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## Editorial

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Firstly, the journal welcomes the work of two scholars of non-European backgrounds to this issue. They bring a distinctive voice and a valuable contribution to the discourses surrounding popular entertainment. As in previous issues, such discourses are informed by the sinuous elasticity of popular forms, capable as they are of transformation, subversion and accommodation, qualities which have insured their longevity. In this context, the chameleon elements of folk culture play an important role, and this is documented here. Equally, an enduring tool in the practices of popular entertainment has been the employment of farce, that most potentially subversive of dramatic modes, providing dramatists and performers with a *lingua franca* that crosses geographical and cultural boundaries. Its subversiveness is well-known as is the fact that high-minded artists and scholars have often felt an acute discomfort at its employment: its reduction to absurdity of human pretention and high art ambitions to the velleities of mundane existence, in particular. This too is explored in the issue.

In terms of boundary crossing performers have played a key role since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They have been responsible for the transmission of artistic values and performance traditions as they criss-crossed the touring routes: from Britain and North America to Ceylon, India, China, Indonesia, Australasia and South Africa. At times, they have brought consolation and acted as therapeutic agents as their involvement with troops in both World Wars demonstrate. On the other hand, crossing cultural boundaries did not necessarily entail geographical displacement. The fascination with the Far East is a case in point. Reports by travellers especially to China and Japan were complemented by ethnological displays like the Japanese Village constructed in London in 1885 and the exposure to Chinese and Japanese acrobats since the 1860s. Unsurprisingly, Asian characters found their way onto the popular stage in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, as performances of *The Mikado*, *A Chinese Honeymoon*, *San Toy* and Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* attest. The point is that all of these cultural and geographical transgressions are discussed in one form or another in this issue.

Martina Lipton provides a foundational piece of research about the engagement of performers in providing relief and reassurance to military personnel in times of war. She focusses on the particular instance of Ada Reeve

who toured Australasia, South Africa, India and Egypt on a number of occasions, performing to soldiers hospitalised or on leave and acting as “a symbolic surrogate mother of fighting boys.” Reeve was immensely popular and had made her name in musical comedies: *The Shop Girl* (1894), *The Girl from Paris* (1896), *Floradora* (1899) and *San Toy* (1901), although she was as accomplished in variety and pantomime. Indeed, it was as a star in pantomime that she first appeared in Australia in 1897. This snapshot of her career, however, focusses on her involvement in charity work on behalf of Australian and New Zealand soldiers (the ANZACS) during World War 1. She was not involved in the conscription recruitment drives like Harry Lauder for instance, but rather in raising money for hospital care and providing a convivial environment for convalescing soldiers or those on leave in London. She was, of course, not alone: L. J. Collins recounts the huge efforts made by show people in taking concert parties to military hospitals in Britain. The results of such intervention were quickly noted. Sir Brian Porter, a commandant of one such hospital considered that: “the opinion of myself and my staff is...these entertainments reduce the period of illness by an average of at least 5 days and in a hospital of 2000 beds that means 10,000 days.”<sup>1</sup> Thus medical reports seemed to affirm the responses of wounded soldiers to the ministrations by performers like Ada Reeve who travelled the world seemingly impervious to the fact that enemy ships or submarines could have brought this activity to an abrupt halt. Lipton refers in the article to other resourceful women like the musician Annette Hullah and the performer and theatre manager Lena Ashwell who organised concert parties to go behind the lines on the Western Front. The article suggests that this is a rich area for further investigation. Certainly more work needs to be done on the role of these concert parties and their effectiveness during both World Wars, particularly as the centenary of the beginning of World War 1 approaches. Little scholarly attention has been paid, for example, to the work of the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) started by Basil Dean and Leslie Henson in Britain in 1939 or to the United Service Organizations (USO) in America from 1941 under whose aegis Bob Hope travelled the Pacific in 1944. Then there is the matter of the concert parties arranged within prisoner-of-war camps which travelled from base camps to outlying work details in both wars. These haven't as yet been analysed and need attention.<sup>2</sup>

By the time Ada Reeve was beginning her journeys to Australia and elsewhere, the touring routes that included Australasia, Ceylon, India, China, Singapore and South Africa had been well-established. Distinguished actors like Gustavus Vaughan Brooke, Charles Kean, Joseph Jefferson, Charles J. Mathews and John Toole had toured Australia and New Zealand since the 1850s. Daniel Bandmann had completed his astonishing five year odyssey that included Calcutta, Madras, Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong, in addition to long stays in Australasia,<sup>3</sup> while George Lewis and his wife Rose Edouin had visited China and India regularly from Australia between 1863 and 1876. They are referred to in Veronica Kelly's *Afterpiece* which looks at fresh research into the careers of travelling performers who either went to Australia from Britain or who emanated from Australia. Much of this research has been conducted by

independent researchers and Kelly pays tribute to their passion and single-minded thoroughness that have added immensely to theatrical historiography.

Travel, however, was a two-way phenomenon. Audiences in Britain had been exposed to Chinese acrobats and Japanese performers from the 1860s. Richard Risley had brought his Imperial Japanese Troupe to London in 1867 while Louis Soullier had introduced Chinese acrobats in 1866. I have referred to the Japanese Village, constructed in 1885 which W. S. Gilbert had visited. Such events materialised the fascination with the Orient that had pervaded the arts more generally since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From our perspective the proliferation of Orientalist fictions that occurred in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods like Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, George Dance's *A Chinese Honeymoon*, Edward Morton's *San Toy* and Oscar Asche's *Chu Chin Chow*, gives some idea about how Europeans appropriated and commodified the Orient for their own consumption. Indeed it is this background that informs Lia Wen-Ching Liang's discussion about London's Limehouse Chinatown in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her point of departure, however, is the production of *Limehouse Chinatown* by the Kandinsky Theatre Company in London in 2010. The production was based on Thomas Burke's journals that documented his wanderings in the East End of London, but it also made use of newspaper reports that illustrated the construction of a "yellow peril" as well as the presence of much-feared Chinese drug cartels. Just as important was the production's reference back to Edwardian musical comedy, Morton's *San Toy* in particular. The production thus constructed a two-way mirror that reflected the artificiality of a theatrical world that portrayed Chinese (and Japanese) in "yellow face," to use Josephine Lee's term,<sup>4</sup> as well as created an 'assemblage' of material to re-investigate and challenge contemporary perceptions of Chinese culture and identity. The fact that the production used ethnic Chinese performers as well as "yellow face" performers would have juxtaposed the fictive quality of Edwardian musicals against the authenticity of the contemporary experience.

Inevitably the travellers to Australasia and the Far East took with them many of the imperial values which British expatriates would have found comforting reminders of 'home.' To the Irish, however, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these values were uncomfortable reminders of British colonisation. We are reasonably familiar with the surge of Irish nationalism which had intensified in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its theatrical manifestations are to be found in Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats's *Manifesto for Irish Literary Theatre* in 1897, the subsequent foundation of the Irish National Theatre and the creation of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. As far as the founders were concerned, popular entertainments were associated with British manifestations of "buffoonery and easy sentiment" that they were determined to banish from the Irish stage. It was time to return to a grass roots Gaelic tradition. Though the movement captured the nationalist mood of the times, it came at a price, a financial price at that. Brenda Winters discusses this price in her article about the playwright George Shiels and offers an insight into a particular instance of the tug-of-war between the lofty ambitions of high art and the *realpolitik* occasioned by ongoing financial insecurity which demanded a low art presence.

George Shiels had a long relationship with the Abbey Theatre (1921-1948) but his early plays were denigrated especially for his use of farce which many saw as cheapening his evident concerns about social justice. Joseph Holloway, an inveterate Abbey theatregoer, described Shiels's short stories in 1924 as showing "the knack of writing exciting pot-boiling stories of the wild and wooly west cowboy type," while his dramatic plots "are as complicated as detective stories and get the spectators into black knots."<sup>5</sup> Even as late as 1994, Hugh Hunt who had been a producer at the Abbey Theatre in the 1930s and had served as its artistic director 1969-71, could describe Shiels's playwriting: "A typical Shiels comedy follows a conventional formula – linear development of plot...melodramatic situations spiced with laugh-lines, and endings that are contrived and sentimentalised."<sup>6</sup> As Winter points out, these remarks conveniently gloss over the fact that the Abbey Theatre was dependent on the success of a Shiels play to maintain its financial stability. Latterly, however, Shiels's reputation has been re-visited and recuperated, no doubt assisted by the publication of Christopher Murray's *Selected Plays: George Shiels* in 2008.<sup>7</sup> The struggle for the recognition of 'the popular' reminds us to be cautious about claiming the dissolution of the high and low art binary: in some contexts the 'lotta continua.'

Even if we might regard the call for a return to ancient Gaelic roots as an aesthetic response of middle-class reformers at a time of strident nationalism, popular entertainments are inextricably entwined with specific manifestations of community affirmation which often preserve ancient forms of language and ritual. Peter Harrop in his *Afterpiece* draws our attention to the "Unconvention" of mummers that took place in Bath, England, late last year. On the surface, we might assume that mumming, like pantomime, is a local British phenomenon that preserves folk tales about a mythical St. George and his opponent, the Turkish Knight and uses disguisings to enhance Christmas, All Souls' Day and Easter festivities. But even a cursory glance at online resources reveals that mumming is very much alive and well in Canada, the United States (where 40 mumming groups exist), Australia, Ireland and even the Netherlands and has many local variations.<sup>8</sup> Harrop describes the way in which modes of mumming have shifted to accommodate local community concerns, and he calls for greater in-depth study of this 'folk' phenomenon.

Puppetry may have a longer history than mumming, yet it too has not received the scholarly recognition it undoubtedly deserves. Many practising puppeteers feel that the form continues to be marginalised by popular and academic presses, or so James Ashby, a Canadian puppeteer, averred at a recent working session of the American Society for Theatre Research's annual conference in Montreal, 2011. At the same time it must be admitted that there exist many resources about puppetry, most of them concerned with the practical business of constructing and operating puppets. As well, UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionette), founded in 1929, continues to hold World Congresses (this year in Chengdu) and the British arm of the organisation publishes *Puppet Notebook* three times a year. There is also some evidence to

suggest a developing (or re-developing) scholarly interest since Peter D. Arnott's seminal work *Plays without People* came out in 1964, for example, Peter J. Wilson and Geoffrey Milne's *The Space Between: the art of puppetry and visual theatre in Australia* (2004), Eileen Blumenthal's *Puppetry: a world history* (2005) and Penny Frances's *Puppetry: a reader in theatre practice* (2012).<sup>9</sup> All this is by way of signalling the contribution of Nashaat Hussein to the scholarly debates about puppetry, on this occasion based geographically in Egypt. The Egyptian experience is an object example of the elasticity and accommodation to which I referred earlier. Despite its long tradition in Egypt dating back to 1517, the appeal of puppetry faded as traditional practitioners aged and were not replaced. Hussein, however, considers its more recent resurgence as younger puppeteers re-discover the traditional form while at the same time are compelled to accommodate the influence of television and other electronic entertainments as they affect particularly young people. It is a problem, of course, that faces puppeteers everywhere. He describes the ways in which puppeteers have utilised new puppet-making techniques and have modified the content of puppet plays and scenarios in line with changing social attitudes to male/female relationships and domestic violence. It will be interesting to discover whether this resurgence will continue to contribute to the form's longevity.

Finally, I make no apology for including the illustration of 18<sup>th</sup> century puppeteers at work. Though its context is distinctly European, it complements Hussein's images of the practice of *Aragoz* puppetry nicely.



Figure 1, *I Burattini* © 1770

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in L. J. Collins, *Theatre at War 1914-18* (Oldham: Jade Publishing, 2004), 67.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting the ongoing publication of Sears Eldredge's monumental account of concert parties during the construction of the Thai-Burma railway in World War 2. *Captive Audiences/Captive Performers: Music and Theatre as Strategies for Survival on the Thailand-Burma Railway 1942-1945* is being published digitally and progress on this work can be accessed at [www.digitalcommons.macalester.edu/thdabooks](http://www.digitalcommons.macalester.edu/thdabooks).

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Bandmann, *An Actor's Tour – or, Seventy Thousand Miles with Shakespeare* (Boston: Cupples, Upham, 1885).

<sup>4</sup> Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), viii.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Holloway, "Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer," in *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre: a selection from his unpublished journal*, eds. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967, repr. 2009), 234.

<sup>6</sup> Hugh Hunt, sv. "George Shiels," in *International Dictionary of the Theatre*, vol. 2 "Playwrights," ed. Mark Hawkins Dady (London and Washington: St. James Press, 1994), 892.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Murray, *Selected Plays: George Shiels* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Smythe, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> See the Master Mummers site at [www.mastermummers.org](http://www.mastermummers.org) that lists 250 groups worldwide.

<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Wilson, *The Space Between: the art of puppetry and visual theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2004); Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry: a world history* (New York: Harry Abrams, 2005); Penny Francis, *Puppetry: a reader in theatre practice* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).