

Staging Restoration dramas: practical aspects of their performance

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ABSTRACT

The Restoration theatre had a great appeal since the surprising, ever-changing resources of those London productions aimed at turning the commercial stage into the 'Land of Enchantment' claimed by Tom Brown. This paper studies the texts of a series of plays premiered between 1660 and 1700, focusing particularly on stage directions and other indications of movement, sound and stagecraft, in an attempt to reassess the spectacular side of Restoration drama. The evidence gathered from those texts seems to confirm that such elements as special effects, machinery and other devices were essential, and very often outweighed the mere dramatic or literary aspect of the plays. This enables a present-day scholar to view them not only as straight dramas, either in the comic or tragic vein, but, above all, as lavish, money-making, successful commercial shows.

In Congreve's first comedy *The Old Bachelor* (1693),¹ Bellmour, as he tries to talk the reluctant Belinda into marrying him, remarks: "Alas! Courtship to Marriage, is but as the Musick in the Playhouse till the Curtain's drawn; but that once up, then opens the Scene of Pleasure," to which the addressee, who is not yet persuaded, replies "Oh, oh, no; rather Courtship to marriage, as a very witty Prologue to a very dull Play" (5.1.418-23). Those two similes seem particularly enlightening, not because of their satirical remarks on marriage, to be expected on the Restoration stage, but as they help us envisage the expectation built at the performance of each new play. The first speaker in the quote refers to the musical turn or overture, the second to the prologue, but both allude to elements that preceded the performance and were at the same time essential parts of it. Both music and prologue had in fact been designed to prepare the audience, anticipating what was in store for them if they only ventured to stay and sit through the entire show.²

¹ Dates of plays are those of their first performance.

² This paper deals with plays composed and/or published in the period 1660-1700, and designed for the patent playhouses.

As for the atmosphere to be expected backstage, if we are to believe the messages of most prologues, each first performance, whether that of a new play or the revival of an old one, would have entailed a nerve-wracking experience. It is true, however, that the authors of prologues tend to convey a slanted and often exaggerated view of the situation, but the recurrent references to their anxiety may have been well grounded, since a mere hissing, the banging of feet, a quarrel in the pit or a loud remark from the boxes might have easily wrecked the performance, and therefore the play. Critics and theatre historians have often cited Act IV of Shadwell's *A True Widow* (1678) to support this view, but the texts of many other plays may be alluded to as well. Hence the continuous appeals to the audience, asking them to be quiet, listen attentively and be responsive to the show. Elkanah Settle's Prologue to his operatic *The World in the Moon* (1697) "Spoken by a new Girl" seems to be the exception, rather than the rule:

They say Young Actors on the Stage appear
At their first Entry, with a trembling Fear.
And yet, methinks, by all that I can find,
The Ladies look so gay, and Men so kind;
That all my trembling Pains are vanish'd quite;
Are such fine Folks so terrible a Sight? (1-6)

The speaker's confidence here contrasts with the mood of Congreve's Epilogue to the aforementioned *The Old Bachelor*, in this case spoken by the famous Mrs. Barry; she is still anxious at the end of the performance and, curiously enough, she likens the production of a writer's first play to the loss of one's own virginity:

As a rash Girl, who will all Hazards run,
And be enjoy'd, tho' sure to be undone;
Soon as her Curiosity is over,
Would give the World she could her Toy recover:
So fares it with our Poet; and I'm sent
To tell you, he already does repent. (1-6)

The sexual simile serves here to stress both the risk run by a dramatist at his debut and the excitement of a person undergoing his/her initiation into the London theatre world.

In Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), Margery, the heroine, the first time she attends a theatre is enthralled, not so much by what she hears, as by what she actually sees on stage: "Indeed I was a-weary

of the play – but I liked hugely the actors! They are the goodliest, proper'st men, sister" (2.1.20-21). Documentary records of the age point to the lavish aspect of Restoration playhouses, especially when compared with those of former times. Samuel Pepys visited the Vere Street premises on 20 November 1660 and regarded it as "the finest playhouse, I believe, that ever was in England" (*Diary* 1: 297). On the other hand, Richard Flecknoe, while boasting in 1664 that the new stages had "arriv'd to the height of Magnificence," complained about the spectacular nature of most new plays which, in his view, were "striving now to make them more for sight, then hearing" (*A Short Discourse of the English Stage*). On 12 February 1667, Samuel Pepys reported having heard Killigrew assure him "That the stage is now ... a thousand times better and more glorious than ever heretofore" (*Diary* 8: 55). A whole series of reports by such foreign visitors as Chappuzeau (1667), Prince Cossimo III of Tuscany (1669), François Brunet (1676) and so on, praise both stage and house, which are described in quite flattering terms (see Nagler 1959: 203-11).

At the same time, and from the early years of the Restoration, theatre people tried to find moral and social arguments in support of a profession that had been banned for so long. So, a character in the Duchess of Newcastle's *Youth's Glory, and Death's Banquet, Part I* (composed 1658, published 1662) states: "Stages and publick Theaters, were first ordained and built, for the education of noble youth, where they might meet to practise how to behave themselves civilly, modestly, gently, comely, gracefully, manly and majestically" and then she adds "Theaters were not only Schools to learn or practise in, but publick patterns to take example from" (1.3).

Tom Brown's later account (1700) describes the Restoration playhouse as an "enchanted island," adding that it is "The Land of Enchantment, the Country of Metamorphosis" where everything is performed "with the greatest speed imaginable. Here, in the twinkling of an Eye, you shall see Men transform'd into Demi-gods, and Goddesses made as true Flesh and Blood as our Common Women" (Nagler 247 and 250).

That sense of wonder, and the feeling of anticipation at what awaited theatregoers as they went into a playhouse, was very likely responsible for the commercial success of the Restoration show business, from its early days to the late 1690's, and even well beyond the eighteenth century. In a theatre run on a professional basis, success meant profit, and both success and profit were the result of the managers' ability to draw fresh audiences and play to packed houses.

At the time when there were two patent companies, that is, the period between 1660 and 1682, and then, again, after 1695, it was the policy of each company to exceed and surpass their rival by offering more attractive shows, which in practice meant inserting pageantry and better and more striking visual and sound effects, even if they invariably denied doing so and accused their rival of that very practice instead. In fact, the Prologue to Arrowsmith's *The Reformation*, staged by the Duke's Company at Dorset Garden in 1673, mocks the King's Men for their use of rhymed verse and, above all, for their excess of spectacular effects: "Here's nothing like a holy Reformation, / Nor drum, nor trumpet, though so much in fashion / In all admired plays of th' new translation" (6-8). However, one year later, Dryden, speaking on behalf of the King's at Drury Lane, uses a similar argument against the Dorset Garden Theatre in the Prologue written for the opening of the second Drury Lane (26 March 1674): "Great Neighbours enviously promote Excess, / While they impose their Splendor on the less" (1:149; 23-24)³. It must be borne in mind that the Duke's was at that time engaged in such operatic productions as *Macbeth* or *The Empress of Morocco* (1673), and *The Tempest* (1674). But in spite of this evidence, the anonymous author of *The Woman Turned Bully*, also performed by the Duke's Men in 1675, still boasts in the Prologue that "'Tis plain, well meant; hardly a Song or Dance, / Scene, nor Machine, its Credit to advance" (11-12); however, the text of *The Woman Turned Bully* includes precisely several songs, dances, scene-changes and other visual and sound effects.

The quotations already cited and numerous passages from other plays seem to suggest that the traditional, scholarly distinction between two types of Restoration dramas, that is, straight and realistic on the one hand, spectacular and fantastic on the other, may not be so operative after all, even if current handbooks still dwell on it.

The two patent London companies had to compete hard with each other to draw to their houses a potential audience which at the turn of the century was still relatively small. Besides, theatregoers were often diverted towards other less costly, similarly enjoyable pastimes, such as fairs, civil pageants, social gatherings and the like. The Prologue to Thomas D'Urfey's *Massaniello, Part II*, (1699) mentions yet another even more fearful rival, namely, fine weather:

³ Numbers allude to volume, page and lines in all references.

The Season too our Interest does oppose,
Warm Weather and May-Fair are Martial Foes;
For whilst th' Great at th'Park in Coaches Loll,
And Dames of humbler Fortunes foot the Mall,
And Citts divert themselves at Miller's Droll,
We strut alas, who cease no Pains nor Care,
To empty Boxes, and to Benches bare. (8-14)

At the same time, each company had to compete with their audiences for attention. It was basically a subtle struggle between stage and house, as players and patrons engaged in their separate and not always compatible tasks, namely, the former enacting their parts in a convincing manner, the latter gazing at each other – the house remained lit throughout the performance –, gossiping, buying oranges, visiting dressing rooms, engaging in commercial and/or sexual transactions, and the like. Samuel Pepys alludes in his famous *Diary* to performances he attended in the 1660s but could not pay much attention to as other patrons talked in a loud voice or quarrelled in the pit, went behind the scenes, or simply flirted with other members of the audience.

No wonder then that managers, players and dramatists all concurred in introducing whatever innovations might make their shows attractive and entertaining. They often claimed to be writing or producing dramas in the spirit of Ben Jonson's comedies, or according to Shakespearean patterns when, in fact, they were simply following their own whimsical criteria and, of course, their personal instinct for business. That is why they did not hesitate to introduce musical interludes and dances in such straight dramas as *Hamlet* or *Volpone*; they turned *The Tempest* into several operas and burlesques; a happy ending was provided for *King Lear*; two different versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, comic and tragic, were ready and available to be staged depending on the changing mood of the audience, and so on and so forth.

Besides, dramatists and players very often expressed their views in contradictory terms, for they condemned the very spectacular practices they were themselves guilty of. For instance, in Edward Howard's tragicomedy *The Women's Conquest*, very likely performed by the Duke's Men in 1670, there were three prologues. The first one, spoken in prose by such first-rate comedians as Angel, Underhill and Nokes, served to attack buffoonery and slapstick, which were condemned as cheap resources for laughter; however as those actors

spoke their speeches they also danced, leapt, laughed, made grimaces and funny gestures, and played mouth-music. After that, the text indicates that there is a musical turn, and a second prologue begins. According to the stage direction, a noise is heard “with Thunder and Lightning, at which time Ben Johnson personated rises from below.” What follows is the ‘infernal’ apparition of Ben Jonson’s ghost, who rises from under the stage, through a trap, to speak a verse prologue in support of his own views on comedy; he also pokes fun at the negative influence of France, that he blames for having brought about farce and slapstick. But, of course, the device of bringing up a ghost in a play contradicts the very rules set down by Ben Jonson himself, in his well-known 1616 Prologue to *Every Man in his Humour*:

He rather prays, you will be pleased to see
One such, to-day, as other plays should be.
Where neither Chorus wafts you o’er the seas;
Nor creaking throne comes down, the boys to please. (13-16)

After Jonson, an unspecified character speaks a third prologue in which, again, the comic principles of Ben Jonson’s theatre are invoked, even if playwright Howard feels compelled to excuse himself: “You see what little Arts w’are fain to try, / To give a Prologue some variety” (1-2).

Variety in prologues was a necessary resource to attract the audience’s very often reluctant attention. The pattern of Restoration prologues was of course a series of couplets spoken by one of the players, in or out of character, asking the audience for a positive response – the conventional *captatio benevolentiae* motif – ; however, dramatists and producers very often departed from that formula in order to insert other elements. For instance, prose speeches and dialogues, slapstick and buffoonery, ghosts, songs, dances, and even the occasional appearance of a non-professional player. Dryden himself, while pretending to be writing in a far more refined age than the Elizabethan, makes famous actor Betterton rise from under the stage in the role of William Shakespeare’s ghost to speak the Prologue to his *Troilus and Cressida* (1679); such apparition is only an excuse for the author to boast that he is following in the footsteps of the Bard, even though he surpasses him for, he argues, the model – Shakespeare’s text – was only a “rough-drawn Play” (13: 249; 13). Dryden would not be alone in making the spirit of Shakespeare speak a prologue; Oldmixon, for instance, introduced a similar device at the turn of the century, and

Farquhar alludes to it in a derisive tone in his second Prologue to *The Constant Couple* (1699): "They Fright the Boxes with Old Shakespear's Ghost" (1: 89; 28).

A rising ghost or, rather, a burlesque version of it, would be employed by Dryden himself in the well-known and often cited Epilogue to his tragedy *Tyrannick Love, or the Royal Martyr* (1669), for as Nell Gwynn, who is lying on the stage, is going "to be carried off dead by the Bearers," she rises of a sudden and complains: "Hold, are you mad? you damn'd confounded Dog,/ I am to rise, and speak the Epilogue" (1-2), after which she addresses the audience in such mischievous terms:

I come, kind Gentlemen, strange news to tell ye,
I am the Ghost of poor departed Nelly.
Sweet Ladies, be not frighted, I'll be civil,
I'm what I was, a little harmless Devil. (10: 192; 3-6)

She then asks for the applause which she undoubtedly got, particularly after calling herself "poor ... Nelly" and "harmless Devil." However, the practice of allowing "dead" characters to rise again – at least to speak epilogues – must have gone out of fashion at some point, for one of the speakers in the Epilogue to John Banks's tragedy *Cyrus the Great* (1695) complains: "Lausaria's dead, Panthea too is slain,/ And wou'd you have dead Bodies rise again?" (4-5).

Nell Gwyn, who obviously spoke the aforementioned lines out of character, was after all a professional player, but there is evidence that a prologue was once delivered by a non-professional person, thus contributing to blur even further the boundaries between fact and fiction, house and stage. As a matter of fact, well-known orange woman and common prostitute Betty Mackarel made a short appearance in the Introduction to Duffett's *The Mock-Tempest* (1674), just to speak to the gentlemen in the pit, while famous actor Joseph Haines, after addressing her as "Ariel" made lewd remarks like these: "Think of thy high calling, Betty, now th'art here, / They gaze and wish, but cannot reach thy Sphere, / Though ev'ry one could squeeze thy Orange there" (17-19). If she was at that moment impersonating a spirit, the allusion to her 'sphere' might suggest her descent from an upper level. The orange joke, on the other hand, is quite self-explanatory. No wonder then that Jeremy Collier, in *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) considered prologues and epilogues "Scandalous to the last degree" for, as he explained, "Now here properly speaking the

Actors quit the Stage, and remove Fiction into Life. Here they converse with the Boxes, and Pit, and address directly to the Audience" (13).

Not only actors, but even animals could play a part in, at least, epilogues, especially after the aforementioned Joseph Haines decided to deliver his lines on the forestage while riding on a donkey. He apparently addressed his speech both to audience and animal, thus likening one to the other, which people then apparently found amusing. Those ass-epilogues became so popular that Haines had imitators in such actors as Pinkethman, Cibber, Shuter, Doggett or Wilson; besides, two engravings of Haines delivering ass-epilogues have been preserved (see *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors 1973-1993*, 7: 13-17).

Those donkey epilogues must have been, however, the only cases of live animals being employed in dramatic performances, for although animals are required in several other plays, there is no evidence that they were actually real, and we may assume that dummies were very likely used instead, notwithstanding the stage direction in D'Urfey's *Don Quixote, Part I* (1694): "The Curtain Drawn, Don Quixote is seen Arm'd Cap-a-pee, upon his Horse Rosinante; and Sancho by him upon Dapple his Ass, Eating a bunch of Haws" (1.1: 1).

A different case is, for instance, Edward Howard's *The Man of Newmarket* (1678): "The Scene opens with the 3rd and 4th Jockey mounted on the shapes of two Horses" (4.1.1), which hints at the difficulty of having live horses on stage. That is why in Shadwell's *Epsom Wells* (1672) Clodpate points to an offstage mare which he describes in great detail, even if the audience cannot see it (3.4.110-17). Still in such a late comedy as Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* (1698) Lucinda's dog remains unseen, for according to a stage direction, "The Dog howls behind the Scenes", after which she cries, "I must run to the rescue of my poor Dog," and then goes offstage (1: 3.1: 38). There is evidence, however, that a live dog was hired for a 1715 revival of *Epsom Wells* (*The London Stage* 2, 1960: cvi). Several other late seventeenth-century plays, especially tragedies and operas, include animals such as monkeys and bears, but in most cases there is enough textual evidence to consider that they were played by actors in disguise.

Spectacular devices on the Restoration stages varied according to time and genre. They were still kept to a bare minimum in the 1660s, and then, after the opening of the Dorset Garden Theatre in 1671 and the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane in 1672, Italian-style machines were imported from France and that, together with new techniques in painted scenery, allowed for more complex stagecraft, which developed

even further in the 1680s and 90s. It goes without saying that a greater number of visual and sound effects would have been employed in tragedies, tragi-comedies, musical dramas or operas and, above all, in the masques and supernatural shows, very often inserted as plays-within-plays in those dramas. But straight comedies, even the realistic ones and the so called "comedies of manners" also employed a considerable amount of spectacular effects and stage tricks, as a close study of those very texts clearly reveals.

A performance was at that time a complex though well planned ritual that began some time before the opening of the play proper, that is, at the moment when doors opened and the first patrons entered the playhouse; probably not later than half past one in the afternoon, as performances usually began at around three. Then those patrons would take their unreserved seats in one of the four different areas allocated in the house – that is, pit and boxes, lower and upper galleries – according to ticket price. A front curtain would hang from the ceiling, thus masking the entire stage. Patrons would talk to each other, would buy oranges and so on, while some stage hands would light the candles over the stage (there is scant evidence of footlights having been used at that time). The Introduction to Richard Flecknoe's *The Damoiselles à la Mode* (1667) has a very specific direction in that sense: "The Candles lighted, before the Curtain's drawn, Enter one of the Actors ..."

Once the stage was lit, a group of musicians – very often half the members of the royal band, known as the "The King's Twenty Four Violins" – would play a musical turn or overture which, far from being a mere decorative element, amounted to a separate and often free entertainment; in fact, since payment could be put off until the end of the first act, people often listened to the overture and then left the theatre. Several dramatists of the age cast an ironic view on that practice; Settle, for instance, makes Frank Wildblood admit in *The World in the Moon*: "I gallop round the Pit, hear the last Musick, pick up a Mask, and carry her off before the Play; and so save the poor whore her Half Crown" (1: 3).

After the musical turn came the Prologue, usually spoken in front of the aforementioned curtain. As the last word of the prologue was said, the audience would expect the curtain to go up. Dilke explains in the Epistle Dedicatory to his comedy *The City Lady* (1697) that "The tedious waiting to have the Curtain drawn, after the Prologue was spoke, occasion'd by Mr. Underhill's violent Bleeding, put the Audience out of Humour ...". On some occasions, however, the prologue required incidental music, in which case the band would still

play on after the curtain had gone up. In fact, a stage direction in the Prologue to Robert Howard's tragedy *The Indian Queen* (1664) states: "As the Musick plays a soft Air, the Curtain rises softly, and discovers an Indian Boy and Girl sleeping under two Plantain-Trees; and when the Curtain is almost up, the Musick turns into a Tune expressing an Alarm, at which the Boy wakes and speaks." Otherwise, the band would play incidental music throughout the performance, as a stage direction in Manley's tragedy *The Royal Mischief* (1696) makes it clear: "The curtain flies up to the sound of flutes, and hoboyes, and discovers the river Phasis, several little gilded boats, with musick in them" (4.1.1).

The most common procedure however must have been music first, then a spoken prologue, then the opening of curtain to make room for the first scene, which usually involved the "discovery" of characters and a first setting. Edward Ravenscroft's comedy *The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman* (1672) opens thus: "The Curtain draws up and discovers the Musick Master sitting at a Table surrounded by Musicians ..." (1.1.1), and a much later comedy such as Crawford's *Courtship à la Mode* (1700) has as its first stage direction: "The Curtain drawn, discovers Sir John Winmore in his Night-gown" (1.1.1).

Alternatively, the front curtain would go up after the musical overture, and so the prologue would be spoken or enacted in front of the first setting, as the Poet, a character in the "Praelude" to Ravenscroft's tragedy *The Italian Husband* (1697), remarks: "See, the Prologue's going to be spoke, the Curtain is drawing up." In any case, both, prologue and epilogue, would have had to be delivered on the forestage or apron, that is, the downstage area, nearer the audience, where most of the business – at least in the 1660s and 70s – seems to have taken place. The upstage area was then known as 'the scene', to distinguish it from the 'stage' or 'theatre', for such were the Restoration terms for the apron, forestage, or downstage area. There were, consequently, two distinct and separate acting spaces, namely, the scene on the one hand, and the stage – or theatre – on the other. As time went on and as the lighting system improved, the upstage area or scene was gradually used for acting as well. In 1675, however, the apron or stage must have still remained the only properly lit area, since a direction in *The Woman Turned Bully* says: "The Scene opens and discovers Trupenny and Clarke, in play"; then Trupenny, holding a pack of cards, asks: "Come, sir, shuffle: But first let's draw the Table more to the light; Gad I have drunk so much, I can scarcely see" and then a new stage direction confirms that "They bring the Table forward upon the Stage" (4.3).

A commonly accepted view is that, once the front curtain went up at the opening of a performance, it only came down at the end, shortly before the epilogue or right after it, just as actor Underhill seems to imply when in Motteux's comedy *Love's a Jest* (1696) he says to actor Bowen: "Now for the Epilogue," but as Bowen replies "There's none I think", Underhill concludes "Let down the Curtain then, and let's go drink" (see Epilogue). However, there is strong evidence that the curtain could go up and down several times throughout the performance whenever there was a painted scene that had to be "discovered" – mostly in tragedies and operas – or simply to mask the view of a particular effect. In Orrery's *The Black Prince* (1667), for instance, "The Curtain falls" at the end of Act 1 and is "drawn up" at the opening of Act 2. Apart from the front curtain, secondary or smaller curtains were often employed in the manner of an Elizabethan traverse; they were sometimes referred to as "the hangings," or even the "traverse".

Aphra Behn uses curtains in several of her plays. In her tragicomedy *The Forc'd Marriage* (1670), they are needed for the dumb show that represents a wedding: "The Curtain must be let down; and soft Musick must play: the Curtain being drawn up, discovers a Scene of a Temple" (5: 2.1.1). Then, in *The Young King* (1679), a direction specifies: "The Curtain is let down – being drawn up, discovers Orsames seated on a Throne asleep" (7: 3.1.1); and in her farce *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687), "Scene changes to the Inside of the House. The Front of the Scene is only a Curtain or Hangings to be drawn up at Pleasure" (7: 2.1.68). In the Duchess of Newcastle's comedy *The Bridals* (composed ca. 1662, published 1665), Lady Amorous can be heard, but not seen, for she is surrounded by hangings, and as a speaker inquires, "Where is the Lady Coy, the now Lady Amorous?," her Maid replies, "There; my Lady is within those Curtains" (2.2: 18).⁴

Much more puzzling seems to be the use of a 'silk curtain', required in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), for Angellica and Moretta appear on a balcony or window above while several men gaze from below, and then those women "draw a Silk Curtain" (5: 2.1.8). Another similar allusion may be found in Ravenscroft's *The Italian Husband*, when a character is being murdered and a direction reads "A little Silk Curtain falls to screen him" (3.1: 35). The type of effect sought by that means is not explained in the texts, but silk was very likely used in lieu

⁴ *The Bridals* was never staged and therefore such reference to curtains may not be regarded as conclusive evidence of their use in Restoration theatres.

of the modern gauze-cloth so as to produce a transparency effect which might have contributed to enhance the sexy profile of Angellica in the former case, or the gory silhouette of a tortured body in the latter.

Curtains, hangings or a traverse were convenient devices to mask the upstage area, while stage-hands were busy working behind, arranging the painted flats or the necessary props for a 'discovery', especially when, in tragedies, a tableau with mutilated bodies or a similarly horrifying view had to be shown. In fact, in Settle's *Cambyses* (1671), Cambyses himself says: "Draw back that Curtain. / Take your Lover there"; after which a direction explains: "The Scene opens, and on a Table appears the Body of Osiris, beheaded; & an Executioner with the suppos'd head in a vessel of blood" (3.4: 47). Similarly, in John Dryden's *Tyrannick Love* Maximin commands: "Draw the Curtain, and let death appear ..." and then a direction reads: "The Scene opens and shews the Wheel" (10: 5.1. 242-43).

It was sometimes necessary to have characters speaking in front of the curtain – a device which in current theatre practice is known as an "act-drop" – so as to allow stage-hands the time for a scene change; so in John Caryl's tragedy *The English Princess or The Death of Richard III* (1667) two characters enter "at one of the Doors before the Curtain," and as they speak, another character makes his entrance through the other stage door, remains in front of the curtain and then speaks (4: 8: 47). However, in some cases, the traverse or curtain was used simply to conceal a character who had just been murdered; in Dryden's *The Duke of Guise* (1682), a traverse is drawn when Guise, who has been repeatedly stabbed, lies dead (14: 5.6.4).

Actors and backstage hands have always found curtains useful for a series of purposes; for instance, to look at the audience through a convenient peep-hole, as the Epilogue to Dryden's *St. Martin-Mar-all* (1667) hints: "But when the Curtain's down we peep and see/ A Jury of the Wits who still stay late, / And in their Club decree the poor Plays fate" (9: 8-10); also, to prompt players when there is need for it, as in John Caryl's *Sir Salomon, or the Cautious Coxcomb* (1670), for Sir Salomon says: "my person shall not appear / upon the Stage in this Tragedy; I'll only prompt behind the Curtain" (5: 80).

Those stages however, with or without the aid of curtains or hangings, were expected to show something new every time, as productions aimed at taking the audience by surprise. The system of painted flats that opened in the middle and could be moved sideways, allowed for a series of painted scenes to appear in a matter of seconds, thus turning a scene-change into an enjoyable stage trick carried out in

full view of the audience. So, stage directions such as “scene opens and discovers so and so” or “scene changes to such and such a place” gradually became common in the texts. The effects sought in operatic plays would have been more spectacular, just as the stage direction in Dryden’s *King Arthur* (1691) points out: “Cupid waves his Wand, upon which the Scene opens, and discovers a Prospect of Ice and Snow to the end of the Stage” (16: 3.2.305) Then, by the turn of the century, stagecraft must have become rather complex, as the direction in Settle’s *The World in the Moon* seems to imply: “The Flat-Scene draws and discovers Three grand Arches of Clouds extending to the Roof of the House, terminated with a Prospect of Cloud-work, all fill’d with the Figures of Fames and Cupids” (1: 6).

Comedies must have aimed at exhibiting similar effects, for in John Lacy’s *The Dumb Lady* (1669), “The scene opens, and the Squire is discovered hanging in a cradle” (5.1: 112), while in Etherege’s *The Man of Mode* (1676), “The scene opens with the fiddles playing a country dance” (4.1.1). In Otway’s *The Soldier’s Fortune* (1680) a setting representing a house suddenly opens, thus allowing the audience to see inside: “The Scene opens the middle of the House and discovers Sir Jolly and the Lady putting Beaugard in order as if he were dead” (2: 4.559) In Dilke’s *The City Lady*, “Scene opens, and the Company goes in to a Banquet, flourish of Trumpets as they lead up ...” (3: 23). A discovery scene in Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* (1676) seems to be particularly striking: “Scene opens, and discovers Sir Nicholas learning to swim upon a table, Sir Formal and the Swimming Master standing by” (2.2.1).

The stage business of Restoration plays was not only carried out on the stage itself, but also at an upper level. The windows or balconies over the stage doors were quite useful in street scenes, since they enabled players to “enter above,” and either comment on whatever was going on below, or address characters who remained in the street. A balcony is in fact quite prominent in several scenes of Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*, and it plays a significant role in Thomas Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* and *Epsom Wells*.

Machines facilitated the flying of objects and people, and also the descent of characters from an upper level. In Francis Fane’s *Love in the Dark* (1675) an Angel sings a song while being held up in the Air, presumably by ropes attached to a pulley (3.1: 41). In Dryden’s *Albion and Albanus* (1685) “Mercury descends in a Chariot drawn by Ravens” (15: 1.1.1). In Duffett’s *The Empress of Morocco* (1673) the Epilogue is “Spoken by Heccate and three Witches, according to the Famous Mode

of Macbeth" and in order to do so, "Three Witches fly over the Pit Riding upon Beesomes", after which "Heccate descends over the Stage in a Glorious Charriot, adorn'd with Pictures of Hells and Devils ... etc" (29-30). How could they have managed to make witches, riding on brooms, fly over the pit in as early a date as 1673 is not easy to figure out. That would not be the only case of flying witches, since in Act 5 of Shadwell's *The Lancashire Witches* (1681) several of them fly over the stage, "mew and spit like Cats" and scratch other characters (Shadwell 1927. 4: 177).

A set of traps on the stage floor enabled characters and objects to rise from a lower level; they could then appear as if they were coming from hell or an underground area. Those traps could also sink, thus dropping people into a hole or room beneath and, by so doing, they would seem to vanish suddenly from view. Although prompters and stage-hands normally used whistles to signal any scene-change or stage business, the banging or stamping of a character's feet on the stage boards seems to have become a common procedure to warn stage-hands that they had to set the trap-lifts in motion. In Act 2 of Orrery's comedy *Guzman* (staged 1669, published 1693) they may have done precisely that, as Francisco, who wears a "Magical Habit", "Knocks with his Foot, and four Boys appear within the Scene" (2.1: 13).

Thomas Duffett seems to have been quite fond of traps, since he employed them in his burlesque plays. For instance, in the second Prologue to *The Empress of Morocco* he makes "The Ghost of Labas the Corn-cutter" ascend and then make a speech, after which he descends (22-51). In *The Mock Tempest*, Stephania whistles, and three Wench enter, but as they are told to go down into the cellar, they do so through a trap, only to reappear by the same means after Stephania has whistled again (1.1.49-51). In *Psyche Debauch'd* (1675) a ghost and a woman "with her head in her hand" rise from below, sing a song and then vanish, presumably by sinking into a trap (4.3.246-60).

In Thomas Otway's *The Soldier's Fortune*, a direction indicates: "Beaugard Rises up like a Ghost at a trap door, just before Sir David" (2: 5.1.444); Sir David, who is by now dead scared, falls on his face, but when he looks again the ghost is no longer there, which very likely points to a quick descent by a convenient trap. Of all traps employed in Restoration plays there is probably none as effective as that of Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*, when Clarinda and Miranda get rid of such bores as Sir Formal and Sir Samuel by dropping them, one after the other, into a "vault" situated under a sinking trap (3.4.124 and 129). Then they reappear, now inside that vault, groping in the dark; Sir

Formal tries to rape Sir Samuel – who is dressed up as a woman – and as the latter screams and asks for help, the former warns him “Be not obstreperous, none can hear you” (4.1.59).

Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* seems to need two traps. As Blunt undresses before going to bed with Lucetta, she asks him to put out the light; he does so and at that very moment the bed descends; Blunt then gropes in the dark, looking for the vanished bed, but he falls or, rather, sinks, into a trap, and is no longer seen (5: 3.2.45-46).

Of all characteristic elements of Restoration drama, music, song and dance were particularly relevant and even compulsory, since no performance could do without musical turns. Apart from the music of overtures, fiddles, pipes or drums were very often played behind the scenes, serving as incidental music. At the same time, musicians were very often required to play on stage, as a party or similar social function was being enacted, or while songs or dances were performed. Most Restoration comedies, farces and tragedies include songs, which were very often sung behind the scenes; alternatively, a person would just come on stage, sing the song and then go out. In both cases, the singer would have been a hired professional singer. In many plays, however, songs were performed by the actors and actresses themselves, as indeed singing seems to have been then part of a player’s training.

Audiences always appreciated good music and song, but they liked dances even better. That is why in D’Avenant’s tragedy *Macbeth* (1664) witches sing and then dance before Macduff (2.5.29-83). Critics and historians often tend to overlook the fact that after Pinchwife’s last speech in Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*, there is “A dance of cuckolds” (5.4.429), or that in Congreve’s *The Old Bachelor* there is song and then “a Dance of Anticks” (3.2.25), or that Act 5, scene 4 of Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* consists of a fancy dress ball, to name but a few well-known cases.

Morris dances associated with a May-pole or May-game festival must have been quite popular with the London audiences as well, for they keep recurring in plays. They in fact take up most of Act 2 in John Leaned’s *The Country Innocence* (1677), which is set in a country village (see 17-18); they also mark the opening of Duffett’s *Psyche Debauch’d* (see 1.182). Such recurrence of morris dances may be the result of their having been banned during the Interregnum, after which they came back with a vengeance.

Playwrights however used any pretext to insert dances in their plays. The extant texts include dances of ghosts and spirits, of furies, milkmaids, watermen, jockeys, shepherds and shepherdesses, the four

seasons, Chinese men and women, Cupids, Egyptians, sailors, Bacchanals and so on. Dancing animals, or rather, players dressed up as animals, must have been favourite turns, since there are references to dances of hobby horses, monkeys, “A Dance of Bears, among which is the white Bear of Norwich” (in Duffett’s *Psyche Debauch’d*, 3.2.53) and, surprisingly enough, even a “Dance of Butterflies” may be found in Thomas Betterton’s *The Prophetess* (1690; 4: 47), to name only a few.

This is so far a mere survey of some of the most common devices employed in Restoration performances, but it may suffice to prove how difficult it is to draw the line between literary or straight dramas and spectacular pageantry, since producers, players and dramatists all aimed at offering shows that might be regarded as innovative, spectacular and attractive. Dialogue alone does not seem to have enticed London patrons to throng to the playhouses, and so, other resources had to be employed as well. After all, theatres are, by definition, sight-seeing places, and it seems that the Restoration theatre had much more to offer than traditional handbooks would give them credit for. Whether those stages actually looked like “enchanted islands” or not, may still be a matter of conjecture, but there is little doubt that many people got caught up in their magic spell, as otherwise the theatre would not have remained a thriving financial enterprise for so long and in such changing political and social conditions.

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