

Session 10:

Anon., “The Hottentot Venus; A New Song” (1811)

1. Intro: Jimmy Hendrix in 60s England

Sting on first seeing Hendrix perform in 1968:

He was like a Venusian. Like someone from another planet. All that hair. And there were hardly any black people in Newcastle – I think he actually was the first black person I'd ever seen. It was absolutely electric, almost too awesome to deal with. [...] That was what decided me to become a musician, although I'd probably decided in some vague way already. (Salewicz 1987, 22)

Paul Gilroy (1993)

A seasoned, if ill-disciplined, rhythm and blues sideman, Hendrix was reinvented as the essential image of what English audiences felt a black American performer should be: wild, sexual, hedonistic, and dangerous. [...] the overt sexuality of Hendrix's neo-minstrel buffoonery seems to have been received as a sign of his authentic blackness by white rock audiences (Gilroy 1993, 93).

Cynthia P Caster

He has got just about the biggest rig I've ever seen! (qtd. in Henderson 1983, 180)

The reception of Hendrix ranging between 'freak' and 'type'

2. The Hottentot Venus

Sarah Baartman, 1811



- A khoisan woman brought to England in 1810 by military surgeon Alexander Dunlop and his manservant Hedrick Cesars
- Exhibited at 225 Piccadilly from 1810 to 1811, then a tour through the British provinces
- In 1814, transfer to Paris, where Baartman falls in the hands of Georges Cuvier and the French anthropological society. After she dies of alcohol, she is dissected, a plaster cast is made of her body, and her genitals and brain are bottled and preserved. They are exhibited in the Paris Museum of Natural History until the 1970s
- In the 1980s, Baartman becomes an 'academic master trope' in postcolonial and gender studies, following and essay by Sander Gilman (1985):

Gilman claims:

In the course of the nineteenth century, the female Hottentot comes to represent the black female *in nuce* [...W]hile many groups of African blacks were known to Europeans in the nineteenth century, the Hottentot remained representative of the essence of the black, especially the black female. (Gilman 1985, 225)

The antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty is embodied in the black, and the essential black, the lowest rung on the great chain of being, is the Hottentot. The physical appearance of the Hottentot is, indeed, the central nineteenth-century icon for sexual difference between the European and the black [...] (ibid., 231)

[T]he figure of Sarah Bartmann was reduced to her sexual parts. The audience which had paid to see her buttocks and had fantasized about the uniqueness of her genitalia when she was alive could, after her death and dissection, examine both [...]. Sarah Bartmann's sexual parts, her genitalia and her buttocks, serve as the central image of the black female throughout the nineteenth century. (ibid., 232-35)

Problems:

- race as an essentialist category and limited Freudianism: e.g. "[f]emale sexuality is linked to the buttocks, and the quintessential buttocks are those of the Hottentot," all the while the "nineteenth-century fascination with the buttocks" is nothing but "a displacement for the genitalia" (Gilman 1985, 238).
- No historical differentiation: the san and khoikoi were seen as a different category from the 'black' African tribes!

No differentiation of audiences: "Only by underplaying the existence and importance of ideological conflict can [theorists] sustain Gilman's argument that people from such widely different social locations as French aristocrats, English merchants, displaced peasants, gentleman scientists, and factory workers held a singular and unified opinion about, and image of, Black women and sexuality." (Magubane 2001, 825)

What was the 'working class' reception of someone like Sarah Baartman like? What possible sources do we have?

3. Romantic Period Broadside Ballads and the Hottentot Venus

Broadside ballads are defined, first, by their medial format, and second, a specific culture of performance:

- printed on a single slip of paper (on one side only; if printed on both sides, they are referred to as 'broadsheets'), often illustrated by a crude woodcut, but never printing the music, "referring instead to some well-known tune (often a folk-tune) or simply carrying the tag 'to a new tune'" (Shepard 1969, 14).
- "The text of the ballad was sung or recited as the printed copy was being sold, and this distribution in the street, marketplace, public house or at the fair, instead of through the usual channel of books, is another distinguishing factor" (Würzbach 1990, 2).
- they were "the literature of the urban working class" which "provides one of the few insights we have into their popular culture" (Neuburg 1977, 142).

The Hottentot Venus; A New Song

Tune – We'll go no more a roving so late in the night

O London is a puppet show, where curious sights are seen,
And at their head the *Hottentot* unrivall'd stands the Queen;
There are giants, dwarfs, and singing birds, which all are but a hum,
compar'd to Venus on the stage, exhibiting her *bum*.

CHORUS:

We'll go no more to other shows while Venus treads the stage,
We'll go no more to other shows while Hottentot's the rage.

His fam'd museum *Bullock* boasts, with Leopardallis skin
From Africa, which he's got stuff'd to gull the people in;
Of Nature's great phenomenon imported from that shore
To Britain's Isle, the *Hottentot* above them all must soar.

Pidcock who long has bore the bell, as general in the field
Of lions, tigers cats and wolves, does now to Venus yield;
The fashionables too, we find, are stirring every stump,
With pads, and hoops, and petticoats to imitate her *rump*.

Our rival Theatres each night produce a something new,
But Convent-Garden soon, we hear, will bring to public view
A Pantomime to please the town, we're told 'tis wond'rous fine,
The *Yorkshire Giant* Harlequin, and *Venus Columbine*.

Old Mother Parker now no more need figure in the dance,
Grimaldi, too, with his grimace, may cease to skip and prance;
Even *Siddons*, as Melpomene, we fear must quit the stage,
And *Glover*, too, as Thalia, since Venus is the rage.

The Opera has ceased to please, and so has *Catalani*,
With all her demi-semi-quavers, fortes and piano;
Her vile Italian squeaks indeed, compared to *Sartjee's* fine tones,
Are just like fiddles out of tune, or sharp'ning knives on grindstones.

Miss Scott who leads the Sans Pareil as Jean the Lowland romp,
We've seen as Mary of the Inn, in all her tragic pomp,
In either part the *Hottentot* that Lady would outshine,
But she's a Venus, and we all must bow to her fair shrine.

Poor Penley with great Marmion has long since tir'd the town,
And Denmark's prince he's now brought on, in hopes it may go down;
But what are princes, warriors, chiefs? Why they're not worth a groat,
They must all yield to that damn'd jade, the *Female Hottentot*.

The Blood-red Knight will take no more nor yet the Pony Race,
And Sadler's Wells with all its charms, to Venus must give place;
Spring Gardens, its attractions now appear but shilly-shally,
To Venus at the Lottery Office held at Piccadilly.

In days of yore when *Garrick* reign'd, with *Pritchard* and *Dame Clive*,
With *Woodward*, *Shuter*, *Weston*, *Yates*, the town was kept alive;
A sterling English play was then to men of sense a feast,
But now a Hottentot's the rage – good Lord, how chang'd is taste!

C. Berry, Printer, Norwich.

Date of print:

- stanza 7, Jane M. Scott, manager, playwright and performer at the Sans Pareil Theatre: the melodrama *The Lowland Rump* was shown between Dec 27 1810 and April 6, 1811

- stanza 8, ‘poor Penley’: theatre manager of the New Theatre in Tottenham Street, staged the first ‘Shakespeare Travestie’ by John Poole, *Hamlet Travestie*, premiered on January 24, 1811 → the ballad was probably first printed in London and distributed in February 1811.

Possible background of the writer and his audience?

“The argument goes that in earlier centuries broadside ballads were common reading for all classes. Young men at universities wrote letters mentioning the buying of broadside ballads. Samuel Pepys bought them. But newspapers and magazines developed, and by the nineteenth century broadside ballads were beneath the notice of middle and upper classes, and newspapers and magazines were largely beyond the means of the poor.”(Hepburn 2000, 65)

Hepburn guesses that on average, only around 65 percent of Romantic and early Victorian broadsides were bought by the lower classes, with considerable variation according to subgenre. The rest was consumed by the middle and upper classes.

“The Hottentot Venus” could have been pirated for broadside use from another source, but it is likely that it was written by a professional broadside writer

How was the ballad sold?

Possibly in the district of Seven Dials, perhaps by someone like John Pitts who monopolised the ballad trade at the time the song was probably printed. The distribution of ballads to the street sellers was done in a pub called the “Beggar’s Opera”:

“Bat Corcoran [Pitt’s manager] held his weekly market at the Beggar’s Opera in Church-lane. [...] Thither flocked in each Saturday night unnumbered brothers and sisters of the profession, to purchase, to pay, to exchange, to bleed a tankard, to fathom a roley-poley, and blow a cloud. Ah, the glorious confusion of those festivals! [...] But let us see Bat amidst his customers – see him riding the whirlwind – let us take him in the shock, the crisis of the night when he is despatching the claims of a series of applicants. “I say, blind Maggie, you’re down for a dozen ‘Jolly Waterman,’ thirteen to the dozen.– Pay up you’re score, Tom, with the wooden leg, I see you are

booked for a lot of 'Arethusas.'— Master Flowers, do you think that 'Cans of Grog' can be got for nothing, that you leave a stiff account behind you.— Sally Sallop, you must either give back 'The Gentlemen of England,' or tip for them at once.— Friday my man, there are so many 'Black Eyed Susans' against you.— Jimmy, get rid of the 'Tars of Old England,' if you can; I think 'Crazy Janes' are more in vogue. What say you to an exchange for 'Hosier's Ghost'?" (qtd. in Shepard 1969, 71)

Different types of ballad venders: 'flying' stationers, standing patterers, 'buskers', pinders-up, chaunters

'Chaunters' were the most frequent, and "The Hottentot Venus" was almost definitely sold in the chaunting tradition:

The chaunter brought to life the story or song, portraying it dramatically to catch the eye of potential buyers. As a skilled performer he considered himself above the ordinary costermonger or vendor, but his income was as precarious as theirs. [...] The proper presentation of a song was essential to attract a buyer. A chaunter, as the name indicates, sang in a monotonous flat twang to conserve his voice and to be heard above the other street noise. He began with a spoken patter, directed toward the audience gathering around, including some local gossip and commentary, while recommending the purchase of the new song to be rendered. He would then launch into selected verses, calling upon the audience to join in the choruses, pausing to make sales, while keeping an eye out for the police or possible trouble-makers. (Vicinus 1974, 19-20)

Song allocated to a cosmopolitan popular version of Child ballad 279, "The Jolly Beggar."

There was a jolly beggar, and a begging he was 'boun',
And he took up his quarters into a land'art town,
'And we'll gang nae mair a roving
Sae late in the night,
And we'll gang nae mair a roving, boys,
Let the moon shine ne'er sae bright.' (lyrics qtd. from Bronson 1972, IV, 214)

Effect of chaunting: calling attention, involving the audience, creating a common performance arena, social bonding → selling the ballad

Other ballads about the Hottentot Venus or black people in Romantic Period London:

The Hottentot Wife

SINCE Ireland I left, by conscience I swear it,
I never saw a spot like the cape of Good Hope,
The Girls are so nate, troth and word I declare it,
Wid skins just the colour of dark yellow soap;
Then the devils so bodor a mans understanding,
And smite you wid lov, far a dasant consarn.
That the time I've oft curs'd, when I here took a landing
So much I'm in love, that I ne'er can return,
So farewell dear Ireland, and Shela so pretty,
I bid you farwell for the days of my life,
No more shall I see again Dublin's sweet city.
But stay here and marry a Hottentot wife.

'Tis lately I saw the dark angel that charm'd me,
Said to her, "pray jewel, how do you do?
Och! this was her answer, o'blood has it alarm'd me,
When she, the dear creature, said, 'vat's that to you.'
Blood-a-nouns, she boders my wig, the sweet creature,
No rest can I take, either morn, noon, or night,
St. Patrick, pray tell me, do, how I'm to treat her,
for she her dear self, sure is all my delight!
Then farewell dear Ireland, &c.

She laughs at my troubles, which makes me quite crazy,
Dear Patrick assist me or else I'm undone,
For my soul's so distres'd, and my hearts so uneasy,
That tears just like rivers, down both my cheeks run.
Och! come to my arms let me hug, you, dear jewel,
To kiss you clear Hottentot lips with delight;
Then be my own darling, and cease to be cruel,
And never more hide you blackface from my sight,
Then farwell dear Ireland, &c.

printed and sold by T. Evans, 79, Long-lane

date: probably 1790s

The Merry Will and Testament of Master Black Billy

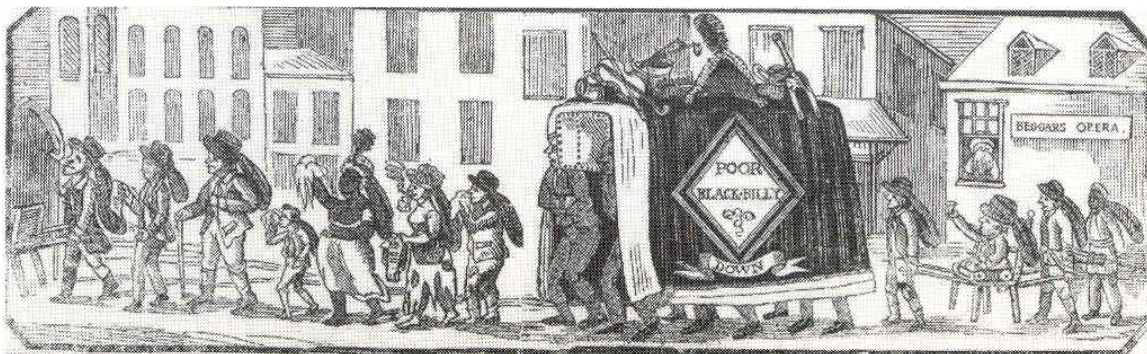
I Master William Waters, O,
A *Minstrel of the Holy Land*;
Well known among my betters, O,
And at the Adelphi, in the Strand,
Convinc'd that death will me soon call,
This day for may old *Palls* I've sent,
And in the presence of them all,
Thus make my Will and Testament.

[...]

I do bequeath unto Black Sal,
One penny for to buy a bun;
Likewise my Shirt so full of holes,
A flea thereon he should not run.
My Trousers (tho' not worth a pin)
By public Auction shall be Sold,
All for to buy a drop of gin,
To warm her heart when it is cold

Thus poor Black Billy made his Will,
His property was small good-lack,
For 'til the day death did him kill
His house he carried on his back.
The Adelphi now may say alas!
And to his memory raise a stone;
Their gold will be exchange'd for brass,
Since poor Black Billy's dead and gone. (qtd. in Hepburn 2001, 308-09)

Printed by James Catnach in 1823



One of three woodcuts on Catnach's sheet, depicting the funeral procession for Black Billy passing by the Beggar's Opera.

The Hottentot Venus: A Ballad

[t]he storie of the Hottentot ladie and her lawful knight who essaied to release her out of captivitie, and what my lordes the judges did therein.

Oh have you been to London towne,
Its rareities to see:
There is, 'mongst ladies of renowne,
A most renowned she.
In Piccadilly Street so faire
A mansion she has got,
In golden letters written there,
"THE VENUS HOTTENTOT".

But you may ask, and well, I ween,
For why she tarries there;
And what, in her is to be seen,
Than other folks more rare.
A rump she has (though strange it be),
Large as a cauldron pot,
And this is why men go to see
This lovely HOTTENTOT.

Now this was shown for many a day,
And eke for many a night;
Till sober folks began to say,
That all could not be right,
Some said, this was with her goodwill:
Some said, that it was not,
And asked why they did use so ill
This ladie HOTTENTOT.

At last a doughty knight stood forth,
Sir Vikar was his name;
A knight of singular good worth,
Of fair and courtly fame.
With him the laws of chivalrie
Were not so much forgot;
But he would try most gallantly
To serve the HOTTENTOT.

He would not fight, but *plead* the cause
Of this most injured she;
And so, appealed to all the laws,
To set the ladie free.
A mighty "Habeas corpus"
He hoped to have got,
Including rump and all, and thus

Release the HOTTENTOT.

[...]

Thus straight two gentlemen they sat,
 (One English and one Dutch)
To learn if she did money get;
 And, if she did, how much.
Who, having finished their intent,
 And visited the spot,
Did say t'was with full consent
 Of the fair HOTTENTOT.

When speaking free from all alarm,
 The whole she does deride:
And says she thinks there is no great harm
 In showing her b—kside.
Thus ended this sad tale of woe,
 Which raised will, I wot,
The fame, and the revenues too,
 Of SARTJEE HOTTENTOT.

And now good people all may go
 To see the wondrous sight;
Both high born men, and also low,
 And eke the good Sir Knight.
Not only this her state to mind,
 Most anxious what she got;
But looking to her latter end,
 Delights the HOTTENTOT. (qtd. in Toole-Stott 1962, 335-36)

**The Address of Jack Higginbottom in behalf of himself and the Hottentot Venus,
to the Ladies of Bath**

[...]

A strange Metamorphosis! – Who that had seen us
'Tother night, would take this for the Hottentot Venus

[...]

In pure virgin robes, full of fears and alarms
How demurely she veils her protuberant charms!
Thus oft', to atone for absurdities past
Tom Fool turn a Methodist preacher at last
Yet the critics, not we are to blame – for 'ot rot em
 There was nothing but innocent fun at the bottom! (qtd. in Kirby 1949, 57)

Back to "The Hottentot Venus; A New Song" – The Hottentot Venus and National Culture

Stanzas 1-3: Focus on Baartman as spectacle: giants, dwarfs, Bullock's museum, Pidcock's circus

From stanza 4: Focus on Baartman and British theatre culture

'Legitimate Theatre': Covent Garden and Drury Lane

e.g. Sarah Siddons

(Joseph Grimaldi)

Angela Catalani

'Illegitimate' Theatre: Sadler's Wells, Pony Race, Spring Gardens etc

'Legitimate' Theatre of the 18th century (the good old times):

David Garrick

Catherine (Kitty) Clive, Hannah Pritchard, Henry Woodward, Thomas Weston, Richard Yates, Ned Shuter

Legitimate vs. Illegitimate Theatre:

After the puritan interregnum, Charles II granted Thomas Killigrew and William Devenant the exclusive right to stage "tragedies, comedies, plays, operas, music, scenes and all other entertainments of the stage" (Killigrew's patent, 25 April 1662, qtd. in Moody 2000), and to build "two houses or theatres with all convenient rooms and other necessities thereunto appertaining" (warrant dating to August 21, 1660, qtd. in Thomas 1989, 9). The patent became firmly associated with the Royal Theatres at Dury Lane (1663) and Covent Garden (1732)

Other theatres were not allowed to play 'legitimate' comedies and tragedies!! Rise of 'illegitimate' theatre: melodrama, burletta, Italian opera or pantomime (a popular operatic form which evolved from the commedia dell'arte),

→ based on visual spectacle and an emphasis on graphic physicality

Theatre crisis in the early 19th century: Illegitimate theatre becomes extremely successful, and the 'legitimate' stages adopt it to financially survive.

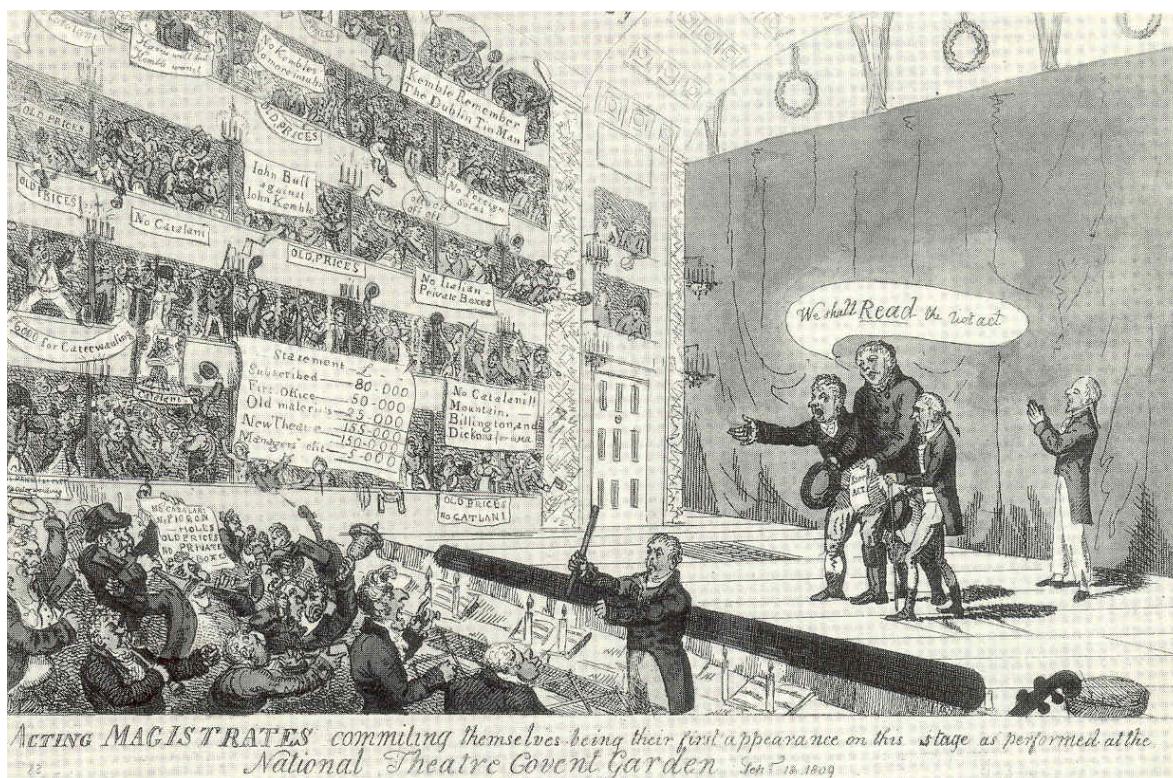
'Orientalist' drama and 'quadrupled' drama on the major stages (elephants, horses etc.)

→ a wide public outcry about the 'decline' of national theatre culture:

e.g. the *Dramatic Censor* of February 1811 laments the public's "resolution to discountenance and proscribe the Legitimate Drama, and establish in its stead a kind of entertainment (forgive the misnomer) recognizable neither by the rules of critics, nor the laws of nature" (qtd. in Moody 2000, 72).

A broadside pamphlet of 1809 accuses the management of Covent Garden of cheaply gratifying the audience "with singing and dancing, with monsters, eunuchs, or any other exotic rarity" (qtd. in Baer 1992, 50).

The OP riots of 1809



Isaac and George Cruikshank, "Acting Magistrates committing themselves being their first appearance on this stage as performed at the National Theatre, Covent Garden" (1809). Engraving. Brady Collection, Christ Church Library, Oxford.

Sarah Baartman as a metaphor of the decline of British (theatre) culture

- **foreignness and infatuation with the non-English exotic**
- **appeal to sheer physicality and bodily spectacle**

ambivalence of working class reception – the performance arena of the song!

Ballad collector Henry Mayhew writes about the areas of London where the song was printed and the people who sold it:

“If Arabia has its nomadic tribes, the British Metropolis has its vagrant hordes as well. If the Carib Islands have their savages, the English Capital has types almost as brutal and uncivilized as they. If India has its Thugs, London has its garotte men” (Mayhew and Binny 1971, 4-5)

!! the cultural rhetoric of the song oscillates between an imposing “nationalist pedagogy” which draws on the ‘legitimate’ orthodoxy of tradition on the one hand, and a range of ‘illegitimate’ performance practices on the other, representing “the prodigious, living principle of the people as the continuing process by which the national life is redeemed and signified” (Bhabha 1990b, 297). !!