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Sarah Bartmann

This paper is about the woman who would become the Hottentot Venus, a title that presents a conundrum. Hottentots were a colonial comfort to English and Dutch settlers in South Africa, singly justifying expansion, subjugation of those peoples impervious to progress, and, above all, they validated scientific summations about racial hierarchy. Although not a tribe at all, but conjured to inhabit a scientific catchword concocted to summarize Bushmen, Pygmies, and other tribes of small-statured, "child-like," southern African people, a Hottentot proved the theories of polygenists, and were worthy of no more than callous relegation to the complete opposite end of the spectrum of humanity from the European. Venus, contrarily, insinuated pleasure – something for man's enjoyment. Sandro Botticelli's Renaissance masterpiece, *The Birth of Venus* (1485-86), imagined blondness, nakedness, wantonness, vulnerability, and racial perfection upon the name of the classic, mythic Goddess of love. Ostensibly, this means that conjoining the words to identify the African woman lewdly exhibited in London and Paris was a joke. It was preposterous to assume that an enlightened, modern European would have even a

remote sexual attraction for a savage, sub-human Hottentot. As this paper will address, that contention is a fallacy. "The soap opera dramas that played in contemporary [European] men, despite their 'civilization,' actually desired such women; civilization kept the European women under control, decreasing the danger of rebellion, but thwarting male desire."¹ The Hottentot Venus was a nineteenth century dosage of *sildenafil citrate*, if you will. This creature born of racial denigration was science's gift to the sexual imagination of nineteenth century Europe.

Mary Shelley's man-made creature, *Frankenstein*, shares commonality with the Hottentot Venus. They "exemplif(y) the confluence of medicine, anthropology, zoology, and a nascent evolutionary/ comparative taxonomy."² As Frankenstein's monster was the sum of the doctor's rendering of body parts, scientists constructed the Hottentot Venus from what they imagined her appendages meant. But beyond the terror of Frankenstein, after her posthumous disassembly, "a horror directly mirroring that of the savage myth," the parts of the Hottentot Venus became available for

¹ Anne Fausto-Sterling, "Gender, Race, and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of 'Hottentot' Women in Europe, 1815-1817," in *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, ed. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995), 40.

² Anca Vlasopolos, "Venus live! Sarahh Bartmann, the Hottentot Venus, Remembered," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 33, no. 4 (Dec. 2000), 129.

the public to reconstruct images to satisfy any pleasure at its convenience – everyone could be an anatomist.³ Sarah Bartmann, the name she inexplicably legally assumed while traveling in England, was arguably more influential after her death, than she was alive. Vestiges of Venus manifested in nearly every aspect of nineteenth century visual culture, in addition to helping to visually assign the beast that lurked in the repressed confines of the sexual subconscious, and serving as the icon visually and mentally for black women. Above any comparison to the literary Frankenstein, however, Bartmann was real, and here, I will investigate her origins, her time in London and Paris, and the scientific licentiousness that made Bartmann's objectified body such a spectacle in Europe.

Sadly, other than from a geographic standpoint, there is precious little more than speculation available about Bartmann's origins in South Africa. In the 1990's, when the South African government began the end of her strange, nearly-two-centuries-long odyssey by demanding that the French government return her body to Cape Town, Bartmann attained pop status, again becoming a modern cultural icon. In a very short time, a (mediocre at best) film appeared, followed by a glamorously romanticized fictional account of her life,

³ H. L. Manchow, "Frankenstein's Monster and Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain," *Past and Present*, no. 139, (May 1993), 111.

and a pseudo-biography. But as the bibliography here indicates, this paper derives its positions about her heroism from works of scholarly import deigned to humanize Bartmann and the peoples implied by the now offensive word Hottentot. These authors are intent upon bestowing a sense of national dignity to her memory, grappling with the controversies of her impact upon nineteenth century European sexuality and ideology, and discussing the license colonialism afforded the discipline of science to bodies of new subjects, of which Bartmann's body is the prototype.

The contrast between these dignified, race-less, and truthful writings and those by some of the men of distinction referred to herein – Georges Cuvier, Sir Francis Galton, or Robert Dunn, for instance – is profound. Some of their scientific imaginings surface in the “objective” articles available from the *Times of London*, and the personal account of seeing the Hottentot Venus from Mrs. Charles Mathews, a *nom de plume* of Anne Jackson, who, in recounting the life of her husband, a comedian, expresses with great horror, the actions of certain “barbarians” while viewing the Hottentot Venus. Among other works I call upon are the two pioneering ones on the life, death, and remains of the Hottentot Venus from Sander L. Gilman and Stephen Jay Gould. Gilman, often deemed “controversial” because of his frank discussion

of what physical sexual differences symbolized in nineteenth century European discourse – the relationship of the debased African woman’s vagina to excrement, for instance – has some absolute opinions about imagery. Appropriately enough titled, Gould’s “The Hottentot Venus” is an entirely evenly authored piece that brings light to the intersection of nineteenth century sex and science. *The Shows of London*, by Richard Altick, is at once timeless and dated: Altick often judges on the empire side of ethnocentrism. That said, without Altick, there would not be this paper. His indulgence of spectacle is exceptional, and his sense of place is essential. Altick also includes the primary sources of the day, including the *Times of London*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Morning Post*, as well as court records.

“Hottentot Bustle”

Scientists across the continent provided conclusive evidence that the people they considered Hottentot exhibited virtually none of the fundamental elements necessary to found civilization, an assessment essential to the conclusion of Boer farmers that they were vermin needing clearing from the land. Bushmen, missionaries reported, were brutal and insensitive cannibals who would eat their babies, not to

mention, according to one failed missionary's account, "strangle them, smother them, cast them away in the desert or bury them alive."⁴

Legend surrounding the origin of the word "Hottentot" purports that colonizers from Holland translated to Dutch the first syllables from the names of some of the tribes in the region and assembled them to form the name. They argued the tribes were not different at all, that the supposed tribal names were instead family names.

Anthropologists now collectively call the tribes the *Khoi San*, as Hottentot and Bushman are derogatory words within the field. Among the groups comprising this modern scientific name designed to sum-up indigenous South African peoples, Sarah Bartmann's tribe is the *Khoi Khoi*, known for speaking a language consisting of efficient, purposeful clicks (the official spelling of the tribal name is *!Klung*). Before the arrival of missionaries in the mid-1700's, the *Khoi San* population was an estimated thirteen million. The population dropped substantially during the first smallpox epidemic that engulfed the region shortly after the arrival of missionaries. There was even a greater population decline during the second epidemic that ended in 1904, leaving only fourteen thousand *Khoi San* people alive.

⁴ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Flamingo's Smile* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 295.

Dutch settlers continued to trample the tribes and to confiscate their lands, ruthlessly exterminating thousands of individuals until 1809, when finally the British government relented to pressures from missionaries and the rising Abolitionist movement and made the Khoi San legal subjects. Though the move heralded a century of conflagration between England and Boer farmers, the legislation marked the acceptance of the enlightened image of the Khoi San as pastoral primitives. Although the move to protect Hottentots used publications from British missionaries recounting a litany of atrocities inflicted by settlers from Holland as justification, it was also a sign that the greatest spoil of colonial conquest, the subjects, were Britain's colonial property, and that colonial treasures were at least worth fighting for. Contemporary intellectual thought makes it hard to believe the action was humanitarian. With tensions strained in the interior, many newly protected indigenes and arriving European settlers set their sites on metropolitan Cape Town. It was in this era of combustion and mobility that the woman born of a drover in 1778 who would become the Hottentot Venus left her tribe and, she would later tell an interviewer in Paris, her betrothed, to work in one of the numerous new support positions erupting on the burgeoning Cape in 1808.

Bartmann took a position as a domestic working for a subsistence farmer named Peter Cezar, who, lured by the promise of free land, brought his family to the Cape in 1800. There is uncertainty as to whether Bartmann was actually an employee for Cezar, some arguing that he “owned” her, perhaps because the next stage of Bartmann’s life is so horrifically improbable. Hendrick Cezar, worldly brother to Peter, arrived in Cape Town sometime in 1809. Hendrick recognized the talent in Bartmann as soon as he saw her. Europeans displayed a perverse fascination with colonized bodies, and Bartmann’s body was different still. Two of the most perplexing issues in science centered on the buttocks and the vaginas of Khoi San women. While there was suspicion among scientists that women of the Khoi San had a “Hottentot apron,” an up-to-six-inch *hypertrophy* presumed to extend from above their vaginas, precluding it from view, there was certainty they were “afflicted” by a “condition” that affected their buttocks termed *steatopygia*, or “Hottentot bustle.” Bartmann “may be said to have carried her fortune behind her, for she was steatopygic to a fault.”⁵

Hendrick Cezar implored Bartmann that she was literally sitting on a goldmine, and imparting visions of wealth and fortune in her

⁵ Altick, 269.

future, convinced her to travel to the capitals of Europe with him, where she would appear before paying audiences for a very short time. And the Hottentot Venus was born.

With his star secured, Cezar sought and received legal permission from Lord Caledon, Cape governor, to “export” Bartmann, and began seeking backers to finance his presumably infallible project. Alexander Dunlop, a navy surgeon, took Cezar up on his offer, and bought part-ownership in the enterprise. Dunlop proceeded immediately to London to conduct the business of intriguing venues in exhibiting the African woman whom he guaranteed would exceed their wildest dreams of profits. In addition to the Hottentot Venus, Dunlop, a purveyor of the exotic, offered exhibitors other “oddities” in package deals that he assured would thrill ticket buyers. To William Bullock, the skeptical owner of the Liverpool Museum in Piccadilly, the deal further included the skin of a camelopard (giraffe). But Bullock was leery, and while he shrewdly bought the camelopard skin for a largely reduced price, he expected that such derogatory exploitation of a human would command an outcry that was not worth the risk, and declined to exhibit the Hottentot Venus. Bullock’s reaction was typical to the point that a disillusioned Dunlop sold his share in the Venus of the Hottentots to Cezar. Dunlop’s move was shortsighted, indeed,

because Cezar would later reap tremendously off the act he and Bartmann devised.

The Hottentot Venus

A private presentation of the Hottentot Venus was pure theatre: In a plush salon, Peter Cezar, his audience forewarned, dramatically and provocatively, would raise a curtain covering a container on a raised platform. Eventually fabric gave way to steel bars, predictably a cage, heightening the senses of the possibility of a wild animal, a beast definitely requiring confinement. Then, oddly-shod feet gave way to black ankles, legitimizing the cage, giving order to the spectacle. Next, the form came forth with thighs wider, pelvis narrower, and buttocks larger and higher than before seen by the audience. The exhibited modestly covered its genitalia. The continually, slowly upward-traveling curtain revealed large breasts, at once offering assurance as to the gender of the exhibit, it's bare-chestedness solidifying the fact that it was a savage. Finally revealed was the face of savage female, painted to resemble primitives depicted in travel brochures and postcards, frozen in terror by the abhorrent reactions of the learned Europeans before her. Cezar would then proudly proclaim: "Ladies and gentlemen: The Venus of the Hottentots."

Viewers were fascinated! Was it fat? Was it bone? Or was it muscle? The two body parts Bartmann exaggerated are included in those that arouse the sexual libido of heterosexual men. The Hottentot Venus, called so because shapes like hers were the “kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen,” heralded not only a new direction in entertainment, but also a new direction in presentation of colonial accoutrements that put achievements in science, and technological progress – the glory of the European versus the inferiority of the conquered – on display.⁶ “The case of the Hottentot Venus marked the collapse of scientific investigation of the racial other into the realm of the pornographic.”⁷ Mrs. Charles Mathews tried to introduce some sense of logic to the spectacle surrounding the viewing of Bartmann’s body, explaining that “the novelty of her figure could be sufficiently appreciated only by those aware of the ideal of feminine beauty prevailing in 1810: ‘In those days, when bustles *were not*, she was a curiosity, for English ladies then wore no shape but what Nature gave and insisted upon; and the Grecian drapery was simply thrown upon the natural form, without whalebone or buckram to distort or disguise it.’”⁸

⁶ Altick, 269.

⁷ Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1995), 54.

⁸ Mrs. Mathews, (Anne Jackson), *Memoirs of Charles Mathews, comedian, by Mrs. Mathews* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1839), 136.

Despite William Bullock's declining to exhibit the Hottentot Venus, a principled decision he later came to, like Dunlop, regret, a nearby venue at 225 Piccadilly exhibited the Bartmann and Cezar show on November 21, 1810. She was among a Dickensian world that included "the Spotted Boy; the elegant dwarf Count Boruwalski; the Living Skeleton; Daniel Lambert a thirty-six-year-old weighing above 50 stone (700lbs/317kg); and Miss Crackham, a young lady measuring just 22 ½ inches tall whose stage name, "the Sicilian Fairy," encapsulated both her size and frailty.⁹ They found the Hottentot Venus

surrounded by many persons, some *females!* One pinched her, another walked round her; one gentleman *poked* her with his cane; and one *lady* employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, "*nattural*." This inhuman baiting the poor creature bore with sullen indifference, except upon some great provocation, when she seemed inclined to resent brutality, which even a Hottentot can understand. On these occasions it required all the authority of the keeper to subdue her resentment. At last her civilized visitors departed, and, to Mr. Mathews' great surprise and pleasure, John Kemble entered the room. As he did so, he paused at the door, with his eyes fixed upon the object of his visit, and advancing slowly to obtain a closer view, without speaking to my husband, he gazed at the

⁹ Sadiya Qureshi, "Displaying Sara Baartman, the 'Hottentot Venus'," *History of Science* 42 (2004): 236-37.

woman, with his under-lip dropped for a minute. His beautiful countenance then underwent a sudden change, and at length softened almost into tears of compassion.

"Poor, *poor* creature!" ... He minutely questioned the man about the state of mind, disposition, comfort, &c. of the Hottentot, and again exclaimed, with an expression of the deepest pity, "Poor creature!"

I had observed that at the time Mr. Mathews entered and found her surrounded by some of our own barbarians, the countenance of the "Venus" exhibited the most sullen and occasionally ferocious expression; but the moment she looked in Mr. Kemble's face, her own became placid and mild, –nay, she was obviously pleased; and, patting her hands together, and holding them up in evident admiration, uttered the unintelligible words, "Oh, ma Babba! Oh' ma Babba!" gazing at the face of the tragedian with unequivocal delight. "What does she say, sir?" asked Mr. Kemble gravely of the keeper..."does she call me her *papa*?" "No, sir," answered the man: "she says, you are a very fine man." "Upon my word," said Kemble drily...during his suspended animation and surprise: "upon my words, the lady does me infinite honour!"¹⁰ Whether his fine face in reality struck the fancy of the lady, or whether Mr. Kemble's pitying tones and considerate forbearance of the usual ceremonies, reached her heart, it is certain that she was much pleased with him. The keeper invited him once more to touch the poor woman, a privilege allowed on more liberal terms than in the case of Miss Crackham, as it was without additional

¹⁰ Mathews, 136-139.

fee. Mr. Kemble again declined the offer, retreating, and again exclaiming in tones of the most humane feeling, "No, no, poor creature, no!" And the two actors went away together.

Protests followed swiftly. Letters appeared in the morning newspapers denouncing the show as inhumane and offensive. The benevolent African Society persuaded the attorney general to plead the case for Bartmann's release to them to the Court of the King's Bench.

The Society, he argued before the presiding justice, Lord Ellenborough, had every right to believe that Bartmann "was brought away from her own country and was kept here for exhibition without her consent, and that the appearance of compliance which she evinced was the result of menaces and ill-treatment."¹¹ The attorney general sought to extract Bartmann from Cezar, and put her under the protection of the African Society until they could repatriate her to her home "by the first conveyance that offered."¹² He read a deposition from the Secretary of the Society, Mr. M'Cartney, relating his experience seeing the show, in which "the Hottentot was produced like a wild beast, and ordered to move backwards and forwards, and come and go into her cage, more like a bear on a chain than a human being.

¹¹ In Altick, 270.

¹² Ibid.

And one time, when she refused to come out of her cage, the keeper let down the curtain, went behind, and was seen to hold up his hand to her in a menacing posture; she then came forward at his call, and was perfectly obedient."¹³ Bartmann's "appearance" he added, "was highly offensive to delicacy."¹⁴

In his deposition, M'Cartney told the attorney aeneral that he perceived Bartmann to be despondent, "anxious and uneasy," and that she "grew sullen when she was ordered to play on some rude instrument of music."¹⁵ M'Cartney said Bartmann, who spoke Dutch, Afrikaans, English, and French, in addition to her native *!Klung*, sat sighing deeply in a cage raised three feet above the floor, and not respond to questions issued from the audience in Dutch, probing the state of her welfare, so he could only judge from appearance.

Addressing the lewdness of the act, the deponent noted, "she is dressed in a colour as nearly resembling her skin as possible. The dress is contrived to exhibit the entire frame of her body, and the spectators are even invited to examine the peculiarities of her form."¹⁶ Lord Ellenborough granted the attorney general's request, ordering an

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

interview of Bartmann in Dutch without the restraining influence of Cezar's presence.

Precluding that the end was near, Hendrick Cezar immediately cashed out of the act, selling his share in Bartmann to a professional management company. This new act ownership immediately complied with the judge's order. After interrogating Bartmann for over three-hours, the attorney general reported to the court that it was assured Bartmann was there on her own free accord. The interviewer translated from Dutch that Bartmann "was happy in England, which she admired; that she went out in a coach for two to three hours each Sunday; that she had two black boys to attend her, and would like warmer clothes; and finally, that 'the man who shews her never comes till she is just dressed, and then only ties a ribbon round her waist.'"¹⁷ A barrister appointed by the judge to read the contract she signed with the company ascertained that "she seemed perfectly to understand" that her contract guaranteed her half the profits. And while there is no record of how much Bartmann earned during her stay in Europe, the management company gladly suggested that the African Society appoint a trustee to attend to the money she was making.¹⁸ There obviously was no case, the attorney general conceded, as "she was

¹⁷ Ibid, 270.

¹⁸ Ibid.

plainly not under restraint, and the only effect of taking her from her keepers would be to let her loose to go back again.”¹⁹ Lord Ellenborough, reluctantly agreed, perhaps the image of Bartmann as a child-like savage influencing his consternation of Lord Caledon as being erroneous in granting the then twenty-one-year-old Bartmann permission to travel abroad. He admonished that he would prosecute what he deemed to be any “offence to decency in the exhibition.”

Bartmann and her new management company enjoyed a successful run in London at a variety of venues, both public and private, before mounting an extensive tour of the countryside in the fall of 1811. The show delighted the fancies of people in the provinces just as it had in the city. It was while on tour in Manchester in December of 1811, that Bartmann accepted Christianity, and assumed as her converted name, Sarah Bartmann. There is much disagreement about her legal name. Some historians conclude that the name she took in Manchester was Saartje Baartman. There is also contention that the name was chosen by her handlers, and was the diminutive Saartjie, which translates to “Little Sarah,” “ie” ending names indicating a status of child-to-parent superiority preferred by masters in their relationships with slaves. It stands noting here that the

¹⁹ Ibid.

majority of historians are wont to call Bartmann either "Sarah" or "Saartje," a blunder that is in itself racist. It is inconceivable that a historian would refer to "Mrs. Mathews" herein, as an example, with such uncharacteristic informality as to address her by her first name, despite the disagreement about Bartmann's last name. One plausible argument is that Reverend Joshua Brookes, the priest who baptized her at the Collegiate and Parish Church of Christ, was not too terribly literate, and spelled the name the way it appeared on a popular jug exported from Germany since the sixteenth century that bore the brand name of Bartmann. Geologist George W. Stow did write in 1905 that there was a clan among the "Khoe Khoe" named "Baardmann."²⁰ This, some historians assume, is perhaps what she was trying to convey, and Brooke's performed an Anglicized translation on his accord. This argument is racist as well, because Bartmann spoke more languages than the vast majority of Europeans. To think she could not converse with a country European parish priest is absurdly dismissive. But all indications suggest the star chose Sarah Bartmann as her name. Miss Bartmann only returned to London briefly before beginning, regrettably, the final eighteen months of her life, in Paris.

²⁰ Sharad Master, "Sarah, Sarah: More on Sarah Bartmann and her Equally Tragic Namesake," *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa*, 58 (2004): 77.

"La Vénus Hottentote"

Late in 1814, a new comic opera called "*La Venus Hottentote, ou haine aux Françaises*," ("The Hottentot Venus or Hatred to French Women"), "a vaudeville in one act," that "encapsulated the complex of racial prejudice and sexual fascination that occupied the European perception of native African people at the time" lampooned Sarah Bartmann.²¹ M. S. Réaux, an animal trainer from the capital, bought the half interest of the management company that bought out Cezar, and commenced showing Bartmann in a manner much more risqué than Lord Ellenborough would legally permit in England. For the right amount, parties could see Bartmann nude.

It was at one such sitting for the privileged at the *Jardin du Roi* Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, where Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hillaire and Georges Cuvier first saw Bartmann, beginning a relationship with her in which she posed for a series of decidedly-simian rendered images that would appear in their *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*. Bartmann confounded the anatomist's race to publish proof of the Hottentot apron by repeatedly refusing to show them her vagina. "Bartmann covered her genitalia during exhibitions, but her rear end

²¹ Antoine Lokongo, "Saartjie Baartman Comes Home at Last," *New African* 407 (2002): 21, and Altick, 271.

was the show."²² Despite lavish offers, they could not persuade her. There was a reversal of fortune, however, when suddenly Bartmann died of what Cuvier said was an inflammatory disease in December 1815.

Geoffroy Saint-Hillare seized Bartmann's body immediately, filing a claim that it was a "singular specimen of humanity and therefore of specific scientific interest." The government agreed, transferring "ownership" of the body of Sarah Bartmann to the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle. There, in January 1816, Cuvier performed the autopsy that fragmented Sarah Bartmann into such pornographic objectivity, that to see her dead, her vagina suspended in a jar of formaldehyde in case number 33 in the exotic oddity section of the Musée de l'Homme, would be much more explicit than to have seen the Hottentot Venus live.

Cuvier went directly for Bartmann's genitalia because "everyone was able to see her during her eighteen-month stay in our capital, and [wanted] to verify the enormous protrusion of her buttocks and the brutal appearance of her face."²³ In presenting his "gift" to the people of France in the continued advancement of the sciences, Cuvier

²² Gould, 297.

²³ Ibid.

determined that “the protuberance of her buttocks had nothing muscular about it, but arose from a [fatty] mass of a trembling and elastic consistency, situated immediately under her skin. It vibrated with all movements Bartmann made.”²⁴ In solving the mystery of the *tablier*, or Hottentot apron, Cuvier, revealed that “the *labia minora*, or inner lips, of the ordinary female genitalia are greatly enlarged in Khoi San women, and may hang down three or four inches below the vagina when women stand, thus giving the impression of a separate and enveloping curtain of skin.”²⁵ The *tablier*, he concluded, diminished in size as womanhood progressed to the north away from the Torrid Zone. Cuvier was proud to have had “the honor to present to the Academy the genital organs of this woman prepared in a manner that leaves no doubt about the nature of her *tablier*” for all the civilized world to see.²⁶

In a move that was imperially racist, Cuvier did donate a part of his body to science: His brain. At 1,830 grams, Cuvier’s brain weighed a significant 1,036 grams more than the brain of the “Bushwoman” Bartmann. This was significant to anthropometrists because the variance “was in approximately the same scale...as the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gould, 298.

²⁶ Gould, 299.

difference between a Zulu and a gorilla."²⁷ This refuted any claims of human sameness, proving there was a chain of gradation for the human species because, Charles Spitzka said, "'we may have cranial capacities ranging from about 2000cc in some of our most eminent men to less than 1000cc in the lowly Hottentot or Florida Indian.'"²⁸ The jar containing Bartmann's vagina remained on exhibit until 1987. There were never any penises displayed or compared in any European museum.

Progress

The French president François Mitterand made a personal promise to South African president Nelson Mandela in 1994 that the French government would send Sarah Bartmann home. On February 21, 2002, in an act of great pomp and ceremony befitting the Hottentot Venus, with South African Deputy Foreign Minister B. S. Mabandla, and Ambassador to France Thuthukile E. Skweyiya in attendance, the French National Assembly unanimously approved a special act to relinquish the remains, giving legislative substance to Mitterand's promise. It took seven years and a special act to free the cast of Bartmann's body, her skeleton, and her dissected appendages

²⁷ John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 38.

²⁸ Ibid.

because the French needed to assuage national concerns that other countries would make colonial claims for repatriation of “cultural artifacts, arts, and treasures” removed to French museums through conquest, objectifying Bartmann’s body at the present national level.

Roger-Gerard Schwartzberg, French minister of research, recognized and offered a national apology for the indignities Sarah Bartmann suffered at the hands of scientists, and stressed the French conviction to supporting human rights. Before the special session, president of Museum of National History, B. Chevassus-au-Louis, took Mabandla, Skweyiya, and Schwartzberg through the Laboratory of Anthropological Biology in the National to see what remained of Bartmann. The party was visibly shaken when they appeared before the legislature for the symbolic vote.

In a ceremony on, April 26, 2002, the spectacle that usually accompanied the Hottentot Venus notably absent, Skweyiya accepted Bartmann’s body at the South African embassy. While a choir of six women sang a spiritual hymn, Ambassador Skweyiya and Schwartzberg opened two crates – one containing Cuvier’s plaster cast of Bartmann, and the other, her skeleton and the parts of her body that the anatomist sealed in formaldehyde-filled jars. Skweyiya

draped the flag of South Africa over the cast of Bartmann; she then covered the jarred remains with a leopard skin. Then, Schwarzenberg proclaimed that "after suffering so much offence and humiliation, Saarti Baartman will have her dignity restored - she will find justice and peace."²⁹

Could Sarah Bartmann find justice and peace at home? Dr. James Parsons read in a lecture before the Royal Society of London in 1776 a story about

...a Hottentot Boy, who was taken up young by the Dutch, educated and supplied with every thing that could engage the Approbation and Satisfaction of such a one for several Years; yet he was not content, but made use of the first Opportunity to get back to his own People; among whom he had no sooner arrived, than he hastily threw off his Cloaths, flew to the next Shambles, and there, in an Instant, clad himself with the Garbage he found, which with Pleasure he rolled round his Limbs and Body; furnishing himself at once with Food and Raiment, more agreeable to him than the Necessaries better suited to the welfare of human Life, with which he was supplied before.³⁰

²⁹ "Hottentot Venus Goes Home." The BBC News, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1957240.stm>>, Monday, April 29, 2002.

³⁰ James Parsons, "Human Physiognomy Explain'd in the Crounian Lectures on Muscular Motion for the Year 1746," *Philosophical Transactions (1683-1775)*, vol. 44. (1746 - 1747), b 2.

On Monday, April 29, 2002, progress again embraced Sarah Bartmann, this time as she flew home aboard a South African Airways Boeing 747 jet.

Science has now made steatopygia a thing of the past, as it is now a treatable "affliction," thanks to "superficial and deep serial suction techniques."³¹

³¹ R. A. Ersek, "Serial and superficial suction for steatopygia (Hottentot bustle)," *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1994), abstract.

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