

## Introduction to Pepys' Diary

We asked everyone involved in the project to create a diary in which they could not only reflect on the performances they had seen, but also on the wider world and how the performances they had seen might impact the public sphere.

The goal was to intertwine ideas about life, theatre, writing, and public debate in order for the participants to understand that performances actually inhabit a public space and that there is no way to escape the spectator's subjectivity.

From 1660 until 1669, Samuel Pepys, an administrator of the English navy and a [Member of Parliament](#), maintained a private diary. This is considered to be one of the most illuminating primary sources for the history of his time, in which the author mixed personal reflections with acute observations. Through his diary, we can learn about the Great Plague of London, the Second Dutch War, and the Great Fire of London – and we also have a glimpse of the theatre from his time. Through his colourful descriptions of venues, people, politics, and performances we can revive the atmosphere and fanfare of Restoration Theatre. In effect, Pepys's diary is considered to be one of the early examples of theatre criticism.

You can read a short extract of it here:

### **Pepys' Diary**

*Monday, 29 September 1662 (Michaelmas Day)*

*This day my oaths for drinking of wine and going to plays are out, and so I do resolve to take a liberty today, and then to fall to them again. Up and by coach to White Hall, in my way taking up Mr. Moore, and walked with him, talking a good while about business, in St. James's Park, and there left him, and to Mr. Coventry's, and so with him and Sir W. Pen up to the Duke, where the King came also and staid till the Duke was ready. It being Collarday, we had no time to talk with him about any business. They went out together. So we parted, and in the park Mr. Cooke by appointment met me, to whom I did give my thoughts concerning Tom's match and their journey tomorrow, and did carry him by water to Tom's, and there taking up my wife, maid, dog, and him, did carry them home, where my wife is much pleased with my house, and so am I fully. I sent for some dinner and there dined, Mrs. Margaret Pen being by, to whom I had spoken to go along with us to a play this afternoon, and then to the King's Theatre, where we saw "Midsummer's Night's Dream," which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure.*

*Thence set my wife down at Madam Turner's, and so by coach home, and having delivered Pegg Pen to her father safe, went home, where I find Mr. Deane, of Woolwich, hath sent me the modell he had promised me; but it so far exceeds my*

*expectations, that I am sorry almost he should make such a present to no greater a person; but I am exceeding glad of it, and shall study to do him a courtesy for it. So, to my office and wrote a letter to Tom's mistress's mother to send by Cooke tomorrow. Then came Mr. Moore thinking to have looked over the business of my Brampton papers against the Court, but my mind was so full of other matters (as it is my nature when I have been a good while from a business, that I have almost forgot it, I am loth to come to it again) that I could not set upon it, and so he and I past the evening away in discourse, and to my lodgings and to bed.*

**Samuel Pepys**