Pavel Drábek, University of Hull

"Samson Figuru nese": Biblical Plays between English Comedy, Czech Drama and the High Baroque Drama of

Early Modern Central Europe

Doſtaneli ſe též komu
 Někdy opuſtiti Wlaſt ſwu,
V niž Božý čeſt geho, ſláwa⁄
 Gak on chce mýt, ſe rozmáhá.
Pamatůg ſe nawrátit zas⁄
 A s Modláři nemnoho kwas.
S lidem Božým rád wždy trweg. (*Komedie Ruth* (1605), C2v-C3r)[1]

[V]šickní 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 particular liking and desire, have the habit of reading and reflecting on *comediae* written by pagan people.]

These are the words of Adam Tesák Brodský in the opening 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, admonishing 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; cited from Cesnaková-Michalcová 1973: 53).[2] Tesák's biblical drama did not need an apology for its genre. Plays 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 (Kopecký 1986: 8). The latter part of the 16th 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 (Kopecký 1986: 8–9). Apart from the many school dramas performed in colleges across the Czech lands, a number of plays were based on German models, such as the dramas of the 1560s to 1580s written by Pavel Kyrmezer (died 1589) or several other anonymous works.[3] The reason behind Tesák's *apologia* is likely to have sprung from a new theatrical context of the early 1600s. This essay analyses the specifics of the early seventeenth-century biblical play in Central Europe as (1) a fusion of transnational influences; (2) a specific theatrical mode interweaving heterogeneous plots; and (3) a mode on the verge between a literal and a figurative enactment of the Scriptures. A special focus is on three biblical plays, *Ruth* (1604) and *Samson* (1608) written in Czech, and *Comœdia von der Königin Esther und Hoffertigen Haman* (Comedy of Queen Esther and the Haughty Haman), published in the German 1620 collection of *Engelische Comedien und Tragedien* (edited in Brauneck 1970: 3–77).[4]

"*Comediæ* od pohanských lidí sepsané": Synchronicity and Similarity

"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*),[5] following an account of classical Roman plays performed for the pastime and instruction of all people. "*Terentius*, *Plautus* and others" are cited among the learned and wise people who spared no cost to bring forth comedies in support of virtues. The conventional religious moralism aside, it is worth observing what the secular theatrical context was for which these plays were created. Unlike the earlier biblical plays of the

[3] For Pavel Kyrmezer, see Cesnaková-Michalcová 1956, and Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 377–380.

[4] Jiří Tesák Mošovský's *Ruth* (1604), or *Komedie z knihy Zákona božího, jenž slove Ruth*, has been edited by Milena Cesnaková-Michalcová (Cesnaková-Michalcová 1973). For this essay, I have used both her edition and the original print. The anonymous *Samson* (1608) has not been published since 1608, with the exception of two interludes, *Helluo a Judaeus*, and *Polapená nevěra* (most recently in Kopecký 1986: 273–279, 281–289).

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

mid- to late sixteenth century, the extant texts of biblical plays published in the early 1600s were clearly written with a theatrical performance in mind. These play texts are not only presentations of scriptural wisdom and learning in a popular form but are obviously dramatic enactments of the situations and perspectives of the dramatic personas. As with so much theatre history, the awareness of the "size of all that's missing" presents a major corrective for the theatre historiographer.[6] Especially in the Czech context, the surviving evidence and the 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 several bouts of looting and destruction, followed by oppressive re-catholicisation of the Counter Reformation and a systematic elimination of deficient books – sanctioned by the several editions of the Catholic *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (1559–1966) as well as the infamous Jesuit Antonín Koniáš's *Clavis Haeresim claudens* (1729).[7] What has survived, escaping the inquisitor's fire, the widespread antitheatrical prejudice or simply the natural attrition of theatrical ephemera, is necessarily only a fraction of the early modern cultural wealth.

Theatre historiography has also prioritised a national prism – writing chapters on particular genres within a language culture or tracing foreign origins, sources and inspirations for national histories. Recent decades have seen a heightened critical interest in a transnational theatrical culture that complements the earlier perspectives.[8] Eschewing "any simple understanding of 'source'" (Masten 2007: 1334), transnational approaches to theatre offer complex interstices

---

[6] 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.

[7] Both the books are available in the Digital Repository of the Moravian Library at <http://www.digitalniknihovna.cz>.

[8] A transnational perspective of early modern theatre cultures has been explored by a number of historians, mostly associating around the Theater Without Borders research initiative (http://www.nyu.edu/projects/theaterwithoutborders/). Apart from the publications of individual authors, the collective has issued two edited volumes, *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (Ashgate 2008) and *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater* (Ashgate 2014), both edited by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson. Forthcoming is a volume *Transnational Connections in Early Modern Theatre*, edited by Pavel Drábek and M. A. Katritzky. The collective have also significantly shaped Volume 3 of *A Cultural History of Theatre: In the Early Modern Age* (Methuen 2017), edited by Robert Henke.

between surviving texts and historical records that problematise linear narratives or historiographic singularity. The two biblical plays in Czech analysed in this essay – in their theatrical form – more in common with the German-language biblical play of *Esther and Haman* than with their Czech predecessors. Moving well beyond a direct literal dialogic representation of the stories from the Old Testament, characteristic of the biblical drama of the 1540s to 1580s, these plays take a creative license, and the dramatic situation structurally overtakes fidelity to the letter. Jiří Tesák Mošovský, the author of *Komedie z knihy Zákona božího, jenž slove Ruth* (1604), was clearly aware of the 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 (Cesnaková-Michalcová in Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 689). Anxious of avoiding heresy, Adam painstakingly defends his father's dramatising strategies in the address "To the Pious Reader" (*K čtenáři pobožnému*):

> 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)[9]

The argument *with a view to the present times* is significant, I would argue, since it defends the freedoms taken in the play. These are not only the comical interludes, which will be discussed below, but also the suggestive, dramatic representation of the situations in which the personas find themselves. Cesnaková-Michalcová claims that "Das Stück enthält keine besondere dramatische Verwicklung; es ist eher als dialogisierte, konfliktfreie Erzählung angelegt" (Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 691).[10] I would argue that the dramatisation presents a

---

[9] "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."
[10] "The piece comprises no special dramatic elaboration; but rather, it is layed out as a dialogised narrative free of any conflict."

cathectic experience of the biblical events with a heightened sense of individuation – as could be

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

exile:

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. (*Ruth* (1604), A7r–A7v)

[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.]

Leaving aside the observation that there is a germ of dramatic conflict here, Naomi's speech

illustrates or "clarifies" what happens in the story by means of engaging affectively the audience's

empathy. This is far from the impersonal retellings of scriptural stories in the earlier biblical plays.

Tesák Mošovský *enacts* the events by means of fully fledged dramatic situations and distinct

personas. The dramatic form is used to convey the interaction between two stage figures in the

first place, and the structural dominant of the dialogue, rather than the narrative.[11] This

---

[11] For the theory of drama as interaction of stage figures, see Zich 1931 (namely, pp. 57ff.); for Roman Jakobson's
and Jan Mukařovský's concept of the structural dominant see Drozd and Kačer (in Drozd et al. 2016: 16), Veltruský
(in Drozd et al. 2016: 383), and Drábek et al. (in Drozd et al. 2016: 603–606).

significant shift in the 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 rooting in between the acts. Cesnaková-Michalcová sees it as "eine starke moralisierende Tendenz" (a strong moralising tendency; Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 691); instead, it could be seen as a religious corrective to the cathectic enactment of the play. The dramatic dialogue abandons a literal recitation of the Scripture in favour of an affective engagement; the Epilogus after each act, in a sermon-like explication (Tesák Mošovský was a Protestant priest), 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 Fig. 1). It was based on the Latin play *Sapientia Salomonis, drama comico-tragicum* by S. Birck (Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 335); 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 "through live reasons" (*Živými důvody*; A2r) – that is, through *embodied examples* – that spectators are moved to virtue:

> Neb aspoň Lidé když na to hleděli ∕
>   Co činili a neb propověděli,
> Tim obrazil jeden každý své Srdce (*Šalamoun* (1604), A3r)
>
> [For when people watched it,
>   Whatever was done [acted] or spoken,
> Through that everyone pictured their heart.]

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 the two 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* 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 since the late 1580s. The first indirect evidence of their presence in Prague comes from 1595 and 1598. The earliest confirmed visit dates from 21 October 1602, but the record suggest that "komedie enklická" was not a novelty (Drábek 2006: 499–500). 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 (Otto G. Schindler in Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 576). In August 1597, Sackville and his company performed in Strasburg and the surviving repertoire list suggests possible links. Among others, it comprises *Comoedia de Fausto*, *Komödie von einem Mann, den der Teufel betrog* (*Comoedia de quodam Viro, quem defraudavit Diabolus*; A comedy about a man snatched by the devil), which may well be a duplication of *Faustus*; *Der reiche Jude* (*Comoedia de Judaeo divite*), and importantly, *Comoedia de Judith* and *Comoedia de Esther* (Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 578). 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 Nabuchodonosor. Translated from German into Czech by Mikuláš Vrána Litomyšlský. Prague, 1605; see Fig. 2). This play has apparently slipped away from critical attention and nothing is known of its provenance beyond what the front page provides. Alongside the republished *Šalamoun*, the play in its dramatic form belongs to an earlier type. However, the web of evidence gets intertwined by connections that may be significant. Given the presence of Sackville and his repertoire in Prague, it is conceivable that the recent changes in the theatrical context, to which the dedications of *Ruth*, *Samson*, the revived *Šalamoun*, and possibly also the publication if *Judith* reacted, were connected with the English comedy.

The repertoire of the English comedians is a much contended issue. The traditional interpretation is that they brought along English plays and performed them "peeces and Patches", as the English traveller Fynes Moryson reported in 1592 (Moryson 1967: 304; see also Drábek and Katritzky 2016: 1530–1531). However, despite occasional similarities in title, there is little evidence that the influence was in the direction England-Germany, or always in this direction. 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.[12] 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 (see also Drábek 2014: 185–187). 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.[13] 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 of *Ruth* (1604) and *Samson* (1608) would be comparators with the English comedy of *Esther and Haman* (1620).

---

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

[13] I have argued this case in an essay "'Why, sir, are there other heauens in other countries?': The English Comedy within a Transnational Network", forthcoming in Pavel Drábek and M. A. Katritzky, eds. *Transnational Connections in Early Modern Theatre*.

"Pedellové ať' nětco zalaškují ∕ aneb Musæ ať' nětco zaspíwají": The Interlude

One of the distinctive features of this notional subgenre is the use of comic interludes. The English comedians' *Esther and Haman* interlaces the biblical scenes with down-to-earth and rather scurrilous comedy, featuring clown Hans, his Wife, their Son and their Neighbour. Hans, surnamed Knapkäse, also enters the main plot in a comical 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 – the tragic and the comical – are kept separately throughout, with the two exceptions that have no bearing on the main plot. This dramatic logic is in evidence in a number of 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 comical interludes with stock routines.[14] The 1620 *Fortunatus* play is similarly interlaced with several non-specific stage directions indicating "Allhier agiret Pickelhering" (Here acts Pickelhering; Brauneck 1970: 137, 146, 154, 159).

Tesák Mošovský's *Ruth* inserts interludes after individual acts, mostly in a permissive 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 stewards to jest; 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 field workers Elsa and Důra, rebuked by the Curator Greeve (or Overseer; Šafář). At this point, Tesák Mošovský starts integrating the additional comical material into the agenda of the play.[15] 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;

---

[14] This play was probably related to the *Comedia de quodam Duce Farrari*, performed by Sackville and company in Strasburg in 1597. For a discussion of the German manuscript in relation to the lost English play *A Comedy of a Duke of Ferrara*, see Steggle 2016.

[15] For an alternative discussion of the comical interludes in *Ruth* (1604), see Cesnaková-Michalcová 1973: 26–27.

C3v). In Act VI, there is an added scene of Ruth leaving Moab's threshingfloor at dawn, meeting Canthara the Old Woman Seducer (Baba Svodnice) and the Devil (Kornyfl). The Old Woman is trying to seduce Ruth to marry someone of her station. While Ruth refuses and goes home to take advice from Naomi, the Old Woman threatens, and starts flirting with the Devil Kornyfl. Kornyfl calls for another two impish devils (comically called Kvasnička and Špetle), who play on the pipes accompanying the Old Woman's and Kornyfl's tumbling and dancing. 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 station. These comical sequences, tangentially interacting with the main plot fulfil the dramatic function of interludes – "with a view to the present times".

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 fashion of a tragedy, Prague, 1608; see Fig. 3). At the start of the play, under the extensive *dramatis personae*, a note is given: "Mezi tím přidány jsou pro kratochvíl pěkná Intermedia po každem Aktu" (In between are added, for pastime, nice *intermedia* after each act; A4r) – a structural logic known from the above-mentioned plays. There are several comical incidents in *Samson* – such as the Barber (Chirurgus), who is paid by Dalida to cut off seven hairs from Samson's head (H7v), or the gruesome comic Demorinus, who is cracking jokes whilst plucking out Samson's eyes onstage (H8v). Apart from these brief moments, there are two identifiable interludes included in the print. One of them, known as *Helluo and Judaeus*, is a farcical episode that counterpoints the events in Act IV. Helluo is a clown figure; he has participated in Samson's wedding feasts among the Philistines. His first appearance is after Samson's monologue, when he has returned, having killed and robbed 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 Helluo's monologue, 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 comes onstage 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. After a comical 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 to see the Helluo and Judaeus episode as anything more than a comical interlude with a stock trickster routine.[16]

Attached to the edition of *Samson*, at the end of the print, continuously following the epilogue, is another comical interlude, known as *Polapená nevěra* (Adultery Revealed). This four-scene playlet of 137 lines was probably intended to be interspersed between 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 two 16th-century variants in England. The 1620 edition of John Florio's English translation gives the following argument:

> 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)

The story exists in a number of variants (one being included even in *The Decameron* 9.1). In a simplified form it was in the stock of comical routines associated with Will Kempe, inherited allegedly from Richard Tarlton. A text called "Kempe's Jig" was entered in the London Stationers' Register on 21 October 1595 but apparently was never published; it is assumed that it

---

[16] Thomas Sackville's repertoire in Strassburg of 1597 comprises a *Comedy of a Rich Jew* (*Comoedia de Judaeo divite*). It has been speculated that this could have been Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* or possibly Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 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 comical interlude that survives as *Helluo and Judaeus*.

was identical with, or an ancestor of the most famous jig, *The Singing Simpkin*. Its surviving

English text dates from six decades later, recorded in Robert Cox's *Actaeon and Diana* (1655/6;

Clegg and Skeaping 2014: 100–103). Clegg and Skeaping trace the provenance of Kempe's jig,

listing *Tales and Quicke Answers* (c1532) 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 Kempe's jig was registered, and 1655, when Robert

Cox's rendering of *The Singing Simpkin*, there were other variants: published in German, in Dutch,

and later even in Swedish (Clegg and Skeaping 2014: 100–102). While Kempe's jig was not

published in his lifetime, it entered with him in 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

(c1597; first printed in 1602). Very importantly, the German version of Kempe's jig appeared in

the 1620 anthology of *Engelische Comedien und Tragedien*. The final section of the volume, after the

ten longer plays, 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 it". The Czech interlude known as *Polapená nevěra*, attached to the

1608 print of *Samson*, is a variant of this jig too.

Will Kempe had had a presence in Northern Germany since the late 1580s and was known in

England as associated with the "Emperour of Germany" (*The Return from Parnassus* Part 2 (1600),

4.3), and it may be that he contributed significantly to the presence and popularity of the jig

connected with his name in the Central European space. However, it would be, again, a

simplification to assume a one-directional flow of influence in the case of this comical interlude.

Boccaccio's bawdy tales were traditional fare both in England and in Central Europe throughout

the sixteenth century. When the first Czech play based on the Old Testament, Konáš's *Judith*

(1547), was published, it was in a triptych, alongside 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 připovídek* (A Play of Witty Tales). Both the English and the

Central European theatrical cultures had a rich repertory of Italianate farces to draw on. I would propose that the combination of biblical stories, jarringly juxtaposed with bawdy farce was another characteristic feature of the subgenre of the Central European biblical play of the early 1600s.

"Nebo Syn Boží, jehož Samson Figuru nese, | Jest náš vůdce": Beyond the Scripture

Both the dramatic techniques analysed above – the affective enactment of situations experienced by biblical personas, and the frivolous juxtaposition of sublime, serious matter, with staunch, bawdy comedy – remove the spectator from a literal engagement with the Scriptures. A more open approach was 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 personas, situations and stories invited the audiences to a greater interpretive interaction and 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 (Drábek 2017: 102–104). Contextually, Tesák Mošovský's *Ruth* and the anonymous *Samson* emulated both the professional travelling actors and the classical drama performed in colleges.

There is a particular detail the author of *Samson* changes in the biblical account; the defeated Samson is humiliated by the Philistines:

> And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. (KJV Judges 16:25)

In the 1608 version, Porphirius and Achior have a much more concrete suggestion – one firmly rooted in early modern theatrical practice:

Porphirius
    Poďme a Hody sobě uděláme ⁄
    Samsona před sebe přivésti dáme ⁄
    Rozkážem k Tanci mu zapískati ⁄
    Musí nám tu co Nedvěd laškovati.

Achior
    Já svoluji ⁄ však do Lusthauzu poďme ⁄
    A tam čistou kratochvíl sobě sploďme. (*Samson* (1608), I1r–I1v)

[**Porphirius**
    Let us go and make a feast,
    We'll have Samson brought before us.
    We'll command pipes to be played to his dance,
    And he must make merry here like a bear.

Achior
    I agree, but let's go to the playhouse
    And let's make pastime for one another.]

Although unspecified by stage directions, the action is carried out on stage soon after. Such a seemingly minor change to the biblical story is significant. Here it is not only the dialogue that structurally dominates the events but also contemporary theatre practices that give shape to the enactment of the biblical story.

Cesnaková-Michalcová suggests that the dedication of *Ruth* was referring to the great Roman comediographers Plautus and Terence (Cesnaková-Michalcová 1973: 24; and in Jakubcová and Pernerstorfer 2014: 689). However, given the thematic material and the structural similarities, it is much more plausible that Tesák Mošovský was rivalling Senecan tragedy – *Medea* in particular, which shares a focus on female protagonists and addresses the topics of suffering and tribulations of exile among strangers. The dedication in *Samson* cites "pěkné Komedie a Tragedie" (nice comedies and tragedies; A2v) composed about illustrious men, "*Holofernes ⁄ Hannibal ⁄ Ptolomeus, Pirrhus, Iulius Cæsar, M. Antonius, Augustus, Severus, Theodosius, Alexander Magnus, &c.*" All this is done,

> 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 Obcováný strojiti se uměli. (*Samson* (1608), A2v)

[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.]

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

In the course of *Samson*, the playwright's dramatic skill can be seen growing. While the play starts as a relatively conventional biblical play, the construction of dialogue, the interweaving of motifs, and re-deployment of named personas gradually gets more complex – until a powerful conclusion. The *dramatis personae* list "Ten adults also present in this history, if you wish, added: their names are fictitious" (*Adolescentes decem. In Historia tamen sunt, Qui vult, addat Nomina eorum ficta, hæc sunt*; A4r). Some of these fictitious names develop into complex and individuated figures. Similarly, one of the Philistines, listed as "Dromo, a servant" (*Dromo servus*), appears first in Act IV with a comical monologue, not unlike that of Helluo a little later. Soon after, he gets orders from Porphirius and is mustering the army and goes on errands (fetching Samson to dance like a bear). Dromo is the only one left alive at the end of the play, when Samson has destroyed the entire city and killed all the Philistines (Judges 16:30). There is no merciful outcome and atonement that the Old Testament offers (Judges 16:31). The play ends on a bleak note, with Dromo left onstage, subversively overriding the biblical righteousness of Samson's slaying of the Philistines:

> **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. (I3r–I3v)

[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 faraway.
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.]

In the 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 bears, 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 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 continuous but ever edifying contemplation of the figurative representation.

The *figurative turn* (as it might be termed), identified here, in Central European biblical drama of the early 1600s, intensified over the course of the seventeenth century, culminating in the high baroque style represented by genres as diverse as the opera, the popular and motley *Haupt- und Staatsaktionen*, or the wide-spread puppet theatre;[17] as well as in the art of the baroque emblem and its complex allegories.[18] 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 on repertoire until the mid-nineteenth

---

[17] For a link between the English travelling actors and Central European puppet theatre, see Drábek 2014; Drábek 2015; and Rudin 1976.
[18] For the authoritative resource on the baroque emblem, see Albrecht Schone's *Emblematik and Drama im Zeitalter des Barock* (Stuttgart, 1964; 2nd ed., 1967).

century, alongside *Doctor Faustus*, *Don Juan*, *Jenovéfa* and other plays (Drábek 2014). A script of a folk play of Esther was recorded and published in the early 1900s (and was performed in the Terezín Ghetto during World War II). 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 openness that allows an affective enjoyment beyond a literal and contextually rooted theological application.

Bibliography

Brauneck, Manfred (1970). *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne. Erster Band: Engelische Comedien und Tragedien*. Volume 1. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Cesnaková-Michalcová, Milena (1956). *Divadelné hry Pavla Kyrmezera* [Pavel Kyrmezer's Theatre Plays]. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied.

Cesnaková-Michalcová, Milena (1973). *Juraj Tesák Mošovský: Komedie… Ruth*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied.

Clegg, Roger, and Lucie Skeaping (2014). *Singing Simpkin and Other Bawdy Jigs: Musical Comedy on the Shakespearean Stage. Scripts, Music & Context*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

Decameron (1620). [Giovanni Boccaccio] s.n. *The Decameron Containing An Hundred Pleasant Novels*. London, printed by Isaac Iaggard.

Dekker, Thomas (1625). *The Run-Away's Answer to a Book Called A Rod for Run-Aways*. N.p.

Drábek, Pavel (2006). "English Comedians in Prague, October 1602". *Notes and Queries* 53: 4: 499–500.

Drábek, Pavel (2014). "English Comedy and Central European Marionette Theatre". In Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson, eds. *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater*. Ashgate, 2014: 177–196.

Drábek, Pavel (2015). "'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* (= *Theatralia* 18.2, Autumn 2015): 7–18.

Drábek, Pavel (2017). "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*. Gen. eds. Christopher Balme and Tracy Davis. London: Methuen, 2017: 93–107.

Drábek, Pavel and M. A. Katritzky (2016). "Shakespearean Players in Early Modern Europe". In Bruce R. Smith, eds. *The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare*. Volume 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1527–1533.

Drozd, David, Tomáš Kačer and Don Sparling, eds. (2016). *Theatre Theory Reader: Prague School Writings*. Prague: Karolinum Press.

Jakubcová, Alena, and Matthias J. Pernerstorfer, eds. (2014). *Theater in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts. Ein Lexikon*. Prague: IDU and Verlag der ÖAW.

Judith (1605). Anonymous. *Komedie česká o ctné a šlechetné vdově Judith: A o Holofernovi hejtmanu krále Nabuchodonozora. Od Mikuláše Vrány Litomyšlského z německé řeči v česků přeložena* [A Czech comedy of the virtuous and noble widow Judith, and of Holofernes, the General of King Nabuchodonosor. Translated from German into Czech by Mikuláš Vrána Litomyšlský]. Prague, 1605.

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

Masten, Jeffrey (2007). Introduction to Thomas Middleton, William Rowley, and Thomas Dekker, *An/The Old Law*, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1331–1334.

Moryson, Fynes (1967). *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 edition. New York: Benjamin Blom.

Rudin, Bärbel (1976). "Das fahrende Volk. Puppenspiel als Metier: Nachrichten und Kommentare aus dem 17. und 18. Jahrhundert". *Kolner Geschichtsjournal* 1 (1976): 2–11.

Ruth (1604). Tesák Mošovský, Jiří (Juraj). *Komedie z Kníhy Zákona Božího, jenž slove Ruth* [A Comedy from a Book of God's Testament Named Ruth]. Prague, 1604.

Šalamoun (1604). Anonymous. *Komedia o Králi Šalamúnovi, z Třetích Kněh Královských vybraná, v Českém Jazyku na Rythmy složena, Létha M. D. LXXI. A nyní z novu Léhta M. DC. IV.* [A Comedy of King Solomon, selected from the Third Books of Kings, composed in rhythms in the Czech Tongue, in the year MDLXXI, and newly in the year MDCIV]. Prague, 1604.

Samson (1608). Anonymous. *Historia Duchovní o Samsonovi silném a udatném někdy Vůdci Izrahelském: v spůsob Tragedie sepsaná/ a vzatá z Kněh Iudicum od Kapitoly třinácté až do sedmnácté* [A Sacred History of Samson, once the strong and brave Israelite general: composed in the fashion of a tragedy and taken from the Books *Iudicum* from chapter thirteen up to seventeen]. Prague, 1608.

Steggle, Matthew (2016). "The 'Comedy of a Duke of Ferrara' in 1598". *Early Theatre* 19: 2 (2016): 139–156.

Zich, Otakar (1931). *Estetika dramatického umění* [The Aesthetic of Dramatic Art]. Prague: Melantrich.