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Part One

The theatre restored: 1660–1700

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Chapter 1

The material circumstance

What can reasonably be called the 'modern' theatre began in England in 1660, and since the habits formed in the first decades of its existence had a lasting effect, and since this period produced a body of plays more remarkable than those of any other under review here, the first part of this book will pay particularly close attention to the rapid evolution of an institution. Who 'made' it and what materials went into its making (Chapter 1)? Who provided it with plays (Chapter 2)? How were they acted, and who acted them (Chapter 3)?

People who assume control of institutions – and a theatre, like a national government, is normally one of those – tend to delude themselves into thinking that they can accomplish something entirely new. At its most grandiose, this delusion involves an utter disregard of the vested interests of those already occupying subordinate positions in the institution and a bold belief that the network of dependencies that has so far, however flimsily, sustained that institution can be replaced at the drop of a new broom. Most of the deluded end up deep in the footnotes of history, where they might at best be used to point a moral or adorn the tale of today's stubborn dependence on yesterday. But in London, at the troubled dawning of the year 1660, there was no established theatre: had been none for eighteen years. Before the year was out, there were two. What the managers of these new theatres might have done is a subject for speculation. What they did is the starting point of this book.

Table of events referred to in Part One

1642	Theatres closed by parliament
1658	Death of Oliver Cromwell
1660	General Monck's march to London. Restoration of Charles II
1662	Royal Society founded
1665	Great Plague of London
1665–7	Second Dutch War
1666	Great Fire of London
1667	Dutch fleet on the Medway. Fall of Earl of Clarendon
1672–4	Third Dutch War
1678	Titus Oates 'discovers' the Popish Plot

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1679	Exclusion Bill to bar accession of James, Duke of York
1681	Charles II dissolves parliament to prevent passage of Exclusion Bill
1685	Death of Charles II. Accession of James II. Duke of Monmouth's rebellion quelled
1688	James II escapes to France. Accession of William and Mary
1689–97	War of the League of Augsburg
1694	Death of Queen Mary. Foundation of Bank of England
1701–13	War of the Spanish Succession
1702	Death of William III. Accession of Anne

The first theatre managers

The nationwide celebration of the restoration of the Stuart monarchy can easily mislead us into supposing that Charles II was inevitable. On the contrary, his crowning was the outcome of political improvisation in a country that was losing control of itself. By the end of 1659, the standing army was so profoundly at odds with parliament that a renewal of civil war seemed imminent. What proved to be the decisive action was taken by General George Monck, then occupied in the suppression of rebellion in Scotland. Monck is one of the abiding enigmas of history. What had he in mind when he marched his disciplined army southward across the Tweed on 2 January 1660? What were his intentions as he systematically disempowered the officers of the army in England? And what political resolution was he seeking when he led his troops into Westminster on 2 February 1660? It seems unlikely that so staunch a Cromwellian was already bent on preparing the way for a king. For more than two months he bided his time, evidently determined to support constitutional procedure. As a member of the parliament newly elected in April, he was among those who voted for the Stuart restoration on 1 May, and he was the first person to embrace Charles II when the gratified, and slightly flummoxed, uncrowned king landed at Dover on 25 May.

> About noon (though the brigantine that Beale made was there ready to carry him) yet [the King] would go in my Lord's barge with the two Dukes. Our Captain steered, and my Lord went along bare with him. I went, and Mr. Mansell, and one of the King's footmen, with a dog that the King loved, and so got on shore when the King did, who was received by General Monk [*sic*] with all imaginable love and respect at his entrance upon the land of Dover. Infinite the crowd of people and the horsemen, citizens, and noblemen of all sorts. The Mayor of the town came and gave him his white staff, the badge of his place, which the King did give him again. The Mayor also presented him from the town a very rich Bible, which he took and said it was the thing that he loved above all things in

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> the world. A canopy was provided for him to stand under, which he did, and talked awhile with General Monk and others, and so into a stately coach there set for him, and so away through the town towards Canterbury, without making any stay at Dover.
>
> Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, 25 May 1660

Monck would be rewarded with the title of Duke of Albemarle, but it is difficult to believe that he could ever have explained just how things had turned out this way. In that respect, he would have been a true representative of the nation at large.

Charles II's instant performance of magnanimity at the beginning of his reign was politically brilliant. It was still being alluded to in the plays of the 1670s.

> That I survive the dangers of the day,
> Next to the gods, brave friends, be yours the honour;
> And let heaven witness for me that my joy
> Is not more great for this my right restored,
> Than, 'tis that I have power to recompence
> Your loyalty and valour. Let mean princes,
> Of abject souls, fear to reward great actions;
> I mean to show
> That whatsoe'er subjects like you dare merit,
> A king like me, dares give.
>
> This is the first speech of the restored rightful king, Leonidas, in Act 5 of John Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode* (1671). There are many comparable passages in plays written between 1660 and 1678.

He relished the power to enhance the prospects of those who had smoothed his path to the throne, but not as much as he relished the power to reward the small group of royalists who had remained loyal to him during his penurious exile. The latter group included Thomas Killigrew, whom, in July 1660, Charles appointed as overseer of his own nominal company of players, the King's Men. The appointment, that is to say, was not based on proven managerial merit of the kind that might have been claimed for Sir William Davenant, given ten days later the oversight of a second company, nominally servants of the king's brother, and known from the outset as the Duke's Men. The political significance of these July appointments needs to be understood:

1) Less than two months into his reign, Charles II was asserting his right to be royally entertained without reference to parliament or Privy Council,

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and effectively bypassing Sir Henry Herbert, the long-serving Master of the Revels, who had been reappointed to that post in June.

2) At the same time, by sanctioning what amounted to a theatrical duopoly in London, he was signalling his determination to contain any threats to the state from a politically independent theatre. The warrants issued exclusively to Killigrew and Davenant, while encouraging them to take a fresh initiative, rendered illegal the theatrical enterprises already underway in the city.

3) Even so, Charles II was publicly setting the tone for a new style of government hospitable to stage-plays, those 'Spectacles of Pleasure' that had been banned by parliamentary directive in 1642.

> Whereas the distressed Estate of Ireland, steeped in her own Blood, and the distracted Estate of England, threatened with a Cloud of Blood by a Civil War, call for all possible Means to appease and avert the Wrath of God, appearing in these Judgements; amongst which, Fasting and Prayer, having been often tried to be very effectual, have been lately and are still enjoined; and whereas Public Sports do not well agree with public Calamities, nor Public Stage-plays with the Seasons of Humiliation, this being an Exercise of sad and pious Solemnity, and the other being Spectacles of Pleasure, too commonly expressing lascivious Mirth and Levity: It is therefore thought fit, and Ordained, by the Lords and Commons in this Parliament assembled, That while these sad causes and set Times of Humiliation do continue, Public Stage Plays shall cease, and be forborne, instead of which are recommended to the People of this Land the profitable and seasonable considerations of Repentance, Reconciliation, and Peace with God, which probably may produce outward Peace and Prosperity, and bring again Times of Joy and Gladness to these Nations.
>
> Parliamentary directive against public stage-plays, issued 2 September 1642

But it was for Killigrew and Davenant to determine the direction of a reborn professional theatre. Who were they? And what had they to offer?

Thomas Killigrew (1612–83) belonged to the London gentry. It was almost certainly his father, vice-chamberlain to Queen Henrietta Maria, who introduced him to the royal court, where, by 1632, he was a page of honour to Charles I. He wrote his first play, *The Prisoners*, in 1635, and had earned himself a modest reputation as a playwright (and a decidedly immodest reputation as a wit) before the closure of the theatres in 1642. His most successful play, *The Parson's Wedding*, was written in 1640/1 and would be famously revived with an all-female cast in 1664. From 1635 until the outbreak of the first Civil War, Killigrew spent much of his time travelling in Europe (according to the 1664 edition of his *Comedies and Tragedies*, he wrote *The Parson's Wedding* in Basel), employed, if at all, on trivial missions; but he was carrying

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messages for Charles I and Henrietta Maria as political tension heightened in 1641–2, and was under house arrest in Covent Garden for several months in 1642–3.

After his release, like many displaced royalists, he took refuge on the Continent, and by 1647 was established in the circle of friends of the prince-in-exile. He served at various times as Charles's special envoy, his liaison officer and a groom of his bedchamber, but most significantly as a specialist in the morale-boosting job of remaining cheerful in adversity. Sometimes, and not always kindly, he was referred to as Charles's licensed jester, but there is something to be admired in a man whose good spirits survived the aimless time-passing of a wandering cavalier during the English Interregnum. It may have been in Madrid in 1654 that Killigrew completed the two-part comedy, *Thomaso*, in which he gave dramatic expression to the adventures (and mishaps) of the stateless royalists who travelled opportunistically from city to city in Europe. Too long and creakily put together, *Thomaso* survives best in Aphra Behn's brilliant compression, *The Rover* (1677); and the Killigrew of history can probably be glimpsed in the Willmore of Behn's recreation. He was certainly as much in need of a wealthy wife as any of Behn's roving cavaliers, and was lucky enough to find one in Holland, the territory in which he came closest to establishing himself. Charlotte van Hesse would later figure as 'north Holland's fine flower' in the Earl of Rochester's obscene poem 'Signior Dildo' (*c.*1673). (The marriage would eventually founder after Killigrew had exhausted Charlotte's fortune, and a few days after his death she was reduced to petitioning the king for relief: she was granted an annual pension of £200.) Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) met Killigrew, his spirits still high, on 24 May 1660, the eve of the restored king's embarkation for England, and marked him 'a merry droll . . . who told us many merry stories'. So far so good, but the biographical searcher for evidence that Killigrew had the makings of a theatre manager will find nothing.

Sir William Davenant (1606–68) – the knighthood was conferred by the beleaguered Charles I in 1643 – was much better equipped by experience, but never as close to Charles II. Davenant, the son of a prosperous vintner, spent his formative years in Oxford, of which city his father was elected mayor in 1621. The near-contemporary claim, given that father's known enjoyment of plays, that Shakespeare stood as young William's godfather is not implausible. Throughout his theatrical career Davenant said nothing to discredit it. Having left Oxford for London in 1622, he found employment first in the household of the Duchess of Richmond and then of the admired 'renaissance man' Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke. Before Greville's violent death at the hands of his manservant in 1628, Davenant had married the first of three wives and had his first play, *The Cruel Brother* (1627), staged by the King's Men at the Blackfriars indoor playhouse, but the career of a young man on the make was interrupted in 1630

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when Davenant contracted a venereal disease, probably syphilis, sufficiently virulent to entail the loss of most of his nose. The mercury cure was painful, but his gratitude to Queen Henrietta Maria's doctor Thomas Cademan, who tended him, found singular expression twenty years later when he married Cademan's widow. It was probably through Cademan that Davenant gained access to the queen, whose neoplatonic circle he joined and with whose support he wrote his courtly plays, *Love and Honour* (1634) and *The Platonic Lovers* (1635). From then until the outbreak of civil war, Davenant's theatrical work was centred on the royal court, above all in the staging of the elaborate masques through which the king and queen sought to celebrate their concept of benign rule. It was through writing these masques, from *The Temple of Love* (1635) to *Salmacida Spolia* (1640), that Davenant encountered the scenic innovations of Inigo Jones, and it is for his importation of scenic spectacle into the public playhouses of the post-Restoration period that he is best remembered. The idea was already in him when, in March 1639, he secured a warrant from Charles I to build a playhouse on the north side of Fleet Street. It was a dream that he would come close to realizing in 1661.

In the early years of the Civil War, Davenant was an active go-between for Charles I in England and his queen in France, but royalist defeats left him marooned in Paris. Without any of Killigrew's backseat skills, he embarked on the wasted labour of a vast 'heroic poem', modelled on the five-act structure of tragedy. Mercifully, only three books of *Gondibert* were ever completed. As unofficial poet laureate since 1638, Davenant was paying homage to the king by writing it. After Charles I's execution in January 1649, though, he returned to the service of the widowed queen, and it was on a mission instigated by her that he was captured and imprisoned by parliamentary forces, initially in Cowes Castle on the Isle of Wight and then, more ominously, in the Tower of London. Extremists argued for a treason trial, but the view that the impoverished Davenant constituted a threat to the state strained credibility, and he was released in the autumn of 1652. His immediate marriage to Anne Cademan brought short-term relief from accumulated debts, but his quick remarriage after her death in 1655 suggests that his financial problems remained. It was his French third wife, Henrietta du Tremblay, who supported and eventually inherited his management of the Duke's Men. Through Davenant's fifties and sixties, she provided him with nine sons and a home base secure enough to release him to the theatre.

Historians of the drama have given due credit to Davenant's groundbreaking initiatives. Confident of Oliver Cromwell's appreciation of music, he began as early as May 1656 with an 'entertainment' in his temporary home, Rutland House in Aldersgate Street. This was not a play – the ban on plays was still

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operative – nor was it merely a concert. Davenant had composed two debates, one on the value of 'moral representations' and one on the relative merits of Paris and London, interspersing them with songs and instrumental music. The audience was invited to consider the event as a first step on the road to 'our Elyzian field, the *Opera*'. A second, and much larger, step on that road was taken later in the same year, when Davenant staged his own *The Siege of Rhodes* at Rutland House. Within the constraints of a narrow room, perspective scenery provided a backdrop to a plain story, told in recitative. At this moment, the scenery mattered more to Davenant than the story. Even when transferred to the Cockpit in Drury Lane, this was a private performance, so that the evident presence among the singers of a Mrs Coleman cannot qualify her as the first woman to appear in a public theatre in England. But Davenant was sufficiently emboldened by the acquiescence of Cromwell and the parliamentary authorities over the presentation of *The Siege of Rhodes* to follow it with two more 'operas', also staged at the Cockpit in 1658 and 1659. Only after Cromwell's death in September 1658 was he formally warned off; and by then London was caught up in pre-Restoration turmoil.

I have outlined the background of Killigrew and Davenant because, in their different ways, these first managers of the revived theatre set the pattern for the subsequent history of theatre management in England. Notably, and against Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline precedent, they owed their appointment to the court. The earliest managers of professional theatre companies in London worked within the companies they managed, and their authority was granted (or challenged) by their fellow-workers. But the limited egalitarianism of the Commonwealth ended abruptly with the restoration of the monarchy. The authority of Killigrew and Davenant shadowed the nation's return to government by privileged aristocrats. Almost the only other things they had in common were their fluctuating aspirations as playwrights, continental wives and a constant shortage of funds to support their willingness to live beyond their means. In relation to the theatre, Killigrew was an amateur and Davenant a professional. The contrast is one that can be observed at almost any time over the next three centuries.

Managing the new theatres

Charles II's July decision to allow Killigrew and Davenant to share the future spoils of London's theatrical market was formally ratified by the issuing of a joint warrant the next month. The warrant sought to appease Puritan opponents of the stage by reminding its beneficiaries of their moral responsibilities.

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> We, taking the premises into our princely consideration, yet not holding it necessary totally to suppress the use of theatres, because we are assured that if the evils and scandals in the plays that now are or have been acted were taken away, the same might serve as innocent and harmless divertissements for many of our subjects; and having experience of the art and skill of our trusty and well-beloved Thomas Killigrew, Esq., one of the Grooms of our Bedchamber, and of Sir William Davenant, Knight, for the purposes hereafter mentioned, do hereby give and grant unto the said Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant full power and authority to erect two companies of players, consisting respectively of such persons as they shall choose and appoint, and to purchase, build, and erect or hire at their charge, as they shall think fit, two houses or theatres with all convenient rooms and other necessaries thereunto appertaining, for the representation of tragedies, comedies, plays, operas, and all other entertainments of that nature in convenient places: and likewise to settle and establish such payments to be paid by those that shall resort to see the said representations performed as either have been accustomely given and taken in the like kind, or as shall be reasonable in regard of the great expenses of scenes, music, and such new decorations as have not been formerly used: with further power to make such allowances out of that which they shall so receive to the actors and other persons employed in the said representations in both houses respectively as they shall think fit; the said companies to be under the government and authority of them, the said Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant. And in regard to the extraordinary licentiousness that has lately used in things of this nature, our pleasure is, that there shall be no more places of representation nor companies of actors of plays, or operas, and recitations, music or representations by dancing and scenes and any other entertainments on the stage, in our Cities of London and Westminster, or in the liberties of them than the two to be now erected by virtue of this authority. Nevertheless, we do hereby by our authority royal strictly enjoin the said Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant that they do not at any time hereafter cause to be acted or represented any play, interlude, or opera, containing any matter of profanation, scurrility, or obscenity; and we do further hereby authorise and command the said Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant to peruse all plays that have been formerly written, and to expunge all profanities and scurrility from the same before they be represented or acted.
>
> Extract from the Warrant granted by Charles II on 21 August 1660

Its terms would be reaffirmed in 1662, with additions in the light of experience, by the delivery into the managers' hands of separate 'Letters Patent', thus initiating nearly two centuries of legal bickering about the duopoly rights of the current holders of the royal patent. While the authority of Killigrew and Davenant as patent-holders was made abundantly clear, the right to succession of their 'heirs and assigns' made the London theatre a hostage to familial and financial fortune. The disposal and vexed authority of the patents would be responsible for much that was inglorious in the subsequent history of the stage.

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Both managers started purposefully. Under the King's Men's banner, Killigrew recruited most of the experienced actors and was granted the rights to the majority of the 'old' repertoire, in which plays by Ben Jonson featured prominently alongside those conventionally ascribed to Beaumont and Fletcher. (The 1647 publication in folio of the *Comedies and Tragedies* under the supposed joint authorship of Beaumont and Fletcher had been one of the Interregnum's sparse contributions to dramatic literature.) Davenant's actors were generally younger and unproven, and his company had a greater dependence on new plays. It was a division temperamentally suited to both men: Killigrew could sit back and leave the theatrical leadership to Charles Hart (1625–83) and Michael Mohun (*c.*1616–84), who had both been actors during the reign of Charles I and had served in royalist armies during the Civil Wars, while Davenant, a 'hands-on' professional, could lead his inexperienced troupe from the front.

Documentation of the early years of the post-Restoration theatre is scanty, and there is nothing to tell us about the backstage life of the actors. That there was an element of competition between the two companies from the outset is suggested by the evidence that they both gave their opening performances on 5 November (as the anniversary of James I's survival of the Gunpowder Plot, this was a significant date in the Stuart calendar) 1660, though there is a possibility that this was a joint production. Either way, the rapidity of the operation is notable. Within a few months, Killigrew and Davenant had assembled their troupes, determined an initial repertoire and furnished a playhouse. They were in close collusion with the royal court, and it may have been Charles II's mischievous prompting that emboldened Killigrew to employ a woman (exactly who she was has not been established) to play Desdemona when the King's Men (transformed by the presence of a pioneering woman into the King's Company) staged *Othello* in December 1660. The risk would not have been taken without at least a nod from the pleasure-loving monarch, whose experience of plays was largely confined to European theatres in which women customarily took the female roles. Political astuteness may have been in operation, too. It would be some time before Puritan forces could regroup without risk to their property or lives. In the event, those who took moral exception to the presence of actresses remained silent or were overruled, and the ethos of the English theatre was permanently transformed.

If the new generation of actors had little experience, the actresses had none, and Davenant's decision to board four of them in his own house typifies his engagement with the Duke's Company. We can assume that he provided personal coaching. The novelty of actresses was the second publicity coup for the new theatres. The first was changeable scenery.

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