

## 4 Slavery as a National Crime

### Defining Britishness in Encounters with the Flying Dutchman

*Agnes Andeweg*

In 1964, the African-American poet Amiri Baraka, then still known as LeRoi Jones, premiered his first play *Dutchman* in New York. The one-act drama, a searing dialogue between a white woman and a black man traveling a metro car ending in the woman coolly murdering the man, created quite a stir, and today is regarded as a landmark of the Black Arts Movement.<sup>1</sup> Even though the word “Dutchman” never actually appears in the script, many critics then and now have associated Baraka’s title with the figure of the Flying Dutchman: the ghostly captain, or his ship, doomed to sail the world seas forever. Theater historian Errol Hill (2006), for instance, read Baraka’s title as a clear reference to the history of slavery, and in Hill’s interpretation the story of the Flying Dutchman becomes a wry myth of origin for African-Americans:

The Flying Dutchman is an obverse metaphor for the horror of black slavery. We need only change the spectral vessel to a Dutch man-of-war; the venue from the Cape of Good Hope to Jamestown, Virginia; the date from eternity to the year 1619; and for the criminal white captain doomed to sail perpetually without ever reaching port we have a cargo of innocent starving Africans whose only crime was to be born black.

(11)

According to Hill, Baraka rewrote this myth of origin with *Dutchman*, and his act of reclaiming black American history marked another stage in the history of black nationalism.

In the highly politicized context of the American 1960s, Baraka’s allusion to the Flying Dutchman legend in order to invoke the history of the slave trade may seem an obvious one to make. But *Dutchman* is rather an exception when we consider the adaptations and remediations of the Flying Dutchman story, European or American, spanning more than two hundred years. As I have described elsewhere, in many of the stories, poems, and plays featuring the Flying Dutchman, the ship’s cargo is not specified or even mentioned. Much more narrative energy is spent on his wandering, his inability to reach port or to contact loved ones. The name

Flying Dutchman has not only been used in texts but was also given to race horses, ink pens, ploughs, trains, and planes, transforming the ghost into another matter altogether: often detaching it from ship or cargo while stressing the supernatural power of these technologies (Andeweg 2015). Though the Flying Dutchman, first mentioned in a British travelogue around 1800, is a colonial ghost in two senses of the word—originating in the colonial period and as a character involved in colonialism—only rarely is he associated with slavery or the slave trade. An early British example of this is John Leyden’s poem *Scenes of Infancy* (1803), which attributes the Flying Dutchman’s doom to his being the first ship involved in the slave trade: “Stout was the ship, from Benin’s palmy shore/That first the weight of barter’d captives bore” (91). Another is Thomas Hood’s comical poem “The Demon-Ship” ([1826] 1871), which pits a horrifying past symbolized by a ship full of men as “black as Afric slaves” against a frightening but ultimately comforting modernity, where blackness is the consequence of shipping coal (Hood [1826] 1871, 213–17). In both Leyden’s and Hood’s poems, the information that the doomed ship is Dutch is relegated to the paratext (footnote and epigraph, respectively), and thus its nationality does not seem to carry much meaning.

However, Dutchness does become a significant category in relation to the slave trade and slavery in the two British Flying Dutchman adaptations I will examine in this essay: Edward Fitzball’s *The Flying Dutchman, or the Phantom Ship* (1827), and a poem “Flying Dutchman” (1832) signed by a certain Clegg. Both texts had a long life in the nineteenth century: Fitzball’s play was one of the most famous nautical gothic melodramas of its day, and the poem—which was most likely inspired by Fitzball—found a wide circulation through reprints up until 1878 at least.<sup>2</sup> I will argue that these two British representations of the Flying Dutchman engage in British self-definition, using the Dutch as a screen to denounce pro-slavery ideology and racist attitudes. These ideologies cannot be warded off completely however, and thus these texts attest to the often problematic “Doppelgänger dilemmas” (the term is Marjorie Rubright’s) that the Flying Dutchman presents to a British audience: part of his frightening quality is that he is too close for comfort (Rubright 2014). Slavery, evoked as a marker of difference with the Dutch, does not suffice to keep the European continent at a distance, even long after British abolition.

Early British gothic fiction has often been analyzed in terms of the religious, political, and cultural oppositions it helped to construct between Britain and the European continent, in particular in Catholic countries like France and Spain. The cultural work that Gothic can be said to be performing in the works of for example Radcliffe and Lewis is to (re)define cultural differences between spaces that are geographically already separate. This division of territorial space is obviously much less clear at sea, and so this raises the question if and how national boundaries

and identities are being upheld and transgressed in the nautical Gothic. Obviously, in Flying Dutchman texts the sea looms large in the staging of supernaturalism. As Emily Alder (2017) has convincingly argued in a recent special issue on nautical Gothic, the sea's gothic potential is almost self-evident yet hardly studied. In the two Flying Dutchman texts under scrutiny here, the sea is an active participant rather than merely the backdrop to action. I shall discuss how the sea now takes and then lashes out, as inscrutable but demanding depth, or as a natural and equally demanding force, respectively, affecting human protagonists—but not indiscriminately.

### Edward Fitzball's *Flying Dutchman*

Gothic drama and tales of terror kept Gothic in the popular imagination during the early nineteenth century, after the first wave of gothic novels started to fall away (Cox 2002; Hoeverler 2012). The 1820s and 1830s not only witnessed many theatrical adaptations of gothic novels by well-known authors like “Monk” Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, and Mary Shelley but also original plays or plays adapted from less canonical gothic materials. Fitzball's *Flying Dutchman* is a good example of the second kind: it was adapted from a tale in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* which appeared in 1821, which, in turn, was the first extensive narrative about the Flying Dutchman, introducing stock elements such as the captain's name (Vanderdecken) and the motif of lost letters.<sup>3</sup> Combining elements from nautical and ghost melodrama proved to be a recipe for success. As Fitzball (1859a) would write in his memoirs:

These sort of dramas were then very much the vogue. The Flying Dutchman was not by any means behind even *Frankenstein* or *Der Freischütz* in horrors and blue fire. The subject was a very fresh one, though it had so much of salt water in its composition.

(1: 169)

*The Flying Dutchman* premiered in December 1826 at the Adelphi theater, one of the popular illegitimate theaters which were not allowed to stage serious drama or the classical narrative genres, and much more than their legitimate counterparts relied on music, pantomime, and special effects to support spoken text in their plays. Though scrutinized by the censor, illegitimate plays allowed for more responsiveness to actual events than legitimate plays with their set scripts (Gould 2011). A quote from a review of a much later adaptation of Flying Dutchman material, called *Harlequin Billy Taylor, or The Flying Dutchman and the King of Raritongo* (1851), may illustrate this: “The dialogue in the first part displayed a good amount of jokes and happy allusions, notwithstanding the Lord Chamberlain's interference” (*London Daily News* 1851).

Fitzball was the first to dramatize the ghostly Dutchman, and some scholarly attention has been devoted to the way various elements—special effects, acting, music—work together in his melodrama to stage the supernatural and help blur the boundaries between on- and off-stage, presence and absence, and good and evil. Gothic drama’s use of technologically advanced machineries made the supernatural convincing in theater, as Diego Saglia (2015) has argued. The innovative and spectacular effects used in illegitimate ghost melodrama gained huge popularity and were soon copied by legitimate theaters, such as Drury Lane. Thus the “sensational proliferation” of ghost drama in the 1820s actually helped bring about the disintegration of legitimate theater (Moody 2007, 41–42). In the earlier quote, Fitzball mentioned blue fire, the conventional color used in the theater for ghost apparitions, but besides these, *The Flying Dutchman* also employed other technologies such as the so-called vampire trap, a trapdoor to make characters instantly disappear, and lighting effects culminating in a moving phantasmagoric image projected on the backscreen to produce the phantom ship (Saglia 2015, 286–87). Fitzball vividly describes how he preferred the phantasmagoria over having a real ship on stage.<sup>4</sup> Still in 1856, when the play was revived, *The Times* reviewer perhaps sardonically recommended its special effects to a younger audience: “the tossing sea is of a quality to satisfy the most severe judge of undulating carpets” (*The Times* 1856).

Besides the use of technology, the combination of acting and music importantly contributed to a convincing staging of the supernatural. The part of Vanderdecken, the Flying Dutchman, was played by famous actor and superintendent, T. P. Cooke. A master of pantomime, Cooke had had a previous career in the navy, which involved an episode of near-drowning (Moody 2007, 93). He was therefore cut out for the part of the non-speaking Vanderdecken, having already acquired fame as the vampire Lord Ruthven and as Frankenstein’s monster. As Jane Moody (2007) observes, the combination in Vanderdecken of muteness and heightened sensitivity especially brought about by music gave him a sublime quality: “Supernatural monstrosity was depicted...as both human and alien, powerfully destructive and yet poignantly susceptible to tender feeling” (93–94). Concurring with Moody, and based on a close analysis of the musical cues and the surviving pieces of the score, Michael Pisani (2014) argues that “the music...should identify the Dutchman not as a villain but as a tragic figure” (91). In this nautical gothic drama which is ultimately a romance, the liminal and frightening Vanderdecken is able to garner sympathy through his genuine romantic feelings. Villainy is relegated elsewhere and motivated not via the supernatural but through different mechanisms of othering. This is relevant to my interest in the way that the play represents slavery. To appreciate how these mechanisms operate, we need to take a closer look at the narrative, even though, regarding the plot, a contemporary reviewer deemed that “consistency has been held in sufficient contempt by the author” (*Morning Post* 1826).<sup>5</sup>

There are many stock features from the Gothic in Fitzball's play, even though it is not situated in a medieval past but in the present-day, taking place at the Cape of Good Hope, in 1827. This setting is however connected to the doom of the past in the shape of a gothic fortress with turret and moat, identified as Vanderdecken's "previous habitation," in which a damsel called Lestelle Vanhelm suffers from her over-possessive uncle, Captain Peppercoal. He is about to marry her off to the son of a former sea mate, Peter von Bummel, who is described as a "cockney Dutchman, a dabbler in the Law," and therefore palpably not apt husband-material. Her true lover is the English lieutenant Mowdrey, who plans to elope with Lestelle, and the third suitor is Captain Vanderdecken who wants to abduct her in order to sacrifice her to Rockalda, "Evil Spirit of the Deep." Vanderdecken and this personification of the sea mutually exercise power: the play opens with Rockalda engaging in a "mystic dance" with the "silv'ry moon"; Vanderdecken's arrival disturbs this natural harmony ("this sudden discord"). She is however in charge: Vanderdecken pleads to have his service renewed for another century and asks Rockalda's permission to go ashore "to increase the number of thy victims" (11). Haunting the African shore, he is a captain who goes back and forth to the deep sea to snatch his victims away from their environment. This practice is firmly framed in terms of romance, evading associations with slave trade yet using the very word: "And now seek a bride to share thy stormy fate. Rockalda's fatal death book make her sign, and become my slave" (11). Before setting foot on land Vanderdecken receives an invisibility cloak and a protective spell which renders him invulnerable. This may sound rather illogical for a ghost, but can be read as indication of the difference between sea and land: on land his spectral qualities are less pronounced than at sea. Likewise, superstition is context-bound, restricted in terms of class and gender: only the sailors, servants, and women believe in the ghost's existence, not Peppercoal and Von Bummel.

Vanderdecken first appears on board the British ship on its way to the Cape with the Dutch lawyer Von Bummel. When he presents a love letter addressed to one Lestelle Vanhelm in Amsterdam, the crew immediately recognize him as the famous Dutch ghost—they know the street does not exist anymore, and do not dare to touch his letter. Vanderdecken seizes Von Bummel's letter of introduction from Lestelle's father to gain easy access to Captain Peppercoal. Von Bummel does not succeed in grasping Vanderdecken's love letter in return: it explodes, demonstrating that arranged marriage is tradable, but romantic love cannot be passed on. What follows is a comedy of errors, with many miscommunications and cross-dressings, familiar gothic and comical doublings of characters and of characters and paintings, all with the purpose to gain Lestelle, who herself remarkably resembles the deceased spouse of Vanderdecken. Of the male characters, only Mowdrey, the young British officer, is Vanderdecken's emotional equivalent—romantically moved, he represents

the new generation. The play ends with a duel between Mowdrey and Vanderdecken in the cave, without Rockalda present. Mowdrey tries to rescue the abducted Lestelle, but falls wounded to the ground, hit by Vanderdecken. Mowdrey's cunning servant and marine painter Toby Varnish manages to burn Rockalda's magic death book; Vanderdecken cries out and, having broken his vow of silence, is forever doomed.

Like the ghostly Vanderdecken, the aforementioned Peppercoal is a (former) sea captain. While the play does not state Peppercoal's nationality explicitly, the jokes about his name, his acquaintance with Von Bummel's father, his possession of both the old fortress and the girl of Dutch descent indicate that he is Dutch, also because this former trade captain is clearly stuck in the wrong age: Peppercoal still addresses everyone around him in naval terms. Peppercoal is ridiculous and evil at the same time: he is compared to a "sea monster" and a "snarling sea griffin" by Toby Varnish, and therefore may be seen to be symbolically on a par with Rockalda. He has promised Lestelle, the only object of exchange in the play, to landlubber Peter Von Bummel, the "walking Dutchman," as Peppercoal calls him, who is equally out-of-place: continually sea-sick, and regarding everything and everyone in legal terms. Von Bummel and Peppercoal embody a merchant ideology and representation of the Dutch as perennial traders of goods and people, a familiar trope in British popular culture dating back to the early modern period (Rubright 2014). The Dutch men are ready to trade Lestelle according to contract, and only Mowdrey, with the aid of Toby Varnish, is able to break these contractual bonds through love. Lestelle also harbors these modern feelings, as evidenced through her wish to elope to England, the "land of liberty" as she calls it, even though her ancestor of the same name lived in Amsterdam. Lestelle's willingness to form bonds with the British symbolizes how the British Empire successfully finds itself at the Cape, ideologically and practically.

Contextualizing this spectacular and supernatural drama, it is clear that many elements of Fitzball's play point to a colonial context that would have been familiar to the London audience, starting with the setting. The South African Cape had only relatively recently become a British colony. It had been a Dutch settlement since the early 1600s, serving as a refreshment point on the journey to the East Indies. In 1795, when the Dutch Republic was occupied by the French, the Dutch entrusted the Cape Colony to the British in order to prevent it from falling into French hands, demanding that they would give it back afterward. And so the British did in 1803, only to take possession again in 1806. This situation was ratified by the Vienna treaty after Napoleon's defeat. *The Flying Dutchman's* final scene, in which the Dutch Peppercoal and Von Bummel take the British lieutenant Mowdrey and his servant Toby Varnish from the Devil's Cave back to the shore, in a sloop flying the "British flag," as the directions read, can easily be read as a metaphorical

rendition of Cape Colony changing hands (45). Likewise, the Dutch predecessors of the British have become the outlaws in the play, no matter how much they “dabble” with the law as Von Bummel does: the first appearance of Vanderdecken shows him “holding in his hand a black flag, emblazoned with a white Death’s head and cross bones” (11).

By 1820 the British government initiated a settler policy for the Cape, mostly inspired by the economic crisis and huge unemployment at home, and in order to avoid having to introduce more radical reforms (Thompson 1996, 22). This settler policy provided people willing to emigrate to the Cape Colony with financial support. About 5,000 British emigrants used this opportunity to leave the country—4,000 selected from 80,000 applicants, and 1,000 who paid for their own journey. These incentives led to a sizeable new group of white colonizers at the Cape (around 1800, Cape Town had a population of about 14,000 burghers and 15,000 slaves). Over time, this influx of new settlers resulted in increasing ethnic tensions between the two white groups: between what the British would call the Boer population of earlier white settlers from Dutch descent, and the newly arrived British settlers. Besides linguistic and cultural differences, there was another difference between the two white colonizers’ groups: the new British settlers were explicitly forbidden to hold slaves (Thompson 1996, 56).<sup>6</sup>

Fitzball’s *The Flying Dutchman*, performed a few years after British settlement policy, stages the encounter between the old and the new colonial order, the British and the Dutch, attempting to mark clear distinctions between the two. Negative stereotypes of the Dutch had been abundant in English literature ever since the early modern period. As Marjorie Rubright (2014) has discussed regarding early modern representations of Anglo-Dutch relations, ongoing “Doppelgänger dilemmas” posed problems: “Often, English efforts to put distance between Englishness and Dutchness—attempts at dis-identification and differentiation—failed to produce distinct boundaries” (237). One way of marking the differences between the British and the Dutch in *The Flying Dutchman* is by gothicizing the Dutch, and relegating them to the past. Another is by unevenly handing out modern sensibilities: the Dutch Von Bummel and Peppercoal are treacherous, and they lack feeling and the value of liberty. The exception is the ghostly Vanderdecken: he can be really affected by Lestelle’s song, and thus he represents a sensibility that Peppercoal and Von Bummel, the very material and present Dutch characters on stage, lack. Vanderdecken still haunts the African coast to snatch away his victims but has sublimated his trade into romantic feelings.

In *The Flying Dutchman*, the Dutch also have slaves, as opposed to the new British arrivals. Peppercoal is not only the possessive custodian of Lestelle, he is a slave owner as well. His personal slave Smutta is introduced when Peppercoal calls him an unfaithful dog. To compare: while

Mowdrey's servant Toby Varnish is at some point also called a dog by his master Mowdrey, unlike Smutta he gets to say something back. And whereas Toby saves his master Mowdrey, Smutta hinders his mistress Lestelle despite his best intentions, unintentionally impeding her when he cuts the rope of her lover's boat. At the same time Smutta is better informed than the rest about mysterious matters: he informs Lestelle about the sea cave and the Flying Dutchman's return. His misunderstandings of Von Bummel's legal jargon ("assault and battery") and the resulting wordplay ("no salt and buttery") both emphasize Von Bummel's misplaced use of legal discourse and Smutta's ignorance. Smutta's stereotypical language keeps him symbolically in his place even when the play temporarily grants him power. In one scene Von Bummel, cross-dressed as a young woman, is chased by a group of slaves, led by Smutta. Von Bummel addresses his capturers as if he is speaking to a jury in court:

Oh! Gentlemen of the jury, pity and protect a lovely young creter...  
 Conduct me to the nearest vessel please, I'm England bound, (*aside*)  
 I wish they were bound neck and heels together. Pity me sweet gentlemen, good-looking, fair-complexioned gentlemen. I'm only a poor trembling, palpitating little damsel.

(38)

Even though *The Flying Dutchman* attributes the desire to chase and bind the black characters to the Dutch, as happens in this passage, it does not disengage itself from representing Smutta and the other enslaved characters as the stereotypical butt of humor. From the valuable work of Hazel Waters (2007) and Jenna Gibbs (2014) on the representations of blacks in Victorian theater, we know that plays and poems played an important part in the development of the stereotypical black image, and in popularizing "scientific" prejudices as well as transforming/reifying popular beliefs about race. Though Gibbs (2014) and Waters (2007) do not discuss *The Flying Dutchman* or the figure of Smutta, the way his character is represented supports their analyses in many ways. Waters (2007), who traced a history of increasingly degrading representations of black characters in the course of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theater, writes that "liberty was always invoked whenever slavery was" (38). In the scene discussed previously, the primal scene of bondage is parodied and existing racial and social hierarchies are temporarily overthrown. By recasting the scene of bondage into a legal setting, and by blurring slavery and romance (liberty pertains to white damsels only), potential dilemmas about existing power structures and black emancipation are averted.

Jenna Gibbs (2014) writes: "[B]lackface supplicant slaves in images, prose, and lyrics along with the theatrical jester, Harlequin Negro, were symbiotic counterparts to white Britannia in articulating subjecthood as white, masculine, and a prerogative of the bourgeois and the elite" 54).



As Gibbs (2014) describes, blackface could be seen on the Victorian stage well before the arrival of black minstrel shows in Britain around 1835, mostly in parts for black supplicant slaves (52–86). In *The Flying Dutchman*, Smutta's role as supplicant slave indeed functions to confirm white masculine subjectivity. But it would be mistaken to assume that his part was necessarily a blackface performance. Waters (2007) informs us that there were some black actors to be found on the London stage in the early nineteenth century, the most famous being Ira Aldridge (58–88). As I was able to ascertain, Smutta was played by a black actor, who was announced on the bill as Signor Paulo. Signor Paulo Jr. was a renowned clown, who had made his debut in 1815 in Sadler's Wells. As a later biographer wrote "The son of 'Le Petit Diable' and 'La Belle Espagnole' was born almost within the walls of Sadler's Wells, and became known to fame as Signor Paulo, a very popular clown for many years" (Cook 1883, 4). His real name was Paul Redigé, and he was the son of Paul Redigé, a French rope dancer who also performed under the name Signor Paulo, and Maria Garcia, a pantomime actress known as "La Belle Espagnole." From the scant information available it seems she was a black woman from Georgia ("La Belle Espagnole" 2017). The British Museum has a portrait of Signor Paulo from the 1820s in its collection (Zeitter 1820s), as well as one of his mother (Gillray 1796). This casting choice also shows the proximity of pantomime, harlequin, and melodrama, not just in the way these genres exchanged and borrowed features but also in the persons of the actors themselves (Figure 4.1).

The stereotype of the black slave lived on for many decades, persisting after slavery was abolished in 1833, though small shifts in the way Smutta was perceived can be registered by tracing newspaper reviews of later performances of Fitzball's *The Flying Dutchman*. When the play was revived in 1856 and performed in *The Adelphi* once more, Smutta is no longer called a slave, but referenced to as "the black" (*Morning Post* 1856).<sup>7</sup> In 1860, Smutta, without explanatory epithet—which suggests he is still a familiar character—is "amusingly rendered" (*Bedfordshire Times and Independent* 1860) and in 1865 a reviewer praised the actor who "played the part of Smutta exceedingly well" (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 1865). In 1887, Von Brunnel (sic) and Smutta are mentioned in one breath as the ones who "supplied the comicality and mirth" (*Yorkshire Gazette* 1887). Similarly, 1882 and 1886, Smutta, now called "a negro servant" is seen as a major source of comedy, creating "much merriment by his antics" (*The Salisbury Times* 1886; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 1891).

Though Smutta would never become as popular as the figure of Mungo, the prototypical black slave originating from the late eighteenth-century play *The Padlock* (Gibbs 2014, 59–66), he does reappear in a number of later texts. As Fitzball's drama is the first source with a character of this name, and given its popularity, it is more than likely that later reappearances of Smutta were inspired by Fitzball. In Edward Stirling's *Sadak*

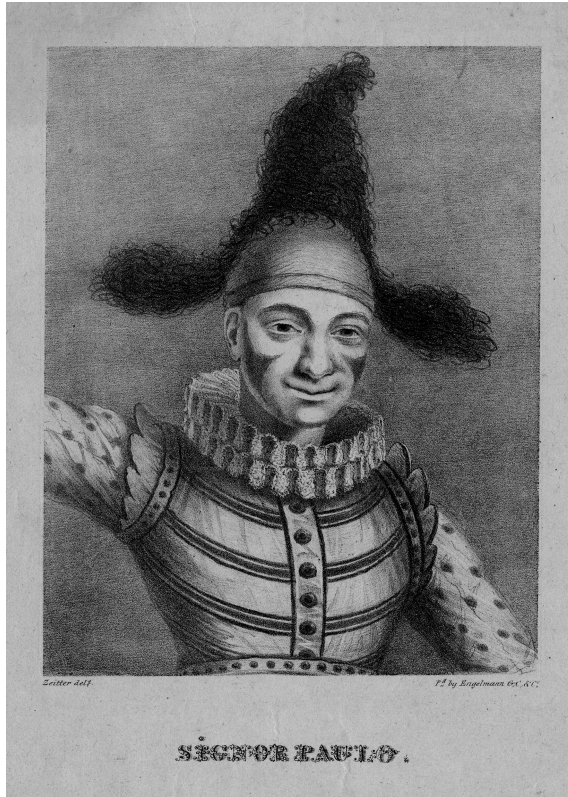


Figure 4.1 Signor Paulo by J.C. Zeitter c. 1820s. ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

and *Kalasarade* (1837), a pirated, comical version of Mary Russell Mitford's opera of the same title, Smutta also features as a slave—dressed in a “striped calico dress” just as in Fitzball's play—to “Mustapha, the Cadi,” acting comically by aping his master (*Pattie's Modern Stage: A Collection of the Most Approved and Popular Dramas* 1839). Again, assigning the black slave to an “Other,” in this case a Muslim magistrate, could help shore up the notion of British liberty for a home audience. Twenty years later, in William Hurton's novel *The Doomed Ship of the Arctic Sea* (1855), the character of Smutta has morphed into a black foster brother and steward to white Captain Larpent from the West Indies. Their affective bond is suggested by the fact that as babies they were both breast-fed by Smutta's mother, an enslaved woman at a plantation. Smutta and Larpent die more or less in each other's arms after having been attacked by mutineers. Though Smutta is put on an almost equal footing with his foster-brother, his inferiority is never really questioned,

and his speech is as stereotypically rendered as ever. Though Smutta is no longer an enslaved character, he is a slave in romantic terms:

Smutta felt the blood tingling all over him. Never before in his life had a real lady taken him by the hand, and spoken such honeyed words. I saw that Oriana had won the giant's simple heart in a moment, and that he was henceforth her slave.

(Hurton 1855, 20)

In *The Doomed Ship*, as in Fitzball's *The Flying Dutchman*, the discourse of slavery easily shifts into the discourse of romance. Here the easiness with which he succumbs to his feelings marks him as the less masculine. Lastly, in a late prose adaptation of Fitzball's play in *The Boys of England Story Teller* (1878), published under the heading of "Our Chimney Corner at the old Village Inn" and thus clearly marked as nostalgic, Smutta still is the "servant" to Peppercoal, but the original dialogues from Fitzball in which Peppercoal belittles and ridicules him have now been left out. Apparently, by 1878, the association of the Dutch with the mistreatment of slaves had vanished. The Dutch had abolished slavery, finally, in 1863—thirty years after the British—and maybe that is why this could no longer be used as a distinguishing feature for a British readership, even within the context of nostalgia.

### Smutta and the Flying Dutchman

Besides Smutta's reappearances in drama and prose I discovered a poem I will discuss at more length. It was published under the titles "The Flying Dutchman" and "Smutta and the Flying Dutchman" and appeared through various channels in the mid-nineteenth century. It is not included in Marcus Wood's vast anthology of Anglo-American poetry on slavery, perhaps overlooked because it was never published in a poetry collection, and it has received no scholarly attention so far. This is a pity, for "The Flying Dutchman" seems remarkable for its ambivalence about slave emancipation. Wood (2003) found very few poems after the 1780s displaying what he calls a "cultural confidence about accepting slavery" (xii), which he explains by the fact that by that time abolition had become a mainstream movement. Yet "The Flying Dutchman's" publication history demonstrates how anti-emancipation sentiments were felt and apparently voiced even decades after abolition. It was first published in 1832, the year before the Emancipation Bill would pass after a long period of intense societal debate and upheavals in Britain and in the colonies, and with the memory of dramatic Jamaican slave rebellions of 1831–1832 still fresh in the public mind. "The Flying Dutchman" appeared in William Hone's popular *Year Book*, an anthology of miscellaneous materials ("amusements"), and was later reprinted anonymously

in magazines, *The Penny Satirist* and *The Ladies Cabinet*, respectively (Clegg 1832; *The Penny Satirist* 1846; *The Ladies' Cabinet of Fashion, Music and Romance* 1850). The *Year Book* itself would be reprinted over and over again, in Britain but also in the United States at least till 1878.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the poem was signed “Clegg” and “March 1831” in Hone’s *Year book*, in later reprints author and date are no longer mentioned.<sup>9</sup> Though I have not been able to trace numbers of print runs, the poem’s repeated publication implies that it kept a certain currency in British and American popular culture. That it was considered to be a piece of amusement like any other may be illustrated by the fact that *The Ladies Cabinet of Fashion, Music and Romance* published it amidst articles on the jealous husband, the language of flowers, and Modern Rome. As with other Flying Dutchman adaptations, the presence of the Dutchman in an English-speaking context evokes and negotiates tensions about British national values, most of all liberty.

This poem starts—as do most Flying Dutchman adaptations—with a ship in a storm, this time situated at a distance in time as well as in space, on the “Pacific Sea in August ’87,” which could either be read as 1787 or 1687. Its cargo is explicitly mentioned: the ship is “Brimful of negroes carried off by force, / And going to market to be sold in form.” Even though the narrator has difficulty reproducing the captain’s name, he knows it is a Dutch ship, with a black shipmate:

The captain’s name I cannot think of yet  
 (These Dutch names ’tis so easy to forget),  
 This much I know, his vessel was a cutter,  
 His mate a negro of the name of Smutta.

The narrator elaborates on the sufferings of the enslaved—their being confined, beaten and force-fed—while maintaining his ironical tone (“dainty fish”):

Who long had languished huddled up in coffins,  
 Exposed to threats and stripes, and kicks and scoffings—  
 Their food dried shark, and other dainty fish;  
 But potted grampus was the standard dish,  
 A pound of which was every day at noon  
 Cramm’d down their gullets with a wooden spoon.

When worst comes to worst, the captain, “conscience-stricken by the angry waves,” orders Smutta to release the enslaved men, so that he will not founder with a ship full of captivated people. Apparently, only natural forces, here personified as “angry,” are able to imbue the captain with the value of liberty. However, the slaves call for revenge as soon as they are released and proclaim Smutta their chief. They throw the

crew overboard, upon which the narrator temporarily discards his distant (external) position. He addresses the freed slaves directly, blaming them and Smutta in particular for what they have done: “Oh slaves, for shame! for shame! oh Smutta, fie!/They were in truth ill us’d, but Smutta had/No cause to grumble—Smutta, ’t was too bad.”<sup>10</sup> The narrator resumes his narration (“however, to my tale”) and recounts how Smutta then sees the captain’s ghost appear, rendering his speech in a stereotypical way often used for black characters: “him pale, him grim, him thin, him all in white.” Like a prototypical slave-trader the ghost carries a whip, telling Smutta that he has called for reinforcements:

I have not lost my time, but made you over  
To Vanderdecken, that eternal rover,  
And this for making spectres of your betters;  
Fool that I was to free you from your fetters!

The ghostly slaver captain bequeaths his cargo to Vanderdecken, the Flying Dutchman, who then sinks the ship in hellish fire: “A shower of brimstone shortly sunk the cutter/Drown’d the unlucky crew and smother’d Smutta.”<sup>11</sup>

Paul Gilroy (1993) famously conceptualized the Black Atlantic as a fluid space of resistance and exploitation, and as a space beyond nationalism.<sup>12</sup> The poem does offer this space temporarily: as soon as the enslaved become physically mobile, resurrected into life when they are released from their coffins, they become socially mobile: demanding a voice and taking over the ship. Though the slaves cannot be blamed for their insurgence—for, as the narrator confirms, “they were in truth ill-used,” Smutta’s subversion of maritime hierarchy is poetically rejected. The narrator clearly puts all the blame on Smutta for leading this mutiny, for he had “no cause to grumble.” Thus, the poem feeds white anxieties about black emancipation: giving freedom to one will result in a complete subversion of hierarchy. A significant feature of this Flying Dutchman poem is how it doubles the ghost: one ghost, even when armed, is not enough apparently to contain the threat of black insurrection. The societal order at sea, here briefly imagined as a potential space of liberty and of self-governance by blacks, can only be restored by a super-supernatural force, who does not just bring a whip, the slaver’s tools, but hellish brimstone to restore the hierarchy.

A racist ideology is here both affirmed (see how the narrator judges), and simultaneously denounced by projecting it onto the Dutch, risible “others” from the past. That this poem remained a source of entertainment—horror by proxy—up until the 1870s, could be read as a sign of the continuing anxieties that occupied some members of the British public during the decades of intense debates about slave emancipation, first in Britain and then in the United States. First published in 1831, this poem

can represent the slave trade—abolished by the British in 1807 and by the Dutch in 1814—as a despicable practice belonging to the past. But the step of black emancipation, here following directly from ending trade, is represented as a step too far. Through this poem British readers could contemplate the potential horrors of black emancipation and decide that haunting was to be preferred over black enfranchisement. Whereas, on the one hand, the Dutch captain is ridiculed as an unmemorable relic from the past, his slaver ghost and his devilish double are needed to ward off societal chaos. While one could argue that this poem only makes fun of the Dutch and enables the shoring up of a superior British sense of self, it does not succeed in completely projecting anxieties onto the Dutch other. The poem betrays its vested interest in current home affairs, and its inability to relegate anxieties to the past or to the Dutch through its use of the word “enfranchise.” In the overall colloquial language the poem employs, this word stands out as a much more formal term. A simple search for word frequencies in British newspapers shows that the use of “enfranchise” in combination with “slave” increased tremendously around the time the poem was first published: 2,054 between 1830 and 1839 compared to 265 in the previous decade.<sup>13</sup> Until about 1870 the word would remain in as frequent use as in the 1830s. The hotly debated topic of enfranchisement ensured the poem’s actuality for many years.

To conclude, in both texts, Dutch characters serve as a screen on which to project British ambivalences about slavery. Fitzball’s play and the poem allow British and other English-speaking audiences to temporarily enjoy pro-slavery sentiments that have politically been left behind, as long as they can safeguard the distinctions with the Dutch, and the European continent at large. The cloak of humor rather than the “invisibility cloak,” that is the supernatural, serves as a means to put these sentiments at a distance, and allows these texts to survive in Anglo-American popular culture for decades after the abolition of slavery. In both texts the ghostly Flying Dutchman is quite literally of a different order than the other Dutch characters. Not involved in the daily, material practice of slaver-enslaved relations, he can act as driven by sublimated feelings: in Fitzball’s play his enslaving happens in the service of romance rather than for economic purposes; in the poem he acts as an instrument of justice, poetically justifying the slaver captain. Thus, supernatural haunting is seemingly “purified” yet made to work in service of a perniciously racist representational regime.

## Notes

- 1 For an overview of *Dutchman*’s reception, see Carol Bunch Davis (2015).
- 2 In his memoirs, Fitzball estimates the number of performances at more than ten thousand; this is clearly an exaggeration as it would amount to thirty years of non-stop performances (Edward Fitzball 1859b, 14). The play was staged at the Adelphi, the Surrey, and—in a pirated version by Douglas

- Jerrold—the Coburg. For the number of performances at the Adelphi, see “The Adelphi Theatre Project: All-Inclusive Index.”
- 3 “Vanderdecken’s message home” was published anonymously, but has been attributed to the Canadian writer John Howison. See Morrison (1995).
  - 4 In his memoirs Fitzball cites his conversation with the theater manager who is afraid the ship will be too expensive: “Two hundred pounds!—for what sir?” “Timber” “Timber!” almost shouted I. “Timber for a Phantom Ship? My dear sir, that would be an absurdity indeed.” “Of what would you compose it?” was the evidently sarcastic reply...“A shadow.” “A shadow?” laughing incredulously (Fitzball 1859b\*, Volume 2, 13–15).
  - 5 The reviewer does not elaborate on his motivation, unfortunately. The relative unfamiliarity of the Flying Dutchman story at this point may be relevant here: several reviews extensively summarize the plot.
  - 6 In practice British colonists owned slaves as well, see Worden (2017).
  - 7 In the reception of the initial performance in 1826, Smutta is not mentioned once. In many reviews, the plot is summarized extensively, probably because the Flying Dutchman was not a familiar story yet.
  - 8 That the poem kept a certain notoriety can also be supported by the fact that it was quoted in a local newspaper as late as 1880 (*Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald* 1880).
  - 9 Hone had acquired fame as a radical publisher when he was acquitted of blasphemy in 1817. His later works, such as *The Year Book* and other similar books (*The Table Book*, *The Every-Day Book*), were not satirical (Ledger 2004, 491).
  - 10 If we read this little admonition of Smutta as a form of irony, because it is such a small one, the narrator could even be condoning his revolt.
  - 11 The poem’s satirical tone and deliberate subversion of a familiar narrative are reminiscent of Byron’s popular poem *Don Juan*, of which parts were published in installments between 1819 and 1824. The rhyme here on “cutter” may be meant to recall the infamous “cutter/butter” rhyme in Canto II, Stanza 61 of *Don Juan*.
  - 12 I believe the dynamics Gilroy describes applies here even though the poem is situated in the Pacific rather than the Atlantic. For a discussion of how to read the Atlantic and Pacific together, see Ganser (2018).
  - 13 With the note that the number of pages archived roughly doubles in period (123,034 versus 70,511). Search conducted in the British Newspaper Archive, [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/), 30 November 2018. In the first two decades, between 1800 and 1820, the term combination was only used 80 times in total.

## References

- Alder, Emily. 2017. “Through Oceans Darkly: Sea Literature and the Nautical Gothic.” *Gothic Studies* 19, no. 2 (November): 1–15.
- Andeweg, Agnes. 2015. “Manifestations of the Flying Dutchman: On Materializing Ghosts and (Not) Remembering the Colonial Past.” *Cultural History* 4, no. 2: 187–205.
- Bedfordshire Times and Independent*. 1860. “Rifle Volunteers” (March 6). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- Clegg. 1832. “Flying Dutchman.” In *The Year Book, of Daily Recreation & Information: Concerning Remarkable Men, Manners, Times, Seasons, Solemnities, Merry-Makings, Antiquities & Novelties, Forming a Complete*

- History of the Year; & a Perpetual Key to the Almanac*, edited by William Hone, 479–80. London: William Tegg.
- Cook, Dutton. 1883. “Pantomimic Families.” *The Theatre* (January).
- Cox, Jeffrey N. 2002. “English Gothic Theatre.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle, 125–44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, Carol Bunch. 2015. “‘A Ghost of the Future’: Racial (Mis)Perception and Black Subjectivity in LeRoi Jones’s *Dutchman*.” In *Prefiguring Postblackness: Cultural Memory, Drama, and the African American Freedom Struggle of the 1960s*, 57–80. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald*. 1880. “Local Historical Gleanings” (July 31). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*. 1891. “‘Pepper’s Ghost’ in Exeter” (March 6). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- Fitzball, Edward. 1859a. *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author’s Life*. Vol. 1. London: T.C. Newby.
- Fitzball, Edward. 1859b. *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author’s Life*. Vol. 2. London: T.C. Newby.
- Fitzball, Edward. 1827. *The Flying Dutchman, or, The Phantom Ship, a Nautical Drama in Three Acts*. Phantom Ship. London: Lacy.
- Ganser, Alexandra. 2018. “From the Black Atlantic to the Bleak Pacific: Re-Reading ‘Benito Cereno.’” *Atlantic Studies*, 15, no. 2 (April), 218–37.
- Gibbs, Jenna. 2014. *Performing the Temple of Liberty. Slavery, Theater, and Popular Culture in London and Philadelphia, 1760–1850*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gillray, James. 1796. “La Belle Espagnole,-Ou-La Doublure de Madame Tallien.” The British Museum.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gould, Marty. 2011. *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter*. London: Routledge.
- Hill, Errol. 2006. *A History of African American Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoeveler, Diana Long. 2012. “Victorian Gothic Drama.” In *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, 57–71. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hood, Thomas. [1826] 1871. *Whims and Oddities, in Prose and Verse*. London: J.C. Hotten.
- Hurton, William. 1855. *The Doomed Ship; or, The Wreck of the Arctic Regions*. London: Willoughby.
- “La Belle Espagnole.” 2017. *The Misfortune Club. Meanderings in 19th Century History* [blog] (September 22). [www.themisfortuneclub.com/2017/09/la-belle-espagnole.html](http://www.themisfortuneclub.com/2017/09/la-belle-espagnole.html).
- Ledger, Sally. 2004. “From Queen Caroline to Lady Dedlock: Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32, no. 2 (September): 575–600.
- Leyden, John. 1803. *Scenes of Infancy: Descriptive of Teviotdale*. Edinburgh: Printed by J. Ballantyne for T. N. Longman, and O. Rees, London: sold by Manners and Miller.



- London Daily News*. 1851. "Holiday Amusements, 'Boxing-Day'" (December 27). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- Moody, Jane. 2007. *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morning Post*. 1856. "Adelphi Theatre" (June 5). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- Morning Post*. 1826. "Theatres" (December 5). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- Morrison, Robert S. 1995. "John Howison of 'Blackwood's Magazine.'" *Notes and Queries* 42, no. 2 (June): 191.
- P.D., ed. 1839. *Pattie's Modern Stage: A Collection of the Most Approved and Popular Dramas*. Vol. 3. London.
- Pisani, Michael V. 2014. *Music for the Melodramatic Theatre in Nineteenth-Century London and New York*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- "Results for 'enfranchise Slaves'" (Between 1st Jan 1800 and 31st Dec 1849). *British Newspaper Archive*. n.d. Accessed on 30 November 2018.
- Rubright, Marjorie. 2014. *Doppelgänger Dilemmas. Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Saglia, Diego. 2015. "'The Frighted Stage': The Sensational Proliferation of Ghost Melodrama in the 1820s." *Studies in Romanticism* 54, no. 2 (June): 269–93.
- Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. 1865. "Local and District News" (April 20). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- "The Adelphi Theatre Project: All-Inclusive Index." n.d. Accessed on 24 November 2018. [www.umass.edu/AdelphiTheatreCalendar/msti.htm](http://www.umass.edu/AdelphiTheatreCalendar/msti.htm).
- The Ladies' Cabinet of Fashion, Music and Romance*. 1850. "SMUTTA, AND THE FLYING DUTCHMAN" (April 1). 19th Century UK Periodicals.
- The Penny Satirist*. 1846. "The Flying Dutchman" (April 18). 19th Century UK Periodicals.
- The Salisbury Times*. 1886. "Local News" (December 11). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- The Times*. 1856. "Adelphi Theatre" (June 6). *The Times Digital Archive*.
- Thompson, Leonard. 1996. *A History of South Africa: Revised Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Waters, Hazel. 2007. *Racism on the Victorian Stage. Representation of Slavery and the Black Character*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wood, Marcus. 2003. *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764–1865*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Worden, Nigel. 2017. "Slavery at the Cape" (April 2017). *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. [oxfordre.com](http://oxfordre.com), doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.76.
- Yorkshire Gazette*. 1887. "Entertainments" (December 3). *British Newspaper Archive*.
- Zeitter, John Christian. 1820s. "Signor Paulo." Printed by Godefroy Engelmann. The British Museum.