

Abstracts

Day 1 – May 16, 2014

Paul Wilson

Spectator- and Reader-Response of V. Havel in USA and Canada

This year we will celebrate 25th anniversary of the fall of communism in the Central and Eastern Europe. By accident, this anniversary collides with the 50th anniversary of the first production of one of the most popular of Havel's plays – Memorandum. In my presentation I would like to ponder the great changes which both Czech Republic and the Western world experienced over the last several decades. I will be looking at these changes through the lenses of stage productions of Memorandum on world stages. The play, which seems to be strongly situated in the historical context of the reformed communism of the 1960s, is paradoxically the most popular play today than ever before, especially in the English-speaking countries, which have no experience with totalitarian regime. In my presentation I will focus on two recent productions of Memorandum in Toronto and Baltimore.

Inna Bezrukova, Sergej Skorvid

Politician and Playwright Václav Havel in Russia, or the Increased Difficulty of Translation

In Soviet Union V. Havel was firstly known as a co-initiator of the Charter 77 and later on as a politician. One of the first Havel's publications in Russian was a selection of excerpts from Dálkový výslech, which were translated by Inna Bezrukova and published in the Moscow democratic journal Literární noviny in December 1989. It was not until 1990 when the first anthology of Havel's plays and typographic poetry (Anticodes) was released under the title Increased Difficulty of Concentration. The publication was prepared by a number of translators, including the authors of this presentation, which will be in a way a personal remembering of the times in which Havel's work was gradually entering Russia. The paper will examine the difficulties with translations of Havel's plays, as well as essays (the second anthology in Russian called Mountain Hotel, 2000). In conclusion, we will look at the yet problematic and rather unsuccessful production history of Havel's plays in Russia.

Andrzej Jagodzinski

Václav Havel's Reception in Poland

Reception of Václav Havel's dramatic work in Poland corresponds to various historical changes of Poland had experienced over the last five decades. The author's debut in December 1968 – The Increased Difficulty of Concentration – was realized in strange times: a few months after the August occupation of Czechoslovakia and brutal suppression of Polish students' revolt in March 1968. Václav Havel had to disappear from the official culture of "comrade country," but, ironically enough, not for such a long time as it was in his mother country. The paper will look at the conditions under which three Vanek plays were staged at the Warsaw Teatr Powszechny in December 1981 and the political scandals which accompanied its restaging in February 1989. It will also examine productions presented by independent theatres and peculiarities which accompanied their performances. In the end, I will discuss Havel's play which foreshadowed events in Poland and finally the reception of his work after 1989

Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz

Troubles with Translations and the Encounter with Havel's Plays

Havel's plays are iconoclastic texts as they are original in the best sense of the word. Their major theme is language which naturally poses obvious troubles for translators. I selected out scenes from a few plays – Memorandum (transl. Paul Wilson), one Vaněk one-act play and Temptation. I will focus on the semantic shifts and transformations of characters that occur while the texts are being transposed to a different linguistic context and culture. I will try to point out what play loses when text departs from the original language, but also what it might gain when it encounters new context and culture. One is certain: I will raise more questions than answers. After all, questions were for Havel and his characters frequently more interesting than answers.

Joachim Bruss

The First Experience with Translating Havel's Plays, Reception of the Productions in Vienna, Spectator- and Reader-Response

Some reflections regarding the translations of Havel's plays and circumstances under which they were staged in the German-speaking world.

Dan Mircea Duta

Reception of Václav Havel and his Work in Post-Communist Romania

Romanian revolution in December 1989 was the most radical and bloody one in the whole communist bloc and as such brought along great expectations among which belonged a hope to encounter work of authors persecuted by communist censorship. Václav Havel was one of them. However, the neo-communist Front of National Salvation didn't have a liking for anti-communist personalities and moral authorities. The tables have turned when right-wing party got into power in 1996. Ever since, V. Havel became „officially“ popular authority. The paper will map out Havel's controversial position in post-revolutionary Romania.

Anna Freimanová

Unnormalized Theatre

The presentation will examine four productions of Havel's plays, directed by Andrej Krobot and performed by his Divadlo na tahu. These performances were produced during the period in which Havel's plays were banned from the Czechoslovakian theatre. Krob's productions include The Beggar's Opera in Horní Počernice (1975), stage reading of Audience in the barn of Krob's cabin (1977), videoproduction of Temptation with Ivan Havel in the title role (1986) and the production of one-act play Mistake, recorded for the samizdat Original Videojournal (1988). I will closely look at the performances and the situation and conditions in/under which the plays were staged and under which were perceived by the audience, consisting of close circle of friends and alternative subculture individuals. Each production brought – due to the difficult circumstances – original approach. Moreover, performed in the times in which a part of Czechoslovakian culture was locked in the dissident ghettos, each production carried not only a specific social meaning, but also a personal one both for persecuted Václav Havel and the circle around Divadlo na tahu and their sympathizers.

Elżbieta Zimna

“Havel to Wawel”, or the Polish Superficiality

After 1989, Poland admired Václav Havel, even though as a playwright he was rather misunderstood. Productions of his plays were mostly naturalistic, psychological and pathetic, only in some meaningful productions a few interpretative surprises emerged which deserve our attention. Poles understand Havel’s essays better, and e.g. Maria Janion or Adam Michnik were very much influenced by them. No one remembers who used the phrase „Havel to Wawel first. Poles wanted to have a national leader similar to Havel, the king who could be admired although no one tries to understand him. In the presentation, I will examine the story of Havel’s plays in Poland from the 1960s to nowadays.

Annalisa Cosentino

Uscire di scena (Leaving)

The paper focuses on Václav Havel’s play Leaving and discusses two aspects of its Italian reception. First of all I will focus on my translation of the play. I will not present an assessment of my own translation of Havel’s play, but I will try to explain a) the direction I followed in interpreting the meaning of the work and b) the reasons of some choices I made. Then, I will switch attention to the stage reading of the play by Paolo Fagiolo and Andrea Gulli who performed four times. In this part of the paper the stage adaptation of the play by Paolo Fagiolo is examined, taking the dramaturgy for the reading as the basis for the analysis.

Carol Rocamora & Tomáš Rychetský

Havel Rediscovered

In our presentation we will talk about the following challenges of translating Havel: Havel’s influences: Theatre of the Absurd, Beckett & Ionesco and Havel’s Czech absurdism. – The challenge of translating Havelian humor in English. – The challenge of translating specific Czech colloquialisms in English. – The challenge of translating specific Czech references to events/places. – The challenge of rendering character names in English. – The challenge of preserving the special quality of the Vanek Plays in English, and the character of Vanek himself.

Cyörgy Varga

Havel’s Journey to Hungarian Readers

The presentation, whose non-original title is a reduced title of Endre Bojtár’s interesting article “Václav Havel’s Troubled Journey to Hungarian Readers and Spectators”, will focus on the complicated story of Havel’s work in Hungary from the unrealized premiere of the Garden Party up until 1990s.

Day 2 – May 17, 2014

Mari Taneichi

Havel's Plays in Japan – Past, present and future

The purpose of this thesis is to focus on the reception of V. Havel's plays and their influence on theatre people within a social and theatrical context in Japan. First, we pay attention to the previous study of Havel in Japan. There are stage productions, translations of plays and essays and theses, which bring up general image of Havel in Japan. Then we analyze two Havel's stage productions in Japan, which were Prague 1975 (Audience and Private View), staged in 1982 at Litterature Theatre, and Memorandum staged in 1995 at the same theatre. Lastly, we refer to possibility of his plays in future society without him or after his death. On March 11, 2011, huge earthquake struck the eastern part of Japan. After the earthquake disaster area of absurd provoked many theatre people to re-think "theatre" and its nature. The paper suggests certain clue for above questions from Havel's plays.

Martina Petranović

Havel's Plays in Croatian Theatre

Vaclav Havel's plays were performed in Croatia from 1960s till today, usually quite soon after their world opening nights. The plays performed in Croatia include The Garden Party, The Memorandum, Unveiling, Audience, Protest, Largo desolato, Temptation, Redevelopment, The Beggar's Opera, and Leaving, and some of them were performed on more than one occasion. They were mostly performed in Zagreb, but they were also staged in Split, Rijeka and Dubrovnik, and were directed by prominent Croatian stage directors such as Radovan Marčić, Božidar Violić, Vlatko Perković, Miro Medimorec, as well as by J. Menzel and H. Burešová. In my paper, I would like to concentrate on individual productions, their interpretative values and characteristics, as well as their reception and political context, and finally on their reflections in Croatian theatre and playwriting.

Pirrko Koski

Václav Havel and the Modes of the Nordic Theatre

When the Tampere Workers' Theatre (TTT) staged the Nordic premiere of Václav Havel's The Garden Party (Puutarhjuhla; Záhradni slavnost) in 1966, the author was already well-known in the Nordic countries. In the following years, Havel's plays were produced all over the Nordic countries. It was generally believed that a truly significant dramatist had emerged. The events of the author's home country gave Havel a political label that gradually grew stronger and changed in the course of decades. Václav Havel and the Nordic Theatrical Modes examines Havel's standing in the Nordic countries through three windows: (1) the time before and right after the Prague Spring, (2) the last years of the 1970s and first years of the 1980s, when the author's works had been banned in his home country and it was general knowledge that he was in prison and (3) the time of great societal change at the turn of the 1990s.

Monika Zgustová

Václav Havel on the Translations of his Plays

In 1991, I met Václav Havel. It happened during his official visit to Barcelona, where I used to work as an interpreter. Upon our meeting, Havel let everything go and talked to his interpreter and translator into Spanish and Catalan about translations of his work. It was a very important moment for me: author advised me how to translate his work and what to avoid. He asked me how I had translated Letters to Olga, which were written in the style which squeezed through the prison censorship but still maintained qualities understandable to reader. Then I have translated several Havel's plays. The major problem was to translate communist gibberish into the language which never experienced such vocabulary. Another question was: how to cope with words such as spirit, spirituality, sacred etc., which have in the country with an infamous tradition of Inquisition strong religious meaning? My presentation will be about all these issues.

Libor Vodička

Havel's Memorandum and the Possibilities of Interpretation

Memorandum is, together with Garden Party, Václav Havel's key drama which demonstrates the mechanization of humans. After the mechanism of phrases in the Garden Party, Havel places in the centre of Memorandum a man ruled by artificial synthetic language whose original purpose was to improve and give precision to human communication. However, the result is bigger and bigger destruction of human relations and alienation. Satirical potential of this parable lost its topicality, nonetheless the dystopic aspects still remain, as well as the themes of rise and fall of power, history and progress, mechanism that causes total egotistic alienation of individual from community in which s/he lives; detachment from human interaction, emotions and at the end from her/himself. The presentation will discuss stage adaptations of Havel's Memorandum which from its first premiere in 1965 received several different stage productions.

Veronika Ambros

Václav Havel's Poetics of Absence in the Garden Party

The invitation to this gathering prompted me to revisit some previous readings of Havel's first performed play and consider an aspect, which though ubiquitous in Havel's work to my knowledge has not attracted much scholarly attention, namely his poetics of absence. Scattered throughout many secondary sources are merely hints mostly with respect to the characters such as "the conception of modern man's identity as a vacuum"; (Trensky) as "dramatic non-persons" (Just), which are akin to Elinor Fuchs notion of "The Death of a Character." Havel's poetics of absence, however, goes beyond the disintegration of the protagonist. Using the notion of "minus priem" (minus device) coined by Yuri Lotman I will explore other aspect of the concept of absence in this work.

Sam Walters

Notes from a Far Away Country

My theatre has been involved with 16 productions of 12 of Havel's plays and worked with 7 translators (translations) over 34 years. Has there been a difference? Does one want a translator or a playwright? Why do we think we need new translations of foreign plays every 10/15 years? I shall try to discuss the difference between translations, versions and adaptations! I hope to look at Vera Blackwell's translation of *The Garden Party* (which I have not done) and compare it with Jan Novak's version. Then to discuss whether there is a need to change, adapt or anglicise in order to make a play accessible. To ask whether the perceived idea that Havel is absurdist is a hindrance to productions in the UK and the US? I shall discuss the reception here in London of the *Vanek* plays and *The Memorandum* in 1977, *Redevelopment* in 1990 and of *Leaving* in 2008 and *The Conspirators* in 2011. The basic thrust of my paper will be that we want to see/hear Havel's plays as he wrote them. We do not want them adapted or altered for UK consumption. Our desire is to enter his world and to do so to enrich ourselves. I shall try to explain why perhaps he is not as popular and produced a playwright as in my eyes he ought to be. In January 1990 I was asked to write an article for the *Daily Telegraph* entitled *How good are the President's plays?* And in December 2011, after his death, I was asked to write a piece for the *Independent* entitled *Why don't more British theatres put on Vaclav Havel's plays?* He is a writer of international stature whose extraordinary political life must not be allowed to over shadow his greatness as a playwright.

Vijay Padaki

Salaam Václav

What can the experience of a European-Bohemian society mean to a South Asian culture? In modern history there are numerous instances of post-colonial transition in which a society is determined to shake off an imposed set of values and societal norms and rediscover its roots. India and the Czech Republic have many things in common in such a transition, although vastly different in size and scale of the canvas and the complexity of the endeavor. The work of Vaclav Havel has generally been regarded as relating mainly to a broadly European sensibility, because of the shared historical context in which he lived and found his calling. Yet, there are recurring themes in his plays that strike a chord immediately among readers and viewers everywhere – the obfuscation in bureaucratic systems, the self-imposed divide between the working class and the intelligentsia, the undercurrent need for power, the menace in the power once acquired, the blinkered world view of the common man, and so on. A recent theatre festival in Bangalore explored the relevance of the work of Havel to the Indian socio-political context. The festival included Indian adaptations of Havel's short plays, a dramatized seminar, a film screening and a reading of an original short story as a tribute to Havel.

Petr Oslzly

On the Czech and International Version of Theatre Goose on the String's Stage Collage of the Circus Havel

The presentation will discuss stage collage of Václav Havel's plays and other texts called *Circus Havel* (prem. 7/11, 2008, *Theatre Goose on the String*). I will describe the way we, Vladimír Morávek and Petr Oslzly, co-created the script and the input of Václav Havel. I will also characterize the final form of the production and its transformations. In the second part of the paper, I will discuss international version of *Circus Havel – Le Cirque Havel*, which came to live as a result of the collaboration between *Theatre Goose on the String* with the French *Villeneuve en scène* (2012). I will describe the preparatory phases which took place in Brno and in France. Special attention will be paid to changes of the Czech script into the multi-lingual form, transposition of the spatial layout from the black box theatre space into the big circus tent, and responses of the international audience. In the end, I will talk about the *Hommage à Václav Havel*, realized in co-operation with *Villeneuve an scène* and *Festival d'Avignon* (July 15–16, 2012). The reactions to the event demonstrate the topicality of Václav Havel's legacy.

Martin Porubjak
Havel in Slovakia

Václav Havel's plays entered Slovakian stage soon after their Czech premieres: Slovakian National Theatre in Bratislava (SNT) produced the Garden Party (1964) and Memorandum (1966). The director of the productions – Peter Mikulík – focused in this period on the modern dramaturgy and staged playwrights whose plays were earlier classified as unacceptable for the regime (Vitrac, Mrožek, Durrenmatt, Schisgal, Beckett, Pinter). After the August occupation of Czechoslovakia Václav Havel and his work was banned from the official cultural life for more than twenty years. Up until 1968, his plays received very limited attention in Slovakia: one production of the Garden Party at SNT and three productions of Memorandum (SNT, Regional Theatre in Nitra a Theatre of Slovakian Uprising in Martin). The situation radically changed after the Velvet Revolution when we can talk about the „boom of Havel“: in 1990, his plays received nine premieres. However, it was not virtually until 2008 when his last play Leaving was staged at the SNT.

Lenka Jungmannová
Václav Havel's Plays and Intertextuality

The paper will explore intertextuality of Václav Havel's plays. It will discuss intertextual connections within his own work (namely Garden Party, Increased Difficulty of Concentration and Largo Desolato), as well as within the wider context of his plays related to the works of other playwright (Beggar's Opera, Temptation and especially Vanek plays).

Vladimír Just
Who is Vilém Rieger?

The presentation reflects various interpretations – misinterpretations – of typical Havel's protagonist. It will take into account several Czech (Radok–Tříška in Prague, Krob–Beseda, Pech in Hradec Králové, Glaser–Šesták in České Budějovice) and Slovak (Vajdička–Labuda in Bratislava) productions of Leaving and their critical reception.