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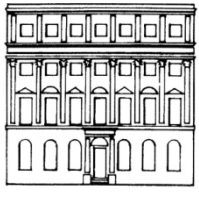

BULLETIN

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Tobias Becker:
Emotional Journeys: Itinerant Theatres, Audiences, and Adaptation in the Long Nineteenth Century
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Emotional Journeys: Itinerant Theatres, Audiences, and Adaptation in the Long Nineteenth Century. Conference held at the German Historical Institute London, 19–20 Oct 2015. Conveners: Kedar Kulkarni (Max Planck Institute for Human Development) and Tobias Becker (GHIL).

The word 'theatre' often conjures up the image of a building. For most people this image probably harks back to the nineteenth century, the era of monumental opera houses and lush bourgeois theatres with well-lit stages, circles of plush red chairs, painted plaster, ceiling-carrying caryatids, and colourful curtains. And no wonder, the nineteenth century was *the* century of theatre-building. No other period saw the constuction of more playhouses, many of which are still in use around the world. Yet this is only half the story, as the nineteenth century was also the century of itinerant theatres. Individual actors as well as touring troupes of all sizes, origins, and qualities took theatrical entertainment from metropolitan centres to the provinces and the edges of colonial empires. Some of these troupes played in large, purpose-built theatres on the European model; others made do with any public building or space available to them.

In the history of theatre, however, these theatre companies are rarely more than a footnote. Some reasons for this are obvious: without headquarters of their own, touring theatres left few sources. Articles in local newspapers, requiring theatre historians to follow the tracks of their subjects, are often the only material available. Methodologically, theatre history is still dominated by the metropolis and the nation-state. As long as scholars work on English, French, and German theatre and drama, a theatre that transcends the borders of nation, language, and culture easily escapes their view. However, this is exactly what makes the travelling theatre so interesting—not only for theatre history, but for global history as well.

This idea, theatre history as global history, provided the starting point for the workshop 'Emotional Journeys: Itinerant Theatres, Audiences, and Adaptation in the Long Nineteenth Century', which was held at the German Historical Institute in October 2015. The

The full programme can be found under 'Events and Conferences' on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

workshop asked what kinds of theatres—troupes, actors, genres, plays, and so on—travelled, why and where they travelled, and how travelling affected their repertoire, their performances, and their outlook on the world. It explored questions of production (management, transport), reception (audiences), and representation (text and performance). The workshop was particularly interested in issues of translation and adaptation, and the role of emotions in this context. Like any art, theatre entertains by appealing to emotions. Yet did humour, suspense, melodrama translate? How did touring companies adapt their repertoires? And if they did not, did they expect their audiences to comprehend their plots, idioms, and genres?

The relationship between mobility, performance, and emotions was the subject of the first paper, 'Idle Tears, Hollow Laughter, and Cultural Containment: English-Speaking Performers in India and Australia in the Late Nineteenth Century' by Jim Davis (Coventry). After sketching out general social and technological changes in the nineteenth century which led to an increase in mobility, Davis concentrated on two actor–managers, Daniel Bandmann and J. L. Toole, both of whom worked in India, though their experiences were different. While Bandmann saw the Hindu community as an ideal audience for Shakespeare (simultaneously infantilizing it), Toole, lauded as the foremost British comedian of his time, did not get a single giggle when performing to Indian schoolchildren, because they were taught not to laugh at their imperial overlords.

Like Bandmann and Toole, many actors were used to travelling, but did so in a bubble. Carrying with them preconceived national and racial stereotypes, most of them did not engage with audiences in the places they visited. This was apparent from Ute Sonnleitner's (Graz) paper on 'National Art and Transnational Artists: Actors' Perceptions of Mobility, Art, and Audiences'. Like Davis, Sonnleitner looked at two actors with thoroughly cosmopolitan careers: Franziska Ellmenreich and Ludwig Barnay. Both travelled widely, yet complained in their memoirs of the lack of patriotism among German migrant communities abroad. Similarly, Berenika Szymanski-Düll's (Munich) paper, 'Touring Theatre and the Difficulty of Language in the Nineteenth Century', looked at two Polish actors who performed in the United States, Bogumil Dawison and Helena Modrzejewska.

One group of travelling actors truly unconstrained by national borders were the Jewish troupes, the subject of Debra Caplan's (New

York) paper, 'Jewish Theatre, Global Theater: Yiddish Theatre's Aesthetics of Itinerancy in the Long Nineteenth Century'. The paper concentrated on one specific group, the Hirschbein troupe, whose plays were inspired by the European art theatre. The Hirschbein troupe aimed to create a 'high' and respectable Yiddish theatre. Yet despite starting out in a promising manner, it never achieved the critical success Hirschbein had hoped for. Rasha Nicholson's (Munich) paper, 'Eastward Success and Westward Failure: The Professionalization, Democratization, and Expansion of the Parsi Theatre', similarly dealt with issues of success and failure. Travelling Parsi theatre companies achieved popularity all over India and South-East Asia, but found little favour in London.

How an audience received a touring company often had less to do with the touring actors and their performances than with local conditions and conflicts. This became particularly clear in Marlis Schweitzer's (Toronto) paper, '"Too much tragedy in real life": Jean Margaret Davenport in the West Indies, 1840–1841'. Schweitzer understood the travelling theatre as a bridge between the colony and the homeland. However, not everyone was ready to cross this bridge. When the child performer Jean Margaret Davenport performed in the West Indies, her visit, far from building bridges, revealed local frictions.

Sometimes theatre acted as a bridge even after a colony had gained independence, as was shown by Kristen McCleary's (Harrisonburg) paper on 'Anger, Amusement, and Adaptation: The Spanish Zarzuela in Argentina, 1890–1900'. Zarzuelas, the Spanish equivalent of operetta, had been performed in Argentina by Spanish actors since the middle of the nineteenth century on a regular basis and were as popular abroad as at home. To catch on with Argentine audiences the Spanish Zarzuelas had to undergo a degree of adaptation. This aspect was further explored by Kedar Kulkarni in his paper on 'Adapting Sentimentality and Pathos on the Marathi Stage'. His paper scrutinized translations of Shakespearean dramas and the sentimental play *Isabella, or The Fatal Marriage*, into Indian vernacular languages, and the specific metaphors used to translate melodrama for Indian audiences.

Though the papers drew on very different examples from different regions of the world, a number of common threads became apparent. The final discussion attempted to find common themes

emerging from the individual case studies. It revolved around the questions of what types and genres of theatre travelled, when they were successful and when not, and why plays, actors, and troupes travelled at all. To some degree the theatre had travelled widely before the nineteenth century. However, new technologies of communication and transport, such as the telegraph and the steamship, led to an increase in mobility and the quantity of exchange. It was less the chance to move around that tempted actors and companies to travel than commercial deliberations—new audiences promised financial gain—and the prestige that went along with having succeeded elsewhere. Travelling as such did not result in a cosmopolitan outlook, nor did it create 'international' supra-regional publics. Often, it reinforced existing identities—whether local, regional, national, or imperial—and brought existing affinities and frictions to the surface. While some troupes sought out migrant audiences from their native lands, others played to much more diverse and heterogeneous audiences. This makes the travelling theatre so interesting, not only for the history of the theatre but also for the history of cross-cultural contacts and conflicts in the long nineteenth century. Cultural globalization, so much is clear, did not begin with twentieth-century mass media like radio and cinema but goes much further back. But it is equally clear that globalization did not necessarily engender cosmopolitanism.

TOBIAS BECKER (GHIL)