

## The Protectorate Playhouse: William Davenant's Cockpit in the 1650s

STEPHEN WATKINS

*University of Southampton*

Recent work on the history of the theater during the decade of republican experiment in England (1649–59) has revealed a modest but sophisticated performance culture, centering on the entrepreneurial and politically wily figure of Sir William Davenant. Despite the ban on stage plays enforced in various forms from 1642, by the mid-1650s Davenant, poet laureate to Charles I and Royalist aid during the civil wars, succeeded in gaining the Protectorate's approval to produce a series of "Heroick Representations" (Davenant, *Proposition 2*) for public audiences, first at his private residence of Rutland House and later at the Cockpit theater in Drury Lane. These "Representations" embody a unique corpus in the history of English theater. They were radically innovative productions, introducing the proscenium arch, painted, perspectival scenery, and recitative music to London audiences. *The Siege of Rhodes* even boasted the first English female performer to appear on a professional public stage. Davenant's 1650s works were not strictly plays in the usual sense—what John Dryden would later term "just drama" (sig. a2v)—but rather hybrid works that drew on a vast array of styles, modes, and traditions for their inspiration, most notably the court masque and the Italian "opera." They would, as one historian has remarked, "transform the cultural life of interregnum London" (Capp 199).

While scholars have been principally concerned with uncovering the ideological and political messages encoded within Davenant's 1650s operas, no one has properly considered just how important the venues themselves were to his enterprise. After an initial trial season in 1656 at Rutland House, Davenant went on to produce three operas at the Jacobean-era indoor playhouse, the Cockpit in Drury Lane. These works were *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*, *The History of Sir Francis Drake*, and *The Siege of Rhodes* (possibly in two parts).<sup>1</sup> This article examines these works in the context of the Cockpit's longer history, as both a theatrical venue and a site of political significance during the Protectorate. It argues that Davenant's placement there in 1658 was not simply a personal *coup*, but something advantageous to the government also. At this time, the authorities were concerned that the Cockpit might be a site of Royalist resistance to the Protectorate. They therefore wanted their own man running the show. As such, the playhouse itself becomes an increasingly important factor for explaining why Davenant was allowed to stage works of any kind at all during the period, allowing us to see these works in the local context of oppositional politics in Westminster and its environs. In what follows, I argue that the Cockpit is not only important as an opera venue in the 1650s and early 1660s, but also as a contested site of the city's changing politics.

The essay is in four parts. First, I begin by defining what we mean by "opera" in the context of Davenant's 1650s entertainments. Too often these works are collapsed into a larger teleology about the arrested development of English opera (Dent 43–77), which is unhelpful and stops us from fully appreciating these works on their own terms. The circumstances of the 1650s, both theatrically and politically, are unique, and we need to be sensitive to the particular circumstances that directed their production. By reconstructing

contemporary uses of the term “opera,” and by amending modern scholarly definitions accordingly, we can appropriate what has become for us such a contested and multifarious term to good effect. Having set out to define 1650s opera, I then offer an explanation as to how and why Davenant ended up moving to the Cockpit some time before the summer of 1658. Next, I turn to a discussion of the operas themselves, and explore the politics they promote. I also examine some contemporary responses to them. The article concludes by showing that the Cockpit remained a site for operatic spectacular after the Restoration: it asks finally that we acknowledge the Cockpit not as the last Jacobean theater to operate in London, but instead as its first Carolean opera house.

### **Defining “opera” in the 1650s**

Davenant’s works for the Cockpit were not “straight” plays in the tradition of the pre-war theater. Rather, they employed a whole range of new performance arts and technologies to create their spectacular effects, such as elaborate scenery, instrumental music, and dance. They may have done so to appeal to the Cromwellian regime, which never took the same negative stance against music as it did against plays (Little 181–82). Critics have thus found it difficult to neatly categorize the Cockpit entertainments using the available taxonomy of early modern performance. Contemporaries, too, described them using a vast range of overlapping and sometimes contradictory terms. They are variously, and often interchangeably, labelled as masques, entertainments, operas, semi-operas, moral representations, and heroic plays.<sup>2</sup> The title page for the 1656 edition of *The Siege of Rhodes*, for example, identifies the work accurately, if cumbersomely, as “a Representation by the Art of Perspective in Scenes, And the Story sung in Recitative Music,” while both *The*

*Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* and *The History of Sir Francis Drake* are described as “Expressed by instrumental and vocal music, and by art of perspectives in scenes, &c.” and as “Expressed by Instrumental and Vocal Music and the art of perspective in scenes” on their respective title pages. The Stationers’ Register record for *The Siege of Rhodes*, however, describes that work as a “maske” (2:81), thereby linking it to the genre of Caroline court spectacle to which Davenant contributed so brilliantly in the 1630s.<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Oliver Cromwell’s Secretary of State, John Thurloe, in which he sets out to justify his theatrical enterprise to the Protectorate government by offering to present anti-Spanish propaganda that would endear his audiences to the government’s ongoing war with Spain in the West Indies, Davenant refers to his works as “moral representations” (Firth 321).<sup>4</sup>

None of these “official” texts (published quartos, a Stationers’ record, and a letter to a government official) use the word “opera,” which suggests that the term does not have common currency in the period. Indeed, Davenant’s fulsome title page descriptions rather suggest the need to explain clearly to readers in simple terms what it is they should expect to see when attending a performance at the Cockpit. The use of “maske” by the Stationer suggests an attempt at bureaucratic efficiency, rather than an appreciation for the minutiae of musicological form. “Maske” seems to be used here as shorthand, roughly congruous with Davenant’s title page descriptions, and recognizable to anyone consulting the Register who was not necessarily familiar with the world of the theater themselves.

Despite this, the idea that Davenant’s Protectorate works resemble the Caroline court masque ideologically as well as formally has proved a compelling point of entry for recent commentators. In her recent book on drama in the revolutionary period, Rachel Willie has argued that *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* and *The History of Sir Francis*

*Drake* were part of a larger attempt by some writers during the Protectorate to reinvent the court masque for a kingless republic (80–116). Willie points out that the Protectorate court had itself appropriated a masque text for their own political ends back in March 1653, when the authorities apparently hosted a production of James Shirley's *Cupid and Death: A Masque*. The title page to the printed edition states that Shirley's work "was presented before his Excellency the Ambassador of Portugal upon the 26 of March, 1653". The ambassador, the Count of Peneguiã, was conducting diplomatic work with the republic at the time. Davenant's works form part of this same trajectory, Willie argues: "where the parameters of what signifies a court alter, courtly entertainments may also be subject to change" (83). This suggests that the Cockpit productions are a direct result of this alteration in courtly traditions.

There is no doubt that Willie is correct to argue for the continuity between the pre-war masque that Davenant knew so intimately and his Cockpit operas. Janet Clare also acknowledges that the 1650s works "appropriate some of that genre's formal elements for distinct ideological purposes" (*Drama* 35). Certainly, they adopt features of the masque, such as "entries" in place of acts or scenes, and their deployment of music and dance is much more in the courtly style than the Italian operatic tradition of, say, Monteverdi (91–94). I am less concerned here, however, with charting the historical relationship between the court masque and the Protectorate opera, than with how contemporaries themselves understood what they were seeing. While Willie insists that these works should be thought of as "masques," this is evidently not how writers in the early 1650s, Davenant included, described them (94–109). Clare herself notes that Davenant deliberately avoided using the term "masque," with all its "associations with Stuart court culture" (*Drama* 35). The fact

that a new terminology was being sought out and adopted by people in the 1650s is suggestive of the aesthetic, political, and ideological shifts occurring during one of the most transformational decades of the century.

If these works are not plays, and their relationship to the masque is, at least on the level of nomenclature, contested, then what of “opera”? Davenant himself uses the term on at least two occasions. In *The First Day’s Entertainment at Rutland House*, he has the Prologue enter and apologize for the poor “*Cup-board-Scene*” (A3v) on offer to his spectators. He asks that, while the inadequate space is unfortunate, they should “Think this your passage, and the narrow way | To our Elisian Field, the *Opera*” (A4; italics reversed). Elsewhere, in a letter to Bulstrode Whitelocke, Keeper of the Great Seal, Davenant invites his old friend to peruse a copy of his newly published work, *The Siege of Rhodes*. “When I consider the nicety of the times,” he writes,

I fear it may draw a curtain between your lordship and our *opera*; therefore I have presumed to send to your lordship, hot from the press, what we mean to represent ... though I despair to have the honour of inviting you to be a spectator.<sup>5</sup>  
(Whitelock 273; my italics)

Recognizing that it would be inappropriate for Whitelocke to actually attend a performance of *The Siege of Rhodes* himself—Parliamentary elections were looming, and Whitelocke was extremely busy trying to secure his seat for Buckinghamshire—Davenant nevertheless wants to send him a copy of his “opera,” hoping that Whitelocke remains “not unwilling to give a little entertainment to poetry” (Whitelocke 273).

The word's origins are of course Italian, and this certainly did inform how English writers understood and deployed it. The earliest reference to "opera" by an English writer is from John Evelyn's diary entry for 31 October 1644, when he was travelling in Rome (2: 202).<sup>6</sup> As Andrew R. Walkling observes, references to "opera" in the 1640s and early 1650s seem always to refer "explicitly to the Italian phenomenon" (13). In 1656, the year *First Day's Entertainment* and *The Siege of Rhodes* were put on at Rutland House, Thomas Blount defined "opera" in his *Glossographia: or A dictionary, interpreting all such hard words... as are now used in our refined English tongue* as follows:

In Italy it signifies a Tragedy, Tragi-Comedy, Comedy or Pastoral, which (being the studied work of a Poet) is not acted after the vulgar manner, but performed by Voyces in that way, which the Italians term *Recitative*, being likewise adorned with Scenes by Perspective, and extraordinary advantages by Musick. (sig. Eev)

Blount's definition points to the Italian connection, while resembling in its particulars the title page rubric of *The Siege of Rhodes*.<sup>7</sup>

Scenery is clearly an important component to the English understanding of opera in the 1650s, as is the employment of recitative. Following Blount, Walkling suggests that "opera" might best be characterized as "an essentially 'technological' genre, combining a newly emerging musical technology (recitative) with the theatrical technology of scenic spectacle" (148). Acknowledging that "our employment of the terms 'masque' and 'opera' must acknowledge from the start an inherent degree of indeterminacy, an understanding that both designations sit uncomfortably in the late-seventeenth-century lexicon" (9),

Blount's and Walkling's definitions sit well with Davenant's title page descriptions of his "representations," and his own use of the term "opera" in his letter to Whitelocke and the *First Day's Entertainment*.

Dramaturgically speaking, then, "opera" captures perfectly the Cockpit productions. Its political implications, however, require some elucidation. Walkling sees the ideological imperatives of the "opera" as different from those of the "masque," as described by Clare and Willie. He points out that the two genres are in fact politically at odds with each other rather than being two sides of the same coin. The court masque is "lofty" and expensive, the preserve of the rich and powerful; operas on the other hand are more democratic, "simplified, linguistically and musically, into the more conversational ... recitative, while the costly scenes and machines found in the court productions were reduced to more affordable stationary wings embellished with changeable shutters and supplemented by an occasional relieve" (148). Designed with public audiences in mind, opera functioned as a democratic lubricant, keeping the wheels of republican government turning. Where tickets went for five shillings at the private Rutland House, Davenant stresses that at the public Cockpit, "Notwithstanding the great expense necessary to scenes and other ornaments ... there is a good provision made of places for a shilling" (*Peru* 27). While still a considerable price for most of the population, this was certainly within the spending limits of most members of the lower gentry.<sup>8</sup> I will discuss the political function of Davenant's operas in more detail below. Thus, divested of its Italianate and modern musicological associations, and remembering Walkling's caution that the masque and the opera are always terms in negotiation with each other in the seventeenth-century context, "opera" can be

appropriately, if retrospectively, deployed to describe Davenant's capricious group of theatrical spectaculars staged at the Cockpit during the Protectorate.

### **Moving to the Cockpit**

Having established Davenant's Cockpit entertainments as "operas" in the early modern sense of incorporating moveable scenery and recitative into their dramaturgy, we next have to ask how and why Davenant moved his enterprise to the Cockpit in the first place. This requires us to think about both the history of the Cockpit's management before the 1650s on the one hand, and the delicate political situation that Davenant's operas set out to address on the other. These two issues are interrelated in important ways.

In 1653, finally granted a pardon by Parliament after spending the best part of three years incarcerated in Cowes Castle and the Tower of London, Davenant wrote and published an anonymous pamphlet that called for the establishment of a state-sponsored theater. *A Proposition for Advancement of Moraltie, By a new way of Entertainment of the People* insisted that the only way to ensure the public peace was to "set up some Entertainment, where their [the people's] Eyes might be subdu'd with *Heroicall Pictures* and change of *Scenes*" and "their Eares, civiliz'd with Musick and wholesome discourses" (14). These "*Heroicall Pictures*" would thus "by degrees enamour them with consideration of the conveniences and protections of Government" (15), ensuring the public's acceptance of controversial Protectorate policies.<sup>9</sup> Davenant's operas were explicitly political, and were sold to the government as instruments for promulgating both moral reform and propaganda. Through a combination of scenic spectacle, music, and heroic action, Davenant's works would "court even the coursest of the people into goodness," "for

though vertue must needs be transcendently amiable, yet since her beames are too dazeling for the Eyes of the vulgar, her meaner approaches, through the disguises of morall Poetry and other Arts, lessen her into a due proportion to their sight" (20–21). Opera was being offered as a moralizing force for the republican cause, in stark contradistinction to the outright flattery of the court masque. In his letter to Thurloe, Davenant suggested one issue of national importance that the operas might address to the government's benefit: the ongoing war with Spain over territory in the West Indies. As this unpopular and expensive war rumbled on, Davenant suggested the opera might make a useful intervention:

If morall representations may be allow'd (being without obscenenesse, profanenesse, and scandall) the first arguments may consist of the Spaniard's barbarous conquests in the West Indies and of their severall cruelties there exercis'd upon the subjects of this nation: of which some use may be made. (Firth 321)

In 1656, however, the war was not going well, England just having suffered a humiliating blow with the loss of Hispaniola to the Spanish. The project to produce operas on the subject were therefore postponed in favor of less controversial fare (Clare, *Drama* 236–37), but Thurloe and his colleagues evidently saw enough value in the general principle of opera to permit Davenant to stage other works in the same spirit.

In May 1656, Davenant presented *The First Day's Entertainment* to a select gathering of spectators in the upper backroom of Rutland House. A spy was sent to attend by Thurloe, and they reported back on the evening. The report survives, and is complimentary.<sup>10</sup> In September Davenant presented *The Siege of Rhodes*. The inadequacies of the Rutland House

space were only too apparent, as Davenant made clear in a note “To the Reader” attached to the printed edition. There, he apologized, as the Prologue had done in *First Days Entertainment*, for the narrowness of the room, which this time deleteriously affected the perspective scenery: “It has been often wished”, he wrote, “that our scenes ... had not been confined to eleven foot in height, and about fifteen in depth, including the places of passage reserved for the music. This is so narrow an allowance for the fleet of Solyman the Magnificent, his army, the island of Rhodes and the varieties attending the siege of the city that I fear you will think we invite you to such a contracted trifle as that of the Caesars carved upon a nut” (sigs. A2–A2v). The obvious solution was to move to another venue, one that was properly equipped to accommodate the moveable scenery and the plethora of musicians demanded by the opera. Sometime between 1656 and 1658 Davenant moved his enterprise, apparently with the Protectorate’s approval, to the Cockpit in Drury Lane.

We do not know precisely when Davenant first went to the Cockpit. Leslie Hotson suggests that it may have been as early as April 1656, even before he set up at Rutland House.<sup>11</sup> This seems implausible, but certainly Davenant may have had *some* connection to the theater and its manager, Elizabeth Kirke, at this time. He had, after all, nominally taken over management of the Cockpit’s resident company back in 1640, after William Beeston, Elizabeth’s stepson, staged Richard’s Brome’s *The Court Beggar*, a play that alluded to the King’s humiliating recent defeat in Scotland in the first Bishops’ War, and was arrested for his impertinence (Freehafer, “Brome” 367). Only the year before his connection with the Cockpit was first established, in 1639, Davenant had received a license from Charles I to build a theater that would accommodate such “musical Presentments, Scenes, Dancing or other the like” (Rymer 20: 378) as he saw fit. This project was intended to make publicly

available the kinds of visual and musical spectacular experienced in the court masques; it was only under the Protectorate that Davenant fully pursued these plans. Davenant may have got to know Elizabeth, William's stepmother, back in 1639–40, then, and may well have reconnected with her after his return to London after 1654. It certainly would have been possible for Davenant to have moved to the Cockpit *after* April 1656 because the Kirke-Beeston's lease on the property expired on the first of that month, and they subsequently retired to Holborn (Matusiak 181).

It is worth noting that there may have been as much a political rationale behind Davenant's move to the Cockpit as well as a practical one. In a recent article, Christopher Matusiak provides compelling evidence to suggest that under the Kirke-Beestons in the 1640s and early 1650s, the area in which the Cockpit was situated, London's modern-day West End, was an area peculiarly resistant to the republican government. Using extensive archival research to support his claims, Matusiak argues that under the Kirke-Beestons the Cockpit became a site "infused ... with robust royalist feeling" (182) in the 1640s. The Kirke-Beestons themselves "were politically motivated", he suggests, in their reopening of the theater back in 1646, while throughout the period they possessed "the means in the form of their playhouse to organize unreconstructed London Royalists, agitate for non-capitulation to Parliament, and facilitate intelligence gathering for those still fighting on behalf of the Stuarts" (181). If Matusiak's reading of the evidence is correct, then during the civil wars and the years of the Commonwealth the Cockpit came to represent a site of intense Royalist opposition to the Parliamentarians. Certainly, Westminster and its environs, including Drury Lane, were notorious Royalist hotspots during the revolutionary period (Merritt 204–7). Perhaps with the expiration of the Kirke-Beestons' lease, the

government felt it prudent to place Davenant in the theater to counter this Royalist resistance.<sup>12</sup> There is evidence that the Protectorate was becoming increasingly concerned about the threat of a Royalist insurrection. In May 1655, Henry Manning, a spy working for Thurloe, wrote to the Secretary of State, “urging him to ‘remember’ active Royalists in London, among them ‘Sr Luis Kirke,’ one of the city’s ‘weekely Intelligencers’” (Matusiak 181). The Kirkes evidently remained a cause for concern for Thurloe and his colleagues after Cromwell came to power. In contrast, Davenant solicited Thurloe himself the following year, offering the government a convenient solution to the problem of the Kirke-Beestons and their Royalist agitations at the Cockpit: he would act as their man in the local area, and his Cockpit operas would champion the government, not undermine it. “It should not be forgotten,” Davenant wrote in his *Proposition*, “that as the way we have propos’d, is the most probable of evincing the necessity of vertue unto vulgar mindes, so is it the most likely to containe them in quiet” (28). Davenant believed he could avert any rebellion likely fomenting in Drury Lane with the distracting attractions of opera.<sup>13</sup>

### **Reforming drama, making history: opera at the Cockpit**

After the Kirke-Beestons had left the Cockpit, Davenant made good on his proposal to produce an opera that would engage with the Spanish atrocities in the New World. By 1658, the war with Spain was beginning to turn in England’s favor, so now seemed a good time to advance the government’s agenda. William Beeston had refurbished the theater in 1651, and as Iain Mackintosh and John Orrell have both shown, John Webb, Davenant’s collaborator and scene designer, transferred the scenery for *The Siege of Rhodes* to the new

theater.<sup>14</sup> It could now accommodate moveable scenery and the musicians required by the anti-Spanish texts.

*The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* and *The History of Sir Francis Drake* were intended to celebrate the “great and vertuous” actions of the English abroad, while at the same time showing the Spanish as barbarous, tyrannical colonizers, covetous of native Amerindian gold and women. At moments, they present terrifying images of Spanish cruelty in order to turn the English audiences against their enemies. One famous stage direction from *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* calls for a scene in which “*Two Spaniards are ... discovered, sitting in their cloaks and appearing more solemn in ruffs, with rapiers and daggers by their sides; the one turning a spit, whilst the other is basting an Indian prince, which is roasted at an artificial fire*” (5.5–10). The idea was to unite the politically disparate spectators in the audience against a foreign enemy, thus creating a national mythology that transcended the recent division of Royalists and Parliamentarians: “the work is indeed responsive to contemporary politics and exigencies,” according to its most recent editor, “while sheltering, by virtue of its subject-matter, under an immunity from ideological conflict” (Clare, “Production” 836).

By generating a series of “*Heroicall Pictures*” that pit the English against the Spanish, all those watching in the audience would invariably take the side of the English, and thus become “enamoured” with the current Protectorate government’s “Western Design”. The final dance consists of a Spaniard kicked into submission, while the English and the Peruvians “*salute and shake hands, in sign of their future amity*” (6.82–3). The English are presented as compassionate and just in their colonial enterprises; the Incans *invite* them to take control of Peru. *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* works to forward Cromwell’s

policies at the same time as garnering support from his potentially hostile critics. The images of Spanish cruelty, mixed with comic scenes of their ineptitude and laziness, highlight England's moral and civil superiority over their European foes, presenting a case for intervention in the New World.

Likewise, *The History of Sir Francis Drake* presents audiences with images of the English as honest, decent and good in contradistinction to the rapacious Spanish. This opera re-enacts Drake's famous explorations of the New World in search of gold and glory. Davenant is keen to make the Englishman as heroic as possible. In the final entry, for example, Drake Senior impresses on his men their true motives in travelling to South and Central America. Presented with an opportunity to intercept a Spanish mule train, he insists that they are not there simply to procure material wealth but to gain something far more valuable:

That treasure which I now would make your prize:  
 Unworthy 'tis to be your chiefest aim.  
 For this attempt is not for gold, but fame;  
 Which is not got when we the reco [*sic*] get,  
 But by subduing those who rescue it [i.e. the Spanish]. (6.26–30)

The English, he suggests, are above such worldly things as monetary gain, unlike their Spanish adversaries. Instead, they are interested in securing glory and immortal reputation through daring deeds of bravery and heroism; the very fact that they do get the gold in the

end is presented as a happy coincidence. Drake ends the drama by meditating on what future generations will make of his exploits:

Those who hereafter on our legend look  
 And value us by that which we have took  
 May over-reckon it, and us misprise [...]  
 Your glory, valiant English, must be known,  
 When men shall read how you did dare  
 To sail so long and march so far,  
 To tempt a strength much greater than your own. (6.101–110)

For those in the audience, Drake is presented as the ultimate English victor. His credentials for national celebration are impeccable: he is merciful beyond the call of duty, valiant, and his only interest is in gaining glory for his queen and country. John Watkins has shown how, during the Interregnum period, images of Elizabeth and Elizabethan England, which had mostly fallen out of living memory, could be equally appropriated by Royalists *and* Parliamentarians to support their respective causes (87–107). At a moment when England's self-image is particularly fragile, rallying around such a heroic figure taps into a nostalgia and national pride that could appeal to Royalists and Republicans alike.

The anti-Spanish sentiment expressed so urgently in *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* and *The History of Sir Francis Drake* transcends internal domestic squabbles, and instead attempts to build cross-political consensus based on pressing national issues. The English who come in and save the natives from the Spanish in the final entry of *The Cruelty*

*of the Spaniards in Peru* are none other than Cromwell's own New Model Army (Clare, *Drama* 238). A text that supposedly recounts the sixteenth-century atrocities of the Spanish against the Amerindians now shows a group of English soldiers, "*distinguished by their red coats*" (6.77), enter the scene, subdue the evil Spaniards, and make peace with the Indians. Keen to defend his crass anachronism, Davenant explains in the printed text that while the appearance of the soldiers may seem "*improper*", "*yet in poetical representations of this nature, it may pass as a vision discerned by the Priest of the Sun before the matter was extant, in order to his prophecy*" (6.7–11). Davenant's Protectorate entertainments thus functioned as propaganda for Cromwellian foreign policy, "by degrees enamour[ing]" audiences to the Protectorate, "with consideration of the conveniences and protections of Government" (245). The audience is supposed to take from this image a belief in, and sympathy for, the Protectorate's war effort and its future success.

*The Siege of Rhodes* is most often cited as the first English opera but, as Walkling has demonstrated, it is not "the pivotal work in Davenant's Protectorate tetralogy" that commentators traditionally have taken it to be; rather, it is an "anomaly" (153). While *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* and *The History of Sir Francis Drake* are performed with their scenery and music in tact even after the Restoration, *The Siege of Rhodes* moves from being sung in recitative to being performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields as a spoken play. Nevertheless, it remains an important work, not least because Webb's scenic designs for the production survive.

John Webb, Inigo Jones's assistant and son-in-law, provided lavish moveable scenery for the production as well as a bespoke proscenium arch. His six designs for *The Siege of Rhodes* are preserved at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire.<sup>15</sup> Iain Mackintosh and John

Orrell (*Theatres* 63–64), in separate but complementary studies, have both posited the idea that Webb’s designs for the show fit the dimensions and frame of the Cockpit, rather than the original venue, Rutland House.<sup>16</sup> Framing the scene was a large proscenium arch “consisting of several columns of gross rustic work, which bore up a large frieze” (1.1–2). The entertainment began when the curtain was raised, “discovering a maritime coast full of craggy rocks and high cliffs” (1.2), with, in the distance, the Turkish fleet sailing towards the island of Rhodes. Then follows a flourish of music. The characters enter the stage through the wings and sing their parts. Set during the 1522 siege by the Ottoman Sultan Solyman the Magnificent and his forces and concerned primarily with the love plot between the beautiful and virtuous Ianthe, her jealous husband Alphonso, and Solyman himself, this work introduced the “heroic” genre to the English stage.

The music for the production is lost, but Davenant certainly engaged some of the most sought-after composers of the day, including Henry Lawes and Matthew Locke. Singers and musicians, rather than actors *per se*, performed the main roles: Solyman was “personated” (232) by Henry Cook, a musician and Royalist captain; Alphonso by Edward Coleman who was also a music teacher; Locke himself sang the part of the Admiral; he also composed the music for the fourth entry. Other young talents, like John Bannister, provided further instrumental music. *The Siege of Rhodes* boasted, too, the first English female performer to grace a public stage. Ianthe was originally sung by Catherine Coleman, née Ferrabosco, Edward’s wife. She was from Italian stock, and part of a professional musical family: her father and brothers were also musicians. In his note to the reader, Davenant wrote that the music for *The Siege of Rhodes* “was composed, and both the vocal and instrumental is exercised, by the most transcendent of England in that Art, and perhaps not

unequal to the best masters abroad” (195). Many of these musicians would go on to have stellar careers after the Restoration, and would work with Davenant’s company as late as the 1670s (Dent 100–70).

While direct testimony from audiences in the early modern period is rare, we do have access to at least two spectators’ reactions to Davenant’s operas at the Cockpit. A ballad, preserved in manuscript, titled “Peru: Or, a new Ballad” describes in jeering notes all the main aspects of *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*, from its acrobatic apes (6.44–6), to its music, which apparently sounded “Like the Squeaking of a Pigg”:

Now God preserve the Realme

And Him that sits at Helme!

I will tell you of a new Story,

Of Sir William & his Apes,

With full many merry Japes,

Much after the rate of “John Dory.”

This sight is to be seene

Neere the street that’s called Queene,

And the people have nam’d it the Opera;

But the devil take my wife

If all the dayes of my lyfe

I did ever see such a Foppery ...

When, presently, the Spaniard

Strutts in with his longe whaniard—

Now, Lord of thy mercy, how grim!

Who 'ld ha[v]e thoght that Christian men

Would have eaten up Children,

Had we not seene 'um do ut [*sic*] Limbe by Limbe!<sup>17</sup>

Despite Davenant's best efforts to produce works of quality, this commentator clearly felt they were little more than poorly executed trifles.

Similarly, John Evelyn recorded in his diary entry for 6 May 1659 a visit he made to the Cockpit with his brother and some friends. Evelyn's editor assumes that the play they saw was *The History of Sir Francis Drake*, but it is *just* possible that he saw one of the *Siege of Rhodes* plays possibly staged there during the same period:<sup>18</sup>

I went to visite my Bro, & next day to see a new *Opera* after the *Italian* way in *Recitative Music & Sceanes*, much inferior to the Italian composure & magnificence: but what was prodigious, that in a time of such a publique Consternation, such a Vanity should be kept up or permitted; I being ingag'd with company, could not decently resist the going to see it, though my heart smote me for it ... (3: 229)

As Evelyn and his guests listened to the singers and gawked at the sub-par scenery, Richard Cromwell's government was collapsing from within. In just two days, he would concede to pressure from the army and reinstate the Rump Parliament, leading to the restoration of

Charles II (Hutton 39–41). Evelyn cannot understand how people could sit around and enjoy such a frivolous activity as watching operas when the political situation outside the theater was so precarious. Clearly, though, the appetite for such distractions remained strong for many.

Richard's government had never appreciated Davenant's theatrical endeavors in quite the way that his father's government seems to have done. In December 1658, his council set about interrogating Davenant and his company about their activities at the Cockpit. As *Mercurius Politicus* recounts it:

A course is ordered for taking into consideration on the *Opera* shewed at the *Cockpit* in *Drury-lane*, and the persons to whom it stands referr'd are to send for the Poet and Actors, and to inform themselves of the nature of the work, and to examine by what authority the same is exposed to publick view, and they are also to take the best information they can concerning the acting of Stage-plays, and upon the whole to make report. (118)

The new regime did not consider opera a "collateral help" (Davenant, *Proposition 37*) of sufficient benefit to permit it to continue unchallenged. As late as February 1659, John Barwick informed Edward Hyde, then in exile with the future Charles II on the continent, that the "Lords," such as they were, were making speeches in the House against the persistent use of the *Book of Common Prayer* in services across the country, as well as of stage plays (Thurloe 6: 715). The rising threat of old, Royalist Anglicanism became once again inextricably linked in public discourse with commercial drama. Davenant must have

convinced the council that the Cockpit was on the side of the angels, however, because there seem to have been no interruptions to performances as a result of this “report”.

Within weeks, Richard would reinstate the Rump Parliament and soon after that Charles II would return to England and officially reopen the theaters. Davenant would move from the Cockpit to Lincoln’s Inn Fields after 1660. Now equipped to handle the spectacular demands of opera, but no doubt beginning to show its age, the Cockpit continued to enjoy life as an opera venue despite Davenant’s departure.

### **Phoenixes and kings: The Restoration Cockpit**

The complex machinations that led to the Restoration theater duopoly between Davenant and Thomas Killigrew are impossible to rehearse here, but Freehafer has shown that the Cockpit was an important site for dramatic performances in the early months of the Restoration (“Formation” 13–25). What has not been properly recognized by theater historians, however, is that before Davenant had properly established his scenic “Opera” at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, the Cockpit remained firmly associated with the form. In the early seasons of the Restoration at least one, possibly two, French acting troupes performed what are described as *tragédies* or *pièces à machines* there in 1661 and 1662. We know that Mademoiselle d’Orléan’s company of actors went on tour from Paris to Brussels during these years, eventually arriving in London with at least two scenic productions: Chapoton’s *La Descente d’Orphée* and Corneille’s *Andromède*, in 1661–62. According to the *London Stage*, *Andromède* was performed at the Cockpit on 20 January 1662 (46). Colin Visser has shown that both productions used the same stock of scenery and how this would have worked on the Cockpit stage (47–49).<sup>19</sup> The libretto for *La Descente* was published in

London in both French and English texts, the latter as *The Description of the Great Machines, of the Descent of Orpheus into Hell. Presented by the French Commedians at the Cock-pit in Drury-lane* (1661). Orrell makes the case that it was Davenant's scenic reformations at the Cockpit in the 1650s that meant the French companies had a suitable venue to produce their works; he also shows that Charles II and his court regularly attended the opera there (Orrell, "Scenes and Machines" 104–11). On 30 August 1661, Samuel Pepys too attended the Cockpit but found the players and the scenes "so nasty and out of order and poor, that I was sick all the while in my mind to be there" (2: 165). After the Restoration, then, the Cockpit opera became an important Royalist endeavor—even if its quality was less than assured.

As we might expect, Davenant successfully negotiated the transition from the Protectorate to the Restoration regimes. In his "Poem to the Kings most Sacred Majesty," a panegyric to Charles II, the former laureate celebrates the successful return of both the King and the theater, "the Poets Magick-Glass" (371). At a moment when Davenant again is reliant on placating the authorities, he changes his political stance to put the best possible gloss on events. It is not the Protectorate but the Stuart monarchy, he insists, that has caused the true theatrical and moral reform in England:

If to reform the publick Mirrour (where  
 The Dead, to teach their living Race, appear)  
 May to the People useful prove, even this  
 (Which but the object of your leisure is  
 To respite Care, and which successivelie

Three of our last wise Monarchs wish'd to see,  
 And in a Century could not be wrought)  
*You*, in Three years, have to perfection brought.  
 If 'tis to height of Art of Virtue grown,  
 The form and matter is as much your own  
 As is your Tribute with your Image coin'd:  
*You* made the Art, the Virtue *You* enjoyn'd. (401–12)

Davenant in effect obliterates the history of his Protectorate drama altogether. After 1660, *The Siege of Rhodes* became a staple of the repertory as a spoken two-part heroic play, while *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* and *The History of Sir Francis Drake* were reshaped as curiosities in the parodic miscellany *Playhouse to be Let* (1663).

The ease with which Davenant compromises his political integrity for professional and commercial ends is indicative of the pressures individuals were under to secure their livelihoods at a time of national crisis and political upheaval during the 1650s and early 1660s. The Cockpit's place in mid-seventeenth-century London likewise points to these changing politics: as a venue that in the 1640s appears to have boasted "robust Royalist feeling", it was put to work on behalf of the Protectorate in the 1650s, only to finally inaugurate the highly lavish operatic entertainments—in no less a form than the French *tragédie*—for the edification and pleasure of the Restoration court.

---

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Siege of Rhodes* was first published in 1656. A second edition appeared in 1659, stating that it was performed “At the Cock-Pit in *Drury Lane*.” A “second part” to the opera was entered into the Stationers’ Register on 30 May 1659; it is unclear whether an edition was ever published. The only extant text for *The Siege of Rhodes* dates from after the Restoration, when Davenant had staged both versions on successive nights at Lincoln’s Inn Fields (Hedbäck 70). All references to Davenant’s texts are to Clare’s edition.

<sup>2</sup> The slipperiness of these terms in the context of the 1650s has been recognized and discussed by many scholars. For a provocative attempt to revise the history of English opera, see Winn.

<sup>3</sup> Following Ben Jonson’s break with Inigo Jones in 1634, Davenant took up the role of chief masque writer at court. He wrote many masques including the last to be produced for Charles I and Henrietta Maria in 1640, *Salmacida Spolia*.

<sup>4</sup> This letter is undated and bound with papers relating to January 1657, but as Firth points out, it belongs to the early part of 1656 (319). For Davenant’s operas in the context of the Protectorate’s moral reforms, see Capp (199–200).

<sup>5</sup> Davenant had known Whitelocke as far back as the 1636, when the latter oversaw arrangements for a performance at the Middle Temple of *The Triumphs of the Prince d’Amour*. Whitelocke was later responsible for securing Davenant’s release from the Tower of London in 1652.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Hume (“Politics” 16) and Walkling (146 n. 8). The *OED* does not cite Evelyn, instead offering Raymond (174) as the first use of the word in English.

<sup>7</sup> Walkling notes that *Glossographia* had been advertised as “in the Presse” as early as 1653, the year Davenant anonymously published *A Proposition for Advancement of Morality, By a New Way of Entertainments of the People* (146 n. 7). *Glossographia* was entered in the Stationers’ Register twice: once on 3 November 1655 and again on 27 June 1656, suggesting it was published around the same time as *First Days Entertainment*.

<sup>8</sup> Hume has investigated the cost of theater attendance for the 1660–1740 period, and concludes that we “are probably safe in assuming that a fair number of Londoners and visitors could pay a shilling to sit in the gallery of a theater” (“Economics” 530).

<sup>9</sup> The pamphlet’s authorship and contents are discussed by Jacob and Raylor, who also supply a transcription.

<sup>10</sup> The National Archives SP18/128, no. 108. No doubt the government was pleased with the evening, which ended with celebratory “songs relating to the Victor (the Protector)”.

<sup>11</sup> Hotson cites a ballad printed in a collection of lampoons as evidence of Davenant’s occupation of the Cockpit at this time (141–49). “How Daphne Pays his Debts” charts Davenant’s life since his release from the Tower in 1654 and mentions various “houses” in which he purportedly mounted performances, including “*Drury Lane*”—i.e. the Cockpit. Noting that the collection, titled *Sportive Wit*, was ordered to be burned in late April, Hotson calculated that it must have been composed some time *before* the first of that month and surmised that Davenant was at the Cockpit while it was under the management

---

of the Kirke-Beestons (their lease expiring on 1 April 1656). Whether we can accept this ballad as evidence of Davenant's mid-decade activities is a moot point. We know that the collection's compiler was John Milton's nephew, John Phillips, and that Phillips was also responsible for a translation of Bartolomé de las Casa's *Brevíssima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1551), which was a key source for *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*. Perhaps Phillips and Davenant, who had a mutual connection through Milton, discussed their interest in the war with Spain (*Peru* had been in the planning stages as early as 1656). Phillips may have known about Davenant's work at the Cockpit from the playwright himself, and subsequently informed the balladeer of these activities. We cannot know for sure, but the connections are highly suggestive.

<sup>12</sup> Davenant's establishment as a figure central to the cultural life of the Protectorate court is suggested by an entry in the Stationers' Register. This was for an epithalamium he apparently wrote for the marriage, in November 1657, of Cromwell's daughter, Lady Mary, to the Lord Viscount Falconbridge. The poem was never published (or has been lost), but its title is tantalisingly suggestive: *Severall poems upon severall occasions, To wch is added, A Poem to my Lord Broghill Epithalamium upon the marriage of the Lady Mary daughter to his Highnesse, wth the Lord Viscount Ffalconbridge, to bee sung in recitative musick An essay for the new theatre, representing the preparac[i]on of the Athenians for the reception of Phocian after hee had gained a victory* (2: 157). Along with the poem is an essay advocating his reformed theater, as well as a play about the classical statesman Phocion (c. 402–c. 318), a subject of one of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. The phrase "for the new theatre" is equivocal: it might refer to his reformed drama in general, or to the *new theater*, i.e. the Cockpit, in particular.

---

<sup>13</sup> If Davenant's move to the Cockpit was motivated as much by the desire to neutralize political threats to the Protectorate as it was by securing his commercial venture, it was clearly felt to have worked: after the Restoration, Sir Henry Herbert, Charles II's Master of the Revels, attempted to discredit his rival by suggesting that Davenant "exercised the Office of Master of the Reuells to Oliuer the Tyrant, And wrote the first and second parte of *Peru*, Acted at the Cockpitt, in Oliuers Tyme, and soly in his favour" (Bawcutt 264).

<sup>14</sup> According to Hotson, the interior of the Cockpit was dismantled by soldiers in 1649 (43). In a court complaint from 1672, Beeston claimed that in 1650/1 he had "laid out near Two hundred pounds about the repairing & fitting" of the Cockpit theatre (Hotson 95). He had apparently arranged with the building's owner, Robert Rolleston, to take over the premises and start up a company of actors there, but this plan fell through—hence the complaint for debt made twenty-one years later.

<sup>15</sup> These designs are reproduced in Clare (*Drama* 188–90).

<sup>16</sup> There is still much scholarly debate about whether the Worcester College drawings, on which these theories are based, are indeed designs for the Cockpit theater, and whether they are by Jones or Webb. For an overview of the evidence, see Griffith.

<sup>17</sup> MS Ashmole 36, fols. 163–4. Rollins provides a transcription (326–28). I have silently amended i/j and u/v and expanded contractions.

<sup>18</sup> Evelyn (229 n. 2). The title page of the 1659 edition of *The Siege of Rhodes* states that it was "sung in Recitative Musick." Neither *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* nor *The History of Sir Francis Drake* are described as employing recitative on their title pages.

---

<sup>19</sup> Remarkably, Visser makes no mention at all of Davenant's Protectorate operas as evidence of the Cockpit's capacity to accommodate scenic technologies before the Restoration. John Orrell ("Scenes and Machines" 107–12) does see continuities between Davenant's activities in the late 1650s and those of the Mademoiselle d'Orléans' company in 1661.

### Works Cited

Arber, E., editor. *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, 1640–1708 AD*, 1913. 3 vols.

Bawcutt, N. W., editor. *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623–73*. Oxford UP, 1996.

Capp, Bernard. *England's Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation and its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649–1660*. Oxford UP, 2012.

Clare, Janet. *Drama of the English Republic, 1649–60*. Manchester UP, 2002.

———. "The Production and Reception of Davenant's *Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 89, no. 4, October 1994, pp. 832–41.

Davenant, William. *First Days Entertainment at Rutland House*. London, 1656.

———. "Poem to the Kings most Sacred Majesty." *The Shorter Poems, and Songs from the Plays and Masques*. Edited by A. M. Gibbs. Clarendon P, 1972.

- 
- . *A Proposition for the Advancement of Morality by a New Way of Entertainment of the People*. London, 1654[3].
- The Description of the Great Machines, of the Descent of Orpheus into Hell*. London, 1661.
- Dent, Edward J. *Foundations of English Opera: A Study of Musical Drama in England during the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge UP, 1928.
- Dryden, John, *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards: In Two Parts*. London, 1672.
- Evelyn, John. *The Diary of John Evelyn*. Edited by E. S. de Beer. Oxford UP, 1955. 6 vols.
- Firth, C. H. "Sir William Davenant and the Revival of the Drama during the Protectorate." *English Historical Review*, vol. 19, 1903, pp. 319–21.
- Freehafer, John. "Brome, Suckling, and Davenant's Theatre Project of 1639." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1968, pp. 367–83.
- . "The Formation of the London Patent Companies in 1660." *Theatre Notebook*, vol. 20, 1965, pp. 6–30.
- Griffith, Eva. "Playing Indoors." *Times Literary Supplement*, May 16, 2014.
- Hedbäck, Ann-Marie. "The Printing of *The Siege of Rhodes*." *Studia Neophilologica*, vol. 45, 1973, pp. 68–79.
- Hotson, Leslie. *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*. Russell & Russell, 1962.
- Hume, Robert D. "The Economics of Culture in London, 1660–1740." *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 4, 2006, pp. 487–533.
- . "The Politics of Opera in Late Seventeenth-Century London." *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1998, pp. 15–43.
- Hutton, Ronald. *The Restoration: A Political and Religious History of England and Wales, 1658–1667*. Oxford UP, 1985.

- 
- Jacob, James R., and Timothy Raylor. "Opera and Obedience: Thomas Hobbes and A Proposition for Advancement of Moraltie by Sir William Davenant." *The Seventeenth Century*, vol 6, no. 2, 1991, pp. 205–50.
- Little, Patrick. "Music at the Court of King Oliver." *The Court Historian*, vol. 12, 2007, pp. 173–91.
- Lenep, William Van, editor. *The London Stage, Part 1: 1660–1700*. Southern Illinois UP, 1965.
- Mackintosh, Iain. "Inigo Jones—Theatre Architect." *TABS*, vol. 31, no. 3, Sept 1973, pp. 99–105.
- Matusiak, Christopher. "Elizabeth Beeston, Sir Lewis Kirke, and the Cockpit's Management during the English Civil Wars." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, vol. 27, 2014, pp. 161–91.
- Merritt, J. F. *Westminster 1640-60: A Royal City in a Time of Revolution*. Manchester UP, 2013.
- Mercurius Politicus*, vol. 547, 23–30 December. London, 1658.
- Orrell, John. "Scenes and Machines at the Cockpit, Drury Lane." *Theatre Survey*, vol. 26, 1985, pp. 103–19.
- . *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb*. Cambridge UP, 1985.
- Pepys, Samuel. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*. Edited by Robert Latham and William Matthews. U of California P, 1971. 11 vols.
- P[hillips], J[ohn]. *Sportive Wit: The Muses Merriment*. London, 1656.
- . *The Tears of the Indians*. London, 1656.

- 
- Raymond, John. *An Itinerary Contayning A VOYAGE, Made through ITALY, In the yeare 1646, and 1647*. London, 1648.
- Rollins, Hyder E. "A Contribution to the History of the English Commonwealth Drama." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1921, pp. 267–333.
- Rymer, Thomas. *Foedera*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. London, 1744. 20 vols.
- Shirley, James. *Cupid and Death: A Masque*. London, 1653.
- Visser, Colin. "The *Descent of Orpheus* at the Cockpit, Drury Lane." *Theatre Survey*, vol. 24, 1983, pp. 35–53.
- Walkling, Andrew R. *Masque and Opera in England, 1656–1688*. Routledge, 2017.
- Watkins, John. *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty*. Cambridge UP, 2002.
- Whitelocke, Bulstrode. *Memorials of the English Affairs*. Oxford UP, 1853. 4 vols.
- Willie, Rachel. *Staging the Revolution: Drama, Reinvention and History, 1647–1672*. Manchester UP, 2015.
- Winn, James A. "Heroic Song: A Proposal for a Revised History of English Theatre and Opera, 1656–1711," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1996/1997, pp. 113–37.
- Wiseman, Susan. "'History Digested': Opera and Colonialism in the 1650s." *Literature and the Civil War*. Edited by Thomas Healey and Jonathan Sawday, Cambridge UP, 1998.