

= The Relapse =

The Relapse , or , Virtue in Danger is a Restoration comedy from 1696 written by John Vanbrugh . The play is a sequel to Colley Cibber 's Love 's Last Shift , or , The Fool in Fashion .

In Cibber 's Love 's Last Shift , a free @-@ living Restoration rake is brought to repentance and reform by the ruses of his wife , while in The Relapse , the rake succumbs again to temptation and has a new love affair . His virtuous wife is also subjected to a determined seduction attempt , and resists with difficulty .

Vanbrugh planned The Relapse around particular actors at Drury Lane , writing their stage habits , public reputations , and personal relationships into the text . One such actor was Colley Cibber himself , who played the luxuriant fop Lord Foppington in both Love 's Last Shift and The Relapse . However , Vanbrugh 's artistic plans were threatened by a cutthroat struggle between London 's two theatre companies , each of which was " seducing " actors from the other . The Relapse came close to being not produced at all , but the successful performance that was eventually achieved in November 1696 vindicated Vanbrugh 's intentions , and saved the company from bankruptcy as well .

Unlike Love 's Last Shift , which never again performed after the 1690s , The Relapse has retained its audience appeal . In the 18th century , however , its tolerant attitude towards actual and attempted adultery gradually became unacceptable to public opinion , and the original play was for a century replaced on the stage by Sheridan 's moralised version A Trip to Scarborough (1777) . On the modern stage , The Relapse has been established as one of the most popular Restoration comedies , valued for Vanbrugh 's light , throwaway wit and the consummate acting part of Lord Foppington , a burlesque character with a dark side .

= = The Relapse as sequel = =

= = = Sexual ideology = = =

Love 's Last Shift can be seen as an early sign of Cibber 's sensitivity to shifts of public opinion , which was to be useful to him in his later career as manager at Drury Lane (see Colley Cibber) . In the 1690s , the economic and political power balance of the nation tilted from the aristocracy towards the middle class after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 , and middle @-@ class values of religion , morality , and gender roles became more dominant , not least in attitudes to the stage . Love 's Last Shift is one of the first illustrations of a massive shift in audience taste , away from the analytic bent and sexual frankness of Restoration comedy and towards the conservative certainties and gender role backlash of exemplary or sentimental comedy . The play illustrates Cibber 's opportunism at a moment in time before the change was assured : fearless of self @-@ contradiction , he puts something into his first play to please every section of the audience , combining the old outspokenness with the new preachiness . The way Vanbrugh , in his turn , allows the reformed rake to relapse quite cheerfully , and has the only preaching in the play come from the comically corrupt parson of " Fatgoose Living " , has made some early 20th @-@ century critics refer to The Relapse as the last of the true Restoration comedies . However , Vanbrugh 's play is also affected by the taste of the 1690s , and compared to a play like the courtier William Wycherley 's The Country Wife of 20 years earlier , with its celebration of predatory aristocratic masculinity , The Relapse contains quite a few moments of morality and uplift . In fact it has a kind of parallel structure to Love 's Last Shift : in the climactic scene of Cibber 's play , Amanda 's virtue reforms her husband , and in the corresponding scene of The Relapse , it reforms her admirer Worthy . Such moments have not done the play any favours with modern critics .

= = = Love 's Last Shift plot = = =

Love 's Last Shift is the story of a last " shift " or trick that a virtuous wife , Amanda , is driven to

reform and retain her rakish husband Loveless . Loveless has been away for ten years , dividing his time between the brothel and the bottle , and no longer recognises his wife when he returns to London . Acting the part of a high @-@ class prostitute , Amanda lures Loveless into her luxurious house and treats him to the night of his dreams , confessing her true identity in the morning . Loveless is so impressed that he immediately reforms . A minor part that was a great hit with the première audience is the fop Sir Novelty Fashion , written by Cibber for himself to play . Sir Novelty flirts with all the women , but is more interested in his own exquisite appearance and witticisms , and Cibber would modestly write in his autobiography 45 years later , " was thought a good portrait of the foppery then in fashion " . Combining daring sex scenes with sentimental reconciliations and Sir Novelty 's buffoonery , Love 's Last Shift offered something for everybody , and was a great box @-@ office hit .

= = = The Relapse plot = = =

Vanbrugh 's The Relapse is less sentimental and more analytical than Love 's Last Shift , subjecting both the reformed husband and the virtuous wife to fresh temptations , and having them react with more psychological realism . Loveless falls for the vivacious young widow Berinthia , while Amanda barely succeeds in summoning her virtue to reject her admirer Worthy . The three central characters , Amanda , Loveless , and Sir Novelty (ennobled by Vanbrugh into " Lord Foppington ") , are the only ones that recur in both plays , the remainder of the Relapse characters being new .

In the trickster subplot , young Tom tricks his elder brother Lord Foppington out of his intended bride and her large dowry . This plot takes up nearly half the play and expands the part of Sir Novelty to give more scope for the roaring success of Cibber 's fop acting . Recycling Cibber 's merely fashion @-@ conscious fop , Vanbrugh lets him buy himself a title and equips him with enough aplomb and selfishness to weather all humiliations . Although Lord Foppington may be " very industrious to pass for an ass " , as Amanda remarks , he is at bottom " a man who Nature has made no fool " (II.i.148) . Literary historians agree in esteeming him " the greatest of all Restoration fops " (Dobrée) , " brutal , evil , and smart " (Hume) .

= = Background : theatre company split = =

In the early 1690s , London had only one officially countenanced theatre company , the " United Company " , badly managed and with its takings bled off by predatory investors (" adventurers ") . To counter the draining of the company 's income , the manager Christopher Rich slashed the salaries and traditional perks of his skilled professional actors , antagonising such popular performers as Thomas Betterton , the tragedienne Elizabeth Barry , and the comedian Anne Bracegirdle . Colley Cibber wrote in his autobiography that the owners of the United Company , " who had made a monopoly of the stage , and consequently presumed they might impose what conditions they pleased upon their people , did not consider that they were all this while endeavouring to enslave a set of actors whom the public ? were inclined to support . " Betterton and his colleagues set forth the bad finances of the United Company and the plight of the actors in a " Petition of the Players " submitted to the Lord Chamberlain . This unusual document is signed by nine men and six women , all established professional actors , and details a disreputable jumble of secret investments and " farmed " shares , making the case that owner chicanery rather than any failure of audience interest was at the root of the company 's financial problems . Barely veiled strike threats in the actors ' petition were met with an answering lock @-@ out threat from Rich in a " Reply of the Patentees " , but the burgeoning conflict was pre @-@ emptied by a suspension of all play @-@ acting from December until March 1695 on account of Queen Mary 's illness and death . During this interval , a cooperative actors ' company took shape under the leadership of Betterton and was granted a Royal " licence to act " on 25 March , to the dismay of Rich , who saw the threat too late .

The two companies that emerged from this labour / management conflict are usually known respectively as the " Patent Company " (the no @-@ longer @-@ united United Company) and "

Betterton 's Company " , although Judith Milhous argues that the latter misrepresents the cooperative nature of the actors ' company . In the following period of intense rivalry , the Patent Company was handicapped by a shortage of competent actors . " Seducing " actors (as the legal term was) back and forth between the companies was a key tactic in the ensuing struggle for position , and so were appeals to the Lord Chamberlain to issue injunctions against seductions from the other side , which that functionary was quite willing to do . Later Rich also resorted to hiring amateurs , and to tempting Irish actors over from Dublin . But such measures were not yet in place for the staging of *The Relapse* in 1696 , Rich 's most desperate venture .

= = Casting = =

Vanbrugh is assumed to have attempted to tailor his play to the talents of particular actors and to what audiences would expect from them , as was normal practice (Holland) , but this was exceptionally difficult to accomplish in 1695 ? 96 . Love 's *Last Shift* had been cast from the remnants of the Patent Company ? " learners " and " boys and girls " ? after the walkout of the stars . Following the surprising success of this young cast , Vanbrugh and Rich had even greater difficulty in retaining the actors needed for *The Relapse* . However , in spite of the continuous emergency in which the *Relapse* production was mounted , most of Vanbrugh 's original intentions were eventually carried out .

= = = Love 's *Last Shift* cast = = =

To cast Love 's *Last Shift* in January 1696 , the Patent Company had to make the best use of such actors as remained after the 1694 split (see cast list right) . An anonymous contemporary pamphlet describes the " despicable condition " the troupe had been reduced to :

The disproportion was so great at parting , that it was almost impossible , in Drury Lane , to muster up a sufficient number to take in all the parts of any play ; and of them so few were tolerable , that a play must of necessity be damned , that had not extraordinary favour from the audience . No fewer than sixteen (most of the old standing) went away ; and with them the very beauty and vigour of the stage ; they who were left being for the most part learners , boys and girls , a very unequal match for them that revolted .

The only well @-@ regarded performers available were the Verbruggens , John and Susanna , who had been re @-@ seduced by Rich from Betterton 's company . They were of course used in Love 's *Last Shift* , with John playing Loveless , the male lead , and his wife Susanna the flirtatious heiress Narcissa , a secondary character . The rest of the cast consisted of the new and untried (for instance Hildebrand Horden , who had just joined Rich 's troupe , playing a rakish young lover) , the modest and lacklustre (Jane Rogers , playing Amanda , and Mary Kent , playing Sir Novelty 's mistress Flareit) , and the widely disliked (the opportunist Colley Cibber , playing Sir Novelty Fashion) ; people who had probably never been given the option of joining Betterton . Betterton 's only rival as male lead , George Powell , had most likely been left behind by the rebels with some relief (Milhous) ; while Powell was skilled and experienced , he was also notorious for his bad temper and alcoholism . Throughout the " seduction " tug @-@ of @-@ war between Rich and Betterton in 1695 ? 96 , Powell remained at Drury Lane , where he was in fact not used for Love 's *Last Shift* , but would instead spectacularly demonstrate his drinking problem at the première of *The Relapse* .

= = = The *Relapse* cast = = =

Vanbrugh planned *The Relapse* , too , round these limited casting resources and minor talents , which Peter Holland has argued explains the robust , farcical character of the play ; Vanbrugh 's second comedy , *The Provoked Wife* (1697) , written for the better actors of the cooperative company , is a much subtler piece . *The Relapse* was written in six weeks and offered to the Patent Company in March , but because of the problems with contracting and retaining actors , it did not

première until November . It is known from Cibber 's autobiography that Vanbrugh had a decisive say in the ongoing casting changes made during these seven months ; it is not known whether he altered his text to accommodate them .

To reinforce the connection with Love 's Last Shift and capitalise on its unexpected success , Vanbrugh designed the central roles of Loveless , Amanda , and Sir Novelty for the same actors : John Verbruggen , Jane Rogers , and Colley Cibber . Keeping Rogers as Amanda was not a problem , since she was not an actress that the companies fought over , but holding on to John Verbruggen and Colley Cibber posed challenges , to which Rich rose with energetic campaigns of bribery and re @-@ seduction . Filling the rest of the large Relapse cast presented a varied palette of problems , which forced some unconventional emergency casting .

John Verbruggen was one of the original rebels and had been offered a share in the actors ' company , but became disgruntled when his wife Susanna , a popular comedian , was not . For Rich , it was a stroke of luck to get Susanna and John back into his depleted and unskilled troupe . John 's availability to play Loveless remained precarious , however . In September , when The Relapse had still not been staged after six months of trying (probably because Rich was still parleying with Cibber about his availability as Lord Foppington) , John was still complaining about his employment situation , even getting into a physical fight over it at the theatre . This misbehaviour caused the Lord Chamberlain to declare his contract void and at the same time order him to stay with the Patent Company until January 1697 , to give Rich time to find a replacement . The original Loveless was thus finally guaranteed for an autumn season run of The Relapse . Since the loyal Verbruggen couple always moved as a unit , Susanna 's services were also assured .

The Verbruggens were essential to the play , not least because Vanbrugh had customised the sprightly temptress Berinthia to Susanna 's talents and reputation for witty , roguish , sexually enterprising characters , most recently Mrs Buxom in Thomas D 'Urfey 's Don Quixote (a success thanks to " the extraordinary well acting of Mrs Verbruggen " , wrote D 'Urfey) . Although John was less well known , his acting skills were considerable and would flourish after January 1697 in the cooperative company , where commentators even started to compare him with the great Betterton . Verbruggen was considered a more natural , intuitive or " careless " actor , with " a negligent agreeable wildness in his action and his mien , which became him well . " Anthony Aston vividly described Verbruggen as " a little in @-@ kneed , which gave him a shambling gait , which was a carelessness , and became him . " Modern critics do not find the Loveless part very lively or irresistible , but Vanbrugh was able to count on Verbruggen 's shambling male magnetism and " agreeable wildness " to enrich the character . This would originally have worked even in print , since cast lists were included in the published plays : most 1690s play readers were playgoers also , and aware of the high @-@ profile Verbruggens . Happily married in private life and playing the secret lovers Loveless and Berinthia , the Verbruggens have left traces of their charisma and erotic stage presences in Vanbrugh 's dialogue . The Relapse even alludes to their real @-@ life relationship , in meta @-@ jokes such as Berinthia 's exclamation , " Well , he is a charming man ! I don 't wonder his wife 's so fond of him ! " .

Hildebrand Horden , who had played a " wild " young lover in Love 's Last Shift , was the only young , handsome , potential romantic lead Rich had . He was presumably cast by Vanbrugh as Tom Fashion , Lord Foppington 's clever younger brother (Holland) , and it was a blow to the Patent Company when he was killed in a tavern brawl (more glamorously referred to as a " duel " in older sources) in May . At the première in November , Tom Fashion was instead played as a breeches role by Mary Kent , an unusual piece of emergency casting that puts a different face on a uniquely frank homosexual scene where Tom keeps skipping nimbly out of the way of the matchmaker Coupler 's lecherous groping .

Colley Cibber was a rather unsuccessful young actor at the time of the split , with a squeaky voice and without any of the physical attractiveness of the soon @-@ to @-@ be @-@ dead Horden . After the success of Love 's Last Shift , his status was transformed , with both companies vying for his services as actor and playwright . He made an off @-@ season transfer to Betterton 's company in the summer of 1696 and wrote part of a play for the rebels before being re @-@ seduced by Rich by means of a fat contract (Milhous) . Cibber as Lord Foppington was thus also assured , and

finally the première of *The Relapse* could be scheduled with some confidence . Cibber 's performance in it was received with even greater acclaim than in his own play , Vanbrugh 's *Lord Foppington* being a larger and , in the estimation of both contemporaries and modern critics , much funnier part than *Sir Novelty Fashion* . Vanbrugh 's play incorporates some of the ad @-@ libbing and affectations of Cibber 's by all accounts inspired performance in *Love 's Last Shift* . Cibber has thus imprinted not only his own playwriting but also his acting style and squeaky personality on Vanbrugh 's best @-@ known character .

Vanbrugh 's preface to the first edition preserves a single fleeting concrete detail about the première performance : George Powell was drunk . He played Amanda 's worldly and sophisticated admirer Worthy , the " fine gentleman of the play " , and apparently brought an unintended hands @-@ on realism to his supposedly suave seduction attempt :

One word more about the bawdy , and I have done . I own the first night this thing was acted , some indecencies had like to have happened , but it was not my fault . The fine gentleman of the play , drinking his mistress 's health in Nantes brandy from six in the morning to the time he waddled upon the stage in the evening , had toasted himself up to such a pitch of vigour , I confess I once gave Amanda for gone .

= = Stage history = =

The desperate straits of the United Company , and the success of *The Relapse* in saving it from collapse , are attested in a private letter from 19 November 1696 : " The other house [Drury Lane] has no company at all , and unless a new play comes out on Saturday revives their reputation , they must break . " The new play is assumed to have been *The Relapse* , and it turned out the success Rich needed . " This play " , notes Colley Cibber in his autobiography , " from its new and easy turn of wit , had great success , and gave me , as a comedian , a second flight of reputation along with it . " Charles Gildon summarises : " This play was received with mighty applause . "

The Relapse is singled out for particular censure in the Puritan clergyman Jeremy Collier 's anti @-@ theatre pamphlet *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) , which attacks its lack of poetic justice and moral sentiment . Worthy and Berinthia , complains Collier , are allowed to enact their wiles against the Lovelesses ' married virtue without being punished or losing face . The subplot is an even worse offence against religion and morality , as it positively rewards vice , allowing the trickster hero Tom to keep the girl , her dowry , and his own bad character to the end . Vanbrugh failed to take *Short View* seriously and published a joking reply , but Collier 's censure was to colour the perception of the play for centuries . While it remained a popular stage piece through the 18th century , much praised and enjoyed for its wit , attitudes to its casual sexual morality became increasingly ambivalent as public opinion became ever more restrictive in this area , and more at odds with the permissive ethos of Restoration comedy . From 1777 Vanbrugh 's original was replaced on the stage by Sheridan 's *A Trip to Scarborough* , a close adaptation but with some " covering " , as the prologue explains , drawn over Vanbrugh 's " too bare " wit :

As change thus circulates throughout the nation ,
Some plays may justly call for alteration ;
At least to draw some slender covering o 'er ,
That graceless wit which was too bare before .

Sheridan does not allow Loveless and Berinthia to consummate their relationship , and he withdraws approval from Amanda 's admirer Worthy by renaming him " Townly " . Some frank quips are silently deleted , and the matchmaker Coupler with the lecherous interest in Tom becomes decorous Mrs Coupler . A small @-@ scale but notable loss is of much of the graphic language of Hoyden 's nurse , who is earthy in Vanbrugh 's original , genteel in Sheridan . However , Sheridan had an appreciation of Vanbrugh 's style , and retained most of the original text unaltered .

In the 19th century , *A Trip to Scarborough* remained the standard version , and there were also some ad hoc adaptations that sidelined the Lovelesses ' drawing @-@ room comedy in favour of the *Lord Foppington* / *Hoyden* plot with its caricatured clashes between exquisite fop and pitchfork @-@

wielding country bumpkins . The Man of Quality (1870) was one such robust production , Miss Tomboy (1890) another . Vanbrugh 's original Relapse was staged once , in 1846 , at the Olympic Theatre in London .

During the first half of the 20th century The Relapse was relatively neglected , along with other Restoration drama , and experts are uncertain about exactly when Vanbrugh 's original again resurged to prominence on the stage and thereby marginalised Sheridan 's version . These experts now believe the play may have been first brilliantly rehabilitated by Anthony Quayle 's 1947 production at the Phoenix Theatre , starring Cyril Ritchard as Lord Foppington and brought to Broadway by Ritchard in 1950 . A musical version , Virtue in Danger (1963) , by Paul Dehn and " John Bernard " , opened to mixed reviews . John Russell Taylor in Plays and Players praised the cast , which included Patricia Routledge as Berinthia and John Moffatt as Lord Foppington , but complained that the production was " full of the simpering , posturing and sniggering which usually stand in for style and sophistication in Restoration revivals . " Following Donald Sinden 's outstanding and award @-@ winning performance at the Aldwych Theatre in the mid @-@ 1970s Vanbrugh 's original play is now again a favourite of the stage . A 2001 revival by Trevor Nunn at the National Theatre was described by Sheridan Morley as " rare , loving and brilliantly cast . " As so often with commentary on The Relapse , Morley focused on the role of Lord Foppington and its different interpretations : " Alex Jennings superbly inherits the role of Lord Foppington which for 20 years or so belonged to Donald Sinden , and for another 20 before that to Cyril Ritchard . "

Restoration Comedy , a play by Amy Freed that draws on both The Relapse and its predecessor , Colley Cibber 's Love 's Last Shift , premiered at Seattle Repertory Theatre in 2005 , starring Stephen Caffrey as Loveless , Caralyn Kozlowski as Amanda , and Jonathan Freeman as Lord Foppington , and directed by Sharon Ott .