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Allardyce Nicoll

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CHAPTER ONE

THE THEATRE

I. *Introductory*

PARADOXICALLY, at a time when the last vestiges of ancient aristocratic life are rapidly vanishing and democracy is the watchword of the age, the predominantly aristocratic drama of the reign of Charles II has once more come into its own again. True, voices have been raised occasionally to champion the claim that the comedy of this period is “insufferably dull” and to protest that

the criticism that defenders of Restoration comedy need to answer is not that the comedies are “immoral,” but that they are trivial, gross and dull.¹

Such warnings are salutary when we think of the pronouncements of some among the more eccentric defenders of the Restoration theatre, but the charge of dulness is perhaps sufficiently met by pointing to the truly extraordinary interest displayed during recent years in stage revivals of these late seventeenth-century plays. We might be prepared to set aside the various productions of the Phoenix Society as having had appeal only to a special and limited audience, but we cannot ignore the way in which Congreve and his fellows have recently attracted the general public within the theatre’s doors. The plays have come alive there and their wit has summoned forth the laughter they were intended to provoke. It is not without significance that only a few years ago appeared a “Playgoer’s Handbook to Restoration Drama”²—

¹ L. C. Knights, “Restoration Comedy: the Reality and the Myth” (*Scrutiny*, 1937, VI, 122–43).

² Malcolm Elwin, *The Playgoer’s Handbook to Restoration Drama* (1938).

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in its title testifying to the widespread and theatrical interest in these works¹.

This theatrical interest has been accompanied by an energetic academic interest. After remaining largely neglected since their own times, or at least from the eighteenth century, numerous Restoration dramatists have had their plays edited during the past two or three decades, in volumes both sumptuously expensive and popularly simple²; and, apart from these collected "works," numerous single plays have received special attention³. A majestic bibliography of Dryden leads

¹ Before 1923, apart from chapters in general histories of literature, the only accounts of the Restoration drama appeared in the 1660-1700 sections of John Genest's *Some Account of the English Stage, from 1660 to 1830* (1832, 10 vols.), Sir A. W. Ward's *A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne* (1875; revised edition 1899, 3 vols.) and G. H. Nettleton's *English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (1914). To these might be added the important general study of literary conditions during the period, Alexandre Beljame's *Le public et les hommes de lettres au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris, 1897; issued in English translation only in 1948). The notes to the present volume indicate the wealth of studies since that time. In addition to the works on particular aspects referred to later, note may be taken of M. Ellehauge's *English Restoration Drama* (1933).

² Thus Montague Summers has prepared minutely annotated (although unfortunately rather erratically prepared) texts of Shadwell (1927, 5 vols.), Dryden (1934, 6 vols.), Wycherley (1924, 4 vols.), Congreve (1923, 4 vols.), Behn (1915, 6 vols.) and Otway (1926, 3 vols.). H. F. B. Brett-Smith has an admirable *Etherege* (1927, 2 vols.), J. C. Ghosh an *Otway* (1932, 2 vols.), Bonamy Dobrée a *Vanbrugh* (1927, 4 vols., in collaboration with G. Webb) and a *Congreve* (1925-8, 2 vols.), F. W. Bateson a *Congreve* (1930), Charles Stonehill a *Farquhar* (1930, 2 vols.), W. S. Clark an *Orrery* (1937, 2 vols.), John Hayward a *Rochester* (1926), V. de S. Pinto a *Sedley* (1928).

³ For example, Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* (ed. Montague Summers, 1914), Kirkman's *The Wits* (ed. J. J. Elson, 1932), Tuke's *The Adventures of Five Hours* (ed. Montague Summers, 1927; and E. H. Swaen, 1927), Shadwell's *Epsom Wells* and *The Volunteers* (ed. D. M. Walmsley, 1930), Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (ed. U. Todd-Naylor, 1931; and, with *The Plain Dealer*, G. B. Churchill, 1924), Banks' *The Unhappy Favourite* (ed. T. M. H. Blair, 1939), Sir William Killigrew's *The Siege of Urbin* (ed. I. E. Taylor, 1946). Several anthologies also testify to the interest in the drama of the period—*Restoration Comedies* (1921) edited by Montague Summers, *Types of English Drama, 1660-1780* (1923) edited by D. H. Stevens, *Five Restoration Tragedies* (1928) edited by Bonamy Dobrée, *British Plays from the Restoration to 1820* (1929, 2 vols.) edited by M. J. Moses, *Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (1931) edited by D. MacMillan and H. M. Jones, *Twelve Famous Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (1933) edited by C. A. Moore, *English Plays, 1660-1820* (1935) edited by A. E. Morgan.

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the van in a series of studies designed to chart the hitherto unexplored territory of Restoration play-publishing¹. Basic contemporary texts have been issued with appropriate annotations². Theatrical history of the period 1660-1700, which thirty years ago had been seriously dealt with only in a few articles devoted to particular problems, has now been more widely reviewed³. And at the same time numerous studies

¹ References to these studies are given in the Handlist of Plays. Montague Summers' *Bibliography of Restoration Drama* (1937), while useful as a list, but one to be treated with caution, is of course not in any respect a bibliography in the technical sense of the term. This is referred to later as "Summers, *Bibliography*". A much closer approach towards a bibliography is the excellent *Check List* prepared by Gertrude L. Woodward and James G. McManaway (1945): an elaborate bibliographic study of the drama from 1660 to 1700 is being prepared by Fredson Bowers.

² Especially important are *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert* (ed. J. Q. Adams, 1917), referred to hereafter as "Herbert"; John Downes' *Roscius Anglicanus* (ed. Montague Summers, 1929), referred to as "Downes"; *A Comparison between the Two Stages* (ed. S. B. Wells, 1942), referred to under its title. It may be noted here that several early basic texts are generally referred to in the present volume simply by the names of their authors: thus "Langbaine" refers to Gerard Langbaine's *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), "Gildon" to Charles Gildon's continuation of this work as *The Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets* (1698), "Jacob" to Giles Jacob's *The Poetical Register* (1719), "Whincop" to *A Compleat List of all the English Dramatic Poets* contributed (apparently by John Mottley) to T. Whincop's *Scanderberg* (1747), "Biographia Dramatica" to the edition of that work prepared by Stephen Jones in 1812. "Cibber" refers to *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber*, edited by R. W. Lowe in 1889 (2 vols.). The reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission are cited as "HMC."

³ By far the most important volumes are Leslie Hotson's *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (1928) and Eleanor Boswell's *The Restoration Court Stage (1660-1702)* (1932)—referred to as "Leslie Hotson" and "Eleanor Boswell" respectively. Both of these present many new documents culled from the Public Records Office. Montague Summers' *The Restoration Theatre* (1934) and *The Playhouse of Pepys* (1935)—referred to as "Summers, *Theatre*" and "Summers, *Playhouse*" respectively—give an account of theatrical conditions in this age. Emmett L. Avery has an invaluable "Tentative Calendar of Daily Theatrical Performances, 1660-1700" (*Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, xiii. 1945, 225-83)—referred to as "Emmett L. Avery"; and Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700* (1940) forms a serviceable complement. Very useful, too, are the two collections of Sybil Rosenfeld, "Dramatic Advertisements in the Burney Newspapers, 1660-1700" (*PMLA*, LI. 1936, 123-52) and "The Restoration Stage in Newspapers and Journal, 1660-1700" (*Modern Language Review*, 1935, 445-59). The same author's publication of interesting Norwich records is referred to in Appendix A.

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of individual playwrights have illuminated the practice of dramatic composition during these years¹.

Most important of all, however, are the many books and articles devoted to an attempt at reassessment of the Restoration drama. These may more appropriately be mentioned individually in those sections of the present book to which they have reference; but it may be advisable here to emphasise that through these diverse studies we have indeed come near to securing a balanced attitude towards the comedy and the serious drama of the age. Neither are we likely now to neglect the solid virtues of the heroic drama and the delicacy of the comic, nor are we tempted to over-praise because of a surrounding atmosphere of indifference. And, above all, we are better equipped now to see the Restoration stage and the dramatic literature to which it gave birth as the interesting and indispensable link between Shakespeare's Globe with its poetic plays and the modern theatres with their combination of realism and spectacle. Although this age seems at first to be a strange world of its own, separated alike from the eras dominated by Elizabeth on the one hand and by Victoria on the other, we are coming more and more to recognise that it does not stand alone. The excesses of its courtiers may momentarily persuade us of its isolation, but the deeper we search the surer becomes our realisation that the playwrights who

¹ Among these, apart from the numerous Dryden studies, are the following: *Aphra Behn* (by V. Sackville-West, 1927); *Colley Cibber* (by F. D. Senior, 1928; by D. M. E. Habbema, 1928; by R. H. Barker, 1939); *Congreve* (by D. Protopopescu, 1924; by Sir Edmund Gosse, revised edition 1924; by D. C. Taylor, 1931; by John C. Hodges, 1941); *Cowley* (by A. H. Nethercot, 1931; by Jean Loiseau, 1931); *Crowne* (by A. F. White, 1922); *D'Avenant* (by Alfred Harbage, 1935; by A. H. Nethercot, 1938); *Dennis* (by H. G. Paul, 1911); *D'Urfey* (by R. S. Forsythe, 1916); *Etherege* (the *Letterbook*, edited by Sybil Rosenfeld, 1928); *Farquhar* (by Willard Connelly, 1948); *Gould* (by E. H. Sloane, 1940); *Killigrew* (by Alfred Harbage, 1930); *Lee and Otway* (by R. G. Ham, 1931); *Mountford* (by A. S. Borgman, 1935); *Motteux* (by R. N. Cunningham, 1933); the Duke and Duchess of *Newcastle* (by H. Ten Eyck Perry, 1921); *Katherine Philips* (by P. W. Souers, 1931); *Sedley* (by V. de Sola Pinto, 1927); *Settle* (by F. C. Brown, 1910); *Shadwell* (by A. S. Borgman, 1928); *Southerne* (by J. W. Dodds, 1933); *Rochester* (by J. Prinz, 1927; by V. de Sola Pinto, 1927; by Charles Williams, 1935); *Vanbrugh* (by L. Whistler, 1938); *Wycherley* (by Charles Perromat, 1921; by Willard Connelly, 1930).

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fluttered around Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields were the descendants of Shakespeare and the ancestors of Shaw.

Thus, the interest we take in the stage and drama which flourished during the reigns of Charles II and his successors must perforce be motivated partly by historical considerations, partly by the intrinsic excellence to be discovered in at least a few plays of these times. Were we concerned merely with such comedies and tragedies as seemed to possess qualities of an enduring sort or such as might appear to merit revival on the modern stage, then most of the plays recorded here would necessarily find no mention: but, since the interest is a double one, it is obviously essential to bring under review not only the few which are permanently worthy but also the many which succeeded merely in arousing a little flutter of contemporary approval and their less fortunate companions which failed to attract even the audiences of their own days. Any account of Restoration drama must, accordingly, consider both the masterpieces of the time and the failures: only by taking these together can we properly assess either the virtues of the one or the defects of the other.

II. *The Audience*

All dramatic art depends ultimately for its form and content on the audience. The spectators of 1590 gave birth to *As You Like It*: the spectators of 1600 to *Hamlet* and to *Every Man in his Humour*: the spectators of 1670 to *The Conquest of Granada* and to *The Man of Mode*. Fundamentally, independent genius counts for less in the world of the theatre than does the general atmosphere of the time: "the drama's laws the drama's patrons give" is a rule which, it seems, may never be broken. Less than any other art is the drama ahead of its time. It reflects, very rarely prophesies: its basis is the world of sentiment around, not before, it.

Of all audiences, the audience of the years 1660 to 1700 is perhaps the easiest to analyse. Save for the very first year or two of the Restoration, two theatres, and for over twelve years, one theatre, supplied the wants of the London play-

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going public of the time¹. Instead of cries that admittance was unobtainable, we meet with lament after lament that the managers and promoters could barely make ends meet². If one theatre had a new play by a well-known author the other was as if deserted, sometimes summoning barely sufficient spectators to make a performance either advisable or even possible³. Outside of London, except for several strolling

¹ See, for the history of the theatres, Appendix A.

² References to small audiences are frequent in prologue and in epilogue from the earliest to the latest period. The first, probably, is that which appears in D'Avenant's prologue to the second part of *The Siege of Rhodes*:

“Oh! Money! Money! if the WITS would dress
With Ornaments, the present face of Peace;
And to our Poet half that Treasure spare,
Which Faction gets from Fools to nourish War;
Then his contracted Scenes should wider be,
And move by greater Engines, till you see
(Whilst you securely sit) fierce Armies meet....”

About 1675–6 the T.R. seems to have been in a peculiarly bad way. See the prologue to a revival of *Every Man out of His Humour* (July, 1675) in Duffett's *New Poems, Songs, Prologues and Epilogues, Never before Printed* (1676), p. 72, and the epilogue to Lee's *Gloriana* (D.L. 1676):

“They told me at t'other House y'had left us quite...
Good faith I'm very glad to see you here!
'Tis well you can at a New Play appear.”

About the year 1667 Pepys has many references to paucity of audiences. On Wed. 17 April, 1667, the King's house for *Rollo* was empty: it was “mighty empty” on Thurs. 1 Aug. for *The Custom of the Country*: it was poor on Mon. Aug. 26 for *The Surprisal*: and “not one soul” was in the pit by three o'clock on Mon. 16 Sept. The Union of 1682, when the two theatres amalgamated, was really the result of financial failure, and no one appears to have been inconvenienced because only one playhouse was open. When Betterton had seceded to the long disused L.I.F. house in 1695, the old complaints started again. Thus Jo. Haynes spoke the epilogue to Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* (D.L. 1699) “in Mourning”:

“I Come not here, our Poet's Fate to see,
He and his Play may both be damn'd for me:
No, Royal Theatre, I come to Mourn for Thee.
And must these Structures then untimely fall,
Whilst th'other House stands, and gets the Devil and all?”

³ Pepys found the T.R. empty on Thurs. July 4, 1661, at *Claracilla* because of the recent opening of D'Avenant's “opera”: on Mon. Mar. 7, 1663–4, he found L.I.F. empty because of a new play at the T.R.: the emptiness of the T.R. on Mon. Aug. 26, 1667, was due to the production of *Sir Martin Mar-all* at L.I.F.: on Mon. Sept. 16, 1667, Pepys noted that L.I.F. was full for *Tu Quoque* but the T.R. empty for *The Scornful Lady*: on Sat. 5 Oct. 1667, the T.R. was empty for *Flora's Vagaries* because of a “new play” at L.I.F.: on Thurs. 14 May, 1668, the T.R. house was

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companies and for visits of the London companies to Oxford and Cambridge¹, plays were unknown, and in the metropolis itself only a very small proportion of the people favoured the theatre. Charles had been restored with practically the full consent of the nation, but the Puritan tenets which had made possible the eighteen years duration of the Commonwealth régime could certainly not have vanished with the mere restoration of a king to his throne. Had the courtiers been less debauched, had Charles been less the slave to his passions, had the playwrights maintained a more sedate attitude towards life, the citizens might, too, have flocked to the playhouses as in Elizabethan times. Of direct reference to the middle classes in the theatre we have practically no record². During the Dutch wars when a certain number of the gallants and the beaux were gone to sea, an appeal might be made from the stage to the citizens "of Lombard-street," but in the main those who were engaged in business, unless they were younger sons of the nobility, were ridiculed in plays, undesired among the spectators. The courtiers made of the theatre a meeting-place of their own, with licence of all kinds, bringing there their dubious loves, so that those citizens who still retained some of their Puritan convictions shunned the place like a plague³. More personal motives may have entered in as well. In the comedies, and the

small for *The Country Captain* because of *The Sullen Lovers* at L.I.F.: "not £10" was in the T.R. for *The Faithful Shepherdess* on Fri. Feb. 26, 1669, because *The Royal Shepherdess* had been performed for the first time at L.I.F. the day before.

¹ See Appendix A.

² The presence of citizens in the theatre was four times noted by Pepys and always as an exception, on Sat. Dec. 27, 1662 (second part of *The Siege of Rhodes*), on Thurs. Jan. 1, 1662-3 (*The Villain*), on Wed. 1 Jan. 1667-8 (*Sir Martin Mar-all*), on Sat. Dec. 26, 1668 (*Women Pleas'd*). It is noticeable that all of these were at the Duke's theatre, and all round the Christmas or New Year season. It is possible that the citizens visited the playhouse only on special occasions such as this, and that the "show" of D'Avenant's house particularly appealed to them.

³ See Wright, *Historia Histriónica*, p. 6; he avers that "many of the more Civilised Part of the Town are uneasy in the Company, and shun the Theater as they would a House of Scandal." Tom Brown in his *Play-house* makes a similar remark that "Men of *Figure* and Consideration are known by seldom being there, and Men of *Wisdom* and Business by being always absent" [*Works*, 1708, III. 41].

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comedies are but a reflex of real life, the citizens' wives are made fair game for the debauched sparks, their husbands the mere butts for ill-placed wit and buffoonery. It must certainly have appeared to many that the introduction of their women-folk into this place of ogling eyes and significant leers was a proceeding injudicious, to say the least¹.

The spectators, then, for whom the poets wrote and the actors played were the courtiers and their satellites. The noblemen in the pit and boxes, the fops and beaux and wits or would-be-wits who hung on to their society, the women of the court, depraved and licentious as the men, the courtesans with whom these women of quality moved and conversed as on equal terms, made up at least four-fifths of the entire audience. Add a sprinkling of footmen in the upper gallery, a stray country cousin or two scattered throughout the theatre, and the picture of the audience is complete.

All of these took their cue from the king. Charles returned from his exile with a very definite love of the drama and of literature in general. The theatre became with him a particular hobby. Of the two licensed houses, one, that which included the actor Mohun, was styled the Theatre Royal, its players, His Majesty's Servants, the other, that which included Betterton, was called the Duke's Theatre, from the fact that it was patronised by the brother of the King, the Duke of York. Charles was the first English sovereign to attend in any frequency a public playhouse, his initial appearance there being, according to Downes, at the opening of the new Duke's Theatre on Friday, June 28, 1661². He had, of course, his own private playhouse at Whitehall, and there performances were given occasionally³, but his

¹ "*The City neither likes us nor our Wit,*" says Shadwell in the epilogue to *The Lancashire Witches* (D.G. 1681).

*"They say their Wives learn ogling in the Pit;
They'r from the Boxes taught to make Advances,
To answer stolen Sighs and naughty Glances."*

² Downes, p. 20, gives the date as "Spring, 1662," but a reference in Pepys shows that this is an error. In general, it should be noted that Downes, while providing an invaluable account of the stage, is not to be trusted where dates are concerned.

³ On the various court theatres Eleanore Boswell's study is the prime

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main interest seems to have been in the public theatres. He acted as judge whenever anything happened to disturb the equanimity of the management, even going so far as to allot shares which had fallen vacant¹, and governing the actions of the players². He had his favourites among the actors, Lacy in particular, whom he caused to be painted for his palace. He had his loves among the actresses, the children of Nell Gwyn becoming Dukes and Lords. He it was who set the fashion for rimed plays, as Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, expressly informs us. He ordered Tuke to write *The Adventures of Five Hours* and Crowne to pen *Sir Courtly Nice*. He it was who provided vestments for the actors on special occasions, passing his state robes over to Mohun or to Betterton as the case might be. For a revival of D'Avenant's *Love and Honour* at L.I.F. sometime before 1665 the royal coronation suits were worn in the theatre³, and the same suits apparently were lent again to the Duke's playhouse for the production of Orrery's *Henry V* in 1664⁴. On Dec. 11, 1667, Pepys heard that Charles was to give £500 for garments to deck up *Catiline* at the T.R., but seemingly the lending of state robes was an easier thing to get out of the merry monarch than a sum of money, however small. A month later the production of *Catiline* was being held over, the King's present not forthcoming.

From this royal countenance of the theatre the actors and the playwrights gained a certain amount of prestige. Of all artists they were nearest the court. They expressed in every way the sentiments of the court, and, unhappily, not only the wit they met with there in the persons of Rochester and

authority. A clear distinction must be made between this theatre and the Hall Theatre. Miss Boswell presents many documents from the Public Records Office relating to the structure and administration of both.

¹ That which lapsed owing to the death of Theophilus Bird was assigned by him (*Cal. State Papers, Dom. Series, Charles II, 1663-4, p. 121*).

² Thus in July, 1663, Henry Harris left the Duke's company for the royal troupe, but was forced by royal command to return (Pepys, July 22, 1663). The year before, in 1662, John Richards had similarly deserted for the Dublin theatre. The King thought fit to issue a warrant immediately, commanding the Lord Lieutenant to arrest him at once and ship him back to England (*Cal. State Papers, Dom. Series, 1661-2, p. 455*).

³ Downes, p. 21.

⁴ Downes, p. 27.

of Sedley or the exalted romance of Mdlle de Scudéry, but also the profound royalism of the Stuart régime. The ultra-monarchism which pervades this theatre may astound us nowadays, but it must be remembered that, not only were the dramatists and the actors cavaliers by necessity, the Puritans condemning and decrying their very means of livelihood, but that they were fettered by a fairly strict and prejudiced censorship. At first, certainly, some slight latitude seems to have been allowed, as when the lost play of Howard's, *The Change of Crowns*, was acted before the King, who flew into a most uncharacteristic passion and ordered it to be restrained—only, characteristically, to permit its revival in a few days' time. Other plays, we know from contemporaries, were regarded as attacks at the court, and were allowed, but for the most part the office of censor, held in turn by Herbert and by Killigrew, was rigidly exercised. An interdiction was laid sometime or another on *The Maid's Tragedy*¹. Crowne's *Henry the Sixth*, part I (1681), because of some anti-Catholic sentiments expressed in it, was suppressed². Charles allowed, but James disallowed, the acting of Dryden's *The Spanish Fryar* (D.G. 1680)³. Shadwell suffered for some injudicious remarks in *The Lancashire Witches* (D.G. 1681), Lee for *Lucius Junius Brutus* (D.G. 1680)⁴, Banks for *The Innocent Usurper* (1694) and for *Cyrus the Great* (L.I.F. 1695)⁵.

At several definite points in the history of this period, however, a certain amount of criticism would seem to have been tolerated, precisely because men did not know where to stand. At first, naturally enough, all the "political" plays

¹ See Fowell, F. and Palmer, F., *Censorship in England* (1913), p. 101.

² Dedication to *The English Friar* (D.L. 1690).

³ The order of suppression is in the P.R.O., L.C. 5/147, p. 239: it is dated Dec. 8, 1686, and commands "that y^e play called y^e Spanish Friar should bee noe more Acted."

⁴ The order is dated Dec. 11, 1680 (L.C. 5/144, p. 28): "Whereas I am informed that there is Acted by you a Play called Lucius Junius Brutus... wherein are very Scandalous Expressions & Reflections vpon y^e Governement these are to require you Not to Act y^e said Play again."

⁵ Tate's *Richard II* was similarly banned on Dec. 14, 1680 (P.R.O., L.C. 5/144, p. 29). Dryden and Lee's *The Duke of Guise* on July 18, 1682 (P.R.O., L.C. 5/16, p. 101) and Crowne's *The City Politiques* on June 26, 1682 (P.R.O., L.C. 5/16, p. 83). See also Fowell and Palmer, *op. cit.* p. 103.