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Gillian Arrighi and Jim Davis (Eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Circus*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021), 292 pp. PB. £22.99.

The publication of this volume within The Cambridge Companions to Theatre and Performance evidences the recognition of circus studies as a distinct field of enquiry. Improvements in research infrastructure, resources and networks over the past twenty years have helped develop a research ecology whose variety of interests, theoretical foundations and methods are well displayed in this volume.

The inclusion of a Timeline may suggest that the editors intended a definitive account of the 250-year history of the modern circus, but Gillian Arrighi (Newcastle, Australia) and Jim Davis (Warwick, UK) are quick to acknowledge the partiality of their collection and that the absence of English translations of circus histories from 'Japan, India, Russia, Brazil, and elsewhere' (p. 14) have restricted its scope. Nevertheless, chapter authors represent a wide range of academic disciplines, many from Circus and theatre studies but also historians and anthropologists. The volume's strategy is to have invited original contributions, each based upon a 'discrete body of specialised literature' (ibid.) supplemented by a bibliography and extensive web resources to ensure breadth. The editors have succeeded in providing a wide-ranging introduction which will be particularly useful for readers new to the field.

The volume is divided into four parts, the first, 'Transnational Geographies of the Modern Circus' considers particular country and regional histories; the second, 'Circus Arts and Aesthetics' considers circus disciplines; the third, 'Circus: A Constantly Evolving Form' provides outlines of the distinguishing types of circus institutionalisation and purpose and two final chapters provide 'Circus Studies Scholarship' with a self-referential final part. Part 1 begins with Matthew Wittmann's 'The Origins and Growth of the Modern Circus' which outlines the period from 1768 to the 1850s. The chapter explains the essential advantages of the new institutional form: "the flexibility of the circus allowed it to incorporate traditional and new acts in innovative fashion that ensured its enduring appeal" (p.16) whilst contextualising this within wider "cultural and socio-economic dynamics" (ibid). Sakina Hughes 'Reconstruction, Railroads and Race: The American Circus in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era' situates the innovation of the three-ring circus, employing over a thousand people and travelling by rail, in the history of racial oppression arguing that "the American railroad circus of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era reflected, supported *and challenged* the race norms of the age" (p.36 – italics in original). Editor Gillian Arrighi's own chapter 'Circus, Colonialism, and Empire: The Circus in Australasia and Asia' argues that whilst the dominant tale of nineteenth century colonial culture is one of domination by imperial centres, that "What is little understood about the processes of circus transculturation in the Asia pacific region is that, once introduced, circus integrated with local culture, giving rise to showmen and entrepreneurs who identified as being 'of these places' " (pp.48-49). Julieta Infantino's 'The Criollo Circus (Circus Theatre) in Argentina: The Emergence of a Unique Circus Form in Connection with the Consolidation of the Argentine Nation State' similarly surfaces the relationship between local cultural identities and the importation of circus through which: "The fusion of circus arts with theatrical representation not only produced an innovative, localised subgenre but also provoked a modification in appraisals of the circus, which, between 1880 and 1910, shifted from being considered a 'minor art' to being legitimised as the 'origin' of the authentic Argentinian national theatre." (p.63). In 'The Past and Present of Czech Circus', Hanuš Jordan and Veronika Štefanová traces the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century development of circus arts in different class-based modalities as an adjunct to "traditional folk puppetry" (p.78) for the rural poor and through lavish performances for the nobility before

conventional touring circuses began from the 1830s. Moving away from circus history to contemporary circus, in the cleverly titled "Catching On: Chinese Acrobatics from China to the West in the Twenty First Century", Rosemary Farrell shows how traditional Chinese acrobatics "have been culturally reinterpreted in hybrid acts and performances that have blossomed in the twenty-first century with the increasing number of contemporary circus companies" (p.92).

Part 2 begins with Kim Baston's 'The Equestrian Circus' which argues that although equestrian performance ritual did not begin with the circus it "provided a performance form in which expert horsemanship was codified into a series of repeated and recognisable acts" (p.107). Whilst equestrian acts have reduced in frequency due to the problematising of animal entertainment through the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the renowned circus scholar Peta Tait's 'Animals, Circus and War Re-enactment: Military Action to Colonial Wars' recalls a form of circus entertainment that has disappeared altogether. Military re-enactment was however key to the legitimisation of circus amongst the British aristocracy in the late eighteenth century and continued long thereafter: "The nineteenth-century war re-enactment was a display of highly skilled horses and riders that glorified the victory of the colonisers, as it implicitly, then explicitly reinforced how animals were necessarily co-opted into the military practices of the colonial era" (p.138). In 'Circus Clowns', Louise Peacock presents a selective history of clowning which highlights "points of connection and difference" (p.141) in the way that clowning developed between Europe and USA. She focuses on the differential impact of the three-ring versus single-ring form in the late nineteenth century and the impact of new circus on clowning practice from the 1970s. In 'Aerial Performance: Ariel Aesthetics', Kate Holmes reviews the history of the wide variety of aerial gymnastics that have developed from Jules Leotard's original solo trapeze in 1859 through to the contemporary Extraordinary Bodies ensemble of artistes with disabilities. Holmes argues for the centrality of "four aesthetics of weightlessness, risk, gender and physical appearance" (p.165).

Part 3 opens with Catherine M. Young's 'Circus and Somatic Specularity on Stage in the Variety Era', which uses archival evidence (especially posters) to remind readers that from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century, circus artistes routinely played variety bills in Europe and America. Focussing on what she terms 'the Variety Era' from 1890 to 1920, Young argues that this begins to "mark the confluence of metropolitan performance cultures spurred by the industrialisation and urbanisation of the mid-late nineteenth century." (p.185). In 'Becoming an Art Form: From Nouveau Cirque to Contemporary Circus in Europe', Agathe Dumont narrates the late twentieth century development of contemporary circus from its origins in 1960s counter-culture through to professionalisation and the mixing of disciplines that characterises much contemporary work. She concludes that "The main challenge today is to affirm that the circus exists as an art on its own; a whole, made up of multiple identities and singularities." (p.199). Alison Funk's 'Risky Play and the Global Rise of Youth Circus' considers youth circus through the lens of "Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter's six categories of risky play" (p.203). At the same time her chapter provides a mapping of developments in youth, community and social circus from Reg Bolton's pioneering work onwards and a brief historic overview of concerns about exploitation of children by circuses in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on her own experience, Funk optimistically points out that "Every circus educator has stories of watching circus transform their students" (p. 212). Jennifer Beth Spiegel's 'Social Circus: The Rise of an 'Inclusive' movement for Collective Creativity' explores "the social and cultural conditions that have led to the rise and evolution of this movement and the unique ways in which it constitutes a form of socio-cultural intervention" (p. 216) and relates this to its philosophical foundations in the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Baol.

Part 4 begins in reflective style with the founders of the 'Circus and Its Others' research project, Charles R. Batson and Karen Fricker, considering 'Methodologies in Circus Scholarship'. Their own method considers 69 articles from three prominent circus texts and finds three dominant methodologies "history/historiography, performance analysis and ethnography." (231) The chapter thematises from work that the authors regard as particularly important but fails to provide a rationale for their selection (citations, downloads) and thereby cannot avoid a certain arbitrariness. The final chapter, Anne-Sophie Jürgens 'Through the looking Glass: Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Circus Studies', provides another selection of research to "clarify some of the aesthetic, innovative, transgressive, and intermedial potential under the umbrella term of circus studies" (p.245), this time structured around a contrast between research in science and in the humanities. It suffers however from both including historical studies of scientific innovation within the former, thereby confusing a methodological with a thematic distinction and reducing the latter to semiotic studies, a hardly warranted conflation.

Anyone who edits collections is challenged to avoid repetition whilst ensuring the selections relate to one another. With the exception of Part 4, the editors have achieved this balance and commissioned articles which convey much of the burgeoning interest in circus studies. One weakness is that their authors have avoided conflict between sources and especially the critiques that Paul Bouissac and other writers on classical circus have made of its contemporary variant. Circus Studies as a field will only reach maturity when such disputes are acknowledged rather than ignored.

*Ron Beadle is Visiting Professor at the National Centre for Circus Arts, UK.*