

Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater. Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson, eds.

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Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater is a very welcome sequel to an earlier volume edited by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson, *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (2008). This book emerged from the work of the international group of scholars and artists Theater without Borders. *Transnational Mobilities* explores the different manifestations of early modern theater and performance “from a transnational and comparative point of view” (n.p.), with an emphasis on early modern England, Italy, Spain, Germany, the Czech lands, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century India. The book consists of fifteen chapters divided into an introduction (Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson), an epilogue (Jane Tylus), and five thematically and geographically oriented units. Part 1, “Systems and Theatergrams,” explores what Louise George Clubb has termed a “theatergram”: “a unit in a stage plot, or a typical relationship between stereotyped characters, which can be removed from one dramatic context and inserted into another” (42). Part 2, “The Pastoral Zone,” looks at the pastoral genre “capaciously,” rather than “from a narrowly English perspective” (12), while part 3, “Performance Texts and Costumes,” focuses on “the performance practice of the virtuosic actress and the ‘performance text’ of the foreign-encoded costume” (13). Part 4, “Northern and Central European Mobilities,” is geographic rather than thematic, and its emphasis on Germany and the Czech lands adds a very welcome and less studied perspective to what is traditionally a Western-centered gaze upon transnational theater. Part 5, “Translation Theory and Practice,” discusses the importance of translation for an understanding of theater’s mobility.

Drawing “on practices and methods developed in Comparative Literature in recent years” (1), this volume investigates predominantly early modern English theater in its manifold international articulations through the concept of “mobility,” as developed by Stephen Greenblatt in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (2010) (5). The mobilities analyzed here range from a discussion of *The Taming of the Shrew* through the lens of Italian dramatic “intertexts” (Robert Henke) to the presence of “foreigners” in London

and their significance for the creation of costumes in Shakespeare's plays (Christian M. Billing); from the importance of the Northern European, and especially German, medieval literary tradition of the "trope of the fool" for Shakespeare's construction of the fool (M. A. Katritzky) to Central European marionette drama, which reveals the "similarity between several early modern English plays and Czech puppet plays" (181; Pavel Drábek); from the pastoral mode in Italian and English comedies (Eric Nicholson), to figurations of Italian pastoral intermezzos and the question of staging the gods (Susanne L. Wofford). Indebted to Clubb's "theatergram" — and indirectly to Vladimir Propp's "morphology" of fables and myths (8) — *Transnational Mobilities* offers interdisciplinary analyses of early modern theater that are "compatible with the wide-angle method [of distant reading] advocated by [Franco] Moretti" (1).

Mobilizing the concept of "contact zone" as an overarching theoretical framework, the editors engage with the complex encounters, exchanges, and interactions among actors, texts, and objects in a time of increased mobility. Contact zone — a concept developed by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), with the purpose to unearth the "contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power," when "cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other" (Pratt, 34) — implies structures of dominance and asymmetry in the theatrical circulation practice. While the editors of the volume use the term "contact zone" without implying an uneven distribution of power, Jacques Lezra's essay on translation, trade, and exile responds to the question of asymmetry in transnational mobilities. Rather than an even exchange and smooth circulation, early modern theater is comparable, Lezra suggests, to the "Escher-like circuit formed by trade, travel, and translation," which emerges as "the point of articulation between the geo-cultural imaginary and the 'new' global system" (200). Pushing the complexities of theatrical mobility beyond the question of national boundaries, Jane Tylus's epilogue asks how we can think of theater's vertical movements: the example of the "first 'modern' actor" (267) Orpheus and the popular topic of his descent to the underworld raises the question of theater's bond with the sacred while also revealing "early modern theater's brush with the dead" (271).

This stimulating and engaging volume will be of great use to students and scholars who wish to venture into new geographic and theoretical realms in their exploration of early modern theater.

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