

Casting Aside Colonial Occupation: Intersections of Race, Sex, and Gender in *Cloud Nine* and *Cloud Nine* Criticism¹

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... colonialism has long served as a metaphor for a wide range of dominations, collapsing the specific hierarchies of time and place into a seamless whole. In this scenario, "to colonize" is an evocative and active verb accounting for a range of inequities and exclusions – that may have little to do with colonialism at all. As a morality tale of the present the metaphor of colonialism has enormous force but it can also eclipse how varied the subjects are created by different colonialisms.²

A certain personal ambivalence defines my response to *Cloud Nine*, Caryl Churchill's drama in two acts featuring an audacious attempt to parallel sexual and gender oppression with colonial and racial oppression. While the attempt to enact the interrelated nature of these oppressions remains attractive, the apparent ease with which a playwright and company drawn exclusively from and implicated by racial and colonial privilege make direct comparisons and equivalencies between gender/sexual and colonialist oppressions is disturbing. These comparisons and equivalencies are made despite critical material differences in the history of gender and sexual oppression within specific cultural contexts, and the history of colonialism and the peculiar history of gender and sexual oppression within colonialism. As a consequence, certain oppressed identities, for example white women, may have been provided with the prospect of empowering representation at the cost of consigning certain other identities, specifically African women, to further subjection and invisibility.

In a bid to trace a certain coherence of effects in Western feminist practices of writing and reading, this examination of *Cloud Nine* concerns itself as much with the playtext as with its critical reception. Critical reaction to the play has focused disproportionately on what are perceived to be its "feminist accomplishments" to the near total exclusion of any in-depth or sustained examination of race and colonialism.³ Where passing review of colonialism has been made, it has been merely to point out how racism and sexism occa-

sionally interpenetrate or how racism, the play's "other" concern, illustrates sexism, the play's "central" or "ideal" concern. Critical discourses generated by *Cloud Nine* seem to imitate the structure of racialized omission inadvertently reproduced in the play. Acts of colonial occupation, mass murder, arson, and violent repression by colonial settlers in Africa depicted in passing in the first act of the play have attracted little critical attention. Virtually no attempt has been made in the critical writing on this play to investigate the manner in which the peculiar experience of African women under British colonial occupation has been effaced in *Cloud Nine*. Nor has any attempt been made to investigate the ways in which the experiences and struggles of white settler women (complicit, however contradictorily, in the colonial project) have been generalized, in a play set substantially in colonial Africa, to represent the plight of all women in a manner comparable to the way men were historically generalized to represent all humanity.

One article, Elin Diamond's "Closing No Gaps: Aphra Behn, Caryl Churchill and Empire," appears to question the impact of the "foregrounding" by these two feminist playwrights of gender critique at the expense of race and colonization.⁴ Diamond concludes that "unacceptable gaps" exist in the examination of race and imperialism in the works of the two playwrights, and attributes these "gaps" to their imperialist (British) background. However, despite noting in passing that women make up half the population of colonized nations, Diamond does not proceed to examine specifically the inherent differences between the respective histories of "colonized" and "colonizing" women. In two separate studies that examine *Cloud Nine*, Diamond herself foregrounds racially marked feminist concerns and almost entirely ignores race and colonialism.⁵ She seems to exempt feminist critics from critical review at precisely the same instant that she indicts the two playwrights for their implication in imperial ideology, leaving unexplored the sources of her own feminist authority even as she challenges the sources of Churchill's authority.

Against this background of existing feminist examinations of *Cloud Nine*, it is instructive to trace the rises of power (both institutional and discursive) that foster the appearance of mutual exclusiveness between the two intertwined economies of white supremacy and phallogocracy. The phallogocratic economy and the colonial economy enacted in *Cloud Nine* are neither mutually exclusive sites of power that can be used to illustrate each other, nor entirely separable sites of power that occasionally collude and/or collide; rather, they represent interrelated structures of gender, racial, and sexual domination. Churchill's attempt to investigate these two economies therefore enacts (in the theatrical sense of that term) the complicated and contradictory mechanics through which power is (re)produced and exercised. It is vital, however, to situate this play within the context of the Western creative and critical practices from which it emerged and within which it has circulated in the last sixteen

years to widespread acclaim. These creative and critical practices, even in their deconstructive and/or feminist configurations, continue to be implicated in colonial discourses and the contemporary exercise of global power.

Claims regarding the interrelatedness of structures of domination ought not, then, to preclude the posing of what Homi K. Bhabha has termed “the colonial question, ‘the ‘other’ question.”⁶ In his essay “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” Bhabha asserts:

To pose the colonial question is to realize that the problematic representation of cultural and racial difference cannot be read off from the signs and designs of social authority that are produced in the analyses of class and gender differentiation. As I was writing in 1982 the conceptual boundaries of the west were being husily reinscribed in a clamor of texts – transgressive, semiotic, semanalytic, deconstructionist – none of which pushed those boundaries to their colonial periphery; to that limit where the west must face a peculiarly displaced and decentered image of itself in “double duty bound,” at once a civilizing mission and a subjugating force.⁷

Bhabha’s insights enable a reconsideration of the ways in which Churchill and her critics may have reproduced an undifferentiated African landscape as the limit text of their critiques of gender and sexual differentiation. They allow, as well, for an examination of the ways in which various empowering white subjectivities seem to materialize against the dark reflection of a generic and stereotypic African man (Joshua). Churchill’s feminist critics appear to use colonial and racial difference to produce social and critical authority for Westernized notions of gender and sexual difference.

Cloud Nine enacts a multiple and highly differentiated structure of oppression that constructs the prevailing gender, sexual, and racial definitions. Churchill demonstrates, as much by her silences and contradictions as by effective and self-conscious dramatization, that these categories are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are inextricably interconnected. White patriarchy forms the foundational basis for this structure. Churchill deploys a number of dramatic devices in attempts to disclose and then dispute these oppressive categories and their informing ideology. These include instances of cross-casting, the destabilization of racial, gender, and sexual identities as discrete categories in character development, and Brechtian alienation attained through a non-linear dramatic structure and a historicized plot. As a result of the complex dynamics of power ceaselessly and contradictorily at play, the disruption of these categories is simultaneously facilitated and invalidated throughout the play.

Churchill identifies white patriarchy as the philosophical basis of the multiple structure of social organization early in the play. In his opening statement, Clive, a senior administrator in the colonial Empire in (undifferentiated) Africa, says:

This is my family. Though far from home
We serve the queen wherever we may roam.
I am a father to the natives here.
And a father to my family so dear.⁸

This statement exposes not only a multiply oppressive structure, but also the interrelation between the colonization of Africa (and of African bodies) and (metaphorically) that of white women and children within a patriarchal structure. The social order constructed reveals itself to be white in its dominant racial ideology, masculinist in its dominant gender ideology, and heterosexist and monogamous in its dominant sexual ideology.

Churchill's exposition of the prevailing social hierarchies is enacted most powerfully, in my view, in Act One, scene three (37–46), during which scene Clive and Harry (both white colonial settlers and both males) are supervising the flogging of their native domestic servants. Joshua, Clive's senior domestic servant and trusted ally, flogs the other African workers – “the stable boys” – for not being “trustworthy,” for “whispering,” for “visiting their people,” for “going out at night,” and for “carrying knives.” While the men are administering this punishment the white women are kept indoors; under patriarchy, acts such as flogging (and violent components of colonial empire-building) are constructed as male acts from whose rigors the women and children are shielded. Significantly, the women embody and reinforce their oppression by performing and embodying their apportioned gendered roles: “The men will do it [the flogging] in the right way We have our own part to play” (38); “Luckily this house has a head, I am squeamish myself but Clive is not” (39). The “part” the domesticated women have to “play” is the consistent reproduction, in a deeply theatrical sense, of docile, obedient bodies useful in support of the colonial economy. Churchill specifies that the role of Betty be played by a male actor during the first act of the play. This casting choice physicalizes and concretizes the occupation of her body and that of other women by patriarchy. She says in self-introduction: “I am a man's creation as you can see. And what men want is what I want to be” (4). She displays (as, indeed, do all the other women in this scene) a crucial facet of “colonial occupation” as she seems to consent to her oppression, a consent at once authorized and undermined by the glaring inequalities in power. Embodiment and enactment are dramatized early in the play as the principal ways through which an oppressed identity, “woman,” is normalized in a colonial setting. The history of colonialism (both of territories and of bodies) is replete with instances in which it entrenches itself through the materialization of subjects as “oppressed bodies.”

The introduction of Edward into this scene presents the final facet of social construction portrayed in the play – the “colonization” of (white) children by a patriarchal family structure that seeks to script onto their bodies a “natural”

bipolar gender identity and a “natural” heterosexual disposition. Edward reveals the ways in which the colonial margin functions as a space for the cultivation of the ideal (white, male) subject. He is beaten for playing with a doll because, as he has been told before, “dolls are for girls.” In a powerful illustration of the intersection of the discourses of race, gender, and class in the colonial arena, Churchill parallels the flogging suffered by the colonized Africans for their “misbehaviour” with the beating suffered by Edward for transgressing prescribed gender roles. The on-stage beating occurs concurrently with the beatings suffered by the Africans off-stage. *Cloud Nine* demonstrates the non-voluntary manner in which bodies are forcefully compelled to materialize within prescribed gender, racial, and sexual forms. At the very outset of her play, Churchill illustrates some of the multiple but inter-related sites of white patriarchal oppression: the colonization of Africa and the enslavement of African bodies, and the metaphorical colonization of women and children.

A critical facet of social organization that is consigned to invisibility in *Cloud Nine* – and, more pointedly, in *Cloud Nine* criticism – is the unique deprivation suffered by African women and children, who are not featured at all in the play. Unlike the gendered materialization of the settler women, which was mitigated (at least in part) by complicity in racial and economic privilege, and that of African men, which was mitigated in some degree by male privilege, the experience of African women under both autogenous and colonial misogyny deserves but fails to receive specific and separate re-enactment. One could argue that in the world of *Cloud Nine* black women do not matter – which is to say, black women fail to materialize.⁹ The exclusion of African women, especially in *Cloud Nine* criticism, seems to presume a trans-historical and universal patriarchy and elides important distinctions between women in terms of race and colonial history. The construction and/or disruption of womanhood in *Cloud Nine* must be understood from a standpoint that takes into account the at once contradictory and complementary discourses of race, gender, and sexuality. This erasure of black women illustrates the problems (as pointed out in the epigraph to this essay) that arise in the use of colonialism as a metaphor for understanding other forms of inequality and exclusion. The erasure of black women from both the creative and critical universes of *Cloud Nine* seems to constitute a condition of the play’s feminist possibilities.

As she exposes – but also replicates – the multiple modes through which a white patriarchal structure variously manifests itself, Churchill deploys a number of dramatic strategies to disrupt the categories inherent in this epistemic regime, including what Diamond¹⁰ and Reinelt¹¹ classify as “cross-racial” and “cross-gender” casting. The elaborate use of “cross-casting” in *Cloud Nine* anticipated and in some instances seems to have triggered debates over gender identity in contemporary Western culture and in Western theatre theory. Such debates would include, for example, the works of Diamond and

Butler. In an uncanny sense, Churchill's enactment of gender constitution seems to anticipate Butler's contentions regarding the performativity of gender. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (as well as in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*), Butler adopts the philosophical doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition in order to demonstrate the performativity of gender.¹² (The analysis of the ways bodies materialized as various racialized, sexual, and gendered subjects in *Cloud Nine* undertaken above drew much of its implicit authority from Butler's work). Basing her argument on Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, one becomes a woman," Butler explores the potential for deconstructing and subverting the gender script. She argues:

... gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [*sic*]; rather, it is an identity tenuously instituted through time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.¹³

Butler's conception of gender affirms de Beauvoir's assertion that "woman" is a historical construction and not a natural fact. Butler makes a firm distinction between "sex as biological facticity and gender as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity," even as she contests the given-ness of sex as a natural fact.¹⁴ She argues that discrete and polar gender identities are punitively regulated cultural fictions whose reproduction sustains a system of compulsory heterosexuality based on a notion of opposing "natural" sexes with "natural" attractions for each other. This argument is forcefully enacted throughout *Cloud Nine*, particularly in the scene examined above (Act One, scene three). In that scene, such mundane acts as bodily comportment, floggings, playing with dolls, and speech acts are coded in race- and gender-specific ways. These race- and gender-inflected bodily codes are violently enforced in order to ensure that bodies materialize in very specific ways.

Butler's project aims beyond providing women, as oppressed subjects, with the capacity to effect social change. It points to the ontological insufficiency of the falsely essentializing and oppressive category "woman." It seeks to disrupt the reification of sexual difference as the founding moment of Western culture and calls, in conclusion, for contestation of the gender script, for a different sort of stylized repetition of acts to be accomplished through "performances out of turn" and/or "unwarranted improvisations." Although the play predates Butler's arguments by nearly a decade, the casting choices and character realizations in *Cloud Nine* enact Butler's call for contestation of the

gender script through myriad gender performances out of turn and unwarranted improvisations.

In a separate attempt to deploy the notion of performance in order to grapple with the problematics of female identity and representation in Western culture, Diamond embarks on an insightful intertextual reading of Brechtian theory and feminist theory in "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards A Gestic Feminist Criticism."¹⁵ This essay seeks "the recovery of the radical potential of the Brechtian critique and a discovery, for feminist theory, of the specificity of the theatre."¹⁶ Diamond envisions the site of performance as simultaneously a site of feminist resistance. She appropriates key Brechtian concepts – *Verfremdungseffekt*, the "not, but" historicization, and *Gestus* – and reinterprets them using feminist concepts. Emerging from this intertextual reading is a theatre-specific aesthetic – gestic criticism – that seeks to use the theatre as a site for enactments of feminist resistance. Diamond suggests, for example, that the Brechtian concept of *Verfremdung* – the defamiliarization, in performance, of words, ideas or gestures in order to provoke fresh appreciation and insights – be deployed to critique gender differentiation. She provides as an example of this feminist *Verfremdung* the "cross-dressing" (a rather erroneous description) that occurs in *Cloud Nine*.

The construction of character and the casting choices directed in *Cloud Nine* ought then to be apprehended against the background of the disparate theorizing outlined above. The use of cross-casting and of other theatrical strategies to demonstrate and subvert the oppressive performativity of racial, gender, and sexual identities would seem to enjoy a fundamental, though admittedly limited, feasibility. Butler writes on the limits of the theatre metaphor and on the susceptibility of theatrical acts of gender subversion to being innocuously (indeed pleurably) contained within the spectacle of dramatic illusion. Such pleasurable containments may have the reactionary effect of reinforcing the naturalness of real life identities. But perhaps the ultimate limit of the purportedly subversive re-enactments is the ontological status and stability of the notion of the West in the contestations of naturalized subject positions. In *Cloud Nine*, the attempted destabilization of normative gender and sexual subjectivities may disclose a creative and critical desire, to adopt Gayatri Spivak's argument, to conserve the West as the ideal subject of discourse or, alternately, to conserve the subject of the West.¹⁷ The specific efficacy of the casting choices made by Churchill to denaturalize oppressive modes of identity formation is undermined by the Western-ness of these identities.

Cross-racial casting is introduced in *Cloud Nine* through the character of Joshua. In her cast list Churchill describes Joshua as Clive's black servant who is played by a white actor. This description presents the first level of cross-casting, at which level the concurrent process of facilitation and invalidation of coherent racial subjectivity and an eventual reification of a white episteme is dramatized. Cross-casting challenges the conflation of skin colour

and racial identity by dominant ideology and seeks, by portraying a white-skinned actor performing a black racial identity, to destabilize and problematize this conflation. Butler's argument for a different sort of gender performance, a different stylization, can be adopted here with a racial difference. This apparent cross-casting is, however, seemingly invalidated by the very process that facilitates it. In order to disaffirm, in performance, the notion of racial identities immutably defined by skin colour, it must first be stabilized and reified during casting as well as in the perception of the audience. It seems, therefore, to be a strategy that cannot resist containment in the process of its own materialization. Further, the playwright seems to be trapped within dominant racial configurations. She unproblematically describes Joshua as a "black [man]" and the actor playing him as a "white [man]" in her cast list and in her introduction to the play (I discuss the introduction in some detail below), thereby re-conflating skin colour and racial identity and reiterating the existence of discrete and stable polar racial categories.

Confining analysis of the problematization of racial identity to the casting of Joshua would be misleading. Joshua's character construction and development appear to contradict any apparent cross-casting. For cross-casting to occur the racial identity of both the actor and the character in question must, paradoxically, be perceived as stable and clearly defined. This is not quite the case with Joshua. "Cross-casting" is problematic as a description to the extent that Joshua's skin color and his performed racial identity are stricken with indeterminacy. As a result, racial identification has been complicated or made ambivalent; this ambivalence authorizes but also potentially threatens the discourses of colonialism. In Churchill's account of events Joshua, at least in the original production, was played by a white-skinned actor as a matter of practical necessity, there being "no black member of the company [the Joint Stock Company]."¹⁸ This led at a deeper level to "the idea of Joshua being so alienated from himself and so much wanting to be what the white man wants him to be that he is played by a white man."¹⁹ Considering the emphasis that has been placed on the fact that the company in the play's first production consisted of actors of "plural sexualities and sexual experiences," this racial and colonial exclusivity seems odd – or perhaps is instructive.²⁰

The character of Joshua goes beyond obsequiousness and develops an active desire to be white, effectively renouncing claims to a black identity. In his disruptive construction Joshua purports to become a white man with a black skin – black skin, white masks ?!²¹ He seems to embody that form of subjectification that Homi Bhabha classifies as "colonial mimicry."²² Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a *subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage."²³ Churchill seems to construct Joshua as a "mimic man": almost the same but not quite;

almost white, but not quite; anglicized, but not English. He says in self-description:

My skin is black but oh my soul is white.
 I hate my tribe. My master is my light.
 I only live for him. As you can see,
 What white men want is what I want to be. (4)

He regards Clive as his father and mother, disowning his own parents after their murder by the forces of colonial occupation during an arsonist raid on his native village (54). He asserts that black people are bad people, that they are not his people and that he does not visit them (44). He flogs his African co-workers as part of his duties – this punishment is in fact administered at his instigation. He has been Christianized (he prays to Jesus) and is domesticated. Despite being black, he seems to enjoy considerable power over Betty, Clive's wife. He continually spies on her, reporting her "misbehaviour" (just like that of "the stable boys") to a grateful Clive. He defies Betty's orders with misogynous insolence and a degree of impunity, with the none-too-subtle connivance of his master. He has become an ingratiating subordinate enforcer – concurrently a target and an instrument of power – of white patriarchy in conspiracy with white men.

Crucially, both Betty and Joshua lend legitimacy to Clive's superiority over them and expend their respective energies battling each other to determine who takes second place and oppresses the other. Any prospect of cooperative struggle is rendered unlikely by the differences in their oppression and in the power they wield. By playing the subjects of colonial occupation against each other, using offers of limited and discriminatory power, Clive entrenches his authority. Churchill dramatizes in this instance a central feature of colonial power – the racialized and gendered diffusion of power – a feature to which her feminist critics appear to fall prey by reifying a white epistemic regime even as they assault a universalized patriarchy.

Through Joshua (not unproblematically), racial identification is presented as a mutable performative, capable of being cast aside or reconfigured. Bhabha contends that the mimic figure, as a crystallization of the exercise of colonial power, marks the discourses of colonialism with their inevitable discursive failure by dramatizing the inability of these discourses to contain difference: "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace."²⁴ Joshua, in spite of his obsequious conduct in Clive's presence, seems to embody the threat or menace of mimicry in his conduct in Clive's absence. A potent instance of the menace of mimicry is presented when Joshua secretly narrates to Edward (the young "idealizable" white subject) a creation story that directly contradicts the Christian creation story they are both required to proclaim. Asked by Edward to narrate, in the secrecy of early morning, another "bad story," Joshua replies,

"First there was nothing and then there was the great goddess. She was very large and she had golden eyes and she made the sun and the earth. But soon she became miserable and lonely and she cried like a great waterfall and her tears made all the rivers in the world ..." (47). At the conclusion of the lengthy recitation of this unauthorized creation story, Edward says, "It is not true, though" (47). Joshua concedes, "Of course it is not true. It is a bad story. Adam and Eve is true. God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all trouble" (47). Although Joshua and Edward end their encounter with a reaffirmation of the official creation story, "the bad story" they conspiratorially indulge in powerfully illustrates the menace of mimicry. In Bhabha's terms, Joshua as a mimic figure can be seen simultaneously to cohere to the dominant strategic function of colonial power and to pose an immanent danger to normalized knowledge and disciplinary power.

As if to contain the menace latent in mimicry, Joshua's final and dramatic act in the play (an act that concludes the first act) is a decontextualized act of violence. He unexpectedly shoots at Clive, his erstwhile master. Rather than elaborating the menace of mimicry, this decontextualized act appears to be a contrived re-enactment of the stereotype of the randomly violent and murderous African. A colonial stereotype is seemingly evoked to finally erase the menace immanent in mimicry. Churchill may have intended Joshua's violence at the end of the first act to represent a belated act of native resistance. Indeed, my analysis above of the menace in Joshua's mimicry lends some credence to this reading. However, the completely decontextualized nature of the shooting undermines its dissident potential. In its unexpectedness and unexplainedness, Joshua's shooting of Clive seems to hark back to white supremacist stereotypes that assign a tendency for atavistic violence and incorrigible duplicity to the black character. In its belatedness – and it is not so much the belatedness, as such, as the unexplainedness that is importantly at issue here – this act of native violence seems to legitimate the paranoia that colored many of the actions of the white settlers earlier in the play. These acts of white paranoia include an arsonist raid on a native village, Mrs. Saunders's flight from her home to Clive's, and the racial diatribes of Clive and Harry. This reading may seem unfair and one-sided until one considers the fact that Joshua's shooting of Clive has attracted very little critical attention; as a singular act, this eruption of native violence seems in harmony with the subordination of race and colonial history to gender and sexuality in the world of the play and its interlocutors.

It is instructive that the one black character portrayed on stage in *Cloud Nine* does not seek to disrupt the fundamental assumptions of hierarchical racial identification. Joshua self-denigratingly affirms the existence of a racial bipolarity in colonial Africa and idolizes whiteness. It is also instructive that the other Africans in this drama – the "stable boys" as well as the invisible

African women and children – who have, presumably, not mimicked whiteness in quite the same fashion as Joshua, are denied representation except on the periphery: off-stage, being flogged. The antithetical (re)production of the colonial subject – the absent but always already criminalized “stable boys”/ native villagers in contrast to the obedient and obsequious Joshua – authorize the reproduction of the discourses of colonialism. Further, in view of Diamond’s elaborate analysis of the potential in Churchill’s plays to remove women from historical and conventional invisibility,²⁵ it is instructive that, while seeming to offer white women the prospect of non-romanticized representation, *Cloud Nine*, as if in conspiracy with colonizing white power, has sustained the continued invisibility and entrapment of African women. Not only does this play seem to be trapped within an ambivalent bipolar racial identification, it ultimately reifies whiteness as the Ideal Subject and casts blackness as the Other, at best the mimic, even in the heart of Africa. It is instructive that, in an act set in colonial Africa, white existence occupies center stage and black deprivation is stereotyped (on stage), marginalized (off stage), or erased.

Further attesting to the location of this drama in a white epistemic regime is the fact that Churchill, in her cast list and throughout the play, does not feel impelled to specify the racial identities of the (other) characters in the play, with the exception of Joshua, whom she pointedly identifies as “black.” Whiteness, as if by irresistible inference, is the given circumstance to which Joshua provides the lone (in)visible exception of a mimicking inferior. Is the generally laudatory critical reaction to the play’s contestation of gender and sexual difference similarly located in a white epistemic regime? Is whiteness, for instance, (in)visibly inscribed on the female bodies purporting, as Diamond puts it, to refuse the romanticism of identity?

Race and colonialism are not as centrally at issue in the second act of the play. The comparison between sexual or gender oppression in contemporary Britain and British colonial settlement in Africa in the nineteenth century is abandoned at the end of the first act, following the uncontextualized and unexplained end of the colonial presence in Africa. The treatment of race and colonialism seems to serve primarily as a backdrop (in Bhabha’s terms, as a limit text) that underwrites and sustains a critique of Western gender and sexual difference. *Cloud Nine* features a sustained attempt to use cross-casting to critique Western gender and sexual ideology. The actors (whose race we know by omission) involved in the out-of-tum gender performances or unwarranted improvisations are all white. The whiteness of all these characters and actors is at once presumed and effaced by Churchill and especially by her critics, who generalize these racially exclusive gender or sexual reconfigurations. An implicit assumption of the West as a primary referent underwrites these readings.

At the level of casting, by assigning “men,” as perceived sexed bodies, to play “female” roles, and “women,” as perceived sexed bodies, to play “male”

roles (Betty is, in the first act, played by an actor identified as a "man"; Cathy as a young child is, in the second act, played by a grown actor described as a "man"; and Edward, as a young child, is, in the first act, played by an adult actor identified as a "woman"), Churchill uncouples gender and sexual identities and appears to fulfil Butler's call for disruptive gender performances, for a different sort of stylization of acts. This is accomplished by the presentation of images of actors, as perceived sexed bodies, playing gender roles or repeating performative acts in conflict with the genders that dominant ideology "naturally" and unalterably assigns them – "women" acting "masculine" and "men" acting "feminine." The uncoupling of gender and sexual identity is reiterated by doubling, where an actor plays more than one role in the course of a performance, in some instances across the boundaries of biological sex. In the first production of the play the following roles, among others, were doubled: the same actor, identified as a "woman," played Edward in the first act and Betty in the second; and the same actor, identified as a "man," played Clive in the first act and Cathy in the second. This demonstration of the performativity of gender and the possibility of transformation through gender performances out of turn is contained by its specific theatrical setting. The actors' "real" sex and "real" gender cannot altogether be subverted in the theatre. As in cross-racial casting, the scheme to illustrate theatrically the performativity of gender (and consequently to undermine it) is simultaneously invalidated by the same means that set it in motion. The stability of "masculinity" and "femininity" as discrete and polar categories must first be affirmed and reified, before the seeming disruptiveness of cross-casting can be achieved and appreciated in performance.

Toward the conclusion of *Cloud Nine* Africa makes an abrupt return into the world of the play. Clive's authority as father to his family has by this point been seriously undermined. In his final failure, his newly liberated wife, Betty, divorces him and begins a life of sexual exploration and self-fulfillment. Clive's empire seems to be crumbling. Conceding this, a despairing Clive remarks at the end of the play: "You are not that sort of woman, Betty. I can't believe that you are. And Africa is to be communist, I suppose. I used to be proud to be British. There was a high ideal. I came out of the verandah and looked at the stars"(111). The irony in Clive's remark is that the discourses of empire in the play's imagination and in its critical reception continue to be everywhere foundational.

NOTES

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- 2 Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, SC, and London, 1995), 199.
- 3 See, for example, John Clum, "'The Work of Culture': *Cloud Nine* and Sex/Gender Theory," in *Caryl Churchill: A Casebook*, ed. Phyllis Randall (New York, 1988), 91–116; Austin Quigley, "Stereotype and Prototype: Character In the Plays of Caryl Churchill," in *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. Enoch Brater (Oxford, 1989), 25–52; Janelle Reinelt, "Elaborating Brecht: Churchill's Domestic Drama," in *Communications from the Brecht International Society*, 14:2 (1985), 49–56; and Anne Herrman, "Travesty and Transgression: Transvestitism in Shakespeare, Brecht and Churchill," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore and London, 1990), 294–316.
- 4 Elin Diamond, "Closing No Gaps: Aphra Behn, Caryl Churchill and Empire," in *Caryl Churchill: A Casebook*, 161–174. See note 3.
- 5 Elin Diamond, "(In)visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre," *Theatre Journal*, 40:2 (1988), 188–204; and "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa and Duras," in *Performing Feminisms*, 92–102 (see note 3).
- 6 Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 71.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine*. Revised American Edition, (New York, 1994), 3. Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text.
- 9 I am drawing here on the concept of materialization discussed by Judith Butler in her book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York and London, 1994). See especially the introduction and chapter 1 ("Bodies That Matter").
- 10 Diamond "(In)visible Bodies," 194. See note 5.
- 11 Reinelt, "Elaborating Brecht," 49. See note 3.
- 12 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Gender Feminist Criticism," in *Performing Feminisms*, 270–82.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 270–71.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 273.
- 15 Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards A Gestic Feminist Criticism," *Drama Review*, 32:1 (1988), 82–94.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 17 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Gary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL, 1988), 271–72.
- 18 Churchill, introduction to *Cloud Nine*, viii. See note 8.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 It was not until its nineteenth production, Hanif Kureishi's *Borderline* in October 1981 (nearly nine years after its founding), that the Joint Stock Company involved non-white practitioners in any of its performances. This is in spite of the fact that

the Company had previously confronted issues of racial and cultural appropriation in several of its previous productions, for example, David Hare's *Fanshen*, a play based on William Hinton's examination of the Chinese Revolution, also entitled *Fanshen*. First performed to great critical and popular acclaim in Sheffield in March 1975, the production featured an all-white British cast playing (mostly peasant) Chinese characters. For an examination of the racist tendencies within the Joint Stock Company and how these impulses were challenged through the institution of "multicultural policies" in the company's last five years of existence (1984–1989), see Joyce Delvin, "Joint Stock: From Colorless Company to Company of Color," *Theatre Topics*, 2 (March 1992), 63–76.

- 21 I adopt this phrase from the title of Frantz Fanon's examination of colonialism, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markman (New York, 1967).
- 22 Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994), 85–92, 86.
- 23 Bhabha, "Of Mimicry," 86. See note 22.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 See especially Diamond, "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity." See note 5.