

The Role of Probability in the Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare

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Abstract

This study explores the role of probability in the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare. It addresses how the observance of probability was the basis for some adaptations of Shakespeare during the period. The study argues, firstly, that Restoration playwrights attempted to address the lack of probability in Shakespeare's plays. Secondly, it argues that, despite their professed goals, these playwrights did not produce adaptations that are more probable than Shakespeare's plays. It argues, thirdly, that the adherence to probability was not the sole motive for these adaptations, but that they were also driven by political and commercial factors. The study sets out to prove these points by closely analyzing two prominent Shakespeare adaptations of the period: John Dryden's *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost* (1677) and Nahum Tate's *The History of King Lear* (1681).

Keywords: Probability, Shakespeare adaptations, Restoration.

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دور مفهوم الاحتمالية في التكييفات الفنية لمسرحيات شكسبير في عصر عودة الملكية

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المستخلص

تتناول الدراسة استكشاف الدور الذي لعبه مفهوم (الاحتمالية) في التكييفات الفنية لمسرحيات شكسبير في عصر عودة الملكية. حيث أنها تدرس كيف كان مراعاة الاحتمالية دافعا وراء كتابة تلك التكييفات المسرحية. تحاول الدراسة اثبات، أولا، ان الاحتمالية كانت الدافع وراء كتابة هذه الاعمال؛ وثانيا، انه بالرغم من هذا الهدف المعلن، إلا أن تلك الاعمال لم تحتوي على حركات مسرحية ذات احتمالية أكثر من تلك التي قدمها شكسبير. وثالثا، فهي تحاول اثبات ان محاولة الحفاظ على الاحتمالية لم تكن الدافع الوحيد وراء تلك الكتابات، بل كانت مدفوعة أيضا بعوامل سياسية وتجارية. ولأجل اثبات تلك النقاط تتناول الدراسة بالتحليل الدقيق عمليين مسرحيين مبنيين على اعمال شكسبير في تلك الفترة: مسرحية كل شيء لأجل الحب لجون درايدن (١٦٧٧) ومسرحية تأريخ الملك لير للكاتب ناهام تايت (١٦٨١).

كلمات مفتاحية: الاحتمالية، التكييفات الأدبية لاعمال شكسبير، عصر عودة الملكية.

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1- Introduction

In the Prologue of George Granville's *Jew of Venice* (1701), which is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), the ghost of Shakespeare appears onstage to recite these lines:

These Scenes in their *rough* Native Dress were mine,
But now *improv'd* with nobler Lustre shine;
The first *rude* Sketches Shakespeare's Pencil drew,
But all the Shining Master stroakes are new.
This Play, ye Criticks, shall your *Fury* 'stand,
Adorn'd and *rescu'd* by a *faultless Hand*. (Prologue, 35-40,
emphasis added)¹

These lines articulate a widespread belief among Restoration and early eighteenth century playwrights that Shakespeare's plays, highly respected though they are, have turned critics 'furious' because of being 'rude' and 'rough.' Therefore, they were in need for being 'improved', 'adorned' and 'rescued' by a 'faultless hand'. Other writers also used similar words to describe Shakespeare's plays which they set out to adapt, such as 'heap of rubbish' (Edward Ravenscroft), 'flat, insipid and his comic wit degenerating' (John Dryden), 'insipid and careless' (Nahum Tate), etc. These terms were so contagious that they always stand out, habitually if sarcastically, in anthologies of and studies about the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare, such as Hazelton Spencer's *Shakespeare Improved: The Restoration Versions in Quarto and on the Stage* (1927) and Sandra Clark's *Shakespeare Made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare* (1997), etc.

But why, and in what sense, did Shakespeare need to be 'improved' and 'made fit'? Restoration dramatists evaluated Shakespeare's plays according to their critical arsenal and the artistic tastes prevalent at the time. One major concept in this critical arsenal, according to which Shakespeare's plays were being evaluated, was probability. Probability was central to the thinking of the age. As Francis Gallaway tersely puts it, "From Hobbes to Blair probability was the watchword of the classicist" (1965, 124). Restoration writers faulted Shakespeare because they thought that his plays violated the rules of

probability. Many of the common rules in neoclassical criticism, such as the observation of decorum and the dramatic unities, in fact boiled down to ‘probability,’ since the end result of observing these rules was to preserve the probability and credibility of literary works.

The present study explores the role of probability in the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare. It addresses how the observance of probability was the basis for several adaptations of Shakespeare during the period. As such, it investigates the interplay between the adaptation process and the critical theory of the time. This topic was not adequately addressed so far. In his survey of Shakespeare’s critical heritage at this early period, Brian Vickers laments: “And further—a task as yet little attempted—we ought to see to what extent the alterations reflect contemporary critical attitudes” (1974, 9). Therefore, this study sets out to attempt the ‘task as yet little attempted’ of showing the relationship between the theatre of the day and the neo-classical theory. So, the study argues, firstly, that Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare responded to and were motivated by debates in contemporary literary theory, namely debates about the essential role of probability in dramatic representation. Their response and motivation were voiced unequivocally in the texts of those adaptors. Secondly, the study also intends to prove that, increasingly vocal about probability though they were, the resultant adaptations contained no fewer improbabilities than they sought to resolve. Thirdly, the study further argues that, despite their set purpose, these adaptations were not motivated by merely artistic ends, but rather they were also the result of political and commercial reasons as well as of changing social conditions. In addition, these adaptations also reveal a certain tension about the role of Shakespeare in the literary and political life of the period. On the one hand, these playwrights used to fault Shakespeare for not following the rules of probability; on the other hand, they needed to promote him to a canonical status in face of the French artistic and critical influence.

Unfortunately, Vickers’s ‘task as yet little attempted’ has continued to be an uncharted territory. There are very few studies that attempted to fully explore the interplay between neoclassical literary theory and Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare. One such study is Jaquelyn Walsh’s *Impact of Restoration Critical Theory on the*

Adaptation of Four Shakespearean Comedies (2000). Yet Walsh's study did not address probability per se. Furthermore, it was restricted to four dramatists: John Dennis, Charles Gildon, William Burnaby, and George Granville, and to four comedies: *Measure for Measure*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This study, in contrast, sets its focus on the concept of probability and its central role in setting the stage for the adaptations of Shakespeare during the Restoration. Moreover, this study ventures into studying in detail the adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies, namely *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The present study contributes both to the field of Shakespeare adaptation during the Restoration and to the field of adaptation studies more generally. Studies of adaptation revolve around a variety of approaches, such as fidelity theories, intertextuality theories, Dialogism, auteur theories, etc. (See Hutcheon 2006; Sanders 2006). This study ventures into addressing the historical side of adaptation: it explores the interplay between the adaptation practices and the literary theories and critical tastes of a given period of time. Such exploration has rarely been carried out. In what follows, I will survey the place of Shakespeare during the Restoration period and then the development of the place of 'probability' in the long history of literary theory will be traced back, with a special focus on the neo-classical theory in the Restoration. Then it will explore the role of probability in two Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare: Dryden's *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost* (1677) and Nahum Tate's *The History of King Lear* (1681).

2- Shakespeare in the Restoration

The adaptations of Shakespeare during the Restoration were influenced by changing performance atmospheres, commercial considerations and political conditions. These conditions are delineated in this section in order to shed light on the adaptation process and to help us better appreciate how far the adaptations of John Dryden and Nahum Tate had been influenced by these conditions.

With the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, the theatres were closed for almost eighteen years. The re-opening of the theatres must have proved a cumbersome business, since it had to revitalize an art form that had been officially banned for a long time. In fact, the last two

decades before the closing of the theatres - the Caroline period - were not particularly fertile in theatrical production either, especially if compared to the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

Thus, at the beginning of the Restoration, the stage lacked its own original writers. It had not been until 1668 when the first writer emerged in the figure of John Dryden. Consequently, and due to the vacuum created by the theatre ban, there was a pressing need to find plays to be performed on the newly opened stages. The right to perform plays was granted to two theatrical companies: The Duke's Company, led by Sir William Davenant and The King's Company, led by Thomas Killigrew. Killigrew claimed the copyrights of the repertoire of the pre-1642 King's Men company in which Shakespeare was a writer and shareholder. So, they acquired the rights for most of Shakespeare's plays, while the Duke's Company had the rights for only nine of Shakespeare's plays (Schoche 2021, 9). Since Davenant's company was not granted copyright for the King's Men, the company that presided over the most extensive archive of Shakespeare's plays, they could only play Shakespeare in an altered version. Hence copyright was one motivation for the surge of adaptations of the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

The most significant aspect of the Restoration adaptations was the liberty they took to change the original plays. Some of these changes were very extreme, like Thomas Otway's *Caius Marius* (1679) which sets Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in Rome and Nahum Tate's *The Sicilian Usurper* (1681) which resets Shakespeare's *Richard II* in Italy. These changes might consist in the addition of some characters, as we see in Dryden and Davenant's adaptation, *The Tempest*, *The Enchanted Island* (1667). They added another daughter to Prospero and another man in the play. Thus, it creates two love stories, instead of one. The change might also consist in the amplification of the roles of some minor characters, as in John Lacy's *Saucy the Scot* (1681), which is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. In other cases, as in Dryden's *All for Love* (1677), the adaptation redesigns the original play, emphasizing specifically the adherence to the three unities. Another extreme case is Sir William Davenant's *The Law against Lovers* (1662), which is an adaptation based on two of Shakespeare's plays, *Measure for*

Measure and *Much Ado About Nothing*. To the story of the former, he added two main characters from the latter: Beatrice and Benedick.²

These adaptations were motivated by the stage conditions that were radically different from those during the Renaissance. One major change was the introduction of the actress roles after the Restoration. The actresses helped to inspire new roles for female characters in the plays. That's why many of the adaptations during that period focused on expanding the roles of existing female figures or even creating new ones. For example, in Dryden and Davenant's adaptation of *The Tempest*, they added many female roles that did not exist in Shakespeare: Caliban's sister Sycorax, Miranda's sister Dorinda, and Ariel's female companion Milcha. All these changes to the texts utilized the new role of the actress on the English stage. Another change in the stage was the more intimate atmosphere of the Restoration stage. The performances turned to be indoors and artificial lighting was being used. Quite different from the Elizabethan theatre, the proscenium stage in the Restoration used painted movable scenery to depict any required setting (Schoche 2021, 10-1). As will be shown below, all those changes had a bearing on the nature of the adaptations in the period.

Moreover, many Restoration adaptations were a response to the political issues of the time. Playwrights were cautious not to touch upon political issues directly. So, many of them chose to adapt older plays to comment on current political issues. For example, John Crowne adapted Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays (which depicted the War of the Roses in Medieval England) in order to comment on the political crisis of 1678-83. The adaptation was a warning against the eruption of a civil war reminiscent of the 1642-9 one. Moreover, he used Henry's Queen Margaret in order to fuel the fear of the Catholics and the French (Maguire 1995, 74). Many of those plays also attempted to have a say in the Popist plot and the Exclusion crisis and most of them adopted a royalist position (Clark 2008, 283).

Some of these adaptations were influenced by the artistic and critical modes imported from the French neoclassicists of the seventeenth century. However, with the dawn of the 18th Century, England and France grew more as rivals, both on the economic and military levels. This sense of rivalry was also reflected in the cultural and

literary domains. English writers ceased to see the French as models to be imitated and increasingly as rivals, they need those heavy weight figures to counterbalance the French literary giants like Corneille, Racine, and Molière. They found that heavy-weight figure in Shakespeare. This helped to elevate Shakespeare to a canonical status. Writers and critics started to better appreciate the choices that he made (See Dobson 1995). Hence the tension these writers felt towards Shakespeare's works: on the one hand, they were not comfortable with many elements of his work (such as the violation of probability) but on the other hand, they needed to promote Shakespeare as an icon of English literary tradition to combat the colossal French influence.

3- Probability in English Literary Theory

The Restoration adapters of Shakespeare proclaim that they address the lack of probability in his plays. Yet, probability as a critical concept of central importance was in no sense a Restoration invention. It is a concept with a long history. The Restoration concept of probability is informed by and a continuation of that concept in former stages of literary theory. This section addresses the central role played by 'probability' in the critical theory in the Restoration. The section surveys how probability emerged during the former periods, starting with Aristotle and moving to Renaissance Italian, French and then English literary criticism, before detailing its meaning and implications in the Restoration period.

The journey of probability in literary theory starts with Aristotle. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle differentiates between poetry and history on the basis that poetry deals with the possible and the probable (or the might be) while history deals with what actually happened (what has been). He writes: "(I)t is not the poet's function to relate actual events, but the kinds of things that might occur and are possible in terms of *probability* or *necessity*. The difference between the historian and the poet is . . . that the one relates actual events, the other the kinds of things that *might* occur" (IX.1451a35-1451b5). Aristotle also addresses the issue of the probable in his treatise on rhetoric. In *Rhetoric*, he points out that logic depends on syllogisms, arguments that yield certainty, but rhetoric employs the 'enthymeme', an argument that results in probable results. To Aristotle, "the theory of rhetoric must be concerned ... with what

seems probable to men of a given type” (I.ii.1356b32-5). Although Aristotle has dealt with the concept of the ‘probable’ in both the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, poetic theory during the Middle Ages did not expand on that concept as much as did the rhetorical tradition. Interestingly, it was rhetoricians who took over the job of elaborating the full significance of the concept of the probable, because of its central role in arbitration and deliberations, legal and otherwise. This tradition started with Aristotle and went down to Roman and Renaissance rhetoric.³

The interest in probability in literature returned with the Italian Renaissance of the sixteenth century. The rediscovery of Aristotle’s treatise fueled the writing of many commentaries on the *Poetics*. Two issues stood out in debates about literature: the first is the differentiation between poetry and history based on principles of probability and necessity. The second is the opposition between the probable and the marvelous. Both points were sparked by Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Yet, the Italian critics did not add substantial improvement to Aristotle’s ideas (Hathaway 1973, 130-1; Newsom 1988, 66). The Italian critics discussed several issues related to probability, such as the differentiation between poetry and history, the nature of reality relative to which literature’s probability is measured, the moral implications of holding on probability, the relation between the probable and the marvelous, etc.⁴

The centrality of ‘probability’ in Italian Renaissance criticism was not echoed in the English Renaissance criticism. Most studies on poetry during the Renaissance dealt with matters of style. Consequently, many of these books did not address the philosophical questions that preoccupied Italian criticism in its follow-up on Aristotle’s *Poetics*. For example, both William Webbe’s *A Discourse on English Poetrie* (1586) and George Puttenham’s *The Art of English Poesy* (1589) did not mention probability *per se* at all in their discussion of poetry. However, one English theorist who addressed such issues was Sir Philip Sidney. Sidney was influenced as much by Aristotle’s *Poetics* as by his Italian commentators such as Julius Caesar Scaliger. In his *Defence of Posie* (written in 1580 but published posthumously in 1595), Sidney addresses similar issues as those discussed by Italian critics. In his discussion of the difference between poetry and history, for example, Sidney reiterates the main dicta of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the Italian commentators

regarding the difference between history and poetry (1999, 351). In his discussion of the stage, Sidney faults the English theatre of his time of presenting improbable actions, such as the disregard for the unities of place and time (successively changing different settings) as well as the synecdoche (an army represented by only 'four swords and buckles') (ibid., 381). However, the term probability does not show up in the Sidney's lexicon. Although Sidney reiterates the Aristotelian percepts about the difference between history and poetry and the unities, it seems that he did not see them so important as to use the word 'probable' or its cognates in his treatise.

Thus, in the English Renaissance, 'probability' did not have the vogue it enjoyed in the Italian critical tradition. The common use in the Renaissance for this concept came mainly from two sources: the first is the rhetorical tradition which, as we have seen, emphasized the centrality of probability in rhetorical reasoning. Poetic theory was itself influenced by rhetorical theory and practice during the Renaissance. Rüdiger Campe refers to the rhetorisation of poetics underway since the Renaissance (2012, 281). The second is the judicial discourse where legal professionals were trying to set rules for the measurement of truth claims in testimonies and court cases. In either case, the term was used to mean the opinion of the masses or the opinion of the wise or experts in any given field. However, the status of probability changed rapidly after 1660. The scarcity of the use of the term before 1660 was counterbalanced by its abundance after the Restoration. As Douglas Lane Patey succinctly puts it:

In England, scarcely a critical work written during the Restoration fails to invoke and enjoin "probability" and to qualify the proper use of its opposite. Neither probability nor the problems it was used to address make such a showing in England before 1660. (1984, 77)⁵

Yet, in the literary and critical domain, this surge of interest in probability did not come directly from Italian literary criticism, but rather from French literary criticism, itself influenced by Italian critics. One major French influence on English literary criticism in the topic of probability in this period was Rene Rapin's *Reflections of Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie* (1674), which is translated into English by Thomas

Rymer. Rapin is a staunch proponent of probability. In Chapter XXIV of the first part of his *Reflections*, Rapin emphasizes the role of probability in balancing the fabulous/marvelous in literature. He elevates it over 'truth', since literature is not concerned with truth (presenting things as they are) but with probability (presenting things as they should be). In Chapter XII of the second part, he makes the probable a complement to the 'admirable' in the heroic poem. The poem is perfected when the action is both probable and admirable.

The meaning and functions assigned to probability changed from the Renaissance to the Restoration and underwent many fluctuations during the Restoration and eighteenth century. In his most exhaustive analysis of probability in the criticism of this period, Douglas Lane Patey observes that during the Renaissance, probability was assigned to the faculty of the imagination. However, in the later seventeenth century with the advent of scientific and naturalistic thinking, and with the emergence of mathematical interpretations of probability, it was re-assigned to reason. In literary theory, probability was being increasingly seen as a mediator between wit and judgement. According to Patey, the fundamental problematic of Augustan literary criticism is "rooted in the opposition between wit and judgment, the lively and the just Works must balance the just and the lively" (1984, 135-6). In other words, probability emerged as a faculty that should balance the fancies of the fictional world, on the one hand, and the truths of the actual world, on the other hand. Both of these two extremes were indispensable. As Dryden puts it, "To invent therefore a probability, and to make it wonderful, is the most difficult undertaking in the Art of Poetry: for that which is not wonderful, is not great, and that which is not probable, will not delight a reasonable Audience" ([1679] 1984, 231.). If literature lacked wit, the lively and the fanciful, it would be no different from history and logic. If it lacked truth and judgement, it would lose all credibility and consequently would lack any effect. The faculty that strikes this balance between the two extremes is probability. This observation echoes the Renaissance opposition between the probable and the marvelous mentioned above.

Nevertheless, that role of probability was soon called into question. The rise of mathematical probability and the increasing

association of probability with reason meant that probability was no longer capable of playing the role of the mediator. Probability is now closer to judgment (reason) than to wit; therefore, that balance is no longer possible: “when it [probability] comes to be referred wholly to judgment, a part of the intellect, the system of mediations must break down” (Patey 1984, 141). Consequently, new terms have been suggested to account for the two sides of the equation. Thus, some critics distinguish between probability and plausibility, with the first denoting the logical side and the latter the artistic side. Others have talked about ordinary probability versus poetical/dramatic/fictional probability. In his survey of the criticism of this period, M H Abrams uses the terms ‘external’ and ‘internal’ probability to denote the same distinction (1953, 267).

Just like their Italian predecessors, English Restoration critics speculated about the kind of nature against which the probability of literature is to be measured. Rene Wellek mentions that the urge for probability stemmed from the classicist view that art is the imitation of nature: “The concept of probability was also used to enforce naturalistic standards” (1955, 15), since the probable is that which aligns with nature. In his Preface to *All for Love*, Dryden states that his choices are based on what he deems as natural behaviour: “for I judg’d it both natural and probable...” ([1677] 1997, 192). What he means by natural is that it follows the rule of cause and effect: “which rule, if observ’d, must needs render all the events in the Play more natural; for there you see the probability of every accident, in the cause that produc’d it” (1971, 43). To Dryden, probability also enhances the illusion of fiction, and hence its immersive power.

Another aspect of probability that Restoration critics were keen on observing was the unities of place, time and action. These unities were emphasized because they also implied adherence to probability (Gallaway 1965, 124). As Rene Wellek puts it, the unities were seen as “guards against improbability” (1955, 40). In his ‘Remarks upon *Cato*, a Tragedy’ (1713), John Dennis writes that the unities help to “strengthen the reasonableness of the Incidents, heighten the probability of the Action, promote the agreeable Deceit of the Representation, and add Cleanliness, Grace, and Comeliness to it” ([1713] 1976, 68). In fact, rather than being the influence of Aristotle and the Italian critics, the

greatest influence was exerted by French neoclassicist dramatists such as Corneille and Racine, whose works were familiar to the English exiled court and were later made available in translations (See Dryden 1971, 17-20). Moreover, the unities were motivated by commercial reasons. For example, the reason why they emphasized the unity of place in particular was the movable scenery in the Restoration stage. Changing the setting made it necessary to move it frequently as it would incur more expenses (Bradley 2010, 44).⁶

The other aspect of the probability of drama is making characters act naturally. Characters must seem to act according to what is appropriate to their nature. In his *A Short View of Tragedy*, Thomas Rymer makes a point in his poignant attack on Shakespeare's *Othello*, faulting it for messing up with character traits. More specifically, he opines that the traits Shakespeare gave to Othello are not appropriate to a soldier: "His Love and his Jealousie are no part of a Souldiers Character, unless for Comedy" ([1693] 1956, 134). Since these features are not characteristic of soldiers, then Shakespeare's portrayal lacked probability and decorum.

One corollary of the adherence to probability was the urge to eliminate the supernatural and the marvelous. When confronted with the choice between the probable and the marvelous, Restoration critics strongly favored the former. In fact, this area is one of great discrepancy between theory and practice in the Restoration writers' treatment of probability: Restoration writers realized that they need to relax their restrictions on the marvelous. For example, in his Preface to *Gondibert*, Davenant writes that eradicating the supernatural will cause us to lose lots of lessons: "Whilst others (no lesse bold with that ancient Guide) say, he hath so often led him into Heaven, and Hell, till by conversation with Gods and Ghosts, he sometimes deprives us of those natural probabilities in Story, which are instructive to humane life" ([1651] 1971, 4). In his essay "Of Heroic Plays" (printed in *The Conquest of Granada*), Dryden also granted the need even for the use of gods and ghosts in literature ([1672] 1978, 12). In several of these adaptations the use of the supernatural is flagrant. For example, in his adaptation of *Macbeth* Davenant uses flying witches and in his and Dryden's adaptation of *The Tempest* employs more supernatural machinery than

Shakespeare himself did. No less disconcerting is their extensive use of masques, songs and dancing in their adaptations while at the same time advocating the adherence to the unity of action. However, Stephen Watkins argues that the main reason for the adoption of the supernatural was commercial, due to the fierce competition with other companies, namely, Thomas Killigrew (2023, 56).

Interestingly enough, Shakespeare was in the core of these debates. Shakespeare's works featured in some critical debates on probability. When mentioned, his works were more often disparaged than praised. Despite the admiration they held for Shakespeare, restoration and eighteenth century critics were not easy about what they saw as improbabilities in Shakespeare's plays. One such vocal critic of Shakespeare was Thomas Rymer. In his *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693), Rymer takes issue with the improbabilities in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Rymer writes: "Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lye. And, certainly, never was any play fraught, like this of *Othello*, with improbabilities" ([1693] 1956, 134). Thomas Rymer was the most vocal critic of Shakespeare, using burlesque criticism. He used the cornerstone of commonsense to rattle about Shakespeare's violation of probability and decorum.⁷ As we have shown, this trend of faulting Shakespeare was widespread among Restoration critics. These debates about probability will have their sway on the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare.

4- Probability in two Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare

In this section two Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare are analysed: John Dryden's *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost* (1677) and Nahum Tate's *The History of King Lear* (1681). These two plays are among the most famous of Shakespeare's Restoration adaptations, and they have the longest performance history of their own. The analysis highlights the structural features of the adaptations and how they differed from the original, as well as the writers' stated steps to achieve a more probable representation of the original story. It will survey the plotlines of these adaptations to underscore the significance and the probability of the changes they made. It also discusses the extent to which these adaptors kept their promise of preserving a higher degree of probability. Finally, it shows how each adaptation was driven by other factors, political or commercial, in addition to the avowed urge of preserving probability.

4.1: 'A tale which often has been told': John Dryden's *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost* (1677)

Dryden's *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost* (1677) is a reworking of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607). In order to make his play more probable than Shakespeare's original, Dryden made drastic changes to the language and structure of the original, so much so that some critics consider it very far removed from that original (Spencer 1927, 210). However, the similarity of the story as well as the striking intertextual references to the original qualify the play as an adaptation of Shakespeare. More importantly, in Dryden's preface to the play, all his comments are haunted by and refer back to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Furthermore, the play features in many anthologies of the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare (See Clark 1997). Besides, so successful was Dryden's version that it replaced Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* on the stage until the middle of the nineteenth century (Dobson and Wells 2001, 19).

As mentioned above, the plot structure and scene divisions of *All for Love* are markedly different from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Act I of *All for Love* starts after the battle of Actium. Here Antony appears devastated after the defeat in Actium, which he thinks is "past recovery" (1.1.50)⁸. He is also torn out emotionally between his love for Cleopatra and his duty to Rome. He laments the wretched man he has become: "I'm now turn'd wild, a Commoner of Nature;/ Of all forsaken, and forsaking alf (1.1.232-3). His lieutenant Ventidius stands as a voice of duty and also serves as a choral figure. After the sentimental give and take between Antony and Ventidius, Antony decides to be the great general he is known to be and to confront Octavius Caesar again. Act II introduces Cleopatra lamenting the loss of Antony. Encouraged by the eunuch Alexas, she seduces Antony with a bracelet: "She begs you wear these Trifles, as a pawn" (2.1.182). She helps him to fasten them and Antony is back to her vowing to sacrifice all the world for her sake: "Go! Whither? go from all that's excellent!/ Faith, Honor, Virtue, all good things forbid,/ That I should go from her" (2.1.440-2). She succeeds in overturning the influence of Ventidius who is left cursing the effect women have in harming men: "O Women!

Women! Women! all the gods/ Have not such pow'r of doing good to Man,/ As you of doing harm" (2.1.450-2).

In Act III, Ventidius is still trying hard to save Antony from Cleopatra's snares. He introduces Dolabella who is bringing messages from Octavius. Antony teases Dolabella about his lascivious description of Cleopatra's badge on the Nile (which Shakespeare presents so illustratively). In the meantime, Ventidius sends for Octavia and her two daughters Agrippina and Antonia, which takes Antony by surprise (3.1.238). This Act is famous for the confrontation that Dryden invents (which appeared neither in the historical sources nor in Shakespeare) between Cleopatra and Octavia. Antony succumbs to the pleas of his wife and children and agrees to leave with them:

Ventidius: Was ever sight so moving! Emperor!

Dolabella: Friend!

Octavia: Husband!

Both children: Father!

Antony: am vanquish'd: take me,

Octavia; take me, Children; share me all. (Embracing them) (3.1.361-6)

Act IV ensues with Antony not daring to take his leave from Cleopatra: "How many deaths are in this word Depart!" (4.1.5). He delegates that mission to Dolabella. Antony makes several attempts to return but in vain. Dolabella, motivated by his love for Cleopatra, decides to approach her (4.1.51-2). But his soliloquy is overheard by Ventidius and Octavia who tell Antony about it. Dolabella later regrets his opportunistic stance. When Antony is informed of Dolabella's move, he raves against both him and Cleopatra. Alexas urges Cleopatra to use jealousy to win Antony back (4.1.78), which she reluctantly accepts: "I must attempt it;/ But Oh with what regret!" (4.1.99-100). Antony's jealousy brings him back to Cleopatra. Octavia, seeing where his true passion really lies, leaves with her children: "So, take my last farewell; for I despair/ To have you whole, and scorn to take you half" (4.1.427-8). However, discovering the jealousy plot, Antony decides to part with Cleopatra. Act V starts with Cleopatra's attempted suicide. Then comes the news of Antony's defeat in battle after being abandoned by his troops. But

Alexas brings fake news of Cleopatra's death which completely unhinges Antony (5.1.228-30). Antony despairs of everything and decides not to fight: "I will not fight: there's no more work for War/ The bus'ness of my angry hours is done" (5.1.261-2). He then dies on his sword only to see Cleopatra and her women rushing to him (5.1.419-21). Seeing him dying, she also commits suicide. At the end, the death of the two lovers is mourned by Serapion: "See, see how the Lovers sit in State together,/ As they were giving Laws to half Mankind" (5.1.508-9).

In his Preface to the play, Dryden expresses his intentions to achieve a more probable representation of this story. He sets out to do that in two ways: the first is by preserving the dramatic unities and the second is by making characters act naturally. As far as unities are concerned, critics have always complained that Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* unapologetically violates the dramatic unities (See, for example, Seccombe and Allen 1971, 18; Steppat 1980, 33; Bevington 1990, 30). With respect to the unities, Dryden writes that: "the Unities of Time, Place and Action, more exactly observ'd, than, perhaps, the English Theater requires" ([1677] 1997, 191). Dryden follows in the steps of Italian and French critics in thinking that observing the unities makes the action more probable. More particularly, alternating the scenes between two far-away places, as Shakespeare did, makes it look improbable to the audience, since it is difficult to imagine that the attention can move so quickly and so abruptly between these places. Besides, extending the action over a long period of time also exceeds the imaginative capacities of the audience. As far as the unity of action is concerned, Dryden writes that: "Particularly, the Action is so much one, that it is the only of the kind without Episode, or Underplot; every Scene in the Tragedy conducing to the main design, and every Act concluding with a turn of it ([1677] 1997, 191). Here Dryden is referring to the idea that a probable action is one that follows naturally from what went before it and leads naturally to what goes after it. In other words, he is referring to the necessary, logical and cause-and-effect relationship between all actions of the plot. He is also making a reference to the absence of a subplot, the existence of which would call the unity of action into question.

The other aspect of probability is to make characters act according to their status. Dryden exemplifies this by devising a meeting between Octavia and Cleopatra in Act III. Dryden justifies it this way:

This Objection I foresaw, and at the same time contemn'd: for I judg'd it both natural and probable, that Octavia, proud of her new-gain'd Conquest, would search out Cleopatra to triumph over her; and that Cleopatra, thus attacqu'd, was not of a spirit to shun the encounter: and 'tis not unlikely, that two exasperated Rivals should use such Satyre as I have put into their mouths; for after all, though the one were a Roman, and the other a Queen, they were both Women. ([1677] 1997, 192)

This quotation is quite revealing of Dryden's conceptualization of probability. First, he equates the probable with the natural. Second, he bases his view of what any given character might do in any given situation on two grounds: general and specific. The general one deals with what people of this kind might do; in this case, women or - to employ terms that Dryden did not - his stereotype of women. It is glaringly obvious that probability is rooted in stereotyping, which is far from natural. Stereotyping is culture-specific: the stereotypes perpetuated in any given place and time might not be shared with people of different places and times. Thus, his view of what these two characters might probably do is informed by the stereotypes of his time. The second ground on which his judgment of probability is based is his specific knowledge of what that particular character would probably do in any given situation. In this case, Cleopatra and Octavia, both belligerent women, would behave that way if they happened to meet under those circumstances. For example, warned that Octavia is sister of Octavius Caesar, Cleopatra replies: *Were she the Sister of the Thund'rer Jove,/ And bore her Brothers Lightning in her eyes,/ Thus would I face my Rival*" (3.1.414-6).

Moreover, in his attempt to preserve Cleopatra's feminine modesty, Dryden got rid of the manipulative nature of Shakespeare's heroine. Peter Nazareth argues that in order to achieve this, Dryden has introduced and expanded the role of Alexas, her eunuch and made him the 'prime mover' of the play (1963, 160-1). Most descriptions of Alexas are provided by Ventidius. Ventidius tells him: *"Thou art her darling mischief, her chief Engin, / Antony's other Fate"* (1.191-2) and, in asides,

he describes him as “Smooth Sycophant!” (2.154) and “False Crocodile!” (2.1.161). Interestingly, Alexas affirms these features of himself. In Act V he says: “My gift of lying’s gone” (5.1.143). On the other hand, T. P. Harrison, Jr (1927) has pinned this point up to argue that Alexas plays a similar role to Iago, thus arguing that Shakespeare’s *Othello* is a model for Dryden’s *All for Love*.

However, notwithstanding Dryden’s goals of producing a more probable representation, his final product is hardly any better than Shakespeare’s play with regard to probability. For one thing, the importance given to the unities is overstated. For example, as far as the unity of action is concerned, one can hardly find any significant action, aside from a series of confrontations between characters (Antony and Ventidius, Cleopatra and Antony, Octavia and Cleopatra, etc.). As Hazelton Spencer points out, “One scene does not grow out of another, or out of characterization; the action is essentially arbitrary with the dramatist, not spontaneous with the characters” (1927, 220). The unity of place did likewise backfire. Dryden aimed to counteract the dizzying rapidity with which Shakespeare’s play alternates between Rome and Egypt. So, he restricted all the action to Egypt. Yet, the resultant unity of place is also superficial and did not yield the probability that Dryden aspired to. Rather, it produced more improbabilities than it resolved. Characters were roaming the Mediterranean and just appear when needs be. This is hardly in conformity with the nature of travel. For example, the speedy arrival of Octavia and her daughters from Rome is wildly improbable. Besides, as far as the unities are concerned, some critics opine that Shakespeare sacrificed them to gain perspective. For example, Georg Brandes persuasively argues that “it was Shakespeare’s design to evoke the conception of a world catastrophe He required a throng of personages to make us think that the action was taking place on a world stage” (1935, 470).

Another aspect of the improbability in *All for Love* is the inconsistency of characters. Antony is portrayed as a totally inconsistent character. He is endlessly torn out between love and duty. In Act III, he exclaims: “O, my distracted Soul!” (3.1.345). His decisions reflect this inconsistency: at one moment he decides to leave with Octavia, “This is thy Triumph; lead me where thou wilt;/ Ev’n to thy Brother’s Camp”

(3.1.370-1), but he recoils back and stays with Cleopatra. This is clearly seen when he decides to leave with Octavia and then asks Dolabella to pass his adieu to Cleopatra; he engages in to-ing and fro-ing thrice before he decides to leave (See 4.1.1-42). Cleopatra, on the other hand, is portrayed one moment as a faithful lover and as a manipulative seductress at another.

Other improbabilities are related to the plot. *All for Love* is full of coincidences and contingencies that are out of place and are only there for the requirements of the plot. For example, Ventidius always appears to influence Antony's decision when Antony is wavering about his position. Besides, in a sheer coincidence, he appears just as suddenly to overhear Dolabella's soliloquy and pass that to Antony (4.1.52-3). Alexas also has the habit of appearing suddenly every time Antony decides to leave Cleopatra. In Act II, when Antony decides to lead his legions, Alexas suddenly shows up dissuading Antony from leaving Egypt (2.1.148-9). And in Act III, when Antony decides to leave with Octavia, Alexas appears with a ring (3.1.372-3). Moreover, exactly at the moment Alexas finishes his speech, Cleopatra makes her entrance (3.1.391-2). Some lines later, as Cleopatra expresses her wish to meet her rival, Octavia appears just as suddenly (3.1.416-7). The news of Cleopatra's death, though fabricated, comes just in time as to motivate Antony's suicide and accomplish the tragic end of the two protagonists. Added to these contingencies is the arrival of Octavia and her two children just in time when Antony was contemplating the precariousness of his position (3.1.188-9). These coincidences and contingencies are far from realistic. Employing terms that Restoration critics preferred, these events fall into the category of the 'marvelous' rather than that of the 'probable.' As mentioned above, Patey identified the urge for probability in Restoration and eighteenth century criticism as emanating from the need to strike a balance between judgment and wit. In the same vein, David Thomas pointed out that in his dramatic writing Dryden "attempted to reconcile neo-classic order and precision with what he saw as English liveliness and imagination" (1998, 186). However, in this play Dryden failed to keep this balance and his treatment preserved the woodenly artificial rules of order and precision, but ended up sacrificing these as well.

More generally, one can identify contradictions in what Dryden intended to achieve and what he actually achieved in *All for Love*. For example, while he wanted to depict “a landscape of decline, decay and poignantly felt loss” (Thomas 1998, 190), others see the play as symptomatic of the Millenarian Tradition, which is symptomatic of order over chaotic passion, an order represented by the ascent of Octavius Caesar, later Augustus, to the rule of the Roman empire (Martin 1975). On the other hand, Aubrey L. Williams argues that his moral of the play, namely to discredit illegal love, was self-defeating in that rather than making the lovers seem deserving of their punishment, Dryden actually elicited sympathy towards them. By the end of the play, the priest Serapion delivers a panegyric for the lovers:

Sleep, blest Pair,
 Secure from humane chance, long Ages out,
 While all the Storms of Fate fly o'er your Tomb;
 And Fame, to late Posterity, shall tell,
 No Lovers liv'd so great, or dy'd so well. (5.1.515-9)

In the Epilogue, the lovers are also praised: “Let Csesar's Pow'r the Men's ambition move,/ But grace You him who lost the World for Love” (Epilogue, 22-3). Likewise, Everett H. Emerson, Harold E. Davis, and Ira Johnson (1955) make a similar point by arguing that, rather than making the lovers' punishment a form of poetic justice, Dryden achieved the opposite by making them even more sympathetic to the audience.

Contrary to what Dryden claims about probability being his sole purpose, his adaptation is motivated by political and commercial reasons as well. On the one hand, the play contributes to topical politics of the day. For example, H. Neville Davies (1989) argues persuasively that Dryden was warning against religious fanaticism, which instigated the English civil war only two decades ago, by the fanatic figures of Egyptian priests. In the Introduction to his edition of the play, N. J. Andrew points out that the play can be read within the context of classical didacticism and its insistence on order and symmetry. That promotion of order, Andrew argues, supported the Stuart political system against the fears of civil war that haunted the Restoration society. This goes in line with Hobbes's artistic theory, itself based on his political

theory that promoted totalitarian rule (1975, xviii-xxiv). Susan J. Owen points out that in comparison to other adaptations of the play and their political implications, Dryden's take on Stuart monarchy was more sympathetic (2008, 134). Moreover, Dryden's attack on the French in the Preface also has a national reason, namely to promote Shakespeare's genius in comparison to the narrowness of the French adherence to the rules (See Dobson 1995). Probability and the rules of cause and effect have political and nationalistic motives, not just artistic ones. The logical order propagated by probability was symbolic of the sense of political order that the Stuart monarchy needed to instill. However, Shakespeare's place here is paradoxical: on the one hand, Restoration critics were not happy with him regarding his violation of probability, yet they needed him to function as the English product of genius that stands in the face of the French influence. So, adaptation was the way to reconcile these two urges.

4.2: 'A new Name to our old honest Play': Nahum Tate's *King Lear* (1681)

Nahum Tate's *The History of King Lear* (1681) is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1606). In his adaptation Tate makes major changes to Shakespeare's play, chief among which is the creation of a happy ending that is premised on a romantic relationship between Edgar and Cordelia. Thus, he turns Shakespeare's tragedy into a tragicomedy. In fact, the happy ending was already there in the original play *King Lear* that Shakespeare adapted. So, Tate's play is a backward adaptation returning *King Lear* to its original (Smith 2022, 34). Tate's adaptation was aligned with Restoration aesthetics and was motivated by an urge for achieving probability which Tate saw as severely lacking in Shakespeare. As such, it was very popular on the stage and it replaced Shakespeare's play up until the middle of the eighteenth century.

In his adaptation of *King Lear*, Tate makes some drastic changes to the play. The most radical of these changes is crafting a happy ending to his version. In order to do that, he needed to create a love affair between Edgar and Cordelia who never exchanged a word in Shakespeare. We see this affair from the beginning of the play. Act I of Tate's play starts with Edmund's soliloquy. Edmund later deceives his father by a more proactive action, setting him up to overhear a speech by Edgar. On the other hand, Edgar and Cordelia appear speaking to each

other about her assumed marriage to Burgundy (1.1.56-60). This move by Tate was intended to give Cordelia motivation to reject Lear's offer. Of her two suitors in Shakespeare, Tate deletes France completely from the play. As a result, we are left with only Burgundy hunting for her. By rejecting Lear's plea, she will appear as poor, thus discouraging Burgundy from asking for her hand. As Lear bids Burgundy, "Then leave her Sir, for by a Father's rage/ I tell you all her Wealth. Away" (1.1.183-4). In this way she would be free to advance her relationship with Edgar. In Act II, however, as Edgar and Gloucester fall apart, Edgar contemplates suicide but he stops because he thinks that he has to help Cordelia who is now in distress: "But Love detains me from Death's peaceful Cell,/ Still whispering me Cordelia's in distress" (2.1.125-6).

The story of Lear's distress and his departure to the heath is preserved in Acts II and III but severely reduced and its grandeur is completely lost. In Act III, Edmund, on his part, shows amorous interest in the two sisters Regan and Goneril: "O for a Tast of such Majestick Beauty,/ Which none but my hot Veins are fit t' engage" (3.1.9-10). Gloucester tells Cordelia that he is planning a rebellion with the peasants: "I have already plotted to restore/ My injur'd Master" (3.1.92-3). Edmund sends two men to capture Cordelia who is leaving to meet her father (3.1.116). Yet Cordelia is saved by Edgar, for whom now she expresses her heartfelt gratitude and love: "Come to my Arms, thou dearest, best of Men,/ And take the kindest Vows that e're were spoke/ By a protesting Maid" (3.4.93-4). Edmund also betrays his father's intended rebellion. Gloucester is blinded as in Shakespeare (3.5.46-7). Yet at the beginning of Act IV, we see Edmund and Regan 'amorously seated, listening to music' in their grotto of dalliance. However, Regan soon discovers Edmund's relationship with Goneril (4.1.22-3). In Act V, as in Shakespeare, the rebellion fails and Lear, Cordelia and Kent are captured and Goneril orders them to be executed (5.4.9). However, at this very moment, Edgar enters and challenges his brother for a fight in which Edmund is mortally wounded (5.5.57), which leaves the two sisters lamenting their dying lover. The two sisters end up poisoning each other. In the prison scene, Lear is able to save Cordelia from execution (5.6.31-9). At the end, Lear gives his blessings to the lovers who will now rule the kingdom: "But, Edgar, I defer thy Joys too long:/

Thou serv'dst distrest Cordelia; take her Crown'd:/ Th'imperial Grace fresh Blooming on her Brow" (5.6.136-8). In the end, Lear, Gloucester and Kent retire to some distant place to spend what remains of their lives in contemplation.

In his Preface to the play, Tate emphasizes that he was driven by a major urge for probabilistic representation in his rewriting of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, so much so that he mentions 'probable' three times in the span of a two-page Preface ([1681] 1997, 295-6). Tate's conception of 'probability' is based on three moves that he attempted to make in his adaptation. The first is to give characters motivations for their actions. Shakespeare's *King Lear* is notorious in hiding the reasons why these characters behave the way they do. Two of these characters are Cordelia and Edgar. Cordelia's adamant refusal to tell her father how much she loved him, which resulted in her banishment, has been a notorious feature of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Edgar's actions throughout the play and especially towards his father and the King have also resisted simple explanations. Tate invented a love affair between Cordelia and Edgar, thus giving them both a reason to behave the way they did:

Twas my good Fortune to light on one Expedient to rectifie what was wanting in the Regularity and Probability of the Tale, which was to run through the whole A Love betwixt Edgar and Cordelia, that never chang'd word with each other in the Original This renders Cordelia's Indifference and her Father's Passion in the first Scene probable. It likewise gives Countenance to Edgar's Disguise, making that a generous Design that was before a poor Shift to save his Life. ([1681] 1997, 295, emphasis added)

The second move towards probability is adding order to the otherwise 'unstrung and unpolisht' scenes that are 'dazzling in their disorder' (ibid.). Tate makes many changes of the order of the scenes, not the least of which is starting the play with Edmund's soliloquy rather than Lear's love test. The third move is making characters behave naturally, as dictated by their personal traits. This is carried out according to two criteria: their actions match both their own character

and the Times they live in. Speaking about his job in this adaptation, Tate states that it “wou'd force me sometimes on the difficult Task of making the chiefest Persons speak something like their Character ... to give it some Resemblance of the Time and Persons here Represented” (ibid., 295-6). This way he threw away the ‘extravagance’ in the action of some characters, most notably Edgar. Moreover, for Tate the happy ending that he crafted is more probable than Shakespeare’s tragic ending: “but to bring the Action to the last Extremity, and then by probable Means to recover All, will require the Art and Judgment of a Writer” (ibid., 296). Just like Dryden, Tate entrenches his conception of probability in natural necessity. According to him, the speeches that he puts in the mouths of characters are the ones that they should have said, given their personal and social circumstances: “we are satisfied that they were the only Things in the World that ought to be said on those Occasions” (ibid., 295). Tate is referring to the concept of decorum that the Restoration and Augustan critics considered as a cornerstone of probability.

Another motivation for the changes that Tate made, especially with regard to saving Cordelia, was a sense of poetic justice. Poetic justice was first theorized by Thomas Rymer. In his *The Tragedies of the Last Age*, Rymer writes: “For though historical Justice might rest there; yet poetical Justice could not be so content. It would require that the satisfaction be compleat and full, e're the Malefactor goes off the Stage, and nothing left to God Almighty, and another World” ([1678] 1956, 27). Restoration and Augustan critics took issue with what they saw as the absence of poetic justice in Shakespeare, since in many of his plays the good are punished, instead of being rewarded. Several prominent critics voiced their disgust of the death of Cordelia which they saw as the violating poetic justice and they preferred Tate’s version. For example, Charles Gildon writes: “The King and Cordelia ought by no means to have dy'd, and therefore Mr Tate has very justly alter'd that particular, which must disgust the Reader and Audience to have Vertue and Piety meet so unjust a Reward” (1710, 406). Dr. Samuel Johnson writes that he was “so shocked by Cordelia’s death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor” ([1765] 1989, 223). So, those critics and the public taste found that Tate’s version restores justice, as it rewards the good and

punishes the evil. This urge for poetic justice is expressed by the end. After Cordelia and Lear's rescue, Cordelia exclaims: "Then there are Gods, and Vertue is their Care" (5.6.97). Tate even concludes the play with these lines by Lear himself addressing Cordelia:

Thy bright Example shall convince the World
(Whatever Storms of Fortune are decreed)
That Truth and Vertue shall at last succeed. (5.6.159-61)

Yet, as with Dryden, Tate created more improbabilities than he resolved. Many of the changes he made are inspired more by conformity with the period's taste than with real artistic probability. One such change is introducing the happy ending, which seems forced on the plot, as it turns a tragic story into a sentimental romantic comedy. Edgar and Cordelia's sudden love seems out of place, forged only to craft out the happy ending. The urge for the happy ending also led to other choices like the survival of Gloucester and the sudden recovery of Lear, both of which are wildly improbable: Gloucester's survival, after all he went through physically and mentally, is quite unlikely. Nor is it likely that Lear would recover from his mental breakdown. This ending also necessitated a superficial resolution for the conflict: the death of Edmund, Regan and Goneril is more like a *deus ex machine*, a superficial means to end the conflict and bring about a convenient closure. There were no repercussions for their evil. Moreover, the sudden death of these antagonists miraculously brings about the resolution and the happy ending. That ending, in other words, could never have been predicted by the defeat of the Lear/Cordelia camp in battle. Shakespeare's choice of ending is more consistent with what went before.

The most precious aspect that Tate's choices sacrificed is characterization. The imposition of the romantic plot meant that both Edgar and Cordelia behaved out of love for each other. In Shakespeare their motivation, unvoiced though it might be, was much deeper. Cordelia's honesty and her reluctance to be a hypocrite, as well as Edgar's honesty and his sheer love to his father, fared much better with audiences and readers. Further, in his deletion of the role of the Fool Tate did away with a crucial character who served as a choral figure and

a mirror whereby Lear can see through his psyche. The depth and the complexity that the character of Lear cherished in Shakespeare have been irrecoverably lost. The moralistic tone of Tate's adaptation was due to the fact that the Restoration authors preferred white-and-black moral categories and they avoided moral ambiguity: "Characters are more unequivocally good or bad, and paradoxes of character – like Albany's conscience-ridden villainy – are avoided" (Bradley 2010, 48). This black-and-white view of characters can hardly be applicable to Shakespeare's major heroes and heroines.

Moreover, Tate's adherence to probability is undermined by the countless coincidences and contingencies in the play. Characters always seem to be present when they are needed. For example, Edgar appears suddenly after Kent and Gloucester were talking about him: "I heard my self proclaim'd," (2.1.118). Lear comes a moment later after Kent is punished (2.1.143-4). And the storm starts exactly as the encounter between Lear and his daughters comes to an end:

Regan: How lewd a thing is Passion!

Gonerill: So old and stomachfull.

(Lightning and Thunder)

Lear: Heav'ns drop your Patience down; (2.1.318-20)

And the two servants come at the same time from the two sisters, each carrying a letter, as Edmund is contemplating their love (3.1.15-6). Cordelia also comes exactly on time as Gloucester exits after meeting Edmund (3.1.59-60). Another flagrant contingency is the sudden appearance of Edgar exactly at the moment the two ruffians were trying to assault Cordelia (3.4.65-7). Letters are also found and exchanged by sheer accident. For example, Regan finds a letter that accidentally falls from Edmund (4.1.22-3) and Edgar accidentally finds Goneril's letter with the gentleman (4.4.200-10). It can be seen that Tate forged all these coincidences to craft the happy ending he was after. Yet, it is equally clear how detrimental these events are to the natural probability of the overall action of the play. Interestingly enough, though, the play itself distances its story from the realm of the probable and situates it in that of the marvelous. After Cordelia and Lear were rescued, Albany tells the oblivious Lear about what happened:

I have a Tale t' unfold so full of Wonder
 As cannot meet an easy Faith;
 But by that Royal injur'd Head 'tis True. (5.6.69-71)

Even more interesting is Lear's reaction when he heard the story: "Is't Possible?" (5.6.98). It seems that Albany's wonders are not finished yet. The story of Edgar and Gloucester is even more wondrous than that of Edmund and the two sister. When Edgar enters with the blinded Gloucester, Albany also exclaims:

Look, Sir, where pious Edgar comes
 Leading his Eye-less Father: O my Liege!
 His wondrous Story will deserve your Leisure: (5.6.112-4)

And about the two sisters, he tells of the letter they *accidentally* captured, which contains: "A blacker Scrawl of Treason, and of Lust/ Than can be found in the Records of Hell" (5.6.79-80). All these pronouncements attest to the unbelievability and improbability of the story and its representation.

Tate lays down the motivation for the adaptation as merely aesthetic. He mentions that he adapted Shakespeare's play in order to make it more orderly and more probable. However, the context in which it was written indicates that there are political and philosophical subtexts for this adaptation. As far as the political atmosphere is concerned, the adaptation has topical resonances in the 1680s. The succession issue aroused by the end of the 1670s about who to succeed Charles II. The Whigs in the Parliament supported an Exclusion bill which called to exclude Charles II's brother James, Duke of York, and instate his bastard son James Scott, Duke of Monmouth. Lynne Bradley points out that Tate's adaptation is quite relevant to the Exclusion crisis of 1680. The bastard son Edmund might be representing Monmouth, the bastard son of Charles II (2010, 49). Tate's Edmund is more lascivious and more desirable for political advancement than his Shakespeare counterpart. Interestingly, he brags out: 'And possibly a king might be my Sire' (5.5.50). Tate also makes a reference to the Popish plot, the fabricated conspiracy that Catholics are planning to take over the English throne. In the Prologue, he says: "In vain our Poets Preach, whilst Church-men Plot" (Prologue 24). Another topical reference is regicide with the possible execution of King Lear, which is quite reminiscent of the

execution of Charles I, four decades ago. The deletion of the role of the French in the play is quite understandable given the tense English-French rivalry in this period as well as the civil war whose abiding memory was still fresh in the English mind.

As far as the philosophical and commercial circumstances are concerned, Katherine Romack (2020) reads Tate's adaptation as reflecting a Hobbesian worldview. The crux of the play becomes Edmund, with his self-serving desire for material gains. This is why, she argues, the play starts with Edmund's 'Nature' speech, rather than with Lear's love trial. John Rempel (1998) accredits Tate with more innovation than he is always given, and argues that his changes were deeply thought out and they were taken up in later adaptations. Besides, this is also evidenced by the long stage history of Tate's adaptation, which almost replaced Shakespeare's *King Lear* for over than 150 years. Interestingly, Tate had Dryden as an intellectual model in writing his play (Basuki 2010, 193). Moreover, Tate's expansion of the role of Cordelia and the addition of a female attendants to her, Arante, was encouraged by the availability of professional actresses in Restoration performances. Furthermore, the addition of the romantic plot is "symptomatic of the progressive decline of tragedy and the increasing popularity of tragicomedy in postrevolutionary drama" (Massai 2000, 436). Thus, it transpires that Tate's adaptation was far from motivated by artistic urges to preserve the probability of Shakespeare's original, but is rather driven by political, commercial and philosophical considerations.

Conclusions

This paper attempts to demonstrate the centrality of the concept of probability to the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare. From the above discussion it becomes clear that the adaptations of Shakespeare in this period were informed by and responded to the critical debates that characterized the literary criticism of this period, especially of the adherence to the probability of representation.

However, the study also demonstrates that, despite their professed adherence to probability and their desire to make Shakespeare's plays more probable, these adaptations had created more improbabilities than they resolved. On the one hand, their essentialist views treated

probability as a universal concept with hard and fast rules and principles. Yet it transpires that probability is shaped by the social and artistic norms prevalent at any given period of time. Restoration writers adopted a very narrow view of what qualifies as probable representation. On the other hand, they were forced to relax their standards when they saw how detrimental these rules were to producing plays that are credible and delightful, as mentioned above regarding Dryden and Davenant. Moreover, they used more antirealistic tools than Shakespeare did, like dancing, masques, flying witches and later even ghosts. Interestingly, George Granville's ghost with which this study started is just one illustrative example of this tradition.

Furthermore, the adaptors' staunch calls for probability were premised on purely artistic basis, namely to make the dramatic representation more credible to the audience. Yet, these changes and adaptations were driven as much by political and commercial motives as by artistic and critical ones. They recruited Shakespeare to pass comments on topical political and social issues, such as the role and function of the monarch, the succession issue, the possibility of social discord and civil war, etc. Many of these changes were conditioned by the new commercial theatres that emerged after the Restoration and their performance conditions and the availability of actresses, etc.

Moreover, Shakespeare's position in this period was paradoxical: these dramatists criticized Shakespeare for his violation of probability but they needed to promote him against the French literary and critical influence, in a time when England and France were fiercely competing for imperial dominance. One way to reconcile their opposing motives was through the adaptation process, whereby they can put Shakespeare against the outside influence while working on 'improving' him and 'making him fit' at the same time.

Notes

Note: In all the quotations I have kept the original spelling of the versions used in this paper.

¹ Interestingly, there was a tradition of invoking Shakespeare's ghost in the plays of the Restoration. It was mostly to make comments on these critical debates which Shakespeare got enmeshed in. In another example, Charles Gildon's *Measure for Measure or Beauty the Best Advocate* (1700), Shakespeare's ghost was much more irked by these debates:

Enough 'your Cruelty Alive I knew;
And must I Dead be Persecuted too?
Injur'd so much of late upon the Stage,
My Ghost can bear no more; but comes to Rage. (Epilogue, 1-4)

² In light of the above, many scholars doubt the viability of the term 'adaptation' to describe these Restoration plays based on Shakespeare. For example, Jenny Davidson (2012, 190) finds the term 'appropriation' heavy to the ear. She suggests that they have two aims: aesthetic and interpretive. On the other hand, Sandra Clark (2008, 279) also calls into question the suitability of the term 'adaptation' for these plays. Although I grant these as legitimate concerns, I will carry on with the use of the term 'adaptation', as these authors themselves have done, for lack of a more convenient alternative.

³ Roman treatises on rhetoric also emphasized that the statement of fact should, among other things, be probable (See, for example, Quintilian (4.2.31); Cicero in *De Oratore* 2.19.80; 2.80.226 and *De Inventione* 1.29.44). This emphasis on the probable came down to the rhetorical tradition of the Renaissance. In Aphthonius's *Progymnasmata*, a narrative is defined as "Narratio est expositio rei factae vel tanquam factae" (Narrative is the exposition of what happened or what might have happened) (1572, 17v). In *Foundacion of Rhetorike*, Richard Rainolde considers 'probability' as a requirement of narrative (1563, 13v). The same line of thinking is followed by Thomas Wilson in his *The Arte of Rhetorique*, a major account of rhetoric in Elizabethan England, in his definition of the conjectural issue: "The Oration conjectural is, when matters be examined and tryed out by suspicions gathered, and some likelihode of thinge appearinge" (1553, 50v).

⁴ For a comprehensive survey of Italian criticism in the Renaissance, see Weinberg (1961) and Hathaway (1973). Almost all Italian critics engaged in commenting on and responding to Aristotle's *Poetics*. However, many critics stand out as Alessandro Bonamici, Paolo Beni, Lodovico Castelvetro, Tasso, and many others.

⁵ This meteoric rise of the interest in probability was the result of many factors. One factor was the crisis of belief resulting from, among other reasons, the Reformation. As people cannot return to the certainty they cherished during the former times, nor could they surrender to sheer doubt. So, they needed a sort of knowledge which, though not completely certain, yet can still be the basis for human behaviour. Interestingly, this rise coincided with or even was motivated by the emergence of the mathematical theory of probability as a result of the interaction between scholars all over Europe, such as Pascal, Fermat, Leibniz (See Hacking 1975). The mathematisation of probability and the desire to tame chance, moreover, served a political purpose. It was an expression for the desire of order and the eradications of chaos. That order symbolized political order and chance was a symbol for civil disorder, including civil war, a war that was both a fresh memory (from the 1640s) and a likely event (as a result of the Exclusion crisis, among others).

⁶ However, Restoration critics agreed that if the unities are practiced without reason, they will render the action more improbable. For example, Dryden is not of the idea that following the rules always is tantamount to adherence to probability. For example, in his Preface to *Don Sebastian*, he says that he “follow'd them only at a distance; for the Genius of the English cannot bear too regular a Play; we are given to variety, even to a debauchery of Pleasure. My Scenes are therefore sometimes broken, because my Under-plot requir'd them so to be” ([1689] 1976, 69-70). He mentions that adherence to the unity of time, and having all the action happen in 24 hours might sometimes lead to the destruction of probability and stifling of creativity. Dryden, however, was careful to observe the unities, especially the unity of place, in his adaptations of Shakespeare, especially in his *Troilus and Cressida or Truth Found Too Late* (1679) and, even more so, in his *All for Love* (1677).

⁷ Yet, when it comes to Caliban in *The Tempest*, some critics found Shakespeare's representation of him a bit probable. Robert Heron and Thomas Twining, both of whom are impressed of how Shakespeare rendered probable something that is quite alien to nature (See Patey 1984, 314). John Dryden, as we shall see, also sometimes expresses his uneasiness with Shakespeare floating of the rule of probability, as in presenting unmotivated characters (like Iago) and inconsistency of characters and the liberty he takes with the dramatic unities.

⁸ In both plays I am using the edition of Sandra Clark (1997). It is to be noticed that Clark preserves the original spelling of these plays, which might be different from modern spelling in some cases.

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