The CRITICS on Aphra Behn:

...That lewd Harlot, that Poetick Quean,  
Fam’d through White Fryars, you know who I mean  
(…)  
Long with a Sciatica she’s beside lame,  
Her limbs distrotur’d, Nerves shrunk up with pain,  
And therefore I’ll all sharp reflections shun,  
Poverty, Poetry, Pox, are plagues enough for one.  
(Anonymous c. 1686–7)

The stage how loosely does Astraea tread  
Who fairly puts all characters to bed!  
(Alexander Pope, 1737)

She might have been an honour to womanhood – she was its disgrace. She might have gained glory by her labours – she chose to reap infamy.  
She was a mere harlot who danced through uncleanness.  
(John Doran, 1865)

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APHRA BEHN responds to criticism:

EPISTLE TO THE READER – The Dutch Lover

Indeed that day ‘twas acted first, there comes me into the Pit, a long, lither, phlegmatick, white, ill-favour’d, wretched Fop, an Officer in Masquerade newly transported with a Scarf & Feather out of France, a sorry Animal that has nought else to shield it from the uttermost contempt of all mankind, but that respect which we afford to Rats and Toads, which though we do not well allow to live, yet when considered as a part of God’s Creation, we make honourable mention of them. A thing, Reader-- but no more of such a Smelt: This thing, I tell ye, opening that which serves it for a mouth, out issued such a noise as this to those that sate about it, that they were to expect a woeful Play, God damn him, for it was a woman’s. Now how this came about I am not sure, but I suppose he brought it piping hot from some who had with him the reputation of a villanous Wit: for Creatures of his size of sense talk without all imagination, such scraps as they pick up from other folks. I would not for a world be taken arguing with such a propertie as this; but if I thought there were a man of any tolerable parts, who could upon mature deliberation distinguish well his right hand from his left, and justly state the difference between the number of sixteen and two, yet had this prejudice upon him; I would take a little pains to make him know how much he errs.
EPILOGUE to Sir Patient Fancy

I here and there o’erheard a Coxcomb cry,

Ah, Rot it – ’tis a Woman’s Comedy,

one, who because she lately chanc’d to please us, with her damn’d Stuff, will never cease to teeze us.

What has poor Woman done, that she must be Debar’d from Sense, and sacred Poetry? (...) Pray tell me then Why women should not write as well as men?

EPISTLE to the Reader – Sir Patient Fancy

The play had no other Misfortune but that of coming out for a Woman’s: had it been owned by a Man, though the most Dull Unthinking Rascally Scribler in Town, it had been a most admirable Play.

PREFACE to The Lucky Chance

The little Obligation I have to some of the witty Sparks and Poets of the Town, has put me on a Vindication of this Comedy (...) Nothing makes them so thorough-stitch an Enemy as a full Third Day, that’s Crime enough to load it with all manner of Infamy; and when they can no longer prevail with the Town, they charge it with the old never failing Scandal – That ’tis not fit for the Ladies.

EPISTLE to the Reader, Sir Patient Fancy

I would be vindicated from the most unjust and silly aspersion (...) which only my being a Woman has procured me; That it was Baudy, the least and most Excusable fault in Men writers, to whose Plays they all crowd, as if they came to no other end than to hear what they condemn in this: but from a Woman is was unnaturall.

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APHRA BEHN ON LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Give me but Love and Wine, I'll ne'er Complain my Destiny's severe.
Since Life bears so uncertain Date, With Pleasure we'll attend our Fate, And Cheerfully go meet it at the Gate.
The Brave and Witty know no Fear or Sorrow, Let us enjoy to day, we'll dye to Morrow.
(Aphra Behn, A Paraphrase on the Eleventh Ode Out of the first Book of Horace)
Marriage is as certain a bane to love as lending money is to friendship; I’ll neither ask nor give a vow.
(Aphra Behn, The Rover)

SCENE FROM Aphra Behn’s THE LUCKY CHANCE

Gayman: Dear Landlady–
Landlady: Dear me no Dears, Sir, but let me have my Money--Eight Weeks Rent last Friday; besides Taverns, Ale-houses, Chandlers, Landresses' Scores, and ready Money out of my Purse; you know it, Sir.
Gayman: Ay, but your Husband don't; speak softly.
Landlady: My Husband! what, do you think to fright me with my Husband?--I'd have you to know I'm an honest Woman, and care not this--for my Husband. Is this all the thanks I have for my kindness, for patching, borrowing and shifting for you; 'twas but last Week I pawn'd my best Petticoat, as I hope to wear it again, it cost me six and twenty shillings besides Making; then this Morning my new Norwich mantua followed, and two 'postle Spoons, I had the whole dozen when you came first; but they dropt, and dropt, till I had only Judas left for my Husband.
Gayman: Hear me, good Landlady.
Landlady: Then I've past my word at the George Tavern, for forty Shillings for you, ten Shillings at my Neighbour Squabs for Ale, besides seven Shillings to Mother Suds for Washing; and do you fob me off with my Husband? (...)
Gayman: Is't come to this, can I not be heard?
Landlady: No, Sir, you had good Clothes when you came first, but they dwindled daily, till they dwindled to this old Campaign--with tan'd coloured Lining--once red--but now all Colours of the Rain-bow, a Cloke to skulk in a-Nights, and a pair of piss-burn'd shammy Breeches. Nay, your very Badge of Manhood's gone too.
Gayman: How, Landlady! nay then, i'faith, no wonder if you rail so.
Landlady: Your Silver Sword I mean--transmogrified to this two-handed Basket Hilt--this old Sir Guy of Warwick--which will sell for nothing but old Iron. In fine, I'll have my money, Sir, or i'faith, Alsatia shall not shelter you. (...)
Landlady: Well, you have no money in your pocket now, I'll warrant you, - here – here’s ten shillings for you old Gregory knows not of.
(Opens a great greasy purse).
APHRA BEHN

‘Love in fantastic triumph sat’
(Song from *Abdelazar*)

1 Love in Fantastique Triumph satt,
2 Whilst Bleeding Hearts a round him flow’d,
3 For whom Fresh paines he did Create,
4 And strange Tyranick power he show’d;
5 From thy Bright Eyes he took his fire,
6 Which round about in sport he hurl’d;
7 But 'twas from mine he took desire
8 Enough to undo the Amorous World.

9 From me he took his sighs and tears,
10 From thee his Pride and Crueltie;
11 From me his Languishments and Feares,
12 And every Killing Dart from thee;
13 Thus thou and I the God have arm’d,
14 And sett him up a Deity;
15 But my poor Heart alone is harm’d,
16 Whilst thine the Victor is, and free.

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