

Theatre, politics and morality

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In March 1660 the parliamentary general George Monck marched on London, restored to the Rump Parliament the members excluded in 1648, and thereby made possible the return of the King, in May. The fall of the Puritan régime restored not only the monarchy but legal, regular theatre, the right to perform plays being quickly restricted to two companies, the King's and the Duke's. Indeed Monck's intervention was celebrated on the stage as it was happening, in the first Carolean comedy, John Tatham's *The Rump*.¹ A year later, these events were redramatized in a more serious form in the Earl of Orrery's tragicomedy *The Generall*, whose hero Clorimun unwillingly fights for a usurper, but eventually restores the true king.² Orrery's next play, *The History of Henry the Fifth*, also portrays the restoration of royal authority (the recovery of France), and so close was the relationship between theatre and politics that (not for the first time) Charles II loaned garments from his coronation, so that the final spectacle of the play is of stage royalty resplendent in the finery of the true.³

Yet the dramatist who thus made free with Charles's coronation apparel had not long before made free with his crown, for Orrery had served Cromwell throughout the 1650s, and in 1657 had taken a leading role in urging him to become king. After Cromwell's death, however, he had established links both with Monck and Charles II, and had indeed hoped to claim the role of restoring hero for himself. In his service of the usurper, Clorimun reflects Orrery's position in the 1650s; in his restoration of the true line, however, he performs an act of which Orrery was only an envious and frustrated onlooker.

¹ As is now usual, I use the term *Carolean* to refer to the period from 1660 to 1688. *Restoration drama* is too imprecise and confusing a term.

² It was first performed in Dublin in 1662, under the title of *Altemera*. The inefficient King's Company did not stage it in London until September 1664, a month after the rival Duke's Company had staged Orrery's *The History of Henry the Fifth*.

³ The King's suit was worn by Owen Tudor and the Duke of York's by Henry V. Coronation apparel had also been used in Davenant's *Love and Honour* (1661). Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus*, 52, 61.

Simple and naïve as dramatic texts, Orrery's plays are nevertheless elaborate as falsifications.⁴

Though forgotten today, they set the pattern for early Carolean serious drama, the primary subject of which is reinstatement of the rightful king. Early adaptations of Shakespeare, for example, tend to be of plays topically concerned with restoration: *Measure for Measure* (as *The Law against Lovers*, 1662), *Macbeth* (1664), and *The Tempest* (1667).⁵ The simplifications of these early political plays are gross. Civil conflict is exacerbated not by ship money, or forced loans, but by love: in *The Generall*, the usurper has seized the throne because he loves the heroine. Political relationships are reduced to ones of feudal dependance, sustained by respect for the moral power of language: for the oath, the vow, the sacred name of king. Although Orrery's characters constantly use the terminology of debt and payment, money does not exist for them: to repay a debt is to reciprocate an obligation, or to honour one's word. Such plays are at once highly contemporary, in that they allegorize recent events, and impossibly fantastic, in that they transpose them to a lost and idealized social order. It was, indeed, a long time before late seventeenth-century tragedians could adequately represent a contemporary commercial economy.

Like tragi-comedy, early Carolean comedy celebrates the re-emergence of a natural social hierarchy that has been unnaturally inverted: parvenus fall, and the gentry return. In *The Rump*, the Puritan upstarts become street vendors, and in one of the best early comedies, Sir Robert Howard's *The Committee* (1662), two impoverished Cavaliers recover their estates and their loved ones from the clutches of jumped-up Puritan ex-servants. Such plays are far removed from our usual conception of 'Restoration' comedies as witty plays about sex, and the movement towards such comedy was gradual. Nevertheless, by the mid-1660s comedies were appearing that were free in sexual sentiment, if not in sexual action. If *The Committee* idealizes an old hierarchical order, and shows a Cavalier hero reproved for wanting pre-marital sex, Etherege's immensely successful *The Comical Revenge* (1664), also set in the late Interregnum, celebrates the ending not only of Puritan rigidity but of Caroline formality and idealism, ushering in a culture of festive hedonism, personified in the play's comic hero, Sir Frederick Frolick. The chief vehicle of sexual daring was a comedy of

⁴ See Staves, *Players' Scepters*, 15–24, 51–60.

⁵ *The Tempest* was adapted by Dryden and Davenant, the others by Davenant alone. *The Law against Lovers* also incorporates the Beatrice and Benedick plot of *Much Ado about Nothing*. Non-political adaptations include John Lacy's farcical rewriting of *The Taming of the Shrew* as *Sauny the Scot* (1667) and, perhaps, James Howard's lost happy-ending version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

bantering courtship built around the talents of Charles Hart and Nell Gwyn at the King's Company.⁶ The man's past could be very scapegrace – the comic hero of James Howard's *All Mistaken* (1665) is confronted on stage with no less than six of his infant bastards – but he is, as yet, denied solace in the play itself.

Tragi-comedies about the Restoration continued until the early 1670s, sometimes with comic and sexually adventurous subplots, but the court frivolity that energized comedy was more soberly treated in completely serious drama. The King's reputation quickly suffered from his extravagance and licentiousness, and the nation was afflicted by plague (1665), fire (1666) and military humiliation by the Dutch (1667). The Earl of Clarendon, who was Lord Chancellor and father-in-law of Charles's brother, James, Duke of York, was made a scapegoat for national humiliation and fled abroad to avoid impeachment for treason. In the early 1670s, when Charles allied himself with the Catholic Louis XIV for another war against the Protestant Dutch, and when James's Catholicism became public knowledge (rather than merely an open secret), fears of popery and arbitrary government took hold.

The King's changing reputation is reflected in serious drama. Despite the continuing appearance of plays about the Restoration, by the mid-1660s even some of his supporters were tactfully admonishing his sex life. Orrery wrote two plays – *Mustapha* (1665) and *The Black Prince* (1667) – about monarchs flawed by unwise love. Sir Robert Howard had collaborated with Dryden (his brother-in-law) on a fictitious play about Montezuma's youth, *The Indian Queen* (1664), portraying his restoration to the throne of Mexico. When, in order to reuse the lavish scenery and costumes, Dryden wrote a sequel, *The Indian Emperour* (1665), he showed the restored hero-king as being gravely weakened by imprudent love. Sir Robert went further. Though *The Committee* and *The Indian Queen* energetically celebrate the Restoration, he was by 1667 one of the parliamentary critics of Charles's administration, playing a leading role in the hounding of Clarendon. His dramatic output changed accordingly: in his *The Great Favourite* (1668), clearly aimed at Clarendon, the voice of factionalism is heard for the first time on the Carolean stage. After 1672, tragi-comedies of restoration yield to tragedies of problematic succession, often portraying kings as lustful tyrants (as in Nathaniel Lee's *The Tragedy of Nero*, 1674) and often diverting succession from the lineal heir (as even Dryden does in *Aureng-Zebe*). According to a hardy myth, Carolean tragedy and comedy showed a Jekyll-and-Hyde split between representation of the unrealistically heroic and the cynically rakish. Although there were both idealistic and cynical plays,

⁶ See Smith, *Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy*.

however, they are not concurrent: post-Restoration euphoria had long gone when the first sex comedies appeared.

The unprecedented sexual daring of late Carolean comedy reflects a subculture of unprecedentedly vigorous opposition to revealed religion. As Orrery's brother, the scientist Robert Boyle, complained, men have always drunk and whored, but they formerly knew they were doing wrong: now men 'question the Truth, and despise the very Name of [Religion]'.⁷ Particularly influential were a moral relativism, derived from Montaigne, and the materialism of Thomas Hobbes. Montaigne had argued that no moral principle is universally acknowledged, and that the moral systems which we take for global truths are like municipal bye-laws – a doctrine which encouraged the view that systems of sexual morality are arbitrary impositions upon healthy natural instinct. For Hobbes, the fundamental principle of existence was the movement of material particles: man was matter in motion, driven by bodily appetites and aversions, his reason a tool of his desires. Because of man's appetitive nature, his relationship to his fellows in the pre-social state of nature is that of war, for there is no institutional authority to define or enforce moral codes: all have right to all. In forming political societies, humanity erects defences against the horror of its own aggressive and anti-social nature, surrendering the natural rights exercised in the primal state of war in return for the protection of an absolute political authority.

Although Hobbes had feared, and sought to restrain, the anarchic power of appetite, some poets synthesized materialism and moral relativism, celebrating the triumph of the sex drive over the fictions of morality. Carolean sex comedy, however, recognizes that man's social nature is too complex and too dominant to permit the libertine dream to be realized: that sex invariably creates social and emotional complications, and that the life of free-ranging instinct, however beguiling as a goal, is not only practically but psychologically impossible. Exploring Hobbes's paradox that man is a social being *because* he is a savage, dramatists often portray characters as experimenting with dual identities in an attempt to separate the socially visible self from the personal pursuit of the instinctual drive. There are, for example, many bedroom tricks, wherein a lover enjoys the object of desire by impersonating a rival. The public self is erased in a regression to pure, pre-social instinct, during which all verbal or visual signs that might betray the impostor are banished; there must be silence and darkness, with copulation becoming an all-engulfing totality.

⁷ [Boyl]E, *Some Considerations about the Reconcilableness of Reason and Religion*, ii.

But it cannot so remain, and many plays dwell on the moment when instinct confronts the renewed social consciousness of the perpetrator. Manly, the hero of Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* (1676), is the most extreme primitivist in Carolean comedy, despising the effeminate verbiage and legalism of London and hankering for the honest savagery of the Indies. His supreme act of unrestrained manliness is to rape the villainess by means of a bedroom trick. But, as soon as his dark, voiceless copulation is over, he finds himself needing witnesses: craving the forms of law to finalize a rape. Deeply though he despises the tame, elaborate formality of London existence, he cannot separate himself from it. A tragic version of an almost identical situation occurs in Thomas Otway's once popular tragedy *The Orphan* (1680). One of the heroes, Polydore, shares Manly's nostalgia for the primitive, envying the unrestrained sexuality of the bull, who instantly satiates and escapes desire without impediment from restrictive custom. Through a bedroom deception, he sleeps with the woman his twin brother loves, not realizing that the couple has just married: that he has committed incest. Once the fact of incest becomes known, however, he is overwhelmed by guilt. The consciousness that distinguishes humanity from the brutes cannot escape the sexual codes it forges, and Polydore is driven to write the story, and then to commit suicide. *The Plain-Dealer* and *The Orphan* present comic and tragic versions of the same situation: the simultaneous inescapability and unattainability of the dream of pure instinct, unfettered by the claims of society. In doing so, they illustrate how closely linked Carolean comedy and tragedy can be.

As has been mentioned, comedy progressed only gradually from the daring banter of the 1660s to the portrayal of active sexual relationships involving the main characters; an intermediate stage is Shadwell's *Epsom Wells* (1672), in which adultery is achieved, but by foolish and socially marginal characters; both heroes are constantly interrupted at the critical moment (though one has a mistress and makes a cuckold, the relationship is not reconfirmed during the play).⁸ The first social comedy to involve leading characters in sex was *The Mall* (1674), by the unidentifiable 'J. D.', which sank without trace. The first successful comedy to do so was Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675). Horner, the hero, pretends to have been emasculated in a botched treatment for syphilis. No longer (seemingly) a threat to husbands, he gains free access to the fashionable ladies, which he puts to good use. It is, however, far from clear that the play is a fantasy of total male dominance: there are far more male

⁸ See Hume, *Development of English Drama*, 295–9 (though Hume believes that one of the heroes of Shadwell's *Epsom Wells* (1672) does consummate).

fools than female; in cases of near discovery, the women think of the way out while the men are nonplussed; and at the end of the play Horner, who started the play as the master-seducer, increasingly finds that he is the property of his seraglio, until finally he is a commodity in a time-share adultery scheme run by the women. This final arrangement demonstrates, again, that man can never be a purely instinctual and asocial being; adultery has its own social dimensions.

Along with Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), with its portrayal of the coldly efficient seducer Dorimant, *The Country Wife* is often regarded as a 'typical' Carolean comedy. Yet each is very different from the other, and both are exceptional.⁹ *The Country Wife* could only happen once. It continues the playful, insouciant attitudes of the comedies where free sex was contemplated but not achieved, but it moves from contemplation to action. If *The Country Wife* broke the taboos that had inhibited earlier comic portrayals of sexual conduct, however, it made it necessary to portray sex from an entirely different viewpoint; for, once characters actually engage in sex, there is a strong pressure to explore the real emotional and social complexities of deception and betrayal. This is what happens, equally for the first time, in *The Man of Mode*, which – while aesthetically detached from the events it portrays – is the first social comedy to portray the pain of sexual rejection, in Dorimant's ex-mistress Loveit.¹⁰ a dramatically complex figure, despite the crudity of her name, veering between ludicrous self-abandon and a controlled and dignified authority. Unlike *The Country Wife*, *The Man of Mode* did directly and decisively influence the details of subsequent comedies. The carefree attitude to sex largely vanished, and was succeeded by a darker comedy of ruthless sexual predators. If *The Man of Mode* is morally inscrutable, succeeding plays – such as Otway's *Friendship in Fashion* (1678) and Durfey's *Trick for Trick* (1678) – clearly condemn the rake and side with his actual or intended victims. When Aphra Behn began her career, she was not confronting a man-created repertory that was entirely hostile to her outlook.

In the winter of 1663–4 Katherine Philips's translation of Corneille's *La Mort de Pompée* was staged in Dublin, and possibly London, and between 1668 and 1670 up to four women had plays staged in London,¹¹ though only Behn

⁹ See Hume, "Change in comedy", 108–9.

¹⁰ Aphra Behn had already done this in the more elevated genre of verse comedy, in *The Amorous Prince* (1671).

¹¹ Philips's translation of Corneille's *Horace*, completed after her death by Sir John Denham, was performed at court in 1668 and by the King's Company in 1669. Frances Boothby's *Marcellia* was also staged in 1669, and it is possible that Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Frolicks* and *The Faithfull Virgins* were also staged at this time. Behn reached the stage in 1670.

became a full-time professional. After Dryden and Shadwell, indeed, she was only the third professional dramatist to establish herself since 1660, appearing when Orrery and other gentleman amateurs were fading out. Although audience taste was, as always, capricious, Behn was often a prominent figure. For example, in the 1681–2 season,¹² when the demand for comedies revived after a lull caused by prolonged political crisis, half of the eight new comedies were by her.¹³ She naturally provided a woman's-eye view of men's sexual dealings. For example, Willmore, the exiled and womanizing Cavalier who is the titular character of *The Rover* (1677), is a more bungling version of Dorimant: an engaging loose cannon, equally devoid of malice and feeling, too thoughtless to realize that rape is wrong, too incompetent to accomplish it. Yet Otway and Durfey create similar, or darker, figures: the man's-eye view was not always blind to the interests of the woman.

Indeed, men can treat the liberation of women with a utopian simplicity that Behn is too realistic to contemplate. In Shadwell's *The Woman Captain* (1679), for example, the unhappily married heroine does not, as we at first expect, cuckold her husband, but avenges herself with greater autonomy and dignity: she disguises herself as a recruiting officer, and in the few minutes necessary to don her uniform also acquires the linguistic habits and authority of a man, with which she terrorizes her husband into, seemingly, enlisting. Behn knew that the association between language and authority was more complex and indirect, and that the exercise of power through signs was secondary to a capacity for violence with which women could never compete. She also saw the patriarchal exchange of women as being fundamental to every known version of society, whether the pre-commercial, militaristic worlds of her earliest plays, the aristocratic hierarchies which she defended in times of crisis, or the unheroic bourgeois economies which she opposed to them. Her Tory play *The City Heiress* (1682), for example, creates a striking visual symmetry and causal relationship between the heroes' physical humiliation of the elderly Whig villain and their seduction of the vulnerable heroine: one interrupts his burglary of the villain's house in order to accomplish his seduction; the other gets drunk while forcing the villain to drink the King's health and, fired with this Dutch courage, browbeats her into sexual submission.

Generalization about Carolean sex comedy is rash, for its rapid changes did not cease with the impact of *The Man of Mode*. The theatre companies

¹² Theatrical seasons started in September.

¹³ I accept the dating of Shadwell's *The Lancashire Witches* to the 1680–1 season. See Milhous and Hume, 'Dating Play Premieres', 392; Danchin, *Prologues and Epilogues of the Restoration*, III: 289–90.

were jolted by the season of 1677–8: of the thirteen comedies premièred, eight contained sex (and a ninth portrayed a seducer ultimately marrying his victim). No comedy from this season is known to have succeeded, and the best sex comedies clearly failed, though probably for unrelated reasons.¹⁴ In the following season only one comedy, Behn's *The Feign'd Curtizans*, was premièred: not a sex comedy, though it steered close to the wind. It too failed. At this point, politics intervened, transforming both the nature of drama and the fortunes of the theatres.

From late 1678 to 1682 Britain was racked by a political crisis, as fabricated disclosures about a planned Catholic coup magnified long-standing mistrust of James, and led to a prolonged but unsuccessful attempt to exclude him from the succession, in favour of the King's eldest illegitimate son, the Earl of Monmouth. During this crisis the terms *Whig* and *Tory* first entered politics, the Whigs supporting Exclusion and the Tories supporting the established order. There were fears of a return to civil war, and the tension inhibited the demand for comedy. Of the four comedies of 1679–80, only Otway's dark anti-Whig satire *The Souldiers Fortune* is a sex comedy. Shadwell, the only writer of Whig comedy, now avoids sex: the heroine's act of self-liberation in *The Woman Captain*, premièred in this season, is an allegory of the defeat of Stuart absolutism, and is chaste; a group of extravagant whoremasters and their women represent the alien, degenerate culture of the Stuarts, but there is no coition. Of the two comedies of the following season, one, the second part of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, is a sex comedy, and again quite a dark one, placing the Royalist Willmore in a harsher light than in the original play; Shadwell's *The Lancashire Witches*, a celebration of English culture at the expense of Catholicism, is chaste.¹⁵ As Tory victory became clear in 1681–2, however, eight comedies were staged, with two salient features. Three plays borrow from the political plays of the very early Restoration, so as to suggest that Charles II has re-enacted his triumph over the Puritan rebels. In *The Roundheads*, for example, Aphra Behn reworked *The Rump* and also drew on *The Committee*. Secondly, in six of the seven surviving plays, sex – often cheerful sex – makes a comeback. In contrast to the unpleasantness of recent sex

¹⁴ Hume, *Development of English Drama*, 333. Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* and Shadwell's *A True Widow* flopped, Otway's *Friendship in Fashion* seems not to have succeeded, and Dryden's *The Kind Keeper* was banned, for reasons now unknown: see Staves, 'Why was Dryden's *Mr Limberham* banned?'

¹⁵ Dryden's tragi-comedy *The Spanish Fryar* (1680) contains a comic subplot of fortunately frustrated sex between characters who turn out to be brother and sister. This parallels the averted usurpation in the main plot. We do not know when Nathaniel Lee's tragi-comedy *The Princess of Cleve* was premièred. Its elements of gross sexual comedy complement the tragically untameable desires that contaminate even the idealistic heroine.

comedy, three are festive comedies (of triumphant Tories cuckolded grasping, unattractive Whigs), with only Aphra Behn combining intense royalism with a sense that both sides oppressed women. The final play of triumphalist Whig-cuckolding was John Crowne's *City Politiques*, which was ready in June 1682 but banned until January 1683. This was popular, but then the bubble burst. In the fifteen years between *City Politiques* and Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), only six sex comedies were clearly successful. The first of these, Thomas Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love*, did not appear until 1690. The real heyday of Carolean sex comedy lasted from just 1675 to 1683, with a gap in the middle, and many changes of character.

Exclusion Crisis tragedy is highly politicized though often opportunistic, with several dramatists changing tack as they struggled to interpret the shifting and obscure balance of power. Some, however (notably Shadwell), wrote out of principle, and there are also pessimistic portrayals of men and women trapped in cruel political conflicts that are beyond their comprehension or control. Like the political upheaval of the Restoration, that of the Exclusion Crisis stimulated adaptations (ten in all) of Shakespeare, chiefly as an interpreter of classical and British history. Between the first and second clutch of adaptations, in 1662–67 and 1678–82, and for the remainder of the century afterwards, Shakespeare was adapted only occasionally, chiefly as a source of opera. The first adaptation of this second wave was Shadwell's *The History of Timon of Athens* (1678), produced some months before the plot scare exploded, but when opposition to James was growing. Shadwell expands Shakespeare's portrayal of Athenian politics, staging a restoration of a kind very different from that celebrated in earlier Carolean plays: the reinstatement of democracy after the oligarchy of the Four Hundred Tyrants in 411 BC. It concludes with a public assembly of the people, and their cries of 'Liberty'. Shadwell also includes attacks on the pride and corruption of the aristocracy, and he provides a remarkable rejection of patriarchal sexual morality by contrasting a vicious virgin with an exemplary fallen woman. This play provides the most radical attack on the old order to appear on the Carolean stage.

A sense of pessimistic entrapment is perhaps best seen in Thomas Otway's *The History and Fall of Caius Marius* (1679), which transposes the story of Romeo and Juliet to the civil war between Marius and Sulla in the first century BC, showing Rome in the grip of two factions that were equally bloody and equally contemptuous of individual life. By contrast, the time-serving suppleness of the jobbing dramatist is nicely illustrated by Nahum Tate, whose (non-Shakespearean) tragedy *The Loyal General* (1679) appears to be a pro-Monmouth allegory, but whose *The History of King Lear* of only a year later shows the

triumph of legitimate order over a ruthlessly aspiring bastard, Edmund clearly standing for Monmouth. The notorious happy ending of this play is not, as is sometimes thought, typical of Carolean Shakespeare adaptations. More typically, the tendency is to add violence: for example, Durfey's adaptation of *Cymbeline*, *The Injured Princess* (1682), includes a blinding scene modelled on *King Lear* (which Tate had retained in his version). Incidents of attempted rape are added in the reworkings of *Lear*, *Cymbeline* and *Coriolanus*, again illustrating how closely sexual and political themes are linked. Planned or attempted rape had been a feature of the earliest Carolean drama: the usurper in *The Generall*, for example, plans to rape the heroine, his proposed sexual violence paralleling the violence by which he has already gained the kingdom. Some critics see the preoccupation with rape as a pornographic prostitution of the actress for the purposes of male titillation.¹⁶ There is some truth in this (particularly in drama of the 1690s), but it is important to note that the appearance of actresses on the public stage pre-dates by more than a decade the first successful rape (in Dryden's *Amboyna*, 1672): the move towards tragic rape is almost as gradual as the move towards comic seduction, and it almost always makes a political point. If usurpers still plan and execute rapes, so now do legitimate rulers, and the rape victim is no longer a symbol of the kingdom but rather an individual menaced by cruel and indifferent authority. Indeed, one general feature of the Shakespeare adaptations is the increased priority of private experience. In adapting *Coriolanus* as *The Ingratitude of a Common-Wealth* (1681), Tate provided a new and very bloody ending, in which Virgilia commits suicide to avoid rape by Aufidius, Young Martius is tortured to death, and Volumnia goes mad with grandmaternal grief (hardly something we can imagine in Shakespeare's Volumnia). This is sensationalism, but it is also an exaltation of the private. The play no longer portrays fissures within a complex society that remains tied to the cult of the warrior; it is the family tragedy of a brave nobleman (James) with too overt a contempt for the mob.

The two best tragedies of the Exclusion Crisis are Nathaniel Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1680) and Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* (1682). Both portray individuals caught between opposing yet equally cruel systems of power (the Roman monarchy and the Republic which replaces it, and the Venetian Senate and the conspirators who plot to overthrow it), and in both the protagonist's involvement in the political conflict threatens to erase his personal (specifically his sexual) life: the son of the republican liberator, Brutus, becomes

¹⁶ E.g., Pearson, *Prostituted Muse*, 95–9; Marsden, 'Rape, voyeurism, and the Restoration stage'.

impotent when he tries to consummate his secret wedding to the daughter of the deposed king, and Jaffier, the hero of *Venice Preserv'd*, rebels against an oppressive plutocracy which makes his marriage financially unsustainable, only to join a conspiracy whose male bonding makes it psychologically impossible; for he can only bond with the other conspirators by surrendering his wife to them as a surety for good behaviour. In Orrery, the personal is easily subject to the social: though usurpers plan rapes, a right-thinking hero will willingly surrender the woman he loves to a friend who also loves her. Jaffier's gesture recalls the self-sacrifice of the Orrery hero but also debases it: if the personal impedes social transactions, social transactions corrupt the personal.

In other ways, too, the outlook of Orrery has long gone. He had portrayed a feudal world unified by the inviolability of the word, in which money had no part. Although the Rome of *Lucius Junius Brutus* is controlled by language, the language is an unverifiable political rhetoric concerning people and events that are never seen: we do not directly see the hated royal dynasty that is deposed. If Orrery's protagonists honour the word, Lee's manipulate it, mastering the state by controlling the means of representation. Like so many other plays, *Lucius Junius Brutus* features a rape, of Lucretia, and this prompts the revolution. Yet, after her suicide, Lucretia becomes a mere rhetorical figment to be manipulated by Brutus in his political myth-making. Again, the personal is consumed by the political. *Venice Preserv'd* travels still further from early Carolean models, since it is the first tragedy since the Restoration to portray the social and psychological power of money. For example, it treats prostitution, and particularly a prostitution of sexual domination and submission, as the fundamental constituent of all human relationships. There are two scenes in which a prostitute is paid to humiliate a masochistic, foot-fetishist politician named Antonio (possibly a partial caricature of the Whig leader, the Earl of Shaftesbury, whose first name was Anthony), but sexual transaction and sexual violence also pervade the higher levels of the play. It is in the brothel (significantly) that Jaffier hands over his wife to the conspirators as a pledge for his good behaviour, to be stabbed to death if he defaults, and echoes of Antonio's submissive fantasies infiltrate the language even of those who would be heroic liberators. The dream of the libertine is for a primitive state of nature in which no artificial codes impede the gratification of desire, and this is what the conspirators wish to recover. Yet, even as desire induces such dreams, it undermines them with an addiction to slavery.

When *Venice Preserv'd* was staged in the aftermath of the Whig defeat, the court applauded the suppression of conspiracy and (perhaps) the mocking of Shaftesbury, but no one (not even Aphra Behn) had expressed loyalty with

greater gloom. *The Country Wife* had comically shown that sexuality entangles man in complex social bonds, even as it drives him to overthrow all social prohibitions. *Venice Preserv'd* presents a tragic version of the same paradox: if social existence makes private sexuality impossible, sexuality carries cravings for servitude that nullify the dreams of the liberator and bind him to the very system he opposes. Man is not a naturally social animal; he is naturally a slave. Here is the sense of irremediably fissured civilization that Tate was busily editing out of Shakespeare. *Venice Preserv'd* is the best tragedy of the later seventeenth century.

If the Exclusion Crisis produced a resurgence in sex comedy, and brought out the best in Otway and Lee, its medium-term consequences for the theatre were damaging. The distractions of the period hit takings, and in 1682 the poorly managed King's Company merged with the Duke's. With no competitor, the United Company took the safe option of mounting tried favourites, and the demand for new plays dropped sharply, especially in the period from 1683 to 1688. (There was a revival in demand after the 1688 revolution, and a glut of new plays after the resumption of competition in 1695.) The mid-1680s were difficult times for playwrights (Otway died, perhaps of starvation): few tragedies were staged, and the three new sex comedies mounted in 1686–7 had a mixed or hostile reception. There was a new fashion for light farce, and the most successful heavyweight comedy of the period (indeed, of the late seventeenth century) was a comedy depicting the education and reform of a gentleman, Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688). Shadwell's hostility to sex comedy was of long standing, and reform comedies had appeared in the 1670s. *The Squire of Alsatia*, however, marks a clear advance in their importance.

It also marks a change in the political interpretation of sex and the family. Alsatia is an area of London that is beyond the law, a safe-haven for debtors and crooks. At the end of the play, it is to be subjected to the authority of law, and the taming of anarchy at the heart of the metropolis is closely paralleled by the hero's reform (his chief transgression had been to seduce the daughter of a lawyer): in perfect synchronicity, we see the maturing of a city and a citizen. The play uses the much adapted plot of Terence's *Adelphi* (*The Brothers*), in which two brothers are separately brought up, one by the strict natural father, the other by the father's kindly brother. Although kindly upbringing does not deliver perfection, its alternative is disastrous. Sir Charles Sedley and Aphra Behn had already used this plot to contrast Puritan repressiveness and Royalist exuberance,¹⁷ but Shadwell reverses the application: the despotic

¹⁷ In *The Mulberry Garden* (1668) and *The City Heiress* (1682).

father, deriving his authority from the act of generation, represents the absolute and hereditary monarchy of the Stuarts, whereas the kind stepfather, who realizes that authority must be earned, not merely inherited, represents an authority that is conditional, potentially contractual.

This was Shadwell's first play for seven years – in the dedication of his next, *Bury Fair* (1689), he claimed that he had been politically excluded from the stage – but now he was on the winning side. Having weathered the Exclusion Crisis, James II had become king in 1685; but in November 1688 he was deposed. He had alienated many natural supporters by his extension of royal power and confrontational advancement of his fellow-Catholics, and the birth of a male heir raised fears of a perpetual Catholic dynasty, prompting seven noblemen to invite William of Orange (husband of James's daughter, Mary) to intervene. In the Parliament which ratified the post-revolution settlement, the Commons (like Shadwell) held that James had broken his contract with the people, but the Lords opposed a contractual interpretation of kingship and adopted the fiction that James had abdicated. Many Tories accepted William, though as a *de facto* monarch, while the Whigs accepted him as a king *de jure*. Whereas Charles had prolonged, dissolved, called and done without Parliaments at will, William in 1694 had – unwillingly – to accept an act stipulating that Parliaments should meet at least once every three years, and should last no more than three years.

Like early Carolean drama, the drama of William's reign frequently celebrates the newly established order, partly out of conviction, partly because the stage was kept under observant political control. Dryden's late plays, with their portrayal of exile and dispossession, do provide coded Jacobite statements, but his *Cleomenes* (1692), about an exiled king in a foreign court, was initially banned on the orders of Queen Mary. Colley Cibber's adaptation of *Richard III* (1700), which included the death of Henry VI, had to be cut lest Henry arouse sympathy for James. The control of the stage persisted throughout the reign of Queen Anne, though it was now controlled by political parties.¹⁸ Despite its narrow range of class interests, Carolean drama had by the 1670s reflected in some detail the political discontents of the gentry and nobility. From Williamite drama, however, one would scarcely guess the extent of the King's initial unpopularity (partly caused by the unprecedentedly high taxes which financed his war against Louis XIV). Perhaps the frankest (though entirely supportive) play is Crowne's tragedy *Regulus* (1692), about the ingratitude of Carthage (Britain) to its foreign defender Xantippus. Celebratory drama flagged after mid-1692, as the war dragged on, but revived after the spring of 1696, when a plot to

¹⁸ See Loftis, *Politics of Drama in Augustan England*.

assassinate William boosted his popularity and there were premature hopes of peace (eventually, if briefly, gratified by the Peace of Ryswick in 1697). It is noteworthy that, immediately after the revolution, tragedians tend to avoid portraying the deposition of a hereditary ruler (George Powell's *Alphonso King of Naples* of 1690 adopts the fiction of James's abdication). After the Assassination Plot, however, they eagerly portray the deposition and slaughter of legitimate but tyrannical rulers.

Much comedy also celebrates the revolution, by translating the defeat of absolutism to the domestic sphere: families are reconstituted after a tyrannical guardian or parent has been neutralized by expulsion or contractual constraint (as in Congreve's *Love for Love*, 1695, and *The Way of the World*, 1700). Here, on the stage, we see the contractual model of authority that had been rejected in the state; we also see resolutions of the tension between the individual and the social unit that had pervaded Carolean drama. The analogy between the contractual family and the contractual state did, however, throw up some problems. Guardians and parents might be disposed of, but spouses presented a thornier problem: as Lady Brute muses in Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* (1697), if a nation can depose an intolerable king, might a wife not rid herself of an intolerable husband? Why, wonders Mrs Sullen in *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707), are British women subject to the absolutist tyranny that Queen Anne's generals are opposing on the battlefields of Blenheim and Ramillies?¹⁹ One well-known development in post-revolution comedy of the 1690s is the increasing interest in unhappy marriages, from which there is often no satisfactory escape.²⁰ As part of the same tendency, dramatists often (as in Congreve's *Love for Love*) show women testing their prospective husbands, aware that marriage can turn a lover into a tyrant; the image is frequently of a judicial trial, again suggesting the containment of authority by law. After 1700, however, dramatists tend to find facile resolutions for sympathetic characters in unhappy marriages. Notoriously, Farquhar solves the marital problems of Mrs Sullen by sleight of hand, with an apparent, but legally impossible, divorce. Other dramatists are content that a jealous dotard married to a teenager should renounce his jealousy, like the titular character of Charles Johnson's *The Generous Husband* (1711).

After the revolution, the court was no longer favourable to sex comedy. James had liked *The Rover* and had accepted the dedication of its sequel, where in Behn (astonishingly) claimed that he had been the model for Willmore. When

¹⁹ 1.1.65–7, in Vanbrugh, *Vanbrugh: Four Comedies; The Beaux' Stratagem* 4.1.1–5, in Farquhar, *Works of George Farquhar*, vol. II.

²⁰ See Hume, 'Marital discord'; Corder, 'Marriage comedy'.

The Rover was performed at court in 1690, however, Mary disapproved strongly of the play. Societies for the reformation of manners were founded, and in 1698 Jeremy Collier published his attack on the stage, initiating a bitter debate between playwrights and their enemies. In the same year, there were attempts to mount prosecutions, and in 1701 actors were successfully prosecuted for profanely using the name of God on the stage. Clearly, the theatre was under pressure, and the Collier controversy finally killed off sex comedy.

Yet, as already indicated, comedy writers had not been unregenerately turning out clones of *The Country Wife* for the previous quarter-century. Sex comedy was a sporadic, localized and mutable phenomenon, which had passed its peak before the ousting of James. Only six clearly succeeded after 1683: Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love* (1690), Dryden's *Amphitryon* (1690), William Mountfort's *Greenwich Park* (1691), Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* (1693) and *Love for Love* (1695), and Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696). Except *Amphitryon*, all are predominantly festive and lightweight. Darker studies of sexuality, such as Congreve's *The Double Dealer* (1693), failed. The following comparison is very approximate, since the reception of plays is not always known, and the term *sex comedy* is imprecise (I use it, crudely, to mean comedy during which illicit sex is at some point known to be happening). Nevertheless, it may have some value. In the seasons from 1674–5 to 1682–3 and 1688–9 to 1697–8, comparable numbers of comedies were premièred (51 and 56). In the earlier period, over half were sex comedies, of which nearly half succeeded. In the later, a quarter were sex comedies; the six clear successes represent approximately one-tenth of the total. Of course, there are subtler differences than bed-counts: many Carolean comedies espouse sexual freedom without portraying it, for example. Conversely, comedies about reformed or exemplary characters recur throughout the post-revolution years;²¹ Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* (1696) is the most famous, but by no means the first. Despite the changing pattern of new comedies, however, a taste for established sex comedies persisted well into the eighteenth century.²²

As well as a change in sexual outlook, there are changes in the social emphasis of drama. Mountfort's *Greenwich Park* favourably portrays bourgeois characters (its witty, beautiful heroines are the daughters of a laundress), as do Mary Pix's *The Beau Defeated* (1700) and Farquhar's *The Twin Rivals* (1702). Such touches are sporadic, and Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722, but conceived by 1710) remains a significantly polemic work in bringing the vindication of the bourgeois to the centre. Another change is the occasional setting of comedy in

²¹ E.g., Shadwell's *Bury Fair* (1689) and *The Scurwiers* (1690), and Dufrey's *Love for Money* (1691).

²² Scouten and Hume, "Restoration comedy".

the provinces, an innovation often mistakenly attributed to the last comedies of George Farquhar.²³ A seminal play is Shadwell's *Bury Fair* (1689), which is one of many to re-enact the revolution within the space of a single family: a Francophile stepmother and her daughter are expelled, a natural daughter returns and a buffoonish but kindly father is free to indulge his love of native culture, of Shakespeare and Jonson. The liberation of native English culture reflects the belief that the revolution reinstated ancestral rights suppressed by Stuart absolutism, and the non-metropolitan setting (Suffolk) emphasizes a return to unspoilt Englishness. Interestingly, Shadwell had spent part of his childhood in Bury: the return to origins is personal as well as national.

There is also a subtler change, in that dramatists increasingly portray societies regulated by numerical systems rather than (as in Orrery) by the word, or by analogies between the distribution of social power and the hierarchic structure of the cosmos itself. The shift first appears in Otway and late Behn, and is really pronounced from the 1690s onwards, when dramatists were particularly responding to the growth of seemingly intangible forms of wealth, with no basis in land: in order to fund King William's war, the Bank of England was founded, covering the gap between assets and liabilities by paying investors in paper currency; there were lotteries; and trade in stocks flourished.

The encroachment of money upon older systems of order was portrayed in the two best tragedies of the 1690s, Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage* (1694) and *Oroonoko* (1695), both based on fiction by Aphra Behn. In possible allusion to the revolution (which Southerne had initially opposed), both show the power of money to dissolve the older obligations of oaths and kinship: an apparently widowed wife is forced by indigence to remarry, only to find that her first husband is still alive; an African prince is sold into slavery. The comedies which most ingeniously portray a society controlled by numbers are those which George Farquhar produced between 1698 and his early death in 1707. His heroes are obsessive and successful enumerators (of sexual conquests, wealth, time and space); his fools obsessive and inept enumerators of the same things.²⁴ Yet his heroes are always physically dislocated, in transit and normally without any landed property, until they gain it through a woman. Apart from his portrayal of an honest banker in *The Twin Rivals*, Farquhar concentrates on gentlemen; yet his gentlemen have to justify their roles and characters in a world whose rules have changed.

A recurrent Farquhar situation is one in which the bodies of inferior or victimized characters become subject to ritualized numerical control: in *The*

²³ Most recently in Bull, *Vanbrugh and Farquhar*, 110.

²⁴ Hughes, 'Who counts in Farquhar?'.

Recruiting Officer (1706), for instance, two raw recruits are sentenced to a spell of motionless clock-watching in a Shrewsbury street. Other dramatists also portray the social manipulation of the body and the social predominance of number. The undertaker in Steele's *The Funeral* (1701) slashes and embalms corpses so as to falsify the characters of the dead and the feelings of the survivors. Susanna Centlivre's *The Basset Table* (1705) parallels the reform of two women, one fascinated with manipulating the body, the other with counting: a scatty dissectionist and a compulsive gambler, who loves 'the Musick of [her] own Voice, crying Nine and Twenty, Threescore, better than the sweetest Poetry in the Universe'.²⁵ The numerically oppressed body is also the ruling conceit of Centlivre's most famous play, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1717). Through an irrational phobia of posterity, the heroine's late father has devised a numerical trap to prevent her from reproducing, leaving her in the rotating quarterly control of four guardians so different in outlook that they will never agree on a suitable husband (one is a virtuoso, with an interest in embalming and dissecting bodies). The hero circumvents the ploy by adopting four different disguises, in the process encountering episodes of silly counting: a conversation about watches, and a scene of trading in South Sea stock. Counting is such an everyday activity that its occurrence, and its varieties, may not strike the eye. Yet, experienced as he was as a politician and landowner, Orrery gave a strikingly limited role to enumeration in his tragedies, showing a sharply declining interest in numbers as they rise beyond two; few numbers above six are mentioned at all. The reason for the prominence of *one* and *two* is that they are the numbers of love, friendship, rivalry and moral choice.

When one talks about the morality of Carolean comedies, one thinks of sex. After the great marital discord comedies of the 1690s, the resolution of sexual temptation or conflict tends to be facile, but there are other kinds of transgression. *The Basset Table* belongs to a wave of plays stressing the evils (and sometimes sexual dangers) of gambling,²⁶ and they in turn contribute to wider satire of waste, conspicuous consumption and luxury, reflecting the rapid growth of London as a residential and commercial centre. Although characters in Carolean comedy occasionally go shopping, their purchases are modest and quickly described: there is no equivalent to the aristocratic kleptomaniac in Southerne's *The Maid's Last Prayer* (1693), or to the brainless connoisseur in his *The Wives' Excuse* (1691), who (to the indifference of his guests) catalogues all his

²⁵ (London, 1706), II: 17.

²⁶ It is a follow-up to Centlivre's *The Gamester* (1705). Other such plays include Farquhar's *Sir Harry Wildair* (1701), Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705) and Cibber's *The Lady's Last Stake* (1707). Gambling had been only sporadically and lightly satirized in Carolean drama.

brands of tea. The rapacious pseudo-hospitality of the gaming parties is a new development of an old theme: the decay of the hospitality once exercised by the mythical ideal gentleman. Generally including crooks disguised as gentlemen, the parties portray a society where old values have disappeared in the competitive circulation of coin and paper credit, with women in danger of paying otherwise unredeemable IOUs – papers inscribed with numbers – with their bodies.

The idealized bourgeois in *The Twin Rivals* displays his virtue by exercising hospitality while, for much of the play, the gentry are too impoverished or corrupt to follow suit. Although not a gentleman by birth, he proves himself by taking over the gentleman's role. By the second decade of the eighteenth century, however, there is a tentatively gathering positiveness in the portrayal of new forces: a conviction that, however suspect the pursuits of the speculator, the honest merchant can not only acquire the qualities of the gentleman but make a distinctive and necessary contribution of his own.²⁷ Cibber and Centlivre start to portray the merchant with some respect,²⁸ and in his ponderous, homiletic, but hugely successful *The Conscious Lovers* – trailed by an attack on Etherege's still popular *The Man of Mode* (*Spectator*, 65) – Steele contrasts the industry of the merchant with the gentleman's idle pride in ancestry, and vigorously denies that gentlemen have any right to a sexual double standard. Whereas many of his predecessors and contemporaries uphold morality by portraying the reform of a former rake, often paired with a man of sense, Steele insists on the wholly exemplary, and on the appropriateness of serious subjects for comedy. It is even less 'typical' of its time than *The Country Wife*,²⁹ but it is a significant monument, as a play which systematically, and with discursive theoretical self-justification, purges itself of the last vestige of the Carolean ethos: not only sex comedy, which was long gone, but the right to a scapegrace past, to intolerant pride in genealogy and to contempt for industry.

²⁷ The point is, however, made when William Mountfort dedicated the anonymous *Henry the Second* (London, 1693), possibly by John Bancroft, to Sir Thomas Cooke, Alderman and Sheriff of London.

²⁸ See Loftis, *Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding*, 77–100.

²⁹ For the varieties of comic drama in the eighteenth century, see Bevis, *Laughing Tradition*, and Hume, 'Multifarious forms of eighteenth-century comedy'.