

**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**

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THE English theatre of the Restoration period, that is, the period following the restoration of the Stuart dynasty on the English throne in 1660, has always been somewhat overshadowed by English Renaissance theatre in the eyes of both theatre practitioners and members of theatregoing and reading audiences. Whenever studied, it was mostly in connection with its most conspicuous genre, the Restoration comedy of manner, which later inspired not only Goldsmith and Sheridan in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century but, even more importantly, the mannered comedies of Oscar Wilde. In recent decades, however, Restoration theatre has enjoyed heightened critical interest, especially in the Anglo-American academic sphere. Four main strands of current research in Restoration theatre can be distinguished: (1) politics, society, commerce, and the empire; (2) class, gender, sexuality and race; (3) theatre practice, architecture, performance technology; and (4) thematic probes, such as actors' biographies, genre studies, reception analyses (e.g. Shakespearean adaptations) and transnational exchanges. While these strands are by no means exhaustive, they capture the prevailing lines of enquiry. The latest comprehensive study so far charting English Restoration theatre is the fourth volume of *A Cultural History of Theatre*, entitled *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Age of Enlightenment*, edited by Mechele Leon (Methuen 2017). Two recent publications are also of great interest: *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Drama in Performance* (Routledge 2018) and *The Routledge Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Performance* (Routledge 2019). These publications break new paths in the critical reassessment of Restoration drama and theatre, presenting it in new contexts and approaching it with unprecedented complexity and thoroughness.

Apart from a handful of survey studies on the history of English theatre and literature which also mention the Restoration period, no attempt at a critical evaluation of this cultural phenomenon has ever been attempted in the Czech language.

Similarly, although roughly a dozen plays from this period have been translated and staged in Czech (the most recent being Jiří Závěš's new version of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, which premiered at the Silesian Theatre in Opava in March 2019), most of these translations are too old to be staged nowadays (the oldest probably being V. A. Jung's 1908 translation of Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved*); moreover, some of the most important canonical Restoration plays are still entirely missing in Czech, as are some "lesser" ones which would give the Czech audience a more complete picture of the theatre culture of the period.

Funded by the Czech Science foundation (GAČR), a team of investigators from Masaryk University's Department of English and American Studies and the Department of Theatre Studies has started a three-year research project charting the English theatre culture of the Restoration period and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (up until the year 1737, when the so-called Licensing Act was passed, an important milestone that irreversibly changed the theatre business in Britain). Following the latest trends in the research on Restoration theatre, the project will examine this phenomenon from multiple perspectives. One of these focuses on the rich variety of theatre genres of the time, which have traditionally been neglected by researchers (for instance, the popular "drolls" and "jigs", musical theatre, pantomime, puppet theatre, and Harlequinades). Another important pillar of the project is the transnational research of Restoration theatre, that is, research not solely from the perspective of the development of English national theatre and culture, but essentially deeming Restoration theatre as a phenomenon which was part of a broader, international theatre tradition. From this perspective, both domestic and Continental (German, Spanish, Italian, French, and others) elements significantly shaped dramaturgy of the period mixed together. While English Restoration theatre presented itself (and has been mostly studied) as an English national project, the patriotic agenda underlying the culture effectively whitewashed the foreign influences that shaped it. It is not culturally dissimilar from other national projects – as cultural semiotician Vladimír Macura has crucially analysed (in his monographs *Znamení zrodu* and *Český sen*). Our project aims to see through the nationalist veneer of Restoration theatre and study it in its transnational dimensions, which include the defining critical impulses not only from classicist France but also, very importantly, from Golden Age Spain, whose imperial grandeur and magnanimity greatly inspired English theatre.

The core team of investigators comprises Filip Krajník and Anna Mikyšková from the English department, David Drozd and Klára Škrobánková from the Department of Theatre Studies, and Pavel Drábek, Professor of Drama and Theatre Practice from the University of Hull, UK (a former member of both departments).

In addition to the core team, a broader collective of both international and domestic collaborators is involved in the project. The first significant results of the research will be presented at the upcoming 11<sup>th</sup> Brno Conference of English, American and Canadian Studies, entitled “Breaking the Boundaries”, which is to be held on 12–14 February 2020 at our department and where the project’s investigators will convene a panel focused solely on Restoration theatre and culture. A special issue of *Brno Studies in English* with selected papers from the conference, co-edited by Anna Mikyšková and Filip Krajník, will be published in late 2020. Another important venue where the team will present its investigation will be an international colloquium on Restoration theatre, which will take place at the Department of Theatre Studies in Brno in late 2020, followed by a monothematic issue of the Department’s journal *Theatralia* in 2021/22, co-edited by Klára Škrobánková and Adam Railton, Pavel Drábek’s PhD Drama student from the University of Hull. The research will culminate in the first ever Czech monograph on Restoration theatre, which will present the up-to-date research on this period in the Czech language, published by Větrné mlýny publishers in 2022.

In addition to scholarly research and its presentation to both international and domestic academic audiences, another ambitious part of the project is the preparation of a three-volume anthology of English Restoration theatre in Czech. For this task, a wide team of scholars, translators and theatre practitioners has been assembled. The aim of this team is, however, not to prepare yet another reader of literary texts, but to apply a new method of drama translation called dramaturgical translation, which is based on the close collaboration of translators, philologists, and theatre practitioners, such as actors, dramaturgs, and directors, to maximize the theatrical potential of the original works and produce texts which could be readily staged. The investigators currently collaborate closely with several Czech theatres which have already expressed their interest in staging some of our translations; the Czech versions are, therefore, already being produced with a stage production in mind. The concept of dramaturgical translation, informed by theatre theory and practice, takes as its basis not the verbal component of the dramatic text but the social reality (human interaction) that underlies the dramatic situations that the dramatic text proffers. Practically, dramaturgical translation is based on close cooperation between the translator and dramaturgs, who refine its dramatic qualities – similar to the way in which new dramatic writing is an outcome of a close collaboration between the playwright and the commissioning dramaturg. We believe that this concept of theatre translation, which combines the expertise of various disciplines and pays attention to the community element of the business, will offer a viable model that might easily be replicated and applied beyond the project’s original geographical, thematic, cultural and linguistic framework.

In the vein of Alois Bejblík, Jaroslav Hornát and Milan Lukeš's anthology *Alžbětinské divadlo* (Odeon 1978, 1980, 1985), the planned anthology of Restoration theatre will include rich theoretical and contextual material aimed at a general readership, mainly thematic studies that will give the reader a rich image of the cultural and intellectual environment in which Restoration drama was created and thrived. Among others, these will include an essay on international relations, influences and inspirations of Restoration theatre (by Anna Mikyšková and Pavel Drábek), on Restoration theatre's sociology (Pavel Drábek and David Drozd), on political contexts of the Restoration period (Kristýna Janská), on gender and sexual politics of Restoration theatre (Soňa Nováková), on music and musical genres of Restoration theatre (Klára Škrobánková), on Restoration theatre's adaptations (Filip Krajník), and on popular genres in English Restoration theatre culture (Anna Mikyšková). The anthology will again be published by Větrné mlýny in 2022. The list of the plays included in the anthology is provided below, at the end of this article.

Perhaps most importantly, and most ambitiously, the project seeks to link the spheres of academia, translation and theatre practice to engender a new community of scholars, translators and theatre practitioners which will, even after the formal end of the project in 2021/22, continue working on early modern theatre and, more specifically, early modern English theatre. This is to revive the strong tradition of theatre historians and translators specialising in early modern English drama – the generation of scholars contributing to the abovementioned three-volume critical anthology of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama (Bejblík, Hornát and Lukeš). In the Czech context, very few scholars have specialised in the field and this project aims at encouraging a generationally healthy scholarly community in the field. Similarly, a new generation of translators of early English drama into Czech is sorely needed in order to continue, and expand on, the work of the previous generation of Martin Hilský, Jiří Josek and Antonín Přidal, who translated (mainly) Shakespeare at the turn of the millennium and whose work has not yet been superseded by a younger generation of translators.

We hope that the abovementioned project *English Theatre Culture 1660-1737* will lay the foundations for a much broader and longer lasting collaboration that will help introduce this neglected topic to both popular and scholarly Czech audiences and, at the same time, contribute to the understanding of Restoration theatre on an international level. We also hope to inspire a new generation of scholars to take up research in theatre and literary history and theatre translation.

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**The plays included in the planned anthology of English Restoration theatre**

William Davenant: *The Law Against Lovers* (1662), trans. Anna Mikyšková, Filip Krajník

George Villiers: *The Rehearsal* (1671), trans. Pavel Drábek

John Dryden, William Davenant, Thomas Shadwell: *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island* (1674), trans. Klára Škrobánková, Filip Krajník, Alžběta Šáchová

Thomas Duffett: *The Mock-Tempest, or The Enchanted Castle* (1674), trans. Filip Krajník

William Wycherley: *The Country Wife* (1675), trans. Michaela Večerková

George Etherege: *The Man of Mode* (1676), trans. Jiří Petruš

Aphra Behn: *The Rover* (1677), trans. Ema Jelínková

John Dryden: *All for Love* (1677), trans. Michal Zahálka

Thomas Otway: *The History and Fall of Caius Marius* (1679), trans. Filip Krajník

Thomas Otway: *Venice Preserved* (1682), trans. Kristýna Janská

Aphra Behn: *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687), trans. Michal Zahálka

Colley Cibber: *Love's Last Shift* (1696), trans. Pavel Drábek

Mary Pix: *The Spanish Wives* (1696), trans. Ema Jelínková

John Vanbrugh: *The Relapse* (1696), trans. Pavel Drábek

John Vanbrugh: *The Provoked Wife* (1697), trans. Anna Mikyšková

George Farquhar: *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), trans. Pavel Drábek

Susanna Centlivre: *The Busybody* (1709), trans. Tomáš Kačer

Benjamin Griffin: *Whig and Tory* (1720), trans. Filip Krajník

Lewis Theobald: *Double Falsehood* (1727), trans. Filip Krajník

John Gay: *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), trans. Klára Škrobánková, Alžběta Šáchová

George Lillo: *The London Merchant* (1731), trans. Anna Mikyšková

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