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Touring

The plays of Shakespeare began their conquest of the globe by way of strolling players. Already during Shakespeare's lifetime, in the 1580s, travelling players crossed the Channel from England to the rest of Europe where they performed in marketplaces and at courts across the Continent. They were sighted in the Low Countries, at Hamlet's Elsinore, at Gdansk, Wolfenbüttel, Heidelberg, Nürnberg, Graz, Prague, and in a host of other European venues. The earliest recorded continental production of the strolling players dates from April 23, 1586. In the train of the Earl of Leicester—Elizabeth I's viceroy in the Low Countries during the war against Spain—a company of actors visited the garrison town of Utrecht, and treated the authorities to 'The Forces of Hercules', a more or less acrobatic show of strength involving the construction of a human pyramid. Leicester must have realized that on the day, which until the sixteenth century and the Reformation had been known as St George's Day, it was more appropriate to celebrate national military strength by way of the achievements of a safely classical hero like Hercules than a challenged Catholic saint.

Notes:

- (1) See Michael D. Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1996) [Find it @ UP](#), and Jyotsna Singh (ed.), *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Age of Expansion* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) [Find it @ UP](#).
- (2) Ernest Brennecke and Henry Brennecke, *Shakespeare in Germany, 1590–1700. With Translations of Five Early Plays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1964) [Find it @ UP](#).
- (3) For an account of these events see Peter Raby, 'Fair Ophelia': *A Life of Harriet Smithson Berlioz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 46 [Find it @ UP](#), and Peter Holland, 'Touring Shakespeare', in Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 203–5 [Find it @ UP](#).

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