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# The Date of Dryden's *Marriage A-la-Mode*

Robert D. Hume

WHEN was *Marriage A-la-Mode* first performed? The first precisely datable performance is 23 April 1674, though the play had been published about a year earlier: it was entered in the *Stationers' Register* 18 March 1673, and was advertised in the *London Gazette* later that spring (29 May–2 June).<sup>1</sup> But from references in the prologue, scholars starting with Malone assumed a première about May 1672. The Dedication, however, thanks Rochester for commending the play in manuscript "to the view of His Majesty, then at *Windsor*." Charles E. Ward proved that this dates completion of the play between late May and mid-July 1671, and hence he hypothesized the probability of a fall 1671 première.<sup>2</sup> This dating, which I propose to reaffirm with new evidence, was rejected by Nicoll because of the prologue's apparent references to the Third Dutch War, *which was not declared until 17 March 1672*. I believe, however, that this objection can be confuted.

The play seems definitely to have been performed before June 1672, later publication and lack of definite evidence notwithstanding. The ground for this supposition is the inclusion of Dryden's song "Whil'st *Alexis* lay prest" (from IV.ii.) in Part 2 of the *Westminster Drollery*, which was entered in the S.R. 3 June. Even more convincing, the prologue and epilogue were published in the *Covent Garden Drollery* sometime that year.<sup>3</sup> The prologue certainly sounds as though it should be helpful in dating the première.

<sup>1</sup> *The London Stage 1660–1800*, Part 1: 1660–1700, ed. William Van Lennep, Emmett L. Avery, and Arthur H. Scouten (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), p. 215. This performance is on the Lord Chamberlain's list of payments for plays seen by royalty, rpt. by Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660–1900*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1961), I, 345 (Appendix B). Throughout this note, the new year is treated as January 1.

<sup>2</sup> Charles E. Ward, "The Dates of Two Dryden Plays," *PMLA*, LI (1936), 786–792.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately this work was not entered in the S.R., and apparently it cannot

Lord, how reform'd and quiet we are grown,  
 Since all our Braves and all our Wits are gone . . . .  
*France*, and the Fleet, have swept the Town so clear,  
 That we can Act in peace, and you can hear.

Dryden continues with a description of sobbing mistresses bidding "our Warriours" farewell. With this strong evidence, the *London Stage* editors guess at a première in April 1672, while admitting that "the date . . . is most uncertain." This accords with Nicoll's "c. April 1672" and Montague Summers' "about Easter, 1672."<sup>4</sup>

Yet so long a delay between completion and production seems extremely surprising. Dryden had become an eminently successful playwright and the King's Company was hard pressed during the 1671-1672 season. In particular, the opening of the fancy new Dorset Garden theatre by the rival Duke's Company (9 November) seems to have hit them hard, and one would definitely expect the King's Men to retaliate as promptly as possible with a major play from their principal playwright. Unfortunately, performance records for fall 1671 are maddeningly sketchy: we have definite evidence for precisely one King's Company performance the whole fall — *The Rehearsal*, seen by John Evelyn 14 December. Consequently, lack of any record of *Marriage A-la-Mode* means nothing. We can further limit possible time of performance by noting that the Bridges Street theatre was destroyed by fire 25 January 1672, and the King's Men did not act again until 26 February, when they reopened in the old Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre with *Wit Without Money*. So the première has to be before 25 January or after 26 February.

Does the evidence of the prologue make the latter definite? Quite to the contrary, I believe that it suggests the opposite. The Third Dutch War did not start abruptly: it was prepared for in the "bogus" treaty of December 1670<sup>5</sup> and was quite thoroughly expected by the

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be dated precisely. It was advertised in an issue of *The Term Catalogue* licensed 21 November 1672.

<sup>4</sup> *Dryden: The Dramatic Works*, ed. Montague Summers, 6 vols. (London: Nonesuch, 1931-1932), III, 184.

<sup>5</sup> The "real" treaty between Charles II and Louis XIV, a secret one, had been signed the previous May, but the fixing of a declaration of war for spring 1672 was not set until the public version of the agreement was arranged in December 1670. See David Ogg, *England in the Reign of Charles II*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), I, 344-348.

early fall of 1671,<sup>6</sup> when Charles II was already busily gearing up for war. Nicoll doubts that "any large body of gentlemen were in service much earlier" than the declaration of war, 17 March 1672, and hence concludes that the prologue *must* refer to that time. This argument is plausible, but evidence from two other prologues and the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* destroys it.

The literary arguments alone are strong. The ideas in Dryden's prologue closely parallel those in John Crowne's prologue for his heroic play, *The History of Charles the Eighth of France*. Crowne begins:

Now the rough sounds of War our ears invade . . .  
 For now our Gallants all to Sea are gone,  
 Muses as well as Misses are undone, . . .  
 They can expect but sorry Trading now.<sup>7</sup>

Crowne goes on to say that those who "here behind remain" will be appropriately entertained "with a Martial Play." Now the date of the première of Crowne's play is uncertain, but we do have John Downes's assertion that "*Charles the VIII of France*" was "the first new Play Acted there" — i.e., in the new Dorset Garden theatre.<sup>8</sup> That opening was 9 November 1671, with three days of *Sir Martin Mar-all*, followed by two days of Etherege's *The Comical Revenge*, or so Downes tells us. The *London Stage* editors sensibly hazard an estimate of "late November" for the première of Crowne's play; Nicoll's handlist says "c. Dec. 1671"; Summers says "November, 1671."<sup>9</sup> But this convincing dating, given the parallels in the two prologues, makes nonsense of the whole argument for c. April 1672 for *Marriage A-la-Mode*.

Some confirmatory evidence is found in the date, prologue, and epilogue of Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing Master*. Downes

<sup>6</sup> For example, see "On the Prorogation" (of Parliament in September 1671), *Poems on Affairs of State*, vol. 1, ed. George deF. Lord (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 179-184. "And twenty to one, before next spring is over, / March'd must our horse again be unto Dover."

<sup>7</sup> London: T. R. and N. T. for Ambrose Isted, 1672. The epilogue has comments in the same vein.

<sup>8</sup> *Roscius Anglicanus* (London: H. Playford, 1708), p. 32. In confirmation of Downes (who is often inaccurate), we can note that on 4 January 1672 the publisher, Ambrose Isted, entered "*Charles the Great, a play acted at the Duke's House*" in the S.R.

<sup>9</sup> *A Bibliography of the Restoration Drama* (1934; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1970), p. 46.

says that it was "the third new Play Acted" at Dorset Garden. From an entry in an L.C. list now at Harvard,<sup>10</sup> we know that it was performed by 6 February 1672: it could have received its première anything up to six or seven weeks earlier. Wycherley's prologue "To the CITY, Newly after the Removal of the Dukes Company from Lincoln-Inn-fields to their new Theatre . . ." suggests not too great a lapse of time between opening of theatre and première. That "the City" particularly is addressed might be taken, as by Gerald Weales,<sup>11</sup> as an acknowledgement of the location of the new theatre. The epilogue, however, addresses "You good men o'th' Exchange, on whom alone/We must depend, when Sparks to Sea are Gone." Here again we have a reference to the absence of gallants, definitely well before the official declaration of war. We also have a strengthening of the pattern of references to men of "the city" present in all three prologues. Crowne refers to "the sober audience of the Town . . . serious men of Trade." Dryden laments that "Our City Friends so far will hardly come," but hopes "T'oblige the Town, the City, and the Court." At the end of the epilogue he announces, rather mockingly, "I humbly cast my self upon the City."

Even a casual reading of the Crowne and Wycherley prologues and epilogues suggests that the rhetoric Dryden employed was thoroughly appropriate to the November 1671 — January 1672 period. Hence we can abandon Ward's improbable hypothesis (rightly scouted by Nicoll) that the prologue printed with *Marriage A-la-Mode* was not that used at the première. Such substitution is quite rare, save on such occasions as the opening of a new theatre or for special performances (out of town, at the Middle Temple, women acting alone, etc.), and the prologue we possess gives no indication of such special circumstances. The burning of the Bridges Street playhouse gives a *terminus ad quem*. Mid-November is presumably the earliest possible date, since Dryden's prologue says that "City Friends . . . can take up with Pleasures nearer home" — presumably a reference to the existence and location of the new Dorset Garden theatre. Given all the points reviewed here, a late November première seems entirely pos-

<sup>10</sup> See William Van Lennep, "Plays on the English Stage 1669-1672," *Theatre Notebook*, XVI (1961), 12-20.

<sup>11</sup> *The Complete Plays of William Wycherley*, ed. Gerald Weales (Garden City: Anchor, 1966), p. 237 notes 1 and 3.

sible, and given the position of the King's Company and the date of the play's completion, that is about what one would expect.

One consequence of a possible November première is the reopening of debate on the alleged hits at *Marriage A-la-Mode* in *The Rehearsal*, which was definitely staged by 14 December, and probably by the 7th. The principal passages at issue are Polydamas' examination of Hermogenes, the "fisherman" business, and the reference to using the rack.<sup>12</sup> Buckingham's passages do indeed look like a passing swipe at Dryden's play — one easy to engineer if *The Rehearsal* was being polished for performance while the actors (of the same company) were preparing Dryden's play for production. This disposes of Montague Summers' belief that "Buckingham hastened to pepper the dialogue with various hits at *Marriage A-la-Mode*"<sup>13</sup> in the 1675 edition of *The Rehearsal*, since the most clearcut references were already present in the version printed in 1672. And we are in a position to explain how those references got there without having to assume that the Buckingham cabal had seen *Marriage A-la-Mode* in manuscript and decided to attack it long before it was on the stage. We can also dismiss, once and for all, the absurd idea, proposed by Scott and still occasionally bruited about, that *Marriage A-la-Mode* was originally a rhymed heroic play which Dryden hastily revised into a tragicomedy after the success of *The Rehearsal*.

This survey has, I believe, pretty well demolished what seemed like very substantial objections to Ward's otherwise convincing dating. Indeed, viewed in the present context, that evidence actually supports the earlier date. If some of the quality folk did depart for sea in late November or early December 1671, we might expect a flurry of comment on the phenomenon, followed by silent acceptance of the situation. The new plays from the relevant period are Crowne's, very

<sup>12</sup> *Marriage A-la-Mode* li. versus Act III of *The Rehearsal* — (London: Thomas Dring, 1672), pp. 25 ff. Critics have been much too ready to accept Malone's flat assertion that "there is not a single parody on any passage" in *Marriage A-la-Mode*, "nor any allusion to it" in Buckingham's play. This opinion appears to be founded on the inaccurate assertion in *A Key to the Rehearsal* (put out by publisher S. Briscoe in 1704) that "*Marriage al-a-Mode*" was "writ since the first Publication of this Farce." Actually, the references in the 1672 edition are quite as clear as most of those to other plays noted in the *Key*.

<sup>13</sup> *Dramatic Works*, III, 184. Some small touches were added: see John Reichert, "A Note on Buckingham and Dryden," *N&Q*, n.s. IX (1962), 220-221.

possibly Wycherley's, and *The Rehearsal*. Interestingly, Buckingham's prologue seems to contain just such another reference. There are those, he says, who admire the heroic stuff he is debunking: "Would some of 'em were here, to see, this night, / What stuff it is in which they took delight."

Turning from literary argument to more substantial historical evidence, we can ask whether men were indeed leaving on military service by December 1671. The answer is yes. *The Calendar of State Papers Domestic* makes it very plain that war preparations were going full blast by November 1671, and we find entries like the following: "The soldiers and horses that went on Saturday for the French King's service were forced back by a violent storm" (16 November). "About twenty vessels, detained by contrary winds, sailed to-day. The horses for the French King's service are not yet gone" (2 December). "On the 3rd the 70 horse and men for the French King's service . . . sailed" (6 December).<sup>14</sup> On the reasonable supposition that such advance contingents were heavily manned by the gentry, the flurry of prologue commentary is comprehensible. And in short, we are probably safe in concluding that *Marriage A-la-Mode* was acted by early December 1671.

<sup>14</sup> *Cal. S. P. Dom.*, volumes for 1671 and 1671-1672.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

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