

“English In Setting and In Sentiment”: The Reworking of Continental Playtexts In Restoration Theatre

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Abstract

The insularity of Great Britain has always represented a *lime*, a threshold, in the dual sense of the term: on the one hand, it has functioned as a barrier; on the other, it has served as an element that has prompted and enabled forms of permeability, exchange, and hybridization. It is along this second trajectory that the present paper seeks to explore the relationship that Restoration comedy establishes with the works of Molière, in terms of both hypotextuality and hypertextuality. Indeed, late seventeenth-century English drama constitutes one of the most significant—albeit one of the least studied—examples of literary and cultural mediation, both endogamous and exogamous, within the British context. This mediation came to define specific modes of reusing the words of others, modes which would persist at least until the mid-eighteenth century. In this regard, by limiting the analysis to the years of Charles II’s reign (1660–1685), one can assert that the staging of French scripts was based on a careful adaptation of those texts to the tastes, orientations, and cultural tendencies of the receiving society. This process of “Anglicization,” as evidenced by the circulation of Molière’s plays, affected settings, elements of material culture, character names, and theatrical types; it unfolded through various strategies of appropriation—ranging from reworking to palimpsest, from translation to adaptation—that were soon codified by playwrights such as Davenant, Shadwell, Dryden, and Medbourne. The outcome was a systematic, yet deliberately oriented, recontextualization and rewriting of the original model.

Keywords: Adaptation, Cultural and Literary Mediation, Molière, Restoration Drama, Translation