

## 'Etc. Etc.': Replicating the 'Exotic' Body on the Nineteenth-Century British Stage

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This article is part of a larger, European-funded project entitled 'The Representation of the "Exotic" Body in 19th-Century English Drama' (REBED), the main goals of which have been to map the presence of the non-European Other, both fictional and real (what I call here the 'exotic' body), on the Georgian and Victorian stage and to understand to what extent, and in what ways, such a presence mirrored or responded to the cultural policies of the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> Although serious drama is included, it is to illegitimate genres — pantomimes, farces, burlesques, extravaganzas — that the project turned first, made aware by (among others) Jane Moody that it is to these genres we have to look if we want to understand 'how British imperialism was being transformed into dramatic spectacle'.<sup>2</sup> In these genres, the presence of the exotic body is extensive and widely documentable, articulated as it is in recurrent themes such as *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*, as well as the several adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that largely contributed to shape the image of the Black (this term referring here to people and cultures of sub-Saharan African descent). The porosity of illegitimate genres — their standing on the threshold between theatre and popular entertainment — has made them of further interest for a project that also looked at performances outside the theatre that entailed the presence of an exotic Other (freak shows, ethnological exhibitions, and world fairs in particular). While real exhibits could feature in these performances, non-Europeans on the theatrical stage were mainly portrayed by white performers, in black-, red-, or yellow-face where appropriate, employing a number of visual and representational conventions (costumes, settings, props, make-up, movement, sound, etc.) that signalled the exotic to the audience (e.g. the turban for Near Eastern dramatis personae).

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 7.

My interest in this article is in discussing how these conventions (and, far more rarely, actual exotic bodies) migrated from one performance and/or genre to another, popular performances informing theatrical portraits of the non-European Other and vice versa.<sup>3</sup> I argue that the *replication* of these conventions across genres, both diachronically and synchronically, is central to an understanding of constructions and perceptions of the exotic on the nineteenth-century British stage. The meta-theatrical nature of this stage — ‘the incorporation of plots and narratives (not to mention images, songs and even a Napoleonic cuirass) borrowed and stolen from a variety of sources, high and low’ that was a distinctive feature of Georgian illegitimate theatre, as well as of Victorian performances — means in fact not only that this theatre invented its own exotic conventions, but that it also echoed conventions from other genres (Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 6). Popular performances, most notably blackface minstrelsy and the circus, as well as non-dramatic genres such as the novel, would also inspire stereotypes of the non-European Other that the theatre would re-elaborate and make its own, just as theatrical images informed other (not only performative) genres.

Stereotyped representations of the Arab, the Chinese, the Native American, or the African were the result of two concurrent sets of influences. On the one hand, these representations partook of wider cultural narratives such as class-related and scientific discourses, as when some ‘savages’ were hastily recruited in the slums of Liverpool by the showman ‘Lord’ George Sanger to perform as ‘Indians’ in 1856;<sup>4</sup> or when a further

<sup>3</sup> As Sadiya Qureshi has observed, ‘interest in displayed foreign people may be partly explained by the relative lack of such people on the British stage in the early to mid-nineteenth century.’ See Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 159. Later in the century, examples of ‘real’ exhibits treading the stage include Hogarty’s troupe of Maori, or the 200 South Africans that performed in Frank Fillis’s ‘Savage South Africa’ show at the Empress Theatre in 1899 as part of the Greater Britain Exhibition. These performances, however, were mainly displays of exhibits on the theatrical stage than plays proper. For the Maori, see Marianne Schultz, ‘“An interest must be strong now-a days to raise much enthusiasm in an audience, but it may be, at the same time, of an unpleasant nature”: Māori, New Zealand and Empire on stage 1862–1864’, in *Staging the Other in Nineteenth-Century British Drama*, ed. by Tiziana Morosetti (Bern: Lang, 2015), pp. 103–24. For Fillis’s show, see also, Ben Shephard, ‘Showbiz Imperialism: The Case of Peter Lobengula’, in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 94–113.

<sup>4</sup> I use this old-fashioned exonym ‘Indians’ to highlight that I am talking about the stereotype (Native Americans being presented as ‘Indians’) and not the actuality. ‘Lord’ George Sanger, *Seventy Years a Showman* (London: Dent, 1926), pp. 233–34. Sanger decided to resort to ordinary people when attending Frank Hamilton Cushing’s American Show in which he recognizes ‘an ordinary specimen of an African negro’ who had worked for him and was now presented as a Red Indian (p. 233).

band of ‘Indians’ for the drama *Oceola* (Surrey Theatre, 1859) were (probably) recruited among the ‘beery-looking and vulgar small tobacconists [...] with whom the region adjacent to the Surrey does much abound’.<sup>5</sup> The assumption behind this process (which also very much depended on the practical need of performers at a very short notice) is that of a resemblance between working classes and ‘savages’, a resemblance that heavily informed representations of both on the theatrical stage. As Alastair Bonnett has observed, ‘[in] the course of the 19th century race and class meaning became increasingly blurred into a mutually constitutive set of associations and images’, so that the working classes were constructed as white ‘in colonial settings [...] but something less than, or other to, white in the context of Britain’s internal social hierarchy’.<sup>6</sup> Overlapping narratives of the poor and the foreign would be further reinforced by the fact that several exotic exhibits performing in England actually ended up living in workhouses as soon as the wave of interest that had built around them faded.<sup>7</sup> In its turn, the physiognomic construction of the Other would affect that of criminals and the lower classes, contributing to shape what Jennifer Jones has termed the ‘foreign face of villainy’, that is, depictions of villains that shared visual features, such as dark hair or complexion, that on the stage usually pertained to non-British *dramatis personae*.<sup>8</sup>

These wider narratives, however, were complemented on the other hand by the specific example set by popular exhibitions such as that of the Zulus, to which I shortly return, or by performances such as those of the blackface minstrel troupes that toured Britain from as early as 1843, and the influence of which was central in representations of American slaves (and Blacks more generally) on the Victorian stage.<sup>9</sup> There was, that is to say, in nineteenth-century theatre a tension between specific and unспе-

<sup>5</sup> T. W. Erle, *Letters from a Theatrical Scene-Painter; Being Sketches of the Minor Theatres of London as They Were Twenty Years Ago* (London: Ward, 1880), pp. 41–42.

<sup>6</sup> Alastair Bonnett, ‘How the British Working Class Became White: The Symbolic (Re)formation of Racialized Capitalism’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 11 (1998), 316–40 (pp. 319, 322).

<sup>7</sup> Sanger’s father exhibited, among others, ‘Tamee Ahmee and Orio Rio, the savage cannibal pigmies of the Dark Continent’, ‘two rather intelligent mulatto children’ of ten and nine years of age (Sanger, pp. 43, 45); after the show was denounced a fake, however, the two were sent to Bristol Workhouse (p. 46). See also, John Conolly, *The Ethnological Exhibitions of London* (London: Churchill, 1855), in which the President of the Ethnological Society expresses his concerns about exotic exhibits such as the ‘Aztec’ children Maximo and Bartola, displayed in 1853, ending up in a workhouse (p. 29).

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Jones, ‘The Face of Villainy on the Victorian Stage’, *Theatre Notebook*, 50 (1996), 95–108 (p. 96).

<sup>9</sup> This is the year Dan Emmett’s Virginia Minstrels appeared at the Adelphi. J. S. Bratton, ‘English Ethiopians: British Audiences and Black-Face Acts, 1835–1865’, *Yearbook of English Studies*, 11 (1981), 127–42 (p. 131).

cific stimuli that is best expressed by performances absorbing topical references while elaborating on general attitudes and longer-lasting imageries of foreign cultures. As Edward Ziter has convincingly shown in *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*, constructions of the East, for instance, combined synchronic representational conventions of the Near and the Far East, as well as diachronic narratives of the Orient. Thus, while a vision of the world as ‘divided between the Occident and the Orient, with the Christian West on one side and the Islamic East on the other [...] underwent considerable revision in the nineteenth century so as to include a greatly expanded and detailed Orient’, the Islamic East still

retained the connotations ingrained over centuries. The Islamic East had become a middle, but a middle that stood in *for the whole*. Consequently, when Britons discussed the Orient they were most often referring to the Islamic East *as imagined over centuries*.<sup>10</sup>

Performances of the Other were, therefore, never exclusively about contemporary notions of the exotic, nor were they *exactly* about the empire and its history; rather, they were the result of an accumulation of elements, exotic narratives working as a catalyst for the layering of references, sources, and discourses. It is my contention here that this accumulation favoured fragmented, incoherent portraits of the non-European Other (and the foreign more generally) that problematize audiences’ responses to the political innuendos of this theatre. While, as Marty Gould has shown in *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter*, the nineteenth-century stage was ‘the privileged vehicle for the transmission of socially reaffirming imperialist discourse’,<sup>11</sup> focusing on the empire as a *driving force* in the history of this theatre may ultimately lead to an overestimation of the linearity with which political ideas and cultural discourses were passed to audiences. These audiences were, no doubt, ‘introduced to the main events and ideas of the age’ by what they saw on stage;<sup>12</sup> yet, they were also presented with concurrent narratives and/or individual elements that may have been incongruously or inconsistently placed within the overall imperialist discourse. If, on the one hand, Victorian playwrights were no doubt ‘uncannily sensitive to the most minor shifts in the sociopolitical landscape’, I would suggest *individual* performances may offer alternative readings of a theatre that was

<sup>10</sup> Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 11–12, emphases added.

<sup>11</sup> Marty Gould, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter*, Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies, 18 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 178.

rarely the product of strong authorship, nor of direct political propaganda, the way ethnological shows and world fairs were.<sup>13</sup>

These exhibitions — the result of often difficult negotiations between managers and the several authorities involved in the importation of native individuals or groups — were perforce ‘slower’, scantier in numbers, and more elaborately studied. They were to look self-evident and self-sufficient, that is, relatively close microcosms meant to illustrate diversity within the boundaries of ‘science’. By contrast, the multifarious, fast-evolving world of theatrical performances had much looser perimeters. In a scenario in which the increasing competition between venues meant that playwrights had to produce ever more spectacular pieces at very short notice, it was in fact the norm to rely on what audiences were already known to be attracted to or to recycle what past performances had to offer. As David Mayer has observed, ‘melodramatic music, just as melodramatic incidents, characters, and dialogue, could be readily assembled from ready-made parts, even as mosaics are fashioned from ready-cut chips of coloured tile.’<sup>14</sup> Far from involving melodrama exclusively, this trend was generally typical of Victorian theatre, not only with the actual inclusion of music from a variety of sources, most notably Italian opera, but with an accumulation of intertextual references and topical allusions, performances also working as miniature catalogues of available entertainment.<sup>15</sup>

Instead of reading this theatre as the product of individual playwrights and managers that functioned as mediator between the outside world and the public, I will therefore read it as the product of the fluidity of genres, narratives, and even roles that characterized the nineteenth-century stage.<sup>16</sup> I will ultimately argue that the accumulation and replication of elements across performances and genres, by working against any stable or consistent arrangement or presentation of details, eventually exposed the

<sup>13</sup> Gould, p. 53. Volumes such as *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) problematize the notion of authorship. The contributions of Jacky Bratton and Jane Moody, in particular, point to the merging of, and collaboration between, key figures of the stage over the course of the nineteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> David Mayer, ‘The Music of Melodrama’, in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television, 1800–1976*, ed. by David Bradby, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 49–63 (p. 51).

<sup>15</sup> This is the case with plays as diverse as J. R. Planché’s *The Prince of Happy Land; or, The Fawn in the Forest* (Lyceum Theatre, 1851), Dion Boucicault’s *Forbidden Fruit* (New York, 1878), and Francis C. Burnand’s *Mazeppa; or, ‘Bound’ to Win!* (Royal Amphitheatre, 1885), which included references to, respectively, the Ethiopian Serenaders, displays of Zulus, and a Tartar village.

<sup>16</sup> Just think of Planché, ‘antiquarian and heraldic scholar, costume designer, playwright and Victorian gentleman’, quoted in Jane Moody, ‘Illusions of Authorship’, in *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Davis and Donkin, pp. 99–124 (p. 99).

fictionality of the exotic body, potentially affecting the audiences' (already quite stretched) suspension of disbelief.

In doing so, I will align my analysis to that of Daniel Carey when he warns against 'the risk of appropriating literature as a mere allegory of history while assigning to criticism the task of determining the ways in which such texts represent historical truths outside themselves'.<sup>17</sup> As this statement may seem in this context to echo what Bernard Porter has observed in his controversial *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, in which he suggests that certain readings of imperial factors may bear the 'presumption that they *must* have been overwhelming' in Victorian society,<sup>18</sup> I should like to expand a little more on the substantial differences between these two approaches and clarify mine.

In his chapter in the groundbreaking volume *The Postcolonial Enlightenment*, Carey discusses the ways interpretations of *Robinson Crusoe* have ultimately bestowed upon the novel references to slavery that are not suggested by the actual text, critics adopting a 'palimpsestic' approach that superimposes the historical background to the text to the detriment of the latter. Although similarly employing the Saidian notion of 'silence' to suggest that historians have filled with their own convictions what the text or evidence do *not* say, Porter, on the other hand, falls into the gross mistake of glossing over the overwhelming evidence of the imperial discourse. As Ross Forman has argued in *China and the Victorian Imagination*, 'even the most blatantly positivist method — counting the number of articles' about the empire would refute Porter's claim that

in the archeological [*sic*] site that is British society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there are, of course, thousands of imperial shards to be found. Dug out and piled up at the side, they can be made to look overwhelming. Studied *in situ*, however, one gets a different impression. They appear widely scattered, and concentrated in certain layers and at particular spots.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Carey, 'Reading Contrapuntally: *Robinson Crusoe*, Slavery, and Postcolonial Theory', in *The Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. by Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 105–36 (p. 109).

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 37, emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> Ross G. Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empire Entwined*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, 85 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 10; Porter, p. xiii. John MacKenzie replied to this statement: 'as it happens, I was trained as an archaeologist and very nearly became one. I have found a lot of shards and, to the archaeologist, an assemblage of such shards in their deposits implies the existence of a culture, not its absence', in John M. MacKenzie, "'Comfort' and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36 (2008), 659–68 (p. 665).

When it comes to the theatre, Porter's book 'reveals methodological errors and a grave misreading of the archival evidence' (Gould, pp. 6–7), as the author argues against the empire playing a major role on the Victorian stage even after, incredibly, he has checked titles in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays collection, which provide rich evidence of the contrary.<sup>20</sup> Some of these titles may, admittedly, be deceiving;<sup>21</sup> but, as Peter Yeandle has shown in reference to the pantomime, from the 1850s onwards there was a

vivid increase in productions set nominally in overseas contexts. In the 1890s, 54 out of the documented 120 pantomimes staged in London were set [...] abroad: of which *Robinson Crusoe*, *Ali Baba*, *Sinbad* and *Aladdin* predominated (these formed less than a tenth of productions in the 1850).<sup>22</sup>

Gould has provided evidence for 'two hundred Victorian theatrical adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe*', while more than fifty productions on the East are taken into account by Ziter in his book.<sup>23</sup>

My argument here, therefore, is not that the empire was not central to nineteenth-century theatre, as this worked 'as an institution of empire, ideally suited to the task of illustrating the distant imperial periphery for the metropolitan masses' (Gould, p. 35). Rather, I will highlight how the stage, while certainly responding to changing ideologies or resounding events in imperial history, did not do so merely to 'illustrate' politics or as a direct dependant of any imperial authority, but also to exploit the visual potential of imperial themes in a context in which spectacle was the main key to success.

### Replicating the exotic body on stage

It is with satisfaction that 'Lord' Sanger describes attires and action for his performance of 'Indians' in 1856:

<sup>20</sup> The collection, held at the British Library, comprises all plays submitted for licensing in the United Kingdom between 1824 and 1968.

<sup>21</sup> Several plays had titles that did not show any reference to the empire, but were nevertheless concerned with imperial themes: Nelson Lee's *King Emerald; or, Harlequin's Crystal Palace in Fairyland* (1852), with references to Australia; the anonymous *Perfect Confidence* (1854) and H. J. Reynoldson's *Beeswing in Port* (1855), which include Anglo-Indian dramatis personae; or Augustus Harris's (and T. J. Williams's) *Gossip: A Comedy in Two Acts* (1859), which discusses the West Indies — to mention but a few.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Yeandle, 'Performing the Other on the Popular London Stage: Exotic People and Places in Victorian Pantomime', in *Staging the Other in Nineteenth-Century British Drama*, ed. by Morosetti, pp. 125–51 (p. 134).

<sup>23</sup> Gould, p. 7. While not only confined to the empire, the bibliography of plays featuring exotic characters, settings, and themes I have compiled for my own project counts, as it stands, more than a thousand titles.

A little red ochre for skin tint, some long, snaky black hair, feathers, skins, and beads did the trick properly, and I had as savage a lot of Ojibbeways to look at as ever took a scalp. They had some terrible-looking weapons, and learned to do war dances, to yell like fiends, and to perform tribal ceremonies. They lived, or *were supposed to*, in an iron-barred carriage for safety's sake, and I would walk them out before the grand procession and make an impression by buying them fruit and sweetmeats. (Sanger, pp. 233–34, emphasis added)

This passage is interesting not only because it offers an insight into practical details, as well as the ideology behind the construction of exotic performances, but because it also reveals a deep awareness about audiences' expectations — Sanger being too experienced a showman not to put to best use what he implies are the paraphernalia of the 'savage' on stage, Native Americans in particular. Audiences in Liverpool had in fact already experienced a performance of 'Indians' by watching George Catlin's exhibition, which, after opening in London in 1840, successfully toured Britain in the following years (visiting Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool, and Glasgow among others). Catlin's Indian Gallery in London was arranged

around the twenty-five foot-high Crow wigwam of twenty buffalo hides. On the walls were three hundred portraits of the Plains tribes. Trophies of hunting and gathering — bear-claw necklaces, shells, beads, eagle plumes, and animal skins — and the occasional silver medal or gold coin, adorned the bare upper-body torsos of the men.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, these had not attracted big enough audiences, as 'authentic art needed explanation or narrative — or artifice and dramatic interpretation', and the exhibition had to be provided with 'eleven war scenes and eight domestic scenes to illustrate the lectures that Catlin gave on Indian life'.<sup>25</sup> The exhibition was promoted, among other means, by Catlin's attending a Caledonian Ball in 1840 himself dressed as an 'Indian': in Christopher Mulvey's words, 'not fancy dress but a carefully staged deception' (p. 253), a choice that aimed at satisfying the increasing interest and curiosity around Native Americans, while providing a good introduction to the 'theatrical dimension' of Catlin's exhibition.

<sup>24</sup> Robert M. Lewis, 'Wild American Savages and the Civilized English: Catlin's Indian Gallery and the Shows of London', *European Journal of American Studies*, 3.1 (2008), 1–20 (pp. 2–3) <<https://ejas.revues.org/2263>> [accessed 16 February 2017].

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, p. 3; Christopher Mulvey, 'Among the Sag-A-Noshes: Ojibwa and Iowa Indians with George Catlin in Europe, 1843–48', in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. by Christian F. Feest (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 253–76 (p. 253).

This ‘theatrical dimension’ had become a necessity for the several exotic exhibitions that dotted Britain throughout the century; as Sadiya Qureshi has noted, ‘the range of ceremonies performed, from meals to acts of warfare, supported showmen’s claims to be presenting dramas comprehensively illustrative of displayed people’s lives’ (p. 122). Acts of warfare seemed to be of particular interest to audiences, entertained, in the case of Catlin’s exhibition, by ‘an enemy attack, the negotiation of a peace treaty, [...] and the rescuing of John Smith by Pocahontas’ (Qureshi, p. 122). The inclusion of Pocahontas, a heroine who had become very popular with nineteenth-century audiences, is interesting here, as it shows that even when the construction of the Other on stage was based on direct observation (as a painter, Catlin had been ‘scrupulous in recording the customs unique to the Plains tribes’ (Lewis, p. 1)), thus aiming at ‘anthropological faithfulness’ or ‘realism’, this came to be blurred by the merging with more generalizing or less historically specific narratives. In the case of Catlin’s exhibition, this included a narrative that dated from the seventeenth century.

As we shall see shortly, performances of the Zulus were also similarly characterized by war dances, tribal ceremonies, and yells, signalling to audiences both the (historically specific) threat posed to the British in South Africa and the Zulus’ (ahistorical) backwardness. Yells in particular seemed, in the course of the century, to have triggered immediate associations with the ‘savage’, thus transcending specific geographical or anthropological connotations to inform representations of the Black more widely.<sup>26</sup> What Sanger was selling to his public was, therefore, no specific image of the ‘Ojibbeways’, but rather an image likely to meet with the predictable appreciation of the public: ‘authenticity’ being built not upon realistic elements, but rather on what audiences understood to be the ‘authentic’ features of the exotic Other. These features were part of a pool of recurring visual (and auditive) techniques that — while claiming specificity — actually presented audiences with general, unspecific assumptions about the non-European Other that performances like that of Sanger incorporate and make their own.

<sup>26</sup> Horace Lennard’s *Robinson Crusoe* (Lyceum Theatre, 1895), a performance that plays on the confusion between Indian proper and Native American, featuring among its extras Chut Nee, the Chief Cook of the King of the Calibres — the white performer Charles Lauri (1860–1903), the ‘Garrick of animal mimes’, who significantly played a ‘monkey’ as well as Friday, was, for instance, praised by *The Times* for the ‘wild savagery of his yells’. See Anne Morton Lane, review of Lennard’s *Robinson Crusoe* (*The Mail and Express Bureau*, 18 December 1895), Clippings on London Theatres, Harvard University, Harvard Theatre Collection; ‘Pantomime Acts’, <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/p/pantomime-acts/>> [accessed 14 February 2017]; “Robinson Crusoe” at the Lyceum’, *The Times*, 27 December 1895, p. 5, quoted in Jeffrey Richards, *The Golden Age of Pantomime: Slapstick, Spectacle and Subversion in Victorian England* (London: Tauris, 2015), p. 394.

Nevertheless, visual patterns and representational strategies that were similar or even identical on stage could in the act of replication come to signify completely different contexts or political meanings, as the case of the Zulus aptly shows. The interrelation between theatre performances and ethnological displays in the construction of the Zulus on stage from 1853 onwards has been discussed by several authors.<sup>27</sup> Performances of the Zulus were highly topical: as John MacKenzie has written, ‘African wars gave rise to military melodramas, and from the middle of the century the growth of African subjects inevitably came to reflect increased imperial activity in Africa.’<sup>28</sup> The eighth ‘Kaffir’ or Xhosa War (1850–53) and the Anglo-Zulu War, with the famous battle of Rorke’s Drift (22–23 January 1879), were no exception to this, as the former inspired productions such as C. S. James’s *The Kaffir War* (Queen’s Theatre, 1851) or Edward Fitzball’s *Amakosa; or, Scenes of Kaffir Warfare* (Astley’s, 1853); while the latter is portrayed by, among others, the ‘Grand Military Spectacular Drama’ *The Kaffir War* (Astley’s, 26 April 1879). However, the strategic employment of the word *kaffir* — an umbrella term that at the time stood for both the Zulus and the Xhosa — in the 1879 drama at Astley’s, did not refer to the same war as the first two titles. This shows not only an awareness of the commercial potential of this term, but also the wish to fall into an established pattern of representation of the Zulus.

This pattern was rooted in the recurrent employment, by both the theatre and ethnological exhibitions such as those organized by C. H. Caldecott (1853) and the Great Farini (1880),<sup>29</sup> of several of the general visual conventions used to signal the ‘savage’ (‘wild’ yells, furry and feathery costumes). Caldecott presented costumes ‘mostly of a furry nature’, with patches of animal skins, and the ‘usual’ feathers and armllets, while exhibits in Farini’s display would also wear ‘fur drapery around the waist, feathers and flowers in the hair, together with armllets and strange ornaments in the ear’.<sup>30</sup> The warlike character of the Zulus would have similarly been highlighted by a recurrent employment of war dances and weapons, shields, and

<sup>27</sup> Alongside Qureshi, see also, *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. by Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Cape Town: Philip, 1999); and *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, ed. by Pascal Blanchard and others (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008). I have myself explored in a previous article how this related to the wider representation of Africans on the nineteenth-century stage: see Tiziana Morosetti, ‘Constructing the Zulus: The “African” Body and Its Narratives’, in *Staging the Other in Nineteenth-Century British Drama*, ed. by Morosetti, pp. 79–101.

<sup>28</sup> John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> William Leonard Hunt (1838–1929).

<sup>30</sup> ‘The Zulu Kaffirs’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 22 May 1853, p. 8; ‘The Zulu Kaffirs’, *Morning Post*, 17 May 1853, p. 5; ‘Zulus at St James’s Hall’, *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 13 July 1879, p. 5.

assegais ensuring these performances an immediate authentic flavour, while testifying to their supposedly anthropological nature. Twenty years later, on the occasion of the Second Boer War, Frank Fillis's miniature impression of this conflict, 'Savage South Africa', which performed at the Greater Britain Exhibition (1899), similarly capitalized on the established, recurrent image of the Zulus. As Tom Rice has observed in commenting on a film of this troupe, *The Landing of Savage South Africa at Southampton* (1899), the emphasis of the performance was in fact 'on movement and the display of "attractions" — the Africans dance and wave their spears and shields — and in its construction, as the Africans perform to the fixed camera as if on a theatrical stage'.<sup>31</sup> While conveying different political circumstances, performances of the Zulus therefore consistently retained their visual patterns so as to represent, as they had done in 1853 on occasion of the first live exhibition of Zulus, 'the domestic manners, mode of hunting the tiger, war dances, superstitions, witch-finding, &c., of this wild and savage race', as the *Morning Post* has it.<sup>32</sup>

This apparent contradiction is, I suggest, best captured by the term *simulacrum*. Meaning 'a material image, made as a representation of some deity, person, or thing', as well as 'something having merely the form or appearance of a certain thing, without possessing its substance or proper qualities' (*OED*), it can be used for images of the non-European Other in nineteenth-century theatre. The second definition is of particular interest in discussions of the exotic body and its replication, as it implies a distance between 'original' and 'copy' — indeed the existence of an 'original' and a 'copy' — that speaks to the several notions of authenticity underlying performances of the Other. Whereas in some cases it is fairly easy to talk of an 'original' and investigate its replication and/or the faithfulness of its copies — when, for instance, given characters (Robinson Crusoe, Oroonoko, Aladdin, Mazeppa, Uncle Tom) are adapted to the stage, or when a specific building is reconstructed — in other cases, of which the Zulus are a paradigmatic example, finding an 'original' may be extremely difficult. If by 'real' Zulus (or Chinese, or Turk) one means examples from all the sources (travelogues, public lectures, museum displays, photographs, medical reports) that provided avowedly authoritative accounts of these people, these were also always partially fictional, the result of a political and cultural construction. As for the actual exhibits in shows such as those of Caldecott and Farini, what Qureshi has observed of ethnological exhibitions in general was valid for them: they were 'commonly marketed as if the performances were unmediated representations of life abroad, yet all were evidently quite carefully choreographed and managed' (p. 122).

<sup>31</sup> Tom Rice, 'Analysis', <<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1186>>. See also, 'Savage South Africa — Savage Attack and Repulse', <<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/57>> [both accessed 16 February 2017].

<sup>32</sup> *Morning Post*, 3 May 1853, p. 6. Incidentally, there are no tigers in Africa.

Simulacra of the Zulus on stage were therefore, although not entirely fictional, the product of self-nurtured, flexible narratives that combined specific, ‘realistic’ elements with others that were drawn from a wider imagery of the ‘savage’. These two contrasting trends were not incompatible, because whereas the stage was prompt in absorbing topical allusions, adapting to new political and cultural circumstances, general attitudes towards the Other and long-lasting imageries of foreign cultures did not adapt as quickly. Furthermore, different visual conventions may also, as in the case of the Zulus, serve different purposes: whereas specific weapons would signify a particularly dangerous enemy, thus highlighting the courage and talent of the British in the context of the actual southern African conflicts, more general features such as feathers, skins, and beads would have signalled a general backwardness compatible with evolutionary and other scientific narratives of the African. Thus, in ‘the confusion generated by the increasingly common juxtaposition of the “real” and the “represented”’ that was characteristic of nineteenth-century theatre, performances of the exotic would complicate the picture further by employing visual conventions that, replicated on stage, conveyed markedly different discourses (Ziter, p. 2).

The ‘movements towards realism of setting and towards a certain historical accuracy’, as Allardyce Nicoll puts it, that is traditionally considered a dominant characteristic of the nineteenth-century British stage, is therefore only partially applicable to representations of the exotic.<sup>33</sup> In the latter, a direct correspondence between ‘original’ and ‘copy’ can seldom be envisaged. Ziter has reflected at length on changing notions of the ‘authentic’ and the ‘real’ over the course of the nineteenth century, arguing that while Georgian theatre presented audiences with ‘fanciful combinations of authentically reproduced fragments’ (p. 16), in Victorian times

it seemed that there had been a fundamental shift in how space functioned in both the theatre and the museum: meaning did not naturally emerge from the presented object but was instead generated in the relation of the object to its displays or acting environment. (p. 4)

This should not leave us under the impression that Victorian performances were necessarily any more accurate than their Georgian counterparts. Whereas the ‘acting environment’ of Victorian theatre may be the extremely faithful representations of the Ancient World — in which, as Jeffrey Richards has noted in *The Ancient World on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage*, ‘spectacle and authenticity went hand in hand’ — this was not the case with other

<sup>33</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama, 1660–1900*, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), v: *A History of Late Nineteenth-Century Drama, 1850–1900*, 37.

settings.<sup>34</sup> As Jacky Bratton has argued, ‘little regard for actual events’ was, for instance, employed in performances of the Crimean War (1853–55), in which ‘spectacle and exotic setting were turned to comic ends’.<sup>35</sup>

This is not to deny that political meanings were in place, but rather that the nineteenth-century stage showed degrees of exoticism that were actually revealed and/or accompanied by corresponding degrees of realism.<sup>36</sup> The more exotic (in its secondary *OED* meaning of ‘outlandish, barbarous, strange, uncouth’) a foreign culture was perceived to be, the less realistic its performance proved to be. High degrees of realism, as in the case of Egypt, tended to signify an affinity with western European ‘civilized’ culture(s).

### Pantomimes and incongruity

The inclusive and hybrid nature of illegitimate drama made it a favourite site for the accumulation and consequent incongruity of representational strategies. It thus further contributed to distancing exotic performances from any pretension to realism. Pantomimes were especially suited to host such processes of accumulation, as the pantomime as we know it today developed from a merger of diverse genres that had existed independently:

The harlequinade, the largely dialogue-less comic knockabout of Clown, Harlequin and Pantaloon; the extravaganza, the elegant and witty satire of modern life in comic versions of classical myths and fairy tales; and the burlesque, the irreverent send-up of everything the Victorians customarily took seriously, such as English history, grand opera and Shakespeare. (Richards, *Golden Age*, p. 14)

In Jeffrey Richards’s view, the convergence of these genres into one enhanced the pantomime’s ‘ability to pun and the chance to comment on current events’, in a scenario in which the stage generally ‘revelled in word-play’ (*Golden Age*, pp. 17, 18). However, if words acquire a new centrality on the Victorian stage, they do not do so at the cost of the visual. As Richards further explains, whereas the merger of burlesque with the pantomime

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *The Ancient World on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> J. S. Bratton, ‘Theatre of War: The Crimea on the London Stage 1854–5’, in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama*, ed. by Bradby, James, and Sharratt, pp. 119–37 (p. 121).

<sup>36</sup> Tiziana Morosetti, ‘Introduction’, in *Staging the Other in Nineteenth-Century British Drama*, ed. by Morosetti, pp. 1–15 (p. 2).

fostered the use of ‘puns, parodies both musical and literary, topical allusions and contemporary slang’, the overlapping with extravaganza meant ‘the rise of spectacle’. Technical developments were of assistance in ensuring spectacular tricks, and scene painters rose to unprecedented fame (pp. 18, 23).

Pantomimes worked as reliable barometers for the political moment because, as Richards notes, ‘topical allusions can tell us what the pantomime producers considered significant events and the reports of audience reaction can tell us about the popular attitude to these events’ (*Golden Age*, p. 39). As Gould has also convincingly argued, performances of the Robinsonade, in particular, ‘helped the British public acclimate to a constantly shifting imperial role by visually recording and commenting upon changes in public attitude and government policies’ (p. 11). However, these performances, as Gould himself has noted,

would look not to the novel but to earlier stage adaptations for inspiration and direction. What we see in the development of the genre is successive adaptations of an adaptation, a sequence of replication and revision that would ultimately yield a theatrical Robinsonade markedly different from its narrative source. (pp. 59–60)

The political potential of theatre is possibly undermined here in yet further forms of accumulation and incongruity. There is also the risk of representational conventions being progressively emptied, in the process of replication, of their original meaning. In a sense, then, what Jane Moody has observed for illegitimate Georgian drama — that its ‘palm trees, moorish arches, and castles with bulbous, onion-shaped towers concisely evoked a portmanteau dramatic orientalism’ (*Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 98) — applies generally to representations of the exotic throughout the century. The seriality of visual conventions means, as we have seen in the case of the Zulus, the triggering of automatic associations on the Victorian stage.

There was, that is to say, a shared understanding of what the exotic Other was expected to be that, although enriched at times by more ‘realistic’ elements, still relied on vague, ‘universal’, and portable elements. This brings me to the last section of this article and to what I consider possibly the most important evidence of this shared understanding and related expectations: the omission of the exotic body. As I am still in the process of collecting evidence for this contention, it will only be possible here to provide a few examples. These, however, seem to me to offer an interesting insight into possible mechanisms of replication of stereotypes and visual elements that warrant fuller attention.

### 'Etc. Etc.': omitting the Other

Morgan and Mrs Howard's pantomime *Bluebeard* (Theatre Royal, Newcastle, 1889) is a very good example of the rather haunting use of 'etc. etc.' in nineteenth-century theatre.<sup>37</sup> It is haunting because the use of 'etc.' is as widespread as it is difficult to trace back to specific elements in the performance, mainly for lack of reviews on given plays. In the case of *Bluebeard*, 'etc.' stands for the unpredictable, highly incongruous accumulation of exotic extras, 'Hindoos, slaves, Amazonians, Nautch Girls, animals, *etc.*', that the manuscript complements with a baby pet elephant, only to present them all, as it is, in a play set in Baghdad of all places, complete with 'an Oriental Ballet' (scene 6).<sup>38</sup>

Given the incongruity that seems to reign in this play, it is likely that the 'etc.' in question may indicate a freedom for the actual production to provide as many and as diverse extras as possible. Parades of exotic Others were in fact not uncommon on the nineteenth-century stage, with plays such as C. H. Stephenson's *Death Flower; or, the Queen of Inde* (undated) and *Zelina* (Royalty Theatre, 1830) also featuring surprising juxtapositions of exotic types.<sup>39</sup> Stephenson's play, a 'new drama in three acts founded on Meyerbeer's opera *L'Africaine*',<sup>40</sup> featured among its extras 'Counsellors — Bishops — Soldiers, Sailors, *etc.*'; 'The High Priest of Brahma — Indians — *etc.*'; 'Indian Priestesses — Girls — Bayadères — *etc.*'; while *Zelina*, which the *Yorkshire Gazette* describes as 'a trumpery melo-drama, with neither language nor plot to recommend it',<sup>41</sup> included, alongside a number of exotic types (a 'Yankee Tar', an 'Irish Sailor', a 'Young Greek Warrior', and a 'Pacha'), 'Greek and Turkish Soldiers, Virgins, Priests, *etc.*', where 'etc.' refers in this case to the nuns and the 'incense boys' in the opening scenes of Act 1. This last detail suggests at least two very practical reasons for the widespread use of 'etc. etc.' in nineteenth-century manuscripts, ephemera, and printed texts, a use that, to my knowledge, has not been investigated in reference to the exotic body.

First, such was the haste with which manuscripts were usually presented to the Lord Chamberlain for approval, that the use of 'etc. etc.' was made necessary by the general abundance of extras in these submissions.

<sup>37</sup> Canterbury, University of Kent, Pettingell Collection, Pett. PAN 33 (1).

<sup>38</sup> Jumbo was the first African elephant to arrive alive in Europe in 1862, which then toured Germany, France, and Britain before sailing to America to be employed in the circus of P. T. Barnum. Alice, dubbed Jumbo's 'wife' by her keepers and the media, was another elephant to arrive at the London Zoo, where Jumbo was held, in 1865.

<sup>39</sup> *Zelina* was also performed at Sadler's Wells, 1836; the National Theatre, Boston, 1847; the National Theatre, New York, 1852; and the Pavilion Theatre, London, 1876.

<sup>40</sup> Pettingell Collection, Pett. MSS. D. 24.

<sup>41</sup> *Yorkshire Gazette*, 22 May 1830, p. 2.

Second, and more importantly, the amount of information displayed on playbills and in printed texts was such that the use of ‘etc.’ was necessitated by lack of space, that is, by the need to include virtually any detail that the playbill or cover could not physically encompass: songs and dances, other works by the same author(s), descriptions of scenery, costumes, and extras. By the end of the eighteenth century, playbills had become ‘the equivalent of the modern programme’, providing both a variety of information and serving themselves as entertainment, as when including ‘descriptions of a humorous nature, consisting almost entirely of puns in the taste of the time [the 1850s]’. Space must have been a crucial factor to take into account.<sup>42</sup> In the printed edition of the pantomime *Dick Whittington and His Cat; or, Harlequin Beau Bell, Gog and Magog, and the Rats of Rat Castle* (Surrey Theatre, 1877), for instance, Frank W. Green is indicated as the author of ‘*Jack and the Beanstalk, Forty Thieves, Jack the Giant Killer, Jack and Jill, &c. &c.*’,<sup>43</sup> where the use of ‘etc.’, while implying a reader familiar with the work of Green, and/or the great resonance of his work, still mainly points to a lack of space — Nicoll’s bibliography alone listing for this author forty-seven titles between pantomimes, burlesques, and farces (v, 390–92).

But the case is different with examples such as Planché’s *Mr Buckstone’s Voyage around the Globe (in Leicester Square)* (Haymarket, 1854), in which Asia appears ‘reclining in a Kiosque, attended by slaves, dancing girls, etc.’,<sup>44</sup> or James’s *The Kaffir War*, the second scene of Act 2 of which is set on the background of ‘a wild view. Rocks etc.’.<sup>45</sup> In yet another production, Gilbert Abbot à Beckett and Mark Lemon’s *Peter Wilkins; or, The Loadstone Rock and the Flying Indians: Extra Extravagant Extravaganza in Two Acts* (Adelphi, 1845), the costume for Columbat includes ‘light blue velvet-shirt trimmed with silver and red feathers — silver ostrich feathers — scarlet and head dress, with silver scarf, etc., blue and silver boots’.<sup>46</sup> It needs some imagination and a good knowledge of specific situations for the researcher to actually fill the gap of these ‘etc.’ with details. However, while the omission of data that may be known to the spectator or reader (such as authors’ works) simply point to a lack of space, that of details

<sup>42</sup> Gabrielle Enthoven, ‘Playbill, Programme’, in *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, ed. by Phyllis Hartnoll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 742–44 (p. 742).

<sup>43</sup> Frank W. Green, *Dick Whittington and His Cat; or, Harlequin Beau Bell, Gog and Magog, and the Rats of Rat Castle* (London: Phillips, [n.d.]).

<sup>44</sup> J. R. Planché, *Mr Buckstone’s Voyage around the Globe (in Leicester Square)* (London: Hailes Lacy, [n.d.]), p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Stanfield James, *The Kaffir War: Drama*, London, British Library, Add. MS. 43036.

<sup>46</sup> Gilbert Abbot à Beckett and Mark Lemon, *Peter Wilkins; or, The Loadstone Rock and the Flying Indians: Extra Extravagant Extravaganza in Two Acts* (London: National Acting Drama Office, [n.d.]), p. 3.

concerning costumes and settings rather reveals a shared understanding of the Other and its representation that is translated into expectations of what should or should not have been on stage. The tone of Planché's text, in particular, like Sanger's, suggests that Asia should be portrayed with the *usual* features, and as this text is also rich with references to ethnological exhibitions and other shows at the time available in town, it may be assumed that this passage also implies a reference to recurrent visual strategies (or some other performance).

James's production, on the other hand, in using the adjective 'wild', also similarly points to an immediately recognizable, but extremely unspecified setting that is only partially in contrast with the supposedly 'authentic' portrait of the 'Kaffir' Wars that this performance was meant to provide. As the ethnic specificity of the Xhosa was in no way taken into account by this performance, neither did the setting need to be 'realistic'. Minimalistic descriptions of scenery were, after all, quite common in Victorian theatre, as was the portmanteau character of costumes such as the one described in *Peter Wilkins*.

These examples suggest that there was a pool of possible conventions applicable to exotic performances that, without being mentioned explicitly, would have been known to playwrights, performers, and also, perhaps, critics. But what about audiences? What were they supposed to think of these repetitive, highly incongruous portraits of the exotic and the foreign more generally? Evocations of the exotic Other, however incongruently framed, may no doubt have reinforced prejudice and stereotypes: in the end, the Zulus, as well as the various African dramatis personae that animated Victorian theatre, spoke to a common, derogative representation of the Black that should not be underestimated today. My interest in this article, however, has been to highlight the heterogeneous character of the several elements that constitute an exotic narrative, while also suggesting that this heterogeneity may have complicated the reception of these performances — and, in particular, that by replicating conventions on stage, as well as by framing them in incongruent narratives, the nineteenth-century stage may have undermined their political potential by revealing them for what they actually were: conventions.

At the core of this process was the very repetition of elements on stage, which eventually may have emptied them of their initial meaning and/or replaced that meaning with other political and cultural references. Simulacra of the Zulus on stage, although retaining some of the features of the original model, conveyed in fact different political and cultural discourses. Second, the accumulation of references or narratives in highly incongruous performances meant that the quality of *entertainment*, rather than illustration, of these performances would be highlighted — plays-within-the-plays furthermore adding to this process. Last but not least, elements later recognized to be blatant fakes would also gladly be packaged as

‘authentic’ and replicated if found to be successful on stage. This is the case with W. Seaman’s *Third Class and First Class; or, The Career of a Widow’s Son* (1859), a play set in Japan, and claiming to include an authentic Japanese dance.<sup>47</sup> In the words of T. W. Erle in *Letters from a Theatrical Scene-Painter* (1880), however, this ‘pretty’ dance would in fact have been ‘the dear old Truandaise’, a dance

known by different names according to the scenes in which it is found. Thus, a Highland fling becomes in succession [...] a Spanish Bolero, or a Rigadoon, or a Fandango, or is executed by a party of theatrical dancing Dervishes as their characteristic performance. (pp. 60–61)

Are we to assume today that audiences were unaware of these mechanisms, that they did not realize that these various dances, however marketed, were actually one?

That the multilayered nineteenth-century stage could convey imperial themes or enhance stereotyped perceptions of the exotic Other is undeniable. As David Mayer has written:

The ornate, imaginative, and traditionally elaborate dress of pantomime ‘openings’ and the timeless motley of the harlequinade seem calculated to avoid comment on anything contemporary. [...] But despite all of these picturesque trappings, the pantomime was a highly topical form of dramatic art offering audiences immediate and specific comment on the issues, major and minor, of the day. Disguised in its exotic and traditional ornamentation, the pantomime held up an *imperfect* mirror to its audiences.<sup>48</sup>

As I hope to have shown in this article, the image conveyed by such an ‘imperfect mirror’ was, however, further distorted by the successive replication of narratives and visuals on stage, which, far from just testifying to drama’s self-nurturing struggle for survival, also meant that it was more likely for established traditions of ‘exotic-ness’ to be exposed as fictional narratives. Whereas the use of ‘etc. etc.’ indicates the existence of a shared understanding of what was expected of the Other on stage, the accumulation and consequent incongruity of details, as well as the use of blatantly inauthentic details, may suggest a contradictory idea: if audiences were to *believe* what they saw, to what extent could the repetitive, stratified exotic work as an effective political commentary on the contemporary world?

<sup>47</sup> Nicoll’s bibliography does not include any venue for the performance, the script of which is at the British Library, Add. MS. 52984 E.

<sup>48</sup> David Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806–1836* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 1–2, emphasis added.