

Part One: The Mechanics of Transfer and Translation

Chapter 1. Berlin/London: London/Berlin—an outline of cultural transfer 1890-1914

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In 1893 Arthur Branscombe put together the book for a new musical, a ‘musical farcical comedy’, which he was later to claim marked the invention of a new form of musical theatre.¹ Called *Morocco Bound*, the show registered as a thoroughly English commodity, not least because of its trademark Orientalism—the second act took place in a Grand Vizier’s palace, complete with harem. Set initially, however, on the grounds of a country estate, the show opens with a song that charts the decline of the English aristocracy, arguably the most recognisable signifier of English cultural insecurities at this time and a pervasive theme in all forms of English culture, ‘high’ and ‘low’. According to the opening song, rendered in part by a butler, the ‘haughty English nobles’ have sold their estates ‘for enormous sums of gold’ to trade families and ‘in a flash have blown the cash/At merry Monaco’. In place of traditional aristocracy, a new ruling elite holds sway, one no longer based on inherited wealth and land but on ‘cash’. It is represented here by an ex-coster, the new Squire, who demonstrates, ‘ow it’s easy enough when you’ve got the oof [money] for even a coster to become the pet of ‘igh Society’. Thus the show simultaneously celebrates and laughs at social mobility and political transformation, where,

The Costers will be peers in the happy coming years

Of democratic liberty and piety—

And our present legislators will be selling fruits and taters

As the costers of a Radical society.

The rest of the show revolves around the export of a commodity also often thought to be quintessentially English, the music hall, to a place where it could never have reached in reality, or so one might have thought—the Middle East or North Africa.

The proselytising instinct was a demonstration of how new forces had taken over the civilizing mission of a wider progressivist English culture. It is ‘the proper task of civilized humanity’, sings one of the characters ‘to show the Africans the fruit of British Christianity....They oughtn’t to be left’, adds the coster-Squire in an important corrective, ‘to pine in sadness while we revel here,/ In all the happy influence of Marie Lloyd and Chevalier.’ In what might be considered a musical comedy parallel to the postcolonial soul searching of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the song continues:

Explorers seem to exercise unnecessary ravages

In sending truth and bullets to the simple hearts of savages....

But I will supersede all evangelical societies

By founding, in benighted lands, a Palace of Varieties.²

Morocco Bound was a success in London. Starring George Grossmith Jnr. and both Letty Lind and the dancer Loïe Fuller at various times, it played 295 performances. It is not easy to imagine at first glance, however, how this show, with its many references to contemporary issues—Irish Home Rule, voter registration and the Eight Hours Bill—and its use of demotic Cockney, Anglo-Irish dialects and mock Moroccan, could ever have played successfully outside of England, perhaps even outside of London. But, with some qualifications, that is precisely what it did. In 1894 it started out on an international tour, being taken round the empire to both South Africa and Australia, and also to New York. It travelled to the Continent, where it was staged with no attempt at translation. Like *Carmen Up-To-Date* (1890), the burlesque

performed by two travelling Gaiety companies, one of which went to Berlin in 1892, *Morocco Bound* was toured rather than adapted, in the way that was to become standard in the later 1890s. It was performed in Hamburg and then in Berlin at the Theater Unter den Linden in February 1895, where ‘songs and dances were encored. Little Miss Valli Valli, who was born in Berlin but lived most of her life in London, received enthusiastic applause for her performance’, although language did turn out to be something of a barrier.³ Berliners apparently ‘sat stonily though the English dialogue and the company had to wait for Amsterdam and Rotterdam to get their laughs back’,⁴ a state of affairs only to be expected according to one reviewer: ‘there is always more or less want of appreciation for a foreign company’s efforts from the simple fact that the majority of the audience do not understand the language, and this was particularly the case with Mr Drew’.⁵

Morocco Bound was neither the first nor last transfer across London/Berlin, Berlin/London. It was part of a much wider cultural traffic that, in terms of popular music theatre and this specific trade route, lasted from the early 1890s to the mid 1930s. The earlier period was initially dominated by the export of highly successful West End musical comedies to Berlin and many other continental and transcontinental metropolises, including Vienna, Paris, Hamburg, Budapest and New York, as well as an Empire circuit that featured such sites as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Dublin, Singapore, Mumbai and Allabad. The transfers to Berlin included such hit shows as *A Gaiety Girl* (1893), *The Geisha* (1896), *A Greek Slave* (1898), *A Runaway Girl* (1898), *San Toy* (1899), *A Chinese Honeymoon* (1899) and *The Silver Slipper* (1901).

Berlin’s version of the West End brio that so shaped popular theatre in this period included Jean Gilbert’s highly successful work as the composer of an

approximate genre, albeit one usually called ‘operetta’ in Berlin—*Die keusche Susanne* (1911), *Das Autoliebchen* (1912) and *Die Kino-Königin* (1913). All these Gilbert shows played in the West End (as *Joy Ride Lady*, *The Girl in the Taxi* and *The Cinema Star*), and elsewhere, to considerable acclaim. *The Girl in the Taxi*, for example, was received on the brink of First World War as a particularly fine example of a still new and specifically urban culture.

The music...[consists] more or less of only a few ‘hits’, while the play is kept going otherwise by rattling dances—especially two step and tango—and plenty of fun. Fashionable dress, or rather, undress, of course also plays a very important role....This class of piece seems to suit the taste of ‘big’, city public and is cheaper to put on because only a small orchestra is required and no first-class singers.⁶

Alongside this direct movement between Berlin and London there would have been a great many shows that, as part of their more general globetrotting, appeared in both capitals while originating in neither—the 1897 show *The Belle of New York* would be illustrative, an American show, but popular in London and in Berlin, where it played at Central-Theater as *Die Schöne von New-York* in 1900. Berlin also often figured as an intermediary between Vienna and London—success in what many saw as the definitive modern metropolis was often a prerequisite for transfer to London and/or Paris. Emmerich Kálmán’s *Die Csárdásfürstin*, for example, premiered in Vienna at the Johann Strauss Theater in November 1915, played for two years in Berlin with Fritzi Massary at the Metropol and later, in 1921, appeared in London, where it was Anglicized as *The Gypsy Princess*.

How were these cultural exchanges mounted? What systems supported and circumscribed the transfers, and what do these tell us about how the culture industry

was organised at this early period? What factors shaped the flow and direction of traffic and the popularity of one form over another? For the most part, and unlike *Morocco Bound*, most of these shows went through serious revisions before they were ‘transferred’. This was not a simple matter of language translation. Dramatic structure was changed, as were plots, librettos, stage designs, songs, costumes—even the preferred body shape of performers varied, not only over time but according to place. What did contemporaries invest in these ‘translations’ and, again, what do they tell us both about conditions of modernity and early twentieth-century forms of nationalism and race identity? These are the kinds of issues addressed in this chapter, an outline essay that examines how cultural transfer operated in musical theatre before the First World War and the meanings that were often attached to it.

Bureaucracies and free enterprise—the cultural economy of musical theatre transfer

Before embarking on the Continental leg of its travels, *Morocco Bound* found itself in the law courts. The ‘*Morocco Bound* Syndicate (Limited)’ sought an injunction to restrain F. J. Harris and A. H. Chamberlayn from taking the show on tour to Germany or ‘any foreign country which is a party to the Berne Convention’, on the grounds that they had the rights only for touring the provinces and the ‘minor theatres of London.’ Mr Justice Kekewich refused the motion, observing that even ‘if he granted the injunction he had no power to enforce it.’ The defendants’ lawyers later wrote to the London-based trade magazine the *Era*, pointing out that their clients had in fact written to ‘the authors and composers of the piece offering to arrange for payment of authors’ fees, &c., in respect of the forthcoming tour of Germany, notwithstanding ... their view...that there were no rights in Germany in respect of *Morocco Bound*.’ The

syndicate had apparently declined the offer, whatever it was, and tried their luck instead with the courts—unsuccessfully, as it turned out.⁷

The *Morocco Bound* legal case suggests that the world of musical theatre almost 120 years ago was a recognisably modern place where bureaucratic order and systemization both facilitated and attempted to moderate the cut and thrust of business life. Complex laws governed copyright and playright. Britain and Germany at this time, for example, were both part of a Copyright Union (which also included France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Tunis, Haiti, Luxembourg, Monaco, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Japan), an organization subject to the protocols of the Berne convention.⁸ Broadly this meant that,

an author on compliance with the conditions of the law in the country of first publication, is protected in all countries signed up to the Convention. In other words, what a country belonging to the Union does is to give a foreign author the rights which the laws of that country give to native authors, with the proviso that the period of copyright shall not exceed in duration that of the country of origin, which is the country of first publication.⁹

At the same time, it is equally clear from the outcome of the *Morocco Bound* case that these laws did not always work as intended. This reflected their operation at relatively new frontiers, which is why arrangements needed frequent updating—the Berne Convention was revised in October 1909, for instance, at an international conference held in Berlin ‘under the auspices of the Emperor of Germany’.¹⁰ The system was characterised by gaps and inconsistencies and was difficult to implement, which is one reason why scarcely a year went by without one or another of the big players in international musical theatre appearing in court over copyright or performing rights. In 1909, for example, George Edwardes took a fellow producer to court for allegedly

including songs from *The Girls of Gottenberg* and *The Merry Widow* in a show called *Potted Plays*, which played at the Apollo. Similarly, in a very high profile case, the Berlin impresario Julius Freund was sued in 1903 by the French playwright Georges Feydeau and his German representative, the publisher Ahn. Feydeau believed Freund's play *Durchlaucht Radieschen* to have violated the copyright of his own comedy *La duchesse des Folies Bergère*. His lawsuit was rejected by two law courts, which led to an appeal to the Reichsgericht, Germany's Supreme Court. The Reichsgericht came to the conclusion that Freund's play, although based on Feydeau's, contained enough elements of the entirely new to constitute an original work. Its definition of the extent to which a new performance or text could be based on an earlier one is still cited in legal literature today.¹¹ At the more everyday level of the musical theatre business, there was an even more voluminous traffic in legal challenge, again notably on copyright and contract matters. In 1912, for example, an English performer, 'John Fuller of Devonshire Road, South Ealing', claimed damages from Messrs. Marinelli, variety agents, Charing Cross Road, in respect of alleged negligence 'through failing to procure him a contract to play in Berlin.' Here he had been engaged, or so he thought, to play the part of a talking cat and considered his contract had been unfairly broken.¹²

Such legal cases, part of the ordinary life of musical theatre transfer, operated in the wider context of theatre economics, where the dynamics of supply and demand held sway. There were potentially large profits to be made, especially in the event of success abroad, which meant that 'overseas rights often become even more valuable than the home'.¹³ Not surprisingly, the purchase of such rights was crucially determined by 'following the money'. *Eine tolle Nacht* (1895), for example, a circus show written by Freund and Wilhelm Mannstädt and produced by Richard Schultz,

apparently had little to distinguish it in aesthetic terms. According to the *Era* it was no more than ‘a series of gorgeously extravagant, somewhat disconnected pictures, replete with jokes of more or less doubtful character. The couplets are not up to their usual mark, neither is the dancing of much account.’¹⁴ None of which affected the show’s profits apparently, because the work ‘caught on’, and it was this popularity, along with a stagecraft gimmick, which led George Edwardes to seek West End rights for the show. The success of these shows, incidentally, was invariably linked to novelties, often of a spectacular kind. In this case, Edwardes developed a mise-en-scène, which meant that the audience viewed the show’s circus ring action from the perspective of backstage.¹⁵

The version of *Eine tolle Nacht* that appeared in London in 1899—*The Circus Girl* adapted by James T. Tanner—owed little else to the original. The plot was completely redesigned, and couplets were replaced by modern dialogue. Although it was usually catchy tunes and songs that sold a show, in this case even they were substantially changed to fit ‘the already established Gaiety mould’. In this Anglicised version, the show ran for 477 performances in London, after which time, ironically enough, it was returned to the Continent with many elements of the West End production remaining in place. It transferred to Budapest in 1901 and then to Vienna, where Gabor Steiner introduced it at his Danzers Orpheum with Karl Tuschl playing the part of Bix of the Café Régence, and the young Fritzi Massary in the role of La Favorita. An artists’ ball full of ‘Ballet-Evolutionen’ was one of the show’s centrepieces. ‘It played 50 performances before Steiner took it across for a handful of performances in a summer guest season at the Theater de Wien’, by which time ownership of the show had multiplied several times over.¹⁶

All such transfers were contingent on profit making. Thus it was only after the evident success of the London version of *The Geisha* (1896)—a show that explored fantasies of romantic encounters between Europe and Japan—that a Berlin version followed, sparking a spate of transfers. *Die Geisha, eine japanische Theehausgeschichte*, adapted by C. M. Röhr and Freund, became a similar hit in Berlin in the following year and indeed across the whole of Germany and Austria, where it joined what had become a worldwide craze for Japanoiserie. It was even ‘given the compliment of a *Geisha Parodie*’, performed at the Alexanderplatz-Theater 6 June 1897.¹⁷ Thereafter all the transfers of the 1890s and 1900s took place against the backdrop of the success of *The Geisha*, which producers naturally tried to emulate.

[INSERT ILLUSTRATION 1]

[CAPTION:] The Berlin production of *Die Geisha* (1897)

All of which indicates the existence of a cultural exchange system understood in modern, professional and commercial terms and organised on a relatively large scale. It circulated around producers, performers, designers, writers and musicians, but also lawyers, journalists, manufacturers and bureaucrats, all engaged in processes of legitimation as well as of translation or adaptation. Communication between Berlin and London in this respect was a product not just of developing transport systems, which enabled producers and performers to travel between cities to catch the latest hit, but of a much wider exchange culture that included a reciprocating theatre press. The *Era*, for example, reported on a weekly or sometimes fortnightly basis on ‘The Drama in Berlin’, and *The Stage Year Book* reported regularly on ‘The German Theatrical Year’. Both had special sections for musical theatre, although the enthusiasm of

conventional theatre critics for these new forms of entertainment was often severely tested, especially by West End musical comedy. Reporting on ‘Drama of the Year’ in 1913, E. A. Baughan thought that popular musical theatre was ‘steadily progressing’, but only on its musical side, and specifically through the talents of German composers:

Princess Caprice by Leo Fall, *Gipsy Love* by Franz Lehár, and *The Girl in the Taxi* by Jean Gilbert are musically far above the musical comedies of a decade ago. Mr. Lionel Monckton has held his own in *The Dancing Mistress*; but on the whole the British composer of musical comedy has not been able to face the competition of the Viennese school.

Magazines and journals like *Bühne und Welt* and *Die Schaubühne* worked similarly, but from the perspective of Berlin.¹⁸

Some of these German publications advertised, in German, in London journals —*The Stage Year Book* for 1913, for example, asked ‘Haben Sie schon das "Deutsche Theater-Adressbuch 1912/13"? Es ist jetzt erschienen!’ (Have you heard about the *German Theatre Address Book 1912/13*? It’s now on sale!), implying not just common business interests but also a free movement between cultures that assumed language difference to be no barrier and pointed to a wider theatre commerce. *The Stage Year Book* in the following year carried advertisements for Georg Anton’s wigs of Berlin and also for George Piek’s Textile Manufacturing Company, which wove and dyed materials and made scenery, again a Berlin-based firm. This genuine internationalism, like much else, was wrecked by the First World War. By 1915 the same publication was declaring ‘Theatre folk say—No more German Grease paint....Boots British grease paint is the best we’ve ever used.’¹⁹

As a further marker of the internationalisation of musical theatre, the most important Berlin companies had business offices overseas in the central theatre sites. The firm of Hugo Baruch, for example, which provided historical costumes, properties, furniture and interiors to almost all Berlin theatres, also had offices in Vienna, New York, and in London.²⁰ The same applied to Felix Bloch Erben, the biggest music and theatre publisher in Germany. It distributed the rights to many of the shows exchanged between Berlin and London in this period, including *Der tapfere Soldat*, *Die keusche Susanne* and *Filmzauber*. Its London office was located conveniently in Norfolk Street, just off the Strand in the heart of the West End.²¹

As these examples indicate, the transfer market was extensive. It was directed and managed through international finance systems—the Metropol-Theater, together with the neighbouring Metropol-Palast, became a joint-stock company under English law registered at the London stock exchange in 1912—and bureaucracies of various kinds.²² Indeed the theatre industry generally at this time involved a large number of systematised organisations, from the Touring Managers' Association, set up in England specifically to protect 'the interest of Touring Theatrical Managers and to promote 'a system of arbitration to endeavour to avoid litigation between managers and artists' through to the 'Incorporated Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers' and the 'Actors' Benevolent Fund'.²³

'Art should have no country': concepts of cultural transfer

At some levels of the industry, the transfer market, for all its regulation, was regarded as fluid and flexible—not surprisingly, because products and personnel often appeared to flow quite freely across traditional checkpoints and boundaries. For all the age of nationalism, musical theatre practitioners experienced a blurring of cultural borders as

a matter of everyday practice. In the field of music and dance, for example, Arthur Sullivan studied at the Leipzig conservatory, while the conductor of the Gaiety orchestra, Wilhelm Meyer Lutz, had been born and educated in Germany. That orchestra, the hub of the quintessential London musical theatre, was especially cosmopolitan, made up of ‘French, German, Belgian, Italian, Swiss, and Russian’ musicians.²⁴ Composers were frequently invited overseas to conduct their own pieces — as were Paul Lincke and Oscar Straus, German composers who both appeared at the London Coliseum in 1912.²⁵ Choreographer, dancer and actor Will Bishop travelled in the opposite direction. After performing and working at different music halls and theatres in London, he joined the staff of the Metropol-Theater in Berlin in 1910, staying in Berlin for over a year.

For actresses and actors it was generally more difficult to make a career in another country, partly because cultural differences, and, occasionally, specific relations between countries, raised particular performance issues. Even at the height of political tensions between Germany and Britain, however, it remained possible for such performers to cross over, as did Emmy Wehlen, for example—albeit as something of a rarity. A *Play Pictorial* of 1909 commented that:

It is seldom that the German accent is wholly acceptable on the English-speaking stage. Miss Emmy Wehlen, however, is a pleasing exception to the general rule...her personality is so delightful, she has such a piquant method of acting, and she sings so charmingly, that she has already established herself in the good opinion of English playgoers.²⁶

In fact Wehlen starred in many musical comedies adapted from German shows, like *The Dollar Princess* and *The Girl on the Film*.

As with play traffic at some periods, more German performers tried their luck in London than did British ones in Berlin, but there were instances of the latter too. An English ‘danseuse’, Rose Bachelor, for example, played alongside Herrn Thielscher and Weiss Haskerl in the Berlin version of *A Gaiety Girl, Ein fideles Corps*. When looking for new plays and talents in Paris in 1908, Richard Schultz saw Madge Lessing and Fred Wright at the music hall Olympia and hired them for the Metropol, where they worked for over a year.²⁷ Indeed the construction of this famous theatre as a site of cosmopolitanism was linked to the fact that it so often had actors and actresses from other countries on its staff. The shows they created, moving between one metropolitan centre and another, represented a transnationalisation of the new and fashionable, now rendered as the cosmopolitan. A figure like George Edwardes, manager of the Gaiety and Dalys’, was understood as illustrating such dimensions with considerable clarity. As ‘well known on the Continent as in London...he used to go very frequently to Berlin, Vienna, and Paris in search of new musical plays’, finding it less bother to take a season ticket ‘between Folkestone and Boulogne than to book a passage each time he went.’²⁸ Edwardes was also approached to work with the Theater Unter den Linden (renamed the Metropol-Theater in 1898), but was forced to withdraw by the shareholders of the Gaiety Theatre, who foresaw conflicts of interest and unacceptable demands on Edwardes’s time and talent.²⁹

In all these senses and more, producers, performers and texts operated in a culture where homogenisation was becoming increasingly familiar and much removed from notions of ‘high’ art, where reified and indivisible works separated out from the conditions of ordinary life. Thus the musical theatre text, at least in this period, while sometimes understood as ‘art’, was more usually conceived of as commercial product—the work of teams of writers and composers working in a collaborative

workshop culture. The end result was only provisionally final; indeed, in practical terms the musical theatre text was never fully completed. It formed a very loose framework that was changed, added to and subtracted from over the whole period of its working life.

Madame Sherry is illustrative of this process and shows just how much change, cultural and otherwise, was implicated in adaptation. This show was originally an operetta by Benno Jacobson, adapted from a libretto by Maurice Ordonneau with music by Hugo Felix. It did not do well at the Carltheater in Vienna, where it premiered in 1902, but played very successfully at the Central-Theater in Berlin and was bought up by Edwardes, who added several Paul Rubens songs to the score. The show was not a huge hit in London either, but the Broadway version was a different story, in more ways than one. While some elements of the original plot remained, the score was replaced by a wholly new one, composed by Karl Hoschna with modern styling—‘Felix’s finales were replaced by act-endings that were largely sung in unison, and the accent was on “numbers” and, very specifically, on dances.’³⁰ Interpolated songs included rags—‘Put your Arms Around Me Honey’ and ‘The Dublin Rag’. In this form, the show returned to Paris and Berlin, where it was re-billed as *Liebestanz aus Madame Sherry*. Many other shows were subjected to similar reformulations. *The Arcadians*, redone as *Schwindelmeier & Co*, had its book adapted by Freund and its score revised by Rudolph Nelson. The London version of *Autoliebchen* involved a similar adaptation of the book, this time by Arthur Anderson and Hartley Carrick. Lyrics were ‘translated’ by James T. Tanner and Adrian Ross, with additional songs by Paul Rubens and Philip Braham. Here the most popular song of the show, the ‘Lindenmarsch’, became a celebration of Bond Street. Other

additional songs, including Jerome Kern's 'You're Here and I'm Here', were added in subsequent versions.

Indeed, once the protocols of buying copyright and performing rights had been observed, an absolute right to appropriate, assimilate and hybridise appeared to come into force. The result was that transfer was often represented in terms of fluidity, at least before the First World War. Unsurprisingly, contemporaries, often highly suspect of musical theatre, nevertheless paid it the compliment of theorising what was perceived as a highly modern approach in terms of the 'art' that was beyond national boundaries, a problematic position not only because so much of adaptation and transfer responded to economic contexts rather than aesthetics, but also because the cosmopolitanism of musical theatre coexisted with a powerful instinct for the appeal of the local.

Cosmopolitanism/national identities

Musical theatre was one of the early popular cultures to be organised on a global scale and demonstrated some of the features, albeit in embryonic form, that have since become associated with both modern and postmodern accounts of globalisation. Here culture did indeed become 'thingified', with texts being literally reproduced as objects—iconographic postcards, playbills, fashions and styles, which took on the identities of star performers and shows.³¹ The special relationship between musical comedy in particular and consumerism meant not only that department stores were reconfigured and celebrated on stage, but that, in a dramatic illustration of commodification, musical comedy became part of what was sold in department stores. It was show transfer and the movement of star performers that most obviously registered these homogenising and globalising tendencies. The appearance in Cape

Town or Melbourne of a show or performer originally popular in Berlin or London implied the existence of a common metropolitan culture that appeared to embrace modernity, as technology, but also as a concept in the broadest sense, in all its cultural dimensions.

There can be little doubt that musical theatre at the turn of the century was in many ways understood, at least by the industry itself and the intelligentsia who commented on it, as a culture of the transnational metropolis. At the same time the degree to which popular musical theatre had become cosmopolitan was not always made transparent to regular theatregoers. Composers, writers and lyricists' names on programmes might indicate that a certain musical comedy was based on a continental operetta or vice versa, and fanzines reflected the glamour of an international theatre circuit. In other respects, however, audiences would have struggled to discern whether a play had originated at home or abroad, because it usually went through a process of fairly complete adaptation. Indeed, one of the central contradictions of music theatre at this time is that for all its cosmopolitan status, it was also routinely translated into local terms. Especially in the case of Berlin, a relatively new model capital city and the product of astonishing growth in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries—‘a growth spurt unprecedented in European urban history’—musical theatre played a particular role in the formation of localised urban identities.³² Richard Schultz took the opportunity of his first revue, *Das Paradies der Frauen* (1898) (*The Paradise of Women*), to dedicate his theatre to the greater glory of the city. He described in the programme notes for this production how the Metropol ‘in its dimensions, in the grandeur of its interior decoration’ was ‘a house...truly worthy of the German Empire’s capital. It is a metropolitan establishment in the true sense of the word.’³³

The contradictions implied here between the stylish metropolitan melting pot—modern, universalising and multiple—and the more conventional attachments to nation, empire and race go to the heart of musical theatre culture as it was constituted at the turn of century and its self-conscious position at a turning point of modernity, paradoxes that, again, became particularly engaged in the cultures of translation and adaptation which transformed, for example, Paul Lincke's *Frau Luna* (1899) into the West End stage show produced at the Scala in 1911. Here, a production originally set in the vicinity of Alexanderplatz, a locality with which every Berliner and tourist would be familiar, became reconfigured as *Castles in the Air*. A show which once represented the quintessential Berlin—one of its songs, ‘*Berliner Luft*’ (Berlin air) became a great theme song for the city—was converted for West End consumption with a setting shifted to Notting Hill. On the one hand the capacity for fluid metamorphosis would have been understood in some quarters as part of a generic modernising world that musical theatre represented and materially embodied. At the same time, the imperative to construct these shows in native terms implicated the more fixed dimensions of regional, national and racial identities.³⁴

Basil Hood, George Edwardes and ‘Translation’

As with more familiar transferences across ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’, transfer between metropolises at this time involved adapting to the immediate. Thus contemporaries who lived and worked in cosmopolitan contexts simultaneously emphasised just how radical adaptation apparently had to be, because of the imagined differences that shaped national cultures in the pre-war period. Basil Hood, one of the best-known translators of operettas in England, is suggestive here. Hood began his career in the British army, writing plays on the side until the success of the musical

comedy *Gentleman Joe* (1895) allowed him to leave the military to become a full-time playwright. He collaborated with Arthur Sullivan on the comic opera *The Rose of Persia* (1899) and with a score of other writers and composers on a string of musical comedies, including *The Girls of Gottenberg*. According to Walter MacQueen-Pope, Hood ‘could write original libretti with as much skill as he showed in adapting continental operettas’,³⁵ but in the second half of his career it was the latter that preoccupied Hood—because by the late-Edwardian period the market in ‘Viennese’ operettas had become so lucrative. His first adaptation was *The Merry Widow* in 1907, which was followed by *The Dollar Princess* and *A Waltz Dream*, both in 1908, *The Count of Luxembourg* in 1911 and *Gypsy Love* the following year.

Where Hood learned German is unknown, but he was one of the few contemporary figures to comment on the work of musical adaptation at some length, providing insight not just into the way he worked personally but into perceptions of transfer culture more generally. In an article published in *The Play Pictorial* in 1911 he explained how, ‘Probably the few who have given the matter a thought presume that the English version of a Continental libretto is a translation of the original work. For more than one reason a translation would not suit or satisfy the taste of our English audiences’. Hood went on to explain how a mere translation would have failed because the expectations of British audiences were different from those on the Continent. While Continental operettas usually consisted of three acts (following the classical structure of an opera), British musical plays—comic operas by Gilbert and Sullivan, as well as Edwardian musical comedies—inevitably had only two. Hood believed the third act usually ‘so trivial in subject and treatment’ that he would simply cut it, collapsing the denouement, which in the original would take a complete act to unfold, into just one scene. But this was only the starting point of Hood’s extreme

version of ‘translation’. In the case of *The Count of Luxemburg*, for example, he went on to introduce ‘new situations and scenes’.³⁶ In the end there were apparently few lines of dialogue in the English adaptation actually translated from the German. The same was true of *Gipsy Love*, which, according to Hood, was ‘practically a new play’ after he had adapted it.³⁷

Such transformations were highly contingent on notions of racialised difference. In the case of *The Count of Luxembourg*, the friendly relations established between Hood and the Continental team of A. M. Wilmer and Franz Lehár depended on a mutual acceptance of the ‘difference in taste or point of view of Continental and English audiences’, which apparently translated into hard aesthetic, and cash, currency. To the ordinary public it might be taken for granted that the obvious danger of importations from ‘the Continent’ would be the standard one—offence caused to ‘the taste of our English audiences’ by ‘native improprieties’. But the more substantial issue, according to Hood, ran even deeper, and involved questions of racialised aesthetic judgment, ‘because our audiences desire different methods of construction and treatment from which our Continental cousins consider sufficient in the “book” of a light opera.’ Hood also shared the familiar view that English audiences expected more comedy in their musicals. From an ‘English point of view’, he wrote, ‘the Viennese libretto generally lacks comic characters and situations’.³⁸ When Hood adapted *The Merry Widow*, the dignified Ambassador Mirko Zeta became the low-comedy figure Baron Popoff, played by the comedian George Graves, who shared Hood’s view—‘Of course in Vienna they do not allow their comics so much rope, and he had to take the British mentality into account’.³⁹

The sense of racial taste significantly shaped the rhetoric of contemporary accounts of adaptation. In a characteristic later reproduced almost as a matter of

course in traditions of musical theatre history, the nationality of musical theatre seemed inscribed everywhere—across kinds of music and song, play structures, costume and so on.⁴⁰ In an interview with the *Manchester Guardian*, for example, George Edwardes wrote about the quality of mise-en-scène in precisely such terms:

It is in presenting a play that the English theatre can out-rival the Continent. Take for instance, *The Merry Widow*. As put before a Viennese audience the play would not be recognised in England, the presentation in this country was so much superior....The sense of beauty and prettiness is developed on the English stage in a far larger degree than in Continental theatres.⁴¹

In a similar vein, when Oscar Straus's operetta *A Waltz Dream* struggled in the West End, Edwardes blamed adaptation issues—it was ‘not adapted sufficiently for the English taste. I think, of course, this is the reason why it failed in London and why it succeeded in the provinces when it was further adapted under my supervision’.⁴² Like Hood, Edwardes held that adaptation was not simply a matter of translating the text, but rather a matter of racial recasting. Thus when he first saw it in Vienna in 1906, Edwardes perceived *Die lustige Witwe* (*The Merry Widow*), to be ‘hopelessly Teutonic’, a product apparently of its investment in high operatic style, but also of a version of female beauty represented by the actress and singer Mizzi Günther, one that Edwardes found both Germanised and old fashioned: ‘The full-busted young woman was going out of vogue in London, and just as fashions in dress were rapidly changing to svelte slim lines, so the female body was growing less robust’.⁴³ It was not until Edwardes ‘translated’ the show that *The Merry Widow* became a viable West End commodity, and in this particular case the transformation did not begin in language at all. It was firstly contingent on reconvening the show around a new and

modern English beauty, the slim and relative unknown Lily Elsie, whose voice had tone but no power, and Joseph Coyne, a comedy lead, American by birth, whose voice was even more limited.⁴⁴ Similarly, genre could be subject to the dynamics that rendered transfer in terms of the national or racial. Musical comedy was thought to be determinedly English and operetta Continental, the latter often being further delineated as French, Austrian or, more rarely, German—although the basis on which such categorisations were made was decidedly flimsy, especially in this early period, where modern stylisation seemed to be rendered across virtually all genres of musical theatre, making them all, at the very least, highly companionable.⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, given this investment in national and racial identification, transfers, however mediated, sometimes caused conflict, especially among observers who had a professional interest in the theatre. Theatre critics often remarked on what they saw as an ‘unhealthy’ importation of shows, and here some of the ways in which a cosmopolitan musical theatre could struggle against more local opinion became especially evident. The ‘international’ sovereignty of musical comedy, commented on with some detachment by a critic like Frank E. Washburn, outraged others.⁴⁶ German critics frequently complained about the endless stream of adaptations of French comedies and farces, or what one called the ‘peaceful French invasion of the realm of art’.⁴⁷ When, however, Viennese and Berlin operettas became fashionable in Paris, French critics also decried ‘*l’invasion étrangère*’.⁴⁸ Likewise, their British critics perceived the increasing number of continental operettas performed on the West End stage in the 1920s and 30s as an ‘Austro-German invasion’.⁴⁹ Such notions, especially in England, were closely tied up with a larger invasion discourse prevalent at the time, fuelled by Germany’s rapid ascent to a power rivalling Britain in economic terms.⁵⁰

In popular theatre as elsewhere, what really made a song or a show British or German remained a problematic issue, the question of perimeters and boundaries being symptomatic in this respect. How much of the composing or performing team of a musical, for example, could be non-British or non-German before the national or racial identity of a show began to be compromised? What of the question of Austrian authorship, presumably of considerable interest to Berlin audiences who made much stronger distinctions between Berlin and Viennese shows than English audiences, who typically imagined a singular German identity? How did Jewish participation at all levels of theatre production impact these designations? Such complexities were generally ignored. As understood by contemporaries and later generations of theatre historians, markers of national and race identities ascribed to musical theatre were defining, self-evident and somehow inherent. In reality, however, they were, as the translation process showed, actively constructed—self-conscious aspirations that were in Berlin and London, as elsewhere, part and parcel of standard branding strategies. It was not that musical theatre magically embodied national and racial traits, but, rather, that the makers of musical comedy and its audiences thought in terms of such attachments and understood success to be at least partially dependent on identifications of these kinds. At the very least, the idea of a uniquely British or German musical theatre obscured the existence of networks of performers, composers, writers, dancers, producers—as well as financiers and technicians—who criss-crossed the Continent, Britain and beyond in search of exciting new plays and performers. Even more fundamentally, it blurred the senses in which musical theatres, in all centres at this time, were competing across the same ground for authority over the hugely prestigious concept of modernity. This was the real domain that musical theatres fought over, because, even in the sphere of light entertainment—then as

now—whatever authorised the modern authorised the world. From this perspective, the internationalisation of musical theatre and its reverse were two sides of the same coin between the 1890s and the outbreak of the First World War.

Notes

¹ Modern theatre historians have tended to follow nineteenth-century contemporaries, who ridiculed Branscombe's claims to have invented musical comedy. But *Morocco Bound* is, in fact, a very early show of this type, and probably has just as good claims as any to be 'first'.

² Arthur Branscombe, *Morocco Bound* (British Library: LCP, 1893).

³ *The Era*, 16 March 1895.

⁴ Kurt Gänzl, *The Encyclopaedia of the Musical Theatre* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 1016.

⁵ *The Era*, 16 March 1895.

⁶ Frank E. Washburn Freund, 'The Theatrical Year in Germany', *The Stage Yearbook 1914* (London: 1914).

⁷ *The Era*, 2 March 1895.

⁸ There was a separate treaty securing international copyright and playright with Austro-Hungary, the only region with which such a treaty existed. See Charles F. James, *The Story of the Performing Rights Society—An Association of Composers, Authors, and Publishers of Music* (London: 1951), 14-15.

⁹ Bernard Weller, 'How to Protect a Play', *The Stage Yearbook 1908* (London: 1908).

¹⁰ 'International Copyright Convention', *The Stage Yearbook 1909* (London: 1909).

¹¹ Zu den Begriffen der ‘Bearbeitung’ und der ‘freien Benutzung’ eines Werkes im Sinne der §§12 und 13 des Urheberrechtsgesetzes vom 19. Juni 1901, *Entscheidungen des Reichsgerichts in Zivilsachen* 63 (1906), 158-60.

¹² *The Stage Year Book* transcript gives some flavour of the minutiae of cultural transfer in this period. See ‘Legal Case’, *The Stage Year Book 1913* (London: 1913).

¹³ Weller, ‘How to Protect a Play’.

¹⁴ *The Era*, 14 September 1895.

¹⁵ The gimmick in *Carmen Up-To-Date*, for example, involved a song called ‘Hush, the Bogie’, a ‘coon song’, ‘which, performed in the semi-dark to a *bouche fermé* chorus, became the rage of the whole country’. See Gänzl, *The Encyclopaedia of The Musical Theatre*, 274.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 274.

¹⁷ *The Encyclopaedia of The Musical Theatre*, 519.

¹⁸ Frank E. Washburn Freund, who wrote about the German Stage for *The Stage Year Book*, also wrote about the London stage for the *Schaubühne* and the *deutsche Bühne*. See ‘Das Londoner Theaterjahr’, *Schaubühne* 4/36 (1908); ‘Londoner Theater’, *deutsche Bühne* 2/ 8 (1910); ‘Londoner Theater’, 3 /3 (1911).

¹⁹ *The Stage Year Book 1915* (London: 1915).

²⁰ See Heike Stange, ‘Berliner Ausstattungsfirmen: Eine selbstständige Branche für die Theater’ in Ruth Freydank (ed.), *Theater als Geschäft: Berlin und seine Privattheater um die Jahrhundertwende* (Berlin: Ed. Hentrich, 1995), 65-77 [74-75]. See also Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 321.

²¹ See Stefanie Watzka, ‘Baruch, Sliwinski und Co.: Serielle Theaterproduktion an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert’ in Friedemann Kreuder (ed.), *Theaterhistoriographie: Kontinuitäten und Brüche in Diskurs und Praxis* (Tübingen: Francke, 2007), 151–78.

²² See ‘Kassenerfolg im Metropol. Die Gründung des Metropolpalastes’, *Berliner Morgenpost* 2.5.1912.

²³ Bernard Weller, ‘The After-War Stage’, *The Stage Yearbook 1920* (London: 1920).

²⁴ James Jupp, *The Gaiety Stage Door: Thirty Years' of Reminiscences of the Theatre* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1923), 279-80.

²⁵ ‘The Variety Theatres—The Coliseum’, *The Times*, 20 Feb 1912.

²⁶ *The Play Pictorial* 15/15 (1909).

²⁷ See *The Era* 4 October 1909.

²⁸ James Jupp, *The Gaiety Stage Door*, 154, 84.

²⁹ ‘Gaiety Theatre Company Limited’, *The Era*, 3.9.1892.

³⁰ Ganzl, *The Encyclopaedia of The Musical Theatre*, 924.

³¹ For the concept of ‘thingification’ in postmodern theory see Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 7-9.

³² Winter and Gordon, *Capital Cities at War*, 26.

³³ Programme celebrating the re-opening of the Metropol-Theater, undated (1898), Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, Metropol-Theater, uncatalogued. As Emily Bilski points out, the relation between the German Emperor and modernity was not without its contradictions: ‘though avid in his advocacy of modern science and technology, Wilhelm II fought vociferously against the new artistic movements. Berlin's extraordinary emergence as a significant capital of modernism during the reign of Wilhelm II must be viewed against the background of the regime's intense hostility

against cultural modernism'. See Emily Bilski, *Berlin Metropolis: Jews and the New Culture 1890-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3.

³⁴ In the case of *Castles in the Air* the adaptation was a flop, according to Gänzl largely due to factors external to the show. It was put on at the unpopular Scala Theatre, on the same programme as a lecture on and demonstration of the new Kinemascope process. 'What audiences there were preferred films of "Our Farmyard Friends" and "Picturesque North Wales" to Sybil Lonsdale, St John Hamund, Sybil Tancredi and Lincke's music and the operette was quickly dropped from the programme', *The Encyclopaedia of The Musical Theatre*, 492.

³⁵ Walter Macqueen-Pope, *Fortune's Favourite: the Life and Times of Franz Lehár* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), 131.

³⁶ Basil Hood, 'My Dear Mr. Findon—'The Count of Luxembourg', *Play Pictorial*, 18/108 (1911).

³⁷ Quoted in D. Forbes-Winslow, *Daly's: The Biography of a Theatre* (London: W. H. Allen, 1944), 108.

³⁸ Hood, 'My Dear Mr Findon'.

³⁹ George Graves, *Gaieties and Gravities. The Autobiography of a Comedian*. Foreword by Charles B. Cochran (London: Hutchinson, 1931), 94.

⁴⁰ See for example, Kurt Gänzl's monumental two volume study, *The British Musical Theatre 1865-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), which constructs a historiography where the British musical appears under constant threat of invasion from 'the Continent' or America.

⁴¹ Quoted in Forbes-Winslow, *Daly's*, 88.

⁴² *Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the Stage Plays (Censorship)*, (London: HMSO, 1909), 242.

⁴³ Ursula Bloom, *Curtain Call for the Guv'nor: A Biography of George Edwardes* (London: Hutchinson, 1954), 210. Alan Hyman's version of this story adds that Edwardes first signed up Mizzi Günther, the original *Merry Widow*, before having met her 'and had a terrible shock when a prima donna weighing around fourteen stone walked into his office at Daly's. "She has the voice of an angel, but no waist", he remarked gloomily....The Gov'nor sent Mizzi Günther back to Vienna by the next train, but had to pay her a large sum in compensation'. See Alan Hyman, *The Gaiety Years* (London: Cassell, 1975), 146-7.

⁴⁴ See chapters 3 and 5 below [000-000; 000-000].

⁴⁵ The same weaknesses applied to preconceptions about audience taste. Frank E. Washburn Freund, for instance, tested the commonplace assertion that German audiences favoured 'serious' theatre and came up with some interesting figures. Apparently the works of Leo Fall were performed no less than 3,862 times in 1908-1909:

Behind him comes Wagner—although with a big falling off—with 1,991 performances; then comes Schiller with 1,632, and Shakespeare with 1,141, which, taken together, is not a bad sign. Before the latter, however, come Oscar Strauss—known in England for his musical comedies—with 1,557, and Blumenthal and Kadelburg, both writers of farces, with 1,149. Jarno, another musical comedy writer has 1,124 performances to his credit; Johann Strauss, the waltz king, 1,096; Sudermann, 1,037; Lehár, 904....It seems, therefore, the sovereignty of musical comedy is international. In Vienna, in fact, it may almost be considered a special industry, whose fluctuations are quoted on the Stock Exchange....Berlin also, in 1910, was threatened with an invasion of the operetta. A good many did arrive, although not as many as at first feared.

Frank E. Washburn Freund, ‘The Theatrical Year in Germany’, *The Stage Yearbook 1911*, (London: 1911).

The relative proportion of stage musicals performed was probably even greater in Berlin than in London.

⁴⁶ Frank E. Washburn Freund, ‘The Theatrical Year in Germany’, *The Stage Year Book 1911*.

⁴⁷ ‘Von den Berliner Theatern 1899/1900’, *Bühne und Welt* 2/1 (1899/1900).

⁴⁸ Florian Bruyas, *Histoire de L’Opérette en France, 1855-1965* (Lyon: E. Vitte 1974), 372, 383.

⁴⁹ Leslie Rees, *Hold Fast to Dreams: Fifty Years in Theater, Radio, Television, and Books* (Sydney: APCOL, 1982), 86.

⁵⁰ See John Ramsden, *Don’t Mention the War: The British and the Germans since 1890* (London: Little, Brown, 2006), 71.