

Pioneers, Virgins, and Whores: (Anti-)Feminist Tropes
in the Feminist Reclamation of Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips

by

Sarah Elizabeth Deller

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August 2017

© Copyright by Sarah Elizabeth Deller, 2017

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Pioneers	5
Chapter Three: The Virgin / Whore Dichotomy	19
Chapter Four: Conclusion	34
Works Cited	38

Abstract

This thesis identifies and interrogates the two most prevalent tropes assigned to Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips as feminist scholars reclaimed and canonized the poets. I ask what perceptions of women have informed our selection of women for the canon. Chapter One, “Pioneers,” criticizes depictions of Behn and Philips as the “first” women to achieve various professional accomplishments within a patriarchy. This trope grants legitimacy to oppressive power structures. Chapter Two, “The Virgin / Whore Dichotomy,” examines the frequent comparison of the sexuality of Behn and Philips. This comparison unduly emphasizes women’s sexuality, and positions Behn — the “whore” — and Philips — the “virgin” — on either side of a misogynistic false dichotomy. An exploration of these tropes reveals the feminist reclamation and canonization of Behn and Philips rely upon narrow and restrictive ideas of gender and sexuality that, far from liberating these writers, limits discussion of their work and perpetuates patriarchal values.

Acknowledgements

My thinking on the subject of “firsts” was prompted six or seven years ago by a brief remark in an article published on a feminist platform online. Regrettably I have been unable to track down this article, which I remember was about either the tokenization of Black women or Black women in positions of authority. I am indebted to the author and would appreciate any leads on their identification.

I have been very fortunate in the encouragement I have received from professors in the Dalhousie English Department, during both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. Thanks are especially due to Trevor Ross, Christina Luckyj, and Julia M. Wright, who comprised my (formidable) supervisory committee and who have each been inestimable sources of inspiration and guidance over the past few years. I also acknowledge the continued support of Marjorie Stone.

I thank as well Cheryl Hann, Chris Shalom, Gil Tobin-Huxley, Graham Jensen, Julia Schabas, Mike Fontaine, Nicole Gerber, Rebecca D’Mello, and my cat for being such good pals when I was in need, and when I wasn’t.

Chapter One: Introduction

Damned for the wrong reasons, praised for the wrong reasons, Aphra Behn the woman has obscured Aphra Behn the writer, and the myth has eclipsed the achievement (O'Donnell 341).

It is unfortunately feminist criticism [...] that has served [Katherine Philips] the least well (Llewellyn 463).

How successful has the feminist recovery of women writers been? Or, to ask a more fundamental question, will we ever — or ought we attempt to — decide what success looks like for such a project? Since its inception with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the feminist recovery and canonization of women writers has been a difficult process leaving as many triumphs as failures in its wake. Indeed, the goal of recovering women writers has itself been faced with skepticism even within the feminist community. As Janet Todd illustrates in *Feminist Literary History*, “It has become fashionable to criticize, even mock, American socio-historical feminist criticism and see it as naive beside the enterprise of French deconstructive and psychoanalytical theory” (1). “But with all its faults,” Todd concludes, “American socio-historical feminist criticism was pioneering and remains inspirational” (2). Certainly, second-wave Anglo-American feminists made valiant strides in the “opening up” of the canon. Anthologies such as the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, *Kissing the Rod*, and *British Women Writers*, to cite only a few examples, provided readers with access to writers whose work had, in some cases, been out of circulation for centuries. Where Virginia Woolf once “[looked] about the shelves for books that were not there” (44), there are now works of poetry, prose, and drama; there are monographs, editions, and anthologies of writing by women.

However, those willing to approve the aims of second-wave Anglo-American feminists — to recover women writers, for example, and explain their previous absence from mainstream discussion — must analyze the “faults” to which Todd opaquely alludes in *Feminist Literary History*. Bold assertions like Patrocinio Schweickart’s that “the point” of feminist literary scholarship “is to *change the world*” require analysis both of intent and of consequences (488, emphasis in original). In 1993, Margaret Ezell challenged feminist literary historians to “examine [their] own hidden assumptions as carefully as [they have] done those of orthodox critics” (6). She writes,

The question about the writing of women’s literary history then becomes, what are the principles of selection and exclusion in the current women’s literary history and to what extent are they manifestations of unquestioned assumptions about women’s texts, about historical periods, and about the nature of authorship? (2)

This is only one example of the 1980s’ and 90s’ “widespread interrogation of the critical agendas and historiographical assumptions that had shaped the study of women’s writing” (Pacheco xv). It is another such project I undertake here. While Ezell frames her question about gender from the perspective of authorship, I am interested in interrogating what notions about “women” have informed not only our selection of women writers for the canon, but also our methods of their installation in the canon. In our attempts to “change the world,” what has been dismantled and what has been reinforced? Do ideological assumptions and patterns lurk in the canonization of certain writers, and do those assumptions have repercussions beyond the study of that writer’s work? As we have canonized women writers, and dragged them out of “the shadows of obscurity”

(Figs 2), what labels and metaphors have we attached to them? Have we used stock phrases and images because of a perceived necessity to prop up women writers? Even amidst — or perhaps because of — our insistence on restrictive notions of gender obstructing women writers, what gendered restrictions have we ourselves perpetuated or created?

The canonizations of Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn have — ostensibly — been two of the Anglo-American feminist project's greatest achievements. Both seventeenth-century women writers were immensely popular during their own lifetimes, but eventually they faded into obscurity, despite the continued canonical success of their male contemporaries. Perhaps because of the writers' centrality in feminist literary scholarship, the reception of Behn and Philips appears to me to be particularly plagued with difficulties. Ironically, it may be the frequency of their names in anthologies and in critical discussion that has ensured limited ideas of their biographies and positions in the canon, while other women writers more shrouded in obscurity are discussed with more nuance and more attention to literary talents rather than gender. It is, to borrow Mary Ann O'Donnell's terms, "simpler to promote banalities" and use "stock responses" than it is to critically examine a writer's work and value (341). In the present paper, though I do not undertake an exhaustive study of the reception of Behn and Philips, I seek to expose some of the tropes and ideologies — the "stock responses" and "banalities" — that accompanied Behn and Philips as they were canonized, and have continued to influence their reception. In particular, a study of feminist and "mainstream" anthologies and criticism reveals there are two prevalent tropes employed when writing about Behn and Philips. The first is the "pioneer" trope, wherein a marginalized person is noted as the

“first” of their community to achieve something already achieved by someone else, or to have achieved something which would be considered inconsequential if done by a non-oppressed person. For instance, Aphra Behn is widely considered to be “the first woman to earn her living by her pen”; Katherine Philips is variously the first woman playwright and the first woman to be admired by both men and women readers. The second trope that surfaces repeatedly is the virgin / whore dichotomy, a false binary wherein women are defined by their sexualities and asserted to be either chaste and virtuous, or immoral and obscenely sexual. In the critical reception of these two writers, whether they are compared directly or not, Philips is assigned the role of the virgin, and Behn the whore. An exploration of these tropes — the pioneer, the virgin, and the whore — in Behn and Philips scholarship reveals the feminist reclamation and canonization of Behn and Philips rely upon narrow and restrictive ideas of gender and sexuality that, far from liberating these writers, limits discussion of their work and perpetuates patriarchal values.

Chapter Two: Pioneers

“Damned for the wrong reasons, praised for the wrong reasons, Aphra Behn the woman has obscured Aphra Behn the writer, and the myth has eclipsed the achievement,” writes Mary Ann O’Donnell in “Tory Wit and Unconventional Woman Aphra Behn” (341). Though her title might not suggest it, O’Donnell is in fact interested in dismantling some of the assumptions that constitute Behn’s status as an “unconventional” and exemplary woman, and instead wishes to redirect attention to Behn’s writings. Appropriately, for my purposes, O’Donnell believes some of the “wrong reasons” Behn has been praised include Behn’s “pioneering” accomplishments: for instance, O’Donnell criticizes the enthusiasm of scholars to deem Behn “The ‘first woman to earn her living by her pen’” and “The ‘first abolitionist’” (341). As O’Donnell suggests, the “pioneer” trope is one of the readiest ways to identify Behn. The terms “the first woman to earn her living by her pen” and “the first professional woman writer” crop up repeatedly — practically always verbatim, though sometimes the phrasing varies — in discussions of Behn and her work.

Of course, Behn scholars are not the first nor the only ones to praise their heroine for being the “first.” Katherine Philips has been ill-served by the “firsts” trope, both as it has been applied to her and as it has excluded her. Though arguments for Philips’s “pioneering” are not as common as those for Behn’s, Philips has been “praised” as a variety of firsts, ranging from the first English woman to produce a play (Wilcox 4; Cuder-Domíniguez 55), to the first woman whose writing was praised by both men and women (Wright 85; Evans 395), claims that I will address more substantially later in this chapter. According to Anthony Kamm, it is Philips’s “reputation, rather than the quality

of her verse” which “gives her the claim to be the first English poetess” (369). This dubious admiration hints at the instability of the trope, which is widely used and extremely problematic. The trope has inherent ideological problems, and also functional shortcomings as a piece of praise. At times, as we shall see, the search for a trait or accomplishment on which to affix “the first” descends into the ridiculous, not least because of the number of qualifying words required to make an accomplishment “the first” of its kind. Predominantly, my concerns with this trope are that it is shallow, that it is flimsy, and that it reinforces existing power structures, contrary to its apparent celebration of defiance. To put it another way, the “first” trope reveals very little of literary value or talent (and sometimes scholars outright reject the literary talents of those they identify as pioneers), it can be refuted by emerging historical information or by cavils, and it perpetuates existing systems of power, even as it seeks to threaten them (as I shall explain more fully later). In this chapter, therefore, I will address the multitude of problems which accompany praising someone as the “first” of their marginalized community to achieve something which has already been achieved by someone else.

Examining the use of the pioneer trope I recall Greer’s assertion “The dilemma of the student of poetry who is also passionately interested in women is that she has to find value in a mass of work that she knows to be inferior” (*Slip-Shod* xi). I disagree wholeheartedly with Greer’s contentions — a position I am sure I share with many other feminist literary scholars — unable as I am to discern the inferiority to which Greer refers. But an undue emphasis on a “pioneering” argument, at the expense of a discussion of literary qualities, seems to reinforce Greer’s conviction “we are more likely to find heroines than poets” when reading women’s writing (xxiv). Identifying “firsts”

appears to inadvertently perpetuate the idea a woman's writing is interesting only in its "trailblazing" quality. Relatedly, in one of few overt criticisms of the "first" trope, Ezell identifies the problem with pioneering versus literary value thus: "Being 'first,' of course, establishes a model against which others are measured, but it also indicates a more rudimentary accomplishment — being the first is not usually equated with being the best" (22). This will be my starting point for identifying specific, representative examples of problems with the "pioneer" trope: the very blatant distinction between literary talent and "pioneering," and the lack of critical discernment in the earliest twentieth-century examples of Behn scholarship.

The pioneering trope has been a relatively recent addition to discourse on Philips as a poet. This trope and its flaws have accompanied Behn, on the other hand, since the beginning of her canonization in the twentieth century. Both Vita Sackville-West, and Virginia Woolf — two writers who were instrumental in kindling an interest in Aphra Behn — identify Behn as the first woman to earn her living by her writing. In her biography of Behn, Sackville-West writes, "The fact that [Behn] wrote is much more important than the quality of what she wrote. The importance of Aphra Behn is that she was the first woman in England to earn her living by her pen" (qtd. Salzman, *Reading* 215-16). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf fashions an evolutionary narrative with Behn at the helm. In Woolf's chronology, Behn is the first woman "to make her living by her wits" (63), and she thus "earned [women] the right to speak their minds" (65).

Woolf's example is the more famous, though on Behn's first-ness and other points Woolf's thinking and Sackville-West's are identical. Anne Greenfield argues compellingly that Sackville-West's biography of Behn was Woolf's primary source for

the Behn segments in *A Room of One's Own*. As such, and in addition to what Greenfield identifies as Woolf's "mild aversion" to Behn's writing (21), Woolf's biographical notes on Behn are a prime example of the uncritical recitation of dazzling cliches that plagues Behn's reception for decades to come. As Greenfield makes clear, Woolf is primarily interested in "*editing and creating the persona of a legendary woman writer*" (21, emphasis in original). Behn is crafted as a symbol or stock figure, and her literary qualities are secondary. After shaping her desolate image of depressed and ill-fated seventeenth-century women writers, Woolf presents the reader with Aphra Behn, who, by Woolf's account, is the antithesis of earlier seventeenth-century women writers and the saviour of women writers for posterity. With Behn we "turn a very important corner on the road" of women's writing (62), for she was a middle-class woman who "[made] her living by her wits" (63). And this, according to Woolf, "outweighs anything that she actually wrote, even the splendid 'A Thousand Martyrs I have made,' or 'Love in Fantastic Triumph sat,' for here begins the freedom of the mind" (63).¹ This clearly indicates, as Greenfield notes, "Woolf is careful in *A Room of One's Own* to separate Behn's professional achievements from the aesthetics of her writing" (30). Regardless, critics "have misread Woolf's praise for Behn as England's first female commercial writer, assuming that Woolf was also a great fan of Behn's writing" (30). Woolf's account of Behn relies on Behn as a pioneer, an idea that is perpetuated for decades of literary scholarship afterwards. However, for all Behn's pioneering, Woolf hastens to add Behn was perhaps not responsible for women's total literary liberation but merely

¹ As Greenfield notes, this appears to be one of several "echoes" of Sackville-West's phrasing. This comment of Woolf's is reminiscent of Sackville-West's that "The fact that [Behn] wrote is much more important than the quality of what she wrote. The importance of Aphra Behn is that she was the first woman in England to earn her living by her pen." See Greenfield 22-23.

allowed “the *possibility* that in the course of time the mind will be free to write what it likes” (63, emphasis added). Thus, in these instances of Behn as a first, which are cited in anthologies for years to come, the “pioneer” trope is revealed to be an insubstantial piece of praise, relying only on historical details and not on literary talent. Additionally, as Ezell and others note, the historical details Woolf chooses to include are self-serving: by situating Behn at the beginning of a chronology of commercialism and professionalism, Woolf and Sackville-West privilege women like themselves, who write for a living. There is little room in their conception of women’s writing for women who write in non-commercial forms, such as manuscript. However, Woolf’s personal benefit in describing Behn as the first woman writer receives little interrogation when people reiterate Woolf’s ideas about Behn’s pioneering. Furthermore, Woolf’s uncritical reliance on Sackville-West is another example of scholars’ emphasis on Behn’s symbolic status without appropriate research, or consideration for critical implications — which is especially ironic, given later critics’ haste to assert Woolf as the one who first ignited interest in Behn.

Perhaps the most rudimentary potential weakness with this trope, therefore, is the shaky grounds praise rests upon should information be historically inaccurate. Suggesting someone is “notable for being the seventeenth century’s first professional woman writer” leaves little grounds to continue talking about someone if it is discovered they are not in fact the first (Wray x). It is useful, therefore, to examine a claim to Lady Mary Wroth as a significant first. In *Mothers of the Novel*, Spender writes,

It is tempting to state that [Lady Mary Wroth] was the first in the long line of women writers of fiction: tempting it may be but a safe bet it most

definitely is not, for until recently I would have sworn that Aphra Behn was the first, the founding mother of fiction, and yet Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* was published nineteen years before Aphra Behn's birth. So all I am prepared to state is that, at this stage, it seems as though Lady Mary Wroth was the first woman to take up her pen for many of the same reasons that women today pick up the pen — to earn money. And Lady Mary Wroth was the first (as far as I know) to find herself up against some of the constraints which worked against a woman writer then, and which continue to work against writers in contemporary times. (11)

This excerpt is the second paragraph of Spender's chapter on Wroth, contextualizing the chapter and highlighting the importance of Wroth's "pioneering." Though Spender goes on to describe in more detail the significance of Wroth's writing, and later spends a great deal of time making a case for Behn's significance, the actual use of the trope works in the favour of neither writer. Spender admits her claims to Wroth's importance rest on shaky grounds, and without the certainty of Behn's "first" achievement, Behn's significance and Behn as a figure is swept aside. Without an analysis of Wroth's noteworthiness beyond her position as a "first," one has to wonder how quickly Wroth herself would be dismissed with the knowledge of an earlier writer. According to Spender, Wroth's "firstness" is clearly a matter of significance in her value. However, the fact Spender *does* go on to explain in other ways Wroth's importance shows the pervasiveness of this trope despite its unreliability, and its apparent importance despite its inherent flaws.

The pioneer trope also has the potential to divert attention away from writers who are significant despite their inability to claim “first” accomplishments. The *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* is like other texts in that it praises Behn for her “pioneering” role in “the establishment by women of careers in writing” (x), and credits her with “[initiating] the role of the female freelancer” (57). But in relation to Behn and questions of value, the *Encyclopedia* is problematic in at least one other way as well. The first entry of the encyclopedia is “abolitionism.” Snodgrass’s reductive introduction creates problematic links between women and slaves in proposing “As women shrugged off the gendered fetters forged in prehistory, they pitied the lot of slaves, whose bondage paralleled the Western marriage market” (xi). Given the diminishment of the horrors of slavery, and its equation with the sufferings of Western women, it is perhaps unsurprising (though still disappointing) it is Behn (rather than a Black abolitionist author or Harriet Beecher Stowe) whose work contextualizes the abolitionism entry, which begins, “Women’s contributions to dismantling the slave system constitute a valuable segment of feminist literary history. The first feminist abolitionist author, the English playwright Aphra BEHN, exposed SLAVERY for its barbarity in *Oronooko*” (1). Presumably, the impulse to include in the first paragraph of the first entry of the encyclopedia the “first” woman writer was irresistible in its opportunities to provide a powerful and cohesive evolutionary narrative. In thus describing and placing Behn, however, the entry conceives of abolitionism as a white woman’s tradition. Six Black writers are mentioned — as opposed to 26 white / European women writers — and are given little individual attention. The desire to create a tradition outweighs contributions by Black abolitionist authors, not only perpetuating racism in feminism but revealing little on the matter of

significance. It is by virtue of her first-ness that Aphra Behn contextualizes the abolitionist entry, but surely the importance of abolitionism which necessitates its inclusion in *Encyclopedia* ought to be represented in a way relating the value of abolitionist literature.

One example of Philips as a pioneer, from the work of Cuder-Domíniguez, exhibits several problems with saying someone is the “first” to do something:

Although Katherine Philips’s translation of Corneille’s *Pompey* was successfully performed in 1663 and set an interesting first, the turning point [for women’s playwriting] came with the theatrical seasons 1668-71: In 1669, Frances Boothby, a young woman whose identity remains controversial, had a tragicomedy performed by the King’s Company. *Marcena, or the Treacherous Friend*, though not a huge success, was the first original play in English written by a woman to be produced in the commercial theatre and was printed in 1670. (55)

Principally, we may observe how easily praise for “firsts” is dismissed and therefore how flimsy it proves as an accolade. Katherine Philips may have “set an interesting first,” but it is actually a “first” which is inadequate when compared to Boothby’s and is therefore unworthy of our attention. Interestingly, this attention to Philips’s play nearly mimics the way Philips’s play was received in the seventeenth century, except in the seventeenth century attention to literary value eventually superseded interest in the author’s gender: “Its initial fame may have come because the author was a woman, but Philips’s *Pompey* continued to be produced for the next sixteen years and was judged a much more faithful rendering of Corneille than that produced by Edmund Waller and other seventeenth-

century wits” (Uphaus and Foster 151). Cuder-Domíniguez invokes Philips’s play as an example of a play written by a woman, just as seventeenth-century audiences did, but unlike seventeenth-century audiences she fails to assess the literary qualities of either *Pompey* or *Marcena* and thus she does not go beyond a tokenization of Philips’s work. Like other observations of “pioneering,” this example raises questions about the significance of value: whether quality and talent are more significant, or the distinction of being “first.” Boothby’s play was “not a huge success” but apparently warrants more attention than Philips’s translation. Any merit in *Pompey*, which would be evidenced in a nuanced literary analysis, is swept away by the fact a more significant “first” followed hers.

Far from bolstering Boothby’s achievement, the number of qualifiers required for *Marcena* to be an accomplishment dilutes any actual sense of distinction. To situate Boothby as a pioneer, a high degree of specificity is necessary: *Marcena* is the “first original [as opposed to translated] play [as opposed to, say, prose romance] in English [as opposed to, say, Italian] written by a woman to be produced in the commercial theatre [as opposed to production for reading as a closet-drama].” Furthermore, here Boothby is tacitly placed in opposition to conventionally established pioneers Philips, Wroth, de Pizan, and Cary. In this competition between feminine (feminist?) “firsts,” we see an example of Greer’s observation “the male establishment can tolerate only one woman at a time,” though in this case it is the feminist establishment that seeks to position one woman as a stand-out at the expense of others (*Rod* 26). Focusing on superficial distinctions, and seeking pioneers, means we are forced to pit women against each other in a competition. Attention to the literary merits of *Pompey* would ensure (or assist) its

ongoing place in critical discussion, but in a pioneer framework there is only room for either Philips or Boothby to be granted a respectable “first” accomplishment, and Boothby’s is apparently the more significant. It is worth noting that the genres implicitly (or explicitly, in the case of translation) devalued in Cuder-Domíniguez’s account are typically associated with women: translation, prose romance, and closet-dramas are often considered “feminine” forms of writing,² and thus ahistorically dismissed. Cuder-Domíniguez’s overt favouring of Boothby’s original play anachronistically diminishes the significance of translation as a genre, and it also dismisses a genre that has been feminized, much in the same way literary scholars traditionally dismissed manuscript. Despite the fact that Philips’s play was a theatrical and commercial success and Boothby’s was not, in Cuder-Domíniguez’s account Boothby’s “first” takes precedence for, apparently, overcoming more patriarchal obstacles in being an original work and not a translation.

As I noted above, Philips has been recorded as the “first woman whose writing has been praised by both men and women” and Gillian Wright believes this partially merits her discussion (98). Robert C. Evans likewise sees this as a notable feat, writing of Philips, “Perhaps no other female poet before her achieved greater respect from her peers, both male and female alike. For this reason alone, Philips’s career marks an important turning point in the development of English literary history” (395). The praise seems strange to me, for two reasons. The first is how very little it actually has to do with Philips’s writing. The second is the very obvious extent to which the distinction relies on replicating the approval of Philips’s contemporary establishment.

² See Ezell 4, Florio n.p., Ostovich and Sauer “Introduction.”

This brings me toward perhaps my most significant concern with the pioneering trope. In *Reading Women's Poetry*, Laurence Lerner discusses the prefaces to the first posthumous edition of Katherine Philips's poetry. These prefatory verses make frequent reference to Philips's chastity, Lerner notes, but they also praise Philips for her achievements in a realm they perceive to be comprised of men. Lerner writes, "Insisting on the unusualness of such accomplished writing coming from a woman is no doubt flattering to her as an individual, but still assumes that writing poetry, like most talents, belongs normally to men" (11). I identify similar problems with the apparent compliment in suggesting a marginalized person is the "first" to accomplish something already accomplished by someone else. An exaltation of pioneering is the suggestion that being the first to overcome the barriers of white heteropatriarchy (or any other system of oppression) is a somehow legitimate marker of accomplishment or of extraordinary talent. The socially constructed barriers of white heteropatriarchy then become the measures of legitimacy and achievement: the barriers become the norm by which achievement is measured. Overcoming those barriers is the minimum requirement for, and foundation of, success. There is a definite suggestion that, in being praised as "the first woman to earn her living by her pen," Aphra Behn is an extraordinary woman, and this extraordinariness has apparently had a significant impact on destroying systems of power. One person's apparent "extraordinariness" can be used to scold others for being less exemplary, and for being complicit in their own oppression: a "pioneering" argument suggests it was clearly *possible* for a woman to "earn her living by her pen," and the fact that nobody before Behn did so reflects their lack of competence, talent, or courage. This is illustrated perhaps most concisely in *The Meridian Anthology of Literature by Women*,

when the editors write that, “Despite the attacks, Behn, considered the first professional woman author in England, demonstrated that a woman could openly succeed as a writer if she was sufficiently tough” (2). Ostensibly, this is a comment that flatters Behn, but it is certainly not flattering to those who were not “tough” enough to succeed in a patriarchal system. The *Meridian* example makes particularly clear that the emphasis in “pioneering” arguments is apparent “extraordinariness” in the overcoming of barriers, rather than the fact oppressive barriers ought never have existed in the first place. This reinforces the idea that there was legitimacy to the patriarchal judgement deployed in selecting women writers for canonization.

Here is another illustration of the problem I identify: according to Nancy Cotton, Aphra Behn “is significant not only as an artist but also as the first professional woman writer and the first woman whose writing won her burial in Westminster Abbey” (53). In the first half of this sentence, we see again the notion that literary talent is merely equivalent to biographical, pioneering accomplishments. I am particularly interested, however, in the latter half of the sentence: Aphra Behn is “the first woman whose writing won her burial in Westminster Abbey.” Woolf testifies to the somewhat “scandalous” nature of Behn’s interment in Westminster Abbey (65), but in this instance the pioneering element of Behn’s interment in Westminster is a point of pride equal in significance to Behn’s artistry. This proposition merits deconstruction. It seems possible to phrase Cotton’s notion another way, which draws attention to an implication lurking beneath the surface of this uncritical use of the pioneer trope. One might say: Behn was the first woman whose writing merited the attention of the establishment to such a degree that her burial was sanctioned by the Dean of Westminster, so she is important. I think

paraphrasing the idea this way illuminates what is implicitly being communicated and also the inappropriateness of such an idea. In this case, there is credibility lent to the position of the Church, suggesting its judgement is valid. To unpack the sentence further, it is useful to examine the particularly intriguing use of the word “won.” Imbedded in the meaning of “winning” is the reference to endeavour, conflict, or contest — there is necessarily an obstacle of some kind, either concrete or abstract. In some cases, to “win” suggests not only achievement or victory, but approval or the attainment of support (we could think of the phrase to “win someone over,” for instance). The very use of the word “won” in this context, therefore, affirms the existence of an establishment against which Behn endeavoured, and the fact that her win is “significant” lends legitimacy to the establishment against which she endeavoured. I use Cotton’s example from Janet Todd’s *Dictionary* because I think the reference to Westminster Abbey makes the existence of an establishment abundantly clear, but this existence is ever-present when the pioneer trope is invoked.

Ironically, this trope is used to affirm subversion. We invoke Aphra Behn as the first woman writer to illustrate women’s resistance and success in the face of adversity, and to indirectly encourage oppressed people to smash whatever systems of oppression keep them down. I by no means wish to suggest the patriarchy is not a real establishment and that Behn or Philips, for instance, did not have to struggle against it. When I have used the word “legitimacy” throughout this chapter I have referred not to the existence of a system of oppression, but to that system’s apparently natural authority. Employing the pioneer trope does more than illustrate the existence of a system of oppression; in fact, it enforces that system as it grants the system legitimacy and suggests that persons of

extraordinary talent, as much as they transcend an oppressive system's limits, ultimately reinvigorate them.

Chapter Three: The Virgin / Whore Dichotomy

What has occurred perhaps more often than substantial comparisons between Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips has been an acknowledgement of such comparisons: anthologies and criticism can scarcely escape, at the very least, a cursory mention of the fact Behn and Philips are frequently compared on the basis of their supposed sexuality or modesty, respectively. But there has been little scrutiny as to the implications of these comparisons, or the troubling nature of the poets' ongoing comparison on these grounds. Indeed, more fundamentally, the canonization of either figure on the basis of her sexuality is a worrying phenomenon and the cause for discussion. And it seems sexuality, as much as "pioneering," has been precisely the grounds for each poet's inclusion in recent scholarship and conversation, if not entirely then certainly in large part, and if not intended as a cause then certainly produced as an effect.

In George Colman and Bonnell Thornton's *The Connoisseur*, in 1755, Behn is described in the narrator's equestrian dream thus:

A BOLD masculine figure now pushed forward in a thin, airy, gay habit, which hung so loose about her, that she appeared to be half undrest. When she came up to *Pegasus*, she clapped her hand upon the side-saddle, and with a spring leaped across it, saying that she would never ride him but astride. She made the poor beast frisk, and caper, and curvet, and play a thousand tricks; while she herself was quite unconcerned, though she shewed her legs at every motion of the horse, and many of the *Muses* turned their heads aside blushing. (409)

Many feminists, albeit attributing a different value judgement to these words, nevertheless seem nearly as resolute on maintaining this description. Herein lies a great deal of the problem. How much more or less insistent are we on the sexuality that initially excluded Behn from the canon? We can deride Thornton for his preoccupation with Behn's sexuality, but have we ourselves escaped notions of Behn as a "half undrest" figure? Or do we not merely perpetuate them? A corresponding question can be asked of Philips, whose

inward Vertue is so bright,

That, like a Lantern's fair enclosed light,

It through the Paper shines where she doth write (Cowley 62-64)

and who is still commonly described by scholars and editors as "chaste" and "virtuous," as I shall demonstrate. Do we really still care as much about "feminine honour" as did Cowley, writing here in 1664? Not only are these notions inherently flawed as they place undue emphasis on each poet's sexuality, but, also, the resulting readings and scholarship have positioned Behn and Philips on either side of a misogynistic false dichotomy, with Behn cast jubilantly as a whore, and Philips serving as her antithetical virgin.

Criticism focused on representations of sexuality in Behn's work has comprised a major part of Behn scholarship. It feels somewhat needless to rehearse what is practically a cliché: that scholars and feminists are interested in Aphra Behn's sexuality and hold it up as a model of feminine audaciousness. However, as my aim here is to make a case that such an overwhelming emphasis on sexuality is excessively reductive, and therefore detrimental to a feminist cause, I will investigate a few passages from key works that laid the groundwork for considering Behn largely in relation to her sexuality.

As Germaine Greer has observed, “Biographers of Aphra Behn tend to project her as a kindred spirit” (173). These scholars become “Seduced by [Behn’s] occasional representation of herself as a free and self-regulating character” (173). The earliest twentieth-century biographies of Behn exemplify this. In the prologue of *Reconstructing Aphra*, after sketching Behn’s life as an “adventuress” and a spy, Angeline Goreau writes, “[Behn] was a feminist who vociferously defended the right of women to an education, and the right to marry whom they pleased, or not at all. She was a sexual pioneer who contended that men and women should love freely and as equals” (3). Goreau baldly enlists Behn as a “feminist” who could stand as a hero for many a different strand within the feminist movement: Behn defended education, pleasing the liberals; she was a “sexual pioneer,” pleasing the radicals. Though here given fairly equal weight with Behn’s other extraordinary qualities, Behn’s sexuality imbues much of the rest of the biography, such as the chapter entitled, “War Between the Sexes: Independence and Desire.” Here, as elsewhere, we see the conflation of sexual themes in Behn’s work with Behn herself: “If Aphra Behn had courted immodesty on a symbolic level merely in the act of staging her plays or the publishing of her writing, she openly embraced it in what she wrote” (164). As the chapter’s title and this opening suggests, this section of the work concentrates on representations of sex within Behn’s work, with Behn situated as the crusading feminist dismantling the offensive verses of the misogynistic Earl of Rochester.

Maira Ferguson carries on this work in her book *First Feminists*. Though Ferguson attempts to include nuanced examples of early modern feminism in her book, it is obvious who her paragon is: poets like Philips, though included, are gently reprovved for producing work that “did not secure acceptance for the less conventional women

writers who followed” (13). In a passage reminiscent of Goreau’s preliminary outline of Behn, Ferguson describes a feminist who “evinced a shrewd sense about women’s economic survival, while rape and impotence were featured in some poems. In later prose fiction, she continued to explore marital tribulations. She also advocated a woman’s right to her own sexuality, particularly in one or perhaps two late lesbian poems written in the last decade of her life” (13-14). The emphasis is on the sex in Behn’s work, and Behn’s radicalness is further evinced in her public embracement of queer desire.

In *Slip-Shod Sibyls*, meanwhile, Greer presses the claim for Behn as a sexual rebel in explicitly pairing her with sex workers, writing, “If [Behn] herself did not scruple to be numbered with women of ill-repute, modern scholars have no right to distinguish and separate her from them. The belief that Behn was the sole virginal *habituée* of the unchaste world of the theatre has no basis in the facts as we know them” (180). Greer observes the anti-sex work attitudes latent in even progressive scholars and activists who want to advocate Behn’s outlandish sexuality. Behn needs to have been falsely condemned a “whore” by her contemporaries, so we can reclaim her and her liberal sexuality from the victimhood of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century misogyny. If our feminist heroine of yore actually *was* a sex worker, she is irredeemable.

Predictably, as a means to illuminate the radical sexuality of Behn, frequent comparisons exist between Behn and the “chaste” Philips. Philips receives one of several cursory, contrapuntal mentions at the beginning of chapter fifteen in Janet Todd’s *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*. The reference occurs after Todd has advanced her description of Behn’s sexuality: even by the mid-1670s, when Behn was “no longer young but still attractive,” we are told Behn “relished the sexual electricity in talk between men and

women” (192). Todd continues: “[Behn] may have been ‘chaste’ or she may have enjoyed a kind of safe sex or sexual foreplay” to avoid venereal disease. Even the potential of Behn’s chastity is diminished by its practical necessity, and is quickly swept away by the notion Behn may nevertheless “have enjoyed a kind of safe sex or sexual foreplay.” Describing passionate sexual desire in “The Platonick Lady” by Rochester (and potentially in Behn’s life), Todd writes, “The old platonic of Henrietta Maria’s court and Katherine Philips’ verses are rejected for something more erotic: the woman wants to retain desire not ruin it with fulfillment, to enjoy the man in her arms, to cuddle and kiss him, to stare in his eyes, to be toyed and ruffled, to be petted and squeezed, enjoying everything except ‘the feate’” (192). The significance of Behn’s rebelliousness is all the clearer after the comparison with Philips, which shows just how far Behn and her contemporaries have moved past the sexual denial in Philips’s verse. Philips is a mere allusion, a symbol held up to heighten Behn’s sexuality, which is then *additionally* emphasized with the anaphoric repetition of the creative acts of desire Behn and Rochester devise for their characters (and, implicitly, themselves). Later, Todd diminishes Philips even further when she writes of Behn’s involvement in Dryden’s translation of Ovid’s *Heroides*. Todd imagines Behn likely wanted to translate the part of Sappho, even though Sappho’s “image had recently been popularised in a soft-focus, rather sentimental version by French writers [that] made it possible for respectable men to call respectable female poets by her name — Katherine Philips had been ‘the English Sappho’ for example. Behn might have done justice to this multifaceted figure if she had the chance” (256). Here we are not only reminded of Philips’s “respectability” and her association with “sentimentality,” it is suggested Philips has not “done justice” to a

fascinating character who was either “a promiscuous lover of women and a suicide” or a “great lyric poet and feminine victim of heterosexual passion” (256). Behn’s unbridled passion and disregard for social convention make her capable of fulfilling either role.

Todd is certainly only one of many scholars to draw overt comparisons between the chastity of Philips and the wild sexuality of Behn. Bronwen Price, for instance, writes in her contribution to *Women and Literature in Britain*,

Thus Katherine Philips’s poetry employs platonic tropes and celebrates the values of feminine virtue, such as chastity and privacy, to construct a world of female friendship unpenetrated by the terms of masculinity, while Aphra Behn’s draws upon Ovidian, Petrarchan and pastoral conventions in order to challenge and revise the politics of sexuality and desire inscribed in those codes. (118-19)

This is certainly not the focus of Price’s paper, but it is the only time she mentions Behn or Philips. The very offhandedness of this remark is evidence of the pervasiveness of the virgin / whore myth at work in the discussion of these two writers, and it continues to perpetuate the importance of referring to sexuality in their work. In this, her historically contextualizing paragraph on the importance of “[recognizing] the difference between women’s writing” (118), Price cannot move away from directly comparing — in the same sentence — Philips’s poetic “virtue” with Behn’s “revisionary” depictions of sexuality. The balance of the sentence becomes a microcosm for ideas about women’s chastity: the sentence proposes contrasting ideas, which become antithetical, and highlights the dependence of each idea on the other.

These same ideas exist in more concentrated form in anthologies, which are, as Ezell reminds us, are tools of canonization through their roles as “popular or teaching [texts]” (42). Constrained by the limited space — and by limited ideas about women’s sexuality — biographical headnotes perpetuate Behn’s reputation as a wild woman, while Philips serves as a more tame and chaste figure against whom Behn can be juxtaposed. Even when not comparing these writers directly, editors often establish Behn as one sort of feminine trope and Philips as another. In the selection of anthologies that follows, I have tried to include anthologies that have been historically important, anthologies that overtly compare Behn and Philips, and popular anthologies currently in use.

Though they (and readers) acknowledge that not everyone can be included in an anthology, the editors of *British Women Writers: An Anthology from 14th c. to Present* have omitted Katherine Philips altogether, but have included Behn because of what they perceive as her “extraordinary efforts” and “delight in sexual vitality” (xiv, 32). The editors’ priorities become more apparent when they suggest “Behn was famous in her day, but, as the bourgeois morality stressing femininity grew in strength her reputation declined and by the mid-eighteenth century she had become the antithesis of what a modest lady writer should be” (32). Behn is established as a victim of the patriarchy who has finally, by virtue of this anthology, been rescued from obscurity. Philips would be an inappropriate choice for selection not only because of the apparent “tameness” of her verse itself, but because it is her poetry that is so often charged with restricting what women can and should write. She becomes a tool of the patriarchy — another damning feature of the virgin — upholding unreasonable standards on women’s sexuality. *Major Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century* is more explicit: “In marked contrast to

Katherine Philips, Behn openly resisted prevailing ideas of women's honour and chastity" (219). Angeline Goreau, meanwhile, who in *The Whole Duty of a Woman* writes of friendship in Philips's poetry as "far removed from the sphere of the merely sexual," applauds Behn's "bawdy poems" which "were probably the first instance in which women dared to write openly about sex" (201, 207).

In *Early Modern Women's Writing*, Paul Salzman notes "while it has been common to contrast the 'virtuous' Katherine Philips with the morally suspect Aphra Behn, Behn in particular demonstrated that it was possible for a woman to sustain a career within the masculine world of letters" (xxxix). The phrasing here is fascinating: not only does Salzman not actually dispute the comparison of Philips and Behn on the grounds of modesty, he awkwardly includes this as a counterpoint in an argument about Behn's ability to work in the "masculine world of letters." Oddly, the sentence seems to be a conflation of the two tropes under discussion here: while it has been common to talk about these two in terms of their sexualities, Salzman seems to say, we should actually just talk about Behn as a pioneer.

In the more recent Broadview anthology, edited by Joseph Black et al., Behn's reputation "as the first professional woman writer in England" is perpetuated, and she "is also known for a life of adventure and espionage, for libertine sexual views, and for helping to lay the foundation for the cause of women's rights" (1143). Meanwhile, the reader is told Philips is "Praised for her modesty and Christian virtue as well as for her poetry" (971). Her "brief career as a playwright" is acknowledged, but only because it "helped pave the way for the acceptance of the somewhat less modest and virtuous Aphra Behn" (971). Aside from the familiar comparison between Philips's propriety and Behn's

“somewhat less modest and virtuous” writing, in this edition Philips doesn’t help “lay the foundation for the cause of women’s rights,” but she does help Behn, who can then begin the real work of fighting the patriarchy. In closing, we are reminded “as Orinda, [Philips] asserted a female claim to what had been so often thought an exclusively male sphere: ideal friendship” (971). Her verses are non-threatening and exist in harmony with heterosexual society.

As noted above, Philips is absent from the “first [...] collection of contributions of notable British women writers” (*British Women Writers* xiii), but her discussion in subsequent anthologies is telling, even when she is not overtly compared to Behn. Gilbert and Gubar’s introduction to Katherine Philips’s work states, “The mother of two children, one of whom died in infancy, she clearly had a ‘room of her own’ in which to write and leisure for friendship as well as for literary activity” (81). The conspicuous allusion to Woolf and remark on Philips’s “leisure for friendship” make it clear Gilbert and Gubar are drawing on Philips for a feminist cause. It makes sense, then, that they would continue in this vein: “That her most loving poems are addressed to female friends suggests the bonds that were beginning to develop between women, who felt that they had found ‘all the world’ in each other rather than in romanticized heroes” (81). Though this is not, of course, a reference to sexuality, and nor do Gilbert and Gubar refer to Philips as chaste or virtuous, Gilbert and Gubar’s assertion that Philips’s poems represent female friendship has been described as a “distortion” of “Philips’s clearly erotic poems” (Stiebel 154). At the very least, the description of “loving poems” addressed to “female friends” precludes any appropriation of Philips by lesbian feminists: a very real fear

during the schismatic straight / lesbian politics of the second-wave of feminism, when straight feminists worried lesbian feminists threatened feminism's reputation.

Three years later, in 1988, Greer et al.'s *Kissing the Rod* was published. *Kissing the Rod* is very much in the minority for not at least *mentioning* Behn's reputation for sexual freedom, either during her own time or in subsequent criticism. Nevertheless, Philips's sexual activity — or lack thereof — is scrutinized. Greer, currently under fire for her transphobia but never accused of the rampant homophobia or lesbian exclusion of other second-wave feminists, also makes it clear Philips was not a lesbian. The biographical notes on Philips in *Kissing the Rod*, though admittedly more varied and lengthy than her description in many other anthologies, nevertheless stress Philips's friendship to the exclusion of any possibility of queer desire. In a phrase that is perhaps prescriptive as well as descriptive, Philips's biographical introduction asserts, "To modern feminists [Philips] is chiefly important for her exaltation of Platonic friendship between women" and adds "some of her champions choose to ignore her own stipulation that such friendship be free from carnal interest" (188). This phrasing not only gives weight to the importance of Philips's sexual identity, it makes a claim for who "modern feminists" are and how they should read. In this single sentence, *Kissing the Rod's* editors have created a divergence between "modern feminists" as a unified group, who "correctly" read friendship in Philips's work, and "some of [Philips's] champions" who insist on queer readings. Philips is credited with "[giving] new meaning to Platonic friendship" and it is reiterated in various ways that "the flame is always pure, the relationship strictly platonic, a meeting of souls, never the flesh" (191). These notes are especially functional with the inclusion of several of the poems to which dissenters

typically attribute lesbian desire. One such example is “To Mrs. M. Awbrey,” for instance, which begins, “Soule of my soule! my Joy, my crown, my friend!” The inclusion of “friend” makes this poem an obvious choice for inclusion in Philips’s chapter in *Kissing the Rod*, but the editors have also informed readers they are to read “Soule of my soule!” and “my Joy, my crown!” as indicative of Platonic friendship, as well, lest they be excluded from “modern feminism.” In demanding this reading, however, the editors of this and other anthologies perpetuate the centuries-old argument that Philips’s poems are the epitome of chastity and feminine virtue.

The description of Philips as “the English Sappho” points to the crux of her reception, both in her century and — albeit for different reasons — in ours. While descriptions of Behn’s sexuality are fairly consistent, Katherine Philips is a complicated case because scholarship on her poetry (and biography) has been so divisive. During her own time, as we are aware, she was held up as the model of chastity and provided a model for female friendship.³ As we have seen, this is an idea that was perpetuated in twentieth-century scholarship, and is still perpetuated in twenty-first-century scholarship. However, recent academic work has been interested in Philips’s potential lesbianism. Initially, essays were concerned with simply making the case for Philips’s sexual identity. More recent criticism, such as that included in *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips*, indicates we are moving away from readings limited to identifying Philips’s sexual orientation. But, as Hilary Menges notes, “While recent and forthcoming criticism has inaugurated new lines of inquiry, our discussions of friendship in Philips remain plagued by such dualistic interpretations” (517). As the editors of *The Noble Flame* say in their

³ See prefatory verses to Philips’s *Poems* (1667), Clark 248, Ferguson 102, Fitzmaurice et al. 177, Hackett 496, and Williamson’s extensive study.

introduction, sex- and gender-based “pathbreaking studies have shaped, and indeed continue to shape, the trajectory of contemporary Philips criticism” (6). Queer studies of Philips’s work have determined “a central scholarly locus” (6). Seeking to make more nuanced these queer studies, the editors write, “The question, then, is not whether to use ‘lesbian’ at all, but rather how best to deploy the concept without obfuscating meaningful differences between early modern and female homoerotic desire” (12). The fact that this is “the question” being asked shows the extent to which emphasis on Philips’s sexuality still dictates criticism of Philips’s work and matters of Philips’s canonization. Although (as Paula Loscocco observes) recent criticism has begun to move away from studies dedicated to making a case for Philips’s Platonism or queerness, in a general sense there is always a perfunctory mention of whether her verse is that of friendship or lesbian desire. Here I will briefly examine pieces of scholarship that “have shaped, and indeed continue to shape” our discussion of Philips’s work.

Leading the charge is Lillian Faderman, who, in her book *Surpassing the Love of Men*, says, “Had [Philips] written in the twentieth century, her poetry would undoubtedly have been identified as ‘lesbian’” (68). Groundbreaking in its rejection of heteronormativity, Faderman’s study nevertheless warns, “It is impossible to be certain what Katherine Philips’s passions meant to her, but we can be sure that they were regarded by those who believed her to be a model of the perfect romantic friend as an expression of platonism” (71).

Such an assertion does not do justice to Philips’s queer poems, other scholars suggest. One of the fundamental texts making a case for Philips’s queer sexuality is Arlene Stiebel’s “Not Since Sappho: the erotic in poems by Katherine Philips and Aphra

Behn.” Stiebel’s article, later turned into a monograph, is one of the first texts to say Philips is queer, and remains one of the most brazen arguments of its kind. The opening of Stiebel’s text could scarcely be more apt in showing the lesbian feminist belief in the importance of Philips as a lesbian heroine, though Philips is actually not mentioned at all: “Despite polite acknowledgement of the newly credited importance of relationships among women, it is a commonplace of recent literary theory and criticism that lesbians do not exist” (153). In making Stiebel’s argument for Philips’s queerness, then, Philips becomes a glorious icon for the lesbian feminist cause. If Philips is queer, Stiebel and others can say not only that lesbians *do* exist, but that they have always existed.

Stiebel surpasses most in insisting upon the sexual acts actually performed by Philips: most scholars championing the lesbian argument are more concerned with the general queer eroticism and desire in Philips’s work. In her book *Sappho in Early Modern England*, Harriette Andreadis dedicates a full chapter to Philips and the ways in which “she expressed her same-sex affective impulses in an acceptable form” (57). In language that — at least initially — echoes Woolf’s praise of Behn, Andreadis writes of Philips, “It was she who established and made permissible for the women writers who followed her not only a female writing persona, but also an apparently chaste language of passionate female friendship whose veiled and shadowed subtext is inescapably erotic” (56). Implicit here is the reminder to lesbian readers that they too are indebted to the lesbian writer who forged a path for feminine queers. Like Stiebel and other critics, Andreadis argues Philips uses Donne as a model and a means to reveal her erotic desire. As part of her analysis, Andreadis examines Philips’s “To my Lucasia, in Defence of Declared Friendship,” which opens thus:

Although we know we love, yet while our soule
Is thus imprison'd by the flesh we wear,
There's no way left that bondage to controule,
But to convey transactions through the Eare.

In part of her reading of this stanza, Andreadis argues, “we might read the opening image of the ear, with its vaginal-like folds and secret channel, as erotically receiving the sounds of passionate declaration” (59). Though a compelling reading in some ways, this is also an example of the lengths to which the process of sexualization occurs in the reading of Philips’s poetry.

But those reclaiming Philips’s poetry (and Philips) as queer run into practical problems in arguing their case. Critics determined to uphold Philips’s work as heterosexual will never be satisfied “unless convincing biographical or historical evidence can be found to the contrary” (Limbert 36). Therefore, despite Stiebel’s textually supported argument that lesbian desire is “encoded” in Philips’s work, that Philips used “masking techniques based in the literary conventions of [her] time” to hide and reveal her sexual desire for other women, and Andreadis’s assertion that “clearly [...] there was much physical and probably emotional distance” between Philips and her husband (155), advocates of straight, chaste readings will also always have textual and biographical evidence at their disposal: for instance, the fact Philips was married and never explicitly states “the desire I feel for women is queer.” Both are interpretations, and neither side will be satisfied with the evidence of the other. A piece of scholarship concerned only with making a case for or against Philips’s sexuality is inevitably drab,⁴ and there is a latent homophobia lurking in many papers advocating Philips’s female

⁴ This practice is, granted, less frequent in recent scholarship.

friendship, but the potentially more troubling side of these arguments is the emphasis on sexuality in Philips's poetry, and scholarship's conflation of apparent sexuality in Philips's poetry with Philips's biography.

The attention to Behn and Philips's sexuality is problematic, particularly coming from feminists who wish to move away from sexuality being the determining factor of a woman's reputation. Not only do these critics attach great importance to each writer's sexuality, the frequent impulse to compare these women -- directly or indirectly -- and situate them on opposite sides of a binary of sexualities perpetuates both in scholarship and society the harmful stereotype of the virgin / whore dichotomy. Behn's subversion is all the more attractive when pinned against Philips's chastity -- in the same way a "virgin's" chastity is normally considered all the more dear when compared to a "whore's" -- and her status as the first radically subversive feminist is under threat if Katherine Philips, deemed to be a lesbian, is not the chaste woman she was made out to be. Whether Philips is chaste or radically queer, however, the fact remains that in her case as well as in the case of Behn, the emphasis has been and remains the writer's sexuality.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

When alive, she may well have deserved her reputation as a loose woman; posthumously, she certainly deserves the more important distinction of being the first Englishwoman to earn her living by her pen (Lerner 17).

As a twenty-first-century reader, I am grateful for the opportunity to read the work of Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips. They are two writers whose work I find extraordinary: intelligent, challenging, funny, and moving. My ability to read them is surely dependent on the efforts of Anglo-American feminist literary scholars who insisted the writers were worthy of study and canonization. In *Virtue of Necessity*, Elaine Hobby states her interest in examining the oppression and circumstances of early modern women writers, as opposed to their literary qualities. It is more interesting and important, she asserts, to focus only on the poetry as historical evidence exposing the hardships of early modern women and their struggle against oppression. In response, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright asserts, “Many years of subsequent scholarship mean that the student is now able to consider both/and rather than either/or” (viii). Like Hodgson-Wright, and others, I agree it is now possible to examine both gender and literary qualities of the writers’ works — and as a feminist, I am certainly interested in a nuanced discussion of gendered power dynamics, gender representations, sex, and desire in early modern works, in addition to other discussions. Furthermore, I recognize, as Laura Rosenthal writes, “Because researchers with a stake in gender studies revived interest in Behn, it makes sense that much of the early Behn criticism took up problems of gender in her work, her life, and her career” (7). Nevertheless, Rosenthal asks, can we recover from recovery?

I have a related question: How different has our feminist recovery been from the initial exclusion of women writers from the canon? Naturally, when twentieth-century feminists began to canonize women writers, they devoted substantial attention to questioning why these women writers had been excluded from the canon. When this question is asked of excluded women writers generally, responses tend to fall into one of two categories: it is proposed either that writing by women is objectively poorer in quality than writing by men,⁵ or that writing by women has been excluded because the patriarchal canon is unwilling to consider seriously writing by a woman.⁶ It may be suggested, for instance, that a woman was too threatening, too demure, too eccentric, or too sexual for her work to be received favourably in her own time or subsequent patriarchal times. This is the natural assertion, in other words, that the general marginalization of women contributed to the canonical marginalization of women.

Given the prominence of Philips — and, especially, Behn — in feminist literary scholarship and history, there has been frequent though often fleeting speculation as to their canonical exclusion. In the case of each writer, as with most women writers, there is an attention to what Dorothy Mermin might call, in “very general terms,” the “cultural suppression of female voices” (335). Like other women, Philips and Behn have been subject to general patriarchal oppression, and this has limited the extent and nature of their works’ reception. But Philips and Behn are considered to have been suppressed for more specific patriarchal reasons as well, often relating to sexuality. Philips, in particular,

⁵ Often, either because men determine the qualities of “greatness,” or because women are excluded from learning how to obtain and apply qualities of “greatness.” Examples of this position include Greer’s Introduction to *Slip-Shod Sibyls* and Woolf’s comments on early modern women writers in *A Room of One’s Own*.

⁶ See, for example, Goulianos xviii. For a further discussion of these differences in approach, see Ezell’s comments on “androgyny” versus “difference,” and the role of that “split” in feminist literary history (23-25).

is accused of catering to masculine tastes and upholding traditional notions of femininity and virtue, which prevented her work from being truly great. Behn, on the other hand, is assumed to have been excluded from the canon because of the alarm at, and threat posed by, her frank representations of women's sexual desire. In the case of both writers, in general terms and specifically, second-wave feminists have identified and insisted upon the gendered barriers facing the woman writer and her reception. This insistence is appropriate to some degree, but inappropriate is the corresponding twentieth-century emphasis on gendered qualities of these writers. In fact, it seems second-wave feminists unwittingly replicated the same canonical problems they initially identified. Anglo-American feminists identified the patriarchy as generally excluding women from the canon, but then validated the judgement and authority of the patriarchy as they insisted on using "pioneer" tropes, suggesting surpassing patriarchal barriers is somehow a legitimate achievement, as opposed to an arbitrary marker in an oppressive system. Second-wave feminists tell us Behn was excluded from the canon because she was too sexual, and Philips's peers were preoccupied with her virtue, but second-wave conversations about these writers also emphasized sexuality.

The reliance on unexamined assumptions and uncritical tropes in Behn's and Philips's canonizations is problematic, and risks reinforcing the very patriarchal structures that feminists wish to dismantle. Each trope relies decidedly on a comparison or competition between women writers, echoing assertions "the male establishment can tolerate only one woman at a time" (*Rod* 26). This is inherently flawed and limiting, but potentially more problematic is the fact the specific stock phrases and images being circulated reinforce and replicate gendered power dynamics, in which the canon is given

absolute patriarchal authority, and women are reduced to their sexuality. Surely in our attempts to resurrect early modern women writers, we must focus on the literary merits of the writing. It is only in reading writers who are women *as writers*, and not *as women* that we will approach gender equality and seventeenth-century women writers will receive the full and nuanced attention they deserve. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating the very notions that excluded women writers like Philips and Behn from the canon.

Works Cited

- Andreadis, Harriette. *Sappho in Early Modern England*. Chicago: UP, 2001. Print.
- Black, Joseph, et al., eds. *Broadview Anthology of British Literature, Concise Edition*. Vol. A. of 2 vol. Peterborough: Broadview, 2007. Print.
- Clark, C. "Katherine Philips." *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800*. Ed. Janet Todd. Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985. 247-48. Print.
- Colman, George and Bonnell Thornton. "Poems by Eminent Ladies." *The Connoisseur* 22 May 1755: 409. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online: Text Creation Partnership*. Web. 25 March 2017.
- Cotton, Nancy. "Aphra Behn." *Dictionary of British Women Writers*. Ed. Janet Todd. London: Routledge, 1989. 52-53. Print.
- Cowley, Abraham. "To the most excellently accomplish'd, Mrs. K. P. upon her Poems." *Spenser and the Tradition: English Poetry 1579-1830*. Ed. David H. Radcliffe. Blacksburg: Virginia Tech, n. d. Web. 10 April 2017.
- Cuder-Domíniguez, Pilar. *Stuart Women Playwrights, 1613-1713*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2011. Print.
- Evans, Robert C., ed. "Katherine (Fowler) Philips, Epitaph on her mother-in-law (1667)." *Reading Early Modern Women*. Eds. Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer. New York: Routledge, 2004. 395-97. Print.
- Ezell, Margaret. *Writing Women's Literary History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993. Print.

- Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. New York: William Morrow, 1981. Print.
- Ferguson, Moira. *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578-1799*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. Print.
- Figes, Eva. *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850*. London: Macmillan Press, 1982. Print.
- Fitzmaurice, James, et al., eds. *Major Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century England*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. Print.
- Florio, John. "Preface." *Montaigne's Essays*. London, 1603. *Renascence Editions*. Web. 9 Aug. 2017.
- Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*. New York: Norton, 1985. Print.
- Goulianos, Joan, ed. *by a Woman writt*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973. Print.
- Goreau, Angeline. *Reconstructing Aphra*. New York: The Dial Press, 1980. Print.
- Goreau, Angeline, ed. *The Whole Duty of a Woman*. New York: The Dial Press, 1984. Print.
- Greenfield, Anne. "Letting Only a Few Flowers Fall Upon Her Tomb: Virginia Woolf and Aphra Behn." *The Virginia Woolf Bulletin* 30 (2009): 20-32. Print.
- Greer, Germaine. *Slip-Shod Sibyls*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1995. Print.
- Greer, Germaine, et al., eds. *Kissing the Rod*. London: Virago, 1988. Print.
- Hackett, Helen. "Katherine Philips." *The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English*. Ed. Lorna Sage. Cambridge: UP, 1999. 496. Print.

- Hodgson-Wright, Stephanie, ed. *Women's Writing of the Early Modern Period, 1588-1688: An Anthology*. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. Print.
- Kamm, Antony. *Biographical Dictionary of English Literature*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 1993. Print.
- Lerner, Laurence. *Reading Women's Poetry*. Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2009. Print.
- Limbert, Claudia. "Katherine Philips: Controlling a life and reputation." *South Atlantic Review* 56.2 (1991): 27-42. Print.
- Llewellyn, Mark. "Katherine Philips: Friendship, Poetry, and Neo-Platonic Thought in Seventeenth Century England." *Philological Quarterly* 81.4 (2002): 441-468. Print.
- Loscocco, Paula. "Inventing the English Sappho." *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips*. Eds. David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2015. 153-86. Print.
- Mahl, Mary R. and Helene Koon, eds. *The Female Spectator*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977. Print.
- Menges, Hilary. "Authorship, friendship, and forms of publication in Katherine Philips." *SEL* 52.3 (2012): 517-41. Print.
- Mermin, Dorothy. "Women Becoming Poets: Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, Anne Finch." *ELH* 57.2 (1990): 335-355. Print.
- O'Donnell, Mary Ann. "Tory Wit and Unconventional Woman Aphra Behn." *Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century*. Eds. Katharina M. Wilson and Frank J. Warnke. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989. 341-364. Print.

- Orvis, David L., and Ryan Singh Paul. "Introduction." *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips*. Eds. David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2015. 1-40. Print.
- Pacheco, Anita, ed. *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. Print.
- Philips, Katherine. "To my Lucasia, in Defence of Declared Friendship." *Poems*. London, 1667. *Early English Books Online*. Web. 8 August 2017.
- , "To Mrs. M. Awbrey." *Poems*. London, 1667. *Early English Books Online*. Web. 8 August 2017.
- Price, Bronwen. "Feminine modes of knowing and scientific enquiry." *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*. Ed. Helen Wilcox. Cambridge: UP, 1996. 117-139. Print.
- Rogers, Katharine M. and William McCarthy, eds. *The Meridian Anthology of Early Modern Writers: British Literary Women from Aphra Behn to Maria Edgeworth 1660-1800*. Markham: Penguin, 1987. Print.
- Rosenthal, Laura J. "Introduction: Recovering from Recovery." *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 50.1 (2009): 1-11. Print.
- Salzman, Paul, ed. *Early Modern Women's Writing, an Anthology 1560-1700*. Toronto: Oxford World's Classics, 2000. Print.
- Salzman, Paul. *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.

- Schweickart, Patrocínio. "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading."
Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader. Eds. David Lodge and Nigel Wood.
 New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.
- Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*. New York: Facts on File-
 Infobase Publishing, 2006. Print.
- Spender, Dale, and Janet Todd, eds. *British Women Writers: An Anthology from 14th c.
 to Present*. New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1989. Print.
- Spender, Dale. *Mothers of the Novel*. London: Pandora, 1986. Print.
- Stiebel, Arlene. "Not Since Sappho: The Erotic in Poems of Katherine Philips and Aphra
 Behn." *Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment England*. Ed. Claude
 Summers. New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992. 153-171. Print.
- Todd, Janet. *Feminist Literary History*. Toronto: Wiley, 1988. Print.
- . *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*. London: André Deutsch, 1996. Print.
- Uphaus, Robert W. and Gretchen M. Foster, eds. *The 'Other' Eighteenth Century:
 English women of Letters in 1660-1800*. East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1991.
 Print.
- Wilcox, Helen, ed. *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*. Cambridge: UP, 1996.
 Print.
- Williamson, Marilyn L. *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers 1650-1750*.
 Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Vintage Classics, 1929. Print.
- Wray, Ramona. *Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century*. Tavistock: Northcote House
 Publishers Ltd., 2004. Print.

Wright, Gillian. *Producing Women's Poetry, 1600-1730*. Cambridge: UP, 2013. Print.