

# Aphra Behn: Portraiture and The Biographical Account

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## ABSTRACT

Scant biographical detail is known about the life of England's first professional woman writer, Aphra Behn (d.1689), which makes it strange that scholars have shown little interest in surviving portraits of her. This article provides the first comprehensive survey of contemporaneous portraiture of Behn, outlining the provenance of these works and summarizing their various claims to authenticity. In doing so, it highlights how these visual documents of Behn's life contradict the dominant scholarly view of Behn as a struggling writer who lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Behn herself endorsed one of her portraits, using it to promote her most significant publication up to that point, *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1684). This portrait neatly reflects the vision of Behn projected through the first biographies of her life which were circulated in the wake of her death. By drawing on Behn's own ideas about the function of portraits, we can begin to account for the contradictions between two very different visions of Behn: the professional author who stressed that her skills as a writer overcame the restrictions of her gender; and the romantic heroine who promoted an image of her own feminine beauty and gentility.

In her dedicatory epistle to *Oroonoko* (1688), Aphra Behn details the processes involved in producing a portrait:

My Lord, a picture drawer, when he intends to make a good picture, essays the face many ways, and in many lights, before he begins; that he may choose from the several turns of it which is most agreeable and gives it the best grace; and if there be a scar, an ungrateful mole, or any little defect, they leave it out; and yet make the picture extremely like. But he who has the good fortune to

I wish to dedicate this article to my much-missed colleague, Professor Richard Terry, who passed away after a sudden illness in July 2020. Richard published his own research in this journal and was immensely fond of it. I would like to thank Diana Dethloff, Malcolm Baker, Oliver Mahony at St Hilda's College, Oxford, Abigail Lamphier at the Yale Centre for British Art, and the team at the National Portrait Gallery's Heinz Archive and Library for their help with queries relating to this article. Mr J. J. Heath-Caldwell kindly shared details of his private family archive. The two anonymous readers provided invaluable feedback and I am very grateful for their time and advice. The research for this article was generously supported by an Arts and Humanities Research Council UKRI Innovation Fellowship.

draw a face that is exactly charming in all its parts and features, what colours or agreements can be added to make it finer? All that he can give is but its due; and glories in a piece whose original alone gives it its perfection.<sup>1</sup>

As she immediately elucidates, Behn's purpose in making this reflection is to provide a comparison that emphasizes the superior features of textual portraiture: 'A poet is a painter in his way; he draws to the life, but in another kind; we draw the nobler part, the soul and mind; the pictures of the pen shall outlast those of the pencil, and even worlds themselves' (A4r–A4v). Behn sees visual portraiture as a temporal and idealized reflection of a person's external appearance. That 'nobler part', the reflection of an inner life, can only be captured by the 'pictures of the pen'. The written word is that which endures. In light of this view, it is fitting, perhaps, that scholars have undertaken so little research into painted portraits of Behn herself. The scant previous research into portraiture of Behn has been driven, primarily, by the desire to find a suitable portrait to serve as a cover image for publications, providing us with a literal face for Behn's writings.<sup>2</sup> Over the decades, Behn studies have become littered with images—on dust jackets, posters and powerpoint slides—that purport to present us with Behn's authorial likeness. In almost all these instances, the relationship between that face and Behn's oeuvre has been little interrogated, with scholars working in good faith in accepting that all images frequently cited as portraits of Behn are equally valid. In 1992 the Huntington Library revealed its desire to hang Behn's face on the institution's walls, publicly celebrating her place within the canon of great British authors. With no portrait available for acquisition, they commissioned the American artist, Sarah Belchetz-Swenson, to paint a new work. Belchetz-Swenson drew on 'all the extant images of Mrs. Behn' in her design, identifying these as a portrait attributed to Sir Peter Lely in New York, a portrait at St Hilda's College, Oxford, possibly by the artist Mary Beale, and an engraving of a lost work by the painter John Riley.<sup>3</sup> As this article will show, this list was not entirely accurate and the three works have differing claims to authenticity. The portrait Belchetz-Swenson produced is one, quite fittingly in Behn's case, drawn half from fact and half from fiction.

Behn's knowledge of the processes involved in visual portraiture was likely gained through two avenues. First, through her friendship with the artist, John Greenhill, who died in 1676 after allegedly falling into a gutter while drunk. Behn commemo-

1 Aphra Behn, 'Oroonoko', in *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, 1994), 3.

2 Portraits of Behn are noted by Montague Summers in his edition of *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 1 (London, 1915), lxiii; they are also discussed briefly in biographies of Behn by Maureen Duffy and Janet Todd: Maureen Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess: The Life of Aphra Behn 1640–1689* (London, 1977), 93, 152–3; Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London, 1996), 201–2. A substantial body of information on portraiture of Behn is held in archival notes at the National Portrait Gallery's Heinz Archive: London, National Portrait Gallery, Notes on Sitters: Behn, Aphra c.1640–1689, NPG 49/4/429.

3 Letter from Sarah Belchetz-Swenson to National Portrait Gallery, 5 March 1995: London, National Portrait Gallery, Notes on Sitters: Behn, Aphra. Belchetz-Swenson's production of her Behn portrait (completed 1994) led to the single most comprehensive review of the surviving portraits to date through her reflective essay on its composition: Sarah Belchetz-Swenson, *Aphra Behn: Genesis of a Portrait* <<http://www.belchetz-swenson.com/aphrabehn>> accessed 14 June 2019.

rated Greenhill in an elegy that acknowledged their friendship whilst pointing to his mastery in poetry's sister art of painting:

Great Master of the Noblest Mysterie,  
That ever happy Knowledge did inspire;  
Sacred as that of Poetry,  
And which the wond'ring World does equally admire.<sup>4</sup>

The friendship was also acknowledged in Bainbrigg Buckeridge's early history of English painting, 'An Essay Towards an English-School of Painters', first published in 1706. Here, Behn's elegy was printed in full, following a note detailing how Greenhill 'was moreover Poetically enclin'd, and very agreeable in Conversation; which won so much on Mrs. Behn, that she endeavour'd, on her Part, to perpetuate his Memory'.<sup>5</sup> We still do not know whether Greenhill painted Behn's portrait. As likely as such an act appears, no trace of such a work has been found in contemporary records or identified as a likely survival.<sup>6</sup> But others certainly did paint Behn. She sat for leading artists, with evidence suggesting that these included the King's Principal Painter, Sir Peter Lely, as well as two men who would later inherit this position: John Riley and Sir Godfrey Kneller. During her sittings, Behn must have learnt about the processes of portraiture first-hand, developing access and insight into the practice of painting.

The current article focuses on the role portraiture of Behn played as a means for marketing one of her most important publications, *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1684), in addition to her collected works. As I will show, by recovering the ways in which portraiture was used to promote certain ideas about the value of her published work, Behn's portrait enables us to re-evaluate her position as a leading professional writer as well as to broker new evidence about her broader reputation and person. Behn and her contemporaries employed her portrait as a marker of status, attaching it to her poetry and later to the first posthumous biographies published in the decade following her death. These publications and early lives present a vision of Behn that is very far removed from the dominant scholarly accounts of recent decades, but one, as we will see, that is increasingly in keeping with emerging scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

4 Behn's elegy, 'On the Death of Mr, Grinhil, the Famous Painter', was first published in Aphra Behn, *Poems Upon Several Occasions: With A Voyage to the Island of Love* (London, 1684), 24–8 (26).

5 Bainbrigg Buckeridge, 'An Essay towards an English-School of Painters', in Roger de Piles's *The Art of Painting and the Lives of the Painters* (London, 1706), 426–8.

6 In her biography of Behn, Maureen Duffy includes a footnote that alludes to the possible existence of a portrait of Behn by Greenhill. This appears to be an anecdotal claim and no archival traces have yet been identified: 'Since my [Duffy's] writing this, Mr Selby Whittingham, who is at work on a monograph of Greenhill, has informed me that a descendant of Greenhill's, Robert Benson, owned a portrait said to be of Aphra Behn, by Greenhill now, alas, lost' (Duffy, *Passionate Shepherdess*, 308).

7 Recently, Karen Britland has explored archival documentation to suggest that Behn was linked to a number of well-connected and influential figures, and that she contracted a marriage with John Halse, a gentleman, in 1657. See Karen Britland, 'Aphra Behn's First Marriage?', *The Seventeenth Century* (pubd online 4 December 2019) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2019.1693420>>.

## I. THE PORTRAITS AND THEIR PROVENANCE

To understand the purpose and functions of portraiture of Behn it is first necessary to assemble the evidence relating to the various known portraits of her. Where are these portraits now, and how reliable is the evidence attributing them as images of England's first professional woman writer?

### The Riley Portrait

The most authentic surviving portrait of Behn is that of an engraving produced by Robert White and taken after a now lost portrait by John Riley. The engraving was produced by 1684, when it was bound as a frontispiece into Behn's *Poems upon Several Occasions*. It was common practice that a frontispiece should be produced for volumes of this status.<sup>8</sup> The 1684 *Poems* signalled Behn's entrée into the literary establishment of the day, and was printed for and sold by its leading literary publisher, Jacob Tonson the Elder, in conjunction with his brother, Richard Tonson. Evidence from surviving copies containing the engraving supports the fact that it was made for inclusion in the volume from the time of publication and was not a later addition.<sup>9</sup> In an enlightening recent article Jordan Howell has shown the importance of the 1684 *Poems* to Behn's career.<sup>10</sup> Howell evidences Behn's close editorial involvement with the volume as one which even extended to control over the sequencing of the work and the printing process. Whilst acknowledging the inclusion of the frontispiece engraving, Howell does not discuss its production, focusing rather on the editing, ordering and printing of the poetic text.

The frontispiece engraving was printed separately and, according to standard practice, was bound in at the time of purchase.<sup>11</sup> In light of Behn's wider involvement with the volume it seems likely she must have been aware of, if not actively involved in, her portrait's reproduction for the 1684 *Poems*. White's engraving appears to have been commissioned for this volume, making it possible that Riley's portrait of Behn, if not already extant, was produced at this time so that such an engraving might be taken. As Antony Griffiths notes, it was common practice at this time for frontispiece engravings to be 'devised by or in collaboration with the authors themselves . . . drawn according to their programme by an artist whose design was then handed to an engraver'.<sup>12</sup> The fact that this image was bound into an authorized volume of Behn's poetry during her lifetime makes this engraving the most authoritative surviving image of Behn. This notion is further supported by the portrait's close correspondence with a contemporaneous portrait of Behn attributed to Lely (see discussion below). Margaret Ezell's suggestion that 'we must continue to investigate whether the 1684 *Poems* featured her [Behn's] living likeness or whether it was

8 For a discussion of the growing trend to include author portraits in literary publications of this period see Margaret J. M. Ezell, 'Seventeenth-Century Female Author Portraits, Or, The Company She Keeps', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 60 (2012), 31–45.

9 Mary Ann O'Donnell found this portrait bound into 10 of the 25 copies she examined of *Poems* (1684), suggesting it was bound into the volume at first sale and was not a later addition: Mary Ann O'Donnell, *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (Aldershot, 2004), 77–9.

10 Jordan M. Howell, 'Aphra Behn: Editor', *RES*, 68 (2016), 549–65.

11 Antony Griffiths, *The Print Before Photography: An Introduction to European Printmaking 1550–1820* (London, 2016), 185.

12 Griffiths, *The Print Before Photography*, 185.

added in posthumously by collectors' must surely be considered resolved: to borrow Behn's words, White's engraving after Riley is certainly the most 'extremely like' surviving image of the writer left to posterity.<sup>13</sup>

A study of the afterlife of White's frontispiece engraving is complicated through the tendency, in later centuries, to remove frontispieces for framing. However, enough evidence survives to suggest a useful overview of its subsequent use. Tonson appears to have had surplus copies of the frontispiece, as it seems to have been tipped in to some copies of an edition to Behn's *Plays* that he published in 1702.<sup>14</sup> By this date, Samuel Briscoe had bound the plate into copies of the first collected works of Behn's writings published after her death, *Histories and Novels of the Ingenious Mrs Behn* (1696).<sup>15</sup> In 1715 it appeared in another Briscoe publication, *The Dramatick Works of His Grace George Villiers, late Duke of Buckingham*. In this instance, new lettering 'pa: 204. Vo 11', with a large flourish following, was included to signal the engraving's position for binding between two poems here incorrectly attributed to Behn.<sup>16</sup> In all of the publications listed above, it was the first state of the engraved plate that was used. This first state signalled White's involvement as engraver through the lettering of 'R. W. fc.' (Robert White *fulcpisit*). It was not until 1718, by which point Riley and White were dead, that the plate was reworked in a second state in which Riley's responsibility for the original source portrait was made clear with the words 'Riley Pinx.' (Riley *Pinxit*) engraved to the bottom left of the image's oval frame (Fig. 1). At this time, a set of volume and page numbers (I, 29) were also added to the bottom of the plate, and the pearls in Behn's hair were slightly reworked. It is unclear as to why Riley's name was added at a later date, and we can only speculate that this was either an oversight or that it was not yet established practice: whilst frontispiece engravings of the Restoration years almost always bear the details of engraver, they do not always bear the name of the original artist from whose work the image was taken.<sup>17</sup> The print seems to have been reworked for a collection titled *Familiar Letters of Love and Gallantry* (1718), another Briscoe

13 Ezell, 'Seventeenth-Century Female Author Portraits', 42.

14 A copy of *Plays* 1702 at the Victoria & Albert Museum contains the frontispiece in its first state (V&A Dyce S 8vo 904). Mary Ann O'Donnell notes a second copy held at the Huntington that also contains the frontispiece and records evidence suggesting that the plate was tipped into the Huntington copy: O'Donnell, *Annotated Bibliography*, 188–9. The British Library copy of Behn's *Plays* (1702) does not contain White's original engraving. In this instance, the later print produced by James Fittler in 1822, after the portrait supposedly of Behn that now hangs at St Hilda's College, has been tipped in at a later date. This BL copy is the basis for the digitized copy of *Plays* available through *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, providing a misleading sense of the volume's original frontispiece engraving.

15 O'Donnell's bibliographical study of Behn publications suggests that it was also bound into copies of Behn's *Histories, Novels, and Translations* (London, 1700), a further Briscoe production. She records four out of nine examined copies as containing the frontispiece: O'Donnell, *Annotated Bibliography*, 178.

16 Robert D. Hume and Harold Love have described the 1715 *Works of Buckingham* as 'a routinely careless reprint which has no authority': Robert D. Hume and Harold Love (eds), *Plays, Poems and Miscellaneous Writings Associated with George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 2007), 330. It is unclear whether the new lettering on the frontispiece represents a further state of White's plate, although this seems unlikely in light of the careless approach of the publication as a whole. It seems more likely that this additional type was produced as a hastily made block of separate text.

17 For example, the frontispiece portraits of Abraham Cowley and Katherine Phillips noted later in the article (see note 42) did not contain details of the artist but solely the engraver, in both cases William Faithorne. This may have been because they were adapted quite extensively from the original portraits.





**Fig. 1.** Robert White (after John Riley), 'Aphra Behn', line engraving, 1718, NPG D9483. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

production. This suggests that Briscoe was still in possession of the plate at this time. Here, Behn's portrait is bound facing her purported letters, printed in volume one and facing page 29. This appears to be the last time the plate was used. A newly

engraved frontispiece based upon the same portrait was made by B. Cole for the 1724 edition of *Plays* published by Mary Poulson.<sup>18</sup> This was modelled closely on the White engraving but was a new production.

The attribution of the engraving's original source portrait to Riley does not rest solely on the lettering that was added to the plate by 1718. Evidence from two auction catalogues from the first half of the eighteenth century indicates the existence of such a portrait. In 1724, an auction catalogue for the picture collection of Mr Sykes lists lot '74. Mrs. A. Behn by Riley'.<sup>19</sup> Within four years the portrait seems to have been placed on the market again, when the collection of the painter, John Verelst, was sold. Here, the work was included as lot '18. Mrs. Behn's Head, by Ryley'.<sup>20</sup> Verelst was an established artist working in contemporary London. The fact that he bought the Riley portrait and retained its attribution strongly suggests that Riley was responsible for the work. Further evidence linking the now lost Riley portrait to the White engraving is found in the notebooks of the artist and antiquarian, George Vertue. Consisting of around 40 notebooks on British art from 1713 onwards, Vertue's manuscripts were later bought by Horace Walpole and became the foundation of his *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (5 vols, 1762–1771). In his fifth notebook, Vertue records a visit to a Mr Bateman, whose house was on the Hammersmith road in Kensington, where Vertue saw 'an Original picture of Mrs Aphara [*sic*] Behn painted by Riley the same from wch the Print is Engrav'd by White'.<sup>21</sup> This wealth of contemporary evidence, recorded within living memory of the portrait's production, strongly supports the attribution of the engraved portrait to Riley.

### The Yale Portrait

The second most reliable surviving portrait of Behn is an oil painting held by the Yale Centre for British Art (Fig. 2). This work was later lettered with the words 'Mrs BEHN. THE POETESS'. The identification of the portrait as one of Behn is supported through the work's compatibility with the White engraving of the Riley portrait. Both paintings appear to depict the same woman and there are only slight differences in the curls and style of Behn's hair, the drapery and fastening of the dress, and the design of the jewels. As with the Riley portrait, there are two surviving auction catalogues from the early eighteenth century that indicate that Lely did produce a portrait of Behn. In 1712, *A Catalogue of Extraordinary Original Pictures* included lot '10. Mrs. Behn, the English Sappho, by Sir Peter Lely', and a later 1740 sale of the art collection of Charles Earl of Halifax included a listing for lot 37, on the second day's sale, of a head 'of Mrs. Behn, by Sir P. Lilly'.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, a record in Vertue's fortieth notebook records how a Mr Lovejoy and Mr Wilson recounted to Vertue that a Lely portrait of Behn was auctioned in 1717: 'The picture

18 *Plays Written by the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn* (London, 1724).

19 *A Catalogue of Mr. Syke's Extraordinary Collection of Original and Other Pictures* [London, 1724].

20 *A Catalogue of Pictures by Several Eminent Masters, Being the Collection of Mr. John Verelst, Painter* [London, 1728].

21 *The Eighteenth Volume of the Walpole Society, 1929–1930. Vertue Note Books*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1930), 88–9.

22 *A Catalogue of Extraordinary Original Pictures by Several Eminent Masters* [London, 1712]; *A Catalogue of the Entire and Valuable Collection of Paintings, Bronzes, Busts in Porphyry and Marble and Other Curiosities of Charles Earl of Halifax* [London, 1740].



**Fig. 2.** Sir Peter Lely (attributed to), 'Aphra Behn', oil on canvas, c.1670, bequest of Arthur D. Schlechter (B2002.15). © Yale Center for British Art.

of Mrs. Behn by Sr Pe: Lelly at the Sale of Sr Geo. Hungerfords Pictures. sold at the Blew Posts. in the Haymarkett on March 20. 1716/7'. The record concludes with a parenthetical aside: '(Mr. Tho. Wright had a picture of Sr. P. Lely of Mrs. Behn.)'<sup>23</sup> It is unclear whether this aside names the purchaser of the portrait at the Hungerford sale, or a broader yet related recollection of Vertue's own. Either way, it is worth noting that the name 'Wright' corresponds with Thomas Culpepper's identification of one of Behn's brothers-in-law as 'Write' in his manuscript *Adversaria*.<sup>24</sup> In

23 *The Eighteenth Volume of the Walpole Society, 1929–1930. Vertue Note Books*, vol. 1, 43.

24 London, British Library, Harley MSS 7587–7605. Todd briefly outlines the possible connection between John Wright (or Write) and Behn; see Todd, *Secret Life*, 455, n. 13.



summary, there appears to be substantial evidence that a portrait of Behn was produced by Lely.

The portrait of Behn held by the Yale Centre for British Art was given to the institution in 2002 as part of a bequest by Arthur B. Schlechter, who had previously kept it as part of his private collection in New York. It is possible to trace some further information about this work's provenance prior to its arrival on American soil. In 1866 a portrait of Behn attributed to Lely was displayed as part of the National Portrait Exhibition in London, with the exhibition catalogue noting it had been lent by Mr Philip Howard of Corby Castle, Carlisle.<sup>25</sup> A photograph from the 1866 exhibition held in the National Portrait Gallery archives confirms that this is the same work now held by the Yale Centre for British Art.<sup>26</sup> Following the National Portrait Exhibition, the work appears to have been sold again, this time by the Colnaghi Art Gallery, with Sir George Scharf recording seeing the portrait on display there in May 1888.<sup>27</sup> Around this time, the portrait found a new home across the Atlantic. The Colnaghi Gallery sold the portrait to R. Hall McCormick in Chicago in 1888, and it went on public display briefly at an exhibition for the Art Institute Chicago in 1894. On 15 April 1920 it was sold, alongside 83 other oils in McCormick's collection, for \$1,025, likely through the Parke Bernet auction house in New York.<sup>28</sup> The portrait then disappeared from view, and it was not until 1976 that Behn's biographer, Maureen Duffy, tracked the portrait to Schlechter, driven by the desire to reproduce the image in her study of Behn's life.<sup>29</sup>

Whilst the 1866 exhibition attributed the painting to Lely, there remains doubt as to the accuracy of this claim. As the first large-scale commercial painter in England, Lely presided over a vast workshop of artists and his style and work were widely reproduced; over the centuries it became common practice to attribute any Lelyesque works to the artist. This is likely what has occurred in the case of the Yale portrait, with current experts rejecting the attribution of this portrait to Lely.<sup>30</sup> In light of the contemporary evidence that Lely did paint Behn, it is possible that the Yale portrait is an early copy taken after Lely's now lost original work.

### The St Hilda's College Portrait

In designing her new portrait of Behn for the Huntington Library, Belchetz-Swenson drew, in part, on a portrait that currently hangs in the Senior Common Room at St Hilda's College, Oxford, often attributed to the artist Mary Beale. This portrait has held a clear allure for Behn scholars, seen as a portrait of England's first professional female author painted by one of its first professional female artists. It is the only oil

25 'Mrs. Aphra Behn', in *Catalogue of the First Special Exhibition of National Portraits Ending with the Reign of King James the Second* (London, 1866), 145.

26 Letter from National Portrait Gallery to Maureen Duffy, 30 November 1976: London, National Portrait Gallery, Notes on Sitters: Behn, Aphra.

27 London, National Portrait Gallery, T. S. B. XXXV, 12.

28 Letter from Royal Museums Greenwich to Yale Centre for British Art, 9 September 2015: New Haven, CT, Yale Centre for British Art, notes on B2002.15.

29 Letter from Maureen Duffy to National Portrait Gallery, 27 November 1976: London, National Portrait Gallery, Notes on Sitters: Behn, Aphra.

30 Diana Dethloff and Catherine MacLeod do not plan to include the Yale portrait in their forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Lely's portraiture (Yale University Press).

painting thought to depict Behn that remains on British soil. However, the sheer desire to accept this portrait as an authentic image of Behn cannot compensate for the lack of evidence for doing so. The earliest identification of the sitter of this portrait as Behn dates to 1824, when the portrait was engraved by John Fittler (Fig. 3) for inclusion in the volume *Effigies Poeticae: or, The Portraits of the British Poets*.<sup>31</sup> Fittler's engraving identified Beale as the artist and Behn as the sitter, lettering the engraving with the text: 'APHRA BEHN/From a Picture by Mary Beale in the Collection of His Grace the Duke of Buckingham'. Fittler based his engraving upon a drawing by Thomas Uwins, who had sketched the work when it was held in Buckingham's collection; Uwins was responsible for a number of the drawings upon which the other engravings in *Effigies Poeticae* were based.

Buckingham certainly did own the painting, as evidenced by the catalogue for the Stowe sale which took place some 26 years later. In 1848, with Buckingham's annual interest exceeding his income, the contents of his family home at Stowe were placed on sale in an auction lasting more than 40 days. The most famous work to be sold from the estate was the Chandos portrait of Shakespeare, which became the National Portrait Gallery's first acquisition. But the sale also included the Behn portrait, sold on the twenty-first day of the sale as lot 57 alongside a portrait of the Earl of Glencairn. Despite Fittler's attribution of the portrait to Beale, no artist is recorded in the Stowe catalogue, with the portrait simply labelled as one of 'Mrs. Behn, the dramatic writer'.<sup>32</sup> The annotated catalogue for the sale shows that these portraits were bought by the Staffordshire antiquary J. C. Heath-Caldwell for £6 6s. The Behn portrait remained in the family for just over a century. In 1925, Heath Caldwell inherited the work as part of the contents of his family home of Linley Wood, Staffordshire. On taking up residence he compiled an inventory in which he recorded a portrait in the hall of 'Aphra Behn by Mary Beale' bought from the Stowe sale.<sup>33</sup> In 1950 Capt. Heath-Caldwell offered the portrait to the National Portrait Gallery, but they rejected the work. Heath-Caldwell then gave the portrait to Miss M. V. Wakefield Richmond, an amateur biographer of Behn. Some decades later, in 1989, Wakefield Richmond presented the portrait to her alma mater, St Hilda's College, Oxford, where it remains today.

Curatorial correspondence held in the National Portrait Gallery's archives suggests that the "Beale" portrait at Oxford is not, in terms of likeness, convincingly the same woman as depicted' in the Riley and Yale portraits.<sup>34</sup> This correspondence reveals scepticism about the attribution both of the portrait's artist and sitter, suggesting why the gallery chose to reject Heath-Caldwell's earlier offer. Curatorial

31 *Effigies Poeticae: or, The Portraits of the British Poets Illustrated by Notes Biographical, Critical, and Poetical* (London, 1824). It appears that the plates were not published in volume one, but in a second volume issued the same year with a new title page, *The Portraits of the British Poets: from Chaucer to Cowper and Beattie*. In both volumes, the entry for Behn contains a note that the portrait is 'From a Picture by Mary Beale, in the Collection of the Marquis of Buckingham' (60) making it clear that the volume refers to the Fittler engraving (as is the case in the copy of volume two held at the UCLA Library, University of California, PR501.P7 1824).

32 Henry Rumsey Forster, *The Stowe Catalogue, Priced and Annotated* (London, 1848), 157.

33 'Heath-Caldwell Family Archive', Private Collection.

34 Letter from National Portrait Gallery to Penguin Group, 12 July 1995: London, National Portrait Gallery, Notes on Sitters: Behn, Aphra.



**Fig. 3.** James Fittler (after a drawing by Thomas Uwins), 'Aphra Behn', line engraving, 1824, NPG D6859. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

notes recorded on the letter state that the identification of Beale as artist ‘has to be regarded as a very tentative attribution’, before continuing with a sense of exasperation that ‘[i]t is very tiresome when every portrait thought not to be a Lely is simply assumed to be by Beale instead’.<sup>35</sup> Further notes made on the letter also suggest the unlikelihood that the portrait’s sitter is Behn: the portrait is noted to be a little too early to depict Behn, more likely dating to c.1645–1655. In light of all the evidence, Fittler’s identification of Behn as the portrait’s sitter (an attribution dating to more than a century after her death), has to be regarded with suspicion. The image certainly shares little correspondence with the one portrait known to depict the author.<sup>36</sup>

### Further Lost Portraits of Behn

Any account of portraiture of Behn should acknowledge the tantalizing evidence that four further portraits of Behn may survive yet to await rediscovery. Amongst these works we must include the aforementioned Lely portrait much referenced by contemporaries, yet which appears to have been lost. A second portrait of Behn may have been produced by Lely’s successor as Principal Painter, Sir Godfrey Kneller. Evidence for the production of this work rests upon a single reference recorded in Vertue’s notebooks: ‘At Mr Mauberts painter, copys of most of our Eminent poets. as big as the life. & in small oval frames. to the number of (twenty or thereabouts.) a Spenser. a Mrs Behn. a profil after S<sup>r</sup>. G. Kneller. Mrs Philips. Mr Wicherley. Erl of Rochester. Waller a half lenght [*sic*] after S<sup>r</sup>. God. K.’<sup>37</sup> James Maubert was a Dublin-trained painter who specialized in portraits and flower paintings. Vertue’s reference suggests that Maubert had a commercial sideline in copying portraits of authors, reflecting the emerging demand for such pictures in the early eighteenth century. The note is undated, but Maubert’s production of a portrait of John Dryden, dating to roughly 1695–1700, indicates that he had moved to London by this time. Maubert lived into the 1740s, but Vertue’s list of poets is suggestive of a Restoration-era, rather than early eighteenth century, dating, placing it in a period in which Behn’s likeness (available through the White engraving after Riley) would have been in living memory. In light of this, it seems unlikely that Maubert would have been able to pass off an inauthentic portrait of Behn as a true likeness. Furthermore, if Behn had been painted both by Lely and Riley, it is no small leap to imagine that she would have been thought a subject worthy of a portrait by Kneller. Lely had died in 1680, so was not available to paint Behn in the final decade of her life when her fame was at its height. If found, the original Kneller profile of Behn—or, indeed, Maubert’s copy—would provide important insight into her appearance, and further confirmation of her recognized status as a leading writer of the day.

35 Letter from National Portrait Gallery to Germaine Greer, 13 July 1995, Notes on Sitters: Behn, Aphra.

36 The same is true of another frontispiece that was published of Behn, this time much earlier than the Fittler print. In 1716 William Meadows reproduced an engraving of Queen Christina of Sweden, made by Michael van der Gucht, implying it was a portrait of Behn by binding it as a frontispiece into copies of her plays: *Plays Written by the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn, entire in Two Volumes* (London, 1716). Correspondence held at the National Portrait Gallery confirms the misidentification of the portrait: Letter from National Portrait Gallery to Penguin Group, 12 July 1995: London, National Portrait Gallery, Notes on Sitters: Behn, Aphra.

37 *The Eighteenth Volume of the Walpole Society, 1929–1930. Vertue Note Books*, vol. 1, 88.



Evidence for the existence of a final contemporaneous portrait of Behn survives in the form of a nineteenth-century sketch by Sir George Scharf (Fig. 4). Scharf's drawing was based upon a portrait, now lost, that he described as being in the style of John Closterman, and which was offered as a portrait of Behn to the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery in 1873 by Edwin Parsons, a Fine Art, Book and Printseller.<sup>38</sup> Scharf's sketch contained notes under the image recording key information about the work:

G. S. 21<sup>st</sup> May. 1873.  
 Oval gilt frame  
 Canvas, 2f. 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> by 2 feet (sight measure)  
 Eyeballs dark slate, Eyebrows dark brown  
 Hair intensely dark rich brown, no ornaments.  
 Very full & hanging over her right shoulder  
 Painted with mid brown shadows & greenish  
 middle tints in style of Closterman

Scharf's notes contain no description of lettering on the portrait that would identify the sitter as Behn, and it is impossible to know upon what Parsons based his identification. The gallery did not accept the portrait, indicating the possibility that they did not feel the attribution of Behn as the sitter was secure. The gallery holds no painted portrait of Behn, giving it an incentive to capitalize upon the opportunity to acquire such a work if they felt it to be genuine. But equally, it must be remembered that in the nineteenth century Behn's authorial reputation had sunk to its lowest ebb and the gallery may have felt it less pressing that a portrait of her should be secured. Unless the original work resurfaces it will be impossible to verify the accuracy of the attribution.

## II. BEHN'S PORTRAITS AND THE BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

A survey of the known portraits that depict Behn suggests that White's engraving of the lost portrait by Riley is the most authoritative surviving likeness of the author. The portrait of Behn now at Yale has a less stable provenance, but due to its close correspondence with the sitter in the Riley portrait it seems very possible that this is also a portrait of her. Having established the relative authority of these portraits, the pressing question becomes that of what these images tell us about the author and her life. What do these portraits reveal, if anything, about Behn as an individual? And to what extent can they inform the literary record and our understanding of Behn's professional reputation?

Both portraits depict Behn in a feigned oval frame. She has an oval face, almond-shaped eyes, a long straight nose and a slight double chin. In both works, Behn's hair is neatly dressed in ringlets and adorned with differing arrangements of pearls; in the White engraving her locks tumble loosely onto her shoulders. Behn appears in a similar dress in both images, fashionable in the 1670s and 1680s and commonly seen in portraiture of these years. This dress is worn over a white shift, and is held in place

38 London, National Portrait Gallery, TSB, XIX, May 1875, 4.



Fig. 4. Sir George Scharf, sketch of a portrait of Aphra Behn, 1873. Trustees' sketchbook 19, 1873–1874, NPG7/1/3/1/2/19. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

by three sets of clasps (of which two are visible), each set with precious stones. A shawl is draped over Behn's shoulder in both portraits. In the case of the Yale portrait a knowledge of colour and texture adds to our understanding of the image; Behn's hair is chestnut brown, her eyes are of a similar brown hue, and her clear pale skin is complemented by lightly rouged cheeks. Behn's dress is tawny red, or russet, and looks to be of a stiff silk-like fabric due to the positioning of its folds and its reflection of light. The shawl, of a similar fabric, is olive green, and the stones in her clasps appear to be diamonds (in reality, they may have been paste). In summary, Behn is presented as a modest yet fashionable woman of her day, accessorized with fabrics and ornaments that speak to a genteel and prosperous status. Admittedly, these jewels and accessories might be the property of the artist's studio and used to shape a certain type of fashionable image, but even if this was the case we must concede that care has been taken to project Behn's position as a woman of status and privilege. Behn's painted image thus shares little in common with today's popular image of her as a woman writing to survive and living hand to mouth. Behn's appearance and dress are not ostentatious in comparison to that of the court ladies who sat for portraits, but neither are they totally restrained or suggestive of a woman in financially strained circumstances.

In his research on the 1684 *Poems*, Howell points to the problematic nature of the evidence most frequently cited to uphold the idea of Behn as an impoverished author, arguing that the note Behn wrote to Tonson asking for a sum total of £30 payment for the volume does not necessarily reveal her desperate need for money but rather reflects her sense that her time and the intrinsic value of the volume was simply worth more than the publisher had initially agreed to pay for it.<sup>39</sup> The inclusion of White's engraving of the Riley portrait as a frontispiece to the 1684 *Poems* upholds this argument in broader ways, as it reflected several ideas that the volume endorsed, primarily Behn's eminent status as an established poet. As Howell notes, the volume itself served as a marker of this: through Tonson's publication of a collected works, Behn was being publicly acknowledged as a leading writer of the age. In the rare surviving letter that Behn sent about the volume to Tonson, it is made clear that the poet laureate, John Dryden, has also commented favourably on Behn's merit and deserved status.<sup>40</sup> The inclusion of Behn's engraved portrait cemented this idea, for by the 1680s it had become an established practice for the portraits of major poets to be attached as frontispieces to their collected works.<sup>41</sup>

39 Howell, 'Aphra Behn: Editor', 553–5.

40 Howell provides a transcript of this letter, 'Aphra Behn: Editor', 552.

41 Malcolm Baker has detailed how the early modern fashion for displaying portraits of authors in libraries, as portraits, busts and statues, mirrored the growing tendency in the seventeenth century to include portraits of authors as frontispieces to their works. Baker cites John Evelyn's 1661 translation of Gabriel Naudés *Advis pour dresser une Bibliothèque* (1627) in noting the complementary role of an author's text and their image: '[t]hereby a man may at once make a judgement of the wit of authors by their Books, and by their bodies; figures and physiognomy by these Pictures and Images, which joyn'd to the description which may have been made of their lives, may serve, in my opinion, as a puissant spur to excite a generous and well-born Soul to follow their track'. Malcolm Baker, 'Authorial Connections and Continuities: Frontispieces, Library Portraits and the Visualization of Literary Canons', in D. Berndt, L. Hagedorn, H. Rößler and E. Strittmatter (eds), *Bildnispolitik der Autorschaft: Visuelle Inszenierungen von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (Göttingen, 2018), 235–252.

This had certainly been the case for the two poets upon whom Behn modelled herself most closely, Abraham Cowley and Katherine Philips: William Faithorne had engraved frontispiece portraits of both poets for inclusion in volumes of their posthumously printed works.<sup>42</sup> Published volumes of Cowley's and Philips's poetry were certainly on Behn's mind, for in her letter to Tonson she directly states that she is modelling the publication sequence of her volume upon their own: 'Methinks y<sup>e</sup> Voyage shou'd com last, as being y<sup>e</sup> largest volume: you know Mr. Couly's *Dauid* is last because a large Poem, & Mrs. Philips her *Plays* for y<sup>e</sup> same reason'.<sup>43</sup> The inclusion of Behn's frontispiece engraving was yet another way in which this mirroring occurred, encouraging a visual association between Behn and her celebrated literary predecessors. The portrait thus encourages readers, publishers and the world at large to take Behn seriously. Like her famed courtesan creation, Angellica Bianca, Behn knows the value of her portrait and here it is hung out to signal her value in the wider literary establishment.<sup>44</sup>

The frontispiece engraving also served to provide evidence for a key concept endorsed by the collection's prefatory materials: the idea of Behn as both a beauty and a wit. This is a trope to which several of the volume's commendatory poems allude directly:

While After-times deservedly approve  
 The choicest object of this Ages Love.  
 For when they reade, gheasing [*sic*] how far she charm'd,  
 With that bright *Body* with such *Wit* inform'd;  
 They will give *heed* and *credit* to our Verse,  
 When we the *Wonders* of her *Face* rehearse.  
 (J. Cooper, 'To Mrs. Behn, on the Publishing her Poems', A6r)

Ah, needs must she th'unwary Soul surprise,  
 Whose Pen sheds Flames as dangerous as her Eyes.  
 (J. Adams, 'To the excellent Madam Behn, on her Poems', A7v)

Oh, wonder of thy Sex! Where can we see,  
 Beauty and Knowledge join'd except in thee?  
 Such pains took Nature with your Heav'nly Face,  
 Form'd it for Love, and moulded every Grace:

42 *Poems by the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips the Matchless Orinda* (London, 1667); *The Works of Mr Abraham Cowley* (London, 1668). Gillian Wright has written about Behn's close engagement with the poetry of Cowley and Philips: Gillian Wright, *The Restoration Transposed: Poetry, Place and History, 1660–1700* (Cambridge, 2019), 209–16, 231; Wright, *Producing Women's Poetry, 1600–1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge, 2013), 98.

43 Howell, 'Aphra Behn: Editor', 556.

44 Scholars often observe that in naming Angellica Bianca, the Neapolitan courtesan of *The Rover* (London, 1677), Behn used her own initials: AB. For a discussion of Behn's use of authorial personae in her work, see Margaret Ferguson, 'The Authorial Ciphers of Aphra Behn', in Steven N. Zwicker (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650–1740* (Cambridge, 2004), 225–49.



I doubted first and fear'd that you had been  
 Unfinish'd lest like other She's within:  
 I see the folly of that fear, and find  
 Your Face is not more beauteous than your Mind.  
 (Anon., 'To the Lovely Witty Astræa, on her Excellent Poems', A8v–b1r)

Behold and with amazement stand,  
 Behold a blush with shame and wonder too,  
 What Divine Nature can in Woman doe.  
 Behold if you can see in all this fertile Land  
 Such an Anointed head, such an inspired hand. (Anon., 'Upon these and other  
 Excellent Works of the Incomparable Astræa', b1v)

The inclusion of the frontispiece enabled readers of the volume to acknowledge the merit of this praise. Readers could see the evidence that Behn should be considered a beauty, just as they were able to deduce her wit from her writings.

The emphasis the portrait places on Behn's status as a contemporary beauty can be further understood through a consideration of the literary symbolism that has been left out of this otherwise conventional image. It was common practice to indicate a writer's profession through the inclusion of laurels or other literary symbols, paraphernalia or poses. In engraved author portraits it was also the case that the author's head might be superimposed onto a marble bust (as adopted in the aforementioned frontispieces of Cowley and Philips). Instead Behn is depicted primarily as a beauty and a woman of genteel status, rather than as a professional writer. This is a very interesting choice in light of the way that the image contradicts those passages of Behn's writings in which she stressed that her status as a writer took precedence over her gender. Behn's oft cited words in her preface to *The Luckey Chance*, in which she refers to 'my Masculine Part the Poet in me', are frequently used as evidence of the way in which Behn lays claim to her professional status to escape the restrictions of her gender.<sup>45</sup> Yet in the portrait that served as the frontispiece to her poems, Behn foregrounds gender over the visual symbols of her trade. The image projects the idea that Behn is foremost a gentlewoman, attractive and confident in her role. This is in keeping with Ezell's invaluable study of frontispiece author portraits, in which she traces a shift from the 1660s onwards with engraved portraits increasingly presenting authors as themselves, in contemporary garb and familiar poses. This represented a shift from the classical iconography employed in earlier, often posthumously produced, frontispiece engravings.<sup>46</sup> Behn's frontispiece portrait, then, is of its own moment in presenting its readers with a contemporary and

45 Behn, 'Preface', *The Luckey Chance, or an Alderman's Bargain* (London, 1687), [vii]. Critics have tended to simplify Behn's gendered posturing in the preface as in the same passage she refers to her status as a 'woman' writer. Simplified critical readings of this oft-cited passage contradict the ways in which Behn genders her authorial strategies elsewhere in her writing, where we find her aligning her authorial persona with diverse figures from male libertines and African princes, to female prostitutes and aristocrats: see Ferguson, 'The Authorial Ciphers', 225–49.

46 Ezell, 'Seventeenth-Century Female Author Portraits', 42.

accessible women. As Ezell notes, Behn's portrait here engages with a 'shift towards the familiar and the intimate', and was a part of the early development of a celebrity culture that created 'a vicarious or artificial intimacy between the individual artist and a consumer'.<sup>47</sup>

The portrait's design also played into professional divides apparent in Behn's authorial self-fashioning. Gillian Wright has recently explored the editorial decisions taken in the 1684 *Poems* to argue that Behn's authorial persona was one crafted, in this instance, to present her as a non-commercial writer to 'paradoxically, enhance the commercial appeal of her poetry'. Wright observes how 'allusions to her theatrical career are . . . notably sparse and, in some cases, seem to have been deliberately excluded . . . The Aphra Behn constructed in *Poems* may be only minimally a woman of the theatre, but she is a well-connected and well-regarded coterie poet'.<sup>48</sup> This analysis of the text within the 1684 *Poems* further supports the idea that careful thought was taken over the design of the portrait for the frontispiece engraving, which likewise created a visual parallel with coterie poets like Philips. In her portrait and poetic persona, Behn sought to stress her femininity and genteel status; it was chiefly in her theatrical writing that she sought to promote a more complex, and at times masculine, commercial identity.

The two surviving known portraits of Behn give us a woman who is very unlike the biographical portrait that scholars have constructed of Behn in recent decades.<sup>49</sup> Despite Behn's recovered status as a key literary figure, we continue to know very little about her life. Catherine Gallagher's influential thesis that Behn purposefully 'fabricated the impression of a continuous but mysterious authorial identity' remains hard to disprove.<sup>50</sup> Yet in her account, Gallagher ignored a key document that has survived to us in the form of Behn's portrait. This mirrored the approach of the major biographers of Behn, who took the author's respective portraits as cover images for their accounts whilst barely addressing the existence of these portraits in the body of their text, treating them as decorative objects to adorn dust jackets rather than as documents in their own right. Perhaps this reluctance to perceive the value of these portraits is due to their depiction of a Behn that contemporary scholars are not conditioned to see. For the portraits jar with the Behn we expect to find: the struggling, worn down writer who lived a hand-to-mouth existence. This biographical account has recently started to come under pressure, with newly rediscovered archival documentation leading Karen Britland to argue that Behn did move within the gentry class and was connected to a number of influential contemporaries.<sup>51</sup> As I will show, the portraits reflect Britland's view of Behn as a well-connected gentlewoman, and in doing so uphold the image of Behn that was promoted in the first biographies published soon after her death.

47 Ezell, 'Seventeenth-Century Female Author Portraits', 42–3.

48 Wright, *Restoration Transposed*, 232–3.

49 For an excellent overview of scholarly accounts of Behn's biography see Britland, 'Aphra Behn's First Marriage?', 2–3.

50 Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), 8.

51 Britland, 'Aphra Behn's First Marriage?', 3.

The two surviving portraits of Behn have claim to be amongst the most important of her biographical documents to survive. In part this is because Behn herself used her engraved image to promote her work and reputation. Furthermore, we should not overlook the compatibility of these portraits with the first biographical accounts to circulate in the wake of Behn's death. 'The Life and Memoirs of Mrs Behn' was published in *Histories and Novels of the Late Ingenious Mrs Behn* (1696) some seven years after her death, and bound in alongside her writings and White's frontispiece engraving. The biography claims to be written by 'One of the Fair Sex' who had an 'intimate Acquaintance' with Behn. In reality, this was a dubiously reliable biography which, in places, betrays its own fictional basis.<sup>52</sup> The opportunistic nature underlying the publication is demonstrated from the outset by its inclusion of a dedication to Lord Maitland which is recycled from the 1688 publication of *Oroonoko* and still bears Behn's signature. The volume was published by Samuel Briscoe and compiled by Charles Gildon, the writer and critic responsible for many early biographies of authors in the period. It is likely Gildon wrote the biography of Behn himself, and much of the material draws on an account of Behn's life, likely authored by Gildon and written to accompany the publication of her play, *The Younger Brother*, earlier that year. Germaine Greer has argued that Briscoe and Gildon's compilation of this volume reveals the ways in which Behn's work was seen as an exploitable commodity following her death, in large part because of the precarious professional position created by her gender.<sup>53</sup> However, in line with emerging scholarship on Behn's position in the marketplace, Maureen Bell argues that their activities were standard in the age and speak to Behn's established reputation as a leading writer, irrespective of her gender: 'it is in fact a sign of Behn's marketability—the power of her brand name—that volumes of her "collected works" not only appeared in the first place but also swelled in size in the years immediately following her death'.<sup>54</sup>

The 18-page biography must have been seen as a particularly successful feature of the volume. When a second edition of the volume was issued just two years later, it was extended to some 60 pages in length. More broadly, this change reflected the growing interest in biographical writing in the period, yet it also fed a demand for increased public intimacy with Behn as a celebrated author. Whilst its authenticity is at best questionable, the biography presents us with a Behn much more like her portrait than the woman found in today's dominant scholarly accounts. Here, Behn is a 'Gentlewoman, by Birth, of a good Family' connected to 'Lord Willoughby'; she is her father's 'Promising Darling, our Future Heroine'.<sup>55</sup> Behn accompanies her family to Surinam, 'leaving behind her the Sighs and Tears of all her Friends, and breaking Hearts of her Lovers, that sigh'd to possess, what was scarce yet arriv'd to a Capacity of easing their Pain, if she had been willing. But as she was Mistress of uncommon Charms of Body, as well of Mind, she gave infinite and raging Desires, before she

52 See Claudine van Hensbergen, "'Why I Write Them, I Can Give No Account': Aphra Behn and "Love-Letters to a Gentleman" (1696)', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 35 (2011), 65–82.

53 See Germaine Greer, 'Honest Sam. Briscoe', in Michael Harris and Robin Myers (eds), *A Genius for Letters: Booksellers and Bookselling from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Winchester, 1995), 33–48 (36).

54 Maureen Bell, "'Literary pimping" or Business as Usual? Aphra Behn and the Book Trade', *Women's Writing*, 27 (2020), 275–93 (285).

55 'Memoirs on the Life of Mrs. Behn', in *Histories and Novels of the Ingenious Mrs Behn* (London, 1696), A7v.

cou'd know the least her self' (A8r-v). The family arrive in Surinam, the scene of Behn's celebrated novella *Oroonoko*. The narrator wastes no time in raising the possibility of another romance in the very act of quashing it, noting the need for 'a Vindication of her from some unjust Aspersions I find, are insinuated about this Town in Relation to that Prince [Oronooko]. I knew her intimately well; and I believe she wou'd not have conceal'd any Love-affair from me, being one of her own Sex, whose Friendship and Secrecy she had experienc'd; which makes me assure the World, there was no Affair between that Prince and Astrea' (A8v-b1r). The biography continues in this sensational amatory vein. Much of its remaining pages are caught up with further descriptions of her beauty, most notably when she catches the eye of a Dutch merchant, Vander Albert of Utrecht. Behn plays upon Albert's affections to gain information during her mission as a government spy in Antwerp. Yet when the time comes to repay Albert, she stages a bed trick in which she switches places with his former lover, Catalina, whom he has jilted following a promise of marriage. Returning from Antwerp in the 1660s, the rest of Behn's life, and thereby her entire literary career, is summarized in a single sentence: 'The Rest of her Life was entirely dedicated to Pleasure and Poetry; the success in which, gain'd her the Acquaintance and Friendship of the most sensible Men of the Age' (b6v).

Behn's first biography is not, therefore, that of the professional writer but one of an adventurous and beautiful young heroine. As noted, in the second edition of 1698, the biography was much extended, chiefly through the further inclusion of similar amatory material, including reproductions of supposed letters from Behn's suitors and lovers. Here, the love letters supposedly written by Behn to the libertine lawyer John Hoyle were moved from their own section in the first edition, where they were categorized as an individual work ('Letters to a Gentleman'), to be incorporated within the opening life. The biography thus presents Behn as a romantic heroine: beautiful, witty and never lacking for friends or admirers. It is a textual image that ably fits the engraved frontispiece portrait that accompanied the volume: one can well imagine this to be the life of the woman who looks out from the page, with the softness of her loosely curled hair and draped clothes gesturing to her physical allure, whilst the nature of the fabrics and ornaments present her genteel status.

It is understandable that the generations of scholars who have worked to recover Behn's significance have not been keen to acknowledge the particular vision of Behn advanced through the posthumously printed *Histories and Novels*; one whose specifically feminine charms totally outweighed the importance of the ambitious writer who would build a 20-year career under the guise of a series of conflicting and transgressive authorial personae. We can never know whether the artists who painted and engraved Behn's image sought to alter and improve her physical appearance; they seem to have given us Behn as a conventional beauty and, as the correspondence between these images suggests, as 'extremely like'. But Behn scholars may take heart from the recognition that, for the author at least, such images did not provide access to her inner life. As Behn's reflections on portraiture in the preface to *Oroonoko* remind us, a portrait could capture the external with great accuracy, but it could not capture the internal, textually recorded, utterances of the 'Nobler part, the Soul and Mind'. Behn's view was not to be shared by those early English authors of art theory, writing during these decades, who would increasingly extol the more immediate and



precise ability of painted portraiture over the written word in attaining such insight.<sup>56</sup> But Behn's belief is revealing as it enables us to understand what she sought to achieve through the reproduction of her image, first in paint and then in print. Through her portrait, she found a means of projecting a genteel and beautiful face for her immediate contemporaries, whilst leaving a separate part of her identity, the nobler part, to posterity through her writings: 'the pictures of the pen shall outlast those of the pencil, and even worlds themselves'. The portrait was never meant to survive in the way that her words would. Perhaps the disjunction between Behn's portrait and her professional output is not so impossible to comprehend.

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56 See, for example, Jonathan Richardson Sr., *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, 1715): 'Words paint to the Imagination, but every Man forms the thing to himself in his own way : Language is very imperfect: There are innumerable Colours and Figures for which we have no name, and an Infinity of other Ideas which have no certain Words universally agreed upon as denoting them; whereas the Painter can convey his Ideas of these things clearly, and without Ambiguity; and what he says every one understands in the Sense he intends it' (5–6).