Capitalizing on Change: The Influence of Queen Elizabeth I's Marriage Politics on the Lives and Works of Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn

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Abstract

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The history of women authors has been long understudied. It is only recently that feminists, historians, and literary critics have contributed to the conversation on women writers. My research adds to this conversation by focusing on historical events that altered English culture, and how these events allowed for the entrance of women into the literary profession and influenced these authors' lives and works. This is done by examining the lives and works of Aphra Behn and Anne Bradstreet, the first acknowledged professional women authors in America and England, respectively. My thesis examines primary sources, biographies, and scholarly analysis of these women's lives and works to explore the connections between the literature of Bradstreet and Behn, and the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. This comprehensive understanding of these women will show how the literature they created was not accomplished in isolation, but was the result of historical influences.

Key Words: Aphra Behn, Anne Bradstreet, Queen Elizabeth I, women's history

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Introduction

The intersection of history and literature has always been a subject of interest to me. I am fascinated by how literature brings historical time periods and people to life, and I found myself studying literature written during specific time periods and exploring how it illuminated the personal lives and struggles of the people that lived within these timeframes. As I continued my education, I began to notice that the majority of the literature I was exposed to was written by male authors. This lack of exposure to women authors made me curious about the reasons for that underrepresentation. Were there so few women authors, were they less accomplished than their male counterparts, or was their underrepresentation the result of cultural limitations imposed upon women authors? In my quest to answer this question I began to search out women authors.

As I began to read more women authors I noticed that the majority of the literature being discussed in the academic coursework I was involved in had been written during or after the eighteenth century. Even when I took a class specifically on the history of women's literature we began with Jane Austen, with only a brief description of the work done by earlier women in the introduction to the class. It appeared as if women had not written anything that qualified as literature before the eighteenth century, then magically burst upon the literary world with the success of the eighteenth century authoress. However, nothing in history has ever appeared out of nothing. Women writers' ambiguous origins made me curious to discover where and who started the journey to literary success for women.

Although my undergraduate education offered limited interpretation of women's literature, it was here that I was introduced, albeit indirectly, to some early women authors through the work of Virginia Woolf. In her treatise "A Room of One's Own" I was introduced to the fascinating Aphra Behn and the many foremothers of women writers like Austen, and the Bronte's. Woolf explains that, "with Mrs. Behn we turn a very important corner on the road… for here begins the freedom of the mind, or rather the possibility that in the course of time the mind will be free to write what it likes."[1] This fascinated me because Woolf was crediting this woman as the cause of women writers' existence, and yet I *had never heard of her*. This made me wonder why I was studying Woolf in a history of women's literature class but *not* studying the woman Woolf credits as the reason women were even able to write. As a result of this confusion I began to wonder what other women writers were being forgotten by modern scholarship, and I began to delve further into the research.

I found that there were actually a number of women authors during the seventeenth century who both made an impact on their societies and are still discussed today. However, I also found that these seventeenth century women authors were forgotten by history for most of the nineteenth century, and it is only in the last fifty years that they have resurfaced as subjects of study. As I was researching, I began to realize that the history and accomplishments of women authors is surprisingly far reaching, but the scholarship is limited in its perspective, and as a result, the motivations and influences that inspired these women to become professional authors is understudied.

Current scholarship on seventeenth century women authors is extensive, but is mostly biographic histories of specific seventeenth century authors or distinctly feminist perspectives on the lives and works of these authors. While this scholarship is important to the illumination of early women authors, it fails to fully explain how these women *became* authors. Most scholarship represents these women authors as brave, independent groundbreakers who singlehandedly broke into the literary profession against fierce resistance. Feminist scholars Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim that seventeenth century women authors were forced to write in an "isolation that felt like illness,…an obscurity that felt like paralysis".[2] This idea of the woman author as a lonely rebel breaking free of the shackles of patriarchy is one that appeared in much of the scholarship on early women writers. Most of this scholarship was done by feminist scholars, looking at the issue through a specific lens, one that may see women writers as boldly and intentionally defying patriarchy. For me, however, this is an incomplete interpretation of the emergence of women authors during the seventeenth century. Women authors did not exist in a bubble and therefore did not create in a bubble. Changes in the society they operated within *must* have influenced these women's decisions to write.

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[1] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 682.

Discovering what those changes were and how they influenced these first-acknowledged women authors is vital for a complete understanding of who these women were and the true depth of their impact on future women writers. These early women authors only being discussed by feminist authors limits them, because it implies that they are only worth considering as feminist constructs and made no other contributions to the historical record they functioned within. These women were complete beings and therefore were probably driven to begin writing by a myriad of personal motives. However, they were also products of their surroundings and the society they existed within. Therefore, something in their society must have influenced them to believe that they *could* become authors, before they took it upon themselves to do so. Current scholarship does not explore these connections, but only looks at women authors from the perspective of the resistance they faced *after* they became authors. By examining these authors only from the context of their reaction to masculine resistance to their authorship, scholars compartmentalize them into a gendered context and fail to see their relevance to the larger historical discussion. As a result women authors are rarely included in academic discussions outside of this feminist context.

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[2] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), 51.

This is a mistake because until women authors are seen as contributing to the general understanding of the historic period and the literature it produced --- and not just examples of counter-societal, early feminist sources --- their full contributions to history will never be understood. It is my intention to explore how early women authors were reflections of their social surroundings and therefore how their literature and lives were examples of the changes in their society, not rebellions against it. Although I am under no illusions that my research alone will explain all of the historic influences and events that helped create early women authors, I hope that my work will inspire other scholars to look at these early women authors as something other than a historic oddity. Perhaps if modern academics can see early women writers as a product of their society, and not a departure from it, these women will begin to make more of an appearance in academic discussion.

Although there are a number of seventeenth century women writers, it would not be practical to look at all of them for this project. The two women authors that I focus on are Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn, credited as the first acknowledged, professional women authors in the Americas and England, respectively.[3] These women were both popular authors during their lives, but were forgotten during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although forgotten, they are perfect examples of how women authors' lives and literary works were directly influenced by the social environment within which they created. Understanding how social changes created an environment that allowed Bradstreet and Behn to feel they had a chance at entering the masculine field of literature is important for understanding the source of shifts in women's rights and opportunities.

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[3] Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578-1799* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985), 143-4; Adrienne Rich, "Anne Bradstreet and Her Poetry," in *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Jeannine Hensley (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), XX.

As I was researching I found that, during this time period, English monarchs not only determined matters of war, peace, and levels of taxation, their choices also influenced the personal lives of their people. Throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were many different monarchs, but I have singled out four whose reigns I believe had the largest impact on the personal lives of English citizens, especially women, both before and after their reign. Queen Elizabeth I, Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, and Charles II all contributed to the appearance of the first recognized, professional women authors, specifically Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn. Examining the decisions these monarchs made during their reigns and their portrayal in the works of Bradstreet and Behn shows these monarchs' influence on the emergence of women writers.

Although I eventually intend to look at the reign of each monarch in depth, for the purposes of this thesis I will be focusing on Queen Elizabeth I. In this thesis I examine Elizabeth's decision to remain unwed and rule independently, how her choice to write her own speeches aided in her ability to rule, and the ways in which these choices affected women's lives during the seventeenth century and influenced the works of Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn.

Why Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn?

I chose to focus on Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn because not only were they both groundbreaking authors of the seventeenth century, but both lay claim to the firsts of their respective literary fields: Anne Bradstreet was the first female poet in America and Aphra Behn is credited as the first professional playwright in England.[4] I can understand how some critics may be skeptical about the validity of comparing two women who, on the surface, appear to be originating from very different places in both their lives and literary works. Anne Bradstreet operated, for the most part, from within the norms of Puritan society, whereas Aphra Behn challenged almost every moral norm of her time. However, these women both came from similar backgrounds and had a common tie to seventeenth century England and the religious and political upheaval that was taking place during their lifetimes.

Both Bradstreet and Behn grew up in England under similar circumstances. Bradstreet was born Anne Dudley in Northampton, England in 1612. The second of five children, her father was Thomas Dudley, steward to the Earl of Lincoln and therefore a member of the lower gentry.[5] As a family with Puritan beliefs they were discontent with the religious battle that was currently the focus of the political situation in England. Behn, despite playing such a significant role in women's history, had an early childhood that has been obscured throughout the centuries. Even the spelling of her first name has been much debated.[6] Despite this obscurity, it is commonly believed that Behn was born in July of 1640 in Wye, Kent to undetermined parents; some scholars believe that they were barbers, or possibly members of the middleclass.[7] As a child Aphra grew up under the controlling Cromwellian government which forbid all forms of theatre as morally corrupt, and caused discontent among English citizens.[8] Both women began their lives in similar situations: middle-class women subject to the vagaries of a shifting English political environment.

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[4] Ferguson, *First Feminists*, 143-4.

[5] Rosamond Rosenmeier, *Anne Bradstreet Revisited* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 14-15.

[6] George Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra* (New York: T.V. Boardman and Co., 1948), 13.

These women also shared a similar adolescence in that they both traveled out of England at a young age and obtained their education in a similar manner. Anne Bradstreet did not go to school, but scholars believe that her parents were followers of the humanistic belief of providing basic education for both sexes. As a result, she would have obtained a basic education in letters and numbers from her parents. References in her poetry also suggest that she may have received further education from tutors hired to educate the Earl of Lincoln's children.[9] In 1628 Anne Dudley, at the young age of sixteen, married Simon Bradstreet, a Cambridge graduate who was nine years her elder. For someone of her class Anne was still young to be married; however Simon Bradstreet was "someone she had known since childhood (Anne was nine when they first met), so although there seems to have been no betrothal, perhaps it had been assumed from a very early age that Simon and Anne would marry."[10] Although Bradstreet's family led a relatively comfortable life in England, as devout Puritans the family was subject to the political and religious persecution that many religious groups faced in England during the seventeenth century. As a result, in 1630 when Anne was eighteen, her family journeyed to New England.

Despite the limited information on Behn's childhood, it is known that Behn lived in

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[7] Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 16.
[8] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra,* 26.
[9] Rosenmeier, *Anne Bradstreet Revisited,* 21-23.
[10] Rosenmeier, *Anne Bradstreet Revisited,* 38.

Surinam with her family for a number of years. The reasons behind this move have been much debated, but it is currently believed that her father was appointed lieutenant governor of the colony.[11] Behn was sixteen when her family moved to the West Indies.[12] Some scholars believe that she acquired some basic formal education while in Surinam, but current research indicates that Behn was primarily self-taught, with only the occasional tutor to supplement her education.[13] It was also while she was in Surinam that Behn married an unnamed Dutch merchant. Ultimately it proved to be a short-lived marriage as he died two years later, leaving Behn penniless.[14]

It is at this point the life experiences of Bradstreet and Behn diverge drastically. Bradstreet, as a newlywed and devout Puritan, made the journey to New England with her immediate family and the Massachusetts Bay Company, landing in Salem.[15] She was a middle class Englishwoman in the wilderness of the Americas, but faced with the struggles of early colonization Bradstreet quickly realized that she was in a whole new world and that the class rules she was familiar with no longer applied. In fact, Bradstreet wrote that she "came into this Country, where [she] found a new World and new manners."[16] In the early Americas every person had to work together to survive, creating a gender equality that wasn't found in England. During her early years in New England Bradstreet struggled with the harsh environment and as a result found herself questioning her faith. As a result, many of her poems reflect this struggle. Bradstreet and her family eventually adapted to the independent and industrious spirit of

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[11] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 16.
[12] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Middle Ages Through the Turn of the Century,* vol. 1 (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 178.
[13] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 15-17.
[14] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 28-9.
[15] Rosenmeier, *Anne Bradstreet Revisited,* 1.
[16] Rosenmeier, *Anne Bradstreet Revisited*, 72.

America and made themselves a part of early New England history. In fact, from 1634-35 her father was the governor of New England, and after her death her husband became governor from 1678-1692.[17]

During her time in New England she not only managed to raise eight children but wrote a substantial body of work. In fact Bradstreet's first poem was written in 1632, and her children were born during the years she wrote her most well-known poems.[18] Her last poem, "A weary pilgrim, now at rest," was written three years before her death in 1672.[19] As a result of Puritan religious beliefs Bradstreet's poetry was originally composed only for her personal gratification and growth; she never intended these works to be published. However, her family's support of her literary efforts led to her works being published when her brother in-law went behind her back and took her poems to a publisher in London.[20]

During Bradstreet's lifetime her works were said to be one of the most salable volumes produced in the Americas.[21] Bradstreet's earlier literary works were historical poems that closely followed the works of authors she studied, such as Milton and Du Bartas.[22] Her later poetry, often credited as her best, were personal narratives focusing on her family and faith. An example of her more personal poetry would be her "Contemplations" series, which was published in a posthumous reprinting of her poetic body of work, *The Tenth Muse.* Bradstreet was not only the first woman poet in the Americas, but "the first good poet in America", period.[23]

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[17] Ibid., 79-141.
[18] Ibid., 72-4.
[19] Ibid., 37-41.
[20] Jeannine Hensley, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), XXVI.
[21] Gilbert and Gubar, *Norton Anthology of Literature,* 144.
[22] Rich, "Anne Bradstreet and Her Poetry," XI-XIII.
[23] Rich, "Anne Bradstreet and Her Poetry*,"* XX.

Behn's literary life was much more tumultuous. Behn returned to England at some point in her early twenties, and it was a drastically different England from her childhood.[24] Now under the rule of King Charles II, England was a place with a more relaxed governmental relationship and looser moral standards. The cultural changes that came with this altered England would greatly affect Behn and eventually lead to her authorship.

Before becoming an author, as a result of her husband's death and her consequent poverty, Behn was forced to seek other employment. Behn's first experience with employment was as a government spy. Unfortunately, this was another disappointment for Behn and she returned to London in 1667.[25] When Behn returned to London she was more impoverished than when she left. She was also now deeply in debt, and as a result spent some time in debtors' prison in 1668.[26] It wasn't until she was released from debtor's prison that she began writing for the stage.

Desperate for a means to support herself Behn turned to a publisher friend, Thomas Killigrew, for assistance in finding employment and began working as a translator of other authors' literary works.[27] As a result of her association with a number of playwrights, Behn may have been inspired to attempt writing plays. Regardless of motivations, Behn entered the theatrical world with the publication of *The Forc'd Marriage* in 1670.[28] It was a success, and she became a prolific playwright for the rest of her life. As a result Behn supported herself solely on her plays and short novels; these endeavors provided her with varying degrees of financial comfort. Behn continued to write poetry and plays until her health completely failed her. After years of struggling with failing health, Behn died in 1689.[29] Her death was mourned by her fellow playwrights, and as a result they ensured that her plays were performed into the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, with the death of her fellow playwrights, much of Behn's life and literary legacy was lost and didn't begin to be resurrected until over a century later.

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[24] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature,* 178; Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 22. Dates of her return vary by source.

[25] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 37.

[26] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature*, 179.

[27] Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 137.

[28] Margaret Ferguson, "Renaissance Concepts of the 'Women Writer'," in *Women and Literature in Britain,* ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 143-68.

Although the literary period of these women's lives seem disparate, there are a number of recurring themes that appear in the works of both authors. What is important about these themes is that they all stemmed from common historical influences: the marriage politics of Queen Elizabeth I, Charles I's execution, the religious politics of Oliver Cromwell, and the cultural freedom of Charles II's reign. This thesis will be discussing the marriage politics of Queen Elizabeth I and its influences on Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn.

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[29] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 210-15.

Review of the Critical Sources

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time of great social, political, and religious change. One effect of these changes was an increase in women's literary activity. Unfortunately, despite this increase in women's authorship it is only in the last fifty years that women's literary history has become a major topic of academic scholarship. Due to historians' late start in researching the subject, even the most ambitious researcher describes their work as "hacking off a piece of the body" [30] that is women's literary history. This has typically led to women's literary history being examined either on an extremely general scale or an extremely specific one.

As I began delving further into the research done specifically on Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn, I came to the realization that information on these women was very vague and more often than not based on speculation, not facts. There are massive numbers of articles and books written by a variety of scholars focusing on the possible meanings of these women's works and vague interpretations of their lives. The problem that I have with this approach to women's literary accomplishments is that all of the scholars I researched did not consider the historical environment within which their subjects were writing and how these events influenced their work. By failing to consider this information, scholars fail to fully understand and therefore successfully interpret, who these women were and what they were trying to share through their literary works.

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[30] Helen Wilcox, "Feminist Criticism in the Renaissance and Seventeenth Century," in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism,* ed. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27.

Intentionally or Unintentionally Forgotten: Women's Literature and its Exclusion from Historical Criticism

Although literary critics have existed for centuries, they rarely reviewed the works of women writers. It was through the work of feminist scholars in the mid-twentieth century that these lost women authors' lives and works began to be studied. As a result, the scholarly discussion became centered on the historical resistance to women authors and potential reasons for why women authors would have been excluded from the critical sources.

Throughout the 1800s, many historians discussed seventeenth century England and America. Most of these scholars, intentionally or unintentionally, excluded women from their research. In the mid-1900s many critics, including Gerda Lerner, Aileen Kraditor, and several others, described this as a failing in the definition of 'history.' Lerner explains that, "as long as historians held to the traditional view that only the transmission and exercise of power were worthy or their interest, women were of necessity ignored."[31] Kraditor explains that because women held little power, they were excluded from the study of history until the late twentieth century.[32] While this historic understanding of women's exclusion is somewhat understandable, there are a number of situations where this type of historical definition does not provide enough justification for the exclusion of women.

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[31] Gerda Lerner, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History," in *Women and Womanhood in America*, ed. Ronald Hogeland (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), 15.

[32] Aileen Kraditor, "Up from the Pedestal," in *Women and Womanhood in America*, ed. Ronald Hogeland (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), 3.

Although several scholars in the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s failed to include women in their research, two of the most notable exclusions were the works of Alexis De Tocqueville and Ian Watt. Alexis De Tocqueville was a Frenchman who came to America in 1831. While visiting America he developed some very strong ideas about the artistic environment of America, which became the subject of his book *Democracy in America*. In his book de Tocqueville argues that high quality arts in America will never exist, partially as a result of America's democratic nature. He explains that, "In aristocracies a few great pictures are produced; in democratic countries, a vast number of insignificant ones."[33] One of the reasons he gives for this terminal mediocrity is that, in America "where every profession is open to all"[34] it is too easy for anyone to participate in any activity, regardless of qualifications. This open access leads to a lack of quality because there is no control over who can or cannot participate in the creation of an item.

Not only does de Tocqueville's book write a rather scathing prediction of America's contributions to the artistic world, but by saying that America is incapable of creating quality *after* the publication of Bradstreet's poetry, he essentially labeled her work as unworthy. Commercial appeal did not impress de Tocqueville, and Bradstreet's works were one of "the most salable volumes produced in seventeenth century London and the Americas."[35] Although de Tocqueville may not have considered salability proof of 'quality,' Bradstreet's success in England made her significant, as the requirements for quality writing were higher than in the Americas.[36] If she was successful in England then she must have been skilled beyond the mediocrity of American arts. Although I am not certain success in England would have been enough proof of quality for de Tocqueville, Bradstreet's success on both continents does suggest that she would have been worthy of discussion.

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[33] Alexis de Tocqueville*, Democracy in America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1945), 157.
[34] De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 153.
[35] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature,* 145.
[36] Joseph Ellis, *After the Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), 23-38.

The most glaring exclusion of women from scholarship is in English scholar Ian Watt's book *The Rise of the Novel,* a comprehensive analysis of the origins and evolution of the novel. This may not seem relevant to Behn and Bradstreet, since neither author was a novelist, but it illustrates the general treatment of women writers. Watt provides an extensive analysis of the lives and works of a number of male novelists, but despite the fact he acknowledges that "the majority of eighteenth century novels were actually written by women,"[37] he completely excludes women writers from his analysis. This conspicuous absence is discussed by feminist scholar Dale Spender. He sees Watt's exclusion of women authors as a conscious statement about the quality Watt attributes to women's literature. Spender explains that "by Watt's failure to discuss 'the majority' of novels of the eighteenth century, Ian Watt indicates that it is not necessary to examine the writing of women to know it is of no account."[38] By directly acknowledging the prevalence of women authors but excluding them from his work, it is clear that Watt was making a conscious decision to exclude them.

Possible Reasons for Active Exclusion

In the 1930s Virginia Woolf shed light upon the reasons for this exclusion of women from the historical criticism in her lecture "A Room of One's Own." Her arguments were later continued by the works of a number of feminist scholars, starting in the 1960s. In fact, the majority of scholarship on women writers has been done by feminist scholars, and they believe that one of the main causes of women's exclusion from critical history was men's active resistance to the existence of women authors.[39]

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[37] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 298.

[38] Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen* (New York: Pandora Press, 1986), 139.

Scholars Virginia Woolf, Gayle Green, and Dale Spender, argue that women have been excluded from the conversation because they were women, not because their work was unworthy. Woolf begins this discussion by attributing women's exclusion from literary history as a result of the harsh discouragement women faced in seeking acknowledgement for their accomplishments. She argues that women writers had to constantly struggle against this "assertion-- that they cannot do this, that they are incapable of doing it."[40] Scholar Gayle Green believes that this resistance to women's authorship was a result of man's wish to control women. Green explains that male supremacy is maintained because "the male perspective, assumed to be universal, dominated fields of knowledge, shaping literary critics' paradigms and methods."[41] Dale Spender explains that this exclusion is the result of a foundation of male-dominated authority. Critics have "been mainly men--and a particular group of white, educated, privileged men-- who have determined that the work of white, middle-class men is the best that can be written."[42] He argues that male authors' "insistence that women should not write has often been transformed (in the minds of many men) into the edict that women could not write."[43] Therefore, resistance to women's writing was not the result of lack of literary skill, but sexism resulting from men's desire to maintain control over women.

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[39] Gayle Green & Coppelia Kahn, *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen Press, 1985); Myra Reynolds, *The Learned Lady in England 1650-1760* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 26; Sarah G Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 12; Laura Runge, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660-1790* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 76; Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Prouix* (New York: Random House, 2009), 28-30.

[40] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* 593.

[41] Green, "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman," 2-3.

[42] Dale Spender, *Living by the Pen: Early British Women Writers (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992*), 30.

According to several scholars, no literary criticism of women writers' actual works can be found from their time period; so there is no actual case against the worth of women writers in the literary establishment.[44] Therefore, Spender argues that the objections that have so long devalued women's works must be objections determined by their sex, not literary skill.[45] Another scholar, Laura Runge, explains that these objections were the result of the heavily patriarchal English society. During this time period male achievements were applauded and women achievements marginalized; "the importance of 'masculine' art always [took] precedence over the 'feminine'."[46] Spender argues that despite "many debates about standards, about content, form, and style, at the center of tension between women and men in the world of letters is the issue of power. Men have it, and they are using it to try and keep women out." [47] Therefore, the discrediting of women authors by literary critics "under the guise of scholarship and the dogma of 'objectivity,' is really just literary men playing politics,"[48] and an intentional action, rather than an accidental omission of history. Scholar Laura Runge explains that this resistance meant that every woman who made the decision to write knew that she was doing so "fully aware of the double bind which a female poet faced: do badly and you will be mocked, but do well and your authorship will be denied."[49]

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[43] Dale Spender, *The Writer or the Sex? Or Why You Don't Have to Read Women's Writing to Know it's no Good* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989), 25.

[44] Spender, *Mothers of the Novel*, 138-139; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, ed., *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (London: Indiana University Press, 1979), XIX-XX.

[45] Spender, *Mothers of the Novel,* 2-4.

[46] Runge, *Gender and Language*, 4.

[47] Spender, *The Writer or the Sex*, 24.

[48] Spender, *The Writer or the Sex*, 31.

Some critics have argued that because women authors have been given *some* credit, the lack of attention paid to women authors has been the result of a lack of quality writing, not intentional exclusion. Spender argues this mindset results from the fact that "the establishment encourages the belief that if any explanation is needed for women's absence, it is because their *writing* is not up to standard."[50] However, Spender argues that if you examine the works of women who have been discussed and the women who have not, the differences in quality are imperceptible.[51] Therefore the exclusion of women writers from the conversation is likely the result of cultural resistance, not a dearth of talent.

This exclusion results in "literature [being] reduced to the level of propaganda, the medium for the unchallenged view of the dominant sex."[52] Underrepresenting women authors is a problem because seeing the literary world from only one perspective is excluding, intentionally or unintentionally, the voices that represent a large part of the population and offers a unique perspective on their culture. It is only by closely examining their writing that scholars can understand the specific contributions women authors offer to both cultural understanding and the literary profession.

Effects of Active Exclusion on the First Women Writers

Virginia Woolf argues that although women characters are often portrayed as important heroines in many seventeenth century male author's stories, in real life they were mostly illiterate and considered to be property.[53] In both seventeenth century society and historic research, the lives of women are mentioned only in passing, or sometimes completely excluded. Woolf argues that, as a result of this exclusion, "one knows nothing detailed, nothing perfectly true and substantial"[54] about the women who first entered the literary world. As a result, during the 1970's feminist scholars began focusing on unearthing the personal experiences of individual women. Despite their efforts, however, accounts of the first women authors' lives are incomplete.[55]

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[49] Helen Wilcox, "Feminism in the Renaissance and Seventeenth Century," in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism,* ed. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33.
[50] Spender, *The Writer or the Sex*, 30.
[51] Spender, *Living by the Pen,* 23-25.
[52] Spender, *Mothers of the Novel*, 54.

These more targeted histories illustrated feminist scholars' belief that "it was a miracle in itself that anything worth reading was ever written by a woman,"[56] as the act of writing likely caused incredible psychological difficulty for the first women authors. This lack of literary tradition for women to reference is defined by feminist scholars, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as an "anxiety of authorship---a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her."[57] Male writers have a literary tradition: "they have always had an established set of literary ancestors and the symbolic support of economically successful men of their own profession."[58] Whereas men had been successful as writers for centuries, providing new male authors with a literary history to look to for emotional support, women writers had no such support. Scholars Cheryl Walker and Adrienne Munich argue that, since women had no literary history of their own, they were forced to find their voice through "entering male dominated discourse; speaking women are silent as women."[59] A lack of understanding how women authors fit into the masculine dominated literary world, combined with active resistance from said world, must have caused severe anxiety in early women writers.[60]

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[53] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 586-7.
[54] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 587.
[55] Hensley, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, Xxiv-xxxvi; Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 26-27.
[56] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* 452.
[57] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 49.
[58] Walker, *The Nightingale's Burden*, 2.

For these scholars this was a problem, because if women were forced to participate in the masculine sphere they had to either challenge that domination or frame their literature to interact within it. Many feminist scholars agree that, "with few female precursors and pitted in an unequal struggle with a long-established male tradition, the woman author doubts her place in creativity"[61] and struggles to understand how to convey her personal voice.

Although I can understand these scholars' perspectives, the fact is women *did* write. This makes me question the level of anxiety that Munich, Gilbert, and Gubar seem to imply existed for these women writers. While I can understand that determining where they would fit into the literary tradition may have caused some anxiety, I doubt that women would have had trouble interacting with the existing masculine texts and determining which elements of those texts to make their own. For example, both of the authors this thesis examines used the works of male authors as inspiration for their works. Anne Bradstreet acknowledges the work of Du Bartas as being the main source of her literary inspiration[62] and many of Aphra Behn's plays drew from works by male playwrights.[63]

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[59] Adrienne Munich, "Notorious Signs, Feminist Criticism and Literary Tradition," in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn, 238-259 (London: Methuen Press, 1985), 239.

[60] Walker, *The Nightingale's Burden*, 1-4.

[61] Mary Eagleton, "Literary Representations of Women," in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism,* ed. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 110; Munich, "Notorious Signs, Feminist Criticism and Literary Tradition," 257; Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 20-28.

[62] Rich, "Anne Bradstreet and Her Poetry," XIII.

[63] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 90-120.

Critical Scholarship of Individual Works

As a result of the explosion of women studies in the 1960's Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn scholarship experienced a growth of interest, but this scholarship was very polarized. It began looking at Bradstreet and Behn's literature as works of autobiography and eventually moved towards the aesthetic qualities of individual texts, divorced from all authorial context.

Criticism of Works as Autobiography

Feminist scholar Gayle Green explains that "history has been a record of male experience, written by men, from a male perspective."[64] As a result, many female historic scholars believed that it was their duty to reject this masculine hegemony and "reconstruct the female experience."[65] As a result, since the 1960s there has been an influx of feminist scholarship on women authors, focusing on the "heroic, passionate, [and] subversive"[66] nature of specific authors' lives and literary works.

Themes in Anne Bradstreet Scholarship

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[64] Gyle Green, "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman," in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn (London: Methuen Press, 1985), 12.

[65] Green, "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman," 13.

[66] Mary Eagleton, "Literary Representations of Women," in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism,* ed. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 111.

Although several scholars examine the influences of other authors on Bradstreet's work,[67] the majority of scholarship on Bradstreet's poetry examines how it illustrates her interaction with her Puritan religion. Critics universally accept that the majority of Bradstreet's work was religiously grounded, and the current conversation explores how her works illustrate the conviction or doubt behind Bradstreet's religious beliefs. Scholars Robert Richardson and Samuel Morison focus on Bradsteet's poems "Burning of the house," "Flesh and spirit," and most notably "Contemplations" to examine how Bradstreet's work illustrates her "extreme positions of acceptance and rejection of this world."[68] Elizabeth Wade White, James Anderson, William J. Irvin, and Helen Saltman explore Bradstreet's poetry as "dramatiz[ing] her spiritual awakening and conversion."[69] For these scholars her works exemplify her personal spiritual communion with her Puritan beliefs. Bradstreet's poetry is seen as exemplifying the depth of her personal spirituality.

Conversely, scholar Randall Mawer discusses Bradstreet's poems as rebellion against religion, particularly in her elegy "Farewel Dear Babe." In these elegy poems Mawer argues Bradstreet's voice is not praising her religion, but criticizing it as "her heart rises, in rebellion that is almost triumph"[70] against a religion that expects her to calmly accept the death of her family members. Scholars like Mawer read Bradstreet's poetry as personal complaints against a religion that required followers to cast off all worldly concerns and focus on spiritual rewards, something a handful of critics argue Bradstreet struggled with. Although I can understand the value in reading Bradstreet's poetry for its spiritual content, I find examining her poetry from such a specific lens imposes limitations on the interpretation of her works. Bradstreet's work clearly comes from a place of spiritual belief, but there are many other subjects that can be explored within her poetry forgotten by scholars who are focusing only on Bradstreet and her religion.

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[67] Helen McMahon, "Anne Bradstreet, Jean Bertault, and Dr. Crooke," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 116-22; Kenneth Requa, "Anne Bradstreet's Use of DuBartas in 'Contemplations'," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 145-49.

[68] Robert Richardson, "The Puritan Poetry of Anne Bradstreet," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 105.

[69] Helen Saltman, "'Contemplations': Anne Bradstreet's Spiritual Autobiography," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet,* ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 226; William J. Irvin, "Allegory and Typology Imbrace and Greet: Anne Bradstreet's Contemplations'," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 174-78; James Anderson, "From Anne Dudley, Wife of Simon Bradstreet," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 17; Elizabeth Wade White, "The Tenth Muse-A tercenary appraisal of Anne Bradstreet," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 74.

Themes in Aphra Behn Scholarship

Criticism of Behn's writing rarely looks at her works individually and mostly focus on her use of art as a means of sharing her political and social beliefs. Many scholars discuss how Behn's plays were examples of her "unreformed and unreformable Toryism."[71] Although these authors focused on Behn's political agenda, one of the main areas of political discussion is her criticism of the sexual politics within her society. Robert Markley and Susan Green agree that Behn's plays "exploit, albeit often cynically, spectacles of women violating decorum in order both to question and to justify the moral and social codes that govern a patrilineal society."[72] This is exemplified in many of Behn's works because she faced this social dynamic in her own life. Scholars like Catharine Gallagher and Susan Owen[73] have recognized this aspect of her life and discuss how Behn combats it through her plays. Gallagher explains that, "by literalizing and embracing the playwright-prostitute metaphor, therefore, Aphra Behn was distinguished from other authors… She became a symbolic figure of authorship for the Restoration."[74] Many critics explored how Behn utilized and/or challenged this poet-whore identifier through her work and how it exemplified her personal life choices. However, Catharine Gallager also believes that Behn's overt sexuality became something of a road block to future women authors. Gallager explains that women following Behn "had to overcome not only her life, her bawdiness and the author-whore metaphor she celebrated, but also her playful challenges to the very possibility of female self-representation."[75] The question of how much the politics and sexuality portrayed in Behn's plays and poetry was indicative of her personal experiences is a subject extensively discussed, to the exclusion of individual plays and the other qualities of Behn's art.

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[70] Randall Mawer, "'Farewel Dear Babe': Bradstreet's Elegy for Elizabeth," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983).

[71] Melinda Zook, "The Political Poetry of Aphra Behn," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46; Alison Shell, "Popish Plots: The Feign'd Curtizans in Context," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 30-49; Susan Owen, "Behn's Dramatic Response to Restoration politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68-82; Rob Ballaster, "Fiction Feigning Femininity: False Counts and Pageant Kings in Aphra Behn's Popish Plot Writings," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 50-65; Virginia Crompton, "'For When the Act is Done and Finish't Cleane,'What Should the Poet doe, but Shift the Scene?': Propaganda, Professionalism and Aphra Behn," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 130-153.

Although several of her plays and poems have been discussed by scholars, only two of Behn's works garnered substantial individual attention: Behn's poem "The Disappointment" and her play *Oroonoko*. Paul Salzman and Jessica Munns examined "The Disappointment" as a historical commentary on the sexual power politics of the seventeenth century.[76] The poem discusses a woman's anxiety over her loss of virtue, and a man's inability to sexually perform. This play was often seen by scholars as an illustration of how the sexual politics of the time were shifting and how men were losing their masculine power, while women were beginning to question the sexual restraint expected of them.[77]

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[72] Robert Markley, "Unstable Traditions of Social Comedy," in *Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 100-1.
[73] Susan Owen, "Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's Drama, 1678-83," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15; Catharine Gallagher, "Who Was That Masked Woman?:The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism* (London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 66.
[74] Gallagher, "Who Was That Masked Woman," 73.
[75] Gallagher, "Who Was That Masked Woman," 84.

Oroonoko is Behn's only text that scholars did not analyze solely for its sexuality. Scholars that focused on *Oroonoko* examined Behn's portrayal of race relations and social displacement. Jacqueline Pearson, Laura Rosenthal, Joanna Lipking, and Charlotte Sussman have all examined how Behn's portrayal of a black central character and criticism of slavery was a groundbreaking development in social understanding. [78] However, Gallagher believed that in *Oroonoko* "racial meaning is displaced by the author's fascination with disembodiment and her attraction to dispossession."[79] Gallagher focuses on the concept of social dispossession from social position, specifically how Behn uses *Oroonoko* to illustrate the loss of autonomy of both the African prince and women in English society.[80] Although these two works are very worthy of discussion, the lack of attention paid to other individual texts in Behn's immense body of work is disappointing.

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[76] Paul Salzman, "Aphra Behn: Poetry and Masquerade," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 109-129; Jessica Munns, "'But to the Touch were Soft': Pleasure, Power, and Impotence in 'The Disappointment' and 'The Golden Age'," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 178-196.

[77] Munns, "But to the Touch were Soft," 182; Charlotte Sussman, "The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism,* ed. Heidi Hutner (London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 179-84.

[78] Jacqueline Pearson, "Slave princes and Lady Monsters: Gender and Ethnic Differences in the Work of Aphra Behn," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 219-234; Laura Rosenthal, "Oroonoko: Reception, Ideology, and Narrative Strategy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151-165; Sussman, "The Other Problem with Women," 179-84; Joanna Lipking, "'Others', Slaves, and Colonists in Oroonoko," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 166.

[79] Catherine Gallagher, "Oroonoko's Blackness," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 235.

[80] Gallagher, "Oroonoko's Blackness," 232-36.

This literature-as-autobiography approach to Bradstreet and Behn's works severely limits the understanding of the complexities of the works, as well as the works' aesthetic literary qualities. A handful of scholars were dissatisfied with this approach to women authors and began to examine the literary quality of women's work. One critic, Gerda Lerner, explained that this glut of information on women writers was actually a problem. Scholarship had a "tendency to praise anything women had done as a 'contribution,' and to include any women who had gained the slightest public attention in numerous lists."[81] For Lerner, this was a mistake because it did not look at the actual quality of women writers' works. Heidi Hutner continues this argument, stating that scholars "tended to read [women writers'] work—as earlier critics did—as an embellishment of [their] sensationalized biography."[82] Reading these authors' works as autobiography fails to analyze and appreciate their works for the art itself. Considering women's literature only valuable as historically informative ignores a large part of what they contribute to the literary conversation, and to history in general.

Criticism of Literary Aesthetics

A small group of scholars realized this limitation and have shifted away from exploring women's literature as extensions of the author's life, towards critiquing the literary esthetic qualities. The backlash to feminist scholars' focus on women's oppression led some scholars to focus exclusively on the patterns and structure used in the poetry, divorced from authorship.[83]

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[81] Gerda Lerner, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History," in *Women and Womanhood in America,* ed. Ronald Hogeland (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), 16.

[82] Heidi Hutner, ed., *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism* (London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 3.

Anne Bradstreet's Aesthetic Qualities

This esthetic critique of literature was utilized in analyzing a number of Bradstreet's poems. For example, scholar Anne Hildebrand looked exclusively at Bradstreet's poetic texts and critiqued her literary skills. Although Hildebrand heavily criticized the formal structures used in Bradstreet's "Quaternions," she applauded the emotion and fluency behind Bradstreet's "Contemplations".[84] Bradstreet's "Quaternions" are often scorned by critics and considered stiff representations of her early work, useful only in illustrating her artistic growth over the course of her career. For example, Rosamond Rosenmeier examines the "Quaternions" and "Marriage poems" to compare how the latter offer a "clearer conception of her poetic imagination."[85] Bradstreet's later poems were often considered her most accomplished works, praised for their fluidity and expression. Yet despite these criticisms, Bradstreet's "Quaternions" are applauded by scholar Jane Eberwein who examines how they "made possible her development as a poet in terms of intellectual adjustments as well as technical craftsmanship."[86] Although many questioned the technical ability of Bradstreet's work, they at least acknowledged the validity of looking at Bradstreet as an accomplished author, not just an interesting historical persona.

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[83] Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn, 4-8.*

[84] Anne Hildebrand, "Anne Bradsteet's Quaternions and 'Contemplations'," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet,* ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 137-149.

[85] Rosamond Rosenmeier, "'Divine Translation': A Contribution to the Study of Anne Bradstreet's Method in the Marriage Poems," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 190.

[86] Jane Eberwein, "The 'Unrefined Ore' of Anne Bradstreet's Quaternions," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983) 166.

Aphra Behn's Aesthetic Qualities

Behn's aesthetic choices have rarely been discussed. Heidi Hutner explains that "the tendency for most critics has been to simplify or to ignore the complexities of Behn's work."[87] Despite this lack of attention, there are a small number of scholars who have explored Behn's literary aesthetics. These scholars have mostly focused on the visual qualities of Behn's plays. Both Judith Kegan Gardiner and Dawn Lewcock have examined Behn's use of scenery to create a specific feeling or vision in the minds of viewers and readers.[88] Gardiner explains that Behn "uses the pastoral setting to create alternatives to the world around her."[89] Through the use of pastoral imagery Behn removes the reader from the suppressive English society and invites them into her more liberated world. It is interesting that these scholars speak of Behn's power to create vivid images for her audience, something that would indicate literary skill, yet Behn's literary qualities are extremely understudied in general scholarship.

As a result of the attempt to prove women authors capable of creating quality works by literary standards, scholars approached women's literature as authorless texts, judged exclusively by the success of their literary choices. By focusing on the aesthetics found in the texts, Behn's literature and Bradstreet's poems are analyzed without looking at these works as belonging to a gendered author. This was important because it gave these women the chance to be criticized as *authors*, not as women who happened to write. However, I believe completely divorcing the words from their authors is an extreme that also leads to a limited understanding. By focusing solely on the structure and word choice of the texts scholars fail to acknowledge that they are the products of a person working in a historical context. Without respecting both the text as quality literature and the product of a specific author and era, much of the intention and interaction within these texts becomes lost in a sea of intensely specific scholarship.

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[87] Hutner, ed., *Rereading Aphra Behn*, 5.

[88] Dawn Lewcock, "More for Seeing than Hearing: Behn and the Use of Theatre," in *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 66-83.

[89] Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Utopian Longings in Behn's Lyric Poetry," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism,* ed. Heidi Hutner (London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 286.

Throughout four centuries, a number of critics with varied perspectives have discussed the lives and works of Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn. They have been discussed as insignificant as a result of their sex, significant only in terms of their sex and the struggles they faced, and their work as removed pieces of literature divorced completely from their sex. Every century and scholar has had their own interpretation of women's literature, often divorced from the context that their work operated from within. Each scholar has closely examined their own niche of women's literary conversation but hasn't looked at how these pieces fit together. My objective with this research is to help start to make those connections with the works of Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn, looking at these authors as women who existed in a specific time period, and chose to represent their life experiences in distinct and informative ways.

Queen Elizabeth I: The Foundation for Women's Literary Future

Women authors did not emerge from nothing. The foundations that allowed for Aphra Behn and Anne Bradstreet to become authors began long before their births. An earlier historical event that greatly affected the lives of women was the rule of Queen Elizabeth I, from 1558-1603.[90] Although Elizabeth I never specifically addressed women's concerns during her reign, Elizabeth's life as Queen provided women with a strong, independent role model with which to identify. Not only was Queen Elizabeth I one of the few female monarchs to rule independently throughout England's history, her political strength and unprecedented decision to remain unmarried influenced generations of women. Although she died twenty years before the emergence of Bradstreet and Behn, her influence on them can be seen in their lives and work.

As a perceived threat to her sister Mary, the sitting queen, Elizabeth spent most of her youth under house arrest, was later imprisoned for several years and released only after her sister's death. Her literary tendencies appear to be a product of her early education, but it was not until her years in captivity that she is believed to have begun writing, an interest continued throughout her reign. One of the earliest examples is an epitaph she wrote in her prison cell during the last year of her imprisonment. Carved into her window she wrote: "Much suspected by me,/Nothing proved can be." [91] This verse could also be used to exemplify Elizabeth's approach to marriage politics during her reign.

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[90] John Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe: From the Renaissance to the Present* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), 201.

Queen Elizabeth I: Using her Literary Skills to Navigate Parliament and Avoid Marriage

Elizabeth became queen at twenty-five with the death of her sister. When she began her reign, England was a country threatened by civil war as a result of her sister's ("Bloody Mary") harsh reign.[92] This threat was compounded because Elizabeth was a woman ruler and many related Mary's violent decisions to her sex in general. Political scholar Christopher Haigh explains this fear of another woman ruler as the popular belief that "rule by a woman was the antithesis of proper order, and was bound to lead to disaster."[93] As a result of this perceived instability there was immediate pressure on her to marry and produce an heir.

Thus, from the second Elizabeth was crowned she faced severe pressure from Parliament to choose a husband and provide a direct heir for the monarchy. This was partially because the Tudor concept of a woman assumed that Elizabeth would *want* to marry--after all that was what women did. However, from a political perspective it was also widely believed that the future success of England depended on Elizabeth's selection of husband, and her strongest defense for her personal and political safety would be a "powerful husband and male infant."[94] Parliament and the people believed that it would only be through the existence of a direct male heir that stability in England and safety for the Queen would be assured. Being an unmarried female monarch was an anomaly unacceptable for the patriarchal society she ruled, but her ability to write and communicate successfully allowed her to navigate many difficult situations that arose as a result of her prolonged independent rule.

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[91] Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose, ed., *Elizabeth I: Collected Works* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 45-6.

[92] Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe*, 201.

[93] Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (New York: Longman Group, 1988), 9.

[94] Elizabeth Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great (*New York: Coward-McCann Inc.*, 1958),* 69.

Elizabeth translated her literary skill into her communications to tactfully manage both pressure from Parliament and her suitors; she avoided marriage by leaving herself maneuverability in her interactions, without challenging Parliament or insulting her powerful suitors. During her reign Parliament petitioned that Elizabeth marry and produce a direct heir four times but never succeeded.[95] Elizabeth was able to pacify Parliament and tactically position herself to legitimately remain unmarried by specifying in her response to Parliament that she accepted her duty to marry, but would only do so if God willed it. In response to their first request for an heir in 1559, Elizabeth told Parliament that she placed her faith in God to provide a suitable heir, but failed to specify that said heir would come from her. She explained that if it,

> please almighty God to continue me still in this mind to live out of the state of marriage, it is not to be feared but He will so work in my heart and in your wisdoms as good provision by His help my be made in convenient time, whereby the realm shall not remain destitute of an heir that may be a fit governor, and peradventure more beneficial to the realm than such offspring as my come of me.[96]

In this response Elizabeth utilized her religious beliefs to provide protection from Parliament's marriage expectations, while still addressing the issue of an heir, Parliament's primary concern.

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[95] Marcus et al., *Elizabeth I*, 58-95. First petition was in February of 1559, following requests came in January of 1563, February of 1563, and November of 1566.

[96] Marcus et al., *Elizabeth I*, 58.

Over the next several decades Elizabeth continued to use her literary abilities to aid her ability to verbally maneuver to keep her suitors engaged and Parliament pacified, without creating a situation that would force her into marriage. During her reign Elizabeth had an impressive collection of masculine admirers. As a result of this plethora of suitors, there was constant anxiety and conversation focused on which suitor she would inevitably accept. However, Elizabeth's overabundance of admirers caused her personal counselors to both urge a quick marriage and fret over the concern "that Elizabeth should not make a ruinous marriage."[97] This became a central concern to both her counselors and Parliament as Elizabeth prolonged marriage negotiations with a number of acceptable political suitors, whose number included Prince Charles of Sweden, the Duke of Saxony, the Archduke Charles, King Philip of Spain, and Alencon of France.[98]

As Elizabeth prolonged her matrimonial decision, Parliament began to be more persistent in their pressure on her to marry. In response to two successive petitions during the fifth year of her reign, Elizabeth began to shift her approach to resisting Parliament by playing on her unique position as both woman and monarch. Elizabeth utilized social conventions and tactical wording to underline the contradiction between her position as a woman and her duty as a monarch. Christopher Haigh believes that Elizabeth used the argument that "she was not a 'mere' woman, she was a special woman, and therefore an exception from the rules binding ordinary females."[99] However, she also used her sex to provide legitimate excuses for her prevarication in choosing a husband. In response to Parliament's second petition that she marry on January 28, 1563, Elizabeth addressed Parliament by stating that:

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[97] Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great*, 87.
[98] Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great*, 75-81.
[99] Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 10.

> the weight and greatness of this matter might cause in me, being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex. But yet the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy) hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to seem little in mine eyes, though grievous perhaps to your ears, and boldeneth me to say somewhat in this matter…So great a matter touching the benefits of this realm and the safety of you all, to defer mine answer till some other time, wherein I assure you the consideration of my own safety (although I thank you for the great care that you seem to have thereof) shall be little in comparison of that great regard that I mean to have of the safety and surety of you all.[100]

The intention behind Elizabeth's decision to reference both her feminine frailty and executive power in this passage has been debated by scholars. Many believe that it was her ability to successfully "shift the ground of concern from her being a woman, by insisting on her personal courage and her royal descent" [101] that allowed her to pacify Parliament's fears regarding her succession. However, I believe that she utilized the novelty to her position to destabilize and disarm Parliament. In the start of the quoted speech, Elizabeth played up her position as a woman and used it to excuse her delay in selecting a husband. By referring to herself as "being a woman wanting both wit and memory" and having a "fear to speak" she disarmed Parliament by reminding them that she was 'just' a woman. This implied that Elizabeth was aware of the gravity of her decision and simultaneously assuaged the men of Parliament by referring to the emotional weaknesses she embodied as a woman. However, Elizabeth quickly progressed in the speech from protecting herself through her femininity, to confronting Parliament's petitions based on her executive power. She did so by referring to the authority placed upon her by the God given "kingly throne." By doing this she reminded Parliament of her supreme authority over the country, them, and her life, but the following lines show that she intended to prioritize the protection of her citizens, regardless of her personal decisions. By acknowledging that her marriage was "a matter touching the benefits of this realm and the safety of all" she made it clear to Parliament that she was approaching the issue seriously. The last line of the passage shows Elizabeth's true literary ability. In the phrase: "of that great regard that I mean to have of the safety and surety of you all," Elizabeth again assured Parliament that she was aware of the importance of her decision, but still provided herself with an excuse for not quickly making a marriage decision. In this line, and in her later speeches to Parliament, Elizabeth stressed her intention to marry only for the good of the realm; this gave her a perfect means to delay making a decision on a husband, indefinitely.

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[100] Marcus, *Elizabeth I*, 70-1.

[101] Frances Teague, "Queen of England: Elizabeth I," in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation,* ed. Katharina Wilson (London: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 528.

This promise to only marry for the good of her people allowed Elizabeth to use her marriageability as a diplomatic tool. As long as Elizabeth maintained the impression that she was actively looking for a husband, she would gain diplomatic opportunities through her political suitors and keep Parliament distracted from her lack of urgency. As Haigh explains, "she offered herself to the highest diplomatic bidder, but since no one could afford her price she became a royal tease rather than a royal tart."[102] This political maneuvering was most apparent in her marriage negotiations with Alencon of France. The marriage was entertained as a possible means of influencing French policy in regards to the Netherlands Revolt from 1579-81 and to prevent France and Spain from combining to invade England.[103] Elizabeth delayed the marriage by continuously changing the terms of their marriage arrangements and inventing reasons to refuse the marriage. For example, one of her objections was the age differences between them. From

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[102] Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 13.
[103] Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 75.

1572-81 Elizabeth kept the marriage negotiations with France open, and by doing so was able to "maintain good relations with the French royal family without actually having to marry one of them."[104] Keeping the marriage issue open allowed Elizabeth to utilize her suitors to her diplomatic advantage, and avoid direct confrontation with Parliament over her lack of husband.

Despite this collection of powerful suitors it was Elizabeth's relationship with childhood friend Lord Robert Dudley that garnered the most attention from her people and Parliament. Elizabeth had known Dudley since they were both eight, and although a married man, he showed considerable affection for the Queen. He lived separately from his wife and it was widely speculated among court that Elizabeth and Dudley were lovers. After the death of Dudley's wife in September of 1560, many accused him of murdering her so he would be free to marry the Queen.[105] This belief caused a public outcry throughout the country. As Mary Stuart so succinctly explained it, England was terrified that "the Queen of England is going to marry her horse-keeper, who has killed his wife to make room for her."[106] Although Elizabeth never publicly addressed the concerns regarding Dudley and herself, she did exclaim in private how people could "think me so unlike myself and unmindful of my royal majesty that I would prefer my servant…!"[107] Moreover, a comment by Dudley a decade later that "her Majesty's heart is nothing inclined to marry,"[108] would suggest that Dudley knew Elizabeth never intended to marry anyone, least of all himself. Eventually Dudley married again and Elizabeth continued to torment her counselors with another love interest.

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[104] Ibid., 75.
[105] Ibid., 12.
[106] Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great,* 84.
[107] Neville Williams, *Elizabeth, Queen of England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967), 129-30.
[108] Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 14.

Although there was constant anxiety among Parliament and Elizabeth's counselors, scholars have debated whether Elizabeth ever intended to marry at all. Seventeenth-century scholar William Camden believed that Elizabeth *would* have married, except she found herself in a position where, if she were to marry "a subject she would disparage herself by the inequality of the match…; if a stranger, she would then subject herself and her people to a foreign yoke and endanger religion."[109] He believed that Elizabeth chose to remain unmarried because she could not find a suitable husband, not because she was resistant to the institution. I tend to read her resistance to marriage like modern scholar Christopher Haigh: "Elizabeth sought to present herself, woman though she was, as a fit occupant of the throne of England, and she did not propose to confuse the issue by recruiting a husband or an heir."[110]

The fact that Elizabeth used words effectively to build her image as a ruler and avoid all pressures to marry would suggest that her actions were intentional and specifically designed to create an environment for herself in which her solo reign would be accepted. Regardless of her original intentions, her literary abilities were one of her many abilities that allowed her to successfully reign independently for forty-five years.

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[109] William Camden, *The Historie of the Most Renovvned and Victorious Princesse Elizabeth, Late Queen of England : Containing all the important and remarkable passages of state both at home and abroad, during her long and prosperous reigne* (London: Thomas Harper, 1675), 269.
[110] Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 19.

Elizabeth's Influence on Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn

Some scholars, such as feminist and literary professor Allison Heish, disagree that Elizabeth had any real impact on women's lives. Heisch argues that although Elizabeth was an exceptional woman, "she did little to inspire other women to regard themselves with pride or to persuade men to regard them differently."[111] Although I agree that Elizabeth's reign may not have changed the entire social structure of sixteenth-or seventeenth-century England, I disagree that Elizabeth had little influence on individual women. There was an influx of literature produced by women throughout the seventeenth century, and much of it referred to the late Queen Elizabeth. References to Elizabeth's literary abilities and exemplification of feminine intelligence have appeared in the works of several women authors. Many of these authors used Elizabeth as an example of feminine achievement and oftentimes as a justification for the existence of their own works. Two of these authors were Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn.

Anne Bradstreet: Words as Quiet Rebellion

The works of Anne Bradstreet illustrate that she was impressed by Elizabeth's use of literary ability to navigate patriarchy and utilized Elizabeth's success as a justification of her own literary abilities. Although Bradstreet wasn't born until 1612, a decade after Elizabeth's death, she was clearly aware of Elizabeth's impact on English society. This is made apparent through

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[111] Allison Heisch, "Queen Elizabeth I and the Persistence of Patriarchy," *Feminist Review* 4, 45-56 (1980), 54.

Bradstreet's poem "In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory," which applauds Elizabeth's accomplishments. In the poem, Bradstreet introduces Elizabeth as someone "Who was so good, so just, so learn'd, so wise,/ From all the kings on earth she won the prize."[112]

In the next lines Bradstreet explains why Elizabeth is important as a woman, not just a monarch. Bradstreet credits Elizabeth as having "wiped off th' aspersions of her sex,/That women wisdom lack to play the rex."[113] These lines show that Bradstreet saw Elizabeth as an advocate for women, someone who has proven women to be intelligent and capable in their own right. Successfully ruling England solo, Elizabeth "wiped off" the ability for men to assume that women were incapable of reason and wisdom, and in Elizabeth's case being wise enough to rule an entire country. The last lines of the poem exemplify Bradstreet's understanding of the power Elizabeth had:

> Now say, have women worth? or have they none?
> Or had they some, but with our Queen is't gone?
> Nay masculines, you have thus taxed us long,
> But she, though dead, will vindicate our wrong.
> Let such as say our sex is void of reason,
> Know 'tis a slander now but once was treason.[114]

In these lines Bradstreet is both hailing Elizabeth as a champion for women and chastising men for continuing to devalue women. The first three lines of the stanza accuse men of questioning women's worth and treating them poorly. She challenges men's current treatment of women by directly questioning them. Her response addresses men's implied answer to these questions. She accuses men of considering women as “void of reason,” but then immediately reminds them that to do so would have been treasonous not long ago. This serves to chastise men but reminding them that through Elizabeth there is a precedence for women’s intelligence. By associating Elizabeth with women as a whole Bradstreet makes a case for the intelligence of all women following Queen Elizabeth I.

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[112] Anne Bradstreet, "In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory," in *The Works of Anne Bradstreet,* ed. Jeannine Hensley (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 195.
[113] Bradstreet, "In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess," 196.
[114] Bradstreet, "In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess," 198.

Bradstreet’s personal life in no way followed that of Elizabeth, but her poetry appears to have borrowed from Elizabeth’s ability to use language to quietly resist the patriarchal society she operated within. However, several scholars would disagree with this interpretation. Stanford and William Scheick see Bradstreet’s works simply as the result of her “struggle between dogma and feeling”[115] and that the “quest for elusive humility is a main theme of Bradstreet’s writings.”[116] They see Bradstreet’s work solely as a reflection of the internal struggle she may have had between her religious beliefs and her personal emotions. I believe that this interpretation excludes her more confrontational works from the discussion. Feminist scholar Cheryl Walker believes that many of Bradstreet’s poems are examples of “attempts to interject a woman’s view into what had been understood previously as the male purview.”[117] She also believes they are a reflection of Bradstreet’s “self-interest operating behind the scenes and cannot be too openly admitted, either to oneself or to others”.[118] That Bradstreet’s use of humility in her poetry acts as a disguise for her literary ambitions, rather than a true reflection of her intentions.

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[115] Anne Stanford, “Anne Bradstreet: Dogmatist and Rebel,” in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet,* ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1983), 43.

[116] William Scheick, *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 54.

[117] Cheryl Walker, “Anne Bradsteet: A Woman Poet,” in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1983), 255.

[118] Walker, *The Nightingale’s Burden,* 14.

Although I would agree that Bradstreet interacted with the male critics and tried to participate in a sphere dominated by male voices, I would disagree that her literary choices were the result of her hiding anything or being unaware of her meaning. Bradstreet was nothing if not intentional in her use of words and she interacted with her critics quietly but openly, not subversively. Both Bradstreet and Elizabeth were very intentional in their communications.

The strongest example of Bradstreet addressing her male critics appears in her poem "The Prologue.*"* Scholar Ann Stanford believes that through Bradstreet's "determination to write and in her defense of the capability of women to reason, to contemplate, and to read widely, she showed herself capable of taking a stand against the more conservative and dogmatic of her contemporaries. It was a quiet rebellion, carried on as an undercurrent in an atmosphere of conformity."[119] The very existence of "The Prologue" is a perfect example of her quiet assertiveness. In the first edition of the *Tenth Muse* there was no "Prologue." It was an addition to the second printing, which Bradstreet was actually involved in. Bradstreet insisted on its addition as a response to those people who might think she had no business writing poetry.

The overall tone of "The Prologue" is one of humility, almost bordering on apology, but there is also a definite undercurrent of defiance and a hint of sarcasm. Eberwein says that Bradstreet's "The Prologue" should be read "as consistently ironic," and that Bradstreet's choice to sound meek and humble was contrived.[120] An example of this rather acerbic wit is found in the following passage:

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[119] Stanford, "Anne Bradstreet: Dogmatist and Rebel," 40.

> I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
> Who says my hand a needle better fits,
> A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
> For such despite they cast of female wits:
> If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
> They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance.[121]

In the line, "I am obnoxious to each carping tongue," the reader gets a sense of her opinion of her critics. Referring to the critics as 'carping tongues' shows how little respect and concern she had for those people; they are not legitimate critics, merely 'carping tongues.' Also, in the line "If what I do prove well, it won't advance" the reader finds a rather acerbic response to a reality that Bradstreet is well aware of, and appears to be challenging. During this time period, especially in England, women were not considered to have the skills necessary to create quality literature, and Bradstreet is confronting this in her poem. Throughout "The Prologue" Bradstreet is self-depreciating and talks about the subjects that she is not qualified to write about. She opens the poem explaining that: "to sing of wars, of captains, and of kings,/Of cities founded, commonwealths begun,/For my mean pen are too superior things."[122] Bradstreet appears very humble, but by accusing readers of not 'advancing' her work, even if it is quality literature, she reproaches the mindset of the male-dominated literary world. By directly confronting this resistance to women writers Bradstreet appears to be challenging male critics and making a case for her own worth. If critics choose to ignore or deprecate her work, they would be validating her criticism of their bias, thereby vindicating Bradstreet's work and making themselves look discriminatory against women literature.

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[120] Jane Eberwein, "No Rhet'ric we expect: Argumentation in Bradstreet's 'The Prologue'," in *Women and Womanhood in America*, ed. Ronald Hogeland (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), 218-224.

[121] Anne Bradstreet, "The Prologue," in *The Works of Anne Bradstreet,* ed. Jeannine Hensley (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 16, st. 5.

[122] Bradstreet, "The Prologue," 15, st. 1.

Although Bradstreet's resistance was confined solely to the literary world, I would argue that is drew strength from the precedent set by Elizabeth's reign. Bradstreet not only credits Elizabeth with having proven to the masculine world that women are capable of intelligent ideas, but she also appears to utilize Elizabeth's strategy of linguistic combat to make a case for women writers in general and her own literary skills in particular.

Aphra Behn: Independence and the "Lewd Widow"

The works and life of Aphra Behn were also greatly affected by Elizabeth I's legacy. Although Behn does not write a tribute to Elizabeth like Bradstreet, she alludes to the Elizabethan legacy in her play *Sir Patient Fancy*. In the epilogue of this play she exclaims,

> What has poor Woman done, what she must be
> Debar'd from Sense, and sacred Poetry?
> Why in this Age has Heaven allow'd you more,
> And Women less of Wit than heretofore?
> We once were fam'd in Story, and cou'd write
> Equall to men; cou'd Govern, nay cou'd Fight.[123]

Scholar Janet Todd argues that this passage referred to a fantastic, mythical ideal[124], but Behn's choice to describe a woman who was equal to men, could write, govern, and fight, shows specific similarities to Elizabeth's reign and would suggest that Behn was referencing the Queen. When combined with the common understanding that much of Behn's work idealized the

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[123] Montague Summers, ed., *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 4 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1915), 73.
[124] Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 230.

Renaissance era, it is likely that Behn was referring to Elizabeth in this passage. Judy Hayden would agree with this interpretation because it seems likely when considering the context of the play. *Sir Patient Fancy* follows the life of the learned Lady Knowell and her confrontations with men's resistance to her knowledge. Hayden explains that through this play Behn provided "her audience an opportunity to consider the concept of knowledge unrestricted by gender."[125] Combining Behn's word choice in the prologue with the subject of the play, it would seem that her prologue is referencing Elizabeth, not merely a hypothetical ideal.

Like Bradstreet, Behn also saw Elizabeth as an example of the potential of women to exceed the arbitrary limitations forced upon them by patriarchy. Behn directly confronted men about these limitations in *Sir Patient Fancy*'s epilogue. She asks them, "Why in this Age has Heaven allow'd you more,/ And Women less of Wit than heretofore?"[126] In this line Behn challenged the distinctions between men and women's knowledge by claiming that women were given less right to knowledge than previously. This implies not only that they *have* the ability to be wits in the first place, but also that during some historical time period they had been acknowledged as such. This desire to be seen as "equal to men" resulted in Behn challenging the resistance to female authorship in the male-dominated literary world more directly than Bradstreet ever dared.

This confrontation of the sexual standards appeared in both Behn's life choices and her work. After her brief marriage ended with her husband's death in 1663, Behn lived independently for the remainder of her life, closely following the independent lifestyle of

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[125] Judy Hayden, "Of Privileges and Masculine Parts: The Learned Lady in Aphra Behn's Sir Patient Fancy," *Papers on Language and Literature* 42, no. 3 (2006) 18-36.
[126] Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, 230.

Elizabeth. It is clear that like Elizabeth, she enjoyed masculine company because her home was frequently the gathering place of other playwrights and literary personalities. Behn was known as a witty conversationalist, and was often in the company of contemporaries such as John Dryden, Thomas Otway, Nahum Tate, Edward Ravenscroft, Charles Gideon, and Charles Cotton.[127] She was also known for provided boarding to many struggling writers. As a result of this generosity and companionability, Behn was a favorite among the artistic community. Otway referred to Behn as a "lady, that has more modesty…and I am sure more wit"[128] than many of their contemporaries. Another playwright reflected that Behn "was a Woman of Sense."[129] The impact of Behn's company and work affected her contemporaries for years and they sang her praise long after her death.[130] However, not everyone appreciated Behn's social generosity and her constant male companionship obtained her a reputation as a whore.

Both during her lifetime and today, it has been assumed that the sexual independence exemplified in many of Behn's plays were extensions of her personal life. Like Elizabeth, Behn has been linked to a number of possible lovers. Also like Elizabeth, there is little proof of the extent of her relationships with her male companions beyond the apparent flirtations. However, despite any academic certainty about the extent of Behn's sexual relationships, past and current scholars have suspected Behn of being lovers with Otway, Ravenscroft, and several others. George Woodcock explains that these speculations were based on conjecture and ambiguous comments in historical documents.[131] Despite this ambiguity, Behn is referred to as "the lewd Widow"[132] in a number of seventeenth century satires.

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[127] George Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra* (New York: T.V. Boardman and Co., 1948), 72-85.
[128] Thomas Otway, as quoted in Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra,* 90.
[129] Charles Gildon, ed., *All the Histories and Novels Written by the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn: Entire in one Volume: Together with the History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn Never before Printed* (London, 1696), 3.
[130] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra*, 212-13. Writer John Hoyle wrote the couplet on her gravestone, and poet Nat Lee wrote the poem "Death of Mrs. Behn" in response to her death.

This reputation resulted in most literary critics during her lifetime disapproving of Behn as a woman. For example, Thomas Shadwell accused Behn of being a "harlot plagued by Poverty, Poetry, Pox."[133] Others attacked her less directly, but their meanings were similar. In a collection of poetry, called a 'session of poets,' several critics saw Behn's plays as proof of her promiscuity. Robert Gould wrote, "Hackney Writers; when their Verse did fail/ To get 'em Brandy, Bread and Cheese, and Ale,/ Their Wants by Prostitution were supply'd;/…/For Punk and Poetess agree so Pat,/You cannot well be This, and not be That."[134] This poem accused Behn of prostitution, not because the critic had proof of Behn's harlotry, but because in the eyes of seventeenth century society, a woman playwright was synonymous with whore.

In another poem from this collection, the author accuses Behn's works as having "neither Witt enough for a Man, nor Modesty enough for a Woman, she was to be look'd upon as an Hermaphrodite, & consequently not fit to enjoy the benefits & Priviledges of either Sex, much less of this Society."[135] These poems show the conflicting accusations of critics; somehow Behn was both too overtly sexualized as a woman and insufficiently womanly enough to be protected by men. This is similar to the speculation that surrounded Elizabeth, in that their personal relationships were a topic of social discussion for both women. Also like Elizabeth, Behn chose to combat these perceptions with her use of language. Instead of being discouraged and disgraced by the words of these literary critics, Behn's response was to defend herself and attack the critics in turn.

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[131] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra,* 95.
[132] Ibid., 28.
[133] Thomas Shadwell, "An Epistle to Julian," in *The Works of Aphra Behn,* ed. Montague Summers, vol. 1 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1915), lvii.
[134] Robert Gould, "The Poetess a Satyr," in *Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd (London: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 208.
[135] Hugh MacDonald, ed., "Of A Journal for Parnassus, Now Printed from a Manuscript Circa 1688," *The Review of English Studies 14,* no. *54 (*1937), 224.

Behn often addressed her critics directly in the epilogues of her plays. Both the epilogue to *Sir Patient Fancy* and *The Dutch Lover* beg critics to excuse her while simultaneously declaring her equality. In *The Dutch Lover*'s epilogue Behn states:

> Unless kind Gallants the same Grace you'd give
> Our Comedy as Her; beg a Reprieve.
> Well, what the other mist, Let our Scribe get,
> A Pardon, for she swears she's the less Cheat.
> She never gull'd you Gallants of the Town
> Of Sum about four Shillings, or half a Crown.[136]

Behn "merged all criticism of her plays into the condemnation of her sex, she represents the charge of her critics as a gross injustice."[137] Runge argues that Behn navigated this injustice by asserting her equality by comparing herself to male playwrights, but also by identifying with her femininity and accusing men of unfair attacks on a "poor Woman." In *The Dutch Lover*'s epilogue Behn appealed to her audience to "pardon her." Her explanation that she is only asking shillings from them, making her less a cheat than other playwrights who ask for more, seems to imply that she is asking for protection based on her sex, not directly challenging her male critics. Behn also seems to employ this strategy in *Sir Patient Fancy* when she refers to herself as a "poor Woman," implying that she is weak and in need of protection. However, several lines later she refers to women as "Equal to Men," a bold claim in seventeenth century England. The challenging nature of Behn's plays and personal communications makes me believe that the demand for equality was closer to her true personality, whereas her appeals for protection and claims of her feminine weakness are likely attempts to distract critics from the confrontational nature of her works.

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[136] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, 329.
[137] Runge, *Gender and Language*, 136.

Her confrontational nature appeared in several of her letters, as well as the end of *The Dutch Lover*'s epilogue, which showed her desire to be acknowledged as equal to male authors. In the last lines of the epilogue Behn writes:

> Hopes her plain and easy Style is such,
> As your high Censures will distain to touch.
> Let her low Sense creep safe from your Bravadoes,
> Whilst Rotas and Cabals aim at Grenadoes.[138]

In this passage Behn is appealing to her audiences to "let her low sense creep" below the notice of censure, but in the next line she compares herself to a number of well-known male playwrights. Although Behn is saying that she is not worthy to be compared to them, the very fact that she even considers mentioning herself in the same sentence implies that she aspires to that level. In another epilogue, Behn identifies as having "male parts" and explains that she understands the "superiority of her male over her female qualities"[139] These passages show that despite her false modesty, Behn considered herself to be comparable to her male counterparts. Scholar Judy Hayden believes that "Behn should be studied in the context of her male colleagues of whom she considered herself very much a part."[140] Hayden sees Behn's epilogues not as creating a defense based on her sex, but as a means of distancing herself from it. The context of Behn's plays and her personal defense of womanhood would make me reluctant to agree with Hayden. Behn seems to be just as likely to appeal to her audience as a woman as she would demand to be given the credit of a man. In fact, Behn criticizes her readers for attacking her feminine talent in a note simply addressed, “To the Reader.” She claims that her plays had “no other Misfortune but that of coming out for a Womans: had it been owned by a Man, though the most Dull Unthinking Rascally Scribbler in Town, it had been a most admirable Play.”[141] This defense combined with Behn’s constant disparaging of men in her plays suggests that Behn firmly identified as a woman; she just wanted to be acknowledged as having the same skills as a man. By the time she died, Behn’s insistence to be seen as an author, not simply a woman, led her to having made it “impossible to deny that a woman could write as well as a man, with both learning and style.”[142]

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[138] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, 330.
[139] Judy Hayden, *Of Love and War: The Political Voice in the Early Plays of Aphra Behn (*Amsterdam: Rudolf Editions, 2010*),* 14.
[140] Hayden, *Of Love and War,* 12.

Queen Elizabeth I once said that she intended to “leave an exceptional work after [her] death, by which not only may my memory be renowned in the future, but others may be inspired by example.”[143] The influence Elizabeth had on society in general may arguably have been minimal, but her influence on the next generation of women seems to have been significant. Her appearance in the work of both Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn would indicate that she obtained her desire to leave lasting inspiration. Queen Elizabeth I’s reign gave authors like Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn a powerful female figure to draw inspiration from and provide legitimacy to their attempts at achieving success as authors. As a result, England began to see the entrance of women into the literary world. At first these women were an exceptional few, but the following decades found women entering into the literary world in increasing numbers. “Only eight female-authored works has appeared in print between 1486 and 1548... And while English women’s printed works constituted only 2 percent of all published material by 1690” this number still reflects a greatly increased visibility.[144] Many scholars believe that this could be a result of the political turmoil of Charles I's reign, which followed the relatively successful and stable rule of Queen Elizabeth.

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[141] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra,* 135.
[142] Woodcock, *The Incomparable Aphra,* 235.
[143] Marcus etc., *Elizabeth I*, 88.

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[144] Sarah Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England (*London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 236.

Conclusion

The understanding of the lives and works of women authors is complicated and time consuming. Unfortunately, it is an endeavor that has been ignored by far too many scholars for far too long. Without the contributions of feminist scholars the lives of women authors like Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn might still be lost to the sands of time. Thankfully, feminists have struggled to maintain the relevance of women's literary history. However, this discussion has framed women authors as valiant rebels, women fighting against a patriarchal system that would crush them, not as compete individuals, and their accomplishments as authors has come secondary to their interesting lives.

Women authors have been kept relevant in the morass that is academic scholarship as a result of feminist scholarship, yet it is not enough. Without further exploration into the lives and literature of Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn these women will remain merely footnotes in history. They will remain interesting examples of feminine rebellion, or brief mentions in the history of women authors, but not given the time and attention they deserve. Creating a complete picture of who these women were and why they wrote is imperative to providing them a lasting place in the historical and literary conversations.

My thesis has aimed to contribute to this comprehensive understanding of Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn's lives and works, through a better understanding of how the social environment affected these women and how that translated into their literature. Through my research I found that the most significant influence over the social environments of these women was the actions of their monarchs. The decisions monarchs made directly affected the environment Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn lived and created within, and these effects are illustrated in the literature they created. Several monarchs influenced the works of Anne Bradstreet and Aphra Behn, including Queen Elizabeth I, k7King Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, and King Charles II.

Although I only discuss the influences of Queen Elizabeth I in this thesis, the implications for further research are substantial. Elizabeth died well before Bradstreet and Behn were even born, yet her influence upon them is apparent. As a result of Elizabeth's ability to utilize her literary talents to navigate the marriage politics of seventeenth century England and rule independently and successfully for over forty years, her reign was a beacon of hope to women writers for centuries, and this is apparent in her appearance in the works of both Bradstreet and Behn. Both Bradstreet and Behn utilize the example of Elizabeth to provide a framework in which to demand their own rights to words: Bradstreet as a poet, and Behn as a playwright. Without the precedent of a successful, accomplished woman set by Elizabeth, Bradstreet and Behn may never have felt capable of entering into the literary profession.

Current scholarship has failed to address these connections between historical influences and women writers. If the reign of Queen Elizabeth had such influence over Bradstreet and Behn's lives and works, even after her death, imagine the influence that monarchs *during* these women's lives must have had on their literature. This scholarship must be pursued, because without it a complete understanding of the lives and literary accomplishments of Anne Bradstreet, Aphra Behn, and other women authors like them, will never be accomplished.

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