CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

Introduction

THE PRESENCE of English players on the Continent was first recorded as early as 1417. An unidentified company of presumably amateur actors accompanied English bishops to the Council at Constance, and performed before the gathered nobles there. A contemporary account tells us that

> The English are proud, among other things, of a new spectacle, or at least of one hitherto not known in Germany. This is a religious drama which the English bishops presented before the Emperor on Sunday 31 January, about the Nativity, the three Magi, and the slaughter of the Innocents. They had ordered the same play to be shown several days earlier in the presence of the magistrates of Constance and numerous other men of distinction, so that the players might act their roles better before the Emperor.[1]

The above description, interesting in itself, is an isolated one, and there is no doubt that the visit and performances in 1417 were unique events, unconnected with any sort of regular activity on the Continent. It is to the last quarter of the sixteenth century – or strictly speaking, to the last decade of the century – that we may trace the origins of one of the most fascinating and intriguing phenomena in English theatrical history: the age of the 'Englische Komödianten', as the English players were labelled by their contemporaries on the Continent.

When Fynes Moryson, the well-known Elizabethan traveller, visited Frankfurt during the annual fair in September 1592, he saw a public performance given by a company of English players. In his 'Itinerary' he left us his account of the performance, which is one of the earliest and most authoritative pieces of written evidence for the early phase of the English actors' activity on the Continent. This is how he recalls the event:

> Germany hath some fewe wandering Comeydians, more deseruing pity then prayse, for the serious parts are dully penned, and worse acted, and the mirth they make is ridiculous, and nothing less then witty . . . So as I remember that when some of our cast despised Stage players came out of England into Germany, and played at Franckford in the tyme of the Mart, hauing nether a complete number of Actours, nor any good Apparell, nor any ornament of the Stage, yet the Germans, not vnderstanding a worde they sayde, both men and women, flocked wonderfully to see theire gesture and Action, rather than heare them, speaking English which they vnderstand not.[2]

Several points need particular attention here. First, Moryson labels the players 'our cast despised Stage players' who 'came out of England into Germany', which indicates that by 1592 there were already English strolling companies active on the Continent, and that they were composed of actors

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

who found no employment at home. Secondly, the company described had neither a 'complete number of Actours, nor any good Apparell, nor any ornament of the Stage', all of which detracted from the quality of the performance. And thirdly, the language used on stage was English, and although the spectators could not understand a word they 'flocked wonderfully' – to Moryson's surprise – 'to see theire gesture and Action', which implies that the non-verbal acting devices used by the English were interesting enough to attract the attention of the audience. In other words, the skills and talents of the English surpassed those of their Continental rivals. Moryson confirms this in another passage of his 'Itinerary':

> For Commedians [i.e. the Continental players], they little practise that Arte, and are the poorest Actours that can be imagined, as my self did see when the Citty of Getrudenberg being taken by them from the Spanyards, they made bonsfyers and publikely at Leyden represented that action in a play, so rudely as the poore Artizans of England would haue both penned and acted it much better. So as at the same tyme when some cast despised players of England came into those partes, the people not vnderstanding what they sayd, only for theere action followed them with wonderfull concorse, yea many young virgines fell in loue with some of the players, and followed them from citty to citty till the magistrates were forced to forbid them to play any more.[3]

Thus in Moryson's opinion it was the quality of 'action' rather than anything else that constituted the chief attraction to Continental spectators and ensured the success of the English players, all in spite of the incomprehensibility of the dramatic text. Far more important for our present purpose than the broken hearts of a number of virgins, is the fact that the described company travelled from one place to another, and that the players needed permission to play from the local authorities, which was not always granted.

With a few possible reservations all Moryson's remarks about the English players may be treated as true and even characteristic of the English dramatic companies that started to tour Europe at the close of the sixteenth century, particularly in the early, or 'reconnaissance' phase of their activity there. The surviving evidence leaves no doubt that the first companies to arrive on the Continent were indeed small, poorly equipped with costumes and stage properties, that the language used was English, and that they had to travel from one place to another in hope of financial gain. However, most of this was certainly not true of the companies that flooded Europe later on, in the first half of the seventeenth century. One of the last famous strollers, George Jolly, in his supplication to the Council of Basle, dated 1654, offered to delight all who love plays 'with his well-practised company, not only by means of good instructive stories, but also with repeated changes of expensive costumes, and a theatre decorated in the Italian manner, with beautiful English music and skilful women';[4] and of course the performances were given in German. These quoted sources illustrate clearly the development that the English companies had undergone.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

It has to be stressed, however, that the company Fynes Moryson saw in 1592 was by no means the first English troupe to visit the Continent in the period under discussion. In 1579/80 a company of English 'instrumentalists' – Johann Krafftt, Johann Personn, Johann Kirck or Kirckmann, and Thomas Bull – was recorded at the Danish court, but nothing more is known of their stay there.[5] Interestingly, Denmark seems to have been the first important destination for the English players. In 1585 an unidentified English troupe is said to have played in the courtyard of the town hall at Elsinore, the performances evoking tremendous interest among local people who – to use Moryson's expression – 'flocked [so] wonderfully' that they broke down the wall.[6] These may have been the same players who visited Leipzig during the same year and were paid 5 thalers for their 'play with leaping' ('Spiel mit Springen').[7] In 1586 the Earl of Leicester's men visited again, and acted at, the court of the King of Denmark at Elsinore, whence they travelled as far south as Dresden.[8] From extant pieces of evidence it appears that the then King of Denmark Frederick II (1559–88) kept the players 'for a long time', and subsequently recommended them to the Elector of Saxony Christian I (1586–91). The Dresden appointment of the company includes the following names: Thomas King, Thomas Stephens, George Bryan, Thomas Pope, and Rupert Persten (Percy?), and the preserved Danish list adds William Kempe and 'his youth' Daniel Jones.[9] The same company may have visited Gdańsk in the following year.[10] One or two other companies are recorded in various countries in or before 1592. For instance Robert Browne, who is one of the most famous strollers, made his first Continental tour in 1590, when he was paid 15 guilder for performances at Leyden,[11] and a company of English 'instrumentalists' was recorded at Nyköping in Sweden in 1591/2.[12]

However, Fynes Moryson is mistaken when he contemptuously labels the actors 'cast despised Stage players', and, in another place, 'stragling broken Companyes'. Although the frequent failure of contemporary records to note the names of individual actors makes it extremely difficult to identify these companies and trace their precise routes, a sufficient amount of documentary evidence has been gathered to support the opinion that many of these actors were members of notable London companies, who, for various reasons, were forced to seek their fortunes 'beyond the seas'. Thus, among the numerous names of actors known to have been active on the Continent even in the reconnaissance phase of their regular visits, many may be found in London records. The names of Robert Browne, Richard Jones, William Kempe, Thomas Pope and Thomas Sackville may serve as examples. For instance, all the players mentioned in a passport granting permission to leave England for a Continental tour, issued on 10 February 1592 by Charles Howard the Lord High Admiral, were members of the notable Lord Admiral's company. The names given in the document are as follows: Robert Browne, John Bradstreet, Thomas Sackville and Richard Jones.[13] The question immedi-

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

ately suggests itself: why should such experienced and well-known actors as Browne and Jones[14] venture a risky journey overseas? To use Hamlet's words – 'How chances it they travel? Their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.' Were it an isolated case in English theatrical history, we would not really have to bother to give a convincing and conclusive answer. But these players were followed by dozens of others, who dominated the Continental theatrical scene for many decades. It would be naïve to assert that this was a conscious cultural enterprise, stemming from a desire to propagate and spread English drama on a wider scale. The reasons for this unprecedented exodus of players from England at the close of the sixteenth century are to be sought, above all, in the unstable economic conditions in London, and in the tremendous success the companies enjoyed on the Continent. For at times acting in London was unprofitable or even impossible, and, without the resource of going abroad or into the country, even the best of the city companies could hardly have survived. The conditions that forced the London actors to travel are well known and the three usually mentioned are the Puritan opposition, the ravages of the plague, which led to temporary inhibitions of acting, and growing competition among the companies. Not all of these factors contributed equally and it was the last of them that seems to have been chiefly responsible. This can be seen particularly clearly after the re-opening of London theatres in 1594, following a two-year inhibition due to the plague. The reconstructed organizations of players in 1594 had no continuity with those in existence up to 1592. Of the numerous companies active in London in the preceding period only two, the Lord Chamberlain's and the Lord Admiral's, now dominated the city's theatrical life. A sort of monopoly was established, which was confirmed by a letter from the Privy Council to the Master of the Revels, dated 19 February 1598:

> Whereas licence hath bin graunted unto two companies of stage players retayned unto us, the Lord Admyral and Lord Chamberlain, to use and practise stage playes . . . and whereas there is also a third company who of late . . . have by waie of intrusion used likewise to play . . . Wee have therefore thought good to require you . . . to take order that the aforesaid third company may be supressed and none suffered heereafter to plaie but those two formerlie named belonging to us.[15]

Even if a contemporary account mentioning two hundred actors living in London is exaggerated,[16] there is little doubt that in and shortly after 1594 a number of players found themselves unemployed, facing not only poverty, but severe punishment under the law. By the Statutes of 1572 and 1598 unlicensed players were threatened with branding as 'rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars'.[17] And although the monopoly of the two companies mentioned above had broken down by 1602, when in March the Earl of Worcester's company received a licence[18] to perform in London, the competition between particular companies remained ruthless, and frequently the

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

fortunes of particular players and even of whole companies depended on such base men as the London theatre entrepreneur Philip Henslowe. How effectively he waged war on rival troupes may be judged, among other things, by a complaint of Lady Elizabeth's men in 1615, who claimed that Henslowe 'in 3 yeares hee hath broken and dissmembred fiue Companies'.[19]

An additional serious menace to the prosperity of adult companies was the sudden and surprising popularity around the year 1600 of children's companies. An immediate echo of this 'war of the theatres' may be found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. When the Prince asks about the reasons that forced the 'tragedians of the city' to travel, he is answered that

> there is, sir, an aery of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyranically clapp'd for't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages – so they call them – that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills and dare scarce come thither. (II, ii, 339–44)

This is even more precisely stated in the 'bad' quarto of *Hamlet*:

> Yfaith my Lord, noueltie carries it away,
> For the principall publike audience that
> Come to them, are turned to private playes,
> And to the humour of children.

Both the quotations illustrate how the children's companies were drawing audiences away from the public playhouses, where the adult players performed, to the private ones, which at that time were occupied by boys' companies. Another important reference to the boys may be found in Ben Jonson's *The Poetaster*, where the winter of 1600/1 is referred to in the following terms from a public player's point of view: 'for this winter ha's made vs all poorer, then so many staru'd snakes: No bodie comes at vs'. This of course had a disastrous effect on the players' income and it is not surprising that at least some of them found themselves in a desperate situation. There is further contemporary evidence of the misery and hopelessness of their plight, including Thomas Dekker's significant statement: 'We can be bancrupts (say the players) on this side and gentlemen of a company beyond the sea.'[20] As E.K. Chambers put it:

> Certainly all the players did not grow rich, even in London. Some of them to the end, perhaps the majority, remained threadbare companions enough; in and out of debt, spongers upon their fellows, frequenters of pawnshops, acquainted with prison. Those who had to do with the stage were not all such riff-raff as a hasty reading of the Puritan literature might suggest.[21]

Thus the prospects of a better life abroad must have been tempting to London players. The sporadic Continental tours of small companies before 1594, exploratory in character, were followed by regular visits which were eventually to develop into a permanent presence of English players on the Continent until well after the Restoration.[22]

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

Of course, the situation at home was only the stimulus, the driving force which made the actors seek their fortunes abroad, and the fact that their expectations of financial gain were, in most cases, fulfilled on the Continent was entirely dependent on other factors, the most important being the patronage of Continental nobility and the steadily improving quality of performances. In spite of the fact that the English actors active on the Continent are traditionally labelled 'strolling', 'wandering', or 'travelling' players, one has to remember that most of the major companies found service at noblemen's, ducal, or even royal courts, where they stayed for many years, undertaking only occasional travels or none at all. It should also be added that in most towns public performances were prohibited throughout almost the whole year, and the actors were given permission to play only on special occasions, local celebrations, during feasts and fairs.

For example, traditional fairs were held at Leyden in summer and autumn; there was also an autumn fair at Amsterdam, and a summer fair at Utrecht; the Frankfurt fairs were held twice yearly in spring and autumn, and Gdańsk had a St Dominic's Fair in August and St Martin's Fair in the autumn. Permission to play was usually granted to the English players for a strictly limited period of time, on average for about two weeks excluding Sundays. This depended largely on the duration of a fair in a given town. Obviously, this was a long-awaited occasion that brought many people from the country, other towns, and in the case of larger towns, like Frankfurt, fairs were held on an international scale. Visitors to fair towns were naturally eager to see 'the tragedians of the city' and they were ready to pay for their entertainment, and in many cases it was these visitors in fact who were the major source of players' income. Had it not been for the fairs, it would often have been entirely unprofitable to give public performances in relatively small towns like Berlin or Elbing. At times, the total number of spectators at performances given for two or three weeks was comparable to the number of inhabitants of a given town. For example, when in 1628 an English company performed at Nuremberg in a newly opened public theatre there, the eight performances given by the players were attended by almost thirteen thousand spectators![23] On the other hand, when in July 1611 John Spencer was allowed to perform with his company for two weeks out of season in Gdańsk, the players gave up acting after a few days, owing to the very small number of spectators. They decided to leave the town and return during the traditional St Dominic's Fair, opening on 5 August. The company played with great success during the fair, and the popularity of performances was such that Spencer complained that a 'crowd broke secretly into the theatre'.

Thus, travelling was generally limited to the period between spring and autumn, and ceased almost entirely in winter. There were, of course, exceptions, and in some regions of Europe, the strolling companies were at times active throughout the whole year. This was particularly the case in the

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

Netherlands – a densely populated area, with numerous wealthy towns at a close distance to one another. On the other hand, the severe climate made winter travelling entirely impossible in Central and Eastern Europe, not to mention the fact that distances between towns were far greater than in the western part of the Continent. Occasionally, however, some English companies braved all difficulties to travel in winter to the remote corners of Europe, sometimes getting themselves into serious trouble. This desperate application was made by an audacious group of players who reached Riga in Livonia in winter 1647/8:

> although we have received a good deal of money, we have . . . not yet recovered our expenses, and even less have we earned a penny to subsist on for a further journey . . . we cannot properly go anywhere else. It is impossible to go by water, and to travel by land . . . is . . . not worth either the trouble, or the expense. Nor is it the custom in any town to welcome us at this time of year.

For these reasons, finding service at court was a blessing and a guarantee of survival, because apart from permanent residence and a more or less stable income, the players were granted patents and licences, which enabled them to travel safely as servants of a given nobleman. As early as 1586, the King of Denmark had an English company in his service for several months. The same company played at the Elector of Saxony's court for an even longer period. More conspicuous was the case of the English players who entered the service of the Landgrave Maurice of Hesse-Kassel, the Learned, who, incidentally, had a private theatre, named the *Ottoneum*, built at Kassel between 1604 and 1605, in which the English performed until 1613.[24] The vogue for keeping English players at court must have been prevalent among the Continental aristocracy, since the Prince of Poland felt a capricious and costly need to bring a whole company direct from London to Warsaw in 1617. The vogue originated and spread on a wider scale towards the close of the sixteenth century and was of prime importance for the future fortunes of the English players on the Continent and, indirectly, for the quality and variety of their staging of plays, and consequently for their popularity among the common people.

It is one of the arguments of this book that the activity of the English players on the Continent could not have developed to the extent that it did without the existence of numerous large and petty courts that facilitated the players' attempts to make a living. The vogue for employing English actors and musicians at court spread among the Continental nobility as early as the 1590s. That noble patronage was widespread and lucrative for the players was generally acknowledged by contemporaries. One, Erhard Cellius, the German author of *Eques Auratus Anglo-Wirtembergicus* (1605), left us with the following account:

> England thus produces numerous and outstanding musicians, and tragedians most experienced in histrionic art, among whom some formed congregations and for some time

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

left their homes and went abroad, and they used to present and exhibit their art above all at ducal courts. Several years ago, the English musicians came to our Germany . . . and having stayed for some time at the courts of great princes, they gained – through their musical and histrionic art – so much favour that they returned home generously rewarded and loaded with gold and silver.[25]

Many other sources, some of which will be discussed below, support the view that the players were often accompanied by musicians, as was the case with John Dowland, the most famous English composer of the period, who emerged on the Continent in c. 1594, and was also present at Kassel, where the Landgrave Maurice the Learned had a company of English players in his service.[26] Dowland left us an account of his Continental adventures, painting a picture of the success all the strolling 'instrumentalists' must have dreamt of:

When I came to the Duke of Brunswick he used me kindly and gave me a rich chain of gold, £23 in money, with velvet and satin and gold lace to make apparell, with promise that if I would serve him he would give me as much as any prince in the world. From thence I went to the Lantgrave of Hessen, who gave me the greatest welcome that might be for one of my quality, who sent a ring into England to my wife, valued at £20 sterling, and gave me a great standing cup with a cover gilt, full of dollars, with many great offers for my service.[27]

And in November 1598 Dowland was appointed lutenist to Christian IV of Denmark at the salary of 500 thalers per annum, a very large sum indeed, and stayed in Denmark for eight years.[28]

It may be noted that the names of patrons given in Dowland's account were not accidental: these nobles not only hired individual artists to perform at their courts, but also had whole companies of English players and musicians in their service for many years. The best known and most prominent case is that of the Landgrave Maurice of Hesse-Kassel. As early as 1594 some English players were mentioned as his comedians, and the company, although changing its cast frequently, remained active at Kassel until about 1613.[29] The court of Duke Henry Julius of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel was one of the first visited by Robert Browne in 1592,[30] and Christian IV's father, Frederick II, had a company of English players in his service as early as 1586. The same company that visited Elsinore in 1586 emerged thereafter at the court of the Elector of Saxony, Christian I, at Dresden, and from that year Dresden became one of the centres of the English players' activities.[31] Christian's two sons, Christian II and John George I continued their father's patronage and on many occasions employed the English. John George I was such an admirer of music and theatre that even the Thirty Years War did not prevent him spending substantial sums of money to keep an English company at his court. Despite contemporary sources, which record that John George's mania was drinking and hunting, he seems to have been, as C.V. Wedgwood put it 'not without culture'[32] and took an intelligent interest in fine arts and above all in music and theatre.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

In Central Europe, there were three major noble families whose patronage enabled the English players to develop their activities there. These were the Hohenzollerns, i.e. the Electors of Brandenburg, the Royal line of the Vasas in Poland, and the Habsburgs in Bohemia and Austria. These will be discussed in greater detail in further chapters of this book. It may be noted here, however, that through family connections and relations all of the above houses helped significantly to smooth the way for English players elsewhere on the Continent. By the early seventeenth century it had become customary among the members of aristocratic families to recommend, and even 'lend' English acting companies to one another, and also to town councils. Early examples may be found in the last decade of the sixteenth century, but more conspicuous ones after 1600. Thus, in 1604 an English company was recommended to the councillors of Nuremberg by Duke John Frederick of Würtemberg.[33] In the same year, John Spencer's men submitted a letter of recommendation from the Elector of Brandenburg to the councillors at Leyden.[34] Spencer was again recommended by the Elector in 1609, this time to the Elector of Saxony's court at Dresden.[35] The Landgrave Maurice of Hesse lent his English comedians for a couple of weeks in 1610 to the Elector of Brandenburg on the occasion of the Elector's brother's wedding celebrations,[36] and the same happened in 1612, when the Landgrave lent his comedians to the city of Frankfurt-am-Main on the occasion of the coronation of the Archduke Mathias of Austria as Emperor.[37] In 1609 the Duke of Stettin recommended English players to the Elector of Brandenburg, and the latter recommended John Spencer again to the Elector of Saxony in 1613.[38] When Robert Archer came to Gdańsk in 1615, he carried a patent from the Elector of Brandenburg and two 'testimonials' from the Duke of Stettin and the Bishop of Köslin.[39] In 1617 John Green's company received a letter of recommendation from the Royal court at Warsaw to the Archduke Charles of Austria, the then Bishop of Breslau, who – in turn – recommended the same company to Cardinal von Dietrichstein. And Richard Jones' men were recommended in 1619 by the King of Poland to the councillors of Gdańsk. At times, the players accompanied their patrons in their travels. In 1611 there was a company of English players and musicians with the Elector of Brandenburg at Ortelsburg in the Duchy of Prussia, accompanying the Elector to Warsaw. The Landgrave Maurice may have been accompanied by his actors when he visited Prague in 1610, and the Elector of Saxony took his company to Torgau, where on 1 April 1627 the marriage was celebrated between the Princess Sophia and the Landgrave George of Hesse-Darmstadt.[40] The list, of course, could be made much longer.[41] Noble patronage extended far beyond the court of a given aristocrat, was essential to the fortunes of the English players and was an important contribution to the dissemination of the art of theatre in various parts of the Continent.

Thus by the early seventeenth century, English players had a number of

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11509-4 - Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660
Jerzy Limon
Excerpt
More information

friendly courts at their disposal, and when necessary they could plan their travels in detail beforehand to take in neighbouring towns during the theatrical season, or perform in towns or villages on the way from one court to another. At times the companies travelled hundreds of miles to reach their destination. For example, in 1607 John Green's troupe went from Gdańsk on the Baltic coast to Graz in southern Austria. The same players left Graz early in 1608 and travelled straight to Brussels, presumably recommended to another Habsburg there, the Archduke Charles. This last example may serve as an additional illustration of how the noble patronage extended and spread through family connections. Thomas Heywood in his *Apology for Actors*, published in 1612, but written in or about 1607, mentioned that 'the Cardinall of Bruxels, hath at this time in pay a company of our English comedians'.[42] This 'Cardinall of Bruxels' has been identified as the Archduke Charles (a Habsburg, of course), Governor-General of the Spanish Netherlands from 1598 to his death in 1621. A recently discovered passport, dated 13 February 1607, reveals that indeed there was a company of English players, seventeen in number, enjoying the Archduke's patronage at about the time Heywood wrote his *Apology*.[43] This may in fact have been John Green's troupe.

One of the first privileges deriving from a nobleman's patronage was the possibility of increasing the number of actors in a company. That the company Fynes Moryson saw at Frankfurt in 1592 did not have a 'complete number of Actours' is by no means surprising. The few companies recorded on the Continent around that period were small indeed, five or six players being the average strength. It seems natural that the managers of travelling companies tried to limit expenses by keeping down the number of actors. The same tendency may be observed in England whenever the London companies toured the country.[44] The growing number of both actors and companies is noticeable almost immediately after 1594, a year which seems to mark the beginning of their regular activity on the Continent, and becomes even more apparent after 1600. It seems, however, that the companies formed *ad hoc* in England were relatively small, and that they grew in strength after they had reached the Continent. Sometimes they joined forces, and sometimes particular companies were supplemented with Continental actors. The custom of hiring foreign players may be observed almost from the very beginning of the English theatrical impact on the Continent. A company of eighteen 'instrumentalists' performing in 1591 at Nyköping in Sweden was composed of twelve Englishmen and six Swedes.[45] In 1600 George Webster, John Hill and Richard Machin, obviously English players, were accompanied by an actor, Bernard Sandt, who was apparently German,[46] and in 1604 we encounter a company styling itself as 'English and Cologne comedians'.[47] Among John Spencer's men in 1615 there was one German and one Dutch player.[48] About the same time Robert Archer and the Peadle brothers were

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org