This Special Number marks a particular moment in the study of Aphra Behn: 2020 is both the 350th anniversary of the staging of her first play, *The Forc’d Marriage* (1670, pub. 1671), and the year when *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn* will start to appear in print. Volume IV, containing fully annotated, scholarly editions of *The City-Heiress* (1682), *The Luckey Chance* (1686, pub. 1687), *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687), and of the posthumously premiéred *The Widdow Ranter* (1690) and *The Younger Brother* (1696) is currently in production. Given that 350-year anniversary, this Introduction will start by exploring some implications of reconsidering accepted truths about the print and performance circumstances of Behn’s first play, before turning to frame more fully the contents of this volume.

As has been widely recognised, the focus of *The Forc’d Marriage* on the misery entailed in being required to wed an unwanted partner re-emerges repeatedly in Behn’s later work. When in *The Luckey Chance* Julia Fulbank laments, “Oh how fatal are forc’d Marriages! | How many Ruines one such Match pulls on” (8), she is echoing not just the title of Behn’s first play, but the sentiments of Ismena in *The Amorous Prince* (1671, 48), Florella in *Abdelazer* (1676, pub. 1677, 21), and Bellmour in *The Town-Fopp* (1676, pub. 1677, 45), to name only the most obvious parallels. Equally consistent in the critical assessment has been the account of the events surrounding the première of *The Forc’d Marriage* 350 years ago: that consensus holds that the play had a markedly successful first run of six days in September 1670, and that Behn’s long-standing friendship with Thomas Otway is indicated in her having cast him as the play’s king. Since all of the narratives referring to a six-day run draw on the same source, the memoirs of the prompter of the Duke’s Company, John Downes, that unanimity is perhaps not surprising. If Downes’s story of what happened is read again, though, in the light of developments in both theatre history and Behn Studies, a different picture emerges.
Downes’s mention of Behn’s first work appears when he starts to talk about plays that make especially notable use of the facilities of the “new Theatre in Dorset-Garden” (68), where the Duke’s Company was to move in November 1671, 14 months after the première of The Forc’d Marriage (London Stage, xxxv). He makes particular mention of William Davenant’s spectacular adaptation of Macbeth, with its “new Cloath’s, new Scenes, Machines, […] flyings for the Witches” (71), and then loops back to remember both that play and other Shakespeare having been performed at the Company’s previous home, the Lincolns-Inn-Fields theatre. He recalls that King Lear and The Tempest, though “very well Acted” at the old theatre, “were laid aside, to make Room for others; the Company having then plenty of new Poets” (72). The first product of those “new Poets” that he recalls is The Forc’d Marriage, using its subtitle:

The Jealous Bridegroom, Wrote by Mrs. Bhen, a very good Play and lasted six Days; but this made its Exit too, to give Room for a greater, The Tempest.

Note, In this Play, Mr. Otway the Poet having an Inclination to turn Actor; Mrs. Bhen gave him the King in the Play, for a Probation Part, but he being not us’d to the Stage; the full House put him to such a Sweat and Tremendous Agony, being dash’t, spoil it him for an Actor. (72)

Questionable elements in these statements are multiple. Firstly, although Otway is believed to have tried acting and abandoned it before or soon after the staging of his first play, Alcibiades, in 1675, in 1670 he was eighteen years old, and a student at Christ Church, Oxford. If his acting trials included The Forc’d Marriage, this would more likely have been after he left Oxford in the autumn of 1671; perhaps Downes – who at this moment in his memoirs goes on to recount his own failed acting attempts – is muddling when it was that Otway appeared. Secondly, there is no other record of the Davenant-Dryden adaptation of The Tempest having been staged in September 1670, and being the play that followed the initial run of The Forc’d Marriage. In itself this lack of independent witness to what else was staged in that month is not surprising: as Robert D. Hume has explained, when Samuel Pepys abandoned his diary-writing in 1669, we lost our major source of information about what was in the repertory when, and only have evidence of any kind for perhaps one night in five for the rest of the century. We can, however, be certain that The Forc’d Marriage was staged in September 1670 because the records of the Lord Chamberlain’s office reveal that Charles II paid £10 for a box for a performance on 20th (London Stage, 175). From a mention in Jeffrey Boys’s diary, we also know that it was on stage again on 9 January 1671 – still too early for Otway to be likely to have appeared (London Stage, 178). We might deduce, then, that The Forc’d Marriage reappeared in the repertoire from time to time, and that on one of those occasions it was followed by The Tempest. If such a sequence did occur, the Tempest in question might have been the Dryden-Davenant one that began its life at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in 1664, or
the operatic re-adaptation by Thomas Shadwell, premièred in about March 1674, which Downes admired greatly. That Shadwell version of *The Tempest* is, indeed, the next play that Downes discusses after his account of *The Forc’d Marriage*, rejoicing in the former’s new scenery, fine costumes, and flying table, and observing that “not any succeeding Opera got more Money” (74). As Downes’s editors, Milhous and Hume, warn, although his account is a vital source on such matters as the success of plays, when it comes to chronology, he is not trustworthy at all (v, xiii, xv). It is therefore reasonable for critics to assume that *The Forc’d Marriage* was a success with its first audiences – i.e. that it lasted six nights at its première, and when Otway played the king it was to a “full House” – but they are unwise in assuming much about the sequence of events solely on the basis of Downes’s testimony.

*The Forc’d Marriage* itself offers some further evidence of what might have gone on 350 years ago, and of what followed. The fact that Downes remembers the play attracting a “full House” suggests that at the beginning of her writing career, Behn was already well-networked in theatre circles, and so able to drum up an audience.9 A series of allusions in the prologue to a “Spy”, “Stratagems and Spyes”, and a “party” being sent to “Scout” might also imply that the London audience was expected to know that “the Poetess” had herself been involved in espionage in 1666–67.10 If Karen Britland’s recent discovery of Behn’s residence in London by 1657 (then under her maiden name of Johnson), and if her outline of the families Behn might have been linked to are confirmed by further research, scholars of Restoration Drama and women’s writing might before long know more about how Behn made her way into the theatre world, and whom she might have expected to have been part of that “full House”. Perhaps some of those audience members also returned only a few weeks later when, the Lord Chamberlain’s records tell us, the king again paid £10 for a box at Behn’s second play, *The Amorous Prince*, on 24 February 1671 (*London Stage*, 180; Van Lennep, “Plays on the English Stage”, 18).11 Downes does not comment on that work, and little is known of its reception, therefore. What is certain, nonetheless, is that even such an apparently settled matter as the longevity of Behn’s first play on the stage is having fresh light shed upon it as new research in theatre history and in Behn Studies is undertaken.

The publication history of *The Forc’d Marriage* also offers some previously unexamined food for thought about Behn’s reception. The play is unusual in her canon in there having been two lifetime editions, the first in 1671 and the second in 1688. It is therefore both Behn’s first play published in her lifetime and her last. *The Forc’d Marriage* was never entered in the Stationers’ Register – as is the case with many books of the period – but its first edition was advertised for sale in the *Term Catalogues* on 13 February 1671 by the well established Stationer, James Magnes.12 By 1675 Magnes was publishing in partnership with his former apprentice, Richard Bentley, who took over the
joint business after Magnes’s death in 1678. Bentley is renowned for his early development of “imaginative [...] marketing techniques”, and during his involvement with The Forc’d Marriage, the play was advertised for sale in a substantial number of Magnes-Bentley books between 1676 and 1684. As was frequent during Behn’s career, the authors of the plays are not specified in the lists that appeared in their 1670s publications, including the Magnes-Bentley editions of the anonymous Zelinda (1676), Thomas D’Urfey’s Fond Husband (1677), and William Wycherley’s Plain-Dealer (1677). From about 1680, however, although such lists in Bentley’s publications continue to include substantial numbers of plays by unnamed authors, some playwrights, including Behn, begin to have their own sub-headings, such as the three “Plays Written by Mrs Bhen” advertised in Gabriel de Bremont’s The Pilgrim (1680, [94]). Although the spelling of her name varies from “Bhen” in two anonymous 1680 Bentley publications, Secret History, and Meroveus, to “Beane” in Nicole’s Moral Essays that same year, the fact that he has copies of The Forc’d Marriage, Abdelazer, and The Town-Fopp to sell continues to be brought to customers’ attention often, along with the information that these plays are by Behn. The final list of this kind seems to have appeared in 1684, in the anonymous Mars Christianissimus; perhaps soon after that date the play sold out. Then, in 1688, James Knapton, who was just starting out on a career that led to a multi-generational publishing business, must have acquired the copyright: he issued the second edition of The Forc’d Marriage, which, listed as “Written by A. Behn”, was advertised by him in various of his publications in 1689 and 1690, including the anonymous Quadrennium Jacobi (1689) and Shadwell’s Bury-Fair (1689), Behn’s The Widdow Ranter (1690) and Shadwell’s Ode on the Anniversary of the King’s Birth (1690). Whilst the general assumption in The London Stage that the publication of a new edition of a play might count as evidence that it was being staged has rightly been debunked by Hume, the fact that the title page of Knapton’s edition advertised The Forc’d Marriage as acted “at the Queens Theatre” – that is, at the Dorset Garden theatre, renamed during James’s reign – might well mean that the play continued to attract audiences as well as readers throughout Behn’s lifetime. It should also be noted that Knapton’s edition includes many corrections and substantially clearer stage directions than Magnes’s had, perhaps implying Behn’s continued attention to her first success. Certainly there is plenty of evidence that casts doubt on the view of Behn’s early twentieth-century editor, Montague Summers, that the play “seems never to have been revived since its first production” (Works, III, 284).

There is a lot more to re-examine at this 350th anniversary beyond the fate of Behn’s first play, because the range of her oeuvre, both within and beyond the theatre, is remarkable. In the nineteen years between the première of The Forc’d Marriage and her death in 1689, she is known to have published her
own Poems upon Several Occasions (1684) and two miscellanies that include more of her own poems and some by many others (1685, 1688); seventeen plays (1671–88); six translations from French (1684–88); and two works of original fiction (Oroonoko and The Fair Jilt, 1688). She also published a series of poems on public themes, including on the death of Charles II and the coronation of James II and VII, and contributed prologues, prefaces and other works to collections published by Thomas Creech, Dryden, John Wilmot earl of Rochester, and various others.20 Around the time of her death more fiction followed: The History of the Nun and The Lucky Mistake (1689), and another play, The Widdow Ranter (1690). As is discussed elsewhere in this volume, further works attributed to Behn by Charles Gildon and others – including another play, The Younger Brother (1696), eight fictions (1698–1700), and various poems and letters – continued to appear.21 Even that extraordinarily wide catalogue leaves out of account another three plays published anonymously in her lifetime but often said to be Behn’s work, and a long-standing, multi-volume hit, Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister (1684–87), attributed to her as early as 1691 by Gerard Langbaine, who names it as hers, along with sixteen of her plays, her translations, and the original fiction published by her.22 All of these works appear, fully annotated and with their attribution considered in detail, in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn. It is our hope that future researchers, reading these texts alongside those that can be confidently attributed to Behn, will be enabled to draw their own conclusions. We are very glad that this process, already set going by Todd’s 1990s edition, can re-start in the light of more recent research, 350 years after the beginning of Behn’s career.

The essays collected in this Special Number all draw on research that has been undertaken in relation to the forthcoming Cambridge Edition. By re-evaluating the range of literary and non-literary genres and traditions with which Behn engaged, as well as the practical aspects of publishing in the late seventeenth century, they together provide a firm basis for new research on her writings and period.23 Each essay here has its own specific focus; between them, they form an inter-connected series of new possibilities. For instance, in their computational study of the authorship of the second play to be published posthumously under Behn’s name, The Younger Brother (1696), Hogarth and Evans note the ways in which the generic variety of Behn’s drama presents challenges in such investigations. In seeking to establish whether The Younger Brother is likely to have been written mostly or solely by Behn, Hogarth and Evans combine a variety of approaches to test the veracity of Charles Gildon’s claim to have edited only the first Act of the play. According to Gildon, his changes were applied so as to make the play more suitable for a mid-1690s audience that was unlikely, he believed, to have been entertained by the Whig and Tory jostling that he had
removed. Hogarth and Evans demonstrate how computational methods, sensitively handled and appropriately contextualised, can shed further light on the accuracy of claims made about not only authorship, but also the nature and possibility of editorial revisions in the period. In so doing, their discussions also intersect with key concerns explored in Maureen Bell’s essay, namely those of Behn’s posthumous popularity, the commercial realities of publishing in the 1690s, and the value of incorporating evidence about who financed publications when investigating authorship. Taking Behn as her case-study, Bell shows that the booksellers involved with her late publications, and with those attributed to her in the decade or so after her death, did not exploit her on the grounds of her sex, as some critics have suggested. Drawing comparisons between Behn’s literary legacy and those of her male predecessors, Bell demonstrates the ways in which Behn’s work and reputation were certainly ripe for profit, but that her booksellers were no more unscrupulous than those of Beaumont and Fletcher were, or those of the vernacular medical writer Nicholas Culpeper.

Indeed, in pointing to the overwhelming popularity of an increasingly large body of writing attributed to the deceased Culpeper from the mid-seventeenth century and through much of Behn’s career, Bell also gestures to the argumentation here advanced by Sara Read: that modern readers of Behn’s works, if sufficiently attuned to the myriad medical contexts and traditions familiar to her early readers and audiences, are likely to find their understandings of events and characters in Restoration fiction enriched, and some of their puzzles solved. Read’s contribution to this Special Number both explains how understanding the period’s humoral framework can prompt new literary-historical interpretations, and shows that more specialist medical frameworks of the period, such as the impact of the “non-naturals” on health, can inform such readings. Taking Behn’s 1686 translation of Balthasar de Bonnecore’s La Montre as a particular focus, Read demonstrates the interpretive productivity of paying attention to such historically significant but seemingly incidental matters as consumption, rest, and exercise when seeking to understand the trajectories of characters and plots. Read also proposes a critical re-evaluation of the role of another non-natural – the passions, and the detrimental effect of excessive passions – urging the need for studies of the kind here undertaken by Margarete Rubik in her exploration of Behn’s rhetorical strategies for conveying heightened emotional states. Through a close examination of several of Behn’s fictions, Rubik shows that in her treatment of the passions, Behn often refuses to distinguish between genders, and that the passions exhibited in the stories are as often masquerade as not. Sensitive to the fact that modern concepts of genre can construct artificial boundaries, Rubik draws attention to the overlaps between how Behn represents emotional excess on the stage and on the page, demonstrating the consistent slipperiness with which she treats the relationship between action and authenticity.
Behn’s ability to manipulate excessive physical display is also explored with a different focus by Marcus Nevitt, who positions her in the wider related traditions of Ben Jonson’s dramatic legacy, and in contemporary debates concerning the nature of Restoration comedy. In particular, Nevitt demonstrates what he calls Behn’s “radical re-imagining of farce’s possibilities”, giving us the title for this Introduction. His discussion shows richly how Behn challenged the established parameters of farce, a genre traditionally more removed from the burden of moral responsibility than either comedy or tragedy, and instead insisted that the genre’s key features could be combined with an ethical imperative drawn not from her source (Thomas Killigrew) but from her source’s source (Jonson). Matthew Birchwood’s contribution also analyses the opportunities for social commentary that Behn saw in farce, but approaches it from a very different angle: how Behn’s plays explore Christian–Muslim relations. Birchwood’s essay examines Behn’s treatment of Muslim culture in two generically diverse plays that bookend the political turmoil of the Popish Plot: her only tragedy, Abdelazer (1677), and her first farce, The False Count (1682). Integral to his re-examination of Behn’s presentation of religious identities are both the adjustments she makes to her play’s dramatic sources when depicting the intersections of Christian and Muslim cultures on stage, and the extent to which she engaged with the wider debates and assumptions evidenced in such sources as the reports of diplomats, merchants, and politicians, as well as in travelogues.

How Behn reached beyond her immediate sources to address key concerns of her culture is here further explored by Catie Gill, who examines her engagement with questions of religious doctrine and natural philosophy. The textual tracing that Gill undertakes in relation to Behn’s preface to Discovery of New Worlds (1688) is tripartite. By collating early seventeenth-century folio editions of Buck’s Bible, Gill establishes the edition that Behn is likely to have used when seeking to synthesise competing cosmological understandings. Gill also demonstrates Behn’s familiarity with biblical exegesis, used in her preface to demonstrate the limitations of scripture on questions of the order of the universe; and, like Nevitt, Gill shows Behn reaching backwards, beyond her immediate source – in this case, Bernard de Fontenelle’s Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes – to affirm her own priorities.

Together these essays constitute “radical re-imaginings” of Behn’s range of reference-points and achievements, and pave the way for many more. It is a particular pleasure to present them as celebrations of Behn’s 350th anniversary begin.

Notes

1. Eds. Rachel Adcock, Kate Aughterson, Claire Bowditch, Elaine Hobby, Alan James Hogarth, Anita Pacheco, and Margarete Rubik. The Forc’d Marriage, ed. Jacqueline Pearson, will appear in vol. I (forthcoming).
2. Key examples include Janet Todd, Aphra Behn: A Secret Life, 2nd ed. (London: Fentum, 2017); Derek Hughes, The Theatre of Aphra Behn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 93, 103, 109, 112, 159–61; Cynthia Lowenthal, “Two Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre”, A Companion to Restoration Drama, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 396–411.

3. All references to Behn’s works are to the copy on EEBO of the stated edition.

4. In his edition of Behn, Montague Summers cites Edmund Gosse’s comment on Behn’s friendship with Otway, and many have followed suit; Summers, ed., The Works of Aphra Behn (London: Heinemann, 1915), vol. III, 284. Almost every account of The Forc’d Marriage première in the last 40 years mentions the six-day run.

5. All references to Downes are to Roscius Anglicanus, ed. Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1987). References to London Stage are to vol. I (1965) of William Van Lennep and others, eds., The London Stage, 1660–1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1960–8).

6. Munns, “Otway, Thomas, 1652–1685” (ODNB).

7. “Theatre Performance Records in London, 1660–1705”, Review of English Studies 67.280 (2016): 468–95.

8. William Van Lennep, “Plays on the English Stage 1669-1672”, Theatre Notebook 16.1 (1961): 12–21 reproduces and comments on an invoice signed by the Lord Chamberlain that records £10 as the standard price paid by the king for a box at the theatre. The presence of the king (almost certainly) and members of his household in the theatre would have attracted audience members; see Jocelyn Powell, Restoration Theatre Production (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 12–13.

9. For playwrights’ probable involvement in increasing audience numbers, see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, The Publication of Plays in London: Playwrights, Publishers, and the Market (London: British Library, 2015), pp. 195–7.

10. See sigs A3r–v, ll. 31, 47, 24, 27. For Behn’s spying career, see Alan Marshall, “‘Memorialls for Mrs Affora’: Aphra Behn and the Restoration Intelligence World”, Women’s Writing 22.1 (2015): 13–33. For the way that Restoration prologues make use of insider knowledge to address audiences, see Pierre Danchin, ed., The Prologues and Epilogues of the Restoration 1660–1700: A Complete Edition (Paris: Université Nancy II, 1981–8), 4 parts in 7 vols.

11. Britland, “Aphra Behn’s First Marriage?”, Seventeenth Century (online December 2019) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2019.1693420>. Not long after The Amorous Prince was staged in February 1671 was the probable première of Edward Howard’s unsuccessful Six Days Adventure. One of the consolatory poems that prefaced this play at its publication was by Behn, and Britland also suggests connections that Behn might have had with him from at least the 1650s (12–14).

12. Edward Arber, ed., The Term Catalogues, 1668–1709 A.D., 3 vols. (London: privately printed, 1903–6), I, 66. The British Book Trade Index (BBTI) <http://bbti.bodleian.ox.ac.uk> indicates Magnes’s trading dates as 1660–79 (and his death as 1678). For the Restoration publication system, see Maureen Bell’s essay in this volume.

13. See the entries on Richard Bentley in BBTI, and Giles Mandelbrote, “Richard Bentley’s Copies: The Ownership of Copyrights in the Late Seventeenth
“Century”, *The Book Trade and its Customers 1450–1900: Historical Essays for Robin Myers*, ed. Arnold Hunt, Giles Mandelbrote, and Alison Shell (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies, 1997), pp. 55–94.

14. Mandelbrote, “Richard Bentley’s Copies”, 57.

15. Similar lists of plays for sale by Bentley and Magnes that include *The Forc’d Marriage* are found in Behn’s *The Town-Fopp* (1676, pub. 1677) and in M. de Villedieu’s *Disorders of Love* (1677). On the frequency with which authors of printed plays are named in other kinds of advertisements of the period, see Milhous and Hume, *Publication of Plays*, 65.

16. The three Behn plays advertised by Bentley were *Forc’d Marriage*, *Town-Fopp*, and *Abdelazer*. Another Bentley copy, D’Urfey’s *Virtuous Wife* (1680) groups under subheadings plays by John Dryden, Nathaniel Lee, John Crowne, and D’Urfey, but does not accord Behn her own heading, instead listing her plays amongst another five unattributed titles. See also the lists in Otway, *Souldiers Fortune* (1681), Wycherley, *Plain-Dealer* (1681), Banks, *Unhappy Favourite* (1682), and Jurieu, *Last Efforts* (1682), all published by Bentley and a member of the Magnes family (initially his wife, and afterwards his daughter), but none according Behn a sub-heading in the list. For the Bentley women’s involvement in the book trade, see Mandelbrote, “Richard Bentley’s Copies”, 57–8. On the plays advertised in the preliminaries or end-papers of other publications, see Milhous and Hume, *Publication of Plays in London*, 67.

17. See his entry in *BBTI*, and those on John Knapton and Paul Knapton. Henry R. Plomer states that “In 1688 he [James Knapton] began to publish plays and novels in large numbers” (*A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1668 to 1725* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1922), p. 181). We have used “copyright” for clarity, but on the limitations of the term, see Bell in this volume.

18. See, e.g., Hume’s warning that “Performance counts are not improved by the *London Stage* policy of listing all known reprints of plays as possible revivals up to 1700. Unwary scholars tend just to assume that the ‘possible’ revival did occur”; “Theatre History, 1660–1800: Aims, Materials, Methodology”, *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660–1800*, ed. Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 9–44 (39, n. 34).

19. For full details of the differences between the editions, see Pearson in *Cambridge Edition*, vol. I. Many of the variants are also listed in Janet Todd, ed., *The Works of Aphra Behn*, 7 vols. (London: Pickering, 1992–6), V, pp. 571–83.

20. See Mary Ann O’Donnell, *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*, 2nd ed. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004) for works known to be by Behn, and for those sometimes attributed to her.

21. See the articles by Bell, and by Hogarth and Evans in this volume. Read’s essay also discusses some of the posthumously published fiction, which is of dubious attribution.

22. *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (Oxford: L.L. for George West and Henry Clements, 1691), pp. 18–23. The three plays later attributed to Behn are *The Revenge* (1680), which may well be hers, and *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* and *The Debauchee* (both 1677), which are so close to their source texts that attribution is difficult to determine; see Mel Evans and Alan Hogarth, “Stylistic Palimpsests: Computational Stylistic Perspectives on Precursory Authorship in
Aphra Behn’s Drama”, Digital Scholarship in the Humanities (2020). For discussion of Love-Letters, see Rubik’s article in this volume.

23. Bell, Evans, Hogarth, Nevitt and Rubik are all part of the Cambridge team as editors, or members of the editorial board. Birchwood, Gill and Read are also providing guidance in their areas of research expertise.

24. For discussion of Behn employing this practice elsewhere, see Elaine Hobby’s edition of The Rover in the Cambridge Edition, vol. II (forthcoming).

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