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Reopening the Theatres in 1660

Events, as they happen, are messier and more unpredictable than they later appear, after historians have established the narratives into which those events must logically fit. The English Restoration stage is no exception to the conforming pressures of historiography. Just as the closure of the theatres by the Puritans in 1642 curtailed, but never totally suppressed, theatrical activity in London for eighteen years, the reopening of the theatres in 1660 was less a total reopening – public performances were held in London months before Sir William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew received their royal patents – than the imposition upon the English theatrical profession of new regulatory, legal and, most importantly, artistic structures. None of those structures fell easily into place. All were openly resisted.

When Charles II entered London in celebrated triumph on 29 May 1660, his thirtieth birthday, the city's theatrical landscape was not barren, but populated by diverse shoots and saplings eager to grow. In anticipation of the monarch's return – and the inevitable lifting of prohibitions against the theatre – groups of London actors formed themselves into different companies, essentially seeking to revive both the pre-Civil War playhouses and the acting conventions suited to those playhouses. Those conventions formed a strong living

memory for older actors like Michael Mohun, who trained as a boy actor for Christopher Beeston's company at the Cockpit in Drury Lane and later became a member of Queen Henrietta Maria's Men. Mohun, who had faithfully served the royalist cause as a military officer, returned to the theatre in 1659 when he assembled a group of mostly veteran actors – among them, William Wintershall, Robert Shatterall, William Cartwright, Walter Clun, Charles Hart and Nicholas Burt – to perform at the Red Bull in Clerkenwell, an open-air playhouse that recalled the amphitheatre style of the Globe, Rose and Fortune Theatres.¹

The bookseller John Rhodes, a former wardrobe-keeper for the King's Men at the Blackfriars Theatre, formed a company of young actors – including Thomas Betterton, Edward Kynaston and James Nokes – who staged plays at the indoor Cockpit (or Phoenix) Theatre in Drury Lane. The 1660 production of *Pericles* at the Cockpit, with the young Betterton in the title role, marks the first recorded appearance of Shakespeare on the Restoration stage.²

William Beeston (son of Christopher), who had the most experience of all, set up a third troupe at the indoor Salisbury Court Theatre. During the Interregnum, the younger Beeston had unsuccessfully tried to re-establish Beeston's Boys (a popular troupe consisting mainly of boy actors that performed from 1637 to 1642) at the Cockpit and in 1652 had been granted title to what remained of the Salisbury Court Theatre. Located west of St Paul's Cathedral and between the Fleet River and the Thames, Salisbury Court was the last playhouse built before the Civil War. In 1660 Beeston mortgaged his lease to restore the dilapidated theatre and for a while succeeded in reconstituting his company of young actors.

Under what legal authority were these companies established and permitted to give public performances? Prior to 1642, London theatre companies were licensed by the Master of the Revels, an official in the Lord Chamberlain's office who controlled the theatrical profession not just by censoring scripts but also by issuing licenses for acting companies,

permitting (or forbidding) the construction of new playhouses, and closing all playhouses during outbreaks of plague. When the theatres were closed in 1642, the office then belonged to Sir Henry Herbert, who had been making a good living from the fees he collected for approving playscripts and licensing acting companies. During the Interregnum, however, the position of Master of the Revels became dormant, such that when Mohun, Rhodes and the younger Beeston formed their companies in anticipation of the restored monarchy, they did so under no authority but their own.

Their freedom did not last long. One of the first positions in the royal household that Charles II re-established was Master of the Revels. On 20 June 1660, less than a month after the king's return – and before the awarding of exclusive patents to Killigrew and Davenant – Sir Henry Herbert was sworn in to resume his former office. Eager to reassert powers that had been in abeyance for eighteen years, Sir Henry demanded that the resurgent companies – which were already staging plays, drawing audiences, and earning money – obtain licenses from him and pay him fees for each play they staged. The acting companies, following the old protocols, dutifully entered into agreements with the reinstated Master of the Revels.

Beeston, who managed an acting company before the Civil War, and thus knew in detail the traditional licensing arrangements, moved quickly to acknowledge Sir Henry's authority. In June 1660 he received a license from the Master of the Revels 'to continue and constitute the said house called Salisbury Court Playhouse into a playhouse', where he was permitted to stage 'comedies, tragedies, or tragi-comedies, pastorals and interludes'. In granting Beeston's license, Sir Henry underlined the continuity of theatrical regulation: 'the allowance of plays, the ordering of players and playmakers [i.e., playwrights], and the permission for erecting of playhouses' have belonged 'time out of mind' to the 'Master of his Majesty's Office of the Revels'.³ Beeston agreed to pay Sir Henry four pounds a week when his company acted at Salisbury Court. Rhodes did the same for his actors at the

Cockpit. By the end of the summer, Michael Mohun and his troupe at the Red Bull – the most important company, because led by experienced actors – agreed to pay Sir Henry ten pounds for allowing the company to perform, supplemented by payments of forty shillings ‘for every new play’ and twenty shillings for ‘every revived play’, consistent with the ‘fees anciently belonging to the Master of the Revels’.⁴

In those first exciting months of resumed activity, many aspects of the theatrical profession as it had once been were indeed ‘restored’: Mohun, Rhodes, and Beeston had all worked in London theatres prior to their closure in 1642; the Red Bull, the Cockpit and Salisbury Court were all pre-Civil War playhouses; Mohun’s company consisted mainly of veteran performers; Beeston’s troupe revived the earlier tradition of boy and adolescent actors; by necessity, the repertoire was drawn from the old stock of plays; and Sir Henry Herbert once more exercised legal and financial control over London’s theatrical world. Nobody was casting actresses. Nobody was constructing elaborate scenery. Nobody was building new theatres. Nobody was adapting Shakespeare. The whole infrastructure of the pre-Civil War theatre seemed poised to resurrect itself. All that would soon change – but not without a fight.

Patents granted to Davenant and Killigrew

Sir Henry Herbert’s hopes for a smooth return to the theatrical profession as it had been constituted and regulated prior to 1642 – to say nothing of the aspirations of Michael Mohun, John Rhodes, and William Beeston for their own acting companies – were threatened by Charles II’s decision in the summer of 1660 to award patents to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant, granting them exclusive rights to produce theatre in London. Consequentially, any acting company in the capital not led by Killigrew or Davenant would be shut down.

This one unique decision redirected the course of English theatre history for nearly two centuries and guaranteed that the future of the London stage would not look anything like its past.

Why did Charles II impose a monopoly on stage productions in London just as the theatrical profession was emerging from years spent in shadows? Why curtail performances so drastically at the very moment when playhouses regained their freedom? It bears recalling that in the years immediately prior to Parliament's closure of the theatres in 1642 only a handful of acting companies in London were financially viable, a clear sign that theatre was already losing its popular appeal. Upon the reopening of the theatres in 1660, it was, therefore, less a question of artificially capping the number of theatre companies – the numbers had already declined in the pre-Civil War era – than of putting the theatrical profession into close alignment with the reinstated Stuart court.⁵ After all, the king, far from being an enemy of the stage (that role had been ferociously undertaken by Puritans) was its great champion and patron. No English monarch has ever been so intimately identified with the professional theatre as Charles II.

The courtier Thomas Killigrew, who in 1647 had followed the future Charles II into exile on the Continent, was rewarded for his loyalty by being named Groom of the Bedchamber in 1660 and also by being granted, along with Davenant, the exclusive right to stage plays in London. Killigrew had written some dramas before the Civil War and, according to Pepys, had played bit roles at the Red Bull in his youth. Yet it was Davenant who boasted the more impressive theatrical pedigree; moreover, he already possessed a claim to a royal patent. The King's Men had performed some of Davenant's early plays at the Blackfriars beginning in the late 1620s (just over a decade after Shakespeare's death) and continuing until 1640. But as we noted previously, it was Davenant's collaboration with Inigo Jones on the lavish and innovative Stuart court masques at the Banqueting House in Whitehall – Jones designed the scenery, Davenant (succeeding Ben Jonson) supplied the words – that proved consequential not just for him personally but for

the future of the English stage.⁶ Determined to bring this extravagant theatrical form to a popular audience, he obtained in 1639 a patent from Charles I that authorized him to build a theatre in Fleet Street, a revolutionary new playhouse where the scenic and musical wonders of the court masque could be incorporated into a public performance.⁷ Davenant would then form an acting company and oversee the theatre's operations himself. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the impending Civil War prevented Davenant from using his patent, and the innovative public theatre that he championed was not built.⁸

Yet as the performances at Rutland House in the 1650s confirm, Davenant never wavered in his desire – expressed didactically in his anonymous *A Proposition for Advancement of Moralitie* (1653) – to bring theatrical innovation to a wider audience: the people's 'Eyes might be subdu'd with *Heroicall Pictures* and changes of *Scenes*' and 'their Eares, civiliz'd with Musick and wholesome discourses'.⁹ The reopening of the theatres gave him the opportunity he had long sought, and he seized it. On 9 July 1660 Killigrew received permission from the king 'to erect one Company of players wch shall be our owne Company' and for all other acting companies 'to be silenced and surprest'.¹⁰ Davenant, unwilling to be overlooked, submitted to the king just ten days later a revised warrant that extended the theatrical monopoly to him. In other words, Davenant tried to resurrect his own royal patent from 1639. The draft revised warrant contained several provisions, including the right to stage performances with music and scenery, to set ticket prices (which might need to be raised to pay for expensive new scenery), and to set actors' wages. The core provision, however, was the establishment of the duopoly and the right of the patentees to build new theatres:

a Grant unto our trusty and well beloved Thomas Killigrew Esquire, one of the Groomes of the Bed-chamber and Sir William Davenant Knight, to give them full power and authoritie to erect Two Companyes of Players . . . and to

purchase or build and erect at their charge as they shall thinke fitt Two Houses or Theaters.¹¹

Reluctant to nullify a license granted two decades earlier by his own father, Charles II honoured Davenant's hitherto dormant patent. Thus, the monopoly awarded to Killigrew became a duopoly awarded to Killigrew and Davenant. Although it took a few years for the terms to be fully established in law, the central provision – the two courtiers enjoyed exclusive rights to produce theatre in London – was established on 21 August 1660, when Charles II issued a warrant that essentially adopted the terms of Davenant's draft.¹²

The nominal justification for imposing a theatrical monopoly was disingenuously moralistic: to ban performances that featured 'much matter of profanation and scurrility' and to encourage those that 'might serve as moral instructions in human life'. That strategic concession to public morals was intended to mollify Puritan opposition in the City of London, one of the two areas where theatres could be built, the other being the City of Westminster. Yet the real reason for granting the new patent, as we have outlined above, was to repay Killigrew for his service to Charles II and to endorse the old patent granted to Davenant by Charles I. This action cost the new king nothing. Indeed, it shifted the responsibility of paying for lavish theatrical productions from the court to the commercial playhouse. Still, the patents enabled Charles II to reward past loyalty and to make the future theatrical profession an artistic elaboration of the court itself. In one variant or another, the royal patents lasted until they were abolished by the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843.

Fighting for survival and control

Empowered by their royal warrant, Davenant and Killigrew needed to make some important decisions quickly: Who would be their actors? What plays would they perform? Where would

they perform them? How would their theatres be equipped? Making these decisions was not easy or straightforward, not least because (unlike Mohun, Rhodes, and the younger Beeston) neither patentee had ever put together an acting company. However astute in the politics of advancing their own interests in elite circles, they had no experience in the hard graft of running a commercial theatre. They possessed legal authority, but lacked money, infrastructure, and personnel. Yet even before they could make their first move, Davenant and Killigrew faced immediate opposition from the very people who were in a position to help them.

Such opposition was no surprise. After all, the patents that benefited Davenant and Killigrew posed a threat to the livelihoods of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, and the companies led by Michael Mohun, John Rhodes, and William Beeston. Sir Henry's authority to license acting companies and to censor plays was now wholly undermined – the patent was itself a permanent license, with Davenant and Killigrew entitled to censor their own plays – while performances at the Red Bull, the Cockpit in Drury Lane, and Salisbury Court were to be suppressed precisely because they infringed upon Davenant and Killigrew's exclusive privileges. As the patent stipulated, 'there shall be no more . . . companies of actors . . . than the two to be now erected by virtue of this authority'.¹³ The excluded parties, far from acquiescing to the new theatrical regime, vigorously opposed it. In the end, Davenant and Killigrew came to an understanding with the Master of the Revels and neutralized the rival companies, mainly by absorbing them into their own. Yet it would be misleading to think that the establishment of the patent companies in the early 1660s – the Duke's Company led by Davenant, the King's Company led by Killigrew – was either uncomplicated or unopposed. It was neither.

When Sir Henry Herbert learned that Thomas Killigrew was going to be given an exclusive warrant to stage plays in London and that Sir William Davenant had petitioned Charles II for the same privilege, he leapt into both defensive and

offensive action. In a petition sent to the king on 4 August 1660, he argued that the proposed monopoly – an ‘unjust surprise’ of which he had no ‘consent or foreknowledge’ – should be rescinded because it was ‘destructive’ of the ‘ancient powers granted’ to his office ‘under the Great Seal.’¹⁴ As Sir Henry saw it, the king was contradicting himself: Charles II had revived the position of Master of the Revels only to strip it of all power and authority by imposing a theatrical monopoly controlled by Davenant and Killigrew. More aggressively, Herbert tried to discredit Davenant in the king’s eyes by linking him to the ‘Late Horrid Rebellion’, when he had ‘obtained leave of Oliver and Richard Cromwell to vent his operas’. Yet Herbert disingenuously failed to acknowledge the theatrical license that the king’s own father had granted to Davenant in 1639. Sir Henry, who had resented Davenant ever since a quarrel over censorship in the 1630s, had good reason to put his case strongly: He was, at that very moment, negotiating fee arrangements with Mohun, Rhodes, and Beeston.¹⁵ Were the monopoly to be enforced he would lose valuable income.

Charles II must have taken Sir Henry’s objections seriously, because he referred the matter to his Attorney General, Sir Geoffrey Palmer. Despite some initial misgivings – the royal warrant overturned without cause the powers traditionally held by the Master of the Revels – Palmer confirmed in a note to the king dated 12 August 1660 that he found no reason ‘to object against the two warrants’ for Davenant and Killigrew.¹⁶ Sir Henry’s attacks on Davenant failed to change the king’s mind. It was true that Davenant (like others at the time) had curried favour with the Cromwellian leadership. But it was also true that Davenant had rendered good service to the martyred Charles I. Sir Henry failed in his attempt to have the warrants revoked. Indeed, they were formally promulgated in late August 1660, diminishing Sir Henry’s powers and ordering the suppression of actors at the Red Bull, the Cockpit, and Salisbury Court.

Yet those acting companies were hardly willing to put themselves out of business just because a superseding warrant

had been issued to Davenant and Killigrew. The existence of the warrant was one thing; its enforcement was another. As we have seen, Mohun, Rhodes and Beeston spent the summer of 1660 – a time when nothing was clear about how London theatre was licensed – reconciling themselves to the reinstated authority of the Master of the Revels and negotiating the licensing and censorship fees payable to him. But they felt the ground shifting. In the postscript to his agreement with Herbert, Mohun added the qualifier ‘to be made good during the time of acting under the said Master of the Revels’, an acknowledgment that Sir Henry’s rule was not inviolable. In fact, Mohun’s agreement with Herbert fell apart pretty quickly. The Red Bull actors paid him for about a month but then stopped, recognizing that the warrants given to Davenant and Killigrew effectively stripped Sir Henry of his customary powers. Unwilling, however, to let the new patentees obstruct or overthrow them, Mohun and his company staged new and old plays alike at the Red Bull into the autumn of 1660.

For Davenant and Killigrew, these continuing performances were a problem. They could not begin to establish their own companies until they eliminated their rivals. But it was less a matter of shutting their rivals down than of taking them over. After all, the existing companies had what the patentees lacked, but needed and needed fast: actors and theatres. Appealing once more to the Crown, the patentees urged the king to suppress Mohun’s company, arguing that it inflated ticket prices, staged morally objectionable plays, and recognized no statutory authority. Killigrew obtained a royal warrant to suppress the Red Bull actors until they entered into an agreement with the new patentees ‘to act with women, [in] a new theatre and [with] habits according to [their] scenes’.¹⁷ Killigrew’s threat to suppress Mohun’s company had its intended effect, because in early October 1660 a new company (‘His Majesty’s Comedians’) was formed under the joint leadership of Davenant and Killigrew. Crucially, this new – and fully legal – company comprised the best actors from the other companies, including Betterton and Kynaston from the Cockpit

in Drury Lane. The new company first performed on 8 October 1660 at the Cockpit. Rhodes was the theatre's rightful lessee, but that was a secondary matter. What mattered was that Davenant and Killigrew were now joint managers of the acting company. 'His Majesty's Comedians' would soon split into the two patent companies. But the most important shift had now been made: the actors stayed the same, but new people were in charge. Mohun, Rhodes and Beeston were yesterday's men. The future of London theatre belonged to Davenant and Killigrew.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the persistent Sir Henry Herbert was fighting a war on two fronts. After the single company was established in October 1660, he harassed the Cockpit actors, demanding payment in return for the preposterous offer of 'protection' from Killigrew's efforts to suppress them. But the actors understood full well that Sir Henry was 'not able' to protect them, precisely because Killigrew (to whom they had already acquiesced) was armed with a royal patent – and they stated as much in their petition to Charles II.¹⁹ At the same time, Sir Henry filed lawsuits against Davenant and Killigrew, accusing the new patentees of obstructing him from collecting his customary licensing fees and, moreover, of undermining his office by setting up acting companies without first obtaining a license from him. The Master of the Revels argued that Davenant and Killigrew should either pay him or be forced out of business. One of the lawsuits was successful, prompting Davenant to protest to the king that Sir Henry's demand for fees was merely 'pretend', because the royal patents that he and Killigrew possessed made any such claim redundant.²⁰

After several years of inconclusive lawsuits, Davenant and Killigrew accepted the Master of the Revels as an immutable fact of theatrical life, their own royal patents notwithstanding. Killigrew settled first, in June 1662, agreeing to pay Sir Henry the non-trivial sum of one pound for each old play his company performed and two pounds for each new one, in addition to a one-time payment to compensate Sir Henry for the time and effort he had expended in the matter. In turn, Sir Henry agreed

to surrender his traditional power to license acting companies – henceforth, his only authority would be to license plays – and agreed to forgo any further claim against Killigrew. Revealingly, Killigrew promised ‘neither directly nor indirectly to aid or assist Sir William Davenant’ or ‘his pretended company of players’.²¹ By this time, the Duke’s Company under Davenant’s leadership was performing at its own theatre in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and thus was a direct commercial and artistic rival to the King’s Company. Sir Henry, still in dispute with Davenant, wanted to prevent an alliance between the patentees; and so, he exploited the competition between them. Eventually, Davenant came to a understanding with Sir Henry that was similar to what Killigrew had negotiated: the Duke’s Company did not require a license from the Master of the Revels but it agreed to pay him to license all the old and new plays that it would perform.²² This arrangement with the patentees became redundant in 1673, when, after Sir Henry’s death, Killigrew purchased for himself the rights to the office of Master of the Revels.²³ The once-powerful position in the Lord Chamberlain’s Office survived, but it atrophied within a decade, amounting to little more than a feeble sinecure. Real control of the theatrical profession had shifted to the patentees.

From a historiographical perspective, the legal wrangling among Davenant and Killigrew, Sir Henry Herbert, and the various London acting companies is important not as a narrow account of how the Restoration stage was first licensed and regulated, but as the articulation of a momentous artistic impasse: What would the future of the English theatre be? At stake in the repeated cycle of lawsuits, petitions and warrants was less the powers accorded to sundry individuals than the entire premise of what a theatrical ‘restoration’ meant for London in the 1660s. Contrary to its literal meaning, this restoration entailed a great deal of innovation. And resistance to innovation in theatre practice was always the sticking point, always the area where disagreements arose in the patent companies. Mohun’s actors, when they joined the temporary united company led by Killigrew and Davenant in October

1660, had to be forced to share the stage with women (which meant relinquishing some of their accustomed roles), to perform in new theatres (the surviving pre-Commonwealth playhouses were never going to pass muster), and to make way for painted movable scenery (gone was the non-representational platform stage for which Jonson and Shakespeare wrote). The source of their dissatisfaction was not just the changes in licensing; it was, more generally, the changing nature of theatrical performance and their resistance to that change.

Davenant's reluctance to settle with Sir Henry Herbert was likewise not confined to the narrow issue of theatrical licensing but was a larger protest against the old system in its entirety, the *ancien régime* that had been conclusively overthrown 'by several warrants under your Majesty's royal hand and signet'.²⁴ Just as Davenant refused to settle for the old ways of licensing and regulating theatre, he refused to settle for the old ways of making theatre. Inspired by a comprehensive vision for the future of the English stage – a vision that the less adventurous Killigrew sometimes claimed for himself, but never consistently executed – Davenant the entrepreneur changed what theatrical performances looked and sounded like, what words were spoken, and who had the final say over the production. Such was the comprehensive vision behind his radical reworkings of Shakespeare, the very productions that secured his legacy. Who better to dictate the legal framework in which this vision unfolded than the visionary himself? Having secured his royal patent, Sir William Davenant did not feel that he needed anyone's permission for anything.

Establishing the patent duopoly

The united company led by Killigrew and Davenant lasted barely a month. The actors from the Red Bull were allied to Killigrew. The patent itself envisaged the establishment of two separate companies in two separate theatres. And most crucially of all, Davenant's expansive theatrical vision could

never be reconciled with Killigrew's willingness to settle for old and accustomed ways of making theatre.

Thus, by early November 1660, the monopoly became a formal duopoly: the King's Company (led by Killigrew) and the Duke's Company (led by Davenant) were now free to follow their own paths.²⁵ But each company needed its own actors, its own theatre, and its own repertoire. Killigrew, consolidating his earlier arrangement, quickly formed his company from senior actors at the Red Bull, including Michael Mohun and Charles Hart.²⁶ Their last performance at the theatre on St. John Street – John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's comedy *The Beggar's Bush* (1622) – was on the afternoon of Wednesday 7 November 1660. Twenty-four hours later they presented *Henry IV, Part 1* at their new theatre in Vere Street, Clare Market, just north of the Strand in the City of Westminster. The former Gibbon's Tennis Court, where occasional and clandestine performances had been staged in the 1650s, was speedily converted into something probably like the pre-Civil War Blackfriars: a rectangular indoor theatre lit by candles that accommodated several hundred spectators.²⁷ As we discuss at greater length in the next chapter, the theatre lacked movable scenery or backstage machines, deficiencies which made it an undesirable performance space within a few years.

Unlike Davenant, Killigrew himself had no special connection with the old Blackfriars, but likely he regarded its traditional form as expedient for the times and suitable for a courtly audience. Having an indoor theatre also meant that his company could perform throughout the year, something not possible in open-air playhouses. Because the King's Company included the older actors – and because it regarded itself as the natural successor to Shakespeare's own company, the King's Men – it held the performance rights to pre-Civil War plays, including those written by Davenant himself. Controlling the old stock drama (as we discuss at length in Chapter 4) gave the King's Company an enormous advantage over the rival Duke's Company because they could put together a rotating schedule of popular plays that could attract an audience day after day.

With the veteran performers firmly under Killigrew's control, Davenant, even though he had greater theatrical experience, had no choice but to form his company largely from the younger actors at the Cockpit in Drury Lane. Yet for Davenant, leading a company of novice performers turned out to be a blessing. Inexperienced actors were more likely to be open to new ways of doing things – including sharing the stage with women – and were more likely to welcome guidance and instruction from the patentee himself. Had the Duke's Company enlisted the older actors at the Red Bull, Davenant would likely have met with immediate opposition to his theatrical innovations, especially having women's roles played by actual women and using painted movable scenery – the very changes that Killigrew's actors seem to have initially resisted. For a revolutionary like Davenant, leading a company of novices was as much an asset as it was a liability. True, he had to spend time training his actors; but that enabled him to shape the Duke's Company in his own image. We will look more closely at Davenant's approach to acting in Chapter 5.

With the performing rights to the pre-1642 plays belonging to the King's Company and lacking a fresh supply of new scripts for his own company – the market for new plays had essentially disappeared during the Interregnum – Davenant scrambled to find dramatic works that his company could perform. In December 1660 he presented to the Lord Chamberlain his plans for 'reformeing some of the most ancient Playes that were played at the Blackfriars and of makeing them, fitt, for the Company of Actors appointed under his direction and comand'.²⁸ In the years before the Civil War, the indoor Blackfriars theatre had been the winter home of the King's Men. Davenant's petition made it clear that not only did he want to perform Shakespeare's plays but that he was already convinced of the need to adapt (or 'reform') them, rendering them suitable for modern day actors and audiences.

Rewriting Shakespeare was thus not a tactic that Davenant arrived at some time after the establishment of his acting company and the opening of his theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Rather, it was a foundational principle of his artistic leadership, a core element of his vision: to create more and better parts for actresses, to introduce changeable scenery and visual spectacle into the production, to integrate music with the dramatic narrative, to render dramatic plots more agreeable to Restoration literary sensibilities, and to make the text sound more agreeable to the Restoration ear. Davenant knew perfectly well that because he could not immediately compete on repertoire, he would have to compete on production style, changeable scenery and music. Indeed, the Duke's Company's early productions at Lincoln's Inn Fields were so successful that the King's Company was forced in 1663 to build a new theatre in Bridges Street that was likewise equipped with movable scenery. As we will see, it took some time for Davenant to find the right style for his adaptations. But a revisionist intent guided his behaviour from the start.

For Davenant to adapt Shakespeare, he needed first to be granted performing rights to some of Shakespeare's plays. In response to Davenant's petition, the Lord Chamberlain, on 12 December 1660, issued a warrant giving the Duke's Company the right to perform eleven plays, of which nine were by Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, *Henry VIII*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, and *Twelfth Night*.²⁹ Davenant was also granted sole rights to perform his own plays from before the Civil War. For a few months, he was allowed to stage six plays (including *Pericles*) that had belonged to Rhodes's company at the Cockpit.

The limitations that Davenant faced in terms of repertoire – he was granted rights to only a small number of old plays, and it would take time for new plays to be written – had two important consequences for his approach to Shakespeare. First, Shakespeare was more prominent in the repertoire of the Duke's Company from the outset of the patent duopoly. In August 1661, eight weeks after the opening of their theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Davenant's company performed *Hamlet* with Betterton in the title role and Mary Saunderson, the leading

actor's future wife, as Ophelia. When the new season began the following month, they performed *Twelfth Night* in their first week. Davenant's first Shakespeare adaptation – *The Law Against Lovers*, which mixed *Measure for Measure* with *Much Ado about Nothing* – premiered later that season, in February 1662. By contrast, Shakespeare was never central to Killigrew's repertoire, which slanted heavily toward plays by John Fletcher and Ben Jonson.³⁰ Second, because Davenant could not attract audiences by the novelty of *which* plays his company performed – comparatively few works were at his disposal – he attracted them by the appeal of *how* those few plays were performed – i.e., with scenery, trap doors, and music. In Chapter 4 we offer a more elaborate discussion of Davenant's repertoire. But for now, it's important to observe that the division of the repertoire between the two companies in 1660 determined in good measure the distinctive path that each company would take. To paraphrase Lady Macbeth, the future was present in the instant.

Although the earliest known performance by the Duke's Company dates from January 1661, in all probability they started acting at the old Salisbury Court theatre on Monday, 5 November 1660.³¹ Supplanting his old nemesis Beeston as playhouse manager must have felt to Davenant like sweet revenge. Even so, the arrangement was temporary, only until he could 'provide a new theatre with scenes', as his contract with the actors stipulated.³² That new theatre would be the converted Lisle's Tennis Court on Portugal Street in Lincoln's Inn Fields.³³ Davenant took his time in renovating his new theatre so that when it eventually opened in June 1661 it immediately surpassed the capabilities of the King's Company at their less well-equipped playhouse in nearby Vere Street.

In setting up their acting companies as legal and commercial entities, Davenant and Killigrew both looked back to how such companies had operated in the 1630s. Senior male actors became shareholders (Shakespeare was a 'sharer' in the King's Men, in addition to being house playwright and part of the acting company), which meant not only that they enjoyed job

security but that they had a material stake in the company's success: their income derived from the profits rather than from individual salaries. Everybody else – actresses, junior male actors ('hirelings'), musicians, wardrobe keepers, doorkeepers, and stagehands – was paid a fixed wage. The patentees determined the number and proportion of shares to be divided among the shareholders, always ensuring that the patentee himself remained in overall control. Shareholding arrangements were abolished by the early eighteenth century and every company member was put on salary, with leading actors and actresses granted a 'benefit' performance to augment their income. But in the early years of the Restoration, a more collective structure existed – at least for the senior men in the company. More than thirty years would pass before a female member of a patent company shared in the profits or took a lead role in company management, a subject we explore in Chapter 7.³⁴

On 5 November 1660, Davenant signed articles of agreement with his leading actors and with the scene painter Henry Harris, who later also appeared on the stage. (In 1668, after Davenant's death, Betterton and Harris essentially took over the day-to-day operations of the Duke's Company.) Net profit – that is, total revenue after house charges and wages for the younger male actors had been deducted – was divided into fifteen shares. These shares were to be allocated to the patentee and the senior actors on a 2:1 ratio: ten for Davenant and five to be divided among the other shareholders. The majority stake accorded to Davenant was not just to give him control – though certainly it did that – but also to enable him to cover certain expenses (e.g., scenery, costumes, and actresses' salaries) for which the other shareholders were not liable. Crucially, Davenant's controlling interest in the Duke's Company gave him scope to sell a portion of his shares to investors to raise the capital needed for large expenses, such as converting Lisle's Tennis Court into a modern theatre equipped with the movable scenery that Davenant had long wanted to use in a public playhouse. Although the Restoration stage was firmly allied to

the court of Charles II, it was still a private commercial enterprise that would thrive, stagnate, or decline based on how it fared in the marketplace.

From a financial perspective, the new patent companies started from scratch, holding neither physical assets nor capital reserves. They possessed an exclusive royal warrant, but nothing else. To raise capital, Davenant had no choice but to sell a fraction of his shares and invest the money he received from the buyers. Within a year of establishing the Duke's Company he sold several of his shares, with the proceeds (the first sale raised £600 per share) going toward the cost of the new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. This new theatre enabled the Duke's Company to offer precisely the sort of productions that secured its future. To be successful, Davenant had to spend money – a lesson he sometimes failed to apply. When the cast for *Pompey the Great* (1663) appeared 'in English habits', the disappointed audience hissed the actor playing Caesar off the stage.³⁵

Whereas Davenant was financially prudent, Killigrew was more reckless, later selling his shares in the Bridges Street Theatre, which the company opened in 1663, to 'adventurers' (as they were disparagingly termed) interested mainly in profits. Killigrew then used the influx of money not for capital investment but to pay off his personal debts. This difference in financial management further reveals why Davenant was the only theatrical pioneer in the years immediately following the reopening of the theatres: He was the only patentee who knew how to manage the money and the only one willing to put the company's interests ahead of his own.

Theatre at the court of Charles II

Never was the English stage more closely tied to monarchy than in the Restoration, when the stage 'was constructed as an agent or surrogate of the crown'.³⁶ The exclusive patents that recognized two London theatre companies – and outlawed

their competition – were the gift of Charles II to Killigrew and Davenant. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Killigrew, a courtier, was formally named a Groom of the Bedchamber. The Restoration patent companies were named after their respective royal patrons, King Charles II and his brother James, Duke of York, the future James II.³⁷ Legally, actors were liveried servants of the sovereign – ‘grooms of the chamber’ – and so could not be sued for debt without the Lord Chamberlain’s permission.³⁸

Many of the older actors, who first reassembled at the Red Bull and then eventually joined Killigrew’s company, had fought on the royalist side during the Civil War. Most of the new playwrights were aristocratic Cavaliers whose plays of political intrigue, like the Earl of Orrery’s tragicomedy *The Generall* (1662), denounced usurpation and affirmed the restoration of rightful monarchs. Davenant’s adaptations of Shakespeare – *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest* – were likewise dominated by themes of sovereignty restored. Once the patent companies started performing, they attracted an audience drawn from courtiers (among them, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham and John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester) and both the king and his brother were seen in the new playhouses in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, the first time an English monarch set foot in a public playhouse. Royalist influence on the theatre and the theatrical profession was unmistakable. It was in those years a partisan enterprise through and through.

Reinstating the tradition of private court performances, Charles II – despite his lack of money – ordered that the disused Cockpit theatre in the Palace of Whitehall be refitted and returned to its former use. (The private Cockpit theatre is not to be confused with the public Cockpit or Phoenix Theatre in Drury Lane.) John Webb, pupil of the great Inigo Jones – who had designed the original court theatre three decades earlier – renovated the small private theatre, transforming it from an actual cockpit dating from the time of Henry VIII into an intimate Palladian court theatre. Among his tasks was to

carve out a dressing room for actresses, a feature never before needed. Renovations began in November 1660 and proceeded by fits and starts over several years.³⁹ But not much could be done. Space was limited, so neither the stage nor the backstage area could expand. Despite the fashionable Palladian style, changeable scenery was impractical in such a tight space. And so, the Cockpit in Court was used for only a few years, until John Webb in 1665 oversaw the creation of a new theatre in the palace's Great Hall.

The first performance in the refurbished Cockpit in Whitehall took place on 19 November 1660 – a mere two weeks after the patent duopoly had been established – when the King's Company presented Jonson's *Epicoene*.⁴⁰ George Monck, the newly created Duke of Albemarle, organized the event, whose audience included Charles II. It was fitting that the resumption of theatre at court began with Killigrew's company of older actors – including Mohun, who had fought for the royalist cause in the Civil War – the whole event being a meta-performance of reinstatement and return, both monarchical and theatrical. Much of that self-reflexivity came through in the prologue, doubtless spoken by one of the veteran actors. Though likely written by Sir John Denham, the prologue certainly expressed a view of the relationship between the stage and the throne that Davenant endorsed and promoted. The prologue looks back to the intertwined histories of the stage and the throne, hailing the tradition under Charles I of court performances ('this place / Which *Majesty* so oft was wont to grace'), linking the overthrow of the monarchy with the closure of the theatres ('The *Laurel* and the *Crown* together went, / Had the same *Foes*, and the same *Banishment*'), and affirming that actors remained loyal to the crown during the Civil War ('When by your Danger, and our Duty prest, / We acted in the Field, and not in Jest'). The delivery of the prologue itself was a moment of celebration, a unifying event that could occur only because the stage and the sovereign had been restored together. At each turn in this tragicomic history, theatre and monarchy move in tandem, each supporting the

other, leading the actors to boast, upon their own return, that '[t]hey that would have no *KING*, would have no *Play*'.⁴¹

In 1663, shortly after being granted his singular patent, Davenant composed a poem addressed to Charles II, cannily attributing to him not just the reopening of the theatres but their necessary *reformation*: elevating public morals and offering the wonders of changeable scenery. With political shrewdness, Davenant banishes his own reforming efforts during the Protectorate and imagines in heroic couplets that the restored theatre owes its existence entirely to the king. And not just its existence, but its flourishing:

If [the theatre is] to height of Art and Virtue grown,
The form and matter is as much your own
As is your Tribute with your Image coin'd:
You made the Art, the Virtue *You* enjoyn'd.⁴²

Appealing to common morality was but a platitude, and wholly at odds with the king's libertine personal life. The more revealing aspect of Davenant's panegyric is that it singles out changeable scenery – 'the *Scene* so various now become' – as the 'perfection' of the English stage, that which makes it greater than the theatres of classical antiquity:

the *Dramatick* Plots of *Greece*, and *Rome*,
Compar'd to ours, do from their height decline,
And shrink in all the compass of design.

Having praised his own company's style as the unquestioned summit of theatrical genius – so triumphant that the glories of 'Greece and Rome' fade away – Davenant cannily attributes this genius not to his own artistry but to the king's magnificence. Despite its flattering hyperbole, Davenant's claim carries some truth. When the king returned to England in May 1660, he had brought with him a decided preference for the French way of making theatre: indoor playhouses with proscenium arches, changeable scenery, lavish spectacle, and professional

actresses.⁴³ The company of male actors that performed on the traditional bare platform stage of the outdoor Red Bull theatre in 1660 saw no reason to break with their own tradition. But under Davenant's leadership, the stage was indeed breaking with tradition, by adopting the methods and practices of the finest European theatres. In his poem Davenant took care to credit the king for the rising artistic standards of the English stage. Reversing the political logic of the Stuart court masques, in which the stage enhanced the sovereign – reflecting back to him, through performance, his own absolute power – the Restoration stage proposed, instead, that the sovereign enhances the stage: 'You, in Three years' have led the theatre toward its 'perfection'.

Any courtier who read Davenant's smooth words or who had attended a performance in the small Cockpit theatre in Whitehall Palace knew perfectly well that the restored Stuarts could not compete with the House of Bourbon for artistic prestige. Charles II, unlike his cousin Louis XIV, the 'Sun King', lacked the wealth required to maintain a magnificent court like Versailles, which boasted Molière as the author of theatrical *divertissements*, sometimes created with his musical partner Jean-Baptiste Lully. Nor could the English king set up a public theatre within the walls of his palace at Whitehall, like the Théâtre du Palais-Royal in Paris, where Molière's company began performing in 1660. The Cockpit-in-Court, whose renovation Charles II ordered, was a small and ill-equipped theatre used for private performances only. There was no doubt about it: the Parisian stage far outclassed the London stage. Having been exiled in France, the English king and his courtiers knew the truth of the matter from their own experience. How could it be otherwise, given the eighteen-year closure of theatres in London? But now that theatres had reopened, Davenant was in a hurry to emulate French performance practice and its royal protocols, not least because those practices echoed how his own court masques had been staged before the Civil War. Yet his playhouse in Lincoln's Inn Fields, far from being sumptuous, had first seen life as a tennis

court. But what he lacked in resources, he made up for in ambitious eloquence. And thus, Sir William Davenant turned to the ancient art of rhetoric – not just to bind the theatre more closely than ever to the crown, but to claim in words what had yet to be achieved in deeds. After all, that's what theatre does: create realities that exist onstage but nowhere else.