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Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the
Natural Order (review)

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end, she carefully interweaves into her analysis a discussion of the ways in which Asian women interrogate how familial expectations regarding social codes of feminine behaviour, steeped in concepts such as *izzat* and *sharam*, complicate their identities in diasporic spaces.

Most fascinating is her discussion in chapter eight of plays about the experiences of refugees, a theme that deserves special attention in theoretical discussions of diaspora and the meanings of spaces and *home* in today's globally interconnected world. Through analyses of plays such as Amrit Wilson's *Survivors* (1999) and Tanika Gupta's *Sanctuary* (2002), Griffin amplifies the ways in which these playwrights problematize political debates on asylum-seekers and refugees to tell gendered narratives of their experiences. Situating the plays in the context of genocides and conflict in other countries that are linked to colonial pasts, she further complicates issues of home and belonging. The contextual specificity that we find in her discussion of plays is also visible in her terminology. As she charts out the terrain of black and Asian theatre since the 1980s in the introduction, Griffin is attentive to definitional work and explains the shifting discourses around the terms *black* and *Asian* from the 1980s until the present and the differences within and among the communities. Diversity among black and Asian populations, as much as between blacks, Asians, and whites, asserts Griffin, "is central to the diasporic identities they – we – inhabit" (12) and is especially relevant for discussion in Britain "where homogenization is the norm" (13).

The question "What does it mean to be Black or Asian in Britain today?" (232) underlies all the plays under review. And by addressing it, Griffin forces theatre scholars and those working on postcolonial migration to rethink the meaning of "British" theatre, and examine, in the process, its elisions and erasures, and its much-needed reconfiguration as a discipline of study. Convincingly arguing for the need for work in this area that has faced severe critical neglect, her insistence upon the inclusion of plays by Asian and black women in postcolonial, intercultural, or world theatre discourses – which, since the 1980s, have emerged as sites of critical debate and interrogation – serves as an important reminder that such inclusion is indeed long overdue.



JANE R. GOODALL. *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the Natural Order*. London: Routledge, 2002. Pp. xi + 266, illustrated. \$114.95 (Hb); \$34.95 (Pb).

Reviewed by Joseph Roach, Yale University

When choosing the title for her irreverent and readable book, which surveys the great panoply of nineteenth-century popular entertainment and moves

deftly through some of its most lively and harrowing performances, Jane R. Goodall might have considered forgoing “the age of Darwin” for “the age of Barnum.” She links the great naturalist with the great showman as exactly contemporaneous promoters of natural history – the former as the avatar of the search for evolutionary continuity between man and beast, the latter as the exhibitor-in-chief of benighted candidates for the missing link. In the end, “The Sun of the Amusement World,” as Barnum was known to himself and his marks, gets the better of “The Sage and Emperor of the new Enlightenment” (219), Goodall’s sarcastically capitalized epithet for the author of *The Origin of Species*. She concludes that while Darwin’s importance has been oversold by academics using methods not unlike the hyperbolic publicity popularized by Barnum, the historic role of popular performances and exhibitions in disseminating the complex of ideas known by the portmanteau word *evolution* has been neglected: “Darwin has become Barnum,” she concludes, not erring on the side of understatement herself, “with more than a little humbug in the promotional mix – but who is to call it?” (220). Goodall herself is prepared to call it “the Darwin industry” of high-minded historians of science and television documentarians (220). She sets their elevated hagiography against her own path-breaking descent into the teeming underworld of freak shows, animal acts, and “ethnological” displays of living people, the whole cacophony of demotic hokum that sometimes passed for uplifting entertainment in the fabulous performance culture of the nineteenth century. “The voices of experts and pedagogues have taken over,” she laments, “and drowned out the kinds of undisciplined, miscellaneous, parodically deflationary engagements that were generated in the popular domain during the age of Darwin” (220). Fortunately, one need not be wholly persuaded by Goodall’s conclusions about Darwinism to embrace her work on Barnumism. (Disclosure: I am named as one of those “writing in a climate heavily dominated by the Darwin industry to portray Darwin as some sort of breakthrough point in human understanding” [177].)

Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin presents evolutionary theory as less a shock to religious and established mores (at its worst, a source of “cultural anxiety,” not “culture shock” [9]) than as a provocation for carnival. The vital heart of the book is in its first four chapters, which present the spectrum of popular entertainments, ranging from the pseudo-scientific exhibitions of the Zoological Society in Regent’s Park and the deadly serious Department of Ethnology and Archaeology of the Columbian Exposition to the breathtaking sideshows, burlesque turns, and minstrel extravaganzas that entertained the public by showing that at least some of its members (if not all) have a place in the animal kingdom. Monstrosity has always been a hot ticket, and Goodall knows that comedy has feasted on the animal nature of humankind since Aristophanes, but she shows convincingly how the scope of the exhibitions and performances starting in the 1830s and growing in the next half cen-

tury was new, a kind of popular “Darwin Revolution” in its own right, with little or no need of the eponymous scientist.

Some of Goodall’s most telling examples come from the exhibition of indeterminate types – the taxonomic oddities of natural history, real or faked, from the platypus to the “Feejee Mermaid,” which might plausibly cast doubt on the sublime perfection of intelligent design. The popularity of this variety of freak expanded into the even more lurid exhibition of “missing links,” putatively unclassifiable specimens that called into question the boundary between the human and the non-human. Barnum’s pitch for the geek he called “What Is It?” speaks for many: “Is it a lower order of Man? Or is it a higher development of the Monkey? Or is it both in combination?” (qtd. 54). In fact, in the London production, it was Hervey Leech, a deformed actor with arms that reached the floor and powerful stumps of legs that gave him an exceptional ability to leap like a monkey. For the New York run, Leech was replaced in the role by Henry Johnson, a black microcephalic from New Jersey, who was familiarly known as “Zip” from his previous appearances as Zip Coon on the minstrel stage (56–57). Much of the material here will not be new to readers of Richard D. Altick’s magisterial *The Shows of London* (1978), but Goodall’s contribution is to reimagine the cultural work that popular entertainment does as low-cost education and high-stakes ideology. In chapters three and four, “Performing Ethnology” and “Varieties,” she traces the nodal points of an international network of performed natural history, including many living exhibits only marginally less obnoxious than Barnum’s, which reached a public incalculably larger than the readership of *The Descent of Man*, its realist apologists and its idealist detractors combined. After that, the concluding chapters on high-culture and avant-garde venues, particularly the rehash of the scientific acting theories of Denis Diderot and George Henry Lewes, seem anticlimactic, though useful enough as a way of showing the pervasiveness of evolutionary speculation at every level of performance. Goodall’s conscious choice to concentrate on modern popular performance rather than modern drama puts her in most direct dialogue with scholars in performance studies, but the economy of *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin*, like the wonderful “Varieties” of both nature and the nineteenth-century stage, is one of abundance, with remarkable specimens of interest to every genus and species in the phylogenetic order of our field.

