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Darryll Grantley

The Social Geography of London in Restoration Comedy

At the Restoration, the theatre was quick to re-establish itself as a powerful part of the metropolitan scene and much of the drama it offered was, in turn, intimately concerned with the urban culture of the growing metropolis of London or at least a particular representation of it. Since the establishment of the commercial playhouses in the 1570s, dramatists had shown an increasing consciousness of the London audience for which they were writing, one effect of which was an extensive representation of the capital's built environment in the drama and an evolving self-consciousness about what it meant to be urban. This reached a high point in the decades following the Restoration which, in the light of the significant growth of provincial theatre in the eighteenth century, was the last period in which playwrights could comfortably assume they were writing for an audience that was almost exclusively London based. One aspect of the urban self-consciousness manifested in the drama of the Restoration is the erection of a town/country divide with the construction of an implicit cognitive map in which the 'other' or equivalent of a 'terra incognita' is the countryside (though the countryside is disavowed rather than 'unknown'). It is this divide that takes precedence over class, morality or gender in the matter of successful social self-definition, but this is a large topic that can only be touched on in this discussion. Another is the substantial shift in the image of London in this period towards a literary or theatricalized, rather than substantially mimetic representation that goes as far in Restoration drama as even to present London social life

itself as a form of theatre. In Pix's *The Beau Defeated* (1700) the wealthy and witty widow Lady Landsworth couches her (pretended) disaffection with London in terms that suggest this quality of life in the capital:

I have seen it all, and despise it: At the Theatre, am tir'd with the double Acted Farce on the Stage, and in the side Boxes; the Noisy Nonsense of the Pit, the Impudence of the Orange Women renders the whole Entertainment to me a disagreeable Medley: Then for Hide-Park, that's Madness to perfection; and the poor Lunatick that runs an eternal Circle in his *Bedlam* Apartment, has, in my Judgement, equal pleasure.

(3, p. 21)

The idea of the 'double acted farce' underscores the theatrical basis of social life, and reinforces the idea that locations in the comedies are dramatic settings in a double sense: they are settings for the action of the plays, but they also form a backdrop for the theatre of social display, and an understanding of the signifying potential of London's geography is as important a feature of the consciousness of characters as that of their own performance within it.

If London is presented as a form of theatre, the realization of its material geography as a type of stage set is inevitably contributed to by the advent of stage scenery in the Restoration theatre. However, the most specific directions for identifiable London scenes to be found in the drama of this period come, surprisingly, not in a social comedy but in Dryden's opera *Albion and Albanius* (1685). This is a patriotic piece looking back to and

celebrating Charles II's restoration in the year of its 25th anniversary. Two directions for scenery specify with some detail identifiable elements of the built environment in London. The first is the opening direction:

The curtain rises, and there appears on either side of the Stage, next to the Frontispiece, as Statue on Horse-back, of Gold, on Pedestal's of Marble, enrich'd with Gold, and bearing the Imperial Armes of *England*: one of these Statues is taken from that of the late King, at *Charing-Cross*; the other from that figure of his present Majesty (done by that noble artist Mr. *Gibbons*) at *Windsor*.

The Scene, is a Street of Palaces, which lead to the Front of the *Royal Exchange*; the great Arch is open, and the view is continued through the open part of the *Exchange*, to the Arch on the other side, and thence to as much of the Street beyond, as could, properly be taken.

(1-12)

The second is the opening direction of Act 2, scene 2: 'The Scene changes to a Prospect taken from the middle of the *Thames*; one side of it begins at *York-Stairs*, thence to *White-Hall*, and the *Mill-Bank &c.*' The other from the *Saw-Mill*, thence to the *Bishop's Palace*, and as far as can be seen in a clear day' (1-5). The opera's strongly allegorical scenic conception clearly recalls the Jacobean and Caroline masque, and its detailed images of London need to be viewed in the light of that tradition. They provide no context for realistic social action, any more than the other more fanciful scenes in the opera but are part of the opera's allegorized visual display, largely detached from the impact of the action. An idealized London is presented as an imperial capital to the glory

of its monarch, including symbols of its trading wealth and political power as well as scenic magnificence.

In opera, however, the scenic arrangements were rather more elaborate than in the social theatre of comedy. Peter Holland has remarked of the comic drama:

Realistic as many of the sets must have been, especially for London locations like the New Exchange, Hyde Park or Covent Garden, the actors aligned themselves with the audience, especially through the use of the aside, so that the audience perceived the realism of the set as being mediated through the action of the hybrid being, the actor-character. The audience saw the actor in a situation potentially analogous to their own, rather than in a totally fictive world.

(1979, 29)

This may seem somewhat to overstate the case for the realist impact of scenery, since there is very little evidence to suggest much by way of visually recognizable London locations in what is known of the arrangements for stage scenery in the period. In fact, the practice of re-using painted scenes would indicate that the distinguishing features of locations – shops in the Royal Exchange, or trees in the parks and gardens – would have been generic rather than particularized. It was only in the mid-eighteenth century that geographical locations were generally visually identifiable in stage representations.¹ However, Holland's general point remains valid because of his emphasis on the actors and their performances. The audience's pleasure in the representation of familiar

¹ For a discussion of scenographic innovations in the eighteenth century, see Nicoll, 1980, pp. 130-141 and Rosenfeld, 1981, pp. 30-59.

locations on stage would have been overwhelmingly with reference to the social activities or people represented rather than having very much to do with any particular visual recognition. This is further suggested by the fact that the plays rarely if ever make reference to specific features that are not generic, and the interest is in the nature of the social intercourse that takes place in the localities represented. Montague Summers claimed that, in the Restoration theatre:

The presentment of any well-known centre, part of the town or other view was very exact. Unless this were the case much of the dialogue between Victoria and Olivia as they walk in the Mulberry Garden (in Sedley's *Mulberry Garden*) would miss its point, and not only is there mention, but in the business of the play use is made, of various arbours.

(1934, p. 219)

However, the specificity of the features of the localities represented visually is in the verbal reference that attaches to them. While the relative immutability of sets might have worked against strict mimetic accuracy of urban geography on stage, it would have done nothing to impair the presentation of a theatricalized London, which represented a carry-over of the taste for topographical representation in contemporary visual art.

One overt means by which plays can occupy London is through settings in identified public locations, such as named parks, squares, ordinaries, taverns or other such public locations. However, even in the drama that is designated as being set in London, most scenes take place in private spaces rather than named public ones, or in unidentified

public locations that might be designated, for instance, simply as ‘the street’ or ‘a street’. Some plays show more of a tendency than others to set action in named locations and they also differ in the extent to which London becomes a subject of allusion or discussion by the characters, or the life of the town is a topic. Apart from the changing modes of drama in the four decades up to 1700, changes in the metropolis itself might be expected to have some effect on the way it is represented in the drama. Some tendencies are discernible. Far fewer plays are actually set in London at all in the 1660s than in the 1670s, which sees the greatest flourishing of such drama, the number dropping back in the 1680s to pick up again somewhat in the final decade of the century. Named London locations also only make a limited appearance as settings in the drama of the 1660s – such places as the Spring Garden, the Exchange and St James’s Park in a few plays. The incidence of these and other identified places such as the Mall, Covent Garden, the Mulberry Garden and known ordinaries and taverns really takes off in the late 1660s. Several plays, including Etherege’s *She Would If She Could* (1668) and Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1675), contain a number of such locations, continuing to the end of the century and beyond with plays like Vanbrugh’s *The Provoked Wife* (1697) and Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (1700). These and other plays like them also tend to make urban life a topic of discussion, including reflections on the town/country contrast, urban manners, the cultural and other attractions of the town, the manners and social conventions of London life, and various aspects of the built environment. The occurrence either of London settings or of a theatrical preoccupation with the city’s material and social texture appears to be affected only in a limited way by the other tendencies of the drama. Though the greater interest in sex comedy in the 1670s is accompanied by more

detailed reference to London localities in plays, it is also true to say that this tendency continues right up through the more sentimental comedy to the end of the century. Some playwrights can also be recognized as having a stronger interest than others both in place realism and the issue of urban life, but these stretch across the whole period, from particularly Etherege and Wycherley in the 1660s and 1670s, to Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar in the 1690s. However, other playwrights such as Duffey, Shadwell, Behn, Otway and Southerne also at times avail themselves of the topography of London in their narratives, or bring aspects of the metropolis into focus in their work. The persistence of certain tropes or preoccupations relating to the representation of the capital across the shifts of fashion in the Restoration theatre suggests that there was a strong element of self-perpetuating convention about it, so that the urban world created on the stage has arguably more to do with a literary or theatrical conception than any more realistic view of urban life. Thus we do not see a substantially different picture of London in 1700 to that present in 1660. Furthermore, this element of convention in a competitive theatre market that was also acutely responsive to fashion and tastes meant that no marked differentiation is apparent between theatres or companies in terms of the representation of London in their output – and though the King’s and Duke’s companies are a little more prominent in the plays with a London focus, this does not seem to be a product of any identifiable policy.

The shift in the setting of most comic drama to the newly developed areas to the west of the City, begun in the Caroline period, became more firmly established in the Restoration. What continues to develop is the idea of the ‘town’ that, though an

inherently geographical concept, is primarily to be understood in cultural and social rather than strictly geographical terms.² It involves an understanding, and ideally an easy familiarity, with the urban landscape which is the natural milieu of the *beau monde* that populates much of this drama, something that is complemented by the location of the theatres themselves in the more fashionable parts of town. This comprehends the audience's knowledge too and the extensive use of reference to place in Restoration drama reposes on a presumption of its audience's awareness of the implications of the places in which the action of the plays is set.³ An example of this occurs in Wycherley's *Love in a Wood* (1671) where the characters' knowledge or ignorance of places in London is used to comic effect. The worldly Lady Flippant asks her hypocritical and censorious old brother, Alderman Gripe, to take her in his coach and set her down near the playhouse. When he, as a puritan, expresses horror at the idea of this, she asks instead to be taken to Lincoln's Inn Fields, a safely fashionable area (4.2.80-84). She knows, though he does not, that this is where one of the playhouses is situated. Gripe's hypocrisy is, however, partly signalled by the fact that he professes an abhorrence of the public places of the metropolis, but is content to walk in those places by night 'because one is not known' (5.1.111-2). In the sex comedy *The Mall* by 'J. D.' (John Dover?, 1674) various assignations take place in the freedom of St James's park at night, including one at the Duck Pond, the darkness leading to comic confusion and mistaken identity. The

² Though the principal geographical definition of the 'town' involved the fashionable western suburbs, particularly Covent Garden, it was not confined to this area.

³ This is likely to have been a product of the increased mobility of the elite in the period, owing to the provision of hireable transport such as coaches and sedan chairs. Robert Shoemaker has commented, 'Among the gentry, male and female Londoners clearly travelled widely in the metropolis, facilitated by their easy access to coaches, sedan chairs, and water transport' and he goes on to cite the records in Pepys's diary of his and his wife's movements about London (2001, p. 149).

audience's familiarity with the locations inevitably adds to the impact of the comedy and, as in numerous other cases, imports into the drama a frame of reference that extends beyond the narratives of the plays.

This familiarity with or ignorance of places in London on the part of characters in the drama was also used to signal innocence or its opposite: either in terms of libertinism or sophistication, and often both together. The jealous husband Pinchwife in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) is an old *roué* who is well able to claim, 'I know the town' (1.1.328–9) and in his view, knowledge of its places would be tantamount to the loss of innocence on the part of the young countrywoman who is his wife. He argues with his sister, Alethea, about her taking his wife into town society. When Alethea asks, 'Would you not have me civil? Answer 'em in a box at the plays? In the drawing-room at Whitehall? In St James's Park, Mulberry Garden, or – ', he cries, 'Hold, hold; do not teach my wife where the men are to be found. I believe she's the worse for your town documents already' (2.1.52–6). Another potential old husband, Sir Salomon of John Caryl's eponymous play of 1670, has his ward and intended wife (whom he keeps in seclusion) recite a catechism of qualities about being an ideal wife, which includes avoiding the places of the town, 'To detest and abhor going to *Court, Hide-Park, Mulberry Garden, or the Play-Houses*' (2. p. 14). However, Harriet, the witty heroine of Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676) indicates that her familiarity with the town allows her to negotiate its spaces safely. To her friend Young Bellair's remark, 'These conversations [i.e. exchanges in places like Hyde Park] have been fatal to some of your sex, madam', she retorts, 'It may be so; because some who want temper have been

undone by gaming, must others who have it wholly deny themselves the pleasures of play?’ (3.3.53–7). In Congreve’s *Love for Love* (1695) the hypocritical Mrs Foresight complains of the possible scandal that might arise from the turn around Covent Garden Square that her sister, Mrs Frail, has taken in a hackney-coach in the company of a man. Mrs Frail rejects this, saying it might have been different if she had gone to Knightsbridge, Chelsea or Barn Elms (London’s ‘outleaps’ used for sexual assignations) with a man alone. Mrs Foresight then asks if she would go to World’s End with a man, and when Mrs Frail appears not to know where this is, her sister thinks she is pretending innocence (2.1.449–500). Another late play, Dilke’s *The Pretenders or The Town Unmaskt* (1698) has two town schemers, Mrs Minx and her maid Doll, feigning ignorance of the town and posing as innocents by pretending to be countrywomen, Doll even affecting a country accent.

Other treatments of the idea of knowledge of the town construe this in more unequivocally positive terms. In Shadwell’s *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) the narrative of which turns on the contrasting upbringing of the two sons of Sir William Belfond the younger of whom Belfond Junior has been adopted by his urbane uncle Sir Edward, reared in town and given a liberal education while his elder brother Belfond Senior has been reared in the country, ‘bred after his Father’s Rustick, swinish manner’ and never allowed to go to London. When a foreign trip by his father allows Belfond Senior to sneak to London, he quickly becomes the quarry of parasites who prey on young heirs, and soon falls into debauchery. The opening scene takes place in the Temple Walks, plunging Belfond Senior into an area that appears visually gracious and respectable on

the surface, but which is actually very dubious, adjoining the lawless area of Whitefriars and a place frequented by those seeking bribes from corrupt lawyers to be false witnesses. Its *louche* quality is illustrated by the characters that Belfond encounters there, and it is a type of parody of the fashionable open spaces to which polite society resorts for social meetings. It is therefore a material instance of the complex and hazardous nature of the urban environment. The difference between the two brothers is not a moral one. Belfond Junior is hardly a paragon of virtue – he has fathered a child with one lover, whom he rejects, has seduced another, innocent young woman, and is no stranger to drinking and gambling. The essential point of contrast between the siblings is their competence in negotiating the sophisticated ways and potential pitfalls of the urban environment. Belfond Senior's lack of exposure to the geographical and moral complexities of the city has him more, rather than less vulnerable, while his younger city-bred brother is well able to take care of himself. A similarly vulnerable countryman is Sir Mannerly Shallow, 'the very flower and ornament of the North' in Crowne's *The Country Wit* (1675). He has been brought up in the country by parents who were opposed to the town, and has never previously set foot in London, but is obsessed with its geography and culture. He describes a masque he once mounted in which 'I was London, or Augusta, and I had a high crown'd hat, to signify Pauls Steeple, and I had one acted the River *Thames*, I had a great nose made on purpose to signify London Bridge, and the River *Thames* swom under my nose' (4.2.122-6). Apart from being inherently preposterous, it is revealing that this is an outdated image of the pre-Fire city and certainly does not involve its more fashionable quarters. Despite having previously taken steps to learn urban accomplishments from hired 'critics' from London, when he arrives he proves

utterly incompetent in negotiating his way in the capital. He ends up being tricked into marriage with a porter's daughter and is landed with a beggar's child not of his own begetting to support.

In the early years immediately following the Restoration, many comedies were set in foreign locations, but towards the end of the decade, London came to constitute a setting for an increasing number of plays. This was a continuation of the tendency begun in the Caroline period of place realism, and the advent of scenery, even if only of a generic nature, probably contributed to this, as added interest would have been provided by visual shifts of action between different types of locality.⁴ The extent of the presence of the features of London in allusion or setting in the drama suggests the interest of many playwrights in the topography of the city, and several scenes in the plays are set in named public locations, though it is true that the overwhelming majority of scenes are without designation of locality, or are in internal domestic spaces with no geographical specificity. And, while certain known fashionable localities do occur repeatedly as settings for scenes, and even more frequently in dialogue references, the interest is particularly what they signify socially.⁵ In the light of this, generic scenery would have been perfectly adequate for their staging. The centre of gravity in dramatic narratives has by the Restoration substantially shifted to the developing fashionable locations to the west of the City, continuing a trend begun in Caroline drama. This is the most probable

⁴ Dryden insisted that the unity of place was maintained if the action of a play was set within 'the compass of the same town or city' ('Essay of Dramatic Poesy' in Ker, 1926, Vol. 1, p. 57)

⁵ Pepys's comments on Sedley's *The Mulberry Garden* and his subsequent visit to the garden itself say relatively little about its physical nature as represented on the stage. His comments on the actual garden indicate his seeing it primarily in terms of social space as they are mainly to do with the type of people who frequent it (see below).

explanation for the fact that the fire of 1666 and the reconstruction after it are largely ignored by the drama. Though it continues to be a point of verbal reference, by this time the City has greatly diminished as a significant setting for the drama and plays set there do not tend to feature named outdoor spaces. In other comedies the public locations most commonly present are, predictably, the westerly lying places commonly resorted to by the elite for social meeting.⁶ This completes the shift begun in the Caroline period from more general public places as dramatic settings to those that are dedicated places of leisure and social gathering (something that inevitably affects the texture of London as theatrically represented). Prominent among these is St James's Park, occurring in a considerable number of plays, some having more than one scene set there, most tending to be of a later date, mostly the 1680s and 1690s, (except two from the early 1670s).⁷ Additionally, 'St James' is specified as the setting in Act 2, Scene 1 of Leaned's *The Rambling Justice* (1678), and this is likely to be the park. A number of plays name the Mall as a setting, a particular part of St James's park, and the 1674 play by 'J. D.' even takes the location's name as its title.⁸ Those that designate settings in the Mall are from the mid to late 1670s and early 1680s, though the thoroughfare had been laid out as early

⁶ Though Behn's *The City Heiress* (1682) is set 'within the walls of London' it is all in private rooms or non-specific locations. Other plays set in the City include Cowley's *The Cutter of Coleman Street* (1658/61), Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds* (1681) and the anonymous *Mr Turbulent* (1682).

⁷ The 1670s plays are: Payne *The Morning Ramble* (1672) 5.1, and Wycherley *Love in a Wood* (1671) 2.1, 5.1; the later ones: Cibber *Love's Last Shift* (1696) 1.1, 3.2 and 4.1, Congreve *The Old Batchelor* (1693) 4.3, and *The Way of the World* (1700) 2.1 and Dufey *The Fool's Preferment, or The Three Dukes of Dunstable* (1688) 4.1, Manley *The Lost Lover* (1695/6) 2.1, Southerne *The Wives' Excuse* (1691/2) 3.2, 5.2, and *The Maid's Last Prayer* (1693) 2.2, Vanbrugh *The Provoked Wife* (1697) 2.1. In Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* (1698) 4.2, 4.3, *The Constant Couple* (1699) 1.1, and its sequel *Sir Harry Wildair* (1700-1701) 1.1, 5.4 the setting is merely designated as 'The Park', presumably St James's. Whereas the park is often not identified in dialogue, this is the only way it is signalled in Dryden's *The Wild Gallant* (1663) 2.1.2.

⁸ Scenes set in the Mall include Dufey, *Madam Fickle* (1676) 2.1, Etherege, *The Man of Mode* (1676) 3.3, Otway, *Friendship in Fashion* (1678) 1.1 and *The Soldier's Fortune* (1680) 1.1 and 2.1, as well as the first two acts of Granville's *The She-Gallants* (1695).

as 1660. Nothing in the dialogue of any of the plays suggests any identifying landmarks present, and what is more important in the visual realization of the location is the type of activity that takes place there, usually chance social meetings or prearranged assignations; the opening stage direction of Granville's *The She-Gallants* (1695) specifies 'Company walking to and fro as in the *Mall*'. However, Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*, which has as its sub-title the name of the park, has two scenes set there, the setting of the first of which (2.1) is specified as 'St James's Park at night.' Another green space providing a recurrent setting is the Mulberry Garden, occurring in several plays including Sedley's King's Theatre piece that has the garden's name as its title.⁹ All the plays using the Mulberry Garden as a setting date from the late 1660s and the early 1670s. It is hard to account for this garden's relatively brief presence as a setting of the drama though it may suggest that it did possibly not last long in favour with the most fashionable, despite the fact that it did remain as a place of resort until the middle of the following century. After a second viewing of *The Mulberry Garden* on the 20th May 1668, Pepys was moved later that day to pay his first visit to the place itself. He records in his diary:

So he (his companion, Creed) and I to Whitehall and walked over the park to the Mulberry-garden, where I never was before; and find it a very silly place, worse then Spring-garden, and but little company and those a rascally, whoring, roguing sort of people; only a wilderness here is that is somewhat pretty, but rude.

(Latham and Matthews, 1970-1983, Vol. 9, p. 207)

⁹ These include Cavendish *The Humorous Lovers* 2.3, Dufey *The Fool Turn'd Critick* 5.3, Etherege *She Would If She Could* 2.1, Payne *The Morning Ramble* 5.2, Sedley *The Mulberry Garden* 3.1, 4.1, 5.2, and Wycherley *Love in a Wood* 5.2

Other public meeting places are less in evidence. The Spring Garden provides the settings of Etherege's *She Would If She Could* (1668) 4.2 and Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife* (1697) 4.4, scenes that contain curiously similar elements despite the lapse of time between them, both being at the centre of an amorous intrigue, featuring also some drunken brawling and involving the panic-stricken flight of women. In both there is clearly an arbour on stage, referred to in the dialogue and in the latter play being used onstage for the concealment of characters. These green or open spaces in the plays tend much more towards gender neutrality than spaces like shops or the eating and drinking houses (see below). They also permit the possibilities of encounters relatively untrammelled by the social constraints of the drawing room, and a considerable degree of privacy or even anonymity. In *The Provoked Wife* they are chosen by characters for the opportunities they afford for transgressive behaviour: Heartfree, a gallant who wishes to confront the affected Lady Fanciful with a catalogue of her faults, selects the neutral ground of St James's Park (2.1) in which to do it rather than a drawing room, while the provoked wife of the title Lady Brute and her friend Belinda choose the Spring Garden to pursue their illicit amours with their respective admirers. The dramatic potential in these places resides in the fact that they do not wholly protect from public exposure as the two women in the latter episode discover. They also much more readily permit recognition by the audience than any private localities in which action might be set.

The named location in London that features most in Restoration drama as a setting is not a park, but Covent Garden. Built by Inigo Jones for the Earl of Bedford and completed in 1639, the square or piazza was a new kind of urban space in England and despite

disapproval of the style in some quarters, quickly became a fashionable residential address, with shops appearing later. The market was also established in the middle of the century (later contributing to the decline of the area's reputation and status). Having first made its appearance in Caroline drama, Covent Garden appears as dramatic setting in Restoration drama as early as 1664 in Etherege's *The Comical Revenge* (1664) 3.2 and furnishes settings in at least eleven other plays to the end of the century with Farquhar's *The Constant Couple, or A Trip to the Jubilee* (1699) 4.1. It crops up more or less evenly through the period, with some plays having more than one scene set there.¹⁰ The locality is not usually identified in the dialogue of these scenes so that a combination of some visual clues in the scenery and the nature of the activity that takes place in them is really the only way the audiences in the theatre can recognize them. In Dilke's *The Lover's Luck* (1695) a stage direction in Act I (p. 5) states, 'The Scene closes to Covent-Garden' which might suggest some attempt to give recognizable visual representation of the space, as might the direction in *The Country Wife* 5.3: 'The scene changes to the Piazza of Covent Garden'. However, the brevity of the scene in the Wycherley play makes any significant scenic gestures unlikely, especially as the location is identified in the dialogue.

The frequency or otherwise of the use of these notable locations as settings has a good deal to do with dramaturgical convenience, allowing characters to come upon one another by chance, for assignations, or for strangers to be introduced. They also allow for the

¹⁰ Scenes in other plays include Behn, *The Town Fop* (1676) 5.1, Carlile, *The Fortune Hunters* 3.4, Cavendish, *The Humorous Lovers* 1.1, Crowne, *Sir Courtly Nice* 3.1, and *The Married Beau* (1694) 1.1, 4.1, Dilke, *The Lover's Luck* Act 1, Durfey, *Madam Fickle* 3.2, and *The Fool Turn'd Critick* 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 5.1, Leamerd, *The Rambling Justice* 3.6, 4.5, Otway, *The Soldier's Fortune* 3.1, 4.2 (the latter scene having the direction, 'Scene changes to Covent-Garden Piazza'), Ravenscroft, *The Careless Lovers* (1673) 5.1 and Vanbrugh *The Provoked Wife* 4.1.

quick traffic of separate but related strands of action involving different groups who follow each other on the stage, without necessarily coming into contact. But the sense of a fashionable milieu is often present too, beyond the mere theatrical functionality of the spaces. As large sections of the audience would have frequented these places in real life, they are implicitly offered ownership of the theatrical space too, helping to draw them into the highly stylized London on the stage. However, though the interest in the significance of places is abundantly clear in the drama, this generally emerges in dialogue reference rather than an attempt to recreate localities on stage for any more than theatrically strategic purposes. This may have had practical dimensions. Hyde Park, despite being a fashionable location, is a setting in only one play, Payne's *The Morning Ramble* (1672), and this rarity may be because it was more usually associated with riding than the sort of pedestrian encounters that were easily represented on stage.¹¹

Commercial spaces constitute another type of public location in which dramatic action is set. The New Exchange in the Strand, built in 1608-9 and particularly popular after the Fire had destroyed the original exchange, provides the setting for scenes in several plays. More physically defined and identifiable than the parks, streets and squares, it might be expected that its dramatization as a setting would involve particular types of action and transactions on the stage, though it is also a venue for general public meeting. It could afford the opportunity for a broader social admixture than was easily manageable in other public social contexts. The Exchange as a public space that nevertheless affords intimacy

¹¹ Pepys records a revival of Shirley's *Hyde Park* at the King's Theatre in 1668, in which real horses were brought on to the stage, something not done in the original production (Latham and Matthews, 1970-1983, Vol. 9, p. 260). Shirley's play had, however, set considerable pedestrian social traffic in the park.

was ideal for sexual trysts, and in *She Would if She Could*, Courtall and Lady Cockwood arrange an assignation at the 'lower walk of the New Exchange' (2.2.78–9). It was a place in which women played a powerful role, as they were frequently the shopkeepers.¹² In *She Would if She Could* 3.1, Etherege uses the Exchange as a means to bring together city women and gentry in semi-social encounters, with the retail of gossip that proceeds from this, while the matter of shopping and consumer products is constantly interwoven into the narrative of the scene. The opening direction is, 'Mrs Trinket, sitting in a shop, people passing by as in the Exchange' though it is unlikely that much more would have been done to represent the place with any visual specificity. In *The Fortune Hunters* 2.2 the scene opens and 'Discovers Mrs Spruce in her Shop' in the Exchange, a scenically realized haberdasher's shop that is then used as a place where the rake-hero meets and flirts with a girl of whose identity he is aware, but who does not know him. The shopkeeper also makes herself sexually available to him, and another of his lovers arrives shortly after. This place that is both intimate and public thus becomes a crucible of sexual intrigue, and the verbal exchanges are accompanied by the handling of the merchandise, notions of sexual and material desire and consumption being meshed together. Its role as a commercial space only adds to this; in *The Country Wife* 3.2.71–3 Harcourt makes an analogy between amorous strategies of women and the commercial tactics of the saleswomen of New Exchange, 'I see all women are like these of the Exchange, who, to enhance the price of their commodities, report to their fond customers offers which were

¹² Rhonda Sanford proposed a distinction between public 'male' and private 'female' spaces in earlier seventeenth-century city comedy (2002, p. 101), but these public female-dominated spaces help to illustrate the fact that in Restoration comedy in any distinction of gender between private and public spaces is complicated. Both private and public spaces become sites of exchanges, liaisons or conflicts between genders though there may be gender domination in varieties of such spaces.

never made 'em'. The rake-hero Horner buys oranges for a disguised countrywoman Meg Pinchwife, but otherwise the function of the locality in this play is as a public meeting place only. This consumer emporium is generally important, however, as one of the pleasures of the town that prove so seductive to the young country wife. Shops, not specifically identified as in the Exchange, are also the setting of Behn's *The Debauchee* (1677) 2.1 and 3.4, Crowne's *The Country Wit* 5.2, while Betterton's *The Amorous Widow* (King's, 1670) 3.1 takes place in the street 'before a glass shop'. In the case of the Behn, Carlile and Crowne plays, the female shopkeepers are involved in the intrigue beyond the professional capacity that defines their rank.

One further forum of public encounter that both provides a setting of dramatic action and is able to be defined scenically, is the eating-house or tavern. These have a long history as locations in the drama, for self-evident reasons, but the tendency in the period for certain of these – particularly eating houses or 'ordinaries' – to become fashionable places for well-heeled townspeople to meet and be seen gives them an added dimension for the purposes of the drama. In most occurrences of taverns as settings, they are unnamed and their theatrical use is simply as public meeting spaces.¹³ Some are, however, identified. Etherege sets *She Would If She Could* 3.3 in 'The Bear' where the reprobate Sir Joslin, who is intent upon an illicit love intrigue, has bespoken dinner because it is 'the privat'st place in town' (3.2.53–4) a comment that is predicated on a certain degree of recognition and possibly even a sense of complicity with at least a part of the audience that would

¹³ Examples include Etherege *The Comical Revenge* 2.3 and 3.2, Leaned *The Country Innocence* (1677) second half of Act 4, and *The Rambling Justice* 3.3 and 4.2, Otway *The Soldiers' Fortune* 4.1, Shadwell *The Humorists* (1671) 4.1, and Vanbrugh *The Provoked Wife* 3.2

presumably have been aware of this characteristic of a readily recognizable location. Identification of these places is verbal rather than visual with the set merely indicating the function of the place, as in Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer* (1676) 5.2 where the direction at the beginning of the scene is, 'The scene changes to the Cock in Bow Street. A table and bottles', a scenic formula that seems to be generic. Congreve opens *The Way of the World* with 'a Chocolate-house' and sets the whole first act there. This has another (offstage) gaming room to which characters can move, thus allowing a variety of encounters and re-encounters between the same people through all nine scenes of the first act. This semi-public space accommodates a combination of close meetings and exposure to the broader social world, offering a convenient range of logistical possibilities for dramatic action. These include conversations between the wits, Fainall and Mirabell, the receipt of a number of messages from outside, the orchestration of stratagems, and encounters between the wits and the fops, Witwoud and Petulant, in which the latter unwittingly reveal themselves as foolish and laughable. It is largely a male homosocial space, the only woman present being Betty, the serving maid who is, however, given stage business in her work, and some minimal dialogue. If the Exchange and shops are essentially female-dominated spaces, the taverns, coffee and chocolate houses and ordinaries are very much masculine ones, though they are usually used to plot love-intrigues. They are frequently also places for male display of wit or planning of strategy and there is a sense of greater behavioural licence in a situation in which, where women are introduced, it is only under particular circumstances. In *Love in a Wood* Sir Simon exhorts his drinking companions to good behaviour before introducing two women, and Lady Cockwood in *She Would If She Could* feigns unfamiliarity with the tavern she is

entering in order to suggest her propriety, 'Dear, how I tremble! I never was in one of these houses before' (1.3.7-8).

The comic exaggeration of characters in Restoration comedy, and of most of their activities, creates a decidedly artificial world detached from the realities of the London inhabited by the audience. But they are positioned in the same geographical frame of reference as the audience – albeit a selective range of urban locations such as the parks, Pall Mall and Covent Garden Piazza, the taverns and ordinaries, and the Exchange. This, along with their self-conscious embrace of their identity as Londoners helps to close the gap between the stage-play world of London and the audience's experience. Where London's various areas and features come particularly into prominence in the drama is not, however, their dramatization as settings, but in the plethora of references in the dialogue of characters. In the case of scenes set in named locations, there is usually little actual discussion of or reference to these in the dialogue of the characters that populate them, other than (very occasionally) to identify them. Reference to significant parts or features of London is, however, to be found much more frequently in general dialogue and in narrated action in the mouths of characters, reflecting the drama's tendency to present the metropolis and its localities in conceptual rather than primarily spatial or geographical terms. In the drama, what particular places represented socially was more important than any of their more material aspects. Moreover, the manner in which discussion of place is incorporated into dramatic dialogue underlines the ways that cultural and social identity is mapped onto locality in the capital, by making explicit the

connections between its geographical spaces and certain activities, levels of social rank, and even moral states. Cynthia Wall has pointed out that:

Restoration plays as a genre set up a vocabulary of place that reaffirmed the stability and recognitive value of key semiotic and historic public spaces: Covent Garden, St James's, Mulberry Gardens, Spring Garden, Pall Mall, the New Exchange – all places visited by the nobility, and those who served them or preyed on them in the dark.

(1998, 159)

If social self-definition was taking place – at least in respect of dramatic characters, on an individual level – it was also happening in geographical terms to the city itself. The interaction between town and individual was significant and the recognized social spaces become the iconic dramatic locations of the Restoration stage: London was being reinterpreted in terms of particular and selected types of such space.

The theatrical conception of London is evident in the acute awareness manifest in dramatic dialogue of places that most frequently provide settings for public scenes and social performance – such as the public parks and gardens, Covent Garden Piazza, the New Exchange – as well as others less evident in actual dramatization, such as the playhouses. The theatrical construction of the town is usually in terms of places of pleasure, when named public locations are involved, so that the theatrical map of London

is selective and entirely socially determined.¹⁴ *Love in a Wood, or St James's Park* is an example of a play deeply rooted in the topography of London, already apparent from the variety of identified public settings in the play. As the sub-title suggests, the 'wood' – when understood in the literal sense – is St James's Park, and the public spaces are extensions of the private ones, so that specific areas of London become part of an enlarged drawing room.¹⁵ The play opens with Lady Flippant, a widow, complaining about her lack of success in attracting another husband, and protesting, 'Have I not constantly kept Covent Garden Church, St Martin's, the playhouses, Hyde Park, Mulberry Garden, and all the other public marts where widows and maids are exposed?' (1.1.23–5). Later Ranger, a gallant, complains to the woman he is unsuccessfully attempting to pursue that lately he has not seen her, 'at the park, playhouse, Exchange, or other public place' (2.2.157). Frequentation of these places becomes something of a social duty. The strong sense of locality and its importance in the play is also illustrated in the description by the foolish aspirant wit Dapperwit of his relationship with his mistress in terms of the resorts they have visited together, 'Can you have the heart to say you will never more break a cheese-cake with me at New Spring Garden, the Neat House, or Chelsea?' (3.2.154–60). He goes on to tempt her, with clear sexual implications, to a tavern called the 'green garret', a place she has previously been partial to, 'You have refused Colby's Mulberry Garden, and the French houses, for the green garret, and a little

¹⁴ Compare Michel De Certeau's observation that, 'The city is . . . "poeticized" by the subject: the subject has refabricated it for his or her own use by undoing the constraints of the urban apparatus and, as a consumer of space, imposes his or her own law on the external order of the city' (1998, 13).

¹⁵ However, the difference is that the park does not have the order and rules of the drawing room. Derek Hughes observes that the play 'resembles *The Country Gentleman* in portraying a world of universal dislocation, but differs by withholding any fixed original order of place against which the dislocations might be measured. Physical, social, economic, and perceptual disorientation abound, all of them combined in the complex nocturnal wanderings and misunderstandings in the park, where signs become ambiguous, and identity, social rank, and moral character are alike obscured and misconstrued' (1998, 122).

something in the green garret pleased you more than the best treat the other places could yield' (3.2.164–7). Both private and public spaces build up a pattern of associations for the audience, not only outlining the activities of characters and placing them in a variety of significant contexts but actually defining them. The romantic heroine, Gatty, in *She Would if She Could* comments to Courtall, the gallant pursuing her: 'I should rather have expected to have seen you, sir, walking in Westminster Hall, watching to make a match at tennis (a favourite sport of the king) or waiting to dine with a Parliament man, than to meet you at such an idle place as the Exchange is' (3.1.260–64). The self-promoting fop Vaunter in Granville's *The She-Gallants* explains how he has contrived to give the impression to the town that he was amorously connected with the witty heroine Lucinda:

At Church, I always sit in the same Pew; at the Play, in the same Box; at the Musick meeting, I contrive to be the next Man to her, and never fail to lead her out upon these occasions. In the Park, I turn as she turns; I go out, when she goes out; I drive by her Coach, then stop, and go softly, till she goes by again, then gallop . . . The World takes notice of these Assiduities, and always being glad of any Opportunity to defame, my Happiness is every where publish'd.'

(2.1. pp. 25–6).

The performance in these public spaces is often carefully conveyed through reported social choreography within particular public spaces, the spaces themselves playing a part in the process. Though there are a few instances of this choreography being staged, the fact that it is more usually conveyed in dialogue allows for a greater degree of satirical comment to be inserted. This is the case in *Love for Love*, where the fop, Tattle, claims to

receive many love letters, ‘and if there be occasion for Witnesses, I can summon the Maids at the Chocolate-Houses, all the Porters of *Pall-Mall* and *Covent-Garden*, the Door-Keepers at the Play-House, the Drawers at *Locket’s*, *Pontack’s*, the *Rummer*, *Spring-Garden*’ (3.1.162–6).¹⁶ In Shadwell’s *The True Widow* (1678), the town gentleman Stanmore instructs his friend Bellamour, recently returned from the country, about the rituals of paying court to ladies in town: ‘I had forgotten half; you must turn as she turns; quit the Park when she goes out, pass by her twice or thrice between that and *St Jame’s*; talk to her at night in the drawing Room – ’ (1. p. 290). The actual refusal of such performance can equally be used to define the sophistication of a character. Millamant, the witty heroine in *The Way of the World* deliberately seeks to eschew social display when she makes one of her marriage conditions that she and Mirabell will not, ‘go to *Hyde Park* together the first *Sunday* in a new Chariot, to provoke Eyes and Whispers’ (4.1.57–9). However, this is from the perspective of familiarity with the place and rituals within it, and indicates the lack of a need for the social aspiration that they might make available.

Alongside the use of their choice of places of entertainment and leisure to help define characters, there is also the idea that to certain public places attaches the privileged right of particular members of society to frequent them. Charles II’s closing off of the formerly fully open-access Hyde Park for the exclusive use of the gentry in 1660 is the clearest articulation of this idea. There is also some sense of competition between different privileged groups for the occupation of spaces. A remark in *The Mulberry Garden*

¹⁶ Tattle’s orchestration of his public persona is comparable to Petulant’s practice in *The Way of the World* of calling for himself (disguised) while he is in company in public places.

suggests that country gentlewomen betray an excessive eagerness to enjoy the space after which the play is named, not being accustomed as fashionable townswomen are to its use, ‘These Country Ladys for the first month take up their places in the Mulberry Garden, as early as a Citizens Wife at a new Play’ (1.2.143–5). In a gratuitous bit of business in *The Man of Mode*, four ‘ill fashioned fellows’ appear at one point in the Mall, whom Bellinda calls the ‘rabble of the town’. Sir Fopling decries the fact that they can invade the fashionable spaces, and remarks, ‘’Tis pity there’s not an order made, that none but the beau monde should walk here’. He claims even to be able to recognize from the tobacco smell of their periwigs the coffee house they have come from (3.3.245–54). In the same play the notion is voiced of forms of behaviour being specific to particular localities. To Young Bellair’s remark, ‘Most people prefer High (Hyde) Park to this place (i.e. the Mall)’, the witty Harriet replies (possibly here, in a direct address to the audience), ‘It has the better reputation I confess: but I abominate the dull diversions there, the formal bows, the affected smiles, the silly by-words, and amorous tweeters, in passing; here one meets with a little conversation now and then’ (3.3.46–52). A converse type of public space occurs in *Mr Turbulent* in which two gallants, Friendly and Fairelove, come upon each other in Moorfields, where the first act of the play is set. Friendly asks what his friend is doing there, thinking he might be having an intrigue with a shopkeeper’s wife, but Fairelove retorts that he is equally surprised to see Friendly there given that he, ‘belongs to the other end of Town as well as I’. Friendly says that he was just passing through, while he casts light-hearted aspersions on his friend by suspecting that he ‘took more delight in *Moor-fields* than in the Train-swept *Mall*, or glorious *Hide-Park*’ (1. p. 2).

Restoration drama represents London and Londoners principally in terms of politics of amatory, economic or social life, closely connected to the various possibilities and liberty for self-definition afforded by the material metropolis. Prominent among these are leisure pursuits, elite spaces for leisure constituting the preponderance of the public London localities featured, also including the theatre itself as well as other forms of consumption. However, if London is a place of pleasure, successful survival in it is also stringently demanding of knowledge, whether of dress, manners, topography, consumer culture or social strategies. Though the mannered fictional narratives of the drama may be texturally removed from the audience's own experience of the social life of London, their being embedded in the real London of the audience's awareness makes them more easily available to those audiences. These narratives also construct a sophisticated urban environment, and the mapping of this on to the familiar geography of London implicitly both offers a compliment to the London audiences and encourages an enhanced self-consciousness in them as metropolitans.

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