

CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN THE ENGLISH RESTORATION

DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

After the dominance of the Puritan worldview which had been imposed on the English for 18 years, Restoration of monarchy in 1660 and the return of the “merry king”, political and religious ideologies, social values, and linguistic culture of England underwent crucial changes. The court’s self-presentation was realized through the development of cultural production. During the English Restoration theatre as one of the most popular leisure activities and almost a daily practice of “royalty, quality, gallants, citizens and whores” became a cultural institution through which conceptualization in the new epoch took place, a tool with the help of which new culture was reiterated and established. In this article, I argue that conceptualization of the new models of behavior was initiated and performed by the cultural group of ‘Court Wits’, who formed a circle of Charles II’s courtiers and close friends. The Wits’ group controlled and influenced the populace, acted in order to represent the power on stage and to manipulate the interpretation of reality. Meaning is always a phenomenon and product of culture. During the English Restoration the Wits produced and established new meanings and representations of the epoch, creating the image of a stable and splendid reign. The emphasis on what is called the ‘staging’ or ‘performance’ of monarchy was an important indicator of royal ambitions during the English Restoration. The aim of the article is to reveal the identities of the English Restoration in the dramatic works of the period and their influence of Restoration culture. Based on the methods of discourse analysis, cognitive-discursive interpretation and the examples elicited from the Restoration plays I state, that Restoration discourse brings to live on the stage brand new and transformed English identities both male: an English Restoration libertine-aristocrat, a fop and female: servants and bawds, con-artist teams, widows and freelancers, which become the role models and bearers of new cultural values. I substantiate, that these identities reveal the following cultural shifts: English people’s reevaluation of social roles of man and woman, husband and wife in a society in transition from one ideological system to another; a woman’s struggle to obtain the right to choose a marriage partner; financial and sexual independence of women; superiority of women over men in certain situations; sexual transgression of both sexes.

Keywords: English Restoration, discourse, identity, conceptualization.

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