

## THE 'EXOTIC' BODY IN 19TH-CENTURY BRITISH DRAMA

University of Oxford

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**Faculty of English Language and Literature, University of Oxford**

Convenor: Dr Tiziana Morosetti (Oxford)

Confirmed speakers:

Professor Ross Forman (Warwick), Dr Peter Yeandle (Manchester),  
Dr Hazel Waters (Institute of Race Relations, London)

Increasing attention has been paid in recent years to the representation of the Other on the 19<sup>th</sup>-century British stage, with key studies such as *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Bratton et al. 1991), *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Ziter 2003), *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Brooks 2006), *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Waters 2007), *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter* (Gould 2011), *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Forman 2013). Building on these, the conference aims at exploring the concept, politics, and aesthetic features of the 'exotic' body on stage, be it the actual body of the actor/actress as s/he performs in genres such as the 'Oriental' extravaganza, or the fictional, 'picturesque' bodies they bring on stage. A term that in itself needs interrogation, the 'exotic' will therefore be discussed addressing the visual features that characterize the construction and representation of the Other in 19<sup>th</sup>-century British drama, as well as the material conditions, and techniques that accompany the 'exotic' on stage on the cultural and political background of imperial Britain.

One of the dissemination activities for the two-year project 'The Representation of the "Exotic" Body in 19th-century English Drama' (REBED), funded under the 2011 Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowships scheme, the conference also hopes to function as a site for discussing the state of the art on the 'exotic' in the theatrical cultures of both Romantic and Victorian Britain; contributions on ongoing research and/or recently completed projects are therefore particularly encouraged. Although attention will be paid mostly to the non-European Other, papers addressing a European 'exotic' are also welcome.

Topics include the following:

### **Definitions of 'exotic':**

- Is the non-European Other on stage really 'exotic'?
- Are any genres more 'exotic' (or more liable to convey 'exotic' stereotypes) than others?
- Do different *dramatis personæ* and/or settings convey different degrees of 'otherness'?
- Can the British on stage be 'exotic', and, if so, to what extent?
- Is the spectacular on stage itself 'exotic'?

### **Staging the 'exotic' body:**

- How are costumes, make-up, scenery, movements employed to construct the 'exotic'?

- Are any visual features more recurrent than others?
- To what extent is the visual representation of the 'exotic' body historically accurate?
- How does music contribute to the staging of the Other?
- Who embodies the 'exotic'? Is the acting career informed by bringing the Other on stage?
- Who were the audiences? Did their composition have an impact on the performance of the 'exotic'?
- Are any experiences abroad relevant to how managers staged the Other in Britain?
- In what ways were representations of the 'exotic' body informed by venues?
- The Other on the London stage and the provinces

### **Cultural and political backgrounds:**

- To what extent did audiences' expectations affect theatrical representations of the Other?
- In what ways do class, gender, race inform the acting and managing of 'exotic' pieces?
- To what extent did scientific and anthropological accounts inform theatrical portraits of the Other?
- Were illustrations of (European and/or) non-European countries informed by theatre?
- In what ways have political narratives influenced (or been influenced by) the 'exotic' on stage?
- Has the legal frame for the theatre influenced the staging of the Other?
- Visual points of contact between popular entertainment and theatrical representations of the Other

### **The travelling 'exotic':**

- How do texts such as *Arabian Nights*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or *Mazeppa* 'travel' between dramatic and non-dramatic genres?
- Survival of a Romantic 'exotic' in the Victorian staging of the Other;
- Is *Othello* on the Romantic and Victorian stage 'exotic'?
- How do translations/adaptations from other languages contribute to the construction of the Other on the British stage? Can we define a British specificity when it comes to the 'exotic'?
- Has the theatrical representation of the 'exotic' in Britain had an impact on non-British stages?

### **The legacy of 19<sup>th</sup>-century 'exotic' body:**

- Contemporary plays/performances addressing the Other on the 19<sup>th</sup>-century British stage (e.g. Lolita Chakrabarti's *Red Velvet*)
- The 'exotic' body on the British stage in a diachronic perspective
- The non-European Other in the 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christmas pantomime

Abstracts of no more than 300 words and a short bio should be sent to [rebedconference@gmail.com](mailto:rebedconference@gmail.com) by 25 May 2014. Speakers whose abstracts have been accepted will be notified by 15 June.