Introduction

> At the Restoration The Theatres were in the Hands of Gentlemen, Who had Done particular service to the Crown, and who were Peculiarly qualifyd for the Discharge of that Important Trust. They had Honour, learning, breeding, Discernment, Integrity, Impartiality and generosity. Their chief aim was to see that the Town was well entertaind and the drama improvd … By these methods men of the finest parts were animated to write for the stage, and noe one was Discouragd by His obscurity or because He had not appeard before.
>
> John Dennis, "The Causes of the Decay and Defects of Dramatick Poetry, and of the Degeneracy of the Publick Taste"

> But in Dryden's time the drama was very far from that universal approbation which it has now obtained. The playhouse was abhorred by the Puritans, and avoided by those who desired the character of seriousness or decency. A grave lawyer would have debased his dignity, and a young trader would have impaired his credit, by appearing in those mansions of dissolute licentiousness. The profits of the theatre when so many classes of people were deducted from the audience were not great, and the poet had for a long time but a single night.
>
> Samuel Johnson, "Life of Dryden"

The eighteenth-century critic John Dennis waxed nostalgic about the Restoration stage, a time when "Gentlemen, Who Had Done particular services to the Crown" managed the two licensed acting companies. Through their efforts, spectators were entertained, the drama "improvd," and "men of the finest parts" encouraged to write for the stage. What delighted Dennis in 1725 disgusted Samuel Johnson fifty years later. In his estimation, so debased were the playhouses and so licentious the drama that decent citizens stayed away in droves, a diminishment of spectatorial interest that hobbled the acting companies financially. If Dennis envisages the world of late seventeenth-century theatre as a gentlemen's club, replete with mahogany paneling and upholstered chairs, then Johnson sees it as a Hobbesian jungle,

where playwrights fight over meagre profits while "decent" spectators flee for the exits – that is, if they ever showed up in the first place.

These opposed takes on this remarkable period of theatre are still with us today. The acting companies, the spectators, and the dramatists are either daubed as creatures of the court, sketched as servants to spectators, or limned as lackeys to the box office. Odai Johnson maintains that the prospect of "royal reciprocity exerted an enormous pull over the very shape of the material in the king's playhouse."[1] Phillip Harth argues that Dryden ensured the success of his plays "by appealing to all members of his prospective audience and by avoiding overt political partisanship that would have alienated any considerable segment."[2] J. L. Styan, however, sees an exclusive coterie of elites dictating social and aesthetic standards. He maintains that aristocrats, such as the Duke of Buckingham and the Earl of Rochester, and "courtier" playwrights, such as Sir George Etherege, Sir Charles Sedley, and William Wycherley – all "members of the same set" – shaped an audience outlook that "was the narrowest in the history of the public theatre."[3] In contrast to these views, Robert D. Hume, Eric Rothstein and Frances M. Kavenik, and Katherine West Scheil attribute developments in stagecraft and dramatic form exclusively to box office competition between the two licensed acting companies.[4]

These fine scholars have illuminated various facets of the Restoration stage, such as the sociology of the audience, the organization of the acting companies, and the close ties between the court and the theatre. Focus on a particular strand, however, invariably returns us to one of the two binary terms in circulation since Dennis and Johnson: courtly or commercial enterprise. By contrast, *The Business of English Theatre, 1660–1700* argues that we need both to understand how a theatre so brilliant ultimately failed as a business enterprise. This period bequeathed to us several of the most sophisticated comedies ever written along with groundbreaking developments: the first actresses; the first professional female playwrights; the advent of baroque theatre architecture in England; the first use of moveable scenery on the

[1] Odai Johnson, *Rehearsing the Revolution: Radical Performance, Radical Politics in the English Restoration* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 40.

[2] Phillip Harth, *Pen for a Party: Dryden's Tory Propaganda in Its Contexts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 54–55.

[3] J. L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 7–8.

[4] See Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Eric Rothstein and Frances M. Kavenik, *The Designs of Carolean Comedy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988); and Katherine West Scheil, *The Taste of the Town: Shakespearean Comedy and the Early Eighteenth-Century Theatre* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2003).

commercial stage; the introduction of ensemble music before, during, and after the performance; and the emergence of new dramatic forms, such as sex comedies, heroic drama, horror plays, and dramatic operas. Despite these innovations, the theatre limped along for much of the period, a calamity even more striking given the demographic and economic changes that had taken place. London more than doubled its population between 1600 and 1660, and the inflation that had dogged the pre-Civil War years subsided.[5] The number of merchants trading on the exchanges tripled. There were far more moneyed citizens to purchase tickets than in Shakespeare's time, but by 1682, the United Company – the sole acting troupe left in the capital – played frequently to half-empty houses. Despite the sumptuousness of playhouses such as Dorset Garden, despite the breathtaking special effects and delightful curtain tunes, despite the celebrity allure of players like Thomas Betterton and Elizabeth Barry, and despite the sparkling comedies and moving dramas, few bought what the theatre had on offer. Accounting for this paradox – aesthetic brilliance and financial bane – is the main preoccupation of this book.

The sheer singularity of this period of English theatre argues for a new scholarly overview. The Restoration is unprecedented in the annals of theatre history: never before or since has a country succeeded in extirpating a performance art for nearly two decades and then reinstating it wholesale. At other historical moments, governments have for ideological reasons stipulated changes to dramatic form and performance practices. The Red Guard in the 1960s demanded that the much beloved tradition of Peking Opera transform into revolutionary or "model" operas. The *Prolekult* in Russia, especially after 1934, formulated a strict working-class aesthetic for Soviet dramatists and novelists to follow. Failure to do so would result in the fate that befell the theatre artist and innovator Vsevolod Meyerhold, who died by firing squad in 1940 after months of unspeakable torture. Although a female temple-dancer, Okuni, originated kabuki drama in Japan, a government edict in 1629 banned women from this art form, a prohibition still largely observed today. Many are the instances of Western and Eastern cultures policing dramatic form and live performance, but England alone eliminated theatre for nearly two decades and then had the opportunity to reinvent it from the bottom up. What emerged, however, after the Restoration was by no means a historical inevitability.

[5] In a recent social history, Margarette Lincoln estimates that London's population totaled 200,000 in 1600. That figure doubled by the outset of the Restoration and reached over half a million by the 1690s. She attributes the rapid increase in the last two decades to migration from the rest of Europe and an influx of Protestant refugees from France and the Netherlands fleeing religious persecution. See Margarette Lincoln, *London and the Seventeenth Century: The Making of the World's Greatest City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 7.

Commercial theatre may have vanished for eighteen years, but several theatre practitioners from the 1620s and '30s survived into the Restoration, as did the memories of prominent courtiers who had seen legitimate performances prior to the closure of the playhouses in 1642 and perhaps illegal shows during the Interregnum.[6] That theatre would return to England along with the restoration of the monarchy was almost a foregone conclusion. Even before Oliver Cromwell's death on September 3, 1658, acting troupes were quietly assembling in anticipation. Far less certain was the *kind* of theatre that would emerge after 1660. England had an unprecedented opportunity to remake the theatre, but which version would emerge from the rubble of memories, experiences, and dispositions that survived the Civil War? Well known is the success of Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant, who would head up the King's and Duke's Companies respectively, in securing a duopoly that gave them exclusive rights to stage plays in London after 1660.[7] Less considered are the alternatives advocated by rival petitioners and courtiers, as well as the role played by contingency. Killigrew and Davenant's ambitions, for instance, to corner the market on commercial theatre happened to dovetail fortuitously with the restoration of a monarch who early in his reign followed the Stuart practice of awarding monopolies to favorites. Ten years later, they could not have secured the same.

On the face of it, Killigrew and Davenant's choice of a theatrical duopoly was eminently practical insofar as it would eliminate competition and create the upmarket theatre they envisioned. Like all monopolistic enterprises, this one assumed the profitability of artificially induced scarcity. In theory, limiting access to theatrical performance would not only intensify pent-up demand but also manufacture prestige, thereby producing the exclusive stage envisioned by both patentees. Pricey seating, opulent playhouses, and the latest technological effects would further imbue engineered scarcity with luxury. The very fact of the duopoly conferred additional cachet since only the monarch possessed the authority to grant these legal barriers to market entry. The names of the two licensed companies underscored that royal imprimatur: the King's Company was named in

[6] "Legitimate" refers to the scripted performances staged by licensed acting companies rather than the puppet or mumming plays put on during fairs or performed in makeshift venues around town. After 1642, illegal underground performances, especially of improvisational dramatic forms, were held in homes, taverns, and other gathering places through the Interregnum. See Dale B. J. Randall, *Winter Fruit: English Drama, 1642–1660* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

[7] For an overview of the ensuing lawsuits and maneuverings, see John Freehafer, "The Formation of the London Patent Companies in 1600," *Theatre Notebook* 20 (1965), 6–30; and N. W. Bawcutt, ed., *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623–73* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

honor of Charles II, while the Duke's Company was named in honor of his brother, James, the Duke of York. For the government, the duopoly offered different albeit complementary benefits. In exchange for a curtailed marketplace, the successful patentees would police plays, generate jobs, and jumpstart innovation – the very assurances to the crown outlined in the letters patent, as explored in Chapter 1.

To attract privileged spectators, both companies intershot into the rich tapestry of their enterprise the golden threads of scarcity, prestige, and novelty. As a result, attending a performance after 1660 became so expensive and so inconvenient that many consumers bypassed this costly transient pleasure for other commodities and pastimes, such as the goods flowing from the bourses and the new modes of entertainment sweeping London. The burgeoning music industry especially would gut the theatre by the end of the century. The economic logic implicit to the duopoly not only placed theatre out of the reach of most people but also inclined management toward aesthetically brilliant but financially ruinous choices. Sought were new upmarket neighborhoods to site their sumptuous playhouses. Equally pursued were the latest and the best, whether dazzling stage technology, gorgeous costumes, or soaring Italian voices. Both companies ran after these developments for years, despite their unsustainability. The adoption of a duopoly produced several other unforeseen effects. By the end of the century, the status of playwrights declined precipitously while players ascended into the firmament of celebrity. Never can we know the long-term repercussions of our choices, a major theme of this book.

A Different Kind of Theatre History

The positivist historiography of the earlier twentieth century rejected earlier belletristic accounts of the Restoration theatre.[8] This new methodology believed that "a proper analysis of the documentary record was sufficient to establish objective truths about the past."[9] Post-war prosperity and the resulting growth of university presses quickened the publication of carefully

[8] For examples of the new positivist historiography, see: Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama, 1660–1900*, vol. 1, *Restoration Drama, 1660–1700*, 4th ed. (1923; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961); Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928); and Montague Summers, *The Restoration Theatre* (1934; repr., New York: Humanities Press, 1964). Robert D. Hume observes that despite Summers's maddening eccentricities, his "erudition probably remains unrivaled to this day." See Robert D. Hume, "The Uses of Montague Summers: A Pioneer Reconsidered," *Restoration: Studies in English Culture, 1660–1700* 3, no. 2 (1979): 59.

[9] Phillip B. Zarrilli et al., *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxiv.

researched studies of stagecraft, theatre architecture, audiences, and the acting companies.[10] Documentary history reached its apex between the 1970s and 1990s with the appearance of ambitious, multivolume performance calendars and reference works, such as *The London Stage, 1660–1800; A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800; Restoration and Georgian England, 1660–1788*; and *A Register of English Theatrical Documents, 1660–1737*.[11] It goes without saying that I am deeply indebted to these earlier works, a body of scholarship that is remarkable both in ambition and scale. This book nonetheless attempts a different approach.

Above all else, *The Business of English Restoration Theatre, 1660–1700* seeks to avoid the pitfalls endemic to what Rita Felski calls "slice of time" histories whereby "phenomena are stuck fast to neighboring phenomena in the same slice of time."[12] Felski points out that boxing literary history off from earlier and later periods prevents us from explaining "how works of art move across time"; instead, she advocates for "models of textual mobility and transhistorical attachment that refuse to be browbeaten by the sacrosanct status of period boundaries."[13] Although the "text" analyzed in the following pages is theatrical rather than literary, I have indeed taken Felski's admonition to heart, as well as several concepts formulated by actor–network theorists such as Michel Serres and Bruno Latour. Serres suggests that instead of thinking of history in purely chronological terms – an approach typified by "slice of time" accounts – we should consider temporal flow as dynamic volumes or topologies. Historical time is thus viewed as a river that forks off, branches into tributaries, slews off course, and rolls back on itself. More famously, Serres likens time to a

[10] See, for instance, titles such as: Leo Hughes, *The Drama's Patrons* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouses* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973); Judith Milhous, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695–1708* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979); Robert D. Hume, ed., *The London Theatre World, 1660–1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980); Styan, *Restoration Comedy*; Michael Cordner and Peter Holland, eds., *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660–1800* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Tim Keenan, *Restoration Staging, 1660–74* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[11] William Van Lennep, et al., *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, 5 parts, 11 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960–1968); Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973–1993); David Thomas, ed., *Restoration and Georgian England, 1660–1788*, comp. and introd. David Thomas and Arnold Hare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, comps. and eds., *A Register of English Theatrical Documents, 1660–1737*, 2 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

[12] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 157.

[13] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 154.

crumpled handkerchief, a way of drawing together into adjacency points that were previously separated.[14]

Both metaphors reframe how we think of Restoration theatre, which has indeed been "sliced off" from pre-1642 English theatre, as well as from contemporary continental theatres and concurrent pastimes and entertainments.[15] Within that slice are useful but nonetheless eerily deracinated "facts": it is as though someone began life at the age of twenty *sans* past, *sans* family, *sans* memory. As a result, traditional accounts of the Restoration theatre take at face value the adoption of a duopoly, as well as the selection of playhouse architecture, neighborhood geographies, and repertory practices. Serres's folded handkerchief reminds us that outcomes are by no means given – that history is not a squared, perfectly pressed object but a balled-up linen of memories, choices, networks, and contingencies. Once unfurled, the resulting creases figure a different kind of historical mapping that connect the past with the present, lived experiences with fantasized desires, and agencies with accidents. In that spirit, *The Business of English Restoration Theatre, 1660–1700* ventures frequently outside of its "slice of time" to open historical folds. Doing so reveals how the past haunted any number of choices, from the managerial quest for courtly élan to the willingness of the court to grant an unprecedented duopoly. The past, though, did not utterly subsume the present. The quest for improvement sweeping through Restoration London also overtook the acting companies, and several continental innovations replaced tried-and-true English practices. These changes – made with an eye toward profit and prestige – did not always produce the desired outcomes. We close our fist around a handkerchief as an act of volition or even as an involuntary response; we do not, however, determine absolutely the resulting furrows, just as we put actions into the world never quite knowing how they will mesh with other phenomena. Both patent companies pursued engineered scarcity with the expectation of riches; they did not, however, foresee how the new pastimes and entertainments sweeping London in the 1670s would converge with their economic policy, just as they did not factor in the contingencies of personality and shifting circumstances. And no one envisaged how the adoption of a duopoly would transform the respective professions of actor and dramatist.

[14] Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 60–61.

[15] The notable exception is Hotson's *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, which remains an invaluable source of information. Hotson traces the individual agents who survived the Civil War into the Restoration; he is not, however, interested in how memories and lived experiences informed the eventual shape of the post-1660 theatrical marketplace, one of the preoccupations of this study.

While this book traces overlapping folds rather than strict linearities, it nonetheless attempts to navigate through the Scylla of historical context and the Charybdis of transhistorical attachment. By focusing on temporally cordoned phenomena, "slice of time" histories ignore recurrence – in Serres's terms, the river that rolls back on itself. Context clearly explains a goodly amount, but the artistic forms and organizations in which artists choose to work exert equally determinative and reiterative effects. Like dramatists everywhere, those writing during the Restoration grappled with the material constraints peculiar to theatrical production. The heightened authority of the late seventeenth-century acting company further limited writerly autonomy, while the duopoly contributed to writerly abjection. For twenty-two years, English playwrights had only two companies to which they could market their plays; after 1682, they had only the United Company, which for several years barely touched their product. Those historical specificities intersected with the inexorable law of dramatic repertory: invariably, a company's accretion of scripts over time minimizes the need for new work. For good reason, playwrights strained against the tight collar of dramatic authorship, as detailed in Chapter 5.

This book also departs from the customary sequestration of the theatre from other commercial pastimes and entertainments. As a multimedia performance event, theatre has always partaken of music, dance, painting, and architecture, and the Restoration was especially keen to incorporate aspects of these popular "sister arts," as scholarship has documented.[16] Developments in Renaissance painting allowed scene painters to create an illusion of visual depth on the stage; advances in architecture and engineering made possible breathtaking special effects, such as rolling waves and the descent of supernatural beings; the creation of a new tonal system in music resulted in complex *entr'acte* compositions; and the invention of notation permitted dancing masters to set *gavottes* rather than simple jigs. These artistic borrowings found their fullest expression in the dramatic operas and multimedia spectaculars, to borrow Judith Milhous's useful phrase, that delighted audiences and broke budgets.[17] Less considered by scholars is how rival pastimes and commodities affected the fortunes of the Restoration theatre, a preterition even more puzzling given recent work in adjacent disciplines, such as film studies, that regularly consider cinema as part of a larger commercial matrix. We know,

[16] See especially Shirley Strum Kenny, ed., *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660–1800* (Washington, DC: Folger Books, 1984).

[17] Judith Milhous, "The Multimedia Spectacular on the Restoration Stage," in *British Theatre*, ed. Kenny, 41–62.

for instance, that the proliferation of cable television series, streaming services, independent films, and foreign film industries (think Bollywood and Nollywood) has radically curtailed output by major Hollywood studios.[18] In 1939, in what was considered a banner year for Hollywood, 365 films were released by eight studios: the so-called "Big Five" (20th Century Fox, MGM, Paramount, Warner Brothers, RKO Radio) and the "Little Three" (Columbia, Universal, and United Artists). By 2006, only six studios remained (Warner Brothers, Disney, 21st Century Fox, Paramount, Sony, and Universal), and they released 128 films, a number that dropped to 93 in 2016 and to 87 by 2019.[19] Further market contraction occurred in 2019, when Disney acquired 21st Century Fox, a move that gave them 38 percent of the U.S. film market.[20] Effectively, new media, new platforms, and new film industries over the past eighty years reduced the number of Hollywood movies released annually by 75 percent.

Seventeenth-century English theatre follows a strikingly similar pattern. In 1600, nine open-air theatres operated (Newington Butts, The Curtain, The Rose, The Swan, The Globe, The Fortune, The Boar's Head, The Red Bull, and The Hope) and one roofed playhouse (Blackfriars).[21] By 1642 – just before Parliament shuttered the theatres – only three open-air playhouses remained (The Fortune, The Red Bull, The Globe) that sponsored theatrical performance. Roofed playhouses, however, expanded, going from one to three (The Second Blackfriars, Salisbury Court, and The Cockpit/Phoenix). Over forty years, supply and demand thus reduced the total number of fully operational theatres from ten to six, a contraction of 40 percent. Like the twentieth-century film industry, the early modern acting companies responded to changing tastes and shifting demographics, and they tested their product in socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods throughout London. After the Restoration, the letters patent, which forbade new companies outside of the two sanctioned by the duopoly, use legal fiat to impede this trial-and-error process. Had the additional

[18] For an excellent assessment of the impact of the internet and new delivery platforms on Hollywood, see Tino Balio's *Hollywood in the New Millennium* (London: British Film Institute, 2013).

[19] See Stephen Follows, "How many films are released each year?," *Stephen Follows: Film Data and Education*, August 14, 2017, https://stephenfollows.com.

[20] Sarah Whitten, "Disney Accounted for Nearly 40% of the 2019 US Box Office," CNBC, December 29, 2019, www.cnbc.com.

[21] Whitefriars, a roofed theatre about which we know relatively little, was in use from 1608 to roughly 1620, which for a dozen years increased the total number of playhouses in London to eleven. Whitefriars, however, had a relatively short life. Poorly constructed and suffering from water damage, it fell out of use by the early 1620s and was eventually replaced by Salisbury Court Theatre in 1629. For more information, see E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 2:515–17.

petitioners been granted licenses, the Restoration marketplace probably would have resembled more closely the 1630s, with five or six companies offering a diverse range of plays. Instead, the post-Restoration duopoly artificially constrained the marketplace to two companies, a reduction in numbers of 80 percent from 1600 and 66 percent from 1642. Run along markedly similar lines and managed in the early years exclusively by courtiers, the two licensed companies competed only with each other and thus had little incentive to attempt different architectural models, test neighborhoods outside of the West End, or experiment with pricing, curtain times, and repertory.

So powerful was the belief in an engineered marketplace that neither company would relinquish the policies it had adopted early on, even in the face of faltering box office. Ignored too were the exciting new pastimes and entertainments springing up around London. As goods filled the bourses and rival pastimes flourished, so vitiated was the demand for theatre that London could barely sustain one playhouse from 1682 until 1695. It took thirteen years and considerable thespian discontent for a second company once again to emerge at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Tellingly, during that long stretch, not a single person came forward with plans for a new company, a lack of interest even more striking when contrasted to the theatrical start-up culture of the Elizabethan period. In the meantime, London had more than doubled its population, who had more disposable income than ever due to falling inflation and improved wages. Most, however, were not spending money on the theatre.

Generationality undoubtedly contributed to management's unwillingness (or inability) to understand this new state of affairs. Davenant and Killigrew were both born shortly after the turn of the century, while Thomas Betterton was born in 1635. All three brought an early seventeenth-century disposition to a society that had changed markedly after the Civil War, and in several respects, they were as ill equipped to cope with new marketplace realities as a 1980s IBM executive dropped into the 2020s world of AI and crypto-currencies. They hailed from a generation that regarded monopolies as the pinnacle of prestige, and the years of legal battles spent securing the theatrical duopoly not only made that hard-won prize difficult to relinquish but also obscured clear-sightedness about its shortcomings. Accordingly, management did not reduce pricing to make their product more competitive; they did not try market saturation rather than engineered scarcity; they did not adjust curtain times to better accommodate work schedules; they did not venture outside of the confines of the West End; and they did not rethink repertory practices to attract

more spectators. The acting companies also pointedly ignored the marketing strategies devised by their new competition. Not until the end of the century would the theatre finally capitulate to advertising in newspapers, an innovation first used by the music industry in 1672. Folding the theatre back into the assemblage of contemporary entertainments highlights its conservatism, as well as its reluctance to confront new marketplace realities.

A brief word about periodization. At first glance, the time frame selected for *The Business of English Theatre, 1660–1700* appears at odds with an historiographic methodology that purports to transgress what Jonathan Gil Harris calls "hermetically concealed necropoles."[22] While the focus here is on English theatre from 1660 to 1700, that brevity allows for a comparatist approach not well served by the *longue durée*. There is, of course, a case to be made for ending with the Stuart dynasty in 1714 or for combining the Restoration with the 1700s – the so-called "long" eighteenth century. Theatre histories that cover large swaths, however, only have room to march readers through chronologically organized facts, the very thing I have tried to avoid in the following chapters. Narrowing the temporal framework makes possible the occasional deep dives into the Geertzian "thick descriptions" necessary to unpick the complicated webbings discussed in the following chapters.[23] Equally important, abbreviated periodization permits this study to investigate at length how the filaments of the past extended into the present of the Restoration.

Chapter Outline

The coevality of the past and the present is nowhere more apparent than in Chapter 1, "The Theatre as Gift: Networks and Patronage." Networks of influence, sheer serendipity, and a monarch's predilections resulted in the duopoly triumphing over the Duke of Newcastle's proposal to reinstate the theatrical heterogeneity of the 1630s. The petitioners also had the good luck to press for a limited marketplace at just the right moment: throughout the 1660s, Charles II would use these barriers to market entry as an inexpensive way of rewarding clients. The duopoly effectively transformed the theatre from a business subject to government oversight into a gift bequeathed by the crown to courtier clients. Future care, however, of this valuable present would be whimsical at best, victim

[22] Jonathan Gil Harris, "Four Exoskeletons and No Funeral," *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 617.
[23] I am, of course, thinking of Clifford Geertz's famous essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (1972): 1–37.

to the woeful state of the Privy Purse and a king's short attention span. Inherited attitudes additionally shaped the eventual configuration of the theatrical marketplace. For Davenant and Killigrew, the duopoly not only represented an economic solution to the problem at hand – how to jump-start theatre after eighteen years – but also ratified a quest for upward mobility that had begun in the 1630s. For Charles II, dispensation of the duopoly flowed from an earlier understanding of patron–client relations gleaned at the court of his parents and abroad in France during the 1650s. It also signaled his affection for all things theatrical, an accident of personality no one could have anticipated.

How the logic of the duopoly shaped company organization is taken up in Chapter 2, "The Economics of Scarcity and Prestige: Performance Practices and Repertories." The two licensed acting companies cornered the market on theatre in the expectation that artificially induced scarcity would drive up demand for their product. Accordingly, various changes to company practices, such as later performance times and higher ticket prices, were adopted to create an aura of exclusivity. In contrast to earlier English theatres, the Restoration companies set aside two-thirds of the auditorium for those wealthy enough to spend significant discretionary income. The companies also imported various French repertory practices, such as long runs, that did not map well onto the English habit of a six-day-a-week performance calendar. Neither engineered scarcity nor altered repertory practices produced the box office magic sought by management. Premieres may have packed houses, but these were few and revivals were many. To flourish, the Restoration companies needed to inculcate playgoing as a widespread cultural practice, a goal that was at odds with a repertory comprised largely of revivals, limited choices, and long runs.

Innovation and lavish expenditures were as foundational to the duopoly as were scarcity and exclusivity, as argued in Chapter 3, "The Culture of Improvement and 'Great Expences': Neighborhoods, Playhouses, and Stagecraft." The language of the letters patent guaranteed that, in exchange for the duopoly, management would police plays, maintain order, and generate jobs. These grants also emphasized expense and innovation, thereby affiliating the restored stage with the costly improvements sweeping London, especially after the Great Fire of 1666. Theatrical amelioration bolstered national pride – England was finally catching up with continental stagecraft – and made available for commercial consumption the technologies and luxury previously reserved for court audiences. To realize these ends, management settled on newly developed, upmarket neighborhoods, small, equally expensive, baroque playhouses, and the latest in scenes and

machines. Despite these innovations, the companies risked disappointing the very consumer expectations they had aroused by embracing the culture of improvement. Quite simply, they could not afford new scenes, new costumes, and new effects for every new production. Moreover, the gorgeous high-tech playhouses of the Restoration were ruinously costly to operate – they required enormous manpower compared to early modern stages – and expenses skyrocketed further whenever the companies ventured upon a dramatic opera or spectacle-heavy production. In the last decade of the century, management finally retreated from bloated budgets and spectacle-laden shows. Dorset Garden, the jewel of Restoration playhouses, was largely abandoned to wrestling matches and lotteries, while the breakaway company of 1695 settled on Lincoln's Inn Fields, the most bare-bones playhouse in London, for their shows. Not until the end of the century were strategies devised to escape the culture of improvement.

Chapter 4, "Not Keeping Up: Rival Commodities, Pastimes, and Entertainments," looks beyond the theatre to the many commodified pleasures with which it now competed. Audiences wanted new works and novel theatrical experiences, but the economic logic of the duopoly hobbled the ability of the theatre to respond nimbly to changing conditions. Strapped for money and shackled by upkeep, the acting companies were hard pressed to keep up with the plethora of experiences and products beckoning consumers outside of playhouse walls. Consumers now had an unprecedented array of goods and pastimes upon which to spend time and money. Coffeehouses, spas, pleasure gardens, dance recitals, and concerts all offered convenience, variety, and good value for money. Goods in expanded and refurbished bourses were another temptation; indeed, for the first time, consumers could window-shop by looking through newly installed panes of glass at the delights awaiting purchase. The theatre largely responded to the new world of goods and pastimes through allusion and imitation, oftentimes to brilliant results. Intermedial exchange between the worlds of music and theatre resulted in the gorgeous dramatic operas still staged today. The new consumerism featured in the sparkling, witty comedies spoofing the London elite. Nonetheless, allusiveness, no matter how cleverly packaged, struggled to rival the actual experiences and commodities themselves, which often could be had for less money and more convenience than an afternoon at the playhouse.

While the expense and inconvenience of playgoing may have put off some consumers, the sheer glamour of the Restoration theatre attracted writers from the gentry and professional classes in unprecedented numbers. Chapter 5, "Fame and Famine: Writing for the Stage," examines how

the theatrical promise of courtliness, prestige, and technological innovation was especially enticing to the men and women who sought careers as dramatists. The duopoly, however, severely limited opportunities. After 1682, only one company – which purchased few new scripts – remained to which they could sell their product. Additionally, expensive playhouses and large payrolls consumed budgets that might otherwise be spent on new play development. On offer, however, was prestige and glamour, and gobsmacked playwrights flung themselves into the arms of a theatre that promised distinction – but not a livelihood. Dramatists thus found themselves in the contradictory position of, on the one hand, affecting the gentility necessary for belonging to this exclusive cultural enterprise and, on the other, chasing after diminishing opportunities like any common hack. And, finally, the theatre's embrace of luxury and innovation rendered valuable another limited resource over which dramatists now competed: sumptuous scenic effects to adorn their scripts. Given these straitened conditions, many writers engaged in bloody feuds, bitterly lambasted their audiences, self-destructed, or simply disappeared after penning a handful of plays. By the end of the century, so deeply felt was authorial disaffection with working conditions that few literary-minded writers took up drama as a profession, thereby establishing a pattern that would continue well into the eighteenth century.

Whereas the duopoly was ruinous for writers, artificially induced scarcity was transformative for the acting profession, as explored in Chapter 6, "Stardom and Sedulousness: Acting for the Stage." The radical curtailment of the theatrical marketplace remade actors as the most valuable of commodities: acting slots fell from a high of 350–500 in 1600 to roughly 35 in 1660, a reduction between 90 and 95 percent. Now few in number and glimmering through their close association with the court, actors were the jewels of the Restoration stage. The tiny gorgeous baroque playhouses with their deep-thrust stages put players in close proximity to audiences. Tendered was performed intersubjectivity, and that commodified experience was further heightened by various dramatic conventions, such as asides, prologues, and epilogues, that created the illusion of access to thespian subjectivity. Lionized by wits, adored by courtiers, and beloved by fans, star players especially achieved a prominence and social liquidity unrivaled by any other trade in the late seventeenth century. That very prominence, however, invited detraction. Actors' presumption of social parity and displays of wealth vexed men anxious about their own hold on respectability – anxiety that gave rise to occasional attacks in person and in print. The duopoly may have inadvertently eroded playwriting

as a profession, but its structural attributes – prestige, scarcity, and innovation – had the equally unexpected effect of transforming actors from scoundrels to stars.

To conclude, *The Business of Restoration Theatre, 1660–1700* chronicles how memories, networks, and contingencies led to the choice of an economic model that would prove simultaneously brilliant and ruinous. In so doing, these pages tell something of an ill-fated love story: one need not invoke Freud or Lacan to discern the almost catastrophic drive toward an idealized object. In the duopoly and its attendant predispositions, management envisaged the wealth, prestige, and fame they wanted so dearly to possess. So besotted with this fantasy were a succession of acting companies that – despite paltry box office, internal disputes, pointedly unhappy dramatists, and, at times, equally dissatisfied performers – they could not bring themselves to change the circumstances sustaining this glorious albeit doomed affair. Put another way, for nearly forty years, brute reality could not dent psychic investment in the economic model first adopted in 1660, although businessmen of a far less romantic bent would eventually dispense with the mirage at the end of the century. Until that moment, however, the Restoration acting companies pursued a glorious oneness with their object of desire until the return to difference ended their fantasy.