



**'To speak  
Shakespeare in  
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Translocation of Languages  
on Nineteenth-Century Stages

BERENIKA SZYMANSKI-DÜLL

# Berenika Szymanski-Düll

Theatre Studies, LMU Munich, Germany  
[berenika.szymanski@lrz.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:berenika.szymanski@lrz.uni-muenchen.de)

Professor in Theatre Studies with a focus on transnational theatre history at LMU Munich. She is currently the executive editor of the journal *Forum Modernes Theater*. In 2019 she received the Starting Grant from the European Research Council for her project *T-MIGRANTS*. Recent publications include, among others, *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War*, co-edited with Christopher Balme (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2017), *Leave left left. Migrationsphänomene in den Künsten in aktueller und historischer Perspektive*, co-edited with Burcu Dogramaci and Wolfgang Rathert (Neofelis: Berlin 2020), and *Methoden der Theaterwissenschaft*, co-edited with Christopher Balme (Narr: Tübingen 2020).

## KEYWORDS

Bilingual performance, non-native language, nation building, contact zone, nineteenth century

## SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER

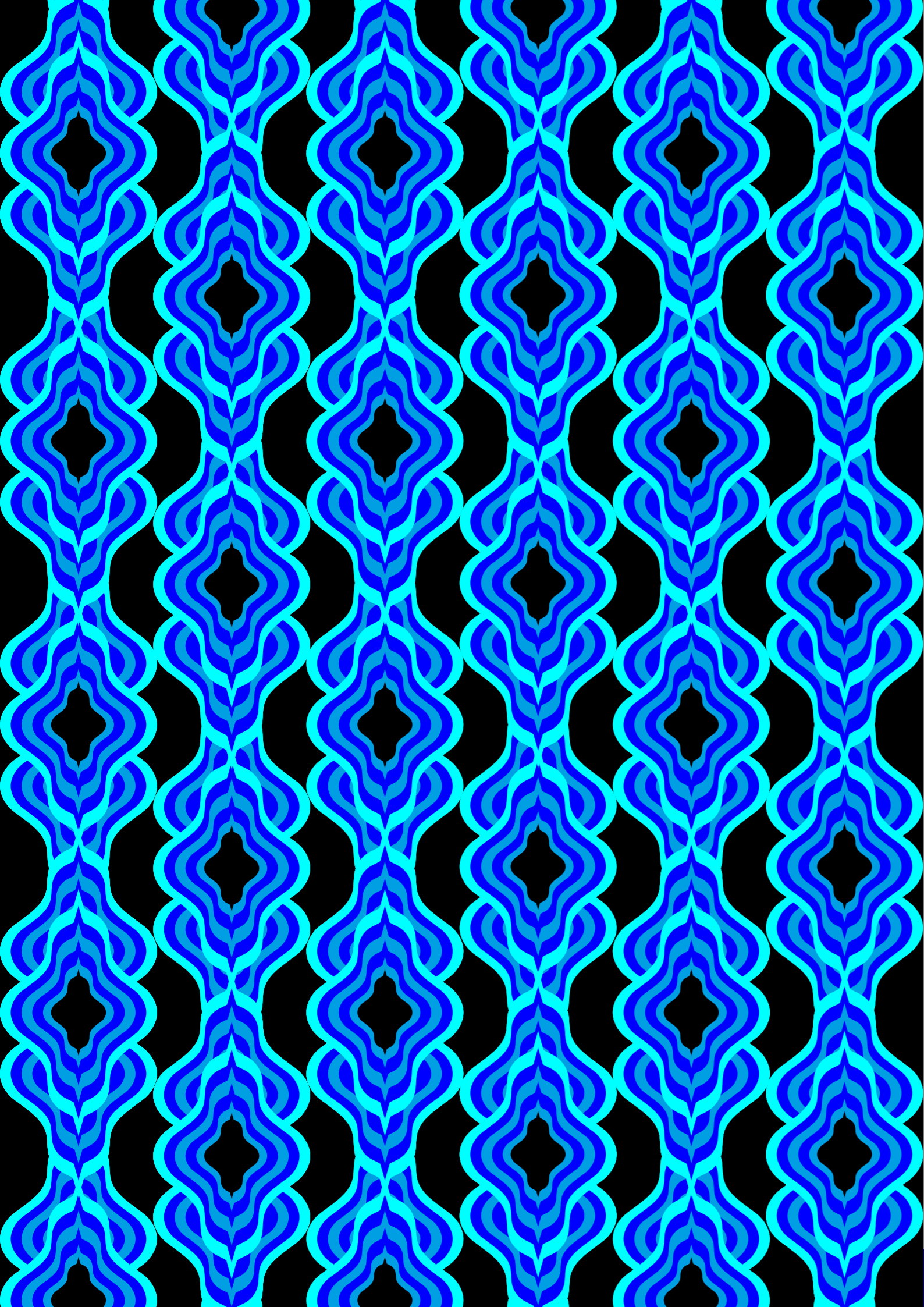
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# Summary

During the nineteenth century technical developments and the associated advances in transportation encouraged mobility and connectivity and greatly expanded the actor's sphere of action. These developments paved the way for theatre to become a transnationally, even globally connected medium with numerous possibilities of cross-cultural encounters and entanglements. In this context, languages left their national contexts by travelling the world with actors. In this article, I will pursue this translocation of languages by focusing on two cases: bilingual performances and performances of actors who have performed in non-native languages. Focusing on the USA, I aim to examine these concrete language practices in theatre as spaces of encounter or contact zones in a time characterised by strong nation building processes.

# Zusammenfassung

Im Verlauf des 19. Jahrhunderts haben technische Entwicklungen und die damit verbundenen Fortschritte im Transportwesen Mobilität und Konnektivität gefördert und so den Aktionsradius von Schauspieler\*innen enorm ausgedehnt. Diese Entwicklungen ebneten dem Theater den Weg, sich zu einem transnationalen, ja global vernetzten Medium mit vielfältigen Möglichkeiten kulturübergreifender Begegnungen und Verflechtungen zu entwickeln. In diesem Zuge verließen auch zahlreiche Sprachen ihre nationalen Kontexte und reisten mit den Schauspieler\*innen um die Welt. In meinem Beitrag werde ich dieser Translokation von Sprachen nachgehen und zwei Beispiele fokussieren: bilinguale Aufführungen sowie Aufführungen von Schauspieler\*innen, die nicht in ihren Muttersprachen aufgetreten sind. Mit einem Fokus auf die USA möchte ich diese beiden Praktiken als Räume der Begegnung bzw. als Kontaktzonen in einer Zeit untersuchen, die von starken Nation-Building-Prozessen geprägt war.



*It occurs to me that, for all their boasts about having the biggest and the most of everything, Americans, when it comes to art, are surprisingly devoid of patriotic self-confidence. It is false to say that the public craves only plebeian entertainments.*

*But it is assumed that performances of quality come from abroad. Foreign actors make quite a splash here and, if French or Italian, are expected to perform in their own language, which no one understands. Rachel triumphed with Adrienne Lecouvreur [...] some twenty years ago; and ten years ago Ristori made a very successful, lucrative tour throughout the country. Thinking about this now, I confess to feeling a twinge of envy. But, no, don't conclude that I dream of resuming my career here. In what language? No one would want to hear our native tongue [...].*

(Sontag 2000: 140-141)

These words were written by Maryna, the protagonist of Susan Sontag's novel *In America*, to her Polish compatriot and friend, Henryk. Although they are fictional, they nevertheless address characteristic aspects of the theatre in the second half of the nineteenth century. Technical developments in this era and the associated advances in transportation encouraged mobility and connectivity and greatly expanded the actor's sphere of action. Many national stars, aspiring actors and dancers, and sometimes even whole companies seized the opportunity

## USA, Language, and Contact Zones

to travel the world performing on stages in different countries and continents. Thus, Eduard Devrient — an important figure in German speaking theatre at the time — stated rightly that ‘everyone rushed into guest tours’ (Devrient 1905: 295).<sup>1</sup> This is as much the case for Adelaide Ristori (1822-1906) and Rachel Félix (1821-1858), mentioned in Maryna’s words above, as it is true of stars like Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) or Eleonora Duse (1858-1924) who to this day are well-known even outside the world of theatre especially because of their successful tours abroad. All these figures transgressed not only territorial, but also cultural boundaries, which had several impacts on the theatre business: theatre grew to become a transnationally, even globally connected medium with numerous possibilities of cross-cultural encounters and entanglements. In this context, many different mother tongues left their national contexts and travelled the world with performers. Since a large part of acting practice, especially within ‘high culture’, was based on language, it seems relevant to ask how this translocality of languages was implemented in theatre practice in a time of strong nation building processes. In this article, I will pursue this question by exploring two practices already mentioned in the opening quotation: firstly, the case of bilingual performances and secondly performances by actors who performed in non-native languages. I aim to examine these concrete language practices as spaces of encounter or contact zones, asking what consequences they may have provoked. Geographically, I will focus on the United States as it is the country which was — as Sontag’s protagonist Maryna describes — one of the most popular travel destinations for European touring actors in the second half of the nineteenth century. I choose to focus on the United States also because of its history of migration marked by a constant oscillation between national ambitions and openness to foreign influences.

To describe situations of cultural encounter, Mary Louise Pratt developed the concept of the ‘contact zone’ that she defines as those spaces ‘where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today’ (Pratt 1990: 34). As this quotation shows, the conditions for interaction that arise in contact zones are not the same for everyone. This circumstance is associated on the one hand with ‘asymmetrical relations of power’ but on the other with different cultural imprints and thus different practices, views, and opinions. This, in turn, harbours enormous potential for conflict and is determined by tensions between dominance and marginality, potentially promoting dispute and exclusion. At the same time, an encounter in a contact zone is reciprocal as it is able to set negotiation processes in motion and thus produce various forms of agency. Contact zones are thus special spaces of communitisation that are always generated anew performatively and that are the result of the joint presences of those involved in them. The emergence of contact zones consequently questions existing concepts of community — such as those of nations —, problematises traditional ideas, and evokes reinterpretations. In this context, Pratt stresses the key function of language as a medium of communication and emphasises — following Benedict Anderson — that both spoken and written language played an important role in the processes of building modern nations:

Languages were seen as living in ‘speech communities’, and these tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared

1. All translations into English are mine unless otherwise acknowledged.

identically and equally among all the members. This abstract idea of the speech community seemed to reflect, among other things, the utopian way modern nations conceive of themselves as what Benedict Anderson calls 'imagined communities'. (Pratt 1991: 37)

In the form of writing such as books, newspapers, or magazines but also in the form of theatre, various vernaculars played a crucial role in nation-building processes and created networks of people who would eventually constitute the literary elites that would rule certain groups as nations (Anderson 1986).

This seems interesting with regards to the USA because despite linguistic diversity due to the country's settlement and migration history, language can also here be ascribed an important role in terms of community building. After the War of Independence between 1775 and 1783 when thirteen British colonies rebelled against their motherland and founded the United States of America, English — the language of these settler colonies — became the language of the newly founded republic. Although there were attempts to allow other languages — such as Greek or Latin — as national languages, precisely in order to distance themselves from the former colonial power of England, these were ultimately not a serious alternative. Over time a new variant of English, American English, prevailed. The propagation of this language was a major concern of the nation's most important thinkers. For example, in his *Dissertations on the English Language* Noah Webster pleaded for the independence of American English: 'As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own in language as well as in government. Great Britain, whose children we are and whose language we speak, should no longer be our standard' (Webster [1789] 1951: 20). Given the close connection between language and nation, it is therefore not surprising that important political manifestos were written in English, that English-language newspapers and magazines were founded, and that the

first literary works to praise and to defend the new nation were written in English. Despite these trends, however, it must be noted that parallel to this development, a great linguistic diversity can be observed within the young US nation. This goes hand in hand with the fact that numerous migrants living in the country and continually arriving not only continued to cultivate their own culture but also their respective national languages. This was, for instance, the case in Little Germany — also called 'Kleindeutschland' — a prototypical district of German immigrants in New York where German restaurants, churches, street signs, and clubs were common. German was the language that connected everyone and that strengthened the sense of community. Theatre also played an important role in this structure, initially in the form of amateur theatres in the 1840s and from the 1850s onwards also on a professional level.

In this context, I would like to refer to Pratt again. For even if certain elites propagate the model of a homogeneous community with a common language, it does not mean that this community functions according to the rules and the ideas of these elites:

Despite whatever conflict or systematic social differences might be in play, it is assumed that all participants are engaged in the same game and that game is the same for all players. Often it is. But of course often it is not, as, for example, when speakers are from different classes or cultures, or one party is exercising authority and another is submitting to it or questioning it. (Pratt 1991: 38)

From this perspective, the history of the USA since the colonisation of North America has been the history of interactions of different cultures manifesting themselves in various forms of encounter. These interactions can by no means be described as a mutual exchange or harmonious process but rather as a process in a conflict-laden field (Zapf 2010: 41), that is to say a contact zone.

This is also evident in the theatre of the time that was a part of this field. Theatre was shunned by the early colonies, especially those with British roots. In revolutionary America performing art was initially boycotted and even prohibited by law. It had opponents due to its reputation as being anti-religious, immoral, and frivolous. However, especially after the War of Independence, many permanent theatres were built and with time theatre eventually established itself as an enterprise that not only served entertainment but also brought the first American plays to the stage and established the first national stars of its own. The language of these theatres was, of course, predominantly English. An exception were those theatres founded by migrants, which were primarily aimed at the respective migrant audience by promoting performances in their home language and by inviting stars from their home countries. Over time these migrant theatres also played an important role for American theatre as they created numerous opportunities for encounters between different theatre traditions by, for example, arranging guest tours by their compatriots on US stages. In addition, many European migrants from the theatre business entered the country and tried to make a career in the USA. All this led to the further creation of contact zones.

Following Pratt's term 'contact zone', I understand theatrical contact zones as spaces in which actors, spectators, languages, texts, and aesthetics from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds come into contact with each other within a theatrical framework and thus interact, communicate, and negotiate shared histories and power relations. What makes these contact zones so distinctive is the specific character of theatre based on the exposition of action and language on stage and the communication both between actors on stage and between those on stage and their audience. All these contacts and interactions take place in the here and now and lead to a spatial and temporal co-presence of culturally different people, themes, languages, and aesthetics. This all has consequences not only for the moment of the performance. Before, during, and after the theatrical

event, interactions take place — whether consciously or unconsciously — triggering questions and discussions, entailing negotiations, promoting redefinitions, or creating new forms (see Szymanski-Düll 2017).

## Bilingual Performances

In contrast to the present day where guest performances — whether at home or abroad — are carried out by the whole company, in the nineteenth century it was not uncommon that actors also travelled alone with their repertoire of roles and had to perform within the existing structures of the theatres in the respective countries that they visited. For foreign guest performances this often meant giving a guest performance in their own language at a theatre mainly specialising in a migrant audience from that particular country. This was, for instance, the case at the popular German speaking stages in New York like the Stadttheater, the Thalia Theatre, or the Amberg Theatre where immigrant directors like Otto Hoym, William Kramer, Heinrich Conried, or Gustav Amberg brought numerous artists, plays, and operettas from German speaking areas to the USA. For many performers such a possibility of performing in the USA represented a steppingstone in their career since it repeatedly occurred that they would receive further offers for guest tours throughout the country playing on other migrant stages.

A second possibility of acting on stages abroad — mainly within popular dramas like *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *The Lady of the Camellias*, or the plays of Shakespeare that were well known to the theatre audience of the time — meant performing in a foreign-language context. It was not uncommon for actors arriving from France, Italy, or Germany to be given the opportunity to play on American stages as well. In such cases,

they performed in their mother language while all the other performers acted in English. This resulted in the presence of different languages in one production. When, for example, in winter 1866-1867,<sup>2</sup> the popular American tragedian Edwin Booth (1833-1893) invited the actor Bogumil Dawison (1818-1872)<sup>3</sup> during his US tour to the New York Winter Garden to play Othello, Dawison acted in German, while Booth himself acted the role of Iago in English. The German actress, Marie Methua-Scheller, who emigrated to America played Desdemona in this production, giving a bilingual performance. She acted in English in her scenes with Booth as well as with the company and in German in scenes with Dawison.<sup>4</sup>

2. The productions of this bilingual *Othello* took place on 29 December 1866 and on 2 and 4 January 1867.

3. Dawison made his stage debut in Polish in 1837 in Warsaw. His first German speaking performances took place in 1841 in Lemberg. In 1847 he performed for the first time in Hamburg at the Thalia Theatre. At the time of the *Othello* performance with Booth he was already considered as one of the foremost European tragedians.

4. Concerning this theatre event, see also Watermaier and Engle 1988.

It is difficult to determine whether this production was the first bilingual performance in the USA. Looking at reviews, however, one can find a comment indicating that it must at least have been the first polyglot performance of *Othello*. The way in which the critics treated this bilingual theatrical event, however, leads one to suspect that bilingual performance was not yet an established practice on US stages at this time. Therefore, some critics expressed serious misgivings in the run-up to the performance that, for example, the bilingualism could lead to a contest on stage between Booth and Dawison simply showing their parts instead of interacting with each other. Another concern was that the presence of different languages on stage would result in 'a confusion of tongues' ('Drama' 1867: 7) in which the audience would be placed in

Bogumila Dawison, Dresden 1861

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a state of incomprehension. In the end the reviewers were indeed surprised to find that the result was very satisfying. A critic from *Albion* magazine stated: 'We only noticed one or two instances in which an actor proceeded with his part, before his predecessor had given the word' (*ibid.*). Some other critics expressed praise as the following passage from *The World* shows: 'Not Paris, with Talma and Rachel; not London, with Garrick and Siddons; have ever witnessed what New York witnessed on Saturday night — the blending of the highest foreign with the greatest native genius in the personification of the principal characters in one of Shakespeare's most thrilling plays' (*The World* 1866: 4). This critic from *The World* even claimed that the fact that Shakespeare was so important for German literature and German theatre meant that it was understandable that the bilingual performance went so smoothly because 'to speak Shakespeare in German is almost to speak it in English' (*ibid.*).

Of course, it was not that simple. Bilingual performances, that can be related to Pratt's idea of the contact zone where the foreign and the other comes into contact with the familiar, marked a disruption of formerly homogeneously monolingual theatre. However, this kind of encounter is not to be seen as a dichotomous differentiation where two or more languages are put in contrast on the stage. Rather, it demonstrates what Homi Bhabha describes as the 'beyond'. This is the 'moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion... there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction' (Bhabha 1994: 1). Thus bilingual performances definitely had their own challenges. On the one hand, they challenged the members of the audience and particularly those who did not understand one of the languages represented on the stage. The spectator's perception oscillated between multiple tongues and they were thus both in a state of understanding and a state of confrontation with foreign, unfamiliar words, which — as some critics pointed out — meant that it was difficult

to understand the play being performed as a whole. On the other hand, bilingual performances also created challenges for the actors who swayed between using their own tongue and interacting with a foreign one. It was generally the case that such actors were not able to speak the language of the person with whom they were acting. They were reliant on certain strategies to ensure that their linguistic deficit was not apparent during the performance. In a letter to a friend, for instance, Booth revealed during a guest tour in Germany where he acted in English within German productions: 'I have mentally to recite in English what the Germans are saying, in order to make the speeches fit' (Booth [1883] 1902: 242). Finally, bilingual performances challenged the idea of American English as the national language on stage and reflected the reality of American life at that time that was in fact multilingual.

What should not remain unmentioned in this context is the fact that the repetition of polyglot performances by Booth and by other actors resulted in such performances ultimately becoming established, as the statement of an editor of *Scribner's Monthly* from 1881 — more than 10 years after the *Othello* performance — shows:

After all, this mixing of languages is not a matter of great importance. Like the use of blank verse or the mingling of prose and verse, it departs from the exact facts of life. The spectators accept it by tacit convention — as they will accept almost any other incongruity, however humorous it may seem, if it be necessary to further their enjoyment, and if it be frankly presented at the start. ('Foreign Actors on the American Stage' 1881: 534)

As is apparent from this quotation, the linguistic contact zone within the framework of bilingual performances resulted in a new form of performance that over time even seemed to establish itself as a theatrical convention, being quickly accepted as such by both audiences and critics.

The popularity of polyglot performances is not surprising because they offered the actors of the time several advantages. On the one hand, they allowed stars to present their acting skills on foreign soil; on the other hand, the audience had the opportunity to admire celebrated international actors and to see them in action with national stars. For American theatre operators this constellation meant not only gaining another audience group — that is migrants living in the host country who longed to experience their fellow countrymen and their mother tongue in theatre — but also large profits because the ticket prices for polyglot performances were higher than those for monolingual performances. The tickets for Booth and Dawison's *Othello* in New York, for example, were sold for two to three dollars, which was more than twice the regular price.

## Debuts in Non-Native Languages

If we recall the fictional words of Maryna quoted at the beginning of this article, we may remember her statement that not all actors were able to take advantage of the option of bilingual performances because of their nationality and native language. In fact, bilingual performances were reserved primarily for German, French, or Italian virtuosos and of course for English-speaking stars when they gave guest performances outside their home country. Actors from Eastern Europe on the other hand had a hard time acting in their native languages on foreign stages. It is for this reason that Susan Sontag's protagonist calculates that she has little chance of success as a Polish speaking actress.

The figure of Maryna is based on the real actress Helena Modrzejewska (1840-1909) who, in 1876 at the height of her career on the Polish stage,

emigrated to the USA with the hope of also performing in America. She did in fact make her debut on the US stage, yet language was indeed a difficult hurdle. Although there were Polish-speaking stages in the USA they were not — in contrast to most of the German, Italian, or French ones — considered part of 'high culture'. Rather, due to their amateur status they were instead, as Beth Holmgren emphasises, 'a ghettoized circuit' in which working-class Polish immigrants enjoyed themselves (Holmgren 2012: 149). Such a debut was out of the question for the ambitious Modrzejewska.<sup>5</sup> She decided to try to make her debut in English, although at that time she only spoke a few words. She revealed her ambitious plan in a letter to her mother dated 4 July 1877 in which she somewhat naively wrote: 'I want the spectators not to discover a foreigner in me. I want them to think I come from an English province' (Modrzejewska [1877] 2015: 390). Together with her English teacher, she prepared some roles in this new language from plays that she had already performed in Polish in her home country and of which she knew were popular with US audiences. After many rejections, with the help of influential compatriots, Modrzejewska had the opportunity to make her US debut on 20 August 1877 in the California Theatre in San Francisco with the role of Adrienne Lecouvreur in the eponymous play by Eugène Scribe and Ernest Legouvé. Beforehand, however, she was advised to change her name because the theatre manager, John McCullough, thought that it was too Polish and worried that the American audience would barely be able to read it and may thus be put off from coming to the theatre. In her memoirs the actress remembers the process of finding a name, which was compatible for American spectators:

5. In the letter correspondence of the actress as well as that of her husband – Karol Chłapowski – offers for an engagement in Polish are mentioned several times, but they are never substantiated. See, for example, Modrzejewska's letter to the Krakow family dated 17 October 1876 or the letter from Karol Chłapowski to Józef Chłapowski dated 15 November 1876. Both letters are printed in the correspondence collection edited by Alicja Kędzióra and Emil Orzechowski, *Modrzejewska/Listy*, which was published in 2015.

I told him [...] I might, by the omission of a few letters, make out a name which would sound pretty much like my own, and yet not frighten people away, and I wrote down 'Modgeska.' He smiled again, saying it might remind one of 'Madagascar.' I soon perceived the point, and changed the 'g' into a 'j'. He spelled aloud 'Modjeska.' 'Now,' he said, 'it is quite easy to read, and sounds pretty, I think'.

(Modjeska 1910: 334)

In this way Helena Modrzejewska became Helena Modjeska. Henryk Sienkiewicz, the later Nobel Prize winner and friend of the actress, who was living at the time as a correspondent in the USA, wrote an article for the *Gazeta Polska* about the US debut of the Polish star. It is very striking that in this text he tried to explain to his compatriots not only the success of Modrzejewska but especially her great performances in a foreign language:

I knew that our artist had been studying the English language for eight months. And believe me, to learn the most difficult language in the world in only eight months, and not only the spoken language, but the language of the stage, yes, it is a miracle and only a genius can do it. (Sienkiewicz 1877: 203)

A debut in a foreign language was not customary but it wasn't a novelty either; other actors also tried to use a change of language to establish themselves in another national sphere. This is the case of Bogumil Dawison, who I have already mentioned. He made his stage debut in Polish in Warsaw and only took on roles in German after his decision to establish himself in the German-speaking theatre. Alexander Moissi (1879-1935) switched from Italian to German and the actress Fanny Janauschek (1829-1904) even changed languages twice, first from Czech to German and then to English. Daniel Bandmann (1837-1904) acted in two foreign languages: English and French. In an announcement

of *The New York Times* we can read for example: 'He will first produce "Narcissus," and will make a triple attack upon it by representing it in English, French, and German' ('Amusements at the Theatres' 1879: 6). However, the question remains — how was such a change of language received by American audiences?

## The Beauty of Shakespeare's Verses and Foreign Accents

In 1881 an editor at *Scribner's Monthly* claimed that 'no jealousy has ever been shown against foreigners on our stage' ('Foreign Actors on the American Stage' 1881: 522) and gave the inability of these foreigners to speak the English language as the reason for this circumstance. At the very same time, however, he stated that there was certainly a prevailing jealousy against actors from England 'who can step into our theatres without serving any linguistic apprenticeship' (*ibid.*). While in a bilingual performance, as shown above, the alien is highlighted by the foreign actor and his native language and appears clearly as the other and is thus accepted, the use of the English language by actors from England is — as this quotation suggests — potentially problematic. The simultaneous otherness and linguistic similarity apparently provoked unease. Due to the previous attempts of the USA to cut ties with Great Britain, this reaction seems understandable. However, this leaves the question — what about non-native speakers who started to perform in English?

If we consider the cases of Daniel Bandmann and Helena Modrzejewska, it can be observed that the public reaction to their mastery of the English language was divided. This was paralleled by the reactions of

critics, even though Bandmann made his debut in English ten years earlier than Modrzejewska (see Szymanski-Düll 2017). While the reviews contain admiration, for example, for the fact that both actors learned a foreign language in only a few months, criticism — in particular of their pronunciation of this language — is prominent. This criticism became even more scathing when both actors began to play Shakespearean roles in English.<sup>6</sup> For instance, a critic from *The New York Times* wrote of Modrzejewska's performance as Viola: 'it was frequently impossible to understand her, and some of the loveliest verse put into the sweet mouth of Viola became, as she spoke it, unintelligible' ('Modjeska as Viola' 1882: 4). The same can be stated with regard to Bandmann. *The Daily Dramatic Chronicle*, for example, wrote: 'Daniel E. Bandmann played "Hamlet" so badly that he was hissed a little, and had not the house been "crowded to excess with his countrymen," would have been hissed a good deal more' ('Shocking' 1866: 3). The main argument of the reviewers was that the beauty of Shakespeare's verses was destroyed by the performances of foreign actors, failing to express the meaning of the words. The renowned New York theatre critic William Winter in particular criticised Modrzejewska's Shakespeare performances in exactly this respect: 'In most of Modjeska's Shakespearean performances her cadences of elocution, her mispronunciation of English words, and her foreign accent somewhat marred the beauty of the verse and impaired its meaning' (Winter 1913: 391). To understand this critique, it is worth taking a brief look at the historical relationship between Shakespeare and the USA.

6. Critics from England proved to be even more severe than those from the USA when considering Modrzejewska's performances in their homeland. The actress had indeed been successful there with roles like Marguerite Gautier or Mary Stuart but she struggled to succeed with Shakespearean roles. Beth Holmgren points out whilst summarising the reviews in the British press that 'in the eyes of the Victorian English public Modjeska could never excel as a Juliet on account of her ethnicity and technique' (2012: 180). In the same sense Gail Marshall emphasises that the actress never achieved the same status in Britain that she had elsewhere and stresses that 'she seems to have fallen victim to ignorance about precisely what her nationality might signify' (2007: 63).

Shakespeare was very important for the young US nation. As Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan state: 'Shakespeare in America in many ways parallels the larger narrative of American history: tentative beginnings in the seventeenth century, strong but uneven expansion in the second half of the eighteenth century, geographic diversification and heightened sophistication in the nineteenth century' (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 1). Shakespeare came with the settlers from England to North America. He was there when the first colonies were founded and experienced anti-theatrical colonial movements that put more emphasis on capable craftsmen, workers, and farmers than on actors with their immoral and frivolous theatre. However, Shakespeare survived this anti-theatrical period in print because — in the eyes of the colonialists and their speakers — his universality, his truths, and his wisdom were able to strengthen the spirit and to improve the morals and the character of the American people. In this sense, Shakespeare, along with the Bible, was one of the most important sources to refer to for moral guidance for people in the USA at the time (*ibid*: 7-15). Norman Hudson, probably the best-known Shakespeare interpreter in the USA in the nineteenth century, whose writings and lectures influenced thousands of Americans, praised Shakespeare as 'the prodigy of our race' (Stafford 1951: 649). Meanwhile, William Cullen Bryant championed the bard's implicit 'Americanness' and Walt Whitman gave him an important role in the evolution of the American democracy (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 62). In this sense, many politicians such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, or Abraham Lincoln admired the bard's works and used Shakespearean quotations in their political discourse (Levine 1988: 23 and 37). By the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, all educated Americans knew Shakespeare intricately. His plays and their parodies were among the most popular on American stages and the bard's works were school readings on the basis of which declamation was practised and moral and patriotic values were taught. Thus Vaughan and Vaughan stress: 'The essence of educational Shakespeare was declamation. School children

recited, often memorized, speeches by Shakespeare's major characters [...] that were explicitly or implicitly accompanied by moral lessons the reader should imbibe with Shakespeare's words' (2012: 72).

In this context, the critique concerning the incorrect pronunciation of Shakespearean verse on stage by non-native speaking actors seems understandable. However, Winter even went so far in his criticism that he not only objected to the accent of the Polish actress but also suggested that the roles of Shakespeare be reserved for actors of the author's 'race'. This point he formulated in particular with regard to foreign-language debuts:

Meanwhile it is a fact, which all the protests made by foreign actors and their over-zealous advocates cannot obscure, that the greatest actors are those who, illustrating a true ideal of Shakespeare's great characters, do so with perfect interpretative art; and the actors in whom that union of ideal and execution has been manifested at the best have been and are actors of Shakespeare's race.

(Winter 1913: 391-392)

In this way the linguistic assessment of performances of Shakespeare in English by non-native speakers was joined by considerations of provenance. Modrzejewska reacted with incomprehension to such reviews: 'To criticize my accent was quite justifiable, but I wondered what my foreign appearance had to do with that matter. Was Juliet an American? Or must all Shakespeare's heroines look Anglo-Saxon, though they belong to different nationalities?' (Modjeska 1910: 380). Daniel Bandmann, too, tried to speak for himself and responded to this kind of critic, especially the critics from England who judged him even more strictly: 'I regret that, being a foreigner, and never having studied the English language till very recently, it is quite possible that I do not pronounce every word with the accent of a gentleman... but I am a hard working student, and zealously anxious to do full justice to the language of my author'

(Bandmann 1868: 7). Here he not only emphasises the efforts he has made to achieve a very good pronunciation of English but also stresses that he is keen to do justice to the Shakespearean language and thus also to the roles that he performs. Helena Modrzejewska, even though she could partly understand the arguments of the reviewers in view of the fact that an incorrect pronunciation could cause the poetics and melody of Shakespeare's verses to lose their beauty, still stresses her efforts to attempt to meet the plays' requirements in her memoirs. Here she gives special attention to her efforts concerning the psychological disposition of the characters and their development in the course of the play:

If the plays are rendered in English by foreign-born actors, their lack of familiarity with the acquired language may make their pronunciation defective, and thus imperil, if not the poetry of the sentence, at least the music of the verse. The latter is my own case, and therefore, whenever my pronunciation was found fault with, I could do nothing but accept the criticism in all humility and endeavor to correct the errors of my tongue; yet I persisted without discouragement, and went on studying more and more Shakespearean part, conscious that their essential value consisted in the psychological development of the characters, and confident that I understood them correctly and might reproduce them accordingly to the author's intentions. (Modjeska 1910: 531-532)

In addition, she tried to refute the argument concerning the doctrine of race by emphasising the bard's universality and by pointing out that Shakespeare did not situate his roles in a certain national context but rather that his characters were international and, depending on the play, often located in a different nation:

We foreigner, born outside the magic pale of the Anglo-Saxon race, place Shakespeare upon a much higher pedestal. We claim that,

before being English, he was human, and that his creations are not bound either by local or ethnological limits, but belong to humanity... Our argument is that when Shakespeare wanted to present English people he located them in England, or at least gave them English names [...]; while he presents Romans, Greeks, Jews, Italians, or Moors, he does not mean them to be travestied Anglo-Saxon, but to have characteristics of their own race and nation. (Modjeska 1910: 530)

While a bilingual performance of Shakespeare — as was the case in Dawison and Booth's *Othello* — did not really represent any national problem for the English-speaking audience in the USA (especially those whose native language was English), a performance in English by foreign actors definitely was a problem, as the examples of Modrzejewska and Bandmann show.<sup>7</sup> Here the encounter with the other took on another dimension because the other was almost the same whilst not quite being the same. Due to this fact, this contact zone caused not only confusion during the performance but provoked discussions and negotiations questioning the imagined homogenous American identity. I would also link the case of performances in non-native languages to Homi Bhabha's concept of *mimicry*. The figure of mimicry is to be understood 'as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1990: 86). Here we can speak of imitation yet one where cultural differences are not aligned but rather where a dissonance remains and indicates dif-

ference. A performance by a non-native speaker of a language mimics a performance by a native speaker but it is not the same thing. Although there is a convergence, the two are never identical. An unattainable remainder remains and indicates difference. As is apparent from the negative reviews of Modrzejewska's and Bandmann's performances in English, this difference — created in the contact zone — questioned the imagined national homogenous

7. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the reviews of Booth and Dawison's performance of *Othello* are by no means negative about Methua-Scheller's linguistic performance, who after all also performed in English as a German actress.

identity. This difference inscribed itself in the prevailing discourse and presented an intrinsic threat to it, especially from the point of view of conservatives striving for US independence and autonomy and therefore for Americanisation. Thus, while the linguistic difference of bilingual performances was very quickly accepted because, as explained above, the other was clearly marked as the other, in contrast linguistic mimicry was identified as a disruptive factor within the cultural frame of reference. In this way, performances in English by non-native English speakers set negotiation processes in motion and undermined traditional notions of language, in particular those of Shakespeare, on the stage.

However, these negotiations did not mean that artists who mastered the English language had no chance of success in the USA. On the contrary, the oscillation between attempts to forge a national identity and the constant influences of migration resulted, in the end, in a certain openness. Diverse US audiences, who all loved Shakespeare, forgave much, including the thoroughly incorrect pronunciation of Shakespearean verses. Finally, even the very critically minded William Winter retrospectively described Bandmann's performance as Shylock alongside that of Bogumil Dawison, Ernst von Possart, and Ermete Novelli as one of the most successful of a European actor in the USA (Winter 1911: 161). Helena Modrzejewska also managed to convince the severe critic. A not inconsiderable factor in her success was Edwin Booth who, in the 1889/1890 season, offered the Polish actress the opportunity to go on tour and to perform Shakespearean plays with him. In this way, the Polish actress finally managed to reach the Olympus of the US stage. Even Winter applauded her in the end without giving any more importance to her pronunciation: 'Modjeska was fortunate as Juliet, by reason of the exquisite beauty of her face and person, the charm of her sympathetic temperament, and the refinement of her style: she had outgrown the part before she ever acted it in America. Her comprehension of it, however, was complete, and completely indicated' (Winter 1915: 172).

**ENGLISH'S**  
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 Respectfully announce the  
 FIRST JOINT-APPEARANCE  
 of **Mr. Edwin Booth**  
 and  
**Mme Helena Modjeska**

IN A GRAND SCENIC AND  
 HISTORICALLY CORRECT PRODUCTION  
 of Shakespeares Sublime 6 Act Tragedy:  
**MACBETH**  
 For One Night Only \*  
 APRIL 29<sup>TH</sup> 1890.

SCENE.  
 SCOTLAND.  
 AND  
 ENGLAND

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

MACBETH	Mr. Edwin Booth
LADY MACBETH	Mme Modjeska
MACDUFF	Mr. Otis Skinner
DUNCAN KING OF SCOTLAND	Mr. Ben. G. Rogers
MALCOLM	Mr. Lawrence Hanley
DONALBAIN	Mr. Rankin Duvall
BANQUO	Mr. Charles Hanford
ROSSE	Mr. Frederic Vroom
LENOX	Mr. Herbert H. Pattee
SEYTON	Mr. Edward Vroom
FLEANCE	Mrs. Beaumont Smith
FIRST WITCH	Mr. Owen Fawcett
SECOND WITCH	Mr. W.R.S. Morris
THIRD WITCH	Mr. Beaumont Smith
DOCTOR	Mr. Frank Marcus
BLEEDING SERGEANT	Mr. James Taylor
DRUNKEN PORTER	Mr. Charles Koehler
FIRST MURDERER	Mr. Charles Campbell
SECOND MURDERER	Mr. Oliver Fiske
FIRST APPARITION	Mr. W.C. Stone
SECOND APPARITION	Mr. Francis Caine
THIRD APPARITION	Mr. John Wolseley
FIRST OFFICER	Mr. George McCulla
SECOND OFFICER	Mr. George Charles
GENTLEWOMAN	Miss Ann E. Proctor

LORDS, LADIES, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, ATTENDANTS.

PERIOD.  
 THE  
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Wm. B. Mumford, Indianapolis

Silk souvenir program for special production of Macbeth with Edwin Booth and Helena Modjeska, English's Opera House Indianapolis, 04/29/1890. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. The New York Public Library Digital Collections

In the case of Modrzejewska it is even possible to observe a national co-opting of her within the American press. While at the beginning of her career in the USA she was always presented as a 'Polish actress' (Greenwood 1878: 2) and was still counted as one of the 'Foreign Actors on the American Stage' in 1881,<sup>8</sup> a few years later this changed to 'Polish-American' or 'American-Polish actress'. At the pinnacle of her American career, she was finally even completely Americanised. In 1891, after a tour in Europe, the headline of a piece in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* read 'Modjeska Home Again' and in 1899 she was finally described as 'American' and was counted among the best female US Shakespeare actresses, as the following quote from *The Chautauquan* displays:

America has good reason to be proud of its many actors and actresses who have successfully undertaken nearly all of the chief roles in Shakespeare's plays...First among our actresses should be named Charlotte Cushman, called 'America's greatest tragedienne'... The versatile and charming Modjeska is an ideal Ophelia and a dignified Queen Katharine... There have been famous interpreters of Shakespeare in other lands: Ducis, Sully, Stendahl, Bernhardt, Rhea and Hading, in France; Salvini, Rossi, Ristori, and Duse, in Italy; Fleck, Schroeder, Iffland, Devrient, Seidelmann, Possart, Behrens, and Vogt, Germany. (Parsons 1899: 495)

Here Modrzejewska is clearly placed alongside the American stars. This becomes notably clear with the sentence: 'There have been famous interpreters of Shakespeare in other lands', which marks the distinction between the self and the other and positions the Polish born actress within the category of the self. Nevertheless, Helena Modrzejewska remained simultaneously the other. The protagonist of Sontag's novel *In America*, who I quoted at the beginning of this paper, had a similar experience. Considering Maryna's career, the fictional Edwin Booth states: 'I do think it is

8. This is indicated by a 1881 article that appeared in *Scribner's Monthly* and which was titled: 'Foreign Actor's on the American Stage'.

very entertaining that for the last ten years everyone has agreed that the greatest actress in the English-speaking world is a Pole. A Pole with an accent. Yes, Marina. No one mentions your accent anymore, it is part of your magic, but eet ees ver-ree, verr-rre noticeable' (Sontag 2000: 372).

## Conclusion

As a result of international guest performances as well as the migration processes of theatre professionals within the nineteenth century, various national languages transgressed their cultural and territorial borders and led to a phenomenon that can be described as contrary to the nation building processes of the time. Languages, one of the most important instruments associated with modern nations as imagined communities, attained a translocal presence, releasing processes of cultural tensions and negotiations. This questioned the idea of national homogeneity by creating contact zones and inscribing otherness onto the dominating discourse. As demonstrated in this article, taking the case of US stages a distinction between the perception of bilingual performances and performances in English by non-native English speakers can be observed. After initial scepticism, bilingual performances where different languages were obviously combined in one performance, established themselves as a common theatrical practice and became accepted by both critics and audiences. In contrast, with performances in English by non-native English speakers, the encounter with the other took on a different dimension. The mimicry of the native language by non-native actors was identified as a disruptive factor and caused discussions and negotiations. However, due to the oscillation between attempts to construct a national identity and the consistent influences of migration within the USA, foreign actors nevertheless were able to make a career on the US stage even in English. In this way these actors undermined traditional notions of language on the stage, too. •

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