

Workshop “Traveling Tragedy”

7.-8 October 2021

Senate Hall, University of Konstanz, Germany

organized by Philipp Lammers, Christina Wald and Juliane Vogel

Thursday, October 7

9.00 Welcome

09: 15 Introduction (Juliane Vogel, Christina Wald, Philipp Lammers)

09: 45: Simon Goldhill (Cambridge): Travelling Tragedy: *Translatio*, cultural conflict and the use of tragedy

Response: Ulrich Gotter (Konstanz)

10.55-11.10 Coffee break

11:10 Fiona Macintosh (Oxford): Travelling with Medea across boundaries, 1750-1800

12.00 Rahul Markovits (Paris): Courtiers «as they would like to be»? Tragedy in the repertoires of French-speaking troupes in eighteenth-century Europe

13.00.-14.30h Lunch break

14.30 Tanya Pollard (New York): Casting Tragedy: Playing companies, gender, and transnational tragic roles

15.20 Dörte Schmidt (Berlin): Traveling with Orpheus. Gluck, the score and opera on the road

16.10 – 16.30 Coffee break

16.30 Bernice Kaminskij (Konstanz): “First [the deuil] sente over many wanton Italian books...” – Italian transfers into Early Modern English Drama

Friday, October 8

09.00 Tobias Döring (Munich): What happens to *Hamlet*? Wulf Sachs and the resistance to travel

09.50 Mark Fleishman (Capetown): Tragedy, Apartheid, (de)Coloniality

10.40-11.00 Coffee break

11.00 Christina Wald (Konstanz): "Europe lies on the beach": Thomas Köck's *antigone* (2019) as postcolonial requiem for Europe's undead

11.50 Christopher Balme (Munich): The infrastructure of tragedy in the postcolonial Cold War

12.40 Round up

ABSTRACTS:

GOLDHILL: Travelling Tragedy: *Translatio*, cultural conflict and the use of tragedy.

In this paper, I will look at three moments in which ancient Athenian tragedy of the fifth century is appropriated to make an argument about cultural change. The three moments are: (a) Hellenistic Greece – with Ezekiel’s *Exagoge*; (b) Byzantine Christianity – with ps-Gregory’s *Christus Patiens*; and (c) nineteenth-century England – with Westcott’s lectures on Western literature and its relation to Christianity. There is no issue of performance. In each case, tragedy is used to make an argument *about* cultural change, and in each case, travel and transition is made an explicit theme. In *Exagoge*, the theme of the play is itself the exodus from Egypt, which is a process that defines the Israelites as a people. Written *in* Egypt, by a marginalized yet educated figure, the play dramatizes what transition and cultural identity can mean – through an inherited genre. Where is the tragedy in this tragic form, when the story tells of triumph, leaving, becoming, as opposed to tragedy’s usual themes of precarious city living, violence, despair? In *Christus Patiens*, attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus but almost certainly written much later, the inheritance is double – both of tragedy itself and of Gregory, the most read author of antiquity in Byzantium after the Gospels, and a figure who had become part of liturgy. The play also focuses around travel – to and from the grave of Jesus – and forms of transition – the translation of Jesus, the translation of the disciples, and, of course, the translation of the language of religion. Again, we might ask where the tragedy is, in a play which also celebrates the resurrection of Christ and turns tears into a world-changing event. My final example is Bishop Westcott, who edited the Revised Version of the Gospels. He is chosen for his paradigmatic – and crazy – argument about how Western culture developed. It is a typical 19th-century piece of stadial thinking: evolutionary social and moral thought is a necessary structuring of such a genealogical imperative. But how can Euripides be a *praeparatio evangelica*? How can tragedy be a stage on a journey towards Christianity? Through these three moments, we will see how tragedy as a privileged genre is transformed as it talks of transformation, and becomes the means and matter of understanding religion as a mode of cultural self-identification.

MARKOVITS: Courtiers « as they would like to be »? Tragedy in the repertoires of French-speaking troupes in eighteenth-century Europe

In eighteenth-century Europe, many princely courts on the continent employed a troupe of French-speaking actors, who played the French repertoire. In spite of the literary prestige the tragedies of Corneille and Racine enjoyed, they were seldom played, however. Why was that? Why was it that classical tragedy, the emblematic genre of the *grand siècle*’s cultural achievements, rarely accompanied French theatrical troupes in their European travels? This paper will try to provide an explanation for this paradoxical lack of interest by focusing on the material and social setting of performances. It will argue that time constraints, acting style and the appeal of a new genre of comedy were key factors. Pace Norbert Elias, who thought the aesthetics of French classical tragedy mirrored the ethics of the European court aristocracy, as it showed them « as they would like to be », I will suggest that tragedy was in fact at odds with the values of eighteenth-century courtly society.

SCHMIDT: Traveling with Orpheus. Gluck, the score and opera on the road

Using Gluck's Orpheus as an example, the formal levels of musical theater and their interaction are

discussed under the conditions of change of place between Vienna, Parma and Paris (with a sideway glance London) and the related interaction of French and Italian-influenced opera cultures. Special attention is given to the question of the literarization of music in the score.

POLLARD: Casting Tragedy: Playing companies, gender, and transnational tragic roles

Why are Shakespeare's tragedies almost exclusively named for male protagonists, when the period's most popular representatives of classical tragedy featured central female roles? Recent directions in theater history offer suggestive contexts for probing these discrepancies by moving beyond playwrights to considering playing companies as authorial forces. As the tragic genre re-emerged from classical Greek and Roman models into theaters across early modern Europe, new company structures led to new casting systems, which in turn shaped the form of plays. This paper will explore the effects of playing company structures on tragic templates, plots, and characters. In particular, the emerging phenomenon of celebrity actors in London's commercial theater led to specific kinds of lead roles. In contrast not only with ancient models but also with contemporary Italy, France, and Spain, where the advent of professional actresses ushered in new plays showcasing female roles, London's adult male playing companies fostered tragic structures designed in part to reflect the strengths of their shareholding members.

KAMINSKIJ: "First [the deuil] sente over many wanton Italian books..." – Italian transfers into Early Modern English Drama

My contribution deals with the modes in which Italian models came to shape Early Modern English Drama. Furthermore, I will tackle the question how these models were transformed by their adaption to the established theatrical practice. There are some major ways of cross-cultural transfer of early modern drama genres which I want to emphasize: These are the traveling libraries of Italian immigrants who were often learned refugees fleeing from the Inquisition which increasingly repressed heterodox thought since the middle of the sixteenth century. Also, the Italian teachers of the same communities had a special impact on the fast circulation of Italian books in England as well as the swift translation of successful Italian works of literature by the mid-century. Thanks to a quickly growing print market throughout Europe and to the outpouring of the latest literary works released by flourishing publishing houses during the same period, these Italian books became ever more easily available. I will single out John Florio as a prominent example of the influence this constellation had on the eager reception of Italian novellas and dramas by professionals of theatre companies and even dramatic authors of an academic background. The second part of my considerations will focus on the question how well-received Italian texts were adapted to the stage under the conditions of an already established theatrical practice. My main example will be Alabasters *Roxana* as the obvious Italian model of it is Grotos *Dalida* which was published only a few years before *Roxana* was staged in England. The main changes of the dramatic form of the neoclassical tragedy can be traced very well as the English rewriter of the play did not care about the strict formal conventions (*decorum*) of Italian academic drama and its hotly debated theorems among Italian intellectuals. On the other hand characteristic stage conventions of early English drama (the genre of revenge plays in this instance) are applied onto the Italian model.

DÖRING: What happens to *Hamlet*? Wulf Sachs and the resistance to travel

Since the earliest record of an actual performance, on board a ship bound for East-India anchored off the coast of Africa, *Hamlet* has intensely travelled. Not only does its melancholy hero undertake a major voyage involving pirates and all kinds of maritime adventure (all of which are, however, diegetically rendered in the play), the understanding of his malady, supposedly the ground for the entire tragic conflict, has undergone adventurous transfers and has been pirated, as it were, in major moves of cultural authorization. This holds especially for the Freudian understanding of the figure and its suggestion of the tragic conflict's travel from archaic to modern times, an account whose influential presentation by E. Jones indeed cites evidence from Africa: *Black Hamlet*, the pioneering treatment of a black South African, published in 1937 by analyst-ethnographer Wulf Sachs. My paper sets out to revisit his much debated and much travelled text and ask what a renewed reading of its colonial and/or postcolonial tactics might suggest about the promises and problems of travelling tragedy.

FLEISHMAN: Tragedy, Apartheid, (de)Coloniality

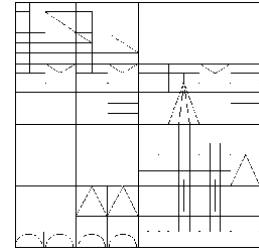
In his 1983 book, *The Word, The Text and The Critic*, Edward Said outlined his 'traveling theory'. For Said, 'like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel - from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another' (p. 226). But he goes on to say that 'such movement into a new environment is never unimpeded. It necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin' (p. 226). So for Said, ideas shift from the specific circumstances in which they came into existence, along a route which applies its own forms of contextual pressure to that idea as it travels, to a new context in which particular 'conditions of acceptance' exist that enable the 'toleration' of the alien idea, and then the alien idea is transformed by 'its new position in a new time and place' (p. 227).

My paper will use Said's traveling theory as a frame in which to examine manifestations of tragedy in a post-democratic South Africa. In the essay on traveling theory, Said follows the peregrinations of the theory of reification from George Lukacs in 1920s Budapest, to Lucien Goldmann in 1950s Paris, and then on to Raymond Williams in 1970s Cambridge. Williams was of course the author of a seminal text on *Modern Tragedy* which he wrote in 1966. In *Modern Tragedy*, Williams traces the traveling of tragic ideas across historical epochs and the mutations in form of actually existing tragedies in the 20th century Euro-American canon.

While he gestures glancingly towards domains outside of Europe and America when discussing tragedy and revolution, he never in fact explores how tragedy might have travelled to, and been taken up in, the colonial world particularly under the influence of decolonization, or in the period we might call the postcolonial that followed independence. In the South African context this takes us to a point very late in the 20th century with the advent of the post-apartheid, democratic state and into its aftermath in the current century, an aftermath in which unfreedom predominates.

In this paper I intend to suggest another form of tragedy to add to Williams's long list – tragedies of the postcolonial. I am aware of the difficulties attached to the term, postcolonial, but I believe that it continues to be useful when understood not as a transcendence or overcoming of the colonial, but rather, to reflect a time and space still suffused with coloniality but in which possibilities for a better future exist, but not yet. It is, to use William's again, a structure of feeling existing in a space between liberation - the end of formal colonial rule and the institution of legal self-determination - and the achievement of a freedom to come. This period has a pre-history in the writing of figures like Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Frantz Fanon, a pre-history that is saturated with futurity despite the colonial conception that 'the disposition towards the future and the capacity for futurity was the

monopoly of Europe' (Mbembe 2021, p. 53). As Achille Mbembe writes with reference to Fanon, the time of decolonization reflects 'the permanent possibility of the emergence of the not-yet. [...] [T]he possibility of a different type of being, a different type of time, a different type of creation, different forms of life, a different humanity, the possibility of reconstituting the human after humanism's complicity with colonial racism' (2021, p. 54). The problem though is that there is no indication of when or how this future possibility will arrive. In fact, it seems that in the postcolony we are caught in a perpetual present overwhelmed by a past that will not pass, struggling to imagine any future at all that is not more of the same. As Seloua Luste Boulbina suggests: 'Decolonization is a becoming



(*devenir*) [that] inevitably remains incomplete. It is not a present endowed with a future that would have an end and would be an *avenir*. It is a continuous present deprived of any teleology' (2019, p. 164, note 1). As a result, in its most severe and morbid manifestations, a kind of ossification sets in, and this leads us back to Lukacs and Williams on the dangers of reification, of the subject and the theory, in our case of tragedy, itself.

It is my contention that postcolonial tragedies are more focused on the chorus than on heroic protagonists, bring ritual into the theatre in a sustained way, and engage a specific set of subjectivities defined by struggle, precarity, violence, invisibility, estrangement and unbelonging, and these are best explicated through close analysis of actually existing tragedies in an actually existing democratic South African state after apartheid, rather than by abstract theorising. In order to achieve this, the paper will examine two productions: *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* which I directed in 2019 and *Inxeba Lomphilisi* and *Did We Dance: Ukutshona Ko Mendi* by Mandla Mbothwe, staged in 2010 and 2012 respectively. It is my contention that these productions reflect two approaches to tragedy as it manifests in the particular circumstances of postcolonial/post-apartheid South Africa. These approaches, that I will term the political and the metaphysical, are shaped I would suggest, by notions of debt and inheritance to particular performance traditions, native and alien.

BALME: The infrastructure of tragedy in the postcolonial Cold War

If we see the introduction or some might say the imposition of tragedy as a product of the colonial education system, it is important to understand how and by what means Western texts found theatrical form in the context of decolonisation. It is well known that in West Africa in particular there was a burgeoning of playwriting, theatre theory and production that explored, drew parallels with or sought to fuse indigenous performance traditions with Western theatre. While it would be too much to say that tragedy was understood as a metonym of Western theatre, there is an indisputable connexion between an exploration of ritual forms and Western theatre. An African theory of tragedy was famously formulated by Wole Soyinka in his essay "The fourth stage" (1967) where Soyinka drew parallels between Yoruba mythology, ritual performance and Greek tragedy. Less well-known is the research project that preceded this essay and the funding structure behind it. The essay is very much a somewhat belated "output" of a Rockefeller-funded research program brokered by the organisation's field officer, Robert W. July, and the newly founded School of Drama at the recently established University of Ibadan. The performance of tragedy requires theatrical infrastructure and in this paper I shall explore how a particular configuration of philanthropic CIA-funding promoting the humanities, neocolonial institution building in the area of higher education and a generation of African playwright-scholars forged a new understanding of theatre in an emerging postcolonial world.