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<A>12 'Samson Figuru nese': biblical plays between Czech drama and English comedy in early modern Central Europe</A>

<Cont>Pavel Drábek</Cont>

<EX>

Všickní dobří a učení lidé s jakousi zvláštní chutí i chtivostí *comediae* od pohanských lidí sepsané mají obyčej čítati a je sobě rozjímati.

Ruth 2014, A2r

('All good and learned people, with a peculiar liking and desire, have the habit of reading and reflecting on *comediae* written by pagan people.')</EX>

These are the words of Adam Tesák Brodský at the beginning of his father Juraj Tesák Mošovský's *Comedy from a Book of God's Testament Named Ruth* (*Komedie z Kníhy Zákona Božího, jenž slove Ruth*; *Ruth* 1604), printed in Prague in 1604. What is more, Tesák Brodský admonishes that 'above all, it is unbeholding to scorn those comedies that are composed *ex fontibus Israel*, that is, from the spring wells of the Holy Scriptures' ('nadto nesluší těmi, kteréž ex fontibus Israel, to jest, z studnic Písem svatých jsou sebrané, pohrdati', *Ruth* 1604, A2r).[1] Tesák's biblical drama, however, did not actually need an apology for its genre. Plays

[1]**<B>Notes</B>**

<Endnote text>

Cited from Milena Cesnaková-Michalcová, *Juraj Tesák Mošovský: Komedie Ruth* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1973), p. 53. This chapter was written as part of the research project *Otakar Zich in the Context of Modern*

based on the Old Testament were common fare in Central Europe for close to a century. The first such known play in Czech was Mikuláš Konáš z Hodiškova's *Judith* (1547), based on Joachim Greff's German play *Tragedia des Buchs Judith*, printed in 1536.[2] The latter part of the sixteenth century saw a number of biblical plays, most likely inspired not only by Jesuit dramatic activities but also by Luther's interest in the dramatic qualities of the Old Testament.[3] Apart from the many school dramas performed in colleges across the Czech lands, various plays were based on German models – such as the dramas of the 1560s–1580s written by Pavel Kyrmezer (d. 1589) or several other anonymous works.[4] The reason behind

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[2] Milan Kopecký, *České humanistické drama* [Czech Humanist Drama] (Prague: ODEON, 1986), p. 8.

[3] Kopecký, *České humanistické drama*, pp. 8–9.

[4] For Pavel Kyrmezer, see Milena Cesnaková-Michalcová, *Divadelné hry Pavla Kyrmezera* [Pavel Kyrmezer's Theatre Plays] (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1956); and Alena Jakubcová and Matthias J. Pernerstorfer (eds), *Theater in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts. Ein Lexikon* (Prague: IDU and Verlag der ÖAW, 2014), pp. 377–80.

Tesák's *apologia* is likely to have sprung from the new theatrical context of the early seventeenth century.

This chapter analyses the specifics of the early seventeenth-century biblical play in Central Europe. These are a fusion of transnational influences – a specific dramaturgy interweaving heterogeneous plots, and a mode on the verge between a literal and a figurative enactment of the scriptures, to which the quotation in the title refers: the character of 'Samson carrying a figure', a symbolic or metaphorical meaning. My particular focus is on three contemporary plays: the Czech plays *Ruth* (1604) and *Samson* (1608), and *Comœdia von der Königin Esther und Hoffertigen Haman* (Comedy of Queen Esther and the Haughty Haman), published in 1620 in the German collection *Engelische Comedien und Tragedien*.[5] While they apparently arose from different backgrounds – Czech Reformed schools and English travelling theatre in Central Europe – they share far too many features to make the similarities coincidental.[6] The striking developments of Central European biblical drama in

[5] Jiří Tesák Mošovský's *Ruth* (1604), or *Komedie z knihy Zákona božího, jenž slove Ruth*, has been edited by Cesnaková-Michalcová, *Juraj Tesák Mošovský*. For this chapter, I have used both her edition and the original print. The anonymous *Samson* has not been published since 1608, with the exception of two interludes, *Helluo a Judaeus*, and *Polapená nevěra* (most recently in Kopecký, *České humanistické drama*, pp. 273–9, 281–9). Manfred Brauneck (ed.), *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne. Erster Band: Engelische Comedien und Tragedien*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970).

[6] For the English Comedy as a specific dramaturgy of travelling English companies of early modern Europe, see Pavel Drábek, '"Why, sir, are there other heauens in other countries?": The English Comedy as a transnational style', in M. A. Katritzky and Pavel Drábek (eds), *Transnational Connections in Early Modern Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 139–61.

the first decades of the seventeenth century, I argue, stemmed from a transnational theatrical culture that anticipated the figurative aesthetics of the baroque.

[FIGURE 12.1 HERE]

<B>*'Comediæ od pohanských lidí sepsané'* ['Comedies written by pagan people']*: synchronicity and similarity*</B>

'One could find other reasons / that you would all prefer, / why *Commediæ* are useful to everyone, / and benefit God and good people', says the anonymous 1604 dedication to the *Comedy of King Solomon* (*Komedia o Králi Šalamúnovi*; see Figure 12.1),[7] following an account of classical Roman plays performed for the entertainment and instruction of the people. '*Terentius*, *Plautus* and others' are cited among the learned and wise who spared no expense to write comedies in support of the virtues. Conventional religious moralism aside, it is worth observing the secular theatrical context for which biblical drama was created. Unlike the earlier biblical drama of the mid- to late sixteenth century, the extant texts of the plays published in the early 1600s were clearly written with theatrical performance in mind. These play-texts are not only presentations of scriptural wisdom and learning in a popular form as manuals of instruction, but are arguably enactments of the situations and views of the *dramatis personae* to be staged. However, this hypothesis is based solely on textual evidence, given the frustrating paucity of other documents to corroborate it.

[7] 'Jiné příčiny by se vyhledali, / Kterýmžto byšte všyckni místo dali, / Proč jsou Commediae všem užitečné, / Bohu i také dobrým Lidem vděčné' (*Šalamoun* 1604, A3r).

As with so much theatre history, the awareness of the 'size of all that's missing' presents a major corrective for the theatre historiographer.[8] Especially in the Czech context, the surviving evidence and extant texts are few and probably unrepresentative. The cataclysm of the Thirty Years War that broke out after the Prague Defenestration of 1618 (at a point when an estimated two-thirds of the Czech population were Protestant) brought about several outbreaks of looting and destruction, followed by the oppressive Counter-Reformation forcing Protestants into exile or to re-Catholicisation, and a systematic elimination of books that were perceived as heretic or suspect.[9] All this was sanctioned by the several editions of the Catholic *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (1559–1966), as well as by the infamous Jesuit Antonín Koniáš's *Clavis Haeresim claudens* (1729).[10] What has survived – escaping the inquisitors' fire, widespread anti-theatrical prejudice, or simply the natural attrition of theatrical ephemera – is necessarily only a fraction of the early modern cultural wealth.

Theatre history has also traditionally prioritised a national perspective – writing chapters on particular genres within a language culture or tracing foreign origins, sources, and inspirations for national histories. Recent decades have, however, witnessed a heightened critical interest in a transnational theatrical culture that complements the earlier

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[8] The 'size of all that's missing' is Odai Johnson's phrase and the title of his work-in-progress on the archival limitations of theatre historiography.

[9] For a comprehensive history of the Thirty Years War, see Peter H. Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years War* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

[10] Both books are available in the Digital Repository of the Moravian Library at www.digitalniknihovna.cz (accessed 11 April 2019).

perspectives.[11] Eschewing 'any simple understanding of "source"',[12] transnational approaches to theatre offer complex connections between surviving texts and historical records that consequently problematise linear narratives or historiographic singularity of interpretation. The two biblical plays in Czech I analyse in this chapter (*Ruth* and *Samson*) thus can be seen to have more in common with the German-language biblical play of *Esther and Haman* than with their Czech predecessors. Moving well beyond a literal dramatisation of the stories from the Old Testament, characteristic of the biblical drama of the 1540s–1580s, all these three plays take creative licence as the dramatic situation structurally overtakes fidelity to the letter. Tesák Mošovský was clearly aware of these shifts. His play was sent to his son Adam, a regent at St Gallus (Havel) Church in Prague, probably to be performed by his pupils.[13]

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[11] A transnational perspective of early modern theatre cultures has been explored by a number of historians, mostly associated with the Theater Without Borders research initiative (www.nyu.edu/projects/theaterwithoutborders, accessed 11 April 2019). Apart from the publications of individual authors, the collective has issued three edited volumes, *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008) and *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), both edited by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson; and *Transnational Connections in Early Modern Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), edited by M. A. Katritzky and Pavel Drábek. The collective have also significantly shaped Volume 3 of *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Early Modern Age* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), edited by Robert Henke.

[12] Jeffrey Masten, 'Introduction', to Thomas Middleton, William Rowley, and Thomas Dekker, *An/The Old Law*, in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (eds), *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1334.

[13] Cesnaková-Michalcová, in Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer, *Theater in Böhmen*, p. 689.

Anxious to avoid heresy, Adam painstakingly defends his father's dramatising strategies in the address 'To the Pious Reader' (K čtenáři pobožnému):

<EX>

I also know full well, dear Reader, that it is improper to add anything to or take away from the Holy Scripture. … But here, in this composed comedy, in addition to what is written in the Bible, whatever has been added by my dearest father, has not been done to harm or belittle the Holy Script but rather for its clarification [or illustration], with a view to the present times. (*Ruth* 1604, A3r)[14]</EX>

The argument 'with a view to the present times' is significant, I propose, since it defends the freedoms taken in the play. These are not only the comic interludes, which will be discussed below, but also the suggestive, dramatic representation of the situations in which the characters find themselves. Cesnaková-Michalcová claims that the piece does not entail any special dramatic elaboration beyond telling the scriptural story, but rather is laid out as a dialogical retelling free of any conflict.[15] I will argue that the dramatisation presents a cathectic experience of the biblical events with a heightened sense of individuation – as could

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[14] 'Vím, čtenáři milý, vejborně i já to, že k Svatým písmum nic nenáleží přidávati ani ujimati … Však tuto, co se v komedí této složené, mimo to, co v bibli poznamenáno, od pana otce mého nejmilejšího přidáva, nestalo se nic na ujmu a zléhčeni Svatého písma, než více pro vysvětlení jeho, prohlídaje k časům těmto.'

[15] 'Das Stück enthält keine besondere dramatische Verwicklung; es ist eher als dialogisierte, konfliktfreie Erzählung angelegt'; see Cesnaková-Michalcová in Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer, *Theater in Böhmen*, p. 691.

be seen in Naomi's speech in the opening scene, when Elimelech tells her of his decision to go into exile:

<EXV>

NOEMIS

Co pak, můj milý manžele,
mé srdečko roztomilé,
dopustí-li Bůh smrt na vás
a tam spolu rozloučí nás,
co já sobě počnu s dětmi
mezi neznámými těmi?
Bylo by lép zde umříti
nám oběma, než tam jíti /
a zavesti naše děti,
kteréž mohou déle býti
živi než my již oba dva,
poněvadž chodíme ledva.

(What then, my dear husband,
My sweetheart,
If God sends death to you
And separates us both,
What shall I do with children
Among all the strangers?
It would be better to die here

For both of us than to go there

And take away our children,

Who can stay longer alive

Than either of us two,

For we can hardly walk.) (*Ruth* 1604, A7r–A7v)</EXV>

Noemis' speech illustrates what happens in the story by means of affectively engaging the audience's empathy. This is far removed from the impersonal retellings of scriptural stories in the earlier biblical plays or devoid of any special dramatic elaboration (as Cesnaková-Michalcová asserts). Tesák Mošovský *enacts* the events by means of fully-formed dramatic situations and distinct personas. The dramatic form is used to convey the interaction between two stage figures, as well as between the two conflicting outcomes of the crisis (death *vs.* exile), which which is the structural dominant of the dialogue.[16] This significant shift in dramatic form is arguably what Tesák Mošovský is also referring to when justifying the additions and changes to the biblical account, 'with a view to the present times'. *Ruth* features a prominent Chorus figure (Epilogus), who provides a fixed moral anchoring

[16] For the underlying theory of drama as interaction of stage figures, which I rely on here, see Otakar Zich, *Estetika dramatického umění* [The Aesthetic of Dramatic Art] (Prague: Melantrich, 1931), pp. 57ff; for Roman Jakobson's and Jan Mukařovský's concept of the structural dominant see David Drozd, Tomáš Kačer, and Don Sparling (eds), *Theatre Theory Reader: Prague School Writings* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2016), p. 16; Pavel Drábek et al., 'The Prague Linguistic Circle and Formalism(s)', in Drozd et al., *Theatre Theory*, pp. 603–6.

between the acts. Cesnaková-Michalcová sees it as a strong moralising tendency;[17] rather, it could possibly be viewed as a religious corrective to the affective experience of the play in performance. The dramatic dialogue abandons a literal recitation of the scriptures in favour of an affective engagement; after each act, in a sermon-like explication (Tesák Mošovský was a Protestant minister), Epilogus provides an orthodox commentary and highlights the moral of the enacted story.

In 1604, a second edition of *Komedia o králi Šalamúnovi* (The Comedy of King Solomon) was published (see Figure 12.1). It was based on the Latin play *Sapientia Salomonis, drama comico-tragicum* by S. Birck;[18] no copy of the first edition of 1571 has survived. The dedication, cited above, to Lord Adam Myslik z Hyršova a na Košířích, was most likely penned for the second edition. In a thorough outline of the benefits of theatregoing for the promotion of virtue, the dedication extols that it is 'by means of live reasons' (Živými důvody; A2r) – that is, with the help of *embodied examples* – that spectators are moved to virtue:

<EXV>
Neb aspoň Lidé když na to hleděli
Co činili a neb propověděli,
Tim obrazil jeden každý své Srdce

[17] '[E]ine starke moralisierende Tendenz'; see Cesnaková-Michalcová in Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer, *Theater in Böhmen*, p. 691.

[18] Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer, *Theater in Böhmen*, p. 335.

(‘For when people watched it,

Whatever was done [acted] or spoken,

Through that everyone pictured their heart.’) (*Šalamoun* 1604, A3r) </EXV>

This complex passage presents a refined understanding of the theatre as an instrument of affective experience, by means of which everyone’s heart may be pictured through whatever is acted or spoken.

This heightened dramatic enactment of biblical stories is a common feature of both Czech plays and the Esther play of the English travelling comedians. While there is no evidence of performances available for any of the three play-texts, their synchronicity and structural similarity puts them in one group. The urge of the publishers of both *Ruth* and *Samson* (as will be shown below) to contextualise these new plays within a wider field may be indicative of a recent development of the theatrical culture in Central Europe. The English travelling actors are known to have toured the German-speaking countries from the late 1580s. The first indirect evidence of their presence in Prague comes from 1595 and 1598. The earliest confirmed visit is on 21 October 1602, but records suggest that ‘komedie enklická’ was not a novelty.[19] The identity of the troupe is unknown, but Thomas Sackville was a prominent presence from 1592 till the 1620s, and he is thought to have been in Prague in 1598.[20] In August 1597, Sackville and his company performed in Strasbourg and the surviving repertoire list suggests possible links, specifically including the *Comoedia de*

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[19] Pavel Drábek, ‘English Comedians in Prague, October 1602’, *Notes and Queries* 53.4 (2006), pp. 499–500.

[20] Otto G. Schindler, ‘Thomas Sackville’, in Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer, *Theater in Böhmen*, p. 576.

Judith and *Comoedia de Esther*.[21] In 1605, a Judith play was published in Prague entitled *Komedie Česká / O ctné a šlechetné Vdově Jůdýth: A o Holofernovi Hejtmanu Krále Nabuchodonozora. Od Mikuláše Vrány Litomyšlského / z Německé Řeči v Českú přeložena* ('A Czech comedy of the virtuous and noble widow Judith, and of Holofernes, the General of King Nebuchadnezzar'), translated from German into Czech by Mikuláš Vrána Litomyšlský, Prague, 1605; see Figure 12.2). This play has apparently eluded the critical attention of scholars so far and nothing is known of its provenance beyond what the title page provides. Given the presence of Sackville and his repertoire in Prague, it is conceivable that the developments in the theatre culture at the turn of the century, to which the dedications of *Ruth* and *Samson*, and possibly also the publication of *Judith* reacted, were connected with the English comedy.

[FIGURE 12.2 HERE]

The repertoire of the English theatrical troupes is a much contended issue. The traditional interpretation is that they brought along English plays and performed them in 'peeces and Patches', as the English traveller Fynes Moryson reported in 1592.[22] However,

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[21] Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer, *Theater in Böhmen*, p. 578.

[22] Fynes Moryson, *Shakespeare's Europe: a Survey of the Condition of Europe at the End of the 16th Century. Being unpublished chapters of Fynes Moryson's* Itinerary (1617), with an Introduction and an Account of Fynes Moryson's Career by Charles Hughes, 2nd edn (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), p. 304; see also Pavel Drábek and M. A. Katritzky, 'Shakespearean Players in Early Modern Europe', in Bruce R. Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1530–1, and Drábek, 'Why, sir', pp. 149–50.

despite occasional similarities in title, there is little evidence that the influence was solely in the direction of England to Germany. It would be reductive to assume so; it would also replicate a much later model of English cultural dominance and apply it anachronistically to a time when English actors 'can bee Bankerupts on this side, and Gentlemen of a Company beyond-Sea', as Thomas Dekker satirically put it in his *The Run-Away's Answer* (1625, B2r). The Lost Plays Database provides a number of titles that have their namesakes in continental Europe – among them several biblical plays: *Judith* (1595), *Samson* (1602, assigned to Samuel Rowley), and *Hester and Ahasuerus* (1594); however, the critical commentary makes no links to biblical plays beyond England.[23] A more plausible historiographic account should operate with a two-directional exchange, recognising the remarkable influence of German theatre and culture on the professional theatre in London.[24] With a view to the surviving repertoire and play titles of the English comedians on the Continent, it should be noted that the plays were mostly handling thematic material that was local; the added value was the acting style rather than the stories.[25] This approach to repertoire and genre would offer an alternative historiographical perspective and place synchronic plays produced in the same cultural space within one subgenre. The Czech plays *Ruth* (1604) and *Samson* (1608) would be placed in the same genre as the English comedy *Esther and Haman* (1620).

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[23] To date, *Samson* and *Hester and Ahasuerus* have detailed accounts on the Lost Plays Database (www.lostplays.org).

[24] Pavel Drábek, 'English Comedy and Central European Marionette Drama: A Study in Theater Etymology', in Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson (eds), *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 185–7.

[25] I have argued this case in my chapter "'Why, sir, are there other heauens in other countries?": The English Comedy within a Transnational Network', forthcoming in Drábek and Katritzky (eds), *Transnational Connections in Early Modern Theatre*.

<B>*‘Pedellové ať nětco zalaškují / aneb Musæ ať nětco zaspíwají’ (‘Let the stewards make some fun or the musicians do some singing’): the interlude*</B>

One of the distinctive features of this notional subgenre is the use of comic interludes. The English comedians’ *Esther and Haman* interlaces biblical scenes with down-to-earth and rather scurrilous comedy, featuring the clown Hans, his Wife, their Neighbour, and their Son. Hans, surnamed Knapkäse, also enters the main plot in a comic scene with Haman (Act III), and alongside his Wife in the final scene of the play (Act IV) with the King Ahasverus. The two modes – tragic and comic – are kept separate throughout, with these two exceptions. This dramatic logic is in evidence in several other plays written in the English style – both in the 1620 collection *Englische Comedien und Tragedien* and in separate texts, such as the unnamed play from Gdańsk (Danzig), known as *Tiberius von Ferrara und Anabella von Mömpelgard*, which gives a number of comic interludes with stock routines.[26] The 1620 *Fortunatus* play is similarly interlaced with several non-specific stage directions indicating ‘Allhier agiret Pickelhering’ (‘Here acts Pickelhering’).[27]

Tesák Mošovský’s *Ruth* inserts interludes after individual acts, mostly calling for it in unspecific but commanding stage direction, such as ‘*Pedellové ať nětco zalaškují / aneb Musæ ať nětco zaspíwají*’ (‘Let the stewards make some fun or the musicians do some singing’, A6r) after Act I; or ‘*Musae canant aneb pedelové zašaškůjte*’ (‘Musicians to play or

[26] This play was probably related to the *Comedia de quodam Duce Farrari*, performed by Sackville and company in Strasbourg in 1597. For a discussion of the German manuscript in relation to the lost English play *A Comedy of a Duke of Ferrara*, see Matthew Steggle, ‘The “Comedy of a Duke of Ferrara” in 1598’, *Early Theatre* 19.2 (2016), pp. 139–56.

[27] Brauneck, *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne*, pp. 137, 146, 154, 159.

stewards, do some fooling about', D7v) after Act IV. There is no specified interlude after Act II, probably because the comic relief is provided by a scene of two lazy fieldworkers Elsa and Důra, rebuked by the Overseer (Šafář). At this point, Tesák Mošovský begins to integrate the additional comic material into the agenda of the play.[28] Elsa and Důra serve as an exemplary scene to illustrate what the Epilogus calls 'Najdeš deset povalečův, / lenochův a zahalečův, / z nichž by mnohý radče visel, / než by na dílo někam šel' ('You can find ten idlers, sluggards and lazybones, who would much rather hang than go and take up a job', C3v). In Act VI, there is an added scene of Ruth leaving Moab's threshing-floor at dawn and meeting Canthara the Old Woman Seducer (Baba Svodnice) and the Devil (Kornyfl). The Old Woman attempts to persuade Ruth to marry someone of her own station. When Ruth refuses and returns home to seek advice from Naomi, the Old Woman threatens and begins flirting with the Devil Kornyfl. Kornyfl calls for another two impish devils (comically called Kvasnička and Špetle), who play the pipes, accompanying the Old Woman and Kornyfl as they tumble and dance. Kornyfl makes another appearance somewhat later, trying to dissuade Ruth and Naomi from coming to Boas; citing the Old Woman, he also advises Ruth to marry someone of her own station. These clowning sequences, tangentially interacting with the main plot, may be seen to fulfil the dramatic function of interludes as comic relief – 'with a view to the present times'.

[FIGURE 12.3 HERE]

Even more characteristic instances can be found in the anonymous *Historia duchovní o Samsonovi silném a udatném někdy vůdci izrahelském: v způsob tragedie sepsaná* ('The Sacred History of Samson, once the strong and brave Israelite general: composed in the

[28] For an alternative discussion of the comic interludes in *Ruth* (1604), see Cesnaková-Michalcová, *Juraj Tesák Mošovský*, pp. 26–7.

fashion of a tragedy', Prague, 1608; see Figure 12.3). At the beginning of the play, under the extensive list of *dramatis personae*, a note is added: *Mezi tím přidány jsou pro kratochvíl pěkná Intermedia po každem Aktu* ('In between are added, to pass the time, nice interludes after each act', A4r) – a structural logic recognised from *Ruth*. There are several comic incidents in *Samson*: the Barber (Chirurgus), who is paid by Dalida to cut off seven hairs from Samson's head (H7v), or the gruesome comic Demorinus, who cracks jokes while plucking out Samson's eyes on stage (H8v). Apart from these brief moments, there are two identifiable interludes included in the printed text. One of them, known as *Helluo and Judaeus*, is a farcical episode that counterpoints the events in Act IV. Helluo is a clown figure, who has participated in Samson's wedding feast mingling with the Philistines. His first appearance is after Samson's monologue, when he has returned after killing and robbing thirty Ashkelonians to pay for the fraudulent lost bet (*pace* Judges 14:19). Samson's oath to murder the Philistines for their treason is comically counterpointed by the monologue from Helluo, who is wondering where to get money to buy himself more drink and respect from the tavern landlady. After another sequence of the main plot, Helluo returns to the stage with a club and forces a wealthy Jew (Judaeus) to buy the club from him for thirty ducats. After a brief monologue relating to the main plot, Judaeus takes Helluo to a Magistrate (Praetor) to retrieve his money. Subsequently, following a comic twist, the Magistrate sides with Helluo and proclaims the deal legal. This semi-integrated scene shifts the locale; Judaeus says in comically broken Czech that he was 'walking from Prague across the Wiederholz Forest' ('Šel jsem z Prahy přes ten Losfidrholec', F7r). Apparently, there was no intention of viewing the Helluo and Judaeus episode as anything more than a comic interlude with a stock trickster routine.[29]

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[29] Thomas Sackville's repertoire in Strasbourg in 1597 included *Comedy of a Rich Jew* (*Comoedia de Judaeo divite*). It has been speculated that this could have been

Attached to the edition of *Samson*, following the epilogue at the end of the printed text, is another comic interlude, known as *Polapená nevěra* ('Adultery discovered'). This four-scene playlet of 137 lines was probably intended to be interspersed among the individual acts of *Samson*, perhaps impromptu. Its plot is based on Boccaccio's novella from *The Decameron* (Day 7, Novella 6), one that survives in England in two sixteenth-century variants. The 1620 edition of John Florio's English translation gives the following argument:

> <EX>
> Madam *Isabella*, delighting in the company of her affected Friend, named *Lionello*, and she being likewise beloued by *Signior Lambertuccio*: At the same time as she had entertained *Lionello*, shee was also visited by *Lambertuccio*. Her Husband returning home in the very instant; she caused *Lambertuccio* to run forth with a drawne sword in his hand, and (by that means) made an excuse sufficient for *Lionello* to her husband. (*Decameron* 1620, K4v)</EX>

This story exists in a number of variants. In a simplified form it was in the stock of comic routines associated with Will Kemp, inherited allegedly from Richard Tarlton. A text called 'Kemp's Jig' was entered in the London Stationers' Register on 21 October 1595, but apparently was never published; it is assumed that it closely related to (if not identical with)

Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* or possibly Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer, *Theater in Böhmen*, p. 578). It could also have been Thomas Dekker's lost *The Jew of Venice* (Dekker had a stronger association with Germany, if there is any point in reinforcing probabilities in historiography). Equally and perhaps most readily, the play could also have been a variant of the comic interlude that survives as *Helluo and Judaeus*.

the most famous jig, *The Singing Simpkin*. Its surviving English text dates from six decades later, recorded in Robert Cox's *Actaeon and Diana* (1655/56).[30] Clegg and Skeaping trace the provenance of Kemp's jig, listing *Tales and Quicke Answers* (*c*. 1532) and *Mery Tales, Wittie Questions, and Quick Answeres* (1567), and the version associated with Richard Tarlton, which appeared in the anonymous *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie* (1590). Between 1595, when Kemp's jig was registered, and 1655, when Robert Cox's rendering of *The Singing Simpkin* was written down, there were other variants – published in German, Dutch, and later even in Swedish.[31] While Kemp's jig was not published in his lifetime, it entered with him into a simplified version as Falstaff's second episode in *A Most Pleasant and Excellent Conceited Comedy of Sir John Falstaff and the Merry Wives of Windsor* (*c.* 1597; first printed in 1602). Most importantly, the German version of Kemp's jig appeared in the 1620 anthology of *Engelische Comedien und Tragedien*. After the ten longer plays, the final section of the volume, known as *Singspiels*, is entitled *Nachfolgende Engelische Auffzüge / können nach Beliebung zwischen die* COMŒDIEN AGIRET *werden* ('The following English acts can be acted in between comedies as you like'). The Czech interlude known as *Polapená nevěra*, attached to the 1608 print of *Samson*, is also a variant of this jig.

Will Kemp had a presence in northern Germany from the late 1580s, and was known in England to be associated with the 'Emperour of Germany' (*The Return from Parnassus*, Part 2 [1600], 4.3). It may be that he thus contributed significantly to the presence and popularity of the jig connected with his name in the Central European space. However, it would be a simplification to assume a one-directional flow of influence in the case of this comic

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[30] Roger Clegg and Lucie Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin and Other Bawdy Jigs: Musical Comedy on the Shakespearean Stage. Scripts, Music and Context* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2014), pp. 100–3.

[31] Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin and Other Bawdy Jigs*, pp. 100–2.

interlude. Boccaccio's bawdy tales were traditional fare both in England and in Central Europe throughout the sixteenth century. The first Czech play based on the Old Testament, Konáš's *Judith* (1547), was published in a triptych, which included an allegorical play *Kniha o hořekování a naříkání Spravedlnosti* ('The Book of Laments and Complaints of Justice') and the first Czech secular play based on Boccaccio, *Hra pěknejch přípovídek* ('A Play of Witty Tales'). Both the English and Central European theatrical cultures had a rich repertory of Italianate farces from which to draw. I would propose that the combination of biblical stories, jarringly juxtaposed with bawdy farce, was another characteristic feature of Central European biblical drama of the early 1600s.

<B>'Nebo Syn Boží, jehož Samson Figuru nese, / Jest náš vůdce' ['For the Son of God, whose Figure Samson carries, is our leader']*: beyond the scripture</B>*

Both the dramatic techniques analysed above – the affective enactment of situations experienced by biblical characters (as evident in *Ruth*), and the juxtaposition of sublime, serious matter, with staunch, bawdy comedy (present in *Ruth*, *Samson*, and *Ester and Haman*) – remove the audience from a literal engagement with the scriptures. A more open approach was also used, allowing for a metaphorical or symbolic reading – not only a narrowly allegorical one in the medieval sense. This openness encouraged a move from blind dogma to knowing belief; *figurations* or figurative representations of characters, situations, and stories invited the audiences to a greater interpretive interaction as well as to a more holistic sensual enjoyment. Such dramatic developments went hand in hand with the changes in school drama – particularly of the German Jesuits, who mixed genres and styles, and incorporated practices

from the professional stage.[32] Contextually, Tesák Mošovský's *Ruth* and the anonymous *Samson* was interacting with its contemporaries in the theatre culture, both the professional travelling actors and the classical drama performed in colleges.

The dedication in *Samson* cites 'nice comedies and tragedies' ('pěkné Komedie a Tragedie', A2v) composed about illustrious men, '*Holofernes / Hannibal / Ptolomeus, Pirrhus, Iulius Cæsar, M. Antonius, Augustus, Severus, Theodosius, Alexander Magnus, &c.*' All this is done

<EX>

pro snadší vyrozumění a schopnost … / aby lidé v ně jako v nějaké Zrcadlo se vzhlédnouti / a bídu a nestálost života svého na tomto světě poznati / a k onomu Nebeskemu věčnemu a neskonalému Obcování strojiti se uměl.

('for an easier understanding and grasping … so that people can, as if in a kind of mirror, observe themselves, and know the misery and inconstancy of their lives in this world, so that they knew how to get ready for the celestial, eternal and unending dwelling'.) (*Samson* 1608, A2v) </EX>

This liberal, enlightened approach to the benefits of theatre and its figurative readings of exemplary tales anticipates later developments in early modern theatre culture.

Over the course of *Samson*, the playwright's dramatic skill increases. While the play starts as a relatively conventional biblical play, the construction of dialogue, interweaving of motifs, and redeployment of named characters gradually becomes more complex – until a

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[32] Pavel Drábek, 'Circulation: Aristocratic, Commercial, Religious, and Artistic Networks', in Robert Henke (ed.), *A Cultural History of Theatre. Volume 3: A Cultural History of Theatre in the Early Modern Age* (London: Methuen, 2017), pp. 102–4.

powerful conclusion is reached. Some of the fictitious names in the list of *dramatis personae* develop also into complex and individualised figures, such as Eulogus, Nemorinus, or Namazon. Similarly, one of the Philistines, listed as 'Dromo, a servant' ('Dromo servus'), appears first in Act IV with a comic monologue, and subsequently receives orders from Porphirius to enlist in the army and do errands (fetching Samson to dance like a bear). Dromo is the only one left alive at the end of the play, after Samson has destroyed the entire city and killed all the Philistines (Judges 16:30). This is not the merciful outcome and closure offered by the Old Testament (Judges 16:31). Thus the play ends on a bleak note, with Dromo left on stage, subversively overriding the biblical righteousness of Samson's slaying of the Philistines:

<EXV>

Dromo

Ach nastojte přenešťastného pádu/

Co, kde, a od koho mám bráti Radu.

Ach jak mnoho Palácův převráceno/

Ach co tu množství Lidu potlačeno.

Kde Knížata, kde znamenití Páni?

Kde šlechetné Panny, kde jiné Paní?

Kde Rytířstvo, kde Služebníci jejich?

Zhynuli, nezůstal ani jeden z nich.

Ach neníli nad čím lítost míti/

Kamenné Srdce musilo by býti/

Aby nad tímto pádem, nesplakalo/

A tak množství Lidu nelitovalo.

Já ze všech jediný sám jsem pozůstal/

A jedné že jsem před tím od stolu vstal.

Ten hle pád Města přišel nenadálý⁄

Ničehéhož toho jsme se nebáli.

Byli jsme tehdáž nejlépe veseli⁄

Ale překazil nám Posel kyselý.

Ach co sobě mám smutný počínati⁄

Ach nebohý, ba ach co mám dělati?

Otec a Máti tu mi se zasuli⁄

Přátelé mojí též všickni zhynuli.

Kamž se mám smutný Sirotek podíti⁄

Kde a u koho svou Hlavu skloniti.

Zde mi žádného není outočiště⁄

Aniž jest mi kde jaké stanoviště.

Jiného mi již nepozůstává nic⁄

Než abych odsud vytáhl někam pryč.

Jižť já kam mne Nohy ponesou půjdu

Vždy někde do ňákého Města důjdu.

An tu již hrozno až vlasy vstávají⁄

Tak se ta Břevna lámí a praskaji.

Půjdu odsud, nebudu plakati víc⁄

Neb vím že sobě tu nevypláči nic⁄

An vždy větčí hrůza mne obstupuje⁄

Mne na srdci mém svírá a sužuje.

Bůh tě žehnej ó má přemilá Vlasti⁄

Jdu preč abych nepadl do též pasti (Samson I3r–v)

(‘Ah behold the lamentable fall.

What, where and from whom take advice?

Ah how many palaces are destroyed,

Ah what hosts people slaughtered.

Where are prince, where worthy lords?

Where noble maids, where other ladies?

Where are the knights, where their servants?

Consumed, not one of them remained.

Ah is there nothing to pity?

A heart of stone it would have to be

Not to weep at this fall

And pity the many people.

Of all only I was left alive,

Only because I left the table just before.

This city fell unexpected,

We never feared anything.

We were at the height of our joy,

But were cut short by the sour messenger.

Ah what should I, sad man, do,

Ah pity my, oh alas, what shall I do?

My father and mother are buried down there,

And all my friends perished as well.

Where shall, sad orphan, go,

Where and with who lay my head?

There is no sanctuary here for me,

Nor any refuge whatsoever.

Nothing else remains for me

But to leave and go somewhere far away.

I shall go wherever my feet take me,

And will come once to some city.

For here the horror makes my hair stand on end,

Hearing the beams cracking and breaking.

I will go from here and will not weep,

For well I know weeping will help not succour me.

For the horror creeps more and more on me,

Clasping and tormenting my heart.

God give you blessing, my dearest homeland,

To avoid ruin I must leave and go away.')</EXV>

In the play's epilogue, the author of *Samson* thanks the audience for coming and explicates the story as a parable: 'Nebo Syn Boží, jehož Samson Figuru nese / Jest náš vůdce, a proti nepřátelům staví se' ('For the Son of God, whose *Figure* Samson carries, is our leader and confronts our enemies', I4v). This formulation explicitly calls for a *figurative*, quasi-allegorical application of this *Sacred History of Samson*. Combined with the dramatic techniques that forestall a literal reading, the play therefore presents a complex enactment of the scriptural parable. The complexity disables a simple allegorical reading or a direct application of an exemplum. In keeping with the elaborate early modern European drama, it calls for a continued engagement and contemplation of the figurative representation on the side of the audience. This *figurative turn* (as it might be termed), identified in Central

European biblical drama of the early 1600s, intensified over the course of the seventeenth century. It culminated in the high baroque style represented by genres as diverse as the opera, the popular and elaborate *Haupt- und Staatsaktionen*, or the popular and influential puppet theatre,[33] as well as in baroque iconography in painting, sculpture and architecture, with its complex allegories.[34]

The dramatic enactments of biblical drama and its theatrical accompaniments have enjoyed a remarkable longevity: the English comedians' *Esther and Haman* play was adopted by travelling puppeteers and remained in the repertoire until the mid-nineteenth century, alongside *Doctor Faustus*, *Don Juan*, *Jenovéfa*, and other plays.[35] A script of a folk play of Esther was recorded and published in the early 1900s (and was performed in the Terezín Ghetto during the Second World War). The Boccaccian interlude *Polapená nevěra* also entered folklore as *Salička*, an all-female charivari played during the carnival. This endurance bears witness not only to the plays' dramatic qualities but also to their interpretive, figurative

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[33] For a link between the English travelling actors and Central European puppet theatre, see Pavel Drábek, 'English Comedy and Central European Marionette Drama: A Study in Theater Etymology', pp. 177–96; and Drábek, '"His Motion is no Italian Motion but Made in London": The Early Modern Roots of Czech Puppet Theatre', in Christian M. Billing and Pavel Drábek (eds), *Czech Puppet Theatre in Global Contexts*, special issue, *Theatralia* 18.2 (Autumn 2015), pp. 7–18; and Bärbel Rudin, 'Das fahrende Volk. Puppenspiel als Metier: Nachrichten und Kommentare aus dem 17. und 18. Jahrhundert', *Kölner Geschichtsjournal* 1 (1976), pp. 2–11.

[34] For the authoritative resource on baroque iconography, see Albrecht Schöne's *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1964; 2nd edn, 1967).

[35] Drábek, 'English Comedy'. For a discussion of *Esther and Haman* as performed by the English comedians, see Chapter 13 below.<Endnote text>

openness that allows an affective enjoyment beyond a literal and contextually rooted theological application. While *Ruth* and *Samson* have held a markedly different place in the history of dramatic literature from that of the English comedians' *Ester and Haman*, they share many dramatic and theatrical features. Most remarkably, in contrast to their precursors among the extant biblical drama, they take significant licence with the foundational text of Christian belief. In allowing a more open reading and use of scripture, these plays represent a significant development in the history of Central European theatre in that they gave creative and intellectual freedom to the performer as well as to the spectator. No longer dogma to be recited verbatim, biblical stories became metaphorical mirrors refracting the human condition here and now. This interpretive openness – the indeterminacy of figurative expression – was a epistemic mode that invited playwrights and performers to engage in adaptation of traditional narratives 'for an easier understanding and grasping' and 'with a view to the present times'.