# *Introduction*

## *The Other Voice*

*The Faithful Virgins* by E. Polwhele, written ca. 1669–1671, is a rewarding play for the study of texts, women playwrights of that period, performance expectations, and the theatrical practices of the first theaters established under Charles II, who returned to the English throne on May 29, 1660. As an early Restoration play, it is particularly useful to students and scholars in demonstrating this playwright's understanding of theatrical performance demands and, especially, audience expectations.

The plot of the play can be briefly summarized. It concerns three "faithful virgins": Umira, Merantha, and Erasila. The play opens with Umira and Merantha weeping before a hearse containing the remains of a young lord, Philammon, whom they both loved. There is, in addition, a lustful Duke who betrays his wife, Isabella, by attempting to seduce Umira, whom the Duchess Isabella subsequently seeks to murder. Meanwhile, the third virgin and sister of Philammon, Erasila, has disguised herself as a page to get closer to Statenor, the lord she loves, and suffers accordingly. While the ending of the play, with its requisite deaths, might imply a tragedy, the handling of the characters, sometimes verging on the satiric, is often comic.

In a conventional introduction such as this, one might next expect an answer to the usual initial question, "Who was E. Polwhele?" There is some ambiguity about this (see the end of this introduction), and thus the answer: we do not know. Her play has been hidden in the archives of the Bodleian Library at Oxford for nearly four centuries, only occasionally noted and still largely unread. Those few who have commented on it gave it little credit and essentially wrote off its playwright as a young, inexperienced writer, somewhat star-struck and with little promise as a serious author.[1] They saw little in the play itself and thus found it unrewarding for scholarship and certainly unfit for print.

This neglect can be partially attributed to a subtle tendency to see women playwrights as less experienced than their male contemporaries, even when such an assessment is excused, somewhat condescendingly, because of the limitations of female education and the assumed social exclusion of women from theatrical circles. These assumptions are then read back into female-authored plays—seeing

1. See, for example, the remark that Polwhele's play "never attained the dignity of print" in Montague Summers, *The Playhouse of Pepys* (1935; repr., New York: Humanities Press, 1964), 338–41. See also Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, introduction to *The Frolicks; or, The Lawyer Cheated (1671)*, by E. Polwhele (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 13–54, who see the author of this play as "a novice writer" (43).

them as unaccomplished due to their authors' limitations, or accomplished in spite of them. Women playwrights were seen as lacking the opportunities to become proficient in their craft and also as conditioned to be wary of the stigma of putting oneself at risk of the notoriety often attached to female authorship. The disparaging terms used for Aphra Behn and Margaret Cavendish are said to be representative, and the reluctance of Katherine Philips to publish is often cited as again suggestive of female self-censuring—a wariness born out of the familiar alignment of female actors and, by extension, female playwrights with prostitutes. Much of this stereotyping of women playwrights as being denied the advantages of their male counterparts and therefore less competent certainly arises from the attitudes of their contemporaries. But some of it also drifts into contemporary scholarship.[2]

To answer, then, the question of who was "E. Polwhele" requires turning away from the conventional initial focus on gender as biography ("Life") and turning instead to gender as situated in the context of the play itself ("Works"). What were the theatrical conditions out of which this play emerged? How well does the play negotiate them? What does it contribute to our understanding of early Restoration drama? And what kind of a female author does the play itself construct? Questions like these, with a focus on how radically the Restoration stage had altered theatrical conventions, audience expectations, and even the nature of the physical stage itself, and how well the play meets these conditions, can ultimately yield a more complete understanding of who E. Polwhele might have been and how to assess her talent.

## *Polwhele's Play in Its Historical Context: The Return of Charles II and the Early Restoration Period*

The years of the early Restoration (1660–1670) mark radical social and political changes from the England of Shakespeare's era and from the recent Commonwealth period (1649–1660), including important changes in the nature of theatricality. In 1660, Charles II, son of Charles I, who had been executed in 1649, was invited by Parliament to restore the Stuart monarchy to the English throne. He was received in London with public celebrations, bonfires, bell ringing, pageantry, and much

2. For a useful summary of seventeenth-century attitudes and contemporary scholarship on women writers and playwrights, see Laura Lunger Knoppers, "Introduction: Critical Framework and Issues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–18. For more specific studies of the reputation of women playwrights, see Catherine Gallagher, "Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," *Women's Studies* 15, no. 1–3 (1988): 23–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1988.9978715; Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists, 1642–1737* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 1–23, 119–42; and Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authority and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

enthusiasm, signifying the nation's relief at the end to the religious rigidity and antitheatricality of the Commonwealth period. That is, the pageantry accompanying Charles II's entrance into London and his coronation on April 23, 1661, signaled not only a return of monarchy but also a restoration of the theatricality that had traditionally accompanied such celebrations. Samuel Pepys, whose *Diary* record of the coronation describes the immediacy and enthusiasm of the moment, accentuates this theatricality, which would become a defining element of Charles II's reign:

> And a pleasure it was to see [Westminster] Abbey raised in the middle, all covered with red, and a throne . . . and footstoole on the top of it. And all the officers of all kinds, so much as the very fidlers, in red vests. At last comes in the Deane and prebends of Westminster, with the Bishops (many of them in cloth-of-gold Copes); and after them the nobility, all in their parliament-robes, which was a most magnificent sight. Then the Duke [of York], and the King with a scepter (carried by my Lord of Sandwich) and Sword and mond [orb] before him, and the crowne too. The King in his robes, bare-headed, which was very fine.[3]

In the context of *The Faithful Virgins*, this passage and others like it that signify Pepys's delight in the return of pageantry are particularly important because the coronation of Charles II marked not just the return of the monarchy but also the reopening of theater, closed for the past eighteen years. It also signaled a monarch whose pleasure in and knowledge of theater was to be a defining element of his reign. In fact, in the first year of his reign, the king issued two warrants for the establishment of what were to become the two primary theatrical companies for the next decade. These warrants were granted to two courtiers, Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant, who, following Continental models, established two indoor London theaters in leased tennis courts, a significant change in theatrical space that in turn dictated changes in staging, performance, and even the shaping of the audience, which would directly influence playwrights like Polwhele.[4] A second important innovation from Charles II was his edict commanding theatrical companies to use women actors for all female parts. The title of Polwhele's play, *The Faithful Virgins*, clearly reflects the playwright's willingness to adapt to this edict.[5]

3. Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert C. Latham and William Matthews, vol. 2, *1661* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1970), 83–84.

4. The warrants, issued in the summer of 1660, are cited in Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, eds., *A Register of English Theatrical Documents, 1660–1737*, vol. l (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 2, 5.

5. For the order for women actors, see Charles II's formal statement as part of that patent to Killigrew that "we do . . . permit and give leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either of the . . . two companies for the time to come . . . be performed by women," cited in Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson, eds., *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 49.

Although the copy of the license of Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, attached to the title page of the manuscript of *The Faithful Virgins* cites it as a "Tragedy," it is difficult to read the play as if composed with totally serious intent. More likely it was a version of romantic tragicomedy, a popular genre of this period.[6] Several scenes in the play can only be read as satiric, and some requisite dead figures at its end are posed in such a way as to emphasize the melodramatic aspect of spectacle. None of the characters arouse our full sympathy, nor are pity and fear, the classically moving tragic emotions, called for in any affective way. And, finally, and perhaps most pertinently, one character, the Duke, is handled in such a way as to point to some amusingly risky parallels between him and the reigning monarch, Charles II.[7] It would seem that, in this play, Polwhele is manipulating and commenting on the theatrical conventions of the day in a comic, almost satiric way, and with much energy and wit.

## *Polwhele's Play in the Context of the Changing Restoration Stage*

In appointing Killigrew and Davenant, courtiers who had been in exile with him on the Continent, as managers of his two designated theatrical companies, Charles encouraged London theater to import some of the theatrical conventions that he and his courtiers had been exposed to while in exile.[8] These included not only a shift from open-air theaters, like the Globe, to indoor performance spaces, but also increased use of changeable scenery, such that scene changes were effected by shutters set in up to five grooves and by matching wings, also set in grooves. Moveable scenery included elaborately painted background sets that could be revealed or hidden when the shutters were manipulated. One of the most frequent uses of such scenery was the back-shutter discovery scene, in which a pair of painted shutters was suddenly withdrawn to reveal a farther part of the stage, complete with its own scenic backing. Moreover, the use of such moveable scenery clarified entrances and exits so that actors no longer needed to leave the stage to signify a change of scene. Although painted scenery had been seen in pre-Restoration court theatricals, the general public probably did not see such moveable

6. Romantic tragicomedy is a theatrical genre that blends aspects of tragedy and comedy with subject matter that involves romantic interests. Popular in the seventeenth century both before and after the Restoration, in its later evolution it tended toward melodrama of a kind that may be found in Polwhele's play. For a discussion of the political uses of tragicomedy, see Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660–1671* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

7. Milhous and Hume make a similar point in their discussion of this play in their introduction to the Cornell edition of *The Frolicks* (43).

8. Charles II had spent nine years of exile in France, the Dutch Republic, and the Spanish Netherlands. These years of exile influenced his love of theater and, in particular, the French stage, with its use of moveable scenery, stage, and flying machinery, and women actors for the female roles. Killigrew and Davenant also followed the French in taking over tennis courts for theatrical performances.

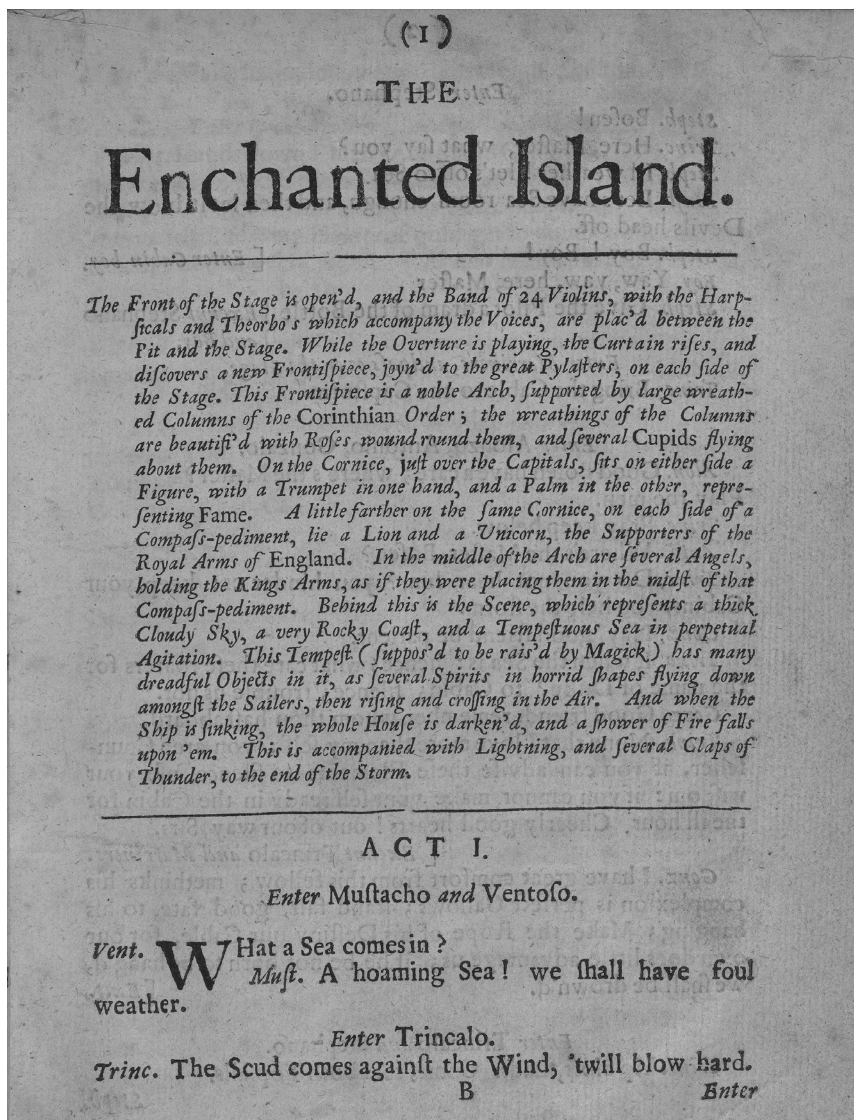
and painted scenery until 1661, when Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes* was performed at his Lincoln's Inn Fields Theater.[9] Whereas actors of pre–Civil War generations performed on a platform stage, most frequently in the open air, Restoration actors performed on an apron stage that allowed for a scenic area upstage, sometimes in front of a curtain, thus putting the actors closer to the audience. Adding to the effect of perspective was the framing of the whole with an elaborate proscenium arch that separated the stage from the auditorium and thus allowed for considerable visual embellishment as well as an enhanced perception of depth.

As these theaters evolved, they also came to include stage machinery, like ceiling features where flying equipment could be located. Doors on each side of the stage allowed for entrances and exits such that, again, an actor no longer needed to leave the stage and then reenter to indicate scene changes. The audience was seated either in the pit or in galleries or boxes at the front and sides of the stage. Because the stage as a whole was smaller than the open-air theaters of Shakespeare's time, the audience was in close proximity to the players and could, and often did, comment to and about them.[10] As these were indoor theaters, lighting was also important. Though primitive, largely achieved via wax candles in sconces or chandeliers, the lighting was sufficient and differed significantly from our present day in that it illuminated the audience as well as the stage, and thus contributed to the greater intimacy of the Restoration theater in contrast to its open-air predecessors.

Moreover, elaborate stage effects not only marked a significant change in Restoration staging from its pre–Civil War predecessors, but they also generated a new kind of audience, one that would be attentive to stage scenery and spectacle—the more lavish the better. The stage directions that open Davenant's 1667 production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (see Fig. 1), for example, illustrate well how Restoration playwrights anticipated and delivered on such expectations.

9. Dawn Lewcock, *Sir William Davenant, the Court Masque, and the English Seventeenth-Century Scenic Stage, c. 1605–c. 1700* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 1, 113.

10. For further discussion of Restoration staging and dramaturgy, see Eleanore Boswell, *The Restoration Court Stage, 1660–1702: With a Particular Account of the Production of Calisto* (1932; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966); Edward A. Langhans, "Theatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–18; Edward A. Langhans, "The Post-1660 Theatres as Performance Spaces," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 3–18; Derek Hughes, *English Drama, 1660–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973); Lewcock, *Sir William Davenant*; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays 1675–1707* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); William Van Lennep, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur Scouten, eds., *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, Part 1, *1600–1700* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965); and Richard Southern, *Changeable Scenery: Its Origin and Development in the British Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952).



(1)

THE

# Enchanted Island.

*The Front of the Stage is open'd, and the Band of 24 Violins, with the Harpſicals and Theorbo's which accompany the Voices, are plac'd between the Pit and the Stage. While the Overture is playing, the Curtain riſes, and diſcovers a new Frontiſpiece, joyn'd to the great Pylaſters, on each ſide of the Stage. This Frontiſpiece is a noble Arch, ſupported by large wreathed Columns of the* Corinthian *Order; the wreathings of the Columns are beautifi'd with Roſes wound round them, and ſeveral* Cupids *flying about them. On the Cornice, juſt over the Capitals, ſits on either ſide a Figure, with a Trumpet in one hand, and a Palm in the other, repreſenting* Fame. *A little farther on the ſame Cornice, on each ſide of a Compaſs-pediment, lie a Lion and a Unicorn, the Supporters of the Royal Arms of* England. *In the middle of the Arch are ſeveral Angels, holding the Kings Arms, as if they were placing them in the midſt of that Compaſs-pediment. Behind this is the Scene, which repreſents a thick Cloudy Sky, a very Rocky Coaſt, and a Tempeſtuous Sea in perpetual Agitation. This Tempeſt (ſuppos'd to be rais'd by Magick) has many dreadful Objects in it, as ſeveral Spirits in horrid ſhapes flying down amongſt the Sailers, then riſing and croſſing in the Air. And when the Ship is ſinking, the whole Houſe is darken'd, and a ſhower of Fire falls upon 'em. This is accompanied with Lightning, and ſeveral Claps of Thunder, to the end of the Storm.*

ACT I.

*Enter* Muſtacho *and* Ventoſo.

*Vent.* WHat a Sea comes in?

*Muſt.* A hoaming Sea! we ſhall have foul weather.

*Enter* Trincalo.

*Trinc.* The Scud comes againſt the Wind, 'twill blow hard.

B *Enter*

Figure 1. *The Enchanted Island*. Opening stage direction for the Dryden, Davenant, and Shadwell production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC. S2945 B, fol. 1r.

The license attached to Polwhele's play states that it was licensed for performance by "the Duke's Company of Actors," that is by Davenant's company, which was noted by Pepys and others as initially more cognizant of Continental theatrical staging than was its competitor, Killigrew's King's Men, then acting at

the Theatre Royal on Bridges Street.[11] Davenant's converted tennis court theater, Lincoln's Inn Fields, opened in 1661, was the first public theater to use changeable scenery.[12] Moreover, Davenant's company was known to have been more likely to perform plays by less well-known playwrights than was Killigrew's, as Killigrew had inherited most of the performance scripts from the pre–Civil War King's Company.[13] Polwhele's play, coming from a relatively unknown playwright, would thus have been more likely to have been selected by Davenant, even if we did not already have Herbert's license corroborating this fact.

More pertinently, Davenant's personal history with court masques may also have played a role in his decision to produce Polwhele's play.[14] In his own playwriting, he had adapted the masque spectacle from an earlier masque to the public stage in the staging of his *Siege of Rhodes*, as evidenced in the 1663 printed version, and masque and spectacle were thus associated with his theatrical company.[15] As almost all of act 3 of Polwhele's *The Faithful Virgins* takes the form of both antimasque and masque, her play is thus consistent with the influence of masque and with the developing genre of rhymed verse drama of the kind that would have appealed to Davenant. His background and experience with Restoration changes in stage conventions is thus pertinent to our understanding *The Faithful Virgins* in the context of the shift from platform to scenic staging.

Davenant's pre-Restoration experience with masque as both playwright and producer involved collaboration with the knowledgeable set designers Inigo Jones and John Webb.[16] From 1631, when he was appointed by Charles I to replace Ben Jonson as poet of masques, until his death in 1668, Davenant gained and displayed the technical and mechanical expertise associated with masques. His 1661 production of *The Siege of Rhodes*, for example, brought Charles II to the public

11. Hughes, *English Drama*, 1–2.

12. Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1988), 12.

13. Lewcock, *Sir William Davenant*, 112.

14. A masque was a courtly entertainment involving dancing, singing, instrumental music, song, and acting, plus elaborate stage design featuring architectural motifs, machinery, and often innovative dramatic effects. It was designed to entertain and to awe but also had moral, social, and political allegorical import. It was usually preceded by an "antimasque," a comic or grotesque dance that was transformed by the masque that followed it into propriety and order, usually by the king, or patron's, active presence.

15. For an extended discussion of the use of masque in Davenant's plays, see Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration*, 83–93.

16. For Jones and his role in masques, see Stephen Orgel and Roy C. Strong, *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court*, 2 vols. (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). See also John Newman, "Jones, Inigo (1573–1652)," in *ODNB*, ed. Lawrence Golden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15017; and John Bold, "Webb, John (1611–1672)," in *ODNB*, ed. Lawrence Golden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28922.

theater for the first time, thus verifying the royal as well as popular appreciation of plays with masque elements. We have relatively few depictions of how these performances appeared on stage, although the sketches in the Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth House give us some idea of how these might have appeared to contemporary audiences (see chatsworth.org). Their effect can also be read in the comments of playgoers like Pepys, who saw *Hamlet* in 1661 and approved the production of that play "as done with scenes."[17] And in Richard Flecknoe's praise of Davenant's productions as having "arrived to the height of magnificence," it is apparent that audience attention had shifted from the verbal to the visual.[18] When Polwhele came to write her *Faithful Virgins* sometime in the 1660s, then, she was faced with constructing a play that emerged as much from contemporary dramatic visual performances as from contemporary dramatic verbal texts.

Finally, the fact that we cannot find documentary evidence beyond that notation of the license does not negate the possibility that Polwhele's play was performed. As Robert D. Hume notes, "Performance records for the professional theatres in London remain radically incomplete until 1705."[19] Thus it is impossible to conclude that absence from these records means that Polwhele's play was not performed. What is particularly important is that even without definitive performance evidence, we can still conclude that Polwhele's play would have been radically different from pre-Restoration drama in staging and in promoting a more directly engaged audience response.

Applying this focus to a reading of Polwhele's *Faithful Virgins*, then, we might look at what the play itself can tell us about how it may have appealed to early Restoration audiences. Most pertinently, a close reading demonstrates that Polwhele was composing her play with the new performative values of the Restoration stage in mind. Act 1, for example, opens, as mentioned earlier, with a "discovery scene." One of the "faithful virgins," Merantha, is seen "weeping," and the second virgin, Umira, then enters. The stage directions read, "A hearse *discovered*" (my emphasis), making explicit that the playwright intended this opening to be performed as a scenic disclosure, something that had been done in the pre-Restoration era, but which was handled quite differently after 1660, when shutters and painted scenery could be employed to enhance both the perspective and the emotional qualities of the drama. In his discussion of the change in the handling of discovery scenes, Tim Keenan comments on the difference between the platform stage and the scenic stage with respect to this theatrical device: "Dramatic as they undoubtedly could be, . . . discoveries were . . . a direct inheritance from the old platform stage. Platform stage discoveries, however, were less frequent [and]

17. See entries for August 24, 1661, and August 21, 1661, in Pepys, *Diary*.

18. Richard Flecknoe, "A Short Discourse of the English Stage," in *Love's Kingdom* (London: R. Flecknoe, 1664), 11.

19. Robert D. Hume, "Theatre Performance Records in London, 1660–1705," *The Review of English Studies* 67 (June 2016): 468–95, https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgv128.

tended to be brief, owing to unfavorable sight lines."[20] Keenan further observes that scenic stage settings, in contrast to platform stage settings, were often used to reveal settings with large props. In Polwhele's play, the opening discovery scene features a "hearse," possibly painted but also possibly a large prop that would return in several scenes to follow. (Thomas Porter's 1662 *The Villain* uses a hearse, suggesting this as a familiar prop.) Davenant also had used this new handling of the discovery scene in his own plays, and Keenan's research shows that while only 30 percent of known Globe plays used the discovery scene, at least 68 percent of the plays performed at Davenant's Lincoln's Inn Fields Theater used the new form of discovery; several of these used it more than once.[21] If Polwhele's *Faithful Virgins* used the new form of discovery scene, it would have called for shutters to disclose the scene and painted scenery to enhance the dramatic effect of sorrow and mourning. At the conclusion of this opening scene in act 1, the stage direction between lines 52 and 53 reads, "The hearse is *shut* in" (my emphasis), thus again suggesting that Polwhele's play is inviting the new scenic stage device of shutters and painted scenery.

For the remainder of act 1, scene changes are accomplished in the usual way, as indicated by the use of the stage direction *Exeunt omnes*. At the end of the act, however, Polwhele introduces a "dumb show," which includes the direction, "A temple *discovered*" (my emphasis), thus giving the audience an opportunity to enjoy the effects of spectacle, another attribute of Restoration theatricality.[22] While dumb shows were a feature of pre-Restoration drama, *Hamlet*'s mouse-trap play being the obvious example,[23] the use of the shutters and painted scenery made the visual appeal of these plays a new element to be noted and appreciated. Moreover, this dumb show, which features that "temple" before which a betrothal scene is silently acted out, seems designed to dramatically alter the mood of the previous somber scene in which the "faithful virgin" Erasila, disguised as the page Floradine, has been lamenting her unrequited love for Statenor, the courtier she serves. The discovery scene of that disclosed temple, when enhanced by painted scenery, makes a strikingly opulent visual commentary on the contrast of the lone character, Floradine, with the more crowded community celebration scene of betrothal.

More subtly, a second contrast might also have been made possible by the conjunction of discovery scene and dumb show. That is, the Duke is being betrothed to Isabella, who has just been seen rejecting her previous lover, Cleophon, and whom the Duke will, in turn, subsequently betray. An excessively lavish temple (achievable through the use of changeable scenery in the new scenic stage)

20. Tim Keenan, *Restoration Staging, 1660–74* (London: Routledge, 2017), 10.

21. Keenan, *Restoration Staging*, 176–77.

22. A dumb show is a dramatic action presented on stage without words, rather like mime, usually to summarize or comment on the main action.

23. See *Hamlet* 3.2.87–258.

might make a foreshadowing visual comment on the excessively lascivious nature of the Duke, and thus also the potential unreliability of events to come. Moreover, Davenant was known to reuse such props in the plays his company presented. As audiences grew to recognize these when used for spectacular effect, it is perhaps possible that a prop that was thus repurposed would carry with it some of the implications of its previous use. The new audience of the Restoration, increasingly trained to appreciate the spectacle involved in scenes like this conclusion to act 1 of Polwhele's play, would have been responsive to this use of props in a way that a pre-Restoration audience would not have been. Finally, if Polwhele's play was indeed performed by Davenant's company, a prop like the temple might also have been handled through the use of perspective effects. The Restoration audience was consciously alert to the ways in which things were perceived and apprehended in the special relationship between themselves and other objects, as Pepys's comments occasionally demonstrate.[24]

We do not have a complete record of specific stage props for either Davenant's or Killigrew's company, but we do know that Restoration staging was capable of elaborate effects. See, for example, the following description of one such spectacle, drawn from a performance later than Polwhele's play but nonetheless illustrative:

> The Clouds divide, and Juno appears in a Machine drawn by Peacocks while a Symphony is playing. It moves gently forward, and as it descends, it opens and discovers the Tail of the Peacock, which is so Large, that it almost fills the opening of the Stage between Scene and Scene.[25]

Davenant's company was invested in spectacle, and Polwhele's temple scene offered an opportunity for similar effect, although probably on a lesser scale.

Act 2 offers a similar opportunity to read Polwhele's play for how it suggests performance values aligned with the changing nature of the Restoration stage. It also opens with a discovery scene disclosing the hearse and thus returning viewers to the initial location. It closes with a stage direction given between lines 159 and 160 that is quite specific: "Enter Cleophon as in a grove looking about. On one side of it a cave [is] discovered." This shift reinforces the conjecture that a movement of shutters, rather than a cleared stage, marked the transition from one scene (the hearse) to another (the grove). That the cave is "discovered" further emphasizes that a movement of shutters to expose the cave must be involved. And again, painted scenery would reinforce the dramatic nature of the change.

24. Lewcock, *Sir William Davenant*, 238.

25. John Dryden, *Albion and Albanius*, quoted in Hughes, *Theatre of Aphra Behn*, 13. See also Fig. 1, p. 6.

Of some importance is our recognition that the goal here is not verisimilitude but entertainment. Scene changes with the movement of shutters and painted scenery, and the sequence and rapidity of scene changes themselves, all had begun to attract an interest not possible in pre-Restoration theater. The changes of scene became in fact an opportunity for commentary from the audience. Notably, the earliest comments are all from foreigners, suggesting the Continental audience's greater exposure to these effects, new to an English audience.[26]

The scene quickly becomes complicated by more calculated use of stage effects as two witches "enter" and "weave charms," though how they do this is not indicated. What does happen is that following one charm, "two spirits ascend in white, like nymphs" (stage direction between ll. 185 and 186). After some discourse, the next stage direction between lines 193 and 194 reads, "Witch stamps and spirits descend." The witch then states, with reference to additional "spirits," "I will conjure the spirits of the air / Straight to descend" (ll. 194–95). She exits, and the stage direction reads, "Thunder as in the air; as that eases, soft music and a song. Song ended and spirits in the shape of men and women descend and dance. Which being done, all vanish." There is more music, then "three aerial spirits descend" and, after more conversation, "ascend" and "vanish." There is thus much descending and ascending, suggesting the opportunity for stage machinery to again entertain the audience as well as further the plot.

Davenant's stage was equipped with the machinery to accomplish such action, and Polwhele's deliberate movement of her "spirits" again demonstrates an awareness of the entertainment value of such theatrical devices, as well as their value for the necessary complications of plot. In the 1660s, playgoing was still a new experience for many, and while much of the machinery used for these effects had been present in the aristocratic masques of earlier periods, they were new to the general Restoration audience and much to be marveled at. In this scene, Polwhele could well be described as responding to the desire for that kind of entertainment. Moreover, her pacing of the "descends" and "ascends" suggests an attentive awareness of when and how such audiences might react.

Act 3, in particular, evidences such performative intention, as almost the whole act is explicitly labeled a "masque," with accompanying dance and music throughout.[27] The first stage direction reads, "Two gentlemen discovered preparing seats for the Duke and Duchess," and the gentlemen's opening lines—"What

26. Some such seventeenth-century comments include the following: "The scene changes . . . are most ingeniously thought out and executed"; "the scenic area is quite open, with many scene changes and perspective views"; "the scenery is very light [and] capable of a great many changes." Quoted with attributions to Balthasar de Monconys (1663), Samuel Sorbière (1663), and Lorenzo Magalotti (1669), respectively, in Keenan, *Restoration Staging*, 65.

27. As stated earlier, a masque was usually preceded by an "antimasque," a comic or grotesque dance that was transformed by the masque that followed into propriety and order, usually by the active presence of the masque's patron. In Polwhele's masque, the activating presence is the Duchess.