduced to her father, Angelica has ready money that will go to her husband upon marriage. Like several other characters in the play, she is emotionally invested in Valere and hopes for his reformation. Because Valere ultimately feigns remorse for his deceit and gambling, he gains both Angelica's and his father's forgiveness. In her marriage to Valere it would appear that—of the three female characters discussed here—Angelica has made the wisest investment and received the largest return. However, as Herrell points out, the relationship of the prologue to the epilogue establishes a continual and progressively pessimistic view of this outcome (56). His moment of repentance is brief and unconvincing, something the audience would undoubtedly have noticed. Though it is unlikely that Valere will stop gambling, the play makes it clear that Angelica's options are limited. She either takes the risk of marrying a habitual gambler and liar, or she takes the risk of remaining single and receiving no future proposals of marriage. Ultimately, even the latter possibility remains unexplored; it is simply implicit. There are no competing suitors, and Angelica never, even briefly, considers remaining single.

What I would like to suggest is that the primary focus should not be limited to either Angelica or Lady Wealthy, but that we also should take seriously the role of Mrs. Security. One way Centlivre explores women's economic independence and successful

negotiation of speculative discourse is by re-locating the representation to a minor female character. I consider Mrs. Security not simply as a minor character, but as one of three main female characters, each of whom represents a different life-stage and a particular relationship to money.²³ Wealthy does not succeed because she is too closely aligned with the feminized figures of “such archetypically female goddesses of disorder as Fortune, Luxury, and...[Lady] Credit herself” (Pocock 114). Lady Wealthy fulfills the traditionally female role by letting her passion overcome her reason in dealing with money. Angelica does not necessarily represent the wisest investment, but instead signifies the limitations and risks women faced in negotiating the marriage contract. Mrs. Security, however, has internalized the virtues associated with the new economic subject—civic virtue, seriousness, and reason—which ensure her credibility and inner worth. It is through this character, rather than the heroine of the play, that Centlivre makes her most significant comment on the egalitarian possibilities for women in the speculative financial world of the early eighteenth century.²⁴

Love at a Venture: Marriage as Speculative Investment

Centlivre’s sixth comedy, *Love at a Venture*, never made it to the London stage.²⁵ The date of its premiere and the complete number of performances are unknown, but the play was published in 1706, after being carried to Bath and acted at the New Theatre (Frushell xxiii).²⁶ Though most Centlivre scholars characterize the play as well- designed and quite funny, it has nonetheless received only a passing acknowledgment from literary critics and theater historians. The main plot features two pairs of lovers who are matched by contrast. The lively spark Belair, whose father has

previously chosen a wife for his son, is paired with the young heiress, Camilla, whom he meets by chance when jumping in the Thames to prevent her from drowning. Though his name implies otherwise, Belair's friend, Sir William Freelove, has feelings only for Beliza, Camilla's witty and reasonable cousin. Much of the play's comic force results from Belair's intrigues with both women, as well as his friend's married sister, Lady Cautious. Belair must not only take a different name and appearance with each woman, but he must also disguise himself from his father, who has come to London to enforce Belair's pre-arranged marriage. His efforts to carry on intrigues with all three women are made nearly impossible since Beliza and Camilla are so frequently in the same house, and Lady Cautious is forever under the jealous eye of her husband.²⁷ Indeed, it becomes clear early on that Belair's love for Camilla is genuine, while his banter with Beliza is little more than flirtation. By the start of the fifth (and final) act, Belair is committed to disobeying his father's wishes if he must, only to realize that Camilla is the woman his father had promised him to all along. Though initially suspicious of Beliza after hearing of Belair's intrigue with her, William quickly realizes that she is too smart to be duped by his friend's foolish disguises. Sir William never officially proposes marriage, but rather his family and friends freely announce the expectation that the two will marry.

The first feature of the play that is most useful for my purposes here is the Prologue. In the Preface to *Love's Contrivance* (1703), Centlivre describes writing as "a kind of Lottery in this fickle Age, and Dependence on the Stage as precarious as the Cast of a Die." Such a statement indicates her awareness of the risk involved with commercial writing for the stage and the rapidly changing tastes of her audience, who increasingly

demanded novelty in the theater. Emmett Avery describes the “growing emphasis upon variety” as “probably the most striking characteristic” of the first three decades of the eighteenth century (Avery and Scouten, *The London Stage, 1700-1729* xviii-xxi). Centlivre’s willingness to continue casting the dice in the hopes her writing would secure a return from which she might earn a living links her to gambling, another inherently speculative activity. The connection is a bit ironic considering the contradictory demands of the audience and theater critics like Collier. On one hand, they wanted the theater to offer moral instruction, but on the other hand they demanded novelty, something that required dramatists to take risks.

Centlivre’s use of the speculative discourse of credit is even more pronounced in the Prologue to *Love at a Venture*. In it, she explicitly connects her position as a commercial female playwright to the cultural, economic, and social changes that have resulted from the rise of symbolic credit. Using “venture” within the context of commercial speculation, the Prologue links economic discourse to a wide array of seemingly non-financial areas of English culture:

The Vertue of these Baths had ne’re been known,
 If or’e these Hills, no Man had ventur’d down.
 Here Doctors Venturing, come in hopes of Fees,
 And Patients Venture, on their Skill for Ease,
 For Wealth, the Merchant Ventures on the Seas.
 The Lawyer Ventures upon any Cause,
 And Venturing Client’s begger’d by the Laws. (lines 9-15)

Professionally trained men, who take risks as part of their business, are followed by venturing lovers, gamblers, prostitutes, and simpletons. Beginning with Bath, which is posited as both a geographical and medical “venture,” a variety of cultural institutions and social relationships are framed in terms of speculative risk. Interestingly, “Seeing how many Men by Ventures live” convinces Centlivre to take the risk of commercial writing (4). Her willingness to write publicly is prompted by attention not to what other women do, but rather to men, who earn their living by taking risks. For Centlivre, then, commercial writing is more than a hobby—like gaming or buying lottery tickets—from which she hopes to earn a bit of money: it is how she hopes to live. Her position as writer/investor is mirrored in the theater world by the audience, and she “hopes her Profits will her Charge defray, / If that bright circle Ventures to adorn her Day” (27-28). In this way she acknowledges and justifies her participation in the speculative nature and financial risk of writing for money.

As the Prologue indicates, the play’s controlling metaphor is the venture. While the Prologue points to the financial venture of commercial authorship, the bulk of the play hints at the various ways marriage too may be seen as a venture. The risk revealed in the last act of the play goes beyond the financial risk that is normally discussed when considering the stakes for women in choosing a husband, if they are given the choice. Beliza’s acceptance of Sir William’s offer to marry comes only after she evaluates and understands what can be considered important markers in his personality:

BELIZA. Well, Sir William, I’ll run the dangerous venture Of a

Jealous Husband, for once; but let me Caution you, Aforehand——
 the more you suspect my conduct, the Less I shall consult your
 Humour; the more you watch Me, the more I shall study to deceive
 you—— Leave then, your Spanish Airs—— and put the true English
 Husband on, that is the only way to have a Virtuous Wife.

SIR WILLIAM: Your advice is so reasonable, that you shall
 be Mistress both of your self, and me. (60)

By pointing out his main fault—his jealous nature—and assertively advising him about her terms for marriage, Beliza’s warning indicates that she is aware of two important premises: first, that marriage itself is a venture; second, that a jealous husband makes the venture “dangerous” or particularly risky. Her strategy not only demonstrates that she is, in Sir William’s words, “reasonable,” but also that she has an understanding of the stakes involved in the negotiation of a happy marriage. That is, laying out her terms beforehand seems to be a risk in itself, a laying out of an ultimatum, which could compromise Sir William’s readiness to marry. It is, however, a necessary risk, one that functions as a means of opening a space for women’s contractual agency and lays the groundwork for a more egalitarian promise for the couple’s marriage.

I think this framework complicates Cynthia Lowenthal’s conclusion about Centlivre’s heroines who, she claims, are “willing to risk very little by way of their...economic security” (402). If we understand risk to be about the decision to marry or not, then Lowenthal’s claim holds some weight. However, when we consider that even Behn’s heroines (with the exception of *La Nuche*) did not opt for the single life as a

way of protecting their economic security, this argument is weakened. Centlivre's heroines see marriage as a potential risk to their economic security and do their best to negotiate the best terms possible. Furthermore, unlike the heroines Ariadne, Pix, and Davys create, Beliza does not have to rely on disguise to mask either her identity or her motives while she negotiates the conditions of her marriage.

In his work on political economy and the means of representation and value in Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy, James Thompson notes the gendered nature of the marriage plot by claiming that, "it is invariably the female protagonist whose value is floating and that must be fixed by the process of recognition" ("Sure I Have Seen" 283). However, if, in contemporary writing by men, the discourse of credit was gendered in feminine, bodily terms of instability or unknown value, it seems to have had a counterpart in Centlivre's plays, which consistently return to the unreliability of men's words (i.e. Valere in *The Gamester* and Ned Freeman in *The Artifice*), their inability to successfully manage their financial capital, and the volatile nature of men's emotional investment in women. In the Epilogue to *Love at a Venture*, the female speaker accuses men of growing so particularly "witty in Deceit" that women "are often ruin'd by't" (5-6). Because, according to the speaker, women are ill-equipped to counter men's deception, she asks them to provide a "Bill of Reformation" so that "the succeeding Age may say of you, / You dare be Civil, tho' you can't be true" (14-16). These last few lines of the Epilogue call into question the distinction and mismatch between the *appearance* of civic virtue—which signifies proper public and social order and the connection of that order to the individual citizen—and a lack of inner worth in men.

“Make me mistress of my fortune”: Money, Marriage, and Liberty in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*

One of Centlivre’s most popular and profitable plays, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, was first performed at Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre on February 3, 1718.²⁸ According to Bowyer, “It was entirely successful, according to the standards of the day, running continuously for six nights” (212). An immediate result of the play’s popularity were the two benefit nights it provided for the author, while one of the long-lasting rewards was the play’s popularity, on stage and in print, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁹ The play follows in the tradition of the intrigue plot although, unlike most of Centlivre’s previous comedies, it has no subplot. More specifically, the play is considered a humane city comedy, reflecting Centlivre’s Whig sympathies and focusing on middle-class urban citizens more seriously than Restoration plays had (Copeland 16). The plot is straightforward: Anne Lovely—and her fortune of 30,000 pounds—has been placed in the care of four guardians, each of whom must give consent before she can marry and thus take possession of her inheritance. Her father is described as a man who “hated posterity” and in order to prevent his daughter from ever getting the fortune he left, he chose four guardians who are “as opposite to each other as light and darkness” (I.i.74-82). The guardians are stock or humours characters, drawn from targets within contemporary culture and both Whig and Tory parties. They include Sir Philip Modelove (an old beau); Periwinkle (a pedantic virtuoso); Tradelove (a stockjobber); and Obadiah Prim (a glover by trade and also a Quaker). As can be seen from their names, they represent old and new interests and attitudes toward property (Lock 111). The play

begins with the understanding that Anne and the hero/soldier Colonel Fainwell are in love and hope to marry.³⁰ Despite the difficulty involved in devising a scheme to gain the consent of all four guardians, the two lovers have previously negotiated an agreement, which Anne explains to her maid Betty: “He promised to set me free, and I, on that condition, promised to make him master of that freedom” (I.i.42-43). By taking on a disguise suited to each guardian’s values, Fainwell is successful, and the promise of an affectionate marriage, along with money, is secured through the paper credit of a contract.

Anne Lovely’s fate in this play is admittedly a difficult one to account for in relation to the heroines in Centlivre’s other comedies. In contrast to previous heroines (and at least one later) who actively participate in the plot and work to make their own discoveries, the heroine in *A Bold Stroke* plays almost no part in Fainwell’s scheme to dupe her guardians.³¹ Anne must literally get around the paper contract her father intended to use as a trap, preventing both her person and her fortune from being managed by Anne herself. It is Fainwell who risks everything in an effort to secure Anne’s freedom, though she helps him pull it off in the last act, when she plays along with his disguise as a Quaker. Anne’s comparatively passive role leads Anderson to conclude that the play “has more desperation than hope in it...Neither the social compact, commercial contracts, nor the marriage contract fully accepts women as agents who are able to make and fulfill promises” (138).³² Though she acknowledges Anne’s business savvy in the understanding that, “Love makes but a slovenly figure in that house where poverty keeps the door” (I.i.29-31), her reading of Anne’s fate as

undermining women's contractual ability is worth studying in a slightly different and perhaps larger context.

No one can dispute the fact that Anne literally moves from one patriarchal authority to another, from the care of four male guardians to the care of her husband, due to little action on her own behalf. The issues at stake for Anne, however, are a bit different from what we find in Behn's heroines. With different political beliefs and a different cultural context, *Centlivre* does not create heroines who are torn between a libertine economy of love and the mercenary nature of forced marriages. Because *Centlivre* does not set out to enforce a set of libertine ethics for her heroines, the problem they face is not based on the choice between the poverty that comes with love outside of marriage versus marriage for money. Rather, *Centlivre's* heroines understand the need for the legal and moral security that marriage promises. In the case of Anne Lovely, the institution of marriage does not inherently exclude mutual affection. We see this as Betty explains to her that marrying Fainwell for love is a viable option:

BETTY. Why, let it [Anne's fortune] go. If the Colonel loves you, as he pretends, he'll marry you without a fortune, madam; and I assure you, a Colonel's lady is no despicable thing; a Colonel's post will maintain you like a gentlewoman, madam. (I.i.18-21)

Because of Fainwell's occupation, the two would not, as La Nuche and Willmore in *The Second Part of The Rover*, be living on Fortune's whim. The implication is that Anne would be provided for comfortably, even without her inheritance. Tellingly for her character, this is not acceptable to Anne, who questions Betty's advice to "throw herself"

upon Fainwell's income (I.i.23). According to Anne's logic, "When the woman has fortune enough to make the man happy, if he has either honor or good manners, he'll make her easy" (I.i.27-29). Though she can have both love and money in marriage to Fainwell, this is only acceptable if part of that fortune is what she brings into the marriage. The question that remains, then, is one that concerns liberty.

Anne's promise to Fainwell, that she will make him "master" of her freedom if he sets her free (I.i.42-44) from her guardians' control leads Anderson to conclude that Anne "understands that the authority her wealth brings in marriage does not translate into full subjectivity thereafter..." and Centlivre's illusion of equality between her promisingly rational lovers that parlays the woman's authority at the moment of marriage into a broader civil claim to equality evaporates here" (133). I argue, however, that, through a subtle shift in the terms of their verbal agreement, Anne maintains her claim to equality as well as a sense of economic authority. A close reading reveals that her original promise to Fainwell shifts slightly between the first and last acts. The first acts is devoted largely to description of the problem Fainwell faces, and the next three acts reveals his plot in action as he tricks the first three guardians (Periwinkle, Tradelove, and Sir Philip) into giving their consent to Anne's marriage to Fainwell. Of course, the "word" of consent is signified not by the unstable verbal promise, but by the signed paper contract. By act five, Fainwell can only trick the remaining guardian, Obadiah Prim, with Anne's assistance, and the hoax relies on Fainwell's impersonation of another Quaker, Simon Pure. When Anne recognizes Fainwell in his disguise, he explains that it is part of his plan to "set her free" and reminds her of the promise she

made to him. The negotiation is a bit different than in the first act of the play, as she responds: “Make me mistress of my fortune and make thy own conditions” (V.i.210-211). In this exchange, which is the final reference to their promises, Anne’s focus is explicitly on her fortune.

While eighteenth-century law might indicate that Fainwell’s possession of her fortune upon marriage goes without saying, the text nonetheless does not correspond. Indeed, the last lines of the final scene are Fainwell’s, and in them he makes it clear that *despite* the fortune Anne brings to their marriage, he will continue to serve as a soldier. Unlike Behn’s Willmore, who lives off of Hellena’s fortune during their brief marriage and then spends the remainder of it immediately following her death, Fainwell has no plans to simply live off of Anne’s fortune, and his willingness to continue working for money aligns him with Whig principles of hard work and honor.³³ And, we have no reason to question or doubt Fainwell’s credibility, unlike that of Valere in *The Gamester*. Even if we consider Fainwell’s name and the lengths to which he has gone to deceive each of Anne’s guardians, Centlivre portrays them in such a way as to ensure our sympathy for the lovers.³⁴ Anne and Fainwell deal honestly and frankly with each other when discussing the terms of their arrangement. Instead of eliminating the possibility of equality within the marriage contract, the conclusion of the play seems to me to suggest the idea that a mutual “liberty of choice” is combined with Anne’s economic sense to create the promise of an egalitarian marriage.

Another element worth study, if only because it has not yet been addressed directly, is what this play says about the way men manage money. That is, we should not

just consider the role, words, and action (or inaction) of the heroines or other female characters in these plays, but rather we should also think about what is suggested by the economic situations in which they find themselves. The financial incompetence of the men in Centlivre's play is a stark contrast to the networks of credit created between women like Widow Belmont and Angellica in Pix's *Different Widows* and Louisa and her aunt in Mary Davys' *The Northern Heiress*. Take, for example, the improbability of the situation created by Mr. Lovely's will. Though we are given an explanation for Mr. Lovely's ridiculous restrictions on his daughter's inheritance, we are given no reason to sympathize with this arrangement or its consequences for Anne. I would suggest that this example is only one among others in the play, which Centlivre uses in order to make a statement on the way men (mis)manage their own property, money, and estates.

The importance of Centlivre's work here lies not only in what her play says about women and credit, but also what it says about men and credit. A mouthpiece for Centlivre's Whig sentiments about the past and its landed gentry, Anne criticizes the kind of man such a system breeds: a lazy, fortune-hunting fool. Comparing him to Fainwell, she explains:

There's something so *gentil* in a soldier, a kind of *je ne sais quoi* air that makes 'em more agreeable than the rest of mankind. They command regard, as who should say, "we are your defenders, we preserve your beauties from the insults of rude, unpolished foes," and ought to be preferred before those lazy, indolent mortals, who, by dropping into

their father's estate, set up their coaches and think to rattle themselves into our affections. (I.ii.52-59)³⁵

Though Centlivre's political bias is clear, Anne's point about those who work for money and those who do not has close connections to the importance of men's poor financial management. Even the prostitute Sir Philip talks with in the second act knows that men like him—conservative, holding Tory beliefs, and tied to the past—“have, indeed, generally more in their pockets than in their heads” (II.i.22-23). In fact, each of the four guardians demonstrates, in different ways, the problems that result from men's fiscal incompetence. Though Prim claims he will “take care that none shall squander away” Anne's father's estate and resolves to give his consent to Anne's marriage to nobody other than a fellow Quaker (II.ii.73-75), the foolishness of this decision is implied by Anne's earlier disdain at the thought of letting her fortune “go to build churches and hospitals” (I.ii.16-17). The case can be made that what Ariadne, Pix, and Davys do through their female characters, Centlivre does here in the negative representation of men's abuse of paper credit.

Cultural anxiety over symbolic credit in the early 1700's appears also in Centlivre's decision to place paper at the center of Fainwell's plot to trick Periwinkle. Fainwell learns of Periwinkle's wealthy Uncle Toby, whose death Periwinkle has always hoped would lead to a large inheritance. The plan is carried off when Fainwell, disguised as a servant of Uncle Toby's, comes to inform Periwinkle of his uncle's death and present him with Toby's will, which is counterfeit. One of the terms of the fake will is the renewal of the servant's lease on part of Toby's land. The lease, also a fake, is about

to expire and requires Periwinkle's signature. Despite Periwinkle's careful reading of both the fake will and lease, he gets distracted by examining Fainwell's pen, at which time Fainwell substitutes for the lease a contract that grants him permission to marry Anne. Periwinkle's failure to notice the switch of documents is further compounded by his account of how he plans to spend what Fainwell calls his imaginary estate:

...Let me consider! What will seven hundred a year amount to — in —
 aye! in thirty years, I'll say but thirty — thirty times seven, is seven
 times thirty — that is — just twenty-one thousand pound — 'tis a
 great deal of money — I may very well reserve sixteen hundred of it
 for a collection of such rarities as well make my name famous to
 posterity. (IV.iv.100-105)

Periwinkle's belief in the forged documents and the signing of Fainwell's contract reveal the instability of paper credit and the consequences for those who pay little attention to the black and white. In addition, Periwinkle's foolish financial plan to waste his money on antiquarian novelties speaks to his inadequacy as one of Anne's guardians.

The worst treatment in this vein is given to Tradelove, whose occupation as a stockjobber immediately aligns him with the increasingly negative eighteenth-century stereotype.³⁶ Moreover, in his world of commerce and exchange, women's bodies are treated as commodities, valuable only in relation to the value of other goods and forms of property. Fainwell's scheme is to appear in Jonathan's Coffee-house, which is located in Exchange Alley, dressed as a Dutch merchant, and engage Tradelove and other jobbers in a false rumor concerning news from Spain.³⁷ The result of the plan is that

Tradelove owes Fainwell a good deal of money. In place of money, however, Tradelove agrees to sign over his ward. As Centlivre's representation of the dark, misogynistic aspects of the discourse of credit, Tradelove also hints at the stakes involved for women who are excluded from or merely observe passively the eighteenth-century's financial world.

Finally, it is important to examine the play in relation to the playwright herself. Part of such an examination means that we consider the *kind* of knowledge that was required to write this play or, certain scenes in particular, with any sense of authenticity. For example, Copeland notes that, compared to the appearance of "stockbrokers, jobbers, and their predecessors the 'projectors' in comedies of the late seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, the scene in Jonathan's Coffee-house is unusual in its authenticity and detail" (26). One later reader and writer on trade and finance, Thomas Mortimer, praised the accuracy of the financial jargon and jobbers' dialogue by saying that Centlivre had "happily expressed the sentiments of the whole fraternity, and their adherents" (127). I would argue that Centlivre's ability to portray this scene so precisely reveals an important discrepancy between the presumed passivity of women within the mercantile world and the actual practice or, at least, possibility for women's familiarity with and understanding of contemporary financial discourse. The discrepancy revealed is the difference between Lovely's supposed passivity and what Centlivre *says* about women's economic sensibility by way of writing/representing the Coffee-house scene. The scene illustrates her familiarity with the discourse of credit

(stocks, bonds, etc) and hints at the access she may have had to spaces that were considered centers for economic activity.

In her discussion of the connection between Fainwell and traditional Whig principles, Copleland explains that,

The form that Fainwell's cleverness takes is particularly well-suited to the Whiggish capitalist milieu in which he operates. Like a tradesman who suits his manners to his customers, Fainwell adopts a character that flatters the prejudices of each of his customers in order to get the better of them in the bargain for Anne Lovely; his success is confirmed in business-like fashion by a written contract. In this way Centlivre's soldier hero takes on some of the characteristics of that other popular Whig figure, the merchant. (22)

Following this logic, I would apply a similar reading to Centlivre. That is, she suits her product to her customers by creating a play in which men feature as the prominent legal and economic players, an element many people in her audience would have been happy to imagine as reality. If Fainwell takes on some of the characteristics of the merchant, so too does Centlivre. Representing the consequences of the "passivity that is characteristic of the genteel middle-class woman's place within mercantile culture" (Copeland 21) is one way to critique that culture. Containing the critique within the scope of farce or comedy works to make it "safe" from attacks or seem harmless—rather than blatantly subversive or dangerous—but this does not automatically mean that Centlivre was not

simultaneously pointing out an important problem with the ways mercantile culture, and by extension financial discourse, attempted to exclude women.

Money in the Middle: Shifting Values and False Security in *The Artifice*

While Centlivre's most commercially successful plays—*The Gamester*, *The Busybody*, and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*—have received increasing attention from literary scholars and theatre historians, one play remains that is virtually unaccounted for in either field of scholarship: her final play, *The Artifice* (1722). Though she describes *The Artifice* as Centlivre's "greatest surprise, because it is her bawdiest and most cynical," Annette Kreis-Schinck also claims it is a "dramatic monster" in terms of its structure (125), while Nancy Cotton refers to it as, "on the whole, dreary" (144). In speculating about the reasons for its failure, the former suggests that the play was Centlivre's response to Arthur Bedford's 1719 attack on the stage, while the latter blames the play's length and overextended plot structure.³⁸ The play contains four plots, each of which revolve around a different pair of characters, but the confusion associated with the busy plots of early eighteenth-century drama is par for the course and relatively easy to follow.

The primary plot centers on Sir John Freeman's rightful recuperation of his inheritance and his marriage to the virtuous and wealthy young Olivia. The obstacle to one of the goals directly affects the other, as John's father reassigns his inheritance to his younger brother, Ned, as a punishment for Sir John's Whig loyalty. Thus, though Olivia's father, Sir Philip Moneylove, had previously promised to give Sir John her fortune as well as her hand in marriage, he quickly relocates both to Sir John's younger

brother Ned after hearing about the disinheritance. The second plot aims to reunite Ned with his pregnant Dutch mistress, whom he left as soon as he realized he would have his own money. The class-climbing Widow Heedless and her would-be suitors are the focus of the third plot. The Widow has declared not to marry anyone below a Lord, and everyone except a Lord seems to be after her money. The most serious and ultimately successful attempts, however, are made by the ensign Fainwell, who appears alternately as a servant to the Widow and as the virtuous Lord Worthy. Arguably well-intentioned, Fainwell appears to love both the person and her money.³⁹ Finally, in a subplot seemingly unrelated to the rest of the play, we find Mr. and Mrs. Watchit, who play out the reformation of the jealous husband. The one claim that scholars seem to agree on is the play's significant difference from anything else in Centlivre's career, including her previous comedies. By 1722, Centlivre clearly knew what the formula for success was, yet she chose not to follow it.⁴⁰

In the first act, the worthy Sir John Freeman reveals the current state of his misfortunes as he explains how his inheritance has been lost. The main reason his father disinherits him is, as his friend Fainwell puts it, "pure Party rage," thus aligning Sir John with Whig interests.⁴¹ Despite having lost his money, Sir John still retains his title, something that usually carries some weight in its own right as a sign of honor and reputation. As the exchange between Sir John and Fainwell indicates, however, the value of such signs has changed:

SIR JOHN. I wish I could transfer it; for it is of no Use to me. Honour's

a Commodity not vendable among the Merchants; there is no Draw-back upon't.

FAINWELL. That's a Mistake, Sir John; I have known a Statesman pawn his Honour as often as Merchants enter the same Commodity for Exploration; and like them, draw it back so cleverly, that those who give him Credit upon't, never perceive'd it 'till the Great Man was out of Post.

SIR JOHN: Honour's a stale cheat.

FAINWELL. It may pass at Court, or the Groom-Porter's; But no Citizen will lend a Shilling upon it. (6)

Here, honor is represented as a worthless commodity no longer accepted by the private citizen. Worse than this, honor is accepted by merchants who extend credit based on its presumed value, only to later be duped by its chimerical nature when a "Great Man" is no longer great.

Honor becomes more directly linked to symbolic credit when we are introduced to John's younger and less worthy brother, Ned. After seducing Louisa, a Dutch Lady to whom he has made a promise of marriage, Ned finds out that he'll be receiving Sir John's inheritance. This is reason enough for him to forget all about his promise to Louisa. Tellingly, his brother reminds him of the Dutch custom that "after such a Promise, the Girl never scruples to go to Bed, and thinks herself as much your Wife, as if the Parson had said Grace; and if ever you are found in that Country, their Laws will oblige you to perform Articles" (7). This, of course, means nothing to Ned, and he is

perfectly willing to run the risk of being arrested. His brother's opinion of him, however, provides the moral condemnation the audience would expect. Sir John concludes that he "should have very little Confidence" in the man that forfeits "his Faith and Honour to a Woman" (7-8). Through Ned's character, Centlivre links false promises to the worthless commodity of honor. Though the audience or reader understands his brother as credible, the spoken word carries no value coming from the morally-bankrupt Ned.

What does seem to carry value in the play is paper credit or, as Olivia's father puts it, the power of "Black and White." After hearing of Ned's deceit in the second act, neither Olivia nor her father is surprised. Olivia suggests that such dissembling isn't particular to Ned per se, but rather expected in men, as she explains to Louisa that "It is no Wonder to find a Man false" (16). Sir Philip and Louisa then demonstrate their respective views on the value of verbal credit:

SIR PHILIP. I suppose, Madam, you had nothing but Mr. Freeman's
bare Word?

LOUISA: Words of the most sacred form! Vows of eternal Faith! Eternal
Constancy! (18)

For Louisa, Ned's promises represent the most sacred form of verbal credit: promises of marriage. Sir Philip, however, understands promises for the future as inherently impossible terms and asks her,

...how the Devil cou'd you expect Performance? Can any Man promise
for Futurity? You should have got him into Bonds. Hereafter let me
advise you: Do nothing till you have 'em under Black and White.—

Then, if they fly the Parson, catch 'em with the Proctor. (18)

Sir Philip questions the very notion that man can make any serious or binding promise for the future and suggests that Louisa should have known better to expect such a thing. His advice is that in order to secure the proper return—the fulfillment of a promise for the future—a contract is required. Thus, the “Black and White” of paper credit is offered as both evidence of one’s promise and security that this promise will be honored. Like coin, paper credit becomes both the thing and promise of the thing (Shell, *Money* 156). Following Sir Philip’s logic, paper credit is the only thing that offers the stability that is inherently absent from the credit of a verbal promise.

Seeming to take this advice to heart, Louisa plots with Sir John and Olivia to design a plan that will force Ned to keep his word and return Sir John’s inheritance. Luring him to see her one last time, Louisa poisons him, hoping that once he believes himself to be dying, he will want to absolve himself of both lying to her and wrongfully taking over Sir John’s inheritance.⁴² Her plan works and, seizing this moment of weakness, Louisa then suggests that if he signs the inheritance over to his brother and keeps his promise to marry her, “the virtuous Act” might pardon them both (him for lying and stealing and her for poisoning him). The two are quickly married, and both Louisa’s as well as Olivia’s fates are secured by paper credit. In Louisa’s case, the marriage certificate promises to restore legal and moral security. For Olivia, it is the paper credit of a will that secures her father’s approval of her marriage to Sir John Freeman. In both cases, the power of paper has held the two men who were concerned only with money—Olivia’s father and Ned Freeman—to their word.

Moral consistency gets a bit more complex, though, when we consider one of the other subplots: the fate of Widow Heedless. When she appears in act three, her situation resembles the common stereotype attributed to early modern widows and their suitors.⁴³ She is hounded by two men: one of her servants, Tally, who is disguised as Lord Pharoah Bank, and the ensign, Fainwell, alternately disguised as a footman and a country gentleman.⁴⁴ Disguised as Jeffrey, the Widow's footman, Fainwell starts describing the fictitious Mr. Worthy, explaining Worthy's inheritance of 40,000 pounds, his sweet nature, wisdom, and intelligence. Heedless, however, is unmoved. According to her, "these Qualifications, tho' I confess are very bright ones, signify nothing without a Title" (63). By the next act, though, the widow is considering her options, so to speak. She describes herself as "strangely divided between Inclination and Grandeur" and confesses to liking Mr. Worthy's person better than Lord Pharoah Bank (Tally in disguise), but she recognizes that if she marries the former she "shall be call'd plain Mrs. Worthy." She reveals her class ambition by explaining: "Then, where's the Distinction between me and my Brother's Wife: And who in their Sense would part with twenty thousand Pounds, to be nothing but what one was before?" (79). Her values are misplaced by caring more about riches and being a "Woman of Quality" than she does about the moral or emotional worth of the actual person she is marrying.

Saving her from Tally's attempted rape, Fainwell (as Worthy) finally makes his appearance and reveals Tally as a fraud. Fainwell and the widow quickly establish the stakes at risk as Fainwell points out the emptiness of a title: "To give twenty thousand pounds for the Name of my Lord's Lady, whilst Ten to One, but your Chamber-maid

supplies your Ladyship's Place in his Arms, and rattle[s] about Streets in her Berlin, supported out of your Ladyship's fortune" (85). Instead, Fainwell suggests, the only way to ensure happiness and constancy is to marry a "Country Gentleman," whose vices of drinking, smoking, and hunting are preferable to that of cards, dice, and wenching. The distinction initially appears to be based primarily on class: the licentious nobility vs. the constant landed gentry. What strikes me, however, is the difference in vices, or rather their consequences. Lord Pharoah-Bank's urban vices are ones that will inevitably result in a fortune lost, while the vices of a country gentleman cost nothing (happiness and fidelity are added bonuses). The widow is somewhat moved by his argument, but remains unwilling to negotiate with a commoner.

Pretending to be on his way out of the country, Fainwell presents her with what he says is his "last Will and Testament" (89), another instance of the instability of paper credit. According to him, the document entitles Widow Heedless to his money should he not return from his voyage. Heedless starts to make sense of how such a fortune might benefit her as she suggests the possibility of it being enough to simply buy a title. Fainwell escapes such a plan by explaining the estate as being "like a Wife, intail'd" (89) and claiming that his father made him promise never to levy a fine upon any consideration except for making a lady a jointure. Not to be put off now, the widow proposes that Fainwell/Worthy go on the journey to Jamaica, sell his effects, return and purchase a barony, at which time she will marry him.

Of course, Fainwell/Worthy is not to be put off either, and he counteroffers with the demand to marry now. The only objection Widow Heedless has is that she cannot

bear the thought of being called “Mrs. Worthy.” Relying on the value of the spoken word, Fainwell promises: “If that be an Objection, I’ll give you my Honour, you shall never be call’d Mrs. Worthy” (90). He ensures this by explaining that they will tell no one of their marriage until he returns and purchases her title. Ultimately, this is the agreement Widow Heedless accepts. In doing so, she relies not so much on the stability of paper credit—the false will and testament—but on the stability of verbal credit, Fainwell/Worthy’s promise that she will never be called Mrs. Worthy. Though this turns out to be a promise he can keep, he is only able to do so because it is based on a prior deception about his identity (and in turn, hers as well).

Fainwell’s tricking Widow Heedless into marriage is the example F.P. Lock uses to support his aforementioned claim that Centlivre “provides no coherent moral perspective for the play as a whole” (18). He elaborates by suggesting that Centlivre condemns Sir Philip’s mercenary attitude toward Olivia, yet condones the same attitude in Fainwell. For Lock, the “problem is not inconsistency of characterization, but confusion of values” (18). In response to this, I argue first, that such a conclusion is only possible if we fail to recognize the way Centlivre seems to prioritize certain values. With money, class, and love at odds with each other, it seems clear that Centlivre’s harshest criticism is reserved for those with mercenary motives (Ned and Sir Philip). Lock fails to consider that Centlivre’s different treatment of this motivation is partly a result of difference in the female characters. Widow Heedless begins the play caring more about social rank than happiness, fidelity, or mutual affection, a value system that is notably different from Olivia’s. Our sympathies lie more with Fainwell than with the Widow, as

it is she who has 'misplaced' values. As a result, Fainwell's deception comes across as somewhat harmless, and he is seen as an agent of change, someone who might bring about a change in the Widow's value system.

My second response is that what Lock identifies as a "problem" was not a problem with the play, but rather a problem of the times that Centlivre herself was struggling to address. That is, a "confusion of values" was central to early eighteenth-century economic and literary culture, and this play reveals those values as they were in competition with one another. Shifting values was not only a signal of changing morals, but also of changing designations of worth: financial and personal. Centlivre attempts to reconcile the two by putting money in the middle as a central concern of the play. Sir Philip never claims to be interested in anything other money; he never so much as feigns an interest in Olivia's happiness. Fainwell, however, is not such a clear-cut character, and his treatment of Widow Heedless in the last act reveals that he has more than mercenary interests at heart.⁴⁵

In the cases of Sir Philip and Ned Freeman, Centlivre reveals how the women who place value on verbal credit alone—Olivia and Louisa—find themselves in need of more stable security, and they look to the power of paper credit to provide it. Paper credit such as wills and marriage contracts function to restore their legal, economic, and moral positions, while it also forces the men to keep their word. Ultimately, each of the female characters secures their financial and moral positions, but only as a result of confronting the instability of symbolic credit, whether it be in the form of an empty title,

a false will, or a broken promise. In this way, Centlivre stabilizes symbolic credit by linking it with the assurance of moral consistency

Conclusion

As conversations about money increasingly intersected with conversations about morality, writers in the early eighteenth century responded to a complex discourse of credit and shifting notions of value, honor, and wealth. This response can be seen clearly in female dramatists' representations of the marriage market, which often required women to act as investors, hoping to secure the financial, legal, and moral security marriage appeared to promise. Like the dramatic works of Behn, Ariadne, and Pix, Centlivre's plays are significantly concerned with women's participation in the distribution and circulation of wealth. In *The Artifice*, paper credit circulates as currency in the "Black and White" form of wills and contracts, while verbal credit is offered in promises and vows. Much of plot, as well as the fate of the female characters, relies on women's ability to determine the most stable form of truth: paper or words. Centlivre's male characters demonstrate the problem with such limited options, as the promises they make are shown to have no value apart from the paper on which they are (or are not) written. Paper credit thus *appears* to offer a sense of stability that the spoken word does not. Ultimately, however, even paper credit fails to guarantee legal, financial, or verbal security for at least one of the women in the play.

In this way, Centlivre's female characters mirror women's unavoidable concern about the reliability and value of credit in the early eighteenth century. Unlike Behn's heroines, Centlivre's heroines are not given the option to risk it all for the pursuit of a

libertine ethics of pleasure. And unlike the women in the comedies of Ariadne, Pix, and even Mary Davys, Centlivre's heroines are forced to negotiate with men for the best marital terms possible. Though they may employ strategies to test the credibility of their lovers, the young women in Centlivre's works understand that there is "nothing so scandalous as to be without money" (*The Virgin Unmask'd* 64), and none of them are willing to marry without it.

Perhaps the most telling change found in Centlivre's comedies is the role of the widow, which synthesizes many of the issues and anxieties concerning women's economic activity. That is, while Centlivre paints an unflattering picture of the wealthy upper-class widow, she sketches a subtle but favorable portrait of the merchant-class widow, a woman who maintains her economic independence through keen business practices, self-reliance, and a strong work ethic. The latter emerges as a critical figure in literary history because she is aligned with principles traditionally associated with the new economic man. A precursor to what Deborah Valenze terms "the first industrial woman," this figure is revised by Centlivre for different purposes, however, and demonstrates the equally important presence of a new economic woman, one who must forge her own way through the financial discourse of the early eighteenth century. Centlivre's work provides important representations of women as caught up in the complex and often contradictory discourses of finance and gender. Their plights—all too familiar to Centlivre's female readers—and their dramatic fates exposed how the link between women and money was complicated by the rise of paper credit.

Notes

¹ For the most recent discussion of Collier's influence, see Lisa Freeman's "Jeremy Collier and the Politics of Theatrical Representation" in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660-1800*, eds. Michael Cordner and Peter Holland, Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 135-151. Matthew Kinservik's "Theatrical Regulation during the Restoration Period" in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, Ed. Susan Owen, Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001, 36-52 discusses the Collier controversy within an extended framework of censorship, policy, and control. Robert Hume offers an alternative view, one that points to Collier's lack of influence, in "Jeremy Collier and the Future of the London Theater in 1698," *Studies in Philology*, 96.4, (1999): 480-511. For a useful study of the link between Collier and women on the Restoration stage, see Jean Marsden, "Female Spectatorship, Jeremy Collier, and the Antitheatrical Debate," *ELH*, 65.4, (1998): 877-98.

² For a thorough discussion of how this concern played out in the comedies of other playwrights as well, see Loftis, "The End of the War and Change in Comedy, 1710-1728," in *Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1959, 77-100.

³ Cynthia Lowenthal offers a comparative study of the two playwrights, concluding that strategies of deception—primarily cross-dressing and dissembling—are used in significantly different ways in each playwright's comedy. While Behn uses "sprightly heroines" in disguise to produce a "fluidity of identity," Centlivre gives this option only to her male characters who cross class or national lines but not those of gender, 403.

⁴ *The Celebrated Mrs. Centlivre*, (Duke University Press): 1952. Using contemporary records and accounts, Bowyer offers what can likely be assumed in the cases where exact dates, names, and locations cannot be decisively determined, and he helpfully explains why some details—even those offered by contemporary sources—cannot be trusted as factual. The main contemporary accounts of Centlivre were provided by J. Mottley, who included her in his 1747 *Compleat list of English dramatic poets*; Giles Jacob's *The poetical register, or, The lives and characters of the English dramattick poets* (1719); and Abel Boyer, who published her earliest writings, as well as her obituary, and referred to her in his *The political state of Great Britain* (1723).

⁵ Bowyer, 3-14; N. Copeland, 7-9; and Lock, 13-30.

⁶ J. Milling. "Susanna Centlivre" *DNB*.

⁷ For more on conventions of Restoration comedy, see J. Douglas Canfield, "Restoration Comedy" in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, p. 211-227 and Brian Corman, "Comedy" in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, p.

52-69. For a full study of the different types of Augustan comedy, see Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1925, 125-217.

⁸ For other studies that suggest this, see LuAnn Venden Herrell, “‘Luck be a Lady Tonight,’ or at Least Make Me a Gentleman: Economic Anxiety in Centlivre’s *The Gamester*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32 (1999): 45-61. John Loftis suggests that her comedies “represent only a gradual break with the dramatic tradition of the Restoration,” 64.

⁹ Anderson’s chapter on Centlivre, “Coming to Market: Centlivre and the Promise of Contract,” is focused explicitly on contract theory within her most popular plays, and it offers an important study on both the aims and limitations of Centlivre’s heroines within the contemporary legal framework. While Anderson and I both examine “money” and marriage on the stage, we do so in unique ways for different purposes. Anderson’s scope is much larger, ranging from Behn to Cowley, she studies only their most popular plays, and her concentration is specifically on contract theory. Because of the attention I pay to the discourse of speculative credit more broadly speaking, and the fact that I focus equally on some of Centlivre’s less commercially successful plays, it is no surprise that we come to somewhat different conclusions regarding Centlivre’s work.

¹⁰ She discusses “public wealth” and “publick loss” in “A WOMAN’S CASE: IN AN EPISTLE TO CHARLES JOYES, Esq; Deputy-Governor of the South-Sea.” London, 1720, in which she seeks a gift of South Sea stock as compensation for her work on behalf of Whig interests. In “AN EPISTLE TO Mrs. WALLUP, Now in the TRAIN of Her Royal Highness, The Princess of WALES,” printed in the *Daily Courant*, October 1714, she addresses the “publick good” that motivated her three journeys across the sea. The former of these texts, along with others, also make clear Centlivre’s well known allegiance to Whig politics.

¹¹ *Daily Courant*, Feb. 20, 1705.

¹² See Frushell’s edited collection of Centlivre’s plays for complete performance and publication record, xviii-xxii.

¹³ *Ibid*, 60. For each of the plays except *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, I use Richard Frushell’s collection, which is based on the first edition of each text. The plays do not include scene or line numbers, so my reference is to the page number. I use line numbers, however, when referring to material in Prologues and Epilogues, as these pages are not numbered.

¹⁴ Though I do not wholly agree with her classification of *The Gamester*, Aparna Gollapudi’s dissertation, “Mending Manners: Reform Comedy and Culture, 1696-1747,

offers a valuable and extensive analysis of reform comedy and the major and minor traits that distinguish it from other categories of Restoration drama. For her reading of *Centlivre*, see ch. 2.

¹⁵ The description of Lady Wealthy in the list of *Dramatis Personae*.

¹⁶ This is in comparison with *The Basset-Table*, in which, according to him, the “earnestness of *The Gamester* is much diluted,” 46. Bowyer also notes that *Centlivre* herself “professed a complete reversal of her purpose in writing,” moving from the sole purpose of entertaining to the aim of reform with *The Gamester* and *The Basset-Table*, 58-59.

¹⁷ Lock also briefly acknowledges credibility as a problem for modern readers, 49.

¹⁸ See Victoria Warren, “Gender and Genre in Susanna Centlivre’s *The Gamester* and *The Basset-Table*.” *Studies in English Literature* 43.3 (2003): 260-277.

¹⁹ Herrell details a long list of Valere’s failures to follow what she calls the “genteel code of honor.” His refusal to behave honorably extends to other gamesters, his servant Hector, and Lady Wealthy, and others, 47-48.

²⁰ For more on women’s involvement with the South Sea Company, lotteries, stocks, and other speculative ventures, see Ann Laurence, “Women Investors, ‘That Nasty South Sea Affair’ and the Rage to Speculate in Early Eighteenth-Century England,” *Accounting, Business & Financial History*, 16.2(2006): 245-264 and Christine Wiskin’s, “Business-women and Financial Management: Three Eighteenth-Century Case Studies,” *Accounting, Business & Financial History*, 16.2 (2006): 143-161.

²¹ P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756*. New York: St. Martin’s, 1967, 282. Dickson explains further that many women bought, sold, and traded stocks via a brother, uncle, or other male relatives.

²² Herrell’s account is the exception, and even her reference is brief (less than a paragraph), 53. She uses Mrs. Security’s refusal to loan Valere money as further proof of the worthlessness of a “gentleman’s word.” The importance of Mrs. Security as a character is never addressed directly.

²³ These call to mind at least two of the categories (Angelica/virgin, Mrs. Security/widow) that Annette Kreis-Schinck identifies as the “triple concept of virgin-wife-widow” in her study of women dramatic writing in the early modern period. A fourth category, what she calls the “dark underside” of the previous three, is the whore,

21. It is arguable that Lady Wealthy signifies both the widow and whore because of her connection to gaming and the precarious sexual danger in which she finds herself.

²⁴ I would suggest further that Centlivre develops similar female characters who function in this way as well. For example, the mercenary Mrs. Brazen, from *The Platonick Lady* (1706), who brokers relationships in the risky London marriage market.

²⁵ Lock draws from *The Laureat* (1740), which attributed the rejection of the play to Colley Cibber, 55.

²⁶ Frushell also mentions the curious fact that no players' names are listed in the *dramatis personae*; the title sheet describes it as being acted "By his Grace, the Duke of Grafton's Servants."

²⁷ It is also consistent with Centlivre's other plays that she does not sympathize with adultery and generally prevents her female characters, just at the last moment, from risking their virtue in this way.

²⁸ All references to the play are based on Nancy Copeland's edition, which includes numbered lines for the prologue, epilogue, and text of the play.

²⁹ Bowyer also notes how surprising it is that printed copies of the play were so successful, since the play's value lay largely in being an "acting piece," 217.

³⁰ The hero's name is ominous and supports Lowenthal's reading of Centlivre's male characters as "gentler heroes" who rely on disguise to manipulate other men (rather than the women they love), 403.

³¹ Indeed, a study of the play's dialogue shows the male characters carry the vast majority of the lines, and women do not appear in two of the five acts. For the specific ratio and numbers, see Pearson, 209, 24, n. 188.

³² See n. 9.

³³ For further support of this particular reading of Fainwell, see Copeland's introduction, 21-22.

³⁴ This is to say that each of the guardians is represented in terms of the threat they pose not only to Anne's happiness, but also to the progress of English commerce, society, and culture.

³⁵ For more on the connection between Fainwell and the Whig philosophy, see Douglas R. Butler, "Plot and Politics in Susanna Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*" in

Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theatre, 1660-1820, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski, Athens: Ohio UP, 1991, 357-370.

³⁶ Defoe's attack on stockjobbers in *The Anatomy of Exchange Alley* (1719) reflects contemporary views. In it, he describes stockjobbing as "...a complete system of knavery; ...a trade founded in fraud, born of deceit, and nourished by trick, cheat, wheedle, forgeries, falsehoods, and all sorts of delusions; coining false news, this way good, that way bad; whispering imaginary terrors, frights, hopes, expectations, and then preying upon the weakness of those whose imaginations they have wrought upon, whom they have either elevated or depressed...The Alley throngs with Jews, jobbers, an brokers; their names are needless, their character dirty as their employment..."

³⁷ Dickson explains how this is tied to the South Sea Company and its stock, the price of which depends largely on trading news from Spain, the country that played a direct role in South Sea trade and profit, *Financial Revolution*, 503.

³⁸ Kreis-Schinck explains how Bedford had previously condemned several of her plays for their depictions of adultery, swearing, lying, and whoredom, *Women, Writing, and the Theater*, 125-128. Cotton devotes less than a full page of discussion to the play, *Women Playwrights in England*, 144.

³⁹ I say arguably only because Fainwell's motives seem to shift throughout the play. There is evidence that indicates he has true feelings for Heedless and is genuinely concerned for her well being, but he is also well aware of how her fortune will benefit him personally.

⁴⁰ As Lock explains, the failure of the play cannot be attributed to an ignorance or failure of technique: "Centlivre had just shown, in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, that she could write a well-constructed comedy observing unity of action. In *The Artifice*, she chose to return to the earlier pattern of her multiple plot comedies, *Susanna Centlivre*, 117.

⁴¹ Instances like this lend credence to the connection many of Centlivre's contemporaries between her writing and her politics. That is, Freeman's character is one with whom the audience is supposed to sympathize. In doing so, they must also sympathize with his interests and the supposed injustice done to him simply because of his political beliefs.

⁴² The comedic element stems from the fact that the poison is not lethal, only strong enough to make Ned temporarily sick.

⁴³ See Jennifer Panek, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, 1-10.

⁴⁴ The name of Pharoah-Bank would have been an easily recognizable reference to Centlivre's audience, as it was a form of the card game bassett. Also known as faro, the game was one of the earliest to pit a banker against a group of players. Playing on the contemporary controversy of gaming women, Centlivre extends it by linking one of the Widow's suitors to a popular form of risk-taking fun.

⁴⁵ Several times in the play he alludes to the fact that he loves her person as much as her fortune, and in the last act, he assures her that he will love and hug her and help her see her money has been "well laid out", V.iii.104.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: WOMEN'S DRAMATIC WRITING AND THE NARRATIVE

HISTORY OF CREDIT BEFORE DEFOE

It is my hope that the work I have done here will serve as a starting point for others interested in the connections of literary and economic history before the novel. In the Preface to *Money and the Novel*, Samuel Macey proclaims that, "Defoe, of course, is the great innovator. In him the times and the man coincided happily to provide the first prose epics of the common man and woman motivated by the accumulation of wealth on this earth" (9). Certainly, Defoe is an innovator, and the significance of his contributions to the development of the English novel is not to be denied. Characters such as Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, and Roxana epitomize an obsession with wealth that would characterize the novel throughout the eighteenth century and into the Victorian period. As I hope the previous chapters have shown, however, Defoe was not the first to recognize the mercenary motivation in English men and women and depict it as a primary concern of his characters. Though Macey, who views Restoration comedy as essentially a masculine domain, acknowledges that the "monetary motivation in Fielding's major novels is very similar to that in the Restoration comedies," such a claim is based on the assumption that Restoration comedies were homogenous in their representations of this motivation (88).

This returns us to one the questions presented in the introduction to this work: What about women writers? One of the goals of this study has been to demonstrate that female playwrights during the Restoration and early eighteenth century connected

women to financial discourse in ways that differed significantly from their male counterparts. Understanding the legal, financial, and moral implications their female viewers and readers had to contend with in their daily lives, female dramatists represented the discourse of credit from a female point of view and placed the language of finance in the mouths of their female characters. Moreover, as the readings I offer have shown, each of the female dramatists included here represented the period's shifting notions of value, wealth, and fortune in a slightly different way.

Speaking of images of women in the eighteenth-century English novel, Mona Scheuermann has said that each major novelist of the period,

depicts women as directly concerned with financial matters, and in each novel women not only talk about money but have a clear understanding of their finances and of the ramifications of their financial status...This emphasis on money suggests an orientation in the novels that places women in the real world, functioning within and dealing with practical daily problems. (3)

I argue that the same might be said of many of their theatrical predecessors. Although they are aware of the importance placed on ready money and fortune, the female characters in the comedies of Behn, Ariadne, Pix, and Centlivre are generally not obsessed with the accumulation of wealth. They are aware of the importance of money, but they are also confronted with the unique problem of determining other forms of worth and value (i.e. honesty, fidelity, mutual affection) in the men who pursue them (or whom they pursue). The fact that not all of the female characters in these plays display the same level of financial competence is important because it allows the playwrights an

opportunity to illustrate where and why those characters fail in their recognition or understanding of the discourse of credit. These heroines and, many times, their servants, understand marriage and the process of choosing a husband to be a risky business, one that is intrinsically influenced by the discourse of credit that characterized the years prior to, during, and immediately after the financial revolution.

Responding to the second question I presented in the introduction to this work—What about before the novel?—I would suggest that it is the discourse of credit that is largely left out of the English novel. As most scholarly accounts of financial discourse in the novel have shown, the characters usually speak in terms of ready money, fortunes in quantifiable amounts, and landed estates.¹ In contrast, women's dramatic writing in the Restoration and early eighteenth century highlights financial discourse as it was complicated by the increased use of credit and early modern notions of gender. As we have seen in Chapter I, long before Defoe, a literary past existed that was full of writers who were concerned about mercenary motivation and the stability of value traditionally held by coin and other forms of ready money. Additionally, their works were frequently wrought with negative associations of women and wealth. To think of Defoe as the starting point for such literary representations is to inaccurately account for almost a century of writers and texts before him and the contributions they made to literary history and the narrative history of financial discourse.

Notes

¹ See Macey, Chapter IV. Even in his comparisons between Richardson's novels and Restoration comedies, Macey fails to acknowledge even one female playwright, making the highly contentious claim that Restoration comedy was "essentially masculine," 88.

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