The Invisible Other in Excess:

(Dis)placing Europe in Simon Stephens's *Three Kingdoms*

There is something about 'Europe' which we don't decide, something which, by the way, no one has decided, something that, by contrast, one needs to be capable of welcoming.[1]

In the preface of the published text of *Three Kingdoms* (2011),[2] Simon Stephens describes his play as 'this exploration of Europe on its knees, this *atrocity exhibition* of post-colonialism'.[3] This article takes the playwright's description of his work as a starting point in order to explore the piece's – both the written text's and Nübling's production's – Europeanness. I approach this Europeanness in two, interrelated ways, which focus on the performance of the marginal, the Other within Europe: first, I discuss the piece's representation of what I term Europe's 'invisible Others', women exploited by a European network of sex trafficking. Following Sophie Nield's fascinating reading of the theatre stage as an 'alternative form of border space',[4] where appearance, identity and representation intersect, I ask what happens when what appears onstage is an identity that in real life remains invisible, seen but not apprehended? How did the stage appearance of displaced Others work on audiences in a production that was described 'more as a series of feelings than thoughts'?[5] I attempt to understand the politics of representation of this marginal Other in *Three Kingdoms* by bringing Stephens's work in dialogue with literature on the construction of post-imperial, post-colonial, 'expanded' New Europe.

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[1] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'La naissance continuée de l' Europe', quoted in Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p.18.

[2] The analysis is based on the published text and the Lyric Hammersmith, Munich Kammerspiele and Teater NO99 production, under Sebastian Nübling's direction and design by Ene-Liis Semper, seen on 9 May 2012, as part of World Stages London (WSL).

[3] Simon Stephens, 'Preface', *Three Kingdoms* (London: Methuen, 2012), pp. v – xiii, p. vi. [emphasis in the original].

[4] Sophie Nield, 'The Proteus Cabinet, or "We are here but not here"', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance,* 13:2 (2008), 137-45, p.144. See also 'On The Border As Theatrical Space: Appearance, Dis-location And The Production Of The Refugee', in *Contemporary Theatres in Europe,* ed. by Joe Kelleher & Nicholas Ridout (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 61-72.

[5] Andrew Haydon, 'Three Kingdoms Review', *Postcards from the Gods,* 10 May 2012 http://postcardsgods.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/three-kingdoms-lyric-hammersmith.html [accessed 02 July 2014].

Second, this article aims to consider how this representation of invisible Others may reflect British theatre's attitudes to or imagination of the so-called 'continental Europe' as Other; does the British imaginary of (New) Europe, as manifested in this theatrical work, exhibit traces of post-colonialism? Can this example, which was programmed in a season of 'world stories for a world city' shortly before the global spectacle of the 2012 Olympic Games, be located in a longstanding and currently growing context of British Euroscepticism, of 'populist processes of collective identity formation and articulation positing Britain against the otherness of Europe and European integration [that] have become typical of British post-imperial trajectory'?[6] This article will situate Stephens's text, its production and reception in a Europe that is understood both as a geopolitical entity with actually existing inequalities and as an ideologically constructed concept. In doing so, it will analyze the perspective on the meaning and value of the term 'European' that *Three Kingdoms* offers.

This play-thriller marks a trajectory on the European map, as we follow the journey of detective Ignatius Stone in his search for the murderers of Vera Petrova, an Eastern European sex worker; from London to Hamburg to Tallinn, Stephens invites readers and audiences to cross borders from West to East. As the play moves away from one of Europe's financial and political centres (London) and focuses on the periphery (Tallinn), as Ignatius moves from Old to New Europe, he finds himself descending into a nightmare; the British detective, who embarks on a mission to find the elusive master criminal, the White Bird, and to save other women, finds himself trapped in this web of 'differentiated mobility'.[7] Women's autonomy in this web is restricted, as they are ferried, like commodities, across borders; in the production, displaced women remained silent, emerged from within suitcases or wore a deer's head when offering services to European men. But before focusing on the women's representation as the 'invisible Other', I would like to situate Ignatius's West-to-East journey in the changing map of Europe after the end of the Cold War and amidst ongoing debates about asymmetrical relations of power and neo-colonial attitudes in Europe. For example, Milija Gluhovic has shown how claims equating Europe with peace, democracy and human rights must be challenged, bearing in mind its imperial and colonialist legacies and how, to this very day, in the name of

[6] Chris Gifford, *The Making of Eurosceptic Britain: Identity and Economy in a Post-imperial State* (London: Ashgate, 2008), p. 8.
[7] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 149.

Europe, uneven relations of power, outside and inside its borders, are reproduced.[8] Against this backdrop, *Three Kingdoms* seems to attempt to acknowledge Europeans' shared responsibility for an oppressive present, particularly women's trafficking and exploitation as forms of contemporary slavery, which perpetuates gender, class, race and cultural inequalities. In this way, I argue, Stephens's play works as a critique of the legacies of colonialism, which often operated through gendered imaginings, as well as of Europe as 'a "world-historical" site of civilization and culture'.[9]

However, both the production, through its aesthetics of excess, and the intense critical debate after its London run reproduced problematic stereotypes of East and West and essentialist positions on what Europe and European theatre might be. For example, Michael Billington doubted the piece's Europeanness, since the final outcome is 'something that displays geographical diversity but has no specific identity'.[10] On the other hand, Andrew Haydon celebrated the production, which offered 'portraits of each country through a kind of distilled essence (perhaps even gentle pastiches) of their theatrical cultures.'[11] My contention with these arguments is that *Three Kingdoms* – both as text and collaboration between a British playwright, a German director, an Estonian designer and a multinational ensemble – reveals a different approach to Europe, which captures a paradox inherent in the shape of this 'eroding, collapsing, important continent.'[12]

Europe and its Others

French philosopher Étienne Balibar, in his convincing analysis of the implications of post-socialism for Europe, has pointed at a

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[8] Milija Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013). Following the Eurozone crisis, debates about who can be a member of the institutional Europe (the European Union) and under what conditions showed similar, ongoing asymmetries of power and subordination.

[9] Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Postcolonial Europe: Or, Understanding Europe in Times of the Postcolonial', in *The Sage Handbook of European Studies,* ed. by Chris Rumford (London: Sage, 2008), pp. 69-86, p. 70.

[10] Michael Billington, '*Three Kingdoms* Review', *The Guardian* 9 May 2012 http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/may/09/three-kingdoms-review [accessed 02 July 2014]. Billington's perspective on Europe is limited, when considering a series of thinkers' conceptualization of Europe not as 'fixed and stable identity,' but as 'a form of identity intrinsically tied to the relentless demand of having to be critically rethought, reinvented, and recast, time and again, at any given turn in history'. [Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task,* p. 6.]

[11] Haydon, '*Three Kingdoms* Review'.

[12] Stephens, 'Preface', p. viii.

> cold war after the Cold War [...] plural and mobile, and which is hidden under a thick mythology about "clashes of civilizations" between Eastern and Western Europe, supposedly inherited from religious tradition or from the form of state building, when not simply from the ethnic character of the nations involved.[13]

Balibar, alongside other critics, draws attention to the tensions and challenges in the relations between Eastern and Western Europe after 1989, in spite of the enlargement of the 'European family'.[14] In the early 2000s, a new phase for Europe and Europeanness emerged, as new member-states were presented with the challenge of integration, which would validate them in the new status quo while perpetuating the privilege of Europe as a 'project of modernity.'[15] Torn between demands for 'Europeanization' and 'convergence' and a popular desire for inclusion and recognition, Central and Eastern European nation-states became dependent market economies whilst, on a cultural level, they often constructed a particular, 'ethnic' image that satisfied the neo-colonial fantasies of Western Europe.[16] Of course, this fetishizing gaze on the Eastern 'Other' is no novelty and cannot be separated from the discursive making of Europe as idea, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[17]

In *Three Kingdoms* – one of the first British plays that tackle the question of 'Europe' after the EU expansion of the 2000s – Ignatius is about to be sent back to London when Estonian Detective Martin Lemsalu challenges the construction of Eastern Europe as fantasy satisfying the Western imaginary.

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[13] *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2004), p. 167.

[14] I am referring to the EU expansion of 2004 and 2007, with the integration of twelve new member-states, most of which were post-communist countries; Estonia was one of these countries, joining the EU in May 2004.

[15] Bhambra, 'Postcolonial Europe'.

[16] For a fascinating reading of the persistence of colonial tropes and popular performances of national image which sustain Euroscentricism as European hegemony and universalism, see Katrin Sieg, 'Conundrums of Post-Socialist Belonging at the Eurovision Song Contest', in *Performing the 'New' Europe: Identities, Feelings, and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest,* ed. by Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 218-37.

[17] Larry Wolff in *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994) has offered a persuasive analysis of how Eastern Europe, as early as the eighteenth century, became a model of backwardness and underdevelopment. These models were in turn instrumental in the construction of modern Western European identity and still underpin relations of power and aspirations of 'progress' or 'convergence' in contemporary Europe.

> I think you guys have a fantasy about the East and it makes you feel better about yourselves because it stops you from looking too hard about what the fuck is going on in your own homes. Really. You get off on it maybe. Maybe it's like a sex thing, which, you know, that's fine, but really it's not that bad.[18]

Martin's questioning of the British detective's tourist view of Tallinn and his rejection of Ignatius's desire to 'save' sex workers in Estonia resonate with arguments that question longstanding, binary conceptions of Europe as the West and the rest. In the opening pages to *Europe: A Cultural History,* Dutch historian Peter Rietbergen points at the difference between Europe's geography and the ways that it has been ideologically constructed.[19] Rietbergen explains that geographically the centre of Europe – a continent that extends from the Irish western coast to the Urals – is close to Vilnius, capital of Lithuania; Tallinn, although historically a 'border region', is an urban centre where local, regional, national and European identities have merged.[20] However, in Stephens' work, Estonia and specifically Talinn emerge as an obscure place, alien to the rest of Europe – this is a place of sexual allure and nightmarish perversions, a place that fails to meet the criteria of European 'integration'. Of course, this is partly due to the play's subject matter, but what is the significance of representing an Eastern European country in such terms? In the representation of Eastern European women as invisible Others, I read an allegory to how Europe has been fetishised in the imagination of British playwrights – thus producing another form of invisibility.

This is not the first time that British drama demonstrates an uneasy relation to or representation of Europe; in post-1989 plays (David Edgar's *The Shape of the Table* [1990], *Pentecost* [1995], *Prisoner's Dilemma* [2002], David Greig's *Europe* [1994]), or earlier (Edward Bond's *Summer* [1982]), action takes place in unnamed European countries and characters' origins are not specific.[21] But in *Three Kingdoms,* Europe and

[18] Stephens, *Three Kingdoms,* p. 140.
[19] Peter Rietbergen, *Europe: A Cultural History,* 2nd edn (Oxford & New York: Routledge, 2006).
[20] It is beyond the scope of this article to go into detail on Estonia's integration to the EU and the sociopolitical and cultural consequences; see, indicatively, Richard Mole *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union* (London: Routledge, 2013).
[21] Further, in these plays New Europe was presented as a child that had to grow up and catch up with Old Europe. For a critique of the first wave of British plays after the fall of socialist regimes see John London, 'Dancing With The Dead Man: Notes On A Theatre For The Future Of Europe'

London are interconnected – both in the play's fictional world and in the actual theatrical process, not least because of the use of three languages. Ignatius' border-crossing and the makers' journeys of collaboration offer an insight into commonalities and differences between the three countries, challenging the British 'splendid isolation',[22] which became a trope in the mainstream press's critical reception. Nübling's production was seen as an example of European theatre, either (mainly for press journalists) as a short-hand for obscure and 'self-indulgent' or (for reviewers in the blogo-sphere) as a model of director-playwright collaboration that British theatre should follow. In both cases, the discourse implies a process of fetishising Europe's theatre.[23]

Europe's fetishisation was thematized in an interview with Stephens, who reversed gender stereotypes: a rational, male Old Europe versus a female, desire-driven Eastern Europe. Stephens employed a masculine language, referring to the Estonians' physicality, their 'visceral muscle' whilst he spoke in gentle, almost feminine terms of the British detectives' tenderness.[24] However, when the Estonian men who run the sex industry appeared, wearing suits and boxing gloves attacking the set, they used a familiar language – that of a competitive market.

> TOM: If we expanded now and we found that the demand for our product was finite/
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> MICHAEL: It's not.
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> TOM: We don't know that, Michael.

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in *Theatre in Crisis? Performance Manifestos For A New Century,* ed. by Caridad Svich & Maria Delgado (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), pp. 103-7 and Janelle Reinelt's 'Performing Europe: Identity Formation for a "New" Europe' *Theatre Journal* 53 (2001): 365-87.

[22] Stephens, 'Deutsch courage: why German theatre dares – and wins' *The Guardian* 09 May 2012 http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2012/may/09/german-theatre-dares-three-kingdoms [accessed 03 July 2014].

[23] For a summation of press and online responses, see Maddy Costa's post, 'Three Kingdoms: The Shape of British theatre to come?' *The Guardian* 16 May 2012 http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2012/may/16/three-kingdoms-shape-british-theatre-or-flop [accessed 02 July 2014]. See also Duska Radosavljevic's account of the controversy around *Three Kingdoms* in *Theatre-Making: Interplay between Text and Performance in the 21st century* where she argues that 'the blogosphere managed to outweigh the mainstream press in the depth of insight and its intellectual enquiry' (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 110-18, 118.

[24] Stephens, 'Interview with Stephens and Sean Holmes', *World Stages London,* 26 April 2012 http://blog.worldstageslondon.org.uk/post/21852549165/lyric-hammersmith-artistic-director-sean-holmes [accessed 03 July 2014]. Aleksandr Richter's interrogation in part one is exemplary of this tenderness, combined with irony.

MICHAEL: We do. The real advantage in our market is that demand is always, has always been and will always be stable. We have the potential now to establish an acute niche identity. It's practically boutique.

TOM: I'm just not sure that it's strong enough to justify the kind of investment that the kind of expansion you're talking about will entail.[25]

The Estonian men's language could have been that of investors in London, Frankfurt or any other centre of neoliberal Europe, while Olya, their sex slave, appeared onstage wearing an elegant green dress and gracefully held a silver tray. Nübling's production portrayed the flesh market, drawing connections between a familiar world of capitalism and its victims. The world in Estonia appears as symptomatic of a New Europe, caught up in modernization and globalization, a New Europe that is 'parasitically inhabiting old Europe'.[26] Perhaps, then, one could argue that the play is more about Europe under deterritorialization and globalization than sex trafficking;[27] but, I would suggest that the depiction of women-'invisible Others' does not allow reading them merely as allegories of products or relations under capitalism.

'On the part of those who have no part': Aesthetics of excess and interruption

Three Kingdoms, like many British plays after Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, engages with the state of nations within a globalized world through new dramaturgies, challenging social realism as the established form of British political theatre.[28] Here, this engagement happened through imagery that appeared to be exceeding what is considered rational or sensible, through an aesthetic of excess that, in its grotesque and hyper-theatrical nature, 'interrupts what is taken for granted as the political'.[29] The production materialized a key element in Stephens's dramaturgy, an 'invitation to engage empathetically with the

[25] Stephens, *Three Kingdoms,* p. 109-10.
[26] Reinelt, 'Performing Europe", p. 365.
[27] This argument was put forward by Matt Trueman in his review *Carousel of Fantasies*, 13 May 2012 http://matttrueman.co.uk/2012/05/review-three-kingdoms-lyric-hammersmith.html [accessed 04 July 2014].
[28] See Dan Rebellato 'From the State of the Nation to Globalization: Shifting Political Agendas in contemporary British Playwriting' in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama,* ed. by Nadine Holdsworth & Mary Luckhurst, (Oxford: Blackwell 2007), pp. 245-62.
[29] Joe Kelleher, *Theatre & Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 72-3.

drama' without aiming to indulge the audience – it worked as 'a provocation, an entreaty, or a dare to the audience to recognize themselves.'[30] *Three Kingdoms* staged '*forces of encounter*'[31] in the fictional world, which exceeded the stage and marked the intense online debate about the production's gender politics. Catherine Love raised the question: 'is silence the way to give these women a voice?' while Chris Goode, in a series of polemical comments, elaborated on what he perceived as the production's 'misogyny', raising important questions about theatre 'that (thinks it) shows things' and theatre 'that (knows it) makes things'.[32] Such arguments point at the contentious nature of images onstage, particularly the representation of invisible Others; did *Three Kingdoms* attempt to disrupt the sensible on the theatre stage (as border space) or did it produce a voyeuristic experience, further objectifying those who 'have no part'?[33]

The production was excessive in the representation of the human body as a commodity exploited by the sex industry. In the play's second part, Ignatius and Charlie arrive in Hamburg; there, they visit the offices of Georg Kohler, where the DVD with Vera's gruesome decapitation was filmed. The scene depicted the porn industry in a hyper-theatrical manner: men and women wearing large prosthetic belts engaged in sexual acts with each other and various objects while the repetitive soundtrack of a porn

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[30] Jacqueline Bolton, 'Simon Stephens' in *Modern British Playwriting 2000-2009: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations,* ed. by Dan Rebellato (London: Methuen, 2013), pp. 101-24, p. 105.

[31] Gregg, Melissa & Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.) 'An inventory of shimmers' in *The Affect Theory Reader,* (Durham & London: Duke UP, 2010), pp. 1-25, p. 2 [emphasis in the original]. When I use the word 'excess' here, I do not only refer to sex industry where desires and behaviors are excessive; I am also influenced by affect theory, which approaches affect as a performative that emerges in between bodies and contributes to their constant becoming. What concerns me here is how Stephens's text 'works' on the spectator's viewing experience and, in turn, how this might transform or shape their approach to Otherness and Europe.

[32] See Catherine Love 'Three Kingdoms: New Ways of Seeing, Experiencing, Expressing' *Love Theatre* 12 May 2012 http://lovetheatre21.wordpress.com/2012/05/12/three-kingdoms-new-ways-of-seeing-experiencing-expressing/ [accessed 03 July 2014]. Chris Goode's comments on Costa's *Guardian* blog entry mentioned earlier and Haydon's response, 'Three Kingdoms and Misogyny', 18 May 2012 http://postcardsgods.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/three-kingdoms-and-misogyny.html [accessed 03 July 2014].

[33] I am following Jacques Rancière's seminal reading of the politics of aesthetics (*The Politics of Aesthetics,* London: Continuum, 2008), where he discusses how different forms of art practice may inscribe a particular sense of community. What concerns Rancière is how each member of a community can have a share of what is common depending on their role in society; in these terms, the politics of a community and identities in it are bound up with an aesthetics that concerns 'a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.' (pp. 12-13)

film was heard. The production's grotesque aesthetic was developed in the third part as Ignatius was caught up in a nightmarish web of repetitive sounds, cross-dressing (the Trickster dressed up as woman) and elusive identities (the two sex workers Liisu and Liisi); in this world, the line separating perpetrator from persecuted became blurred. Excessive appearances captured the cold atomization of a world of violent, sexual gratification; at the same time, the messy stage imagery – blood on the walls, liquids spilt on the floor – as well as various smells triggered an intense sensory experience while the constant move between the visual and the verbal (through surtitles) produced a dislocation, which corresponded to Ignatius' uneasy feelings during his travels.

The use of animals' heads added to this disorientating effect: apart from subtly reminding the audience of Vera's severed head, the fusion of the animal and the over-sexualized, silenced female body in high heels suggested a limbo state of 'here/not here' that invisible Others often occupy. The woman as animal is deprived of identity, vulnerable but also in its stage framing occupies a peculiarly erotic place; it visualises a contemporary version of human zoo, reminiscent of the '*atrocity exhibition* of post-colonialism',[34] where certain human lives are considered of lesser value. On the contrary, the wolf-headed men in the third part was not a hiding device for the criminal men's identities but instead emphasized a threatening gaze that watches everything but cannot be perceived.

The work was punctuated by moments of interruption, similar to Brechtian estrangement: significantly, the Trickster, an a-sexual commentator in a white suit interrupted the action singing a medley of pop songs.[35] Further, because of the use of animals' heads and the casting of two female performers (in an ensemble of thirteen), all women characters – trapped in the world of violence or not – remained silent[36] and looked the same; hence, any identification with characters (bar Ignatius) was

[34] Stephens, 'Preface', p. vi.
[35] The Trickster does not appear in the text but was developed during rehearsals by Risto Kübar.
[36] The only exception is the dialogue of one of the sex workers and the victim's former flat-mate, Kristina Suvi with the detectives in part two, where some of the realities of her work are clearly spoken about; for example, the long days of work and the fact that she has two children, who perhaps she is not allowed to see anymore but she is trying to hide it from the detectives by talking about them in an ordinary way ['Yeah. They're lovely. Silbie's like me. She's a real chatterbox. Eduardo is brilliant. He's so clever. He's a brilliant artist. He's grumpy though. He has an artistic temperament' (90)].

compromised by excessive appearances or 'interruptive aesthetics'.[37] The night I saw the work, audience's reactions varied from frantic laughter to cold disengagement – comparable to press and bloggers' polarized responses. The production's excessive aesthetic combined with the play's gruesome matter led to a fractured response, which may become politically productive; as Read puts it, 'the consensual fantasy of a phantasm called "audience" gives way to the interruptive *dissensus* of a multitude'.[38] For me, the production's emphasis on the visual could be interpreted as an attempt to make audiences (through Ignatius) *see* and recognize what is not visible in reality; in other words, the aesthetic of excessive visual and sensory stimuli sought to show what cannot be seen. However, women's absence, silence or the performance of their abuse onstage (as they are spat on, ridiculed, or mopping the floor) and the production's overwhelming masculine tone, in the combination of naturalist (British), presentational (German) and physical (Estonian) acting styles meant that *Three Kingdoms*' engagement with 'those who have no part' only exposed the limitations of representation on the border space that is the stage. The more excessive the appearances onstage, the more concealed or invisible the women became – they disappeared, 'in plain sight', in a similar way that other women 'disappear' as, seeking work, they cross the borders of New to Old Europe.

Conclusion: A view from a distance

When French philosopher Montesquieu arrived in Britain in 1729 he wrote: 'I am here in a country which hardly resembles the rest of Europe';[39] Stephens's play stages the opposite: Europe appears foreign to the British detectives. Jen Harvie has proposed that British identities should not be perceived 'as distinct from European ones but precisely *as* multiple and dynamic European identities.'[40] To borrow Harvie's argument, presented almost a decade before Stephens's and Nübling's collaboration, *Three Kingdoms* presents:

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[37] Read, *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement. The Last Human Venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), p. 187. The term refers to experiences produced in the theatre that can challenge easy conceptions of community.
[38] *Ibid,* p. 179.
[39] Quoted in Alex May, *Britain and Europe since 1945* (London & New York: Longman, 1999) p.3.
[40] Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 114. [emphasis in the original]. A similar argument is put forward by Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato in their introduction to the volume *Contemporary European Directors* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), where they observe that UK artists and companies that are discussed in the collection 'are shown to be productively embedded in wider European structures of making

> a confidently hybridised form of theatre that offers both new representational possibilities and provocative examples of British-European creative cooperation and development – for a "new Europe", for a "pro-theatrical" theatre, and for cultural and theatrical practice that is open to exploring different ways of doing things.[41]

Unlike the utopian tone that underpinned some of the earlier British plays about Europe,[42] what appears in Stephens's work are the breaks, failures and excesses in contemporary Europe, including Britain. But in its excessive and grotesque imagery, *Three Kingdoms* reveals something more about how Europe has been imagined– and I conclude this article arguing that this is precisely where its unique Europeanness lies.

In a foundational myth of Europe, the God Zeus, disguised as a bull, abducts Europa, the daughter of the Phoenician king, taking her from Asia to an unknown land that subsequently is named after the abducted princess. In the introduction to his study of four philosophers' approaches to Europe, Rodolphe Gasché explains the significance of this myth-genealogy of Europe's name: 'what the name *Europe* refers to is thus not primarily the proper name of a land but a name for a movement of separation and tearing (oneself) away in which everything proper has always already been left behind.'[43] Thus, Gasché explains how in the 'figure' of Europe one can always see an exposure to the foreign, the strange.

Europa's abduction by Zeus is an act of violence, a forced displacement, but myths, as Roland Barthes has shown, can work as 'depoliticized speech' that produce communities.[44] Thus, the myth of Europa's abduction has legitimized male violence or at least naturalized the exploitation of the weak (the Eastern female) by the powerful (Western male); an experience that does not only feature in Europe's mythopoetics but

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theatre, treating issues of displacement, territoriality and historical memory that are so pertinent to the wider discussions of the UK's position within the wider structures of the EU.' (pp. 19-20)

[41] *Ibid,* p. 145.

[42] Reinelt, discussing *Pentecost, Europe* and Complicitè's *Mnemonic* (1999), locates utopian but troubling promises, in moments such as the sharing of stories in the 'inclusive, harmonious, polyglot Europe' (*Performing Europe* p. 379) in Edgar's play or in the pan-European connections traced in the opening of *Mnemonic.*

[43] Gasché, *Europe: The Infinite Task,* p.11. [emphasis in the original]

[44] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Yang, 1995), p.142.

stains the continent's modern history. At the same time, the Europa myth constructed a version of Europe of acceptance and openness to difference, as it has always carried its Otherness in its name and in doing so, it offered a (problematic) way of moving beyond Europe's colonial past. *Three Kingdoms* produces a similar effect with the Europa myth; it depoliticizes the specificity of acts of violence occurring across the continent by obscuring them through what can be seen as a contemporary kind of myth: a postmodern thriller conveyed through a spectacular aesthetic of excess. At the same time, through its journey narrative and jigsaw structure that corresponds to Europe's fragmented geography, this work appears to be shaping a theatre language that recognizes the Other and her predicament. *Three Kingdoms* is an example of European theatre, not because it 'shows' Europe by employing recognizable tropes of European theatre-making. It is European in the ways it imagines and 'makes' Europe in its paradoxical and failed attempt to stand in for the Other, the one who appears to be crossing the border, to be arriving from a distance but, who, in fact, has always been and remains an excluded, silenced and invisible Other inside Europe.