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Editorial

In our March 2012 issue of the journal we published Egyptian scholar Nashaat H. Hussein's account of the Aragoz puppets and the attempts by contemporary puppeteers to revitalise the tradition of performance after a period when its form appears to have been deserted in the face of new technological assaults, particularly on young people. In this issue we take up the story from a complementary yet rather different perspective: the Hellenic shadow plays usually identified with the character of Karaghiozis. Readers will note the etymological basis of the two forms can be traced back to a common ancestry, the Ottoman Karagöz. While the two manifestations retain some of the subversive characteristics of the Aragoz/Karaghiozis persona, particularly in its capacity to attack and satirise the privileged and to offer support for the socially underprivileged, the two forms travelled in different directions. In Egypt the Ottoman shadow puppet tradition was rejected in favour of real wooden puppets displayed in a portable theatre not dissimilar to the Punch and Judy booths. In Greece, the shadow puppet format appears to have been retained and Ioanna Papageorgiou describes the inclusion of the highly ambiguous character of the mountain bandit into the play form, a figure that mixes historical reality with fictional constructions and that may incorporate the qualities of a partisan fighter with the attributes of a Robin Hood. The Egyptian puppet version is currently struggling to reinvent itself as a form of entertainment that includes both adults and children; whether there is some resurgence of the Hellenic tradition remains to be seen given that its heyday was in the period 1890 to 1960. The article however clearly demonstrates the cultural transportability of popular entertainment forms.

The transportability of popular entertainment forms is further illustrated in the transatlantic and transpacific cultural exchanges that began in the 18th century and of course persist to the present day. Mark St. Leon, himself the descendant of a distinguished circus family, gives an account of the travels made by circus companies throughout the Pacific from 1841 to 1941. Although the exchanges between Australia, New Zealand and North America would prove to be the most enduring, St. Leon points out the extraordinary energy of circus companies with which they followed the commercial expansion into China and Japan. In a sense, these companies had the advantage of rendering language, nationality and politics as negligible: their international passport lay in the instant recognition of one another's consummate physical skills. Thus, for example, Richard Risley Carlisle's company was in Shanghai in 1863 and became the first Western performing troupe to land in Japan in 1864, and was

immediately exposed to the complementary skills of Japanese acrobats and wire walkers. Japanese exponents then were introduced to the Australian circus community in 1867. I particularly responded to the nugatory significance of politics in the account of Australian equestrian James Melville's circus travelling "along the Mississippi River in a sternwheeled steamboat, landing and giving performances...to Union soldiers one day, and Confederates the next." The circus entrepreneurs did indeed take important steps to connect the world, as St. Leon suggests. This connection also saw circus companies visit the islands of the Pacific—Tahiti, Fiji, New Caledonia and Samoa, as examples, and in so doing, brought them into direct contact with the indigenous peoples. To many, such peoples might have been associated with the death of Captain Cook or more indirectly with Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*. It is this novel that forms the point of departure for Victoria Lantz's discussion of the theatrical transformations endured by Crusoe's companion, Friday.

Lantz's article is framed by references to Derek Walcott's play *Pantomime* (1978) in which two characters representing Crusoe and Friday have their roles reversed, thus precipitating a confrontational debate about the nature of master/servant relationships within a post-colonial context. It is an appropriate device to launch the discussion about the ways in which the Friday character has served to epitomise colonialist representations of black people on stage from the 18th century to at least World War 2. Lantz argues that it was the stage representations that brought about the 'blackening' of Friday after his initial 1781 appearance in Sheridan's *Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday* at Drury Lane theatre. By 1785 Lewis Hallam was on his way to America with this pantomime, an American connection that would hasten the 'Africanising' of Friday, particularly when the character was coloured by blackfaced minstrelsy and the parodic representation of African-American slaves. When this minstrelsy was exported across the Atlantic to Britain in the 1830s, it came at a time of agitation against slavery. Nonetheless, blackface minstrelsy would permeate British entertainment to the extent that it would continue as a form until 1978: the publication of Walcott's play coincided with the last appearances of the *Black and White Minstrel Show* on British television after an immensely popular 20 year run.

The *'Stage' Encyclopaedia* lists 14 different versions of *Robinson Crusoe* in pantomime or burlesque travesty form from its 1781 appearance until 1892. One of the productions listed is of *Robinson Crusoe, Junior*, a 'burlesque extravaganza' by Charles McCabe and Ernest Barrington performed at the Queen's theatre, Battersea in December 1892. This may have formed the basis of Al Jolson's version under the same name on Broadway in 1916. Lantz emphasises the significance of Jolson in perpetuating the blackface caricature of Friday and culminating of course in *The Jazz Singer* film in 1927. When the film was released, it, together with subsequent animated cartoon versions preserved the Jolson construction and insured that the caricature would become a global phenomenon that transcended and replaced the earlier stage versions.

Portability and cultural translation form elements of Naomi Stubbs and Janet McGaw's articles on American pleasure gardens and the performance of

Only an Orphan Girl in an Australian country town respectively. Another common resonance is the role of popular entertainments during periods of a nation's uncertainty: in America, the transition from an agrarian to an urban society during the 19th and early 20th centuries; in Australia, the post-World War 2 immigration of thousands of European settlers displaced by the war which in turn transformed the country from a dominant Anglo-Celtic community into a multicultural one—or at least signalled its beginnings. Finally, the two articles explore from differing vantage points the principle of sociability, perhaps the most enduring accompaniment of all popular entertainments.

Overt social interaction and its concomitant sociability formed the jealously guarded prerogatives of popular theatregoing from the 17th century on. Many attempts by theatre managers to erode this in favour of a carefully crafted 'artistic' event which would relegate its participants to the role of passive observers were often fiercely resisted. Theatregoing had brought together discrete groups and individuals to an occasion in which they all shared. Watching and being watched formed part of the exchanges taking place in a theatre's auditorium: the theatre after all was a public social space. These factors are highlighted by Naomi Stubbs in her discussion of American pleasure gardens. She also suggests that these gardens (and there were many of them) formed loci for the exploration of national identity as the United States moved from a predominantly agrarian to an industrial nation especially in the period from the Revolution to the Civil War. Pleasure gardens declined in the latter half of the 19th century to be replaced by the amusement parks and expositions that foregrounded new technological advances. The transition from a parade ground of personal social display into a showground for industrial display seems to have been teleologically inevitable. Nevertheless, as Stubbs points out, today's amusement parks still retain the element of voyeurism that allows spectators to observe one another, even if it contains an element of superiority as people observe the antics and discomfort of others as they negotiate the challenging demands of fairground machinery. Thus Stubbs concludes that "...pleasure gardens...through their form as a garden, their focus on visibility and their various exhibits and entertainments...served many functions within the constructed performance of American national identities...their impact can still be felt in forms of popular entertainment familiar to us all today."

Undoubtedly melodrama is the most significant dramatic genre to have emerged in the last 250 years. It has become a global phenomenon incorporating film and theatre under its umbrella. Its significance seems to have been most prevalent in moments of social and cultural unrest. As societies become more stable and secure, and indeed more complacent about such stability, melodrama seems to lose its currency, although such an assertion remains to be tested. Perhaps melodrama and its performance, calculated to cross the boundaries of language and cultural difference, can bring together spectators normally separated by such circumstances. In any case, Janet McGraw describes a moment in 1962 when the performance of a melodrama did help to bring together hitherto irreconcilable sections of a community that had lost an earlier pastoral identity and been forced to adopt a new industrial and cosmopolitan one.

The post-World War 2 period especially between 1947 and 1961 saw a huge influx of migrants to Australia, many of whom, traumatised by war and unable to speak English, came from continental Europe. The Snowy River Scheme was the largest construction project financed by the government in the immediate post-war period and many of the migrants were employed as workers on the vast hydroelectric project. Cooma in south-eastern Australia became the centre for the administration of the Scheme and suddenly found its population massively augmented by migrant labourers. McGraw describes the factionalising of the town as predominantly Anglo-Saxon managerial and professional sections found themselves needing to adapt to this new influx. Generally they handled it badly and the town became divided along class and employment lines and to a degree no doubt ethnic lines as well. The Cooma Little Theatre had been established in 1954 by English-speaking migrants, some of whom had been involved with the theatrical repertory groups which had sprung up during the years after World War 1. The Theatre was supported initially by professional and administrative staff involved with the Snowy Scheme as well as by local business people and teachers. No attempt seems to have been made to accommodate the non-English speaking migrants as potential audience members. This was to change and melodrama may have played a key role.

Australia in 1962 was embarking on a state of flux. Its migration policies were starting to erode the dominant English cultural patrimony, its youth culture was starting to make its presence felt and Australia would soon follow the United States into the Vietnam War, having just extricated itself completely from the aftermath of the Korean War. It may be a coincidence but the early 1960s saw the establishment of theatre restaurants in metropolitan centres that used the vehicle of melodrama, albeit in a pastiche form, to create a cabaret environment which once again would restore spectators to the sociable environment which popular theatregoing had largely lost. It was just such an event that helped create a bond between various sections of the Cooma community when melodrama resumed its ability to provide a universal language. Even if Henning Nelms's 1944 American version of melodrama might appear inauthentic to purists, *Only an Orphan Girl*, set within a music hall environment, appears to have acted as a social leveller through its deliberate creation of a shared experience. The production proved immensely popular even amongst the Snowy Scheme's construction camps. Although the Little Theatre was never quite able to replicate the cachet of this production, McGraw points to the continuing popularity of melodrama in Australian country towns today: perhaps the tyrannies of distance and social separation continue to demand the need for a universal language.

By way of a postscript, it is encouraging to see a developing scholarly interest in amateur theatre. To be sure, scholars have in the past examined private theatricals and the occasional small company of dedicated enthusiasts; our last issue in March 2014, concerned with popular entertainments in times of war, drew attention to the continuing importance of entertainments among combatants and prisoners-of-war, most of whom were themselves amateurs during the two World Wars. The recent creation of a research initiative devoted to the area of non-professional performance is most welcome. Further information can be found at Research into Amateur Performance and Private

Theatricals (www.rappt.org) which at present lists 20 researchers interested in the area. The organisation mounted its first conference—“Paying the Piper: economics of amateur performance”—in June 2014.