CAVALIER DRAMA

AN HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL SUPPLEMENT TO THE STUDY OF THE ELIZABETHAN AND RESTORATION STAGE

BY

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TO
FELIX E. SCHELLING

PREFACE

WHILE preparing biographies of Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant, I found that it encouraged a fresh point of view to deal with material spanning Elizabethan and Restoration dramatic history, and I projected the present book. Facilities for gaining access to manuscripts and rare prints were provided me by a committee of the Board of Graduate Education and Research of the University of Pennsylvania, drawing upon a special research fund. Without the assistance thus rendered, my work could not have been done.

The bibliography originally planned to accompany this study is available elsewhere. Most of the authors treated appear in "Minor Dramatists: 1603-1660," a section in the forthcoming *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* with which I have assisted; and the manuscripts are listed in my "Elizabethan and Seventeenth-Century Play Manuscripts," *PMLA*, L (1935), 687-699. Secondary sources of information are indicated in the footnotes (at the end of chapters) with sufficient fullness to insure identification; it may be well to explain, however, that the publications of the *Historical Manuscripts Commission* are numbered according to the system followed in the index volumes of the series.

Of those who have read this study in manuscript, Dr. Joseph Q. Adams of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Professor Allardyce Nicoll of Yale University, and Professor J. S. P. Tatlock of the University of California have been kind enough to communicate with me directly. I wish to thank them for their interest and helpful criticism—without implying that they endorse my views or stand sponsor for the accuracy of my facts. I wish also to acknowledge the courtesies extended to me by the Committee on Research Activities of the Modern Language Association, and by Mr. Donald Goodchild of the American Council of Learned Societies. My generous colleague, Dr. Edgar Potts, has read the proof, and my always helpful wife has prepared the index.

October, 1936. A. H.

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INTRODUCTION

THE term Cavalier Drama is not so familiar in studies of the English theatre that it needs no apology, yet the term may be properly used. That same class of authors who gave us our Cavalier lyrics wrote also a number of plays, and these plays, although long banished to the realm of half-forgotten things, form an important link in the chain of dramatic history. The purpose of the present book is to discuss the trends in English drama during the Caroline and Commonwealth periods, and the first few years of the Restoration, with a view to illustrating the continuity of an English literary tradition.

That the Commonwealth period, when theatres were outlawed, is not here dismissed as a blank will seem natural enough to students of today. Modern scholars have enabled us to see that the interruption effected by Puritan rule was less complete than used generally to be supposed. Plays were acted during the time of prohibition, by amateurs in private and by professionals in public—furtively as a rule, but sometimes openly and with quasi-official toleration. Plays were more eagerly read than ever before; and new plays were written—by dramatists who had been active before 1642, by others who remained active after 1660, and by others whose total production belongs to this period when once there was supposed to have been no drama.

That neither 1642 nor 1660 is selected as a terminal date will also seem natural. Each was a year of political more than of literary change, and each affected the public performance of plays rather than the English love of plays and inherited aptitude for creating particular kinds. Elizabethan drama did not foresee that, at such and such a time, a Parliamentary resolution would close the theatres, and was not willing to cease evolving after the days of Shakespeare, or the days of Fletcher, merely surviving with diminishing pulse, prepared to expire when that resolution came. By the same token, Restoration drama did not cast its nativity and assume a parcel of self-determined qualities on the day when young Charles debarked from the *Naseby*. Political and literary history are linked, but in no such relation. The wellsprings of drama lie deep in the national culture, a factor more powerful in the end than the spectacular edicts of new political administrations.

What may seem unusual about this book is the lack of emphasis placed upon the popular stage. The explanation lies in the fact that in the mid-seventeenth century the most striking evolution in serious

drama was effected, not by professional playwrights, but by the fashionable gentry active in the Caroline court and on the Royal side in the Civil Wars—by the "Cavaliers." When Fletcher died, he was succeeded by no popular playwright with a personal note so novel or so appealing as to set a fashion. Ford in tragedy and Shirley in comedy were original, but they were not immediately influential. Fletcher himself, and Ben Jonson, continued to be imitated in the theatres. Then, in 1633, the Queen of England acted a part in Walter Montague's *The Shepherd's Paradise,* precipitating the "Prynne episode" and inducing a number of courtiers, almost as an expression of loyalty to their Queen, to imitate Montague by writing plays. The courtly usurpation of the stage, so striking after the Restoration, began in the Caroline era. From the time of Montague, Carlell, Suckling, Killigrew, and Cartwright to the time of Stapylton, Digby, Howard, and Orrery scores of plays were written by Cavaliers, some of whom are not commonly known to have written at all. Sometimes the new interest in drama functioned oddly as a social leveller. In 1627 William Davenant, son of a taverner, was a common playwright, while Thomas Killigrew, son of a Vice Chamberlain, was Page of Honor to the King; but in 1660 Killigrew was a playhouse manager, with Davenant—now *Sir* William Davenant—as his professional rival.

Montague and his followers were able, because of the special character of their circle, to work a new variation upon tragicomedy. Courtly predilections, clearly evident as early as the time of *The Arcadia* and *Euphues,* but held in abeyance so long as drama was mainly the property of the London populace, now found expression in plays, together with fads more recently acquired from D'Urfé and the *précieuses.* Like *Tamburlaine, The Spanish Tragedy, Every Man in his Humor,* and *Philaster,* Walter Montague's "pastoral" may be considered as a fashion-setting play. The manner of *The Shepherd's Paradise* was modified by the more heroical tendencies of Carlell and other courtiers, so that a composite inspiration went into the making of typical plays of the Cavalier mode. The mode culminated, or so it may be argued, in the heroic plays of John Dryden. That the plays of Montague and Carlell are inferior in quality should not confuse the issue, for plays need not be good in order to set a fashion.

Nearly all Cavalier plays are inferior in quality, and the historian's penalty for dealing with a body of literature which Time has justly submerged is self-evident. Cavalier plays are often so similar in theme that it is hard to describe them in such a way as to distinguish one from another, and their artistic weakness is so manifest that it is hard to concede the point with play after play without subjecting all to a

monotonous drizzle of sarcasm. It is equally hard to convey impressions of merit in certain plays without seeming totally to have lost one's sense of proportion. Depressed by the knowledge that he is dealing constantly with the trivial, the historian must draw comfort from the truism that a body of material, unimportant in each detail, may be important in the aggregate.

Apart from their significance as a stage in the evolution of English drama, the plays to be discussed have an undeniable interest as social history. Although we are here largely concerned with the problem of literary continuity, we are also concerned with Cavalier drama itself—with its kind, with its quality or lack of quality, and with the lives, the character, and the background of those who produced it. The interest of the reader will normally be focussed elsewhere, and he will see in the plays described the last withered blossoms of Elizabethan drama, or the first green buds of Restoration drama, according to his point of view, but it is to be hoped that he will see something else as well. These plays deserve, for a smiling while at least, attention for their own sake. The Cavalier is known by his scintillant lyrics of love and laughter, by his repute as a roisterer and scapegrace, and to some by the records of his social and religious bigotry; but he is revealed here upon a new and almost unsuspected side. These plays furnish insight into a generation, faded, exotic, and absurd though they often are.

The material of the book has been arranged with a view to the convenience of two different classes of readers. In Part I are brought together such conclusions concerning trends as may be of fairly general interest. In Part II is a detailed description of the body of material upon which these conclusions are based. Cavalier plays will never receive the minute scholarly attention which Elizabethan plays have received and which Restoration plays are now receiving. They are, and will remain, the most rarely read and least known of all our earlier English drama, if for no other reason than that many of them exist only in manuscript or in rare and inaccessible early editions. Even the specialist need not feel called upon to read all of these plays. Since the survey in Part II is intended as a substitute for, rather than as a guide to, reading, it has been made, regretfully, encyclopedic: it is filled with biographical data, synopses, and quotations, as well as evaluations. In deprecation one can only say, that it is intended for reference, and that the index is complete.

PART ONE

TRENDS

I

THE COURT INVADES THE DRAMA

WHEN Elizabethan drama was taking shape, the court and the courtiers helped to fashion the mould. Then the theatre of the populace outstripped all else, and except in the schools, the Quality ceased to traffic with an art sullied by the professional dexterity of the sons of Kentish and Warwickshire yeomen. The heyday of drama had passed, and the body of Shakespeare had lain by the banks of the Avon a decade, before courtly hands began to reach again for the puppet strings. They could do little harm now, as in the interim they could have done little good, and the effects produced were divertingly fantastic. These effects were important too, for the prestige of Westminster was still potent enough to send a new current into the stream of our dramatic development.

It was a gesture from the throne that made the court invade the drama. Caroline royalty wished to *participate* in plays, yearning from Stuart illusions in life toward their microcosm on the stage. At least this is one explanation for the renewal of courtly intimacy with the mimic art; there are others less intangible. For their effects to be calculated, the novel features of Caroline dramatic patronage must be recognized; a glance must be spared at the royal attitude during preceding reigns.

Queen Elizabeth had patronized the drama officially. She had permitted it to flourish. For this we should be grateful, but we should not mistake her rôle. Elizabeth was not in reality like that tutelary deity in the red wig who presides benignantly at the Shakespeare festivals of women's colleges. She was further still from the imaginative conception in Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare*—a woman holding the threads of destiny in the lives of Marlowe and his Stratford rival, and pondering, with queenly intensity, how the latter must prevail since his is a richer poetic gift for the world. The conjunction of a great drama and a great queen seems to demand a link between the two closer than their being products alike of a great age. Even historians of the drama are a little misleading in this matter. Enthusiasts, they are apt to appropriate the Queen.

The inspiration playwrights took from Elizabeth was generated within; her personal condescensions to their offerings were few, her patronage regally aloof. She permitted herself to be amused by plays,

selected, censored, and supervised by her office of the revels, but she was a cold spectator, easily displeased and morbidly quick to take offense. The records preserve but few comments on the many plays that she saw, and usually these are in the vein of her remark to De Silva concerning *Juno and Diana,* "This is all against me."[1] We have no right to expect of her elaborate critiques, or to charge her with lack of appreciation; contemporary appreciation was loud in no quarter and is now scarcely audible. Native drama was not taken to be literature; plays filled the idle hours; trivial in the lives of subjects, how trivial indeed in the life of their great monarch. We shall look in vain for a sign that it was otherwise. Elizabeth, passive as a spectator, is inconceivable as a participant. Peele touched the limits of propriety when he concluded his *Arraignment of Paris* by denying Até's golden apple to Venus herself and presenting it to the fairer Eliza on her throne, thus conscripting her for his cast. Previously it had been matter for remark when a sonnet praising her beauty had been received from a performer with her own queenly hands. Reputedly unconventional, she felt her majesty and kept her royal state; knowledge that an English queen would one day act in a play would have stunned her sense of propriety; nor would she have relished more the thought that an English king would one day supply fables to playmakers. There is a legend that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written because Elizabeth wished to see Falstaff in love. Let us believe it, then let us savor it as the Queen's sole intimacy with the drama of her day. May games, archery contests, country dances, plays: Elizabeth was the patron of all diversions—viewed from an eminence.

King James had a relish for plays more demonstrative than Elizabeth's, but he too was content to let them spawn naturally among his subjects, and after a few early generosities to the players, his routine payments of ten pounds per court performance became his only effective liaison with the stage. These court performances he required constantly. "What do you tell me of the fashion?" he replied to his Lords when they demurred at a play on Christmas; "I will make it a fashion."[2] Since his wife and children could each order the players to court, performances at some seasons occurred almost nightly. Yet little remains to show that one kind of play was preferred before another, save that most should be "new," or that any interest was taken in the men who wrote them. The best of Shakespeare, new minted and made current by his own men, must have been acted at Whitehall, often to be received there with amiable indifference, like dinner music now. James had, truly, a favorite play—not *Lear* or *The Tempest,* not even one of the

spiced romances or wicked comedies of Fletcher, but George Ruggles' *Ignoramus,* a broad lampoon. This delighted him so vastly that he returned to Cambridge to see it again. As a rule, even at the universities, James did not exert himself to be a gracious spectator; he showed a discouraging tendency to sleep or to leave early. His response to Barten Holiday's *Technogamia or the Marriage of the Arts* is preserved by a contemporary wit:

> At Christ Church Marriage, done before the king,
> Lest that those mates should want an offering,
> The king himself did offer; What I pray?
> He offer'd twice or thrice to go away.[3]

James' was a blunt nature, and that simian gravity with which he contemplated his own kingly divinity and the prerogative of his bishops relaxed into boisterousness, not into the subtle enjoyments of a Mæcenas. He had his literary protégés and his personal ambitions, but these were in the sphere of piety and pedantry.

Queen Anne showed more initiative than her husband in directing the pleasures of Whitehall; she frequently, like James on occasion, danced in court masques; and although her connection with regular drama is only that of a constant spectator, to a certain popular dramatist she gave steady employment and became the *raison d'être* of one section of his dramatic works. Ben Jonson's best masques were created on Anne's commissions for entertainments which she herself planned and organized. She even at times suggested the subject matter, and if Jonson was not being simply complimentary in his foreword to the *Masque of Queens,* the capital idea of the antimasque originated with her. Had Anne's interest as a participant extended beyond the masque and had she been surrounded by a more sympathetic court, the movement we shall trace might have received an earlier impetus. As it is, no courtly clique of writers responded to the activities of the Queen; owing to her curious lack of prestige these only contributed to her reputation of frivolity. When Anne died and left James a widower, court entertainment tended to center about Buckingham; but the efforts of Buckingham and his circle found their plane in buffoonery and the dance; they have scarcely any literary implications.

It was several years after King Charles had ascended the throne that royal interest in the drama assumed its first true note of intimacy. The actors were being called to court with greater frequency than ever, and there are signs that they were received with greater cordiality. Sir Henry Herbert, his Majesty's Master of the Revels, began to note that certain plays were "well likte," that the "kinge and queene were very well pleasd

with my service."[4] When Davenant's *Wits* was presented in 1634, Herbert observed that "the kinge commended the language, but dislikt the plott and characters."[5] Characters, plot, language: distinguished and weighed by the King—here is refined criticism! Previously Charles had gone over the manuscript of this play and softened the rigors of censorship by restoring such expressions as *faith, death,* and *slight,* judged by him to be "asseverations only, and no oathes."[6] One can picture neither Elizabeth nor James thus reviewing a playbook. An even closer contact between king and dramatic text is recorded in this same year when *The Gamester* was presented at court, "made by Sherley out of a plot of the king's." Observe too the latter's paternal pride; he "sayd it was the best play he had seen for seven years."[7] Charles must also have supplied the plot of *The Passionate Lovers.* In the epilogue to Part I, he is addressed by Carlell, the author:

> If what hath been presented to your sense
> You do approve, thank your own influence;
> Which moving in the story that you told
> Infus'd new heat into a brain grown cold . . .

Nor were the King's dealings with drama of only one kind. He bore the expense so that Mayne's *City Match* might be acted at Blackfriars.[8] Cartwright planned to destroy the manuscript of *The Siege,* but upon Charles' intervention it was revised and published.[9] These are but isolated examples of a type of patronage that has no recorded counterpart in earlier reigns.

Yet Cavalier drama sprang not from the patronage of the King, but from that of the Queen, Henrietta Maria of Bourbon. Despite the influence upon him of his mother's delight in masques, in which she had encouraged him to appear when a boy, and of Buckingham's fondness for merry making and the dance, Charles would never have been won so completely by the stage had it not been for the example of the French Princess. With this charming lady we shall dwell until the end of the chapter.

Henrietta Maria is best known as a moving spirit in a discredited cause, as the religious zealot and political bigot, the irreconcilable helping to ruin her husband with wrong-headed schemes. But this is not the person with whom we are to deal. In her personal character, especially in her youth, Henrietta was amiable enough. She was lovely of person, sprightly, kind—even tender, and although imperious from the first, of sufficient magnetism to enlist almost at once a following in the English court. Her prestige was great; a love of festive toys and tinsel which in Anne of Denmark had seemed childish frivolity was dignified in "Queen Mary," daughter of Marie de Medicis and Henry of Navarre.

Consonant with the literary movement she provoked, Henrietta had not a jot of literary taste. But she had literary preferences; these indulged with active enthusiasm produced their spectacular effect.

It is symbolic that Charles first glimpsed his future wife performing in a masque with the Queen of France and "as many as made up nineteen fair dancing ladies."[10] One of her earliest pastimes after her arrival in England is just as characteristic. "The Queen," we hear, "is much delighted with the River of the Thames and doth love to walk in the meadows and look upon the haymakers, and will sometimes take a rake and fork and sportingly make hay with them."[11] Less than a year later Henrietta sportingly acted a part in a court play! This in a land where women upon a public stage would for some time yet be thought an obscenity, and where women (and men too for that matter) called in professionals to speak the lines even in court masques.[12] The escapade, far more serious than the whimsy of haymaking, requires a foreword of explanation.

Henrietta's background was different from that of the high-born English of the day. In France the Hôtel de Rambouillet was having a pervasive influence in making literature fashionable; compared with it the Pembroke circle, perhaps its closest English prototype, had been parochial in its effect. Despite the fact that Henrietta was reared in the nucleus of the French court, from which the Marquise de Rambouillet had fastidiously retreated, so prevalent was *préciosité* that D'Urfé's *Astrée* was her favorite book. In the French court itself literature, at least play-acting, was a diversion to be participated in, not left solely to professionals. Throughout Henrietta's childhood, her brother, Louis XIII, would conduct his child court to the apartment of the queen mother and have them act plays. In Héroard's *Journal* occur such typical entries as, "Il [Louis] fait jouer dans sa chambre la tragédie de Emon, tirée de l'Arioste, par ses petits . . .," or "Mené au cabinet de la Reine, il fait jouer une comédie par ses enfants d'honneur . . ."[13] Parts were taken not only by noble children, but by their elders as well; court performances in France before 1625, the year of Henrietta's marriage, were nearly always amateur.[14] As a girl she may have heard De Luynes, the King's favorite, chant the title rôle in *La Délivrance de Renaud,* and before her departure she would have seen the lead in devising court entertainments appropriated by no less a person than Henry of Savoy, Duke of Nemours.[15] She may have seen the King himself take the part of Godfrey of Bouillon in a performance in which Bassompierre, soon to be a weighty ambassador in her cause, gamboled about as a centaur. The *ballet de cour* was conducted with none of the aloofness of the English masque. Amateurs and professionals mingled

in the dance; the king and his peers spoke or chanted lines, and assumed character parts—all this in public. Royalty furnished the tidbit in spectacular amusement; in carnival time at Le Petit-Bourbon, l'Hotel de Ville, or the grand salle of the Louvre, the ballet was performed before thousands of spectators, frequently unruly.[16]

With fresh memories of such revels, with her French attendants still about her, with her high spirit disinclined to yield to English conventions, Henrietta quite naturally behaved in the fashion of France. During her first Christmas season in England, gossip hummed that her demoiselles were to perform a French pastoral with herself as a principal actress in it.[17] On February 21, 1626, the play was presented at Somerset House. A description occurs in the Salvetti correspondence:

> Her Majesty the Queen conducts herself with youthful grace. On the day of the carnival, for which Tuesday was set aside, she acted in a beautiful pastoral of her own composition, assisted by twelve of her ladies whom she had trained since Christmas. The pastoral succeeded admirably; not only in the decorations and changes of scenery, but also in the acting and recitation of the ladies—Her Majesty surpassing all the others. The performance was conducted as privately as possible, inasmuch as it is an unusual thing in this country to see the queen upon a stage; the audience consequently was limited to a few of the nobility, expressly invited, no others being admitted.[18]

This account is gracious, for the point of view is Continental. A description substantially the same occurs among the Venetian state papers, but it concludes with a dissonant note; the play "did not give complete satisfaction, because the English objected to the first part (attione) being declaimed by the queen."[19] This note grows louder in native Saxon voices. A queen on a stage "would once have been thought a strange sight," wrote John Chamberlain grumpily,[20] and there is scent of brimstone in the words of Henry Manners, "I heare not much honor of the Quene's maske, for, if they were not all, soome were in men's apparell."[21] It was a bit hard at first: the Queen of England—an author, a director, an actress in a play!

The heresy in queenly behavior prevailed, but not at once. Charles himself was disturbed by such Gallic buoyancy. In June, 1626, we hear that "the king, passing into the queen's side [of Whitehall] and finding some Frenchmen, her servants, unreverently curveting and dancing in her presence, took her by the hand and led her into his lodgings, locking the door after him, and shutting out all, save the queen . . ."[22] Most of the French attendants were dismissed, and in August it was reported that "The extreme formality and outward decorum with which the queen is now waited on by the English ladies, so contrary to French custom and familiarity, begins to weary her Majesty, who leads

a very discontented life . . ."[23] But these restrictions were of short duration. The decorum of the English ladies relaxed, and most of the French were permitted to return. Once Buckingham, her rival in the King's affections, had been removed, and early differences over religion, the marriage portion, and the French attendants had been adjusted, the reconciliation between Henrietta and Charles became complete and she gained remarkable ascendency over him. Charles's familiarities with drama date from this ascendency. Basically he was not a frivolous man. In later life, when less swayed by the tastes of his wife, he advised John Denham not to jeopardize his dignity by writing verse, and the starchiness thus revealed would have kept him from jeopardizing his own dignity by appearing in certain types of court masques and by conversing with plays in the manner already described had it not been for the Queen. Once he forbade bowling by the gallants in his Spring Garden because of the disturbance there, but the order was recalled on Henrietta's intercession.[24] She was the true Caroline patroness of pleasure. She dined and diverted ambassadors; Denmark House glittered with festive candles; a House of Delight was erected for her at Greenwich. One year the courtiers had never known a duller Christmas, only one play and no dancing at all, because the Queen "has some little Infirmity, a Bile or some such Thing . . ."[25] On her progresses she rode forth with her family of dwarfs, her bands of musicians, her hunting hounds, her "billiard board!" Theatricals in her private suits continued, and we hear at intervals of her "getting her maids to perform pastorals and comedies and other pleasant diversions."[26] Her complaisance in making sure and doubly sure the Stuart succession kept her frequently confined, but as she awaited successive arrivals, she was happy "with her intertainments and devotions."[27] Her entertainments as well as her devotions helped widen the gap between the English people and the King; one of them drove a wedge between the theatre and the remnant of the staid city audience, made plays conclusively a partisan issue, and begat a new development in English drama.

On September 20, 1632, Mr. Pory wrote to Sir Thomas Puckering, "That which the queen's majesty, some of her ladies, and all her maids of honour are now practising upon, is a pastoral penned by Mr. Walter Montagu, wherein her majesty is pleased to act a part, as well for her recreation as for the exercise of her English."[28] In November it was reported that the play would be performed shortly, the Queen to act publicly "for the gratification and pleasure of the king."[29] But there was some delay, and not until January 3, 1633, do we hear more of the project. This time Mr. Pory becomes waggish: "On Wednesday next, the queen's pastoral is to be acted in the lower court of Denmark