



# Staging the Other in Nineteenth-Century British Drama

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## Introduction

This volume is the outcome of the international conference *The 'Exotic' Body in Nineteenth-century British Drama* (Oxford, 25–6 September 2014), itself one of the dissemination activities of a two-year project on the same topic I undertook as a Marie Curie Research Fellow at Oxford between 2012 and 2014. The conference provided a true testing ground for that project, the main goal of which – an exhaustive bibliography of all plays featuring 'exotic' characters, settings, and themes on the nineteenth-century British stage – demanded clarification first of all regarding that very term, 'exotic'. Inverted commas abounded in my notes, and the conference seemed somewhat bound to confirm the caution of my approach, if only because 'exotic' is a term that still awaits full canonization within studies of Empire and its cultural background, its employment, especially since the publication of Graham Huggan's ground-breaking study,<sup>1</sup> mainly established within the postcolonial context. Had not delegates accepted the challenge implied by the call for papers, then, and proposed their own definitions of 'exotic', I would have most certainly ended up overlooking its possibilities as a critical term, and for this, I remain deeply thankful for a conference that was as varied as it was rich.

After all, it is only in a second definition of the word that 'exotic' may mean 'Outlandish, barbarous, strange, uncouth. Also, having the attraction of the strange or foreign, glamorous' (OED) – all adjectives that sit particularly well within a theatrical context in which cultural and ethnic difference, often elaborated through the lenses of Empire, held great fascination for audiences. In the main definition of the word, however, that is, 'Belonging to another

1 Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

country, foreign, alien' or, in a narrower sense, 'Introduced from abroad, not indigenous' (OED), 'exotic' is still largely under-used to describe 'otherness' in nineteenth-century British culture. Yet, it is this technical acceptance that best describes a case such as that of the Māoris on the London stage of the 1860s, or that of the increasingly popular human zoos, in which actual 'savages' were displayed and performed – whereas other terms, such as 'picturesque', often recurrent in relation to the often fascinating features of Georgian and Victorian theatre, remain as vague as they are informed by negative connotations.

What the conference achieved was in particular to highlight how 'exotic' as a critical term can complement and complicate visions of the Other. While, as Toni Wein points out in the essay that opens this collection, 'it is the very physicality of the marker that distinguishes the exotic body as different from any other Other', in nineteenth-century drama such physicality worked towards hierarchies in the way people of non-British origin especially were portrayed on stage. As we shall see in the latter part of this introduction, and as pointed out by many of the contributions gathered in this volume, these *degrees of exoticism* often went in parallel with the degree of realism employed on stage. The 'exotic' body came to represent a particular type of Other, a spatial or geographical variation of 'otherness', as Zara Barlas suggests, with specific visual connotations that rendered non-European bodies in particular immediately recognizable on stage. Yet, interpreted as basically an 'unusual corporeal body', as Arthur W. Bloom has it, the 'exotic' also applies to a number of less obvious examples than the Māori or the Zulu, such as the sailor – the press-ganged sailor in particular, 'often conceived as a primitive being dwelling on the margins of civilization', as Sara Malton explains – thus embracing virtually each and every character, each and every costume. In fact, if we accept Jonathan Arac and Harriet Rivo's definition of 'exoticism' as 'the aestheticizing means by which the pain of [imperial] expansion is converted to spectacle, to culture in the service of empire,'<sup>2</sup> it is

2 Jonathan Arac and Harriet Rivo, eds, *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Exoticism, Imperialism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 3.

the entire theatrical process that came to be 'exotic' in nineteenth-century Britain. The spectacular nature, as well as the consistent exaggeration of genres like the pantomime, the extravaganza or the melodrama tended to reverberate on all characters and settings involved, so that theatre 'rendered people, objects and places strange even as it domesticated them,'<sup>3</sup> as Graham Huggan has it. In this light, even Britain and the British could be portrayed in a very 'exotic' light.

*Staging the Other in Nineteenth-Century British Drama* includes a selection of the papers presented at the conference (plus three contributions – mine, Schultz's, and Yeandle's<sup>4</sup> – that were not in the programme), and while it sets out to expand on the issues delineated above, it also proposes a specific focus on the body and the bodily – be it the fictional body of characters as they walk through the copious examples of 'exotic', imperial-themed, foreign-oriented drama, and/or the actual body of the actors/actresses that impersonated them. 'Complicit in colonial and imperial methods of domination' (Toni Wein) as they were, 'exotic' bodies 'served to enforce colonial ideologies and help generate support for British foreign policy' (Peter Yeandle), but they also exposed the 'topsy-turvydom', in Serena Guarracino's term, that often accompanied the process of othering on the Georgian and Victorian stages.

Not limited to an analysis of costumes and staging techniques, this collection involves a discussion of all things visual, from make-up to settings, without forgetting, however, that in many cases it is still *texts* that we are confronted by – both printed plays and the texts (reviews, contemporary criticism, etc.) – through which many of these performances have survived down to us. Although it is physical bodies that represent diversity on stage, 'When a character is offered or received as exotic, ethnically different, or ethnically typical in some way, these qualities derive from cultural texts in circulation, rather than from physical bodies' themselves, as Michael Bradshaw points out. This is particularly true for nineteenth-century British theatre, the recurrent intertextuality of which, born out of a general trend to

3 Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 13.

4 Peter Yeandle was a keynote speaker at the conference, but spoke on a different topic.

borrow from a variety of sources, was enhanced by a competition between venues so fierce that plays and performances were consistently recycled in a self-nurturing struggle for survival.

However, while drama, not theatre,<sup>5</sup> is the main focus or starting point for most contributions in this collection, it is important to stress that any understanding of ‘drama’ as a ‘script for theatrical performance’<sup>6</sup> does *not* necessarily imply an accordingly hierarchical understanding of authorship. In a context in which ‘virtually anybody could write a play – and virtually everybody did,’<sup>7</sup> as Frank Rahill has it, playwrights were also often performers and/or managers at once, so that authorship became intangible and virtually inseparable from production – what Jacky Bratton has termed the *intertheatricality*,<sup>8</sup> and Jane Moody the *ventriloquism*<sup>9</sup> of nineteenth-century British drama.

Nor does the investigation of ‘drama’ in this volume rule out an examination of popular entertainment as well, the contamination between the two – a relevant reason for the nineteenth century being long regarded as ‘the nadir of the English drama, the decades when [...] dogs sometimes

- 5 See the distinction drawn by Keir Elam, according to which ‘theatre’ is ‘the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it’, while ‘drama’ is ‘the mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular (“dramatic”) conventions’. Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.
- 6 Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 163.
- 7 Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), 173.
- 8 Jacky Bratton, ‘Jane Scott the Writer-Manager’, in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, eds, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 77–98, 77.
- 9 Jane Moody, ‘Illusions of Authorship’, in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, eds, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 99–124, 107.

had more lines to deliver than great tragedians'<sup>10</sup> – remaining a key feature of Georgian and Victorian theatre. When lamenting the lack of 'works of a truly permanent value',<sup>11</sup> it is their uneasiness at this hybridity that critics have often expressed, above all when trying to establish sure criteria of 'merit' or hierarchies within the intricate world of nineteenth-century performing arts. This is the case with an essay published in 1980, Anthony Coxe's 'Equestrian drama and the Circus', the interest of which lies in its attempt to draw a clear line between *fiction* and *reality*. Equestrian drama, one of the most popular genres of the century, is by the author defined thus:

A bastard entertainment, the result of a misalliance between the theatre and the circus. The spectacle is seen against a representational background. In the traditional theatre the audience is confronted with make-believe on the stage. Go backstage and the illusion is lost [...]. In the circus there is no scenery, no backstage; the spectacle can be seen from all sides, like sculpture. Because the audience holds the spectacle in its midst, there are eyes all round to see that there is no make-believe.<sup>12</sup>

To see the theatre as 'interpretative', and therefore an art, and the circus as 'demonstrative', and therefore 'simply a craft', just because, as the author goes on, 'after all, jugglers *actually do* keep six clubs turning in mid-air',<sup>13</sup> seems to ignore that there are, without saying, a number of other tricks in the circus for which some suspension of disbelief *is* in fact required (unless one wishes to believe that a woman can be seriously split in six, or that a fire-eater will actually eat fire).

Beside the theoretical objections that one may have against Coxe's argument, however,<sup>14</sup> what matters here is that his interpretation does not

10 Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800–1885* (Stanford University Press, 1995), 2.

11 Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952–59), vol. IV, 1800–1850, 59.

12 Antony D. Hippisley Coxe, 'Equestrian Drama and the Circus', in David Bradby, Louis James, Bernard Sharratt, eds, *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 109–18, 109.

13 Ibid.

14 On the one hand, it may be pointed out that the circus has its own narrative, as the ability of a juggler is not independent of how it is presented to the audience, nor is the

do any justice to the specific notion of circus (or theatre, for that matter) in the nineteenth century. In the frenzy for novelty that was characteristic of the whole century, and laid the train for much of the 'exotic' on stage, reality and fiction did often overlap – both on stage and in the ring – to present audiences with pieces of 'realism' or 'truth' that were, however, all invariably subject to illusion. This is a point 'Lord' George Sanger (1825–1911), himself a liminal figure between the circus and the theatre, stresses beautifully in several passages of his *Seventy Years a Showman*. Audience expectations were central in defining what a show *should have been* about, so that when, later in the century, as a renowned and wealthy manager, Sanger decided to put a white elephant on show, although he could have acquired a proper one, he only exhibited one that had been whitewashed. The actual, sacred 'white' elephant was in fact not properly white, and therefore unfit for business, while 'the people wanted a white elephant, so [...], assisting nature with art, gave them what they desired – a handsome creature white as driven snow'.<sup>15</sup>

The point is of central relevance to the topic of this collection, as issues of 'authenticity' are as problematic as they are unavoidable in examining representations of the Other on the nineteenth-century British stage. Whatever degree of 'exoticness' was presented to the audience, it had

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audience's enjoyment of that ability neutral or insensitive to the liminal, provisional, and, indeed, *fictional* space provided by the circus. On the other, theatre must also be said to have its good share of 'reality'. Because, of course, Coxe is right in seeing equestrian drama as a cross-over between theatre and the circus: as in the theatre, the plot, the characters, the scenery are fictional; as in the circus, the horses on stage are real, the rider is an actual rider, and the skills a rider needs are also real, as they stay with him or her when the show is over. But what about an actor that only *pretends* to be a rider (or a juggler)? After all, the *body* of the actor/actress, like the body of the rider, is all we have both on and off stage; it is the same body (however different its function) as it steps in and out of fiction; it is a real body, that no fiction can prevent from accidentally falling off a stage (or off a horse); and the skills an actor needs to make a convincing rider or juggler on stage will also stay with them when their performance is over. Even a fictional juggler may have to be able to actually keep six clubs turning in mid-air.

15 'Lord' George Sanger, *Seventy Years a Showman* (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1926), 271.

to respond to specific expectations, so that, in the case of the American actor Edwin Forrest, for instance, 'his acting style and the original plays in which he performed were designed to create an American persona and to reinforce both English and American assumptions about what that persona would be', as Arthur W. Bloom reminds us. Similarly, as I show in my own essay, theatrical constructions of the Zulus and their counterpart in human zoos were centred on what the Zulus, the 'Kaffirs' more generally, were assumed to be by British audiences. Whether it was actual 'savages' that were displayed on stage or their blackface impersonations made little difference as for their presumed 'authenticity'. 'Real savages' also had to impersonate themselves, as they were to embody in their performances what was expected of them in terms of savagery, dangerousness, and striking appearance. Ira Aldridge's 'self-staging as an exotic African prince', as Sophie Duncan shows in her essay, is yet another example of this process.

Presented as 'authentic', not all landscapes and/or costumes resembled a verisimilitude to the original, the degree of realism employed on stage betraying in many ways the degree of exoticism attached to any given production. On the one hand, the overlapping of 'real' and fictional elements was partly due to historical circumstances; in the case of colonial melodrama, for instance, as argued by Heidi Holder, its origins 'in the traditions of equestrian, military and aquatic melodrama [...] ensured a persistent emphasis on physical realism and historical accuracy'<sup>16</sup> but also meant the permanence of a 'fantasy element' that was kept 'alive and present on the stage'.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, however, different political and cultural perceptions of the Other also contributed to its diversification on stage, stressing 'fact' and fiction differently according to who or what was being portrayed. Whereas, for example, 'spectacle and authenticity went hand in hand in the

16 Heidi J. Holder, 'Melodrama, Realism and Empire on the British Stage', in J.S. Bratton, Richard Allen Cave, Breandan Gregory, Heidi J. Holder and Michael Pickering, eds, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790–1930* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 129–49, 132.

17 Ibid.

recreation of the Ancient World',<sup>18</sup> although ancient Egypt in particular certainly 'appealed to the cult of the picturesque',<sup>19</sup> other 'exotic' productions such as those dealing with the war of Crimea showed, as observed by Jacky Bratton, 'little regard for actual events'.<sup>20</sup> In a production of *The Passage of the Deserts*, a play set in Egypt during the Napoleon Campaigns, a llama and a wild zebra were introduced, and yet another zebra crossed Tartary in a production of *Mazeppa*, Andrew Ducrow not seeming to care much 'for correctness of local colouring' if he could 'produce an effect by disregarding it', as A.H. Saxon has it.<sup>21</sup>

The 'effect' at which most productions were aimed in nineteenth-century Britain should not, however, lead us to false conclusions about audiences. As Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow have argued in their seminal *Reflecting the Audience*, audiences have also been constructed as credulous, illiterate, coarse and aggressive in the overall 'mythologized picture'<sup>22</sup> of nineteenth-century theatre, with East End theatres in particular being portrayed by West End critics as 'something remote and "other"'.<sup>23</sup> We may be tempted today to dismiss the audiences' reactions to 'exotic' performances as exploitative and racist, or to see these audiences as fundamentally *unaware* of the propaganda that was poured on them, but, as I will argue further in my conclusion, audiences may well also have been *made* aware, if not of the political message, of the tricks that such message conveyed. While it is in fact undeniable that performances such as the pantomime 'operated as a cultural site for the dissemination of imperial ideology' (Yeandle), given that it is first and utmost to 'illegitimate' genres, as convincingly argued

18 Jeffrey Richards, *The Ancient World on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 23.

19 Richards, *The Ancient World*, 17.

20 J.S. Bratton, 'Theatre of War: The Crimea on the London Stage 1854–5', in David Bradby, Louis James, Bernard Sharratt, eds, *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 119–37, 121.

21 A.H. Saxon, *Enter Foot and Horse: A History of Hippodrama in England and France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), 187.

22 Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing 1840–1880* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 97.

23 Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, 46.

by Jane Moody, that we have to turn to understand ‘how British imperialism was being transformed into dramatic spectacle,’<sup>24</sup> the ambiguity of a theatrical culture that at the same time hid and highlighted the artificiality of such propaganda must yet also be kept in mind.

This is a particularly interesting point made by the opening essay, Toni Wein’s “By a Nose” or “By a Hair”: Bearding the Jew on the Georgian Stage’, which, analysing the beard as a signifier of Jewish ‘exoticness’, stresses how ‘The more the beard becomes a metonymic displacement for the Jew, the more its function as a reality effect calls attention to itself, forcing the thing to simultaneously avow and disavow its own status’. In marking the difference between Edmund Kean’s and Charles Macklin’s interpretation of Shylock, the beard more generally became, on the Georgian stage, a ‘detachable, reproduceable, and hence convertible meme for Jewishness’ – but as such, also an obvious, hyper-visible mark of difference.

A counterpoint to Wein’s analysis is Michael Bradshaw’s ‘The Jew on Stage and on the Page: Intertextual Exotic’, which takes into account two plays in particular, Henry Hart Milman’s *Fazio* (1815), and Thomas Wade’s *The Jew of Arragon; or, the Hebrew Queen* (1830), the former employing in his central character a ‘disguised deployment of some of the distinctive features of Jewish caricature’, so that, although it does not openly feature any Jewish character, the play nonetheless contributed to a stereotype that was mainly the result of intertextuality. Both Wein and Bradshaw also aptly show how the Jewish stereotype tended to incorporate characteristics that were common to other ‘Oriental’ types, such as circumcision, equally ‘a marker for Islam, especially in the form of the threatening power of the Ottoman Empire’, as Bradshaw has it.

As Arthur W. Bloom reminds us in his ‘Edwin Forrest: The Exotic American Body on the Nineteenth-Century English Stage’, however, the ‘exotic’ body on the nineteenth-century stage need not be associated necessarily with the features, as mysterious as they are often vague, of any ‘Oriental’ type, nor with those, even more alien, of the black African, as

24 Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.

‘[d]uring 1836, 1837, 1845 and 1846 the exotic body on the English stage was male, white, muscular and American.’ In impersonating the protagonists of John Augustus Stone’s *Metamora; or, the Last of the Wampanoags* and Robert Montgomery Bird’s *The Gladiator*, Forrest ‘appeared to embody American freedom while simultaneously foretelling the tragic fate of the Indian and the slave’.

But readers will not fail to note interesting similarities between the masculinity displayed by Forrest, and that of two undeniably ‘exotic’ and ‘picturesque’ groups: the Zulus and the Māori. In my contribution, I juxtapose two famous exhibitions of Zulus, Charles Caldecott’s ‘Zulu Kaffirs’ (1853) and Farini’s ‘Friendly Zulus’ (1879) with their theatrical counterpart, in particular Edward Fitzball’s *Amakosa; or, Kaffir Warfare* (1853) and *The Grand Equestrian Spectacle of the War in Zululand* (1879). In constructing the body of the Zulu so as to highlight the valour of British troops on the South African fronts, these performances built on ideas about the ‘African’ body that reveal mixed, diversified, and often contradictory attitudes towards the ‘dark’ continent.

The sensation pursued by these performances was also at the core of productions featuring real Māori actors: *Wahena; or The Maori Queen* (Princess’s Theatre, Edinburgh, 1863) and J.B. Johnstone’s *The Emigrant’s Trial; or, Life in New Zealand* (Marylebone Theatre, London, 1864). As in the case of the Zulus, the Māori are also perceived as a ‘superior class of men and women’, and as such distinct from the ‘lower’ savages of other areas of the Empire. But the interest in Marianne Schultz’s essay, which presents rarely investigated materials, lies also in that it highlights how Māori on stage – be it in theatrical performances or in more scientific-oriented displays such as that of fourteen ‘New Zealand Native Chiefs’ assembled at the Alhambra Palace Theatre, Leicester Square, in 1863 – were not just presenting themselves, but more often *performing* themselves to the delight of British audiences.

The ‘enacted’ body of the Other, as Peter Yeandle shows in his ‘Performing the Other on the Popular London Stage: Exotic People and Places in Victorian Pantomime’, is employed in constant juxtaposition to that, both political and actual, of the British, so that ‘the contrast of “home” and “foreign” bodies’ in Victorian pantomime actively contributed ‘to

collective identity formation'. Employing significant quantitative analysis, and investigating two main areas – pantomimic responses to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the evolution of the *Jack and the Beanstalk* story in the second part of the century – this essay also explores the relation between bodies and landscapes, as it is the place that first 'positioned the "other" beyond civilization itself', so that it is the overall visual concept of pantomime that must be examined so as to best appreciate its political impact.

While nineteenth-century theatre was, as mentioned above, highly intertextual in its approach, Sara Malton's 'Impressment, Exoticism and Enslavement: Revisiting the Theatre of War through Thomas Hardy's *The Trumpet-Major* (1880)' is an important contribution regarding that other main area of exchange: that between theatre and the novel. In this essay, however, it is not the way theatre responded to the publication of relevant novels that is investigated, but rather the way in which the novel, and one author in particular, Thomas Hardy, responded to the stimuli of the theatrical experience. Through a discussion of a specific but wide-impacting phenomenon, impressment or coerced naval service, Malton investigates the way 'historical novels often notably revisit and revise earlier dramatic forms in order to foreground the pressed sailor's plight, exoticism, and [...] his connection to slavery', focusing in particular on how *The Trumpet Major* was informed by pantomime.

A thorough examination of a telling case of 'exotic' body, that of the nautch girl, is instead at the core of Zara Barlas's 'Transcultural Operatics: India on the British Stage in *The Nautch Girl, or, The Rajah of Chutneyport*', in which Edward Solomon's 1891 operetta and the visual features of its early twentieth-century productions are in particular explored, as 'Musical entertainments set in "exotic" locations often relied on visual hints and pointers to locate the work in a specific regional and cultural setting'. While 'authenticity was an inherent aspect of this artwork', changes in costumes and settings reveal evolving attitudes towards India and nautch girls specifically, but also, as the essay argues, the limits of a genre, comic operetta, the main intention of which 'was to provide light entertainment'.

The last two contributions in this collection, Serena Guarracino's 'Singing the Exotic Body across the Atlantic: From *The Mikado* to the *Swing Mikado* and Beyond' and Sophie Duncan's 'A Progressive *Othello*:

Modern Blackness in Chakrabarti's *Red Velvet* (2012)', move steadily to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to investigate the legacy of nineteenth-century British drama and, in particular, that of its 'exotic' portraits. Also a contribution on musical theatre, Guarracino's focuses on the fortune of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* 'not as a vehicle for staging the Other but as an exotic body *per se*, whose permanence in contemporary theatres allows for a continuous redefinition of what stands as Other'. A production in particular, the all-black *Swing Mikado*, staged in Chicago in 1939, is examined here to show how the 'Japan of pure invention' that emerged from *The Mikado* found inspiring and unexpected re-interpretations in the contemporary Anglophone world, amongst which a 2011 Opera Australia production in which 'the Victorian and Japanese exotic are so intertwined as to become practically indistinguishable'.

Last but not least, Sophie Duncan's essay invites us to follow Adrian Lester as Ira Aldridge on the stage of Lolita Chakrabarti's recent *Red Velvet* to consider the way this 'speculative restaging of Aldridge's *Othello* associates nineteenth-century blackness not merely with the "exotic", but also emphatically with the modern and progressive'. Chakrabarti's 'redeployment of historical material' – if at times loosely interpreted, as shown by Duncan through a punctual and painstaking reconstruction of contexts and sources – supports a view of Aldridge's diversity as aligned to 'multiple progressive figures marginalized by their radical identities and networks'.

The political connotation of contemporary readings of nineteenth-century drama further adds to a theatrical landscape already ripe with cultural and social implications. Far from representing only a (considerable) portion of Georgian and Victorian entertainment, 'exotic' performances are particularly endowed to shed light on the complex mechanisms underlying the relation between theatre and the Empire. Never as straightforward and hierarchical as the renowned educational role of Victorian entertainment may lead us to believe, this relation is further complicated by the employment of staging devices that, as mentioned earlier, are presented as 'authentic' but are obviously the result of artefact. This inherent ambiguity is also what should alert us to the possibility that audiences may have been fully aware of the propaganda machine that nineteenth-century drama could be.

In commenting on two of his shows in particular, ‘Shoal of Trained Fish in their Exhibition of a Naval Engagement’ and ‘The Wonderful Performing Fish and a Tame Oyster that sits by the fire and smokes his yard of clay’, ‘Lord’ George Sanger again explains that the public craved ‘novelty’ so much that it was no problem, really, should the novelty disappoint, because ‘they liked to see others gulled as well as themselves, so the *game* went merrily on.’<sup>25</sup> Earlier on in the century, when Sanger was still working with his father on the peepshow, having candles at night was once more not a problem, because ‘No doubt the candles, placed as they were, detracted from the effect of the pictures, but people in those days were not so particular as they are now, and as long as they had plenty of colour in the backgrounds were perfectly satisfied.’<sup>26</sup> Although these comments may today sound very derogatory, they nonetheless suggest that audiences may have not been completely oblivious of the *game*, as Sanger himself calls it, that bringing novelty to them implied. This does not rule out complicity. But it allows us for more nuanced, intriguing readings of the nineteenth-century theatrical landscape, the contradictions of which mirrors those of an extraordinary century.

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25 ‘Lord’ Sanger, *Seventy Years a Showman*, 56. Emphasis added.

26 Ibid.

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