

Women and Dramatic Production 1550-1700

Alison Findlay and
Stephanie Hodgson-Wright
with Gweno Williams

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WOMEN AND DRAMATIC PRODUCTION
1550-1700

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ALISON FINDLAY AND
STEPHANIE HODGSON-WRIGHT,
WITH GWENO WILLIAMS

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To
Eleanor Findlay,
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and
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Note on texts

For all plays, we have used a modern, accessible edition where possible. In the absence of any modern edition, we have used the original printed text or manuscript. References to these texts are given in full the first time they are used in each chapter; thereafter, by page numbers or page signatures as appropriate. All references to Shakespeare's plays are to Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine Eisaman Maus, (eds) (1997) *The Norton Shakespeare*, New York and London: W. W. Norton. All biblical references are to the King James Bible (1611).

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Introduction

ALISON FINDLAY AND
STEPHANIE HODGSON-WRIGHT

In arguing for the emergence of feminist theatre post 1968, Loren Kruger states:

There is a saying that women have always made spectacles of themselves. However, it has only been recently, and intermittently, that women have made spectacles themselves. On this difference turns the ambiguous identity of feminist theatre.

(1996: 27)

While accepting the importance of 1968 as a turning point in feminist consciousness, this book takes issue with the thesis that, in earlier periods, women's involvement in dramatic production simply took the form of 'making spectacles of themselves' as though this were a self-compromising project. We argue that a select number of women took an active part in directing and controlling dramatic self-representations: that they made the spectacle themselves. In the chapters that follow, we show how women in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries shaped dramatic productions as scriptwriters, and as directors and performers. According to Kruger's definition, this makes their theatre 'feminist' before its time. Such a label seems anomalous, anachronistic even, in a period governed by an ideology of female subservience, and the term 'feminist' is used with some caution in the pages that follow. Nevertheless, we firmly believe that the texts we discuss, despite their huge differences, share a common strand in the promotion of a female-centred aesthetic. They show women taking the stage in order to foreground interests particular to their sex.

Of course it is important to acknowledge differences: the women who made dramatic spectacles are drawn from across a huge social and cultural

spectrum. For example, Queen Henrietta Maria, the main performer in her extravagant court masques, and the Quaker woman who went naked for a sign at a Whitehall church in 1652, were practitioners with very different individual needs and interests. These must be taken into account alongside the different venues in which their entertainments were staged. Therefore, this account of women's dramatic production does not present a homogeneous, developing female aesthetic, but rather a discontinuous, multi-faceted tradition. By virtue of its discontinuity, it escapes the dangers Teresa de Lauretis outlines for a feminist theatre, which seeks to define itself according to a monological female aesthetic, namely 'to remain caught within the master's house and there . . . to legitimate the hidden agendas of a culture we badly need to change' (1987: 131). While some of the texts we discuss do display signs of being confined within a male-dominated tradition, others explicitly seek to redefine that tradition by taking the stage in alternative ways.

'Taking the stage' is almost as vexed a term as the collective 'women', since it groups together texts that were definitely performed and those for which we have no performance history. In our discussions, we have provided production details, such as performance dates, based on the evidence currently available to us. Since women did not participate in the major professional theatre companies as either dramatists or actors until 1660, their dramatic activities are not recorded in the usual sources, such as the records of the Master of the Revels. Performances written or staged by women in the household could still have been public events, as the example of Lady Elizabeth Delavel's production of *Il Pastor Fido* shows (see Chapter 5), but since spectators did not pay to watch, these productions were not automatically included in financial or official documents. Domestic performances which relied on the resources already available in the household may not even have been noted in the household accounts. The evidence we do have is probably incomplete and has come down to us, almost by chance, from personal writings like Lady Elizabeth Delavel's spiritual meditations. We therefore believe that lack of evidence does not preclude the possibility that plays by women were produced at the time of their composition, or were intended for performance.

We have worked from the assumption that, in composing a play, a woman made an active and informed choice of genre. Her script was written with a theatrical arena in mind, whether or not evidence of a production has survived in documentary form. It is therefore only proper to accord to these texts the same kind of critical attention as any other piece of drama, rather than automatically classifying them as 'closet' plays intended for reading rather than performance. In any case, the categories 'reading' and 'performance' were not mutually exclusive for early modern writers

and readers. People steeped in a culture of display, costume and ritual would automatically bring a theatrical sensibility and imagination to the scripts in the processes of composition and reading. It is mistaken to assume that plays for which we have no production history are unperformable and not even intended for performance. Our own experiments in staging work by early modern women has proved that, in the words of Margaret Cavendish, 'the Play is ready to be Acted' (Findlay, Hodgson-Wright and Williams 1999a).

The discussion of women's drama in the following chapters has grown out of an inter-disciplinary research project dedicated to exploring the interface between women's writing and dramatic practice. Alison Findlay directed a full-length production of *The Concealed Fancies* with Jane Milling in 1994. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright directed full-length productions of *The Tragedy of Mariam* in 1994 and *Iphigeneia at Aulis* in 1997. Gweno Williams devised a production of central scenes of *The Convent of Pleasure*, directed by Bill Pinner in 1995.¹ Practical work continues with a 'household' reading of *The Tragedie of Antonie*, directed by Marion Wynne-Davies and Alison Findlay (1999) and a production of *Love's Victory*, directed by Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (1999). These have been followed, as the book goes to press, with television productions of scenes from Cavendish and Brackley's *A Pastorall*, directed by Alison Findlay, and from Margaret Cavendish's *Lady Contemplation*, and *The Female Academy*, directed by Gweno Williams. The experience of moving these plays from the page to the stage (or screen) has allowed us to approach the scripts we discuss from the perspective of theatre practitioners. Although we have not addressed the texts from the director's viewpoint in this book, we have endeavoured to maintain a theatrical sensibility, a heightened sensitivity to their multi-dimensional nature.

More than any other literary form, drama relies on material presences: visual spectacle, sound and the presence of actors and audience within specific physical spaces. Women of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were adept in manipulating these dimensions of dramatic production for their own purposes. Lynda Hart has noted women's skill in exploiting theatrical space 'to disclose and critique women's confinement while suggesting liberating strategies from the patriarchal order' (1989: 8–9). Our book pays attention to the spatial dimension of plays: elements such as Aphra Behn's astute stagings of the 'discovery' scene in Restoration theatre

1. See Alison Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright and Gweno Williams (1999b) *Women Dramatists 1550–1670: Plays in Performance*, Lancaster: Lancaster University Television Unit, a teaching video, which includes extracts of these productions and discussion of the plays in performance.

to disorientate the conventional fetishisation of woman as the object of a male gaze, for example, or Margaret Cavendish's creation of a liberated space in which women can direct their own lives behind walls in *The Convent of Pleasure*. The importance of sound, music and dance in some of the texts are also highlighted in our discussions. Chapters 2 and 3, for example, include consideration of spectacle and song as presented in noblewomen's masques and pastorals and Chapter 5 examines the role of the female singer in *Rare en Tout*.

The appearance of a female character on stage is potentially a means of objectifying women or confining them to stereotypical roles that reinforce the cultural prescriptions designed to govern female behaviour in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Women dramatists seize on female presence as an opportunity to 'create a theatrical discourse that highlights the politicization of feminine appearance, foregrounding the categorization, containment and misrecognition of women's diversity' (Hart 1989: 8). Our study of texts from across the period reveals a continued interest in redefining some significant feminine types, such as the woman as sacrificial victim, as goddess, villainess, virgin or whore. From the eponymous heroine of Jane Lumley's *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, or the self-staging Catholic martyr Margaret Clitherow, to the outspoken Camilla in Katherine Philips's *Horace*, we see women embracing the role of tragic sacrifice as an autonomous act, rather than passively accepting it as victims. Similarly, the Petrarchan stereotype of woman as goddess is shown as ridiculously confining in plays like Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory* and Mary Pix's *Ibrahim*. It is rearticulated as a powerful shaping presence in masque performances by Queens Anna of Denmark and Henrietta Maria. Chaste virginity, the bedrock of the homosocial traffic in women, is transformed from an appearance of female passivity into active sisterly choice in Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Faithfull Virgins*.

Negative stereotypes are also rewritten in many women's dramatic productions. Anna Trapnel's appearance in the courtroom to answer charges of witchcraft allowed her to redefine her spiritual testimonies as the public proclamations of a dutiful, sober, daughter of Christ. Plays such as Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam* represent female villainy as a form of victimisation, showing how the actions of 'wicked' women are often the result of their confinement within male-dominated ideologies. Sexual stereotyping of women and the pejorative associations engendered thereby are rigorously interrogated in the plays of Aphra Behn. Later plays, like Catherine Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* and Delariviere Manley's *The Royal Mischief*, deliberately re-structure the common pairings of chaste virgin and villainess, played by actresses famed for representing those types, in order to critique such categorisation. Another technique common to several female-authored texts is the physical dramatisation of the ideologies used to 'frame' women, often using concrete

props. Thus, in Cavendish and Brackley's *The Concealed Fancies*, the heroine Luceny considers the prescriptions placed on wifely behaviour by contemplating her image, dressed as a bride, in a mirror. In Pix's *Ibrahim*, the villainess's imprisonment within the dominant patriarchal ideology is shown when she exclaims 'Break all the flattering Mirrors! / Let me ne'er behold this rejected Face again' (13).

In spite of the importance of non-verbal elements, 'language remains a primary tool for the dramatists' (Hart 1989: 11), especially since the texts we have of dramatic productions from 300 or 400 years ago can necessarily only give occasional hints of elements which combined with the verbal script. In this book, we have concentrated primarily, although not exclusively, on scripted drama. Despite Juliet Mitchell's view (*Times Literary Supplement* 23 August 1996) that attempts to construct a female-authored canon of Renaissance drama would necessarily mean 'scraping the bottom of the barrel' in terms of quality, we have been impressed by the richness and complexity of much of the writing we have studied. It deserves attention, first, as a territory that still needs to be charted. Pioneering books like Jacqueline Pearson's *The Prostituted Muse* (1989) and Nancy Cotton's *Women Playwrights in England 1363–1750* (1980) present valuable collocations of information about female dramatists, to which we are indebted. Since these studies are readily accessible, we have not attempted to give detailed biographical sketches of the writers whose scripts we examine, but refer readers to Cotton and Pearson's work. As Mitchell's comment demonstrates all too clearly, however, the importance of that territory – those female contributions to the canon – needs reiterating. Plays by Lady Mary Wroth or Margaret Cavendish or Anne Wharton are not established within the dramatic canon; their value as scripts which engage with the dynamics of performance has not been widely appreciated. One goal of our book has been to redress this imbalance.

Besides their importance in the wider literary field, the plays are worthy of study in their own right. We have found an amazing depth of writing in scripts that engage provocatively with the cultural moments in which they were composed and with the theatre forms for which they were written. Lady Jane Lumley's covert exploration of the religious politics surrounding Lady Jane Grey's execution in *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and Elizabeth Polwhele's examination of the power of the actress on the Restoration stage in *The Frolicks* are just two contrasting examples. It is important to point out, however, that new criteria are necessary to assess much of this early work by female theatre practitioners. Previous studies of masques, progresses, plays written for the Renaissance public stage or the private theatres, carry inbuilt expectations that are themselves implicitly gendered by theatrical traditions centred on male authors and performers. While paying attention

to the mainstream theatrical contexts in which women's dramatic productions took place then, we have concentrated mainly on the texts themselves as sources of meaning.

Lizbeth Goodman points out that women's intervention as producers of drama 'both "usurps" the power of creation, and assumes the right to restructure the values and expectations according to which creative work tends to be judged' (1996: 39). This is exactly what we see in much women's drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since they did not participate in the major professional theatre companies as either dramatists or actors until 1660, women's dramatic productions necessarily challenge the values and expectations according to which drama was, and still is, judged. Taking account of alternative types of drama staged in the royal court or the country house or in non-official venues like the street, obliges us to rethink our definitions of theatre. This is especially obvious in the case of more marginal forms of 'experimental' theatre such as courtroom appearances, scaffold speeches and spiritual testimonies. A major regret we share is that we have been unable to cover more of these alternative forms of theatre within the book. The reason for this is, however, encouraging. In order to do justice to the complexity of women's scripted drama, we have found it necessary, within our word limit, to leave out lots of potentially interesting material. Another book is needed to look in more detail at the complex dynamics involved when women seized the opportunity to stage themselves in alternative public spaces, or in political or religious demonstrations. The archives of regional record offices and the evidence already made available in the *Records of Early English Drama* series suggests there is material which needs to be explored specifically as theatre. Indeed, the process of editing our work has made it abundantly clear that the subject matter of each of the chapters warrants lengthier study.

Chapter 1 covers the most varied manifestations of women's dramatic production, as we consider the impact of a range of women appearing as speaking subjects in different public spaces. The overriding need to appropriate and mediate arenas and discourses previously characterised as masculine is apparent in the material dealt with in this chapter. The four queens regnant, Jane Grey, Mary I, Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots, who were in power during the Tudor period, all occupied a position which, by the law of primogeniture, properly belonged to a man. Their accessions all relied on the lack of a masculine heir. The effects of the Reformation, most keenly felt in the changing religious affiliations of the monarchs throughout the period, and resultant prosecution of dissenters, both allowed and required women to speak for themselves in the courtroom and the scaffold, spaces presided over by men. The full dramatic texts of the period, Jane Lumley's *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and Mary Sidney's *Tragedy of Antonie* are both

translations of texts authored by men and written by women who lived within a literary culture populated by male relations and clients. Yet these apparent constraints offered the opportunity for feminised re-workings. The power of the queen to direct the production as autonomous subject in alternative forms of theatre appears in the queens' coronations, progresses and entertainments. The courtroom and scaffold afforded women speakers legitimate attention – the male authority figures who demanded testimony were also obliged to listen to it – and gave them the opportunity for ultimate self-fashioning as they embraced a martyr's death rather than a silent and obedient life. In Jane Lumley's play, Iphigeneia effects a similar transformation. The absent Iphigeneia, initially constructed as sacrificial victim to her father's political ambition, becomes the present and vocal saviour of her country as she offers to die for it just at the moment when her life could be saved. Mary Sidney's play concerns itself with the tension between the private passion and public duty of Antonie and Cleopatra. The sympathetic treatment of Cleopatra particularly legitimates the passion of the individual woman, in contrast to her public role as queen, as fit subject matter for the self-fashioned feminine speaking subject. The chapter also considers both of these plays in the context of the emergent culture of self-staging women to argue strongly for the presence of a performance dimension within each play.

Chapter 2 deals with the ways in which women as producers of drama began to present, argue for, and assert an iconic feminine theatrical presence by appropriating and re-defining the ideologically feminine qualities of beauty and chastity. The two early Stuart queens, Anna and Henrietta Maria, had grown up in a cultural milieu where the elite woman as producer and performer of dramatic entertainments had an important role. In bringing this sensibility with them, they appropriated and transformed the court stage into a playing arena that is, topographically speaking, the true ancestor of the modern proscenium arch theatre. While all the masques in which Anna and Henrietta Maria participated were ostensibly written by men, namely Samuel Daniel, Ben Jonson, and William Davenant, for the purposes of this study, the issue of authorship is necessarily problematic. As Jerzy Limon has argued, 'it seems clear that the masque-in-performance and the printed literary masque not only belong to different systems, but also that their authorship is not the same' (1990: 28). Masques were a form of cultural production whose 'true' existence was in the performance, the printed text merely being a journalistic record of the event. In many senses the creators of the masques were those people who commissioned and performed them. While Anna and Henrietta Maria might not have had their names on the title pages, in the spectacle of the masque in performance, there can have been little doubt who was the presiding 'authority' in that cultural moment.

Cupid's Banishment, written by Robert White for the ladies of Deptford Hall to perform for Anna, and Walter Montagu's *The Shepherd's Paradise*, have also been included as legitimate examples of women and dramatic production in this period. They each mark crucial moments in which women acted with both body and voice; they also underscore the extent to which the particular agendas of Anna and Henrietta Maria informed apparently male-authored texts. In tandem with such developments at court, the chapter also demonstrates the dramatic activity of women in the country house setting, where the striking emergence of the female performer in a dramatic rather than purely emblematic context keeps pace with the developments at court. Moreover, the country house entertainment was a genre in which women wrote as well as commissioned and performed. The household entertainments of Lady Rachel Fane are considered in detail, paying particular attention to the ways in which she addresses her immediate geographical and familial context and creates opportunities for her younger siblings of both sexes to perform for the senior members of the household. Significantly, alongside such entertainments, a fragment of a play by Fane survives, offering the possibility that the household stage and actors she used for her entertainments might also have been involved in lengthier dramatic productions. The chapter then turns to the two surviving full play texts of the period, Lady Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* and Lady Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory*. Rather than considering these plays as excluded from the masculine context of the public stage, the chapter evaluates the ways in which they address themselves to the aesthetic and ideological values of the contemporary feminine dramatic context. The dynamics of household entertainment, the spectacle and plotting of masque and the exposure of patriarchal ideology's inadequacy to articulate the female subject, are utilised to tragic effect in *Mariam* and to ultimate comic effect in *Love's Victory*. Both of the plays hint at the essential instability of patriarchal authority, whether as exhibited by a self-deluding tyrant, or a mildly treacherous classical deity.

The special circumstances created by the English Civil War and Interregnum are considered in Chapter 3. The closure of the public theatres from 1642 to 1660 had the advantage, for women dramatists, of creating a newly-levelled playing field on which to work. The crisis in government was accompanied by a turbulent social environment, in which conventional gender roles and forms of authority were open to question and to change. Drama was used strategically and self-consciously by women during these years as a means of renegotiating their places within the microcosm of the family and the wider Commonwealth. The play and pastoral written collaboratively by Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley are discussed as dramatic explorations of the position held by many aristocratic noblewomen

in the English Civil War: often imprisoned within their houses, but simultaneously empowered and liberated as managers, in the absence of their husbands or fathers. While Cavendish and Brackley display nostalgia for royal entertainments like the masque and the pastoral in these pieces, the chapter shows how they also manipulate the literary forms for more controversial feminist purposes.

Moving on from these household entertainments, Chapter 3 examines religious and political demonstrations and personal testimonies staged in public arenas. The very theatrical modes in which female preachers expressed their message are explored with reference to male condemnations of female performance. The vexed problem of whose voice is speaking in the case of visionaries is discussed using the model of acting, in which the female performer can be defined as a creative interpreter of God's holy word. Her position as enactor of the indwelling spirit creates a space for intensely powerful self-representation as well as a celebration of divine authority. Women's participation in political demonstrations is also briefly considered as another form of public enactment. The spaces women used for dramatic productions during these years were necessarily outside the arenas officially designated for performance. Their location in the household, the street, the inn, allies them in form with feminist theatre practice which, as Loren Kruger (1996) points out, deliberately locates itself 'outside', in order to challenge patriarchal institutions.

The physical location of alternative theatre has resulted in unfair discrimination. Theatre criticism has 'historically excluded as illegitimate those groups whose performances in diverse and multi-purpose spaces are held to demonstrate their 'instability' and thus their unreliability in rising to the proper occasion of theatre' (Kruger 1996: 52). By concentrating on some examples of women's alternative theatrical practices during the English Civil War years, the chapter aims to relegitimise them as drama. Kruger points out that 'the place and occasion of a performance (in a national theatre or a makeshift hall, for aesthetic contemplation or for immediate recreational or educational use) contribute as much to its legitimation (addition to the repertoire or one of the subsidized theatres and publication) as its apparently autonomous literary value' (1996: 52). Given the discrimination against non-official theatre venues, women's admission to the King's and the Duke's theatre companies in 1660 would seem to be an important step forward. Michel Adam goes so far as to argue that, after this point, to go on writing scripts for an alternative 'private' arena would be nothing less than masochism on the part of a woman dramatist (Adam 1993: 106).

Nevertheless, in 1662 and 1668, Margaret Cavendish proudly published 19 plays, which were not written for either of the professional theatre

companies. Chapter 4 examines aspects of her dramatic corpus in some detail, starting with a consideration of the emphasis she placed on publication and the ways she used it to style herself after the giants of the male dramatic tradition: Jonson, Shakespeare, and Beaumont and Fletcher. The importance of her husband William as a literary mentor and collaborator in some of her work is examined. Cavendish's contradictory attitudes to performance, as revealed in the numerous prefaces to her first collection, are explored with reference to her own experience of different types of theatre, as part of Henrietta Maria's court and through her husband's close connections with the profession as both writer and patron. The chapter considers Cavendish's paradoxical attitude to public exposure: actively seeking fame (and performing an extravagant version of herself as one way of achieving it), while simultaneously defining herself as bashful. Perhaps this goes some way to explaining why she did not, apparently, present her own plays for performance on the public stage, reserving them instead for the fantasy theatre of her imagination or possibly domestic performance.

Discussion of a selection of Cavendish's plays reveals a staging of issues central to female experience, undertaken with an informed dramatic imagination. Chapter 4 considers Cavendish's presentation of autonomous, often strongly empowered, female characters who are able to renegotiate courtship and marriage on their own terms, or pursue alternative life patterns. Special focus is given to the way her plays explore gender construction, and how she dramatises idealised and more realistic versions of the English Civil War. Margaret's position within the Cavendish household, where her scripts might have been played, is discussed with reference to *Love's Adventures*, in which it is possible to trace an antagonistic response to her step-daughters' earlier play *The Concealed Fancies*. By considering her scripts in a theatrical rather than literary context, the chapter reveals a dramatist who was adept at entertaining, while promoting ideas about gender which were often subversive.

The appearance of female actors on the professional stage in 1660 marked a significant change in women's relationship to the institution of theatre. Chapter 5 traces how women dramatists responded to the challenge presented by this new arena, which seemed to offer great opportunities and yet also carried its own forms of prescription. The earliest plays, Katherine Philips's translations of Corneille's *Pompey* and *Horace*, are examined as resonant with national and sexual politics, speaking directly to the new order after the Restoration of Charles II, as well as to the role of woman within the family and state. The actress was a novel spectacle on the public stage. The first original plays for the professional theatre, *Marcellia* by Francis Boothby and Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Frolicks* and *The Faithfull Virgins*, seem to exploit the convention of women's positioning as the object

of an erotically-charged male gaze. Elements of Laura Mulvey's argument that woman's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' is built 'into the spectacle' of cinema can also be applied to the position of the actress in the theatre (Mulvey 1975: 11). The chapter argues that in self-consciously staging the female body, however, these plays simultaneously critique the objectification of woman. In addition, they draw attention to the actress's power to control the scene by returning the gaze of the audience and reconfiguring herself as a desiring subject whose skills in performance allow her to play constructively with the sexual energies within the theatre.

The close relationship between the theatres and the world of the court allows these first professional women dramatists to offer criticisms of royal behaviour. Charles II's extramarital affairs with actresses and noblewomen are anatomised in the plays of Elizabeth Polwhele. Chapter 5 explores how her tragedy adopts a high moral tone to criticise royal lust and sympathise with the isolation of Charles's slighted queen, Catherine of Braganza. Analysis of the court entertainment *Rare en Tout*, directed by Madame Le Roche-Guilhen, reveals that this too is a highly politicised commentary on royal favours. The play is designed to illustrate the power of the court mistress and the actress to sway national politics via the king. Women's continued use of non-professional theatre forms is also explored in a discussion of Lady Elizabeth Delavel's production of *Il Pastor Fido* at her aunt's country house. The evidence which has come down to us about such entertainments reveals that women's admittance to the commercial theatre did not represent the only avenue open to female practitioners, although its importance is obvious.

The success of Aphra Behn as a playwright in the public theatre is crucial to any work on women's drama of the period. Due to the sheer size of Behn's dramatic oeuvre, it has been impossible to deal with each play in detail, so the chapter is organised thematically. A chronological and biographical delineation of Behn's theatrical career has already been effected, in work such as Maureen Duffy's *The Passionate Shepherdess* (1977, rev. 1989) and Angeline Goreau's *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (1980). As with the general works of Cotton and Pearson, we would direct the reader towards these studies for an overview of Behn's life and career. Aphra Behn has a somewhat heroic status in women's history as the first woman to earn her living by writing (though Germaine Greer has recently questioned the accuracy of this view 1995: 173–96). Behn's audacity and success led Virginia Woolf to call for 'all women together ought to let fall flowers upon the tomb of Aphra Behn' (Woolf, 1977: 63). Yet her 'firstness' and 'uniqueness' in the theatre is perhaps dangerously redolent of the 'token woman', rendering her vulnerable to the scenario proposed by Kruger: 'the theatre institution can absorb individual

female successes without in any way threatening the legitimacy of the masculinist and capitalist definition of that success' (1996: 50).

Possibly the problematic status of Behn *vis-à-vis* the public stage has engendered reluctance among feminist scholars to consider her as a playwright, rather than as a novelist or poet. The relatively small amount of critical material on her plays (with the notable exception of *The Rover*) compared to that on her prose or poetry is striking, especially when one considers that, of Janet Todd's seven-volume edition of the *Works of Aphra Behn* (1996), the plays occupy three. This reluctance to acknowledge fully Behn's credibility as a playwright is perhaps epitomised by the list of plays chosen for Royal Shakespeare Company's 1999 season. While *The Widow Ranter* received a single rehearsed reading, one of Behn's prose works, *Oroonoko*, featured as a full production in a modern adaptation, which totally erases the voice and character of the narrator. Moreover, apart from Elin Diamond's incisive chapter in *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on feminism and theater* (1997: 56–82), Behn's stagecraft is a largely unexplored territory. The aims of Chapter 6 are therefore twofold, incorporating consideration of both textual and theatrical strategies in Behn's plays. Rather than exploring plays individually, the chapter investigates the ways in which Behn selected and manipulated generic features, feminine character types, and the presence of the actress, to create heroines of psychological substance who offer images of female empowerment. In counterpoint to this, the chapter also examines the ways in which Behn's plays expose the perverse limitations placed upon women by the socio-economic conditions, ideological milieu and generic conventions operating in late seventeenth-century England.

The material dealt with in Chapter 7 is an apposite mixture of drama written for private consumption and that written for the public stage. It provides a fit conclusion to the book, encouraging the reader to acknowledge the different auspices utilised by the seventeenth-century women playwrights who came after Behn, but also to recognise their common gender-political agenda, which sought to question and transcend the material and ideological limitations imposed on women as writers and as speaking subjects. Here again we challenge Michel Adam's comment (*see above*), by refusing to see the pioneering work of Aphra Behn as the point at which women eventually 'made it' in the theatre. To do so would privilege the professional over the amateur, the public over the private, and the commercial over the non-profit making. Such privileging is the result of an historical application of specifically twentieth-century values. It also makes the assumption that the necessarily masculinist values of 'professionalism' are the only ones by which dramatic texts were and are judged, implying that those who wrote for sites other than the public theatre were demonstrably lesser writers and that they accepted their inferior status. In fact, the

women writers who chose to withhold their plays from the public stage, namely Ephelia, Anne Wharton and Anne Finch, were well-known and prolific writers who use drama to engage in a debate about the literary and theatrical representation of female characters, women performers and women playwrights. The semi-permeable nature of the divide between private and public theatres is demonstrated in Delariviere Manley's Prologue to *The Lost Lover*, in which she gives her reason for writing the play as 'only to pass some tedious Country Hours' (A2v). She explains that her friends persuaded her to put it on the public stage where 'the bare Name of being a woman's play damn'd it beyond its own want of Merit' (A3r). Thus, the women who wrote for the public stage in this period shared the debate with their sister writers who kept their scripts out of the playhouse.

While the novelty of the woman playwright appears to have been used as a marketing tool in the case of Ariadne's *She Ventures and He Wins*, the problematic status of the woman playwright in the public theatre is consistently raised by Catherine Trotter, Delariviere Manley and Mary Pix. These women were doubly vulnerable at the moment of their plays' public realisation on stage by being absent from the occasion of performance (a liminality also suffered by male playwrights), and yet exposed to public view *as women*. They sought to reconfigure the woman playwright as a positive presence. Although they came together as a distinct feminine force in the theatre, their playwriting strategies were highly individual. We consider the very different ways in which each playwright addresses both the dramatic tradition in which she is writing and the material conditions in which the play will be realised. For example, in *The Lost Lover* Manley explores the inadequacies of comedy to represent the cast-mistress. Trotter stages love between women in *Agnes de Castro*, effecting de Lauretis' point that 'in the very act of assuming and speaking from the position of subject, a woman could concurrently recognize women as subjects *and* as objects of female desire' (1990: 17). We reconsider Mary Pix in terms of her pragmatism and lengthy career to give a reading that departs from previous critical assessments of her as less obviously feminist than her sister playwrights.

We began this project with the intent of taking individual responsibility for discrete chapters, and of writing the introduction and final chapters collaboratively. As with dramatic productions, however, changes in schedule, crises, and the pressing deadline, have obliged us to reassign material in order to complete the book for the 'opening night'. While we all take responsibility for the 'final production', we have chosen to make explicit our various contributions to the project by attributing each chapter to its proper authors, thus giving a 'local habitation and a name' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.17) to our different approaches and writing styles. As a theatre programme breaks down a performance into its constituent actors