Abstracts for Session 2

Friday, October 1, Campus Center, 3545

2:30pm Session 2: PERFORMANCE, 3545

2:30 Introduction, Leonard Von Morze (University of Massachusetts Boston)

2:40 David Worrall (Nottingham Trent University), "Ethical Cleansing: Total Theatre, Total War in British Occupied Philadelphia, 1778"

The paper examines British military theatre in Philadelphia in early 1778 and its transition into the total theatre of the Mischianza, the May 1778 massed regatta on the Delaware with His Majesty's warships, 108 oboeists, medieval tournaments for ladies' 'favours' (on horseback, with lances plus anachronistic pistols), dancing and gambling held to celebrate General Howe's recall to London after a dismal campaign. The presentation will ponder the complexity of the different personal and national perspectives which both participated in and reflected on an astonishing winter of performance. British military actors produced Arthur Murphy's play *No One's Enemy But his Own*, part comment on their general's leadership, part contemplation on their own fate. My discovery of an attempt to blow up the Philadelphia theatre (complete with its army and navy actors and audience) in February 1778 plus the fascinating perspectives of contemporary soldier's diaries and the Quaker diarist Elizabeth Drinker signals the complexity of the allegiances at stake. The Mischianza appears to have been an attempt to cleanse the scars of Britain's defeat in the war into a dominant, theatricalized, memory of medieval European chivalry.

3:05 Sarah Meer (University of Cambridge), "Dion Boucicault's Transatlantic Irishness, in 'Belle Lamar' (1874), 'Fin Mac Cool' (1887), and ‘Daddy O'Dowd' (1873)"

Recent criticism has explored the transatlantic quality of the career of Dion Boucicault, the nineteenth-century playwright and actor who worked in London, Paris, Dublin, Boston and New York between 1840 and 1890. This has examined Boucicault's translations from French, his skill at catering specifically for British and American audiences, and the echoes of American racial issues in his Irish plays.

However, Boucicault's explicitly transatlantic melodramas have been overlooked. In these three neglected plays Boucicault dramatised the emotional effects of transatlantic migration, and posited a dramatic identity that was itinerant and wandering, between Irish and American. In his Civil War drama Belle Lamar, he gave this identity the name that
he later used for his most famous play, and its Irish rogue hero, The Shaughraun (the wanderer). This paper discusses Boucicault's insertion of Shaughraun characters into his dramas of the American Civil War, his overlaying of Irishness and Americanness in those plays, and his sensitivity to the human effects of migration. It will also explore his New York and Boston audiences' sense of a theatre that was both local and international.

3:30 Elizabeth Maddock Dillon (Northeastern University), "New World Drama: The Beggar's Opera in London, Charleston, and Kingston"

John Gay's Beggar's Opera ballad opera took the London theatre world by storm in 1728, appearing on stage for a record-breaking sixty-two consecutive nights. Combining folk ballad with the depiction of a gang of thieves and the corrupt officials who oversee the circulation of the thieves and prostitutes in and out of the legal system, the play served to satirize both Italian opera and the Walpole administration: the play thus unleashed a populist force in the space of the theatre by means of the galvanizing collective effects of popular ballad, political satire, and bawdy, hum-along, class-leveling festivity. In championing an ethos that is anti-property, anti-marriage, and anti-contract, The Beggar's Opera celebrates a revivification of the commons in theatrical form. Interestingly, this “cultural commons” was rapidly mobilized in locations around the British imperial world, including Charleston, South Carolina, and Kingston, Jamaica: The Beggar's Opera was among the most popular plays performed in Anglo-America in the 18th century. How does the concept of a “cultural commons” circulate in the larger Anglo-Atlantic world in the late 18th century? How does theatrical performance serve to both connect audiences to a larger, imperial culture and to instantiate a local, embodied commons as well? In this paper, I explore the concept of theatrical performance and the cultural commons in the Atlantic world by means of tracing performances of The Beggar's Opera in urban enclaves of the Atlantic.

3:55 Kathleen Wilson (Stony Brook University), “The Purposes of Playing: Print, People and Performance in an Imperial Public Sphere”

Why did Britons get up a play wherever they went? This paper offers a brief answer to what is a surprisingly complex question, focusing in each instance on the boundary-making and boundary-crossing performance practices of eighteenth century British people, both within Britain and without, that reveal the political purposes of playing. In doing so, it will take attention away from the politics of print to that of performance, and specifically to the ways in which theatre offered a different, embodied form of engagement with the cultural and political issues of the day, revealing novel aspects of social and political relations that are otherwise ignored. From York to Dublin, Cork to Kingston, and Kingston to
Calcutta, the various performances within the playhouse and without all aimed to underline British distinctiveness and modernity while they also revealed British culture’s embracing attachments to alterity. To consider these themes, the paper revisits the notion of the ‘public sphere’ in order to re-territorialize it as an imperial, and not merely national, domain, which owed much to the extension of British overseas as it did to indigenous ‘English’ forms.

4:20 Discussion