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"Theatre, Society and Politics"**

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**REVISITING RESTORATION PERFORMANCE
CULTURE FOR THE SECOND TIME: RESTORATION
ONLINE SYMPOSIUM #2, “THEATRE, SOCIETY
AND POLITICS”**

Filip Krajník

REACHING the third and final year of the Czech Science Foundation funded project “English Theatre Culture 1660–1737” (see Krajník et al. 2019), this past April our research team organised the second online symposium devoted to the long Restoration period and its performance culture, subtitled “Theatre, Society and Politics.” In the same vein as our previous event (see Hájková 2021), the aim of the second symposium was to invite both junior and senior scholars from all corners of the world interested in early modern theatre and its social, cultural and intellectual contexts to encourage them to discuss their research and collaborate within a broader international community. The first significant outcome of the 2020 symposium (and the aforementioned research project) in this respect is [the first 2021 issue of *Theatralia* journal](#), containing a selection of lectures and papers presented at our first online event. The present monothematic issue of *THEPES*, which primarily publishes works of postgraduate and early-career researchers, could be considered the second.

The “Theatre, Society and Politics” symposium was spread over two days (19 and 21 April) and chiefly explored the issues of religion, politics and identity (in the broadest sense) in relation to the English theatre culture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Like in the case of the previous event, the online format ultimately proved to be felicitous as the symposium, again, attracted researchers and audience members from several continents who would have otherwise hardly met in person at one place.

The first day of the event opened with a plenary lecture by Adrian Streete (University of Glasgow, UK), entitled “Religion and Politics in William Lawrence’s *News from Geneva, or The Lewd Levite* (1662).” An author of two volumes and a number of essays and book chapters on early-modern religion and its impact on the cultural sphere of the time, Streete presented Lawrence’s manuscript play, otherwise virtually

unknown to literary and theatre historians, focusing on the depiction of non-conformism in early Restoration drama. Streete maintained that, just like several other dramatic pieces written in the immediate aftermath of the Restoration, Lawrence's comedy partakes in the popular campaign of the time against Presbyterianism while drawing on a number of both biblical and non-biblical sources that circulated in England in the early 1660s (such as a series of ballads about a vicar of Chelmsford in Essex, who was castrated by a butcher for sleeping with the latter's wife). Like several of his contemporaries, Lawrence approaches the subject of religious (non-)conformity with a combination of criticism, satire, but also with glimpses of a more accommodating attitude. This was considered necessary by some to maintain the fragile stability in the country in the early Restoration period. Besides the ideological level of the play, Streete also focused on the way in which Lawrence envisions his non-conformists represented on the stage, including details such as large prosthetic ears and nose (possibly drawing on contemporaneous anti-Semitic tropes) and a specific nasal style of speech.

The first half of the seminar "Restoration Theatre, Politics, and Religion" that followed continued the discussion of Professor Streete's lecture, focusing on minor religious groups in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England and their dramatic representations. While David Fletcher (University of Warwick, UK) demonstrated how the issue of religious non-conformity provided an outlet for dramatic satire and stereotyping in the depiction of Quakers in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, Filip Krajník (Masaryk University, Czech Republic, and the present author) argued that the anonymous 1666 tragedy *St Cecily, or, The Converted Twins* is a rare case of pro-Catholic Restoration drama and that its author addressed the Queen-consort, Catherine of Braganza, in hopes that she would help to achieve toleration for the Roman Catholic minority in the country.

The second half of the seminar primarily addressed the political contexts of Restoration plays, although the issue of religion was not altogether absent from it. The opening presentation of the section, by Lauren Liebe (Texas A&M University, USA), demonstrated how John Crowne's adaptations of Shakespeare's 2–3 *Henry VI* (c. 1680), although clearly set in the framework of anti-Catholicism that was not unusual in the middle of the Exclusion Crisis, offered a nuanced examination of the nature of kingship and the legitimacy of royal succession that was neither ostentatiously Whig or Tory. Both the first seminar and the first day of the symposium concluded with a paper by Laura J. Rosenthal (University of Maryland, USA). In her presentation,

Rosenthal argued that Charles Sedley's *Bellamira* (1687), despite being an adaptation of a classical comedy by Terrence, confronts England's then current participation in the transatlantic slave trade, honing in especially on its royal governor, King James II, against whom Sedley had a personal grudge for seducing his daughter.

The second day of the symposium, devoted to "identities" on the Restoration and eighteenth-century English stages, opened with a plenary talk by Elaine Hobby (Loughborough University, UK), entitled "Performing Identity: Aphra Behn." Since Professor Hobby is one of the editors of the forthcoming *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn* (whose *Volume IV: Plays 1682–1696* was published earlier this year), she utilised her broad knowledge of Behn to demonstrate how the dramatist construed her female characters and their identities. Starting with the comparison of Behn's *The Rover* (1677) and its model, Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso* (c. 1654), Professor Hobby argued that, despite the same name and other surface similarities, Killigrew's and Behn's Angellicas are fundamentally different characters, the latter being markedly more complex and more aware of (and more introspective and confused about) her sexuality and emotional life. Giving an overview of Behn's dramatic career, the lecture further showed how some of Behn's key female protagonists share these features of Angellica Bianca's – an observation also applicable to Behn's very last plays that premiered posthumously. Much to the pleasure of the conference delegates and audience members, at the end of her presentation, Professor Hobby announced her plan to write a new Aphra Behn biography after the completion of the *Cambridge Edition* in 2025.

The aim of the seminar that followed was to explore the issue of identities and how they were represented on the late early-modern English stage. Employing thematic and linguistic approaches, Fabio Ciambella (Tuscia University, Italy) demonstrated how George Powell, in his 1696 operatic adaptation of Fletcher's *Bonduca*, constructed gender and national identities of the play's key protagonists, Bonduca and Catarach, making them distinctively different from their Jacobean models. Gender and national relations were also the subject of the paper by Rogério Miguel Puga (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal). Employing the concepts of imagology, Puga focused on Susanna Centlivre's three Portugal plays, showing how Centlivre used the image of a distant space in order to criticize the patriarchal European society and raise awareness concerning the lack of freedom that characterizes the female condition in the Continent and in Britain.

After a break, the issues of gender and gender dynamics in Restoration plays were further explored by Simran Dhingra (Jamia Millia Islamia, India). Focusing

on William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), Dhingra discussed the double societal standards concerning male and female sexuality and the ways in which women, despite the boundaries imposed on them both inside and outside marriage, found ways to exercise their agency. Finally, Jessica Banner (University of Ottawa, Canada) analysed how David Garrick, in his popular version of *Romeo and Juliet* (1748), refashioned Shakespeare's tragic heroine into a sentimental one. Apart from textual alterations, the presentation addressed several contemporaneous images of Juliet (by Anthony Walker, Ignatius Joseph van den Berghe and Benjamin Wilson), showing the rôle of costume in communicating the sentimental mode of Garrick's Juliet. (An elaborated version of Jessica Banner's paper is published in the present issue of *THEPES*.)

In the lecture concluding the second day, as well as the entire symposium, entitled "‘Commanding Eyes’: Female Spectators and the Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Repertoire," Jean I. Marsden (University of Connecticut, USA) very aptly moved from the Restoration theatre stage to the auditorium and discussed the female experience of theatregoing in the period and the way in which female audiences shaped the theatres' repertoire in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the first decades of the Restoration period, the picture of female spectatorship that we have is mostly filtered through (chiefly male) authors and playwrights, who were often obsessed with the idea of female modesty. Yet, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, an entirely different image appears to us – one of female theatregoers who actively participated in the theatre life and, rather than *performing* their identity, they *asserted* it through shaping the theatre and literary tastes of their period.

Although smaller than the first Restoration symposium, the "Theatre, Society and Politics" offered a wide selection of presentations that provoked lively and genuinely pleasant discussions. Once again, the seemingly impersonal character of an online event proved beneficial in bringing together scholars from diverse backgrounds who, nevertheless, shared the common passion for early-modern theatre culture and its various aspects. The organising team behind the symposium and the Czech Science Foundation project hopes to offer one more thematic online event in early 2022 that will mark the end of one research endeavour, but hopefully also a beginning of a much longer transnational collaboration among researchers of early-modern drama, theatre and performance.

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