

Mikyšková, Anna

Editorial

Theory and Practice in English Studies. 2021, vol. 10, iss. 1, pp. 7-12

ISSN 1805-0859

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/143982>

License: [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International](#)

Access Date: 25. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

EDITORIAL

Anna Mikyšková

THE period of English Restoration theatre was for a considerable time in the shadow of Renaissance studies. This tendency was, to a great extent, fuelled by the traditional focus on Shakespeare and his contemporaries. However, the period of English theatre that resumed its life after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 is an equally rich and significant era, one that largely shaped not only the later reception of the pre-Interregnum theatre, but also laid much of the foundations for modern theatre as we know it today. This is also confirmed by the fact that the theatrical period of the Restoration and eighteenth century (which are in many ways culturally impossible to divide clearly) has attracted a growing scholarly interest in recent years. Studies such as Peter Kirwan and Emma Depledge's *Canonising Shakespeare: Stationers and the Book Trade, 1640–1740* (2017), Al Coppola's *Theater of Experiment: Staging Natural Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2016) and Jean I. Marsden's *Theatres of Feeling: Affect, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century Stage* (2019), to name but a few, as well as recent surveys, for instance, *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Age of Enlightenment* (2017), and anthologies, such as *The Routledge Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Drama* (2017) and *The Routledge Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Performance* (2019), clearly demonstrate that the theatre culture in question was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that deserves further enquiry. The present monothematic issue of *Theory and Practice in English Studies (THEPES)* hopes to contribute to this ongoing discussion.

The issue, entitled “Theatre and Popular Culture in the English Restoration and Eighteenth Century,” is one of the outcomes of the ongoing project “English Theatre Culture 1660–1737” funded by the Czech Science Foundation (project code GA19–07494S) and conducted at the Department of Theatre Studies and the Department of English and American Studies, Masaryk University, Brno (for the project's description, see [Krajník et al. 2019](#)). The aim of the project is twofold. On the local level, it aims to prepare and publish the first Czech anthology of Restoration plays which will be informed by up-to-date scholarship. On the international level, it strives to foster vibrant research into the area of Restoration theatre and bring together an international community of both junior and senior scholars and theatre practitioners interested in the Restoration theatre culture. To achieve the latter, two international online Restoration symposia were organized, one in October 2020 (see

[Hájková 2021](#)), the other in April 2021 (which you can read about in the present issue in the conference report by Filip Krajník). The symposia proved successful and facilitated engaging discussions which resulted in the publication of [the first 2021 issue of *Theatralia* journal](#), subtitled “Performance Cultures of English Restoration (1660–1737),” and the first 2021 issue of *THEPES* journal which you are currently reading.

The present monothematic issue aims to explore the connections between the English Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre and popular culture. Since the early Restoration until the mid-eighteenth century, English theatre culture witnessed a marked shift towards increased commercialization and popularization of the theatre. Gone were the post-1660 close association with the court, royalist productions and prominently elite (well-off and upper-class) audiences. Instead, the experimentation with new genres, the opening of new theatres and the growing differentiation of the theatre evening into mainpieces, *entr’acte* entertainments and afterpieces challenged the established cultural hierarchies of the period.

The term “popular culture” has always been difficult to pin down, as popular culture can be defined in multiple ways. Historically speaking and leaving the study of twentieth-century pop culture aside, popular culture as a concept emerged with what Peter Burke termed the “discovery of the people,” when late eighteenth-century folklorists started to preserve the, in their view, disappearing popular culture of the common people (Burke 2009, 23). However, the implied sharp distinction between elite and popular expressions of culture was in time becoming more and more problematic. As with other similar terms, the categories of this “two-tier model” were too neat and too convenient to account for the description of most cultural practices and artefacts, which gradually led to the study of local cultures and various shared cultures, which put increasingly more emphasis on the diversity, multiplicity and interrelatedness of cultural experience (e.g., Shershow and Reay). Although the categories of high and low have troubled historians for a long time now and no matter how unstable and unreliable these concepts are, *the high* and *the low*, or *the elite* and *the popular*, are constructed categories with a history of their own, and it is useful to ask where they come from and how ideas about them shaped the changing historical perception of leisure entertainment.

The English long Restoration is precisely the type of culture in which the distinction between high and low genres, though seemingly clear-cut, is very much open to discussion. For instance, the conventional division between Restoration London public theatres, which offered intellectual drama, and popular entertainments in the streets and at local fairs is no longer sufficient, especially as we move

to the early eighteenth century, when much of the popular spectacle and show became a regular part of London theatrical evenings (to the dismay of many social and cultural commentators of the period). As far as audience division into elite and popular groups is concerned, it does not hold even for the early Restoration (for example, Samuel Pepys was able to sit in the same theatre audience as the king and visit a dirty alehouse and the Bartholomew Fair within one week, not to mention his collection of popular broadside ballads). The aim of the issue is, therefore, to foster the discussion about the shifting cultural trends of the Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre and explore the various modes of theatre's engagement with the popular culture of the period. Due to the existing multitude of popular culture's definitions and contexts in which it has been studied, it is not an ambition of this issue to come up with yet more theoretical definitions of the term. Instead, it seeks to open a space for discussions about what the word "popular" means, or might have meant, when applied to the theatre of the Restoration period and beyond. Each of the contributors approached the topic from a different perspective and, as a result, this issue offers a variety of articles that hint at the diversity of the Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre experience.

Eva Bilská opens the issue with her study about the rise of the Restoration actress as a modern celebrity. In her discussion of Lady Macduff and Lady Macbeth in William Davenant's *Macbeth* (1664), she argues that the female dramatic characters were, to a great extent, understood through the popular reputation of the actresses that portrayed them. By combining this theatrical reading with a textual interpretation of the two key female characters of the play – in this case a motivic interpretation based on the then popular metaphor of body and soul – Bilská shows how the textual and performance realities might have merged to create an ambiguous image of femininity on the Restoration stage. **Kristýna Janská** traces the prologues and epilogues associated with the Exclusion Crisis, examining the playwrights' anxieties about the growing competition for audiences' attention, as other forms of popular entertainment such as fairs, rope-dancing, jigs, as well as political print and other ways of political engagement, were luring their spectators away. By employing the theory of cultural public sphere, Janská shows that with the increasing commercialisation of popular entertainment, on which the London public theatres were dependent, the "elite" conception of Restoration drama was becoming obsolete, and new, more popular, modes of theatrical entertainments were taking over. In his paper, **Filip Krajník** focuses on the early eighteenth-century English farce and asks what a play-text can tell us about the English popular theatrical tradition. Starting with a literary analysis of Benjamin Griffin's afterpiece farce *The Humours*

of *Purgatory* (1716), which clearly drew on a popular tale from Boccaccio's *Decameron* and other Continental sources, Krajník also explores the performance tradition of the farce and argues that plays in the long Restoration popular culture could be interpreted within a frame of complex and shifting intertextual networks. In her contribution about the Jack Sheppard Craze of the 1720s, **Klára Škrobánková** examines London popular criminal narratives. Stories about Jack Sheppard the prison breaker abounded specifically after his 1724 execution and inspired writers of pamphlets, farces, pantomimes, as well as ballad operas. As Škrobánková demonstrates, the various genres took inspiration from one another and gradually created two parallel narratives – the contemptible criminal vs. the noble thief, whose most legendary portrayal survived in John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728). Finally, **Jessica Banner** moves the conversation to the middle of the eighteenth century, focusing on David Garrick's 1748 production of *Romeo and Juliet* and discussing the new fashioning of the character of Juliet. By taking into account the visual representations of Juliet and other heroines from the mid-eighteenth-century sentimental fiction, Banner analyses Juliet's speech and costume in Garrick's adaptation, arguing that his Juliet had lost the tragic qualities of her Shakespeare's predecessor and, instead, assumed sentimental qualities which responded to the popular taste of the period.

The issue continues with a short academic note by **Laura Alexander**, who offers an original reading of the character of Marplot in Susanna Centlivre's comedy *The Busybody* (1709). She challenges the traditional heteronormative interpretation of the male characters, re-examines Marplot's dependence on his male friends and argues for a homoerotic reading that invites discussion about homoerotic love and tolerance in the eighteenth-century sentimental comedy.

The next section of the issue, "Interviews, Reviews, Conference Reports," opens with an interview with **Moira Goff** about dancing on the London Restoration and eighteenth-century stages. As a baroque dance specialist and experienced baroque dancer, Moira Goff insightfully talks about French dancing in English Restoration theatre. She also sheds light on the key role of John Weaver, the dancing master, and John Rich, the theatre manager and famous Harlequin, in the development of English pantomimes. Furthermore, she explains the French notation system for baroque dance which was adopted by the English dancing masters and thanks to which we can nowadays have a good idea about what was danced not only in London at that time. According to Goff, a greater scholarly focus on early eighteenth-century dancing, which has been generally overlooked by theatre historians, would very much deepen our understanding of the English popular stage, on which dance, music and stage action used to be of equal importance.

Sharon Wiseman contributes with a review on the live streaming of Hannah Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem* (original premiere in 1780), which was performed online by the Red Bull Theatre (New York) via Zoom on February 22, 2021. This production is one of the many online theatre projects, realized in the last year and a half, which attempted to bridge over the long period when theatres worldwide had to be closed due to the covid-19 pandemic. As Wiseman shows, the Zoom platform has its limitations and potential advantages alike. **Klára Škrobánková** follows with a review of the recent volume *Music and the Benefit Performance in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2020, ed. Matthew Gardner and Alison DeSimone), which, among other things, demonstrates that the musical and theatrical affairs in England of the eighteenth century were, in practical aspects of the entertainment business, very similar and that benefit performances were a key principle of the popular theatrical entertainment of the period. Lastly, **Filip Krajník** provides a report on the aforementioned second online Restoration symposium from last April, which offers an overview of the lectures and seminar papers which partly inspired this issue.

Bibliography

- Burke, Peter. 2009. *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. 3rd ed. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Coppola, Al. 2016. *The Theater of Experiment: Staging Natural Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hájková, Simona. 2021. "Revisiting Restoration Theatre through Transnational Interactions." *Theatralia* 24, no. 1: 303–308. <https://doi.org/10.5817/TY2021-1-26>.
- Kirwan, Peter, and Emma Depledge, eds. 2017. *Canonising Shakespeare: Stationers and the Book Trade, 1640–1740*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krajník, Filip, Anna Mikyšková, Klára Škrobánková, Pavel Drábek, and David Drozd. 2019. "English Restoration Theatre in Czech: An Ongoing Research Project Conducted at the Department of English and American Studies and the Department of Theatre Studies in Brno." *Theory and Practice in English Studies* 8, no. 1: 123–27.
- Leon, Mechele, ed. 2017. *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Age of Enlightenment*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Marsden, Jean I. 2019. *Theatres of Feeling: Affect, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Quinn, Daniel, Kristina Straub, and Misty G. Anderson, eds. 2017. *The Routledge Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Drama*. New York: Routledge.
- O'Quinn, Daniel, Kristina Straub, and Misty G. Anderson, eds. 2019. *The Routledge Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Performance*. New York: Routledge.

Editorial

Reay, Barry. 1998. *Popular Cultures in England 1550–1750*. London: Routledge.
Shershow, Scott Cutler. 1995. *Puppets and “Popular” Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Anna Mikyšková, Masaryk University
anna.mikyskova@phil.mail.cz



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as images or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.

RESEARCH ARTICLES
