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College of Humanities and Sciences
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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Erica Spiller entitled *Collaboration of Feminist and Postcolonial Discourses in the Plays of Aphra Behn and Caryl Churchill* has been approved by her committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Collaboration of Feminist and Postcolonial Discourses in the Plays of Aphra Behn and
Caryl Churchill

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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May, 2009

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank several people. First and foremost Dr. Ingrassia for her help and guidance with this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Barnes, Dr. Browder, and Dr. Cornis-Pope for their knowledgeable insight. Gratitude is also due to many former professors, classmates, and theatre co-workers, who were influential in steering my education in this direction. Finally, I would like to thank my parents who have supported me in all of my endeavors.

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Abstract

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by Erica L. Spiller, Master of Arts

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Subjugated groups studied by discourses of feminism and postcolonialism are commonly
oppressed by white, male, imperial power systems. As different marginalized groups are
exploited by the same dominant ideology the disparate discourses should collaborate in
an attempt to fight the powers of oppression en masse. This thesis will explore not only

how feminism and postcolonialism should collaborate, but that they have already been doing so for hundreds of years. In the seventeenth century the playwright Aphra Behn was already exploring the discourses as inseparable, and three-hundred-years later, playwright Caryl Churchill continues to do the same. By studying conventions of drama throughout various theatre movements, such as Restoration and Epic theatre, I will show how class, gender, and race have always been cultural issues as long as Britain has had imperial status.

EXPLORING BOUNDARIES

“It is necessary to destroy and rebuild the entire false picture of the world, to sunder the false hierarchical links between objects and ideas, to abolish the divisive ideational strata.”

– M.M. Bakhtin¹

Ideologies with hierarchies and divisions of class stratification, gender expectations, and racial segregation, have survived so long that it may seem impossible to bridge the divide. By clinging to divisive ideologies that exclude and oppress, people are forced to exist in a constant state of tension. In an effort to relieve that pressure, various schools of discourse, for example Feminism and Postcolonialism, whose marginalized people often have the same types of oppressors need to work together with other discourses in an attempt to unify the all-embracing goal of eliminating disparity. Laura Brown asserts in *Ends of Empire* that when a marginalized group cannot find a successful voice through which to speak to the masses, they may find themselves in “the role of ‘Archimedes’ lever’ – which paradoxically could move the earth, if only it could have a place to stand.”² This study will uncover those places where, as Brown discusses, the voiceless attempt to stand, although in my argument, it takes not one place to stand, but many. It is the divisions between places, ideologies, and cultures that create weak foundations. By

¹ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 169.

² Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 48.

offering the opportunity for discourses to collaborate, different types of people marginalized by similar systems of oppression will find more arenas in which to convey and combat their various forms of alterity. I will argue that those affected by class stratification, racism, and sexism, are often victims of the same oppressor; the white imperial male. If the discourses of feminism and postcolonialism could join forces they would increase the strength of their argument, and numbers, in the fight against common oppressors.

To fight a war against oppression, marginalized groups need a mission and weapons. In this study the oppressed are armed with some of the very media that frequently reinforced subjugation – literature, art, and drama.³ The appropriateness of a creative weapon is its embodiment of humanity. Constructed by an individual experiencing and reacting to particular moments in time, literature, art, or drama allow viewers insight into histories or events and recognition of relevance in contemporary times. I propose two of the best artists to illustrate the effective merging of marginalized groups are playwrights Aphra Behn (1640?⁴ – 1689) and Caryl Churchill (1938 -). Separated by a three-hundred-year period, but similar in locale and form, the work of these playwrights offers a thorough study of the inability to fully separate discourses of oppression. The interconnectedness of marginalized groups that Behn and Churchill exemplify through drama is echoed by Anne McClintock who states that “race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each

³ For discussion of early oppressive literature and art, such as Haggard’s derogatory sexist treasure maps and Jan van der Straet’s drawing, *America*, see Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁴ There is debate surrounding the exact year of Behn’s birth. This is an approximation.

other... Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other.”⁵ Behn and Churchill’s similarities and differences to each other and their systems of oppression make them prime subjects for this study. They are both white, middle-class, females, living and writing, primarily, in Britain. However, they differ from each other in domestic life, degrees of feminine mobility, and the formation of theoretical discourses such as feminism and postcolonialism. As Raymond Williams articulates in *Marxism and Literature*, culture and literature are often a direct consequence of economy and politics.⁶ The literature of Behn and Churchill, both British playwrights working during periods of political turmoil or economic change, frequently provide a critical look at government and societal hierarchies.

Two Authors in Search of a Character

The plays of Aphra Behn and Caryl Churchill are the result of authors truly living in and experiencing their time and place, and the events that occurred in either playwright’s lifetime frequently influenced the works they produced. Behn’s plays often discuss imperial realms and people ill-treated due to colonization, thus gender and race. This is not surprising considering the fact that she was alive during the execution of Charles I in 1649, Interregnum (1649-1660), and the beginnings of globalization with Britain at the helm. That Behn incorporated these events into her plays is made clear in *The Forc’d Marriage* (1670) and *The Amorous Prince* (1670) which both “draw on the common

⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1-2.

1660s theme of royal restoration,”⁷ and her play *The Roundheads* (1681) which addresses the Whig and Tory conflict in the Prologue when the Ghost of “Hewson...a true Son / Of the late *Good Old Cause*” recites “Pay Bully Whig, who loyal Writers bang, / And honest Tories in Effigie hang.”⁸ In *Abdelazer* (1676) Behn suggests that a man should not be denied his throne by skin color alone, and in *The Rover Part II* (1681) she shows how a Giant and a Dwarf cannot be tricked into marriage simply because they are female.

Three-hundred years later, Caryl Churchill continues to incorporate Britain’s historical moments into plays. Margaret Thatcher became the Prime Minister in 1979 and in 1982 “Caryl Churchill sharply interrogated the assumptions and values of Thatcherism in *Top Girls*.”⁹ Churchill even acknowledges that “the issues you feel strongly about are going to come through, and they’re going to be a moral and political stance in some form.”¹⁰ Beyond Thatcherism, Churchill witnesses various shifts in women’s rights, black rights, and the inescapable demise of British colonial imperialism as once-controlled colonies such as the Gold Coast in 1957, Nigeria in 1960, and Jamaica in 1962 gained independence.¹¹ The most overt themes of colonialism occur in Churchill’s play *Cloud 9* (1979) the first act of which is set in a British Colony in Africa during the Victorian Era.

⁷ Janet Todd. “Aphra Behn,” *Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-8), 3.

⁸ Aphra Behn, “The Roundheads,” *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol. 1*. ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 341-2.

⁹ Amelia Howe Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain: New Writing: 1995-2005* (New York Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 6.

¹⁰ Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, eds., “Caryl Churchill,” *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights* (New York: Beech Tree, 1987), 80.

¹¹ Judith Brown. *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 348.

The works of Behn and Churchill clearly illustrate that oppression, for them, is inescapable if a group is within proximity to the British government. The imperial government, dominantly controlled by white, upper-class males, serves as the system of oppression which commonly marginalizes characters in Behn and Churchill's plays. The government and its ruling members segregate individuals based on gender, race, and class, thus, that same government is what Behn and Churchill, both aware of disparities in humanity, critique and combat. To work against the cause of oppression, Behn and Churchill use marginalized groups and characters in tandem, thus increasing their power and force.

As Brown suggests with her dialectical approach in *Ends of Empire*, it does greater good to be inclusive, not only in the types of "others," but in having the ability to at times even embrace the dominant ideology. Brown offers an example of how the collaboration of theoretical discourses can help create sympathy in those outside of the oppression. She suggests that Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) was a way to elicit sympathy for slaves by framing the narrative around the mistreatment of the king – a type of story that Britain, after the beheading of Charles I, could respond to emotionally.¹² While Behn regards Britain's monarchs as absolute sovereigns she is still sensitive to people of different races, such as slaves in *Oroonoko* or Native Americans in *The Widdow Ranter* (1689). The lower status and value of women is exemplified in the male view and treatment of prostitutes in *The Rover Part I* and *Part II* (1681). She also understands the plight of the lower class and exposes their opinions in *The Roundheads*. Churchill, with

¹² Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire*, 58-9.

significantly less unconditional respect for her monarchs and leaders is openly critical of her government and society. She blames her government, as well as society and its individuals, for the disparity in treatment of different races, including the indigenes of Africa and how they are treated by white landowners in *Cloud 9*. She is also critical of class structure and how individuals seeking personal gain abuse and abandon those they deem below them which is evident in *Owners* (1972) and *Top Girls* (1982). In *Top Girls* Churchill incorporates women from many different time periods to discuss how marginalization by gender has occurred throughout history. She also explores the treatment and acceptance, or lack thereof, of homosexuals in *Cloud 9*.

An Other World

The government often provided inspiration for Behn and Churchill's choice of material, and the play provided the vehicle. Although successful in other genres, Behn and Churchill's choice of drama is significant. Behn uses the libertine aspects of Restoration drama to portray cross-dressing, licentiousness, and parodic characterization of well-known public figures in front of public audiences. Although public figures or events could be portrayed, Behn often had to do so carefully to avoid censorship. According to Robert Hume "Political smears were risky at best. Author and actors risked suppression and occasionally physical violence."¹³ Authors of Restoration comedy had to be especially careful as plays were seen, on average, by over 500 people a day, and these

¹³ Robert D. Hume, *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama, 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 31.

people were made up of all classes.¹⁴ While “political smears” may not be tolerated in some ways, it was appreciated in others, for example if the writer was on the politically favored or powerful side of the argument.

A popular mode of conveying the differing opinions of artists without angering systems of power was to adapt pre-existing plays. By putting plays in dialogue with each other playwrights were able to cast social issues in a less politically harmful light by appearing to combat another author as opposed to a political body. John Tatham’s *The Rump* (1660) was a reflection a “variety of Commonwealth leaders” long since discredited, while Behn in her 1681 adaptation of *The Roundheads* combats the idea of Puritanism in general.¹⁵ By focusing on an entire group of people and specific individuals responsible Behn is commenting on the defunct ideology as well as a couple of crooked individuals.

Drama also allowed the masses to see works and opinions in an oral as well as written tradition. Having a public venue afforded Behn an opportunity to rile up a crowd as long as they could grasp the message she was delivering. Performing on stage allowed for flexibility in the delivery of thoughts or ideas, therefore, if an audience was reacting strongly toward something happening, or not reacting enough, an actor could shift the mood through words or actions. Another advantage in the performance nature of Restoration theatre is the physical orientation of the theater. The theater as it was physically situated in Behn’s period, seated the aristocracy and bourgeoisie on or above

¹⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵ Ibid., 32.

the stage, allowing the other audience members to see them as well as the play.¹⁶ The socially less fortunate were forced to stand and stare at their “betters” while Behn’s actors delivered her message. The aristocracy and bourgeoisie sitting on or above the stage provided a physical image of what was keeping the less fortunate oppressed and could further motivate their advocacy for change if the language itself could not. Conversely, if the bourgeoisie were so inclined, they could also look out amongst the “unfortunate” and perhaps become sensitive to their plight, or conversely revel in their own social supremacy.

By the time Churchill began staging plays numerous changes and advancements had taken place in the theater. In the 1920s Bertolt Brecht’s epic drama intended to keep the audience separate from the world of the play, but also active in the ideas and debates set forth, in order to evoke a critical view of the messages being presented. Brecht’s goal was to stir up thought and debate, for him theatre “was neither a temple for dogma nor a market for finished products but a laboratory where one might find a problem for every solution.”¹⁷ Adding further political and social impact to early twentieth century plays was the resurgence of realism in drama as a result of World War II. Aside from the changes in the genre’s movements, there were also changes in technological capabilities. Plays of the Restoration that took place in broad daylight switched in the late nineteenth century and now often take place in dark rooms where audiences cannot see each other. Increased technology brings forth lights, sound, and video capability, which not only

¹⁶ Mark Stanley Dawson, *Gentility and the Comic Theatre of Late Stuart London*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 99.

¹⁷ Bertolt Brecht and George Tabori. *Brecht on Brecht*. (Ontario: Samuel French, Inc., 1967), 3.

offers more ways of affecting the moods of the audience, but can allow for a more realistic experience, making viewers feel like they are actually in the world of the play. Though these things are available, the ability to make audiences feel like they are in the play is actually something Churchill at times works against. In *Vinegar Tom* (1976) songs are performed by actors who have dropped out of character in an attempt to produce what has been commonly associated with Brecht's "alienation effect."¹⁸ Another example of her staging occurs in *Cloud 9* where she has actors that play characters of gender different from their own (i.e. in Act I the wife Betty is played by a man). What Churchill is attempting to do is convey that gender is *performative* and not a means by which to judge or classify humans.¹⁹ In the same way, Churchill makes a similar correlation to race by having the slave, Joshua, played by a white man, thereby showing that race is culturally constructed and often for the benefit of those in power.

One of the reasons that Churchill writes critically against the people in power might be the demographics of theatre-goers. In a 2002 government survey, theatre attendance in the UK was at 23% of citizens in the twenty-first century.²⁰ A quarter of the population is not a surprisingly low number, but according to one report the average annual household income of a theatre-goer stands today over sixty-eight thousand pounds. Churchill writes critically of the elite who abuse their power status, because she is writing to part of the audience that is present. She is also writing to the middle-class,

¹⁸ Bertolt Brecht's idea of keeping the audience emotionally separate from the play through devices created to remind viewers they are watching a play. In this case, Churchill used didactic song from actors, not characters, out of costume, out of the time period represented in the play.

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 139.

²⁰ UK Statistics Authority, *UK in Figures: 2002*, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=4824>.

still able to afford tickets, because they outnumber the upper-class, and if she draws the division between upper and middle, as opposed to upper and lower classes, she is correctly highlighting which groups are those most capable of causing shifts in power and oppression. If she wrote for the lower classes to band together and fight the powers she would likely not reach her target audience as significantly fewer theatre patrons are of the lower class.

Feminine Voice from a Male Mouth

The stage is a strong choice of location for Behn and Churchill, considering the ability for direct address to their intended demographics, but a form of media in which they had to compete with the prevalence of male playwrights, managers, performers, and staff. Although other women had plays written or produced, Behn wrote at a time when the public was apprehensive about female playwrights. A letter correspondence in regards to an anticipated play of Dryden, illuminates the weary climate for female playwrights at Behn's time. This letter reported that "There is a bowld woman [Aphra Behn (?)] hath offerd one: . . . I shall tremble for the poor woman exposed among the critticks."²¹ Churchill also writes at a time when the works of men are more often produced. She, however, seemed less consciously aware of the gendered climate when she began her career in playwriting.

Looking back, she now sees the relative paucity of women playwrights as related to the upbringing of girls, who are taught to avoid conflict, to be

²¹ Arthur Clifford, *The London Stage 1660-1800, Part 1: 1660-1700*. ed. William van Lennep. (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 163.

introspective rather than active. “That way of being lends itself more readily to the letter, the diary – to the reflective form,” she believes.²²

Behn and Churchill are similar in that they had to compete with the prevalence of male playwrights, but their choices of genre fluctuate in similarity. Behn’s earlier plays such as *The Amorous Prince* (1670) and *The Forc’d Marriage* (1670) are all considered tragicomedy. Her plays stayed primarily in the genres of comedy or tragicomedy and she produced few tragedies, including one which we will explore, *Abdelazer* (1676). Churchill writes across the board from tragedy to comedy and comedy to avant-garde. In plays like *Top Girls* and *Vinegar Tom* the action is steeped in tragedy and Churchill’s disappointment with the lack of humanity in groups and individuals who are in positions of power. Meanwhile her play *Blue Kettle* (1997) approaches avant-garde procedures, with the dialogue almost completely taken over by only the words “blue” and “kettle,” or fragments of each, at points in the piece.

The theatre of both these women is also primarily oral versus spectacular with much of the action occurring offstage. For example, battle scenes, such as those in *The Widdow Ranter*, are described by characters that enter the on-stage scene and relate the events that have happened on the off-stage battle field. In Churchill’s works, the choices are intentional as small-scale spectacle, such as a suicide attempt, may not cost contemporary theatre companies much money. When Worsely repeatedly tries to kill himself, in Churchill’s *Owners*, he never does it onstage. At one point he even takes explosive ingredients outside while Clegg is tending to the baby, but only returns to

²² Stanley Weintraub, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 13: British Dramatists Since World War II* (Gale Research: Pennsylvania State University, 1982), 118-24.

report that his suicide attempt has failed.²³ The failed suicide attempt focuses the attention on Worsely's issue as an individual as opposed to drawing the audience into the act of spectacle. When spectacle does take place on stage it is usually on a personal scale such as the cruel removal of clothing of accused witches in *Vinegar Tom*²⁴ in an attempt to find any marks that may signify a witch. Behn's plays incorporate small scale spectacle such as a sword fight between enemies, as in *The Rover*, yet leaves large battles such as the one in *The Widdow Ranter* offstage.²⁵ Some of the events described in *The Widdow Ranter*, such as the battle scene, could have been staged with hoards of actors battling throughout the theatre, but here again, spectacle may have risked outshining the political issues being presented.

Another concept Behn and Churchill both explore is verisimilitude. Since the Greek tragedies, "unnatural" or "unworldly" procedures such as *deus ex machina* have been employed. Though Aristotle would have argued against such "improbable" help, Behn and Churchill preserve and embrace the unbelievable as a way to further their points. Behn welcomes verisimilitude only to a point as Janet Todd, discussing Behn, observes:

Male addiction to sterile learning led to an absurd drama of rules which delighted no one...Behn had already rejected the doctrine of the unities of time, place and action, as well as the necessary imitation of Ben Jonson, which Shadwell...insisted should be the practice of *all* playwrights.²⁶

²³ Caryl Churchill, "Owners," *Plays: One* (London: Methuen, 1985), 40-1.

²⁴ Caryl Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," *Plays: One* (London: Methuen, 1985), 165-6.

²⁵ Aphra Behn, "The Rover (Part I)" *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol. 1*. ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 66.

²⁶ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (Rutgers: New Jersey, 1996), 171.

Churchill also plays with verisimilitude by using incongruities in time and place to an extreme, while retaining certain aspects of believability. In *Cloud 9* she places Act I in the Victorian Era but moves Act II to 1979, yet the characters from Act I have only aged twenty-five years. This disregard for traditional conventions of time and space, or as Bakhtin would call them, *chronotopes*, allows Churchill to convey that few societies or groups of people throughout the ages can ever escape issues surrounding class systems, sexuality, and racism. By depicting a Victorian age accurately in Act I, she is able to convey her serious attention to the issues presented, and taking a big leap in time to modern day, she can acknowledge that the issues span history. By placing Acts I and II in different time chronotopes Churchill creates juxtapositions of similar issues in different time periods. Bakhtin explains that only “in an environment outside time altogether – can there be revealed the true meaning of ‘that which was, and which is and which shall be’ ...because the force (time) that had divided these three is deprived of its authentic reality and its power to shape thinking.”²⁷ Bakhtin uses as his example the stretching out of chronotopes in Dante’s *Inferno* to include a vertical axis of existence as well as a horizontal. Churchill expands Bakhtin’s chronotopic possibilities even further by making moves through time that, while taking us forward, skip entire time periods while preserving individual time or age, and even switch the gender of the actor portraying a character.

²⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 157.

To link the ideologies of Behn and Churchill is not merely to convey coincidence of their race, gender, and environments. By comparing the works and opinions of these two women it can be shown that similar problems and issues have been at hand in the three-hundred-year span from the seventeenth century into the present. At most points in history people want to usurp the throne or impeach a president, stronger groups will often try to dominate weaker groups, and people at the margins are having their rights violated. Two authors three hundred years apart illustrate how class stratification, sexism, and racism are always present.

By collaborating the discourses of feminism and postcolonialism, consciously for Churchill and in unconscious prefigurations by Behn, they are able to demonstrate that the theoretical approaches should be used in tandem, allowing broader social issues to be addressed. By doing so, the two authors also seem to realize how easily their voices could be stifled by those in power – government or otherwise – or that the bourgeoisie, through participation or lack of, can aid in the success or failure of their careers. Behn's writing conveys her desire for upper class mobility more than Churchill's, but both women continue to write for, and from, the margins. I intend to show that, regardless of whether Behn and Churchill were stifled by their governments or not, they were still able to convey the idea that the complete separation of discourses is hardly possible. In the next chapter I will discuss the feminist and postcolonial attitudes of Behn and Churchill's respective time periods. Behn was not aware of such discourses yet still managed to incorporate the themes of oppression in each, unlike Churchill, who, aware of feminism

and postcolonialism, and less prohibited by governmental hold on theatre, could boldly incorporate themes of oppression in her works.

INTERACTION OF DISCOURSES

“The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast.”

-Oscar Wilde²⁸

Leela Gandhi suggests, in regards to the converging of feminism and postcolonialism, that “it is only in the last decade or so that these two parallel projects have finally come together in what is, at best, a very volatile and tenuous partnership.”²⁹ While she may be correct in asserting that, in the main, the two disciplines have recently begun recognizing a discursive relationship, I would argue that such a cooperation has been happening for a while as evidenced in the works of Behn. The previous chapter advocated collaborating the perspectives of feminism and postcolonialism, and this chapter will explore the intricacies of the discourses and why precisely they should not be studied exclusively. In order to determine how the discourses can be combined I will first explore the statements of critics who argue that they cannot be fully aligned. Then, I will move into how Behn and Churchill do incorporate both feminism and postcolonialism in their plays.

Gandhi outlines three areas of contention that she associates with the two disciplines’ inability to fully align. “The debate surrounding the figure of the ‘third-world woman’; the problematic history of the ‘feminist-as-imperialist’; and finally, the

²⁸ Oscar Wilde, *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime*. (London: Electric Book Company, 2001), 15.

²⁹ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 83.

colonialist deployment of ‘feminist criteria’ to bolster the appeal of the ‘civilizing mission.’”³⁰

Before going into a discussion of how Behn or Churchill pay homage to the third-world woman I must acknowledge that both Behn and Churchill as Western women, are limited in their portrayals. As it seems clear through the works of many postcolonialists, giving a voice to the subalterns is nearly, if not completely, impossible, we should be aware that the attempts by Behn and Churchill contain vestiges of a ‘feminist-as-imperialist’ attitude, which we will discuss later. As Behn’s novel *Oroonoko* is not a focal point of my work here, I will not discuss it in full; however, it may be the best seventeenth century example of the appearance of the third-world woman in a novel that also has feminist motifs. The character of Imoinda is an example of Behn trying to handle feminism, racism, and class struggles. Joanna Lipking observes that “[A]s consideration of race displaces gender, Imoinda also disrupts the earlier feminist identification of woman author with her slave hero by showing the failed solidarity of the white woman with the black one.”³¹ Lipking goes on to discuss the dichotomy in Imoinda’s character “Sometimes she seems like a decorous heroine, sometimes quite foreign; an author stands to be criticized either way. But Imoinda always seems to be in the service of some planned symmetry.”³² I posit that this is in agreement with Lipking who states that:

Oroonoko can serve as a theoretical test case for the necessary connection of race and gender, a model for the mutual interaction of the positions of the oppressed in the literary discourse of its own age, and a mirror for

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Joanna Lipking, “‘Others’, slaves, and colonists in *Oroonoko*”, *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, eds. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 180.

³² Ibid, 181.

modern criticism in which one political reading can reflect another, one revisionist school a variety of revisions.³³

Using this evidence from *Oroonoko*, Brown encourages the grouping of feminism and postcolonialism.

An example of the inability to separate gender and race is highlighted in Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak's article relies heavily on the *sati*, or widows in Indian culture and their (non)suicides upon the burning funeral pyre of their deceased husband. The *sati* rite was abolished by Britain who misunderstood it as cruelty to women imposed by the Hindu men, which opposes the Indian nativist argument that "The women actually wanted to die."³⁴ According to Spivak, it is the white civilizing mission, based on its own cultural value system, that attempts to disrupt the gender roles of a different society against its will. The women, in particular, are done the greatest disservice as males of their culture, as well as those of the white imperial culture, do not allow them to speak. Gandhi contends that Spivak "argues that the 'gendered subaltern' disappears because we never hear her speak about herself."³⁵ Gandhi uses as her point-of-reference Spivak's statement that:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization.³⁶

³³ Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 27.

³⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 297.

³⁵ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 90.

³⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 306.

More important than the “gendered subaltern’s” inability to speak is what Spivak points to as her “violent shuttling” that causes not only her voicelessness, but her complete lack of presence or acknowledgement. Further, a lack of presence that is not a quiet and neat disappearance into “pristine nothingness,” but painful, hurtful, neglect.

Leaving what seems to be Gandhi’s conclusion of the “third-world woman” as completely voiceless, we can then move on to her second reason for the lack of convergence between feminism and postcolonialism – the “feminist-as-imperialist.” What she begins dealing with here is the Western feminist investment in imperialism, i.e. the feminist desire to obtain what may have before been considered male aspirations; careers, autonomy, etc. To further her point, Gandhi calls to her aid Pat Barr and her book *The Memsahibs*.³⁷ The “feminist-as-imperialist” angle comes from Barr’s idea that once the feminist in the colonies gains some sort of autonomy she then sets out to push her biblical and domestic beliefs on the “glaring problem of the backward ‘Indian female’.”³⁸ If the roadblock here is the prevalence of imperialist ideals on the “other” then why does it matter the gender of the Occident or the Orient? This mode of imperializing women can also affect third-world women gaining Western educations, as Spivak mentions her own “unlearning” of oppressive Western attitudes to avoid risking marginalization of the groups of which formerly a third-world woman once belonged. Barr seems to be implying that when women gain their autonomy through feminism they are only questing at becoming the same close-minded individuals they have previously thought anti-

³⁷ For further discussion on the ideas of Barr’s put forth by Gandhi see *The Memsahibs: The Women of Victorian India* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976).

³⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 93.

feminists to be. But what about men who were also feminists? Could there not also be feminists who are postcolonialists? Yes, the argument a man can never truly know what it is like to be a woman, and a Western woman can never truly know what it is like to be an Eastern woman could be mentioned, but such a sentiment should not exclude a feminist from trying to marry their quest for voice with the similar postcolonial pursuit. Simply because a man is not a woman should not necessarily mean a woman would not want him to join in the fight for feminist causes or that certain men could not contribute to feminist analysis.

Here we come to Gandhi's third reason for refusing to render feminism and postcolonialism entirely compatible. Gandhi theorizes that the "colonialist deployment of 'feminist criteria'" will be used "to bolster the appeal of the 'civilizing mission.'" The "colonialist deployment of 'feminist criteria'" is similar to Spivak's statement regarding the abolition of *sati*, "White men saving brown women from brown men."³⁹ The problem here is twofold; first, the feminists who believe all women should be saved from oppressive masculinity despite varying cultural practices or beliefs, and second the overly aggressive masculinity of male colonial-imperialist's ideologies. Leela Gandhi cites writers and theorists such as Mahatma Gandhi and Oscar Wilde who quested for a sort of sexlessness, bisexuality, or androgyny. With this assertion it seems possible that it is not the feminism that stops the merging with postcolonialism, but sexism in general. Similarly, Behn and Churchill might suggest a similar sort of racelessness, in that their reports on racial disparities are rife with negative connotation. Although their plays

³⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 297.

broadcast racial inequality their first-world, Anglo perspective often focuses their texts more predominantly on gender than race. Elin Diamond says in her article explaining the apparent feminism of Behn and Churchill that:

[T]he foregrounding of gender inequalities in texts by women dramatists does not perforce include, and may not even imply, an awareness of racism's violence.⁴⁰

Although Behn and Churchill both do a fair amount of “gender-bending”⁴¹ and emphasizing the female condition, they also include a great deal of content on other types of alterity, such as class and race. In response to Diamond’s observation that it is easier for them to talk about femininity or gender disparities than racial divides; of course white *women* have an easier time writing about the plight of women than the struggles of someone from another race because they are marginalized by gender and not race; gender experience is first-hand while racial is second.. However, their gender does not mean class and racial disparity is wholly absent in their works. In fact, the ways in which various discourses evoke differences while in conversation can be as illuminating as suggestion of similarities. Classic feminism stems from a Western ideology that often ignores the condition of the third-world woman and can be responsible for the wrongful “civilizing” of the postcolonial oppressed. There is also contention that one group of discourse, such as feminism, may not be able to comprehend the intricacies of colonization if that type of oppression has not been directly felt by the feminist. In order

⁴⁰ Elin Diamond, “Closing No Gaps: Aphra Behn, Caryl Churchill, and Empire,” *Caryl Churchill: A Casebook*, ed. Phyllis R. Randall (New York: Garland, 1988), 172.

⁴¹ A term Diamond uses further in article, cited above.

to rectify this situation Behn uses a narrative easily understood by the British as the framing device for her prefiguration of the postcolonial novel *Oroonoko*.

A Restoration Backdrop

The historical context and time in which someone is writing must be taken into account when examining how they write race as opposed to gender. Lipking describes that “As a woman, Behn is expected to hold a different or dissident view of power, yet as a white European, she is inevitably in service to power, colluding with it and constructing it in her writing.”⁴² Through works like *Abdelazer* and *Oroonoko* the climate of the racial “other” was drawing near in that Behn was noticing something besides gender oppression. Lipking emphasizes that terms such as “slavery” and “colonialism” “were not Behn’s guiding terms; their meanings were developing, and they would change more...with the new reign of William III.”⁴³ The shift from feudalism to the “industrial market and the imperial enterprise,”⁴⁴ and accompanied changes with the government and political environment and its impact on colonialism and the treatment of the “other,” whether they be woman, poor, slave or belonging to any other margin, had an impact on the yet undefined ideologies of feminism and postcolonialism in Behn’s time.⁴⁵ Hume

⁴² Joanna Lipking, “‘Others’, slaves, and colonists in *Oroonoko*”, 178-9.

⁴³ Ibid, 168.

⁴⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 5.

⁴⁵ For further discussion on the subjugation of the lower class, women, and other races for the purposes of industry and commerce see the chapter “The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism,” in Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather*.

discusses how marriage, sex, government, and kingship are “generally paramount” and “crucial to the plays.”⁴⁶

Behn was writing during a time when “slavery,” as understood in American culture, did not exist; people were often oppressed or enslaved under more systems of classification than race alone. At the time Britain was colonizing Surinam they were not only using the help of the locals but of many British citizens as well. In fact, there were many campaigns encouraging British citizens to take a ship to Surinam and help farm the lands as the natives were not reproducing farm-hands fast enough to keep up with the growing demand for labor. Eventually, to keep up with the demand for work, the British did embark more heartily upon the slave trade and often took natives from other countries to work in the fields of their colonies. However, even in this case, it must be remembered that to Behn, taking people from another country to work in Surinam was likely little different to her than taking people from her own country to work in the same or similar location. The enslavement of people in Surinam illustrated for Behn that the importation of forced labor was not about race considering whites were sent to colonies to work as well.

To say that she did not advocate rights or fair treatment for “slaves,” “indentured servants,” or “migrant workers” would be inaccurate. Behn’s novel, *Oroonoko*, best sums up her exact feelings on the political climate of capitalistic imperialism implemented by her British motherland. What bothers Behn is not the difference in skin color, but the difference in class distinction. What she feels for the royal slave Oroonoko is not felt only

⁴⁶ Robert Hume, *The Rakish Stage*, 20.

because he is a different race, but mainly because he is a captive prince treated poorly by the landowners. Race, as defined before the twentieth century, included any class deemed “degenerate” or “primitive”. McClintock’s list of degenerates includes “the militant working class, the Irish, Jews, feminists, gays and lesbians, prostitutes, criminals, alcoholics and the insane.”⁴⁷ If Oroonoko were a white, lower-class citizen from Britain who was forced to Surinam Behn may have cared little for his treatment. However, as he is a royal and deserving of royal treatment, Behn could not tolerate his “exile” from his native land and being forced to live under rules that he, a rightful ruler, had not made on his own. In a way, Oroonoko is to his native land as Charles I and James II were to England. As Behn was so focused on the political climate of her time and greatly disturbed by the end of the Stuart Monarchy, with the beheading of Charles I and exile of James II, she was likely less worried about the racial climate of the time.

Although specific political changes were happening in Behn’s lifetime, she was still clearly aware of other political and societal issues beyond what monarchs and parliamentarians were doing. Behn, as a person trying to climb the ranks, was sensitive to middle-class mobility. She saw that if you were not born into aristocracy, there was very little chance you would ever attain the status, but if she impressed a royal, perhaps through playwriting, she may find aristocratic favor. Beyond her own self awareness, she also was aware of the chokehold that the British colonizers had on people of other races and locales. In *The Widdow Ranter* Behn is critical of what the British immigrants are doing to the Native Americans. In *Abdelazer*, she is critical of Abdelazer’s treatment in

⁴⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 43.

that his adopted family, whose father usurped Abdelazer's father, will not let him become the rightful king of his land. While it could be argued that she only feels bad for the royals of other races, she is clearly aware of, but not discriminating by, race. Abdelazer speaks of his skin color and how that kept him from his rightful position:

Curst be my Birth,
And curse be Nature, that has dy'd my skin
With this ungrateful colour!...
The Lights put out! thou in my naked arms
Wilt find me soft and smooth as polisht Ebony⁴⁸

By Abdelazer's speech Behn is not only saying he was unfairly treated due to the color of his skin, but also that if sight were done away with and "The Lights put out!" people would not be able to tell the difference between his greatness and that of any other royal person, of any other race.

Twentieth Century Perspective

Caryl Churchill was writing at a time when ideas of second-wave feminism were abundant. Beyond depicting feminism, British theatre of the 1960s was also discussing gay rights, gender and sexuality, socialism, the working class, nuclear disarmament, trade unions, ethnicity, and race.⁴⁹ Also, the effects of a capitalist society has a strong presence in Churchill's plays. However, Churchill rarely focuses solely on a society that is capitalistic, but also incorporates other forms of power oppression such as male to female

⁴⁸ Aphra Behn, "Abdelazer," *The Plays 1671-1677*, vol. 5, ed. Janet Todd (Columbus: Ohio State, 1996), 307.

⁴⁹ Amelia Howe Kritzer, *Political Theatre*, 5.

or across racial divides.⁵⁰ Apollo Amoko describes Churchill's *Cloud 9* as an "attempt to parallel sexual and gender oppression with colonial and racial oppression"⁵¹ and continues to argue that Churchill even explores Gandhi's worries about feminist-imperialism:

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.⁵²

Amoko acknowledges that audiences and critics have "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."⁵³ Many critical articles do focus almost exclusively on her feminism, and it seems Churchill has had to often put the word "socialist" in front of "feminist" for her critics and interviewers. In an interview Churchill mentions:

When I was in the States in '79 I talked to some women who were saying how well things were going for women in America now with far more top executives being women, and I was struck by the difference between that and the feminism I was used to in England, which is far more closely connected with socialism. And that was one of the ideas behind writing *Top Girls*, that achieving things isn't necessarily good, it matters *what* you achieve.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ For more discussion on capitalist subjugation see McClintock's discussion in *Imperial Leather* on how imperial power structures produce climates of sexism and racism, especially in the Victorian Era, which is when Act I of *Cloud 9* takes place.

⁵¹ Amoko Apollo, "Casting Aside Colonial Occupation: Intersections of Race, Sex, and Gender in *Cloud Nine* and *Cloud Nine* Criticism," *Modern Drama*, Spring 1999, 45.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, eds., "Caryl Churchill", *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights* (New York: Beech Tree, 1987), 78.

Churchill illustrates here that she does not necessarily divide up the specific issues she wants to handle, but deals with oppressions under larger ideologies or discourses, such as socialism. She explains further that:

[S]ocialism and feminism aren't synonymous, but I feel strongly about both and wouldn't be interested in a form of one that didn't include the other.⁵⁵

Churchill believes very strongly in inviting the ideas of the many and as a result often works in a collaboration process when it comes to writing. She will give actors a situation and ask them to improvise, and based on what they come up with, Churchill is able to see the concerns of many people and work them into her plays. This aligns with her socialist ideas that the various forms of oppression that affect many types of people are all unfair and deserve a collaborative effort at diffusion.

While Behn and Churchill have different levels of awareness when it comes to the blending of feminism and postcolonialism it is evident that both are active participants in bridging ideological divisions. Made clear in this chapter is that both Behn and Churchill operate under large ideological structures which shape their frame of thinking. Behn was foremost a royalist, and this association was the guiding influence in her playwriting. However, aware of the heterogeneous society around her, and with her finger always on the pulse of society, she was able to address issues that interested marginalized groups oppressed by power systems. As Cromwell and Parliament were the heavily criticized

⁵⁵ Ibid.

power systems operating around her lifetime she was able to side with those they oppressed while still preserving her respect for royalty. Churchill, on the other hand, operates under the larger ideology of socialism which allows her to acknowledge disparities placed on almost any group oppressed by a power system. Differing from Behn, thanks to the end of censorship of theatre in 1968, she pays no obligatory respect to those in power and is able to openly criticize their systems of oppression.

Whether stifled by power or not, both authors convey an awareness that power systems create oppression of all types of people and therefore those subjugated should work together against their tormenter as opposed to dividing under disparate discourses. In the following two chapters I will explore in greater detail the works of Aphra Behn and Caryl Churchill, citing many further examples of their agreement that imperial power systems create oppression and how exploited groups can better fight smothering forces through collaboration.

Aphra Behn

*“I for all Uses in a State was able,
Cou’d Mutiny, cou’d fight, hold forth, and cobble.”*

-Aphra Behn⁵⁶

Royal Aspirations

Many facts pertaining to Aphra Behn’s life and works are debatable, but Behn’s prolific and active rate of publication is not. Behn was so immersed in her country and culture that it is necessary to include not only her biographic and literary details but, to also pay close attention to significant events happening during her life. The large scale political events taking place included the First and Second Civil Wars (1642-1651), Charles I’s execution (1649), Cromwell’s leadership as Protectorate (1653-59) and the Restoration of the monarchy, beginning in 1660, to Charles II.⁵⁷

These cultural movements and events took so much precedence that Behn often found in them the motivating factors and creative influences for her literary works. The civil war and cessation of Rump Parliament influenced her work on *The Roundheads* (1681),⁵⁸ while attitudes toward slavery and monarchy can be seen in her play *Abdelazer* (1676). In fact, it may impossible to find a Behn play not steeped in some sort of civil

⁵⁶ Aphra Behn, “The Round-Heads,” *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol 1*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 342.

⁵⁷ For more discussion of historical events in the time of Carolinian theatre see Hume’s discussion in *The Rakish Stage*.

⁵⁸ She was also influenced by John Tatam’s *The Rump*, a play about the cessation of the Rump Parliament that opened in 1659. Robert Watt, *Bibliotheca Britannica; or The General Index to British and Foreign Literature: Volume II – Authors* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1824), 895.

unrest or cultural event. With so much going on in her world at the time, Behn writes about society around her, and these events resonate well beyond the time they take place, still being referenced in the work of modern writers.

Behn was influenced by her political and cultural environment and her family affiliations. The hardships that her family may have endured during this time guided her toward siding with the monarchy. With Cromwell as Protectorate, middle and lower-class citizens were offered more opportunities in the military as well as receiving sequestered royalist properties, yet Behn's parents never capitalized on these opportunities.⁵⁹ One would think Behn should have supported Cromwell because with militaristic advancement class mobility was a greater possibility, and Behn was always looking to move up in status. While Behn may have respected Cromwell for being politically tough her inability to support him stemmed from her belief in absolute sovereigns. Behn offers no blatant speech regarding her preference for monarchy over parliament and protectorate, but the evidence in her plays speaks clearly on the matter. Mary Ann O'Donnell concurs that:

While Behn used cavaliers and Oliverians in her plays, most notably *The Roundheads* and the two parts of *The Rover*, and, while the theme of restoration runs through many of her other plays, she has left us no understanding of the impact of these angst-filled years on her youth.⁶⁰

O'Donnell argues that we have no way to understand her youth, but Todd, enlisting contemporaries letters and testaments, surmises how her early years were most likely to

⁵⁹ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (Rutgers: New Jersey, 1996), 17. Todd's assertions incorporated in this thesis are those supported by various contemporaries accounts of Behn's life, thought, they are still, at best, speculations.

⁶⁰ Mary Ann O'Donnell, "The Documentary Record," *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*. ed. Janet Todd, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

have passed. To locate the identity of Behn's parents she enlisted the help of Richard Blome's *Britannia: or, a Geographical Description of the Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland* which lists gentlemen residing in specific locales. When searching Kent, where Behn was most likely born and perhaps spent some of her younger years, Todd noticed Behn's alleged father, Bartholomew Johnson was not listed. She then linked this finding to a "later sneer" in Behn's dedication to *The Roundheads*, "at people of whom not even 'a Parish Book makes mention or cou'd show there was any such Name or Family'." ⁶¹ Based on this assertion, and conjecture of others, it is possible that Behn may have blamed the circumstances surrounding her birth for her exclusion from the aristocracy. ⁶²

Her awareness of the lack of opportunities for females began in her childhood. While living with her parents in Kent she would have been subjected to traditional feminine duties despite her interest in politics. ⁶³ Succumbing to traditional feminine tropes would have communicated to the young Behn that her duties as a female were already prescribed to her and she should not stray. Fortunately, she didn't believe in typical female roles. As her family lacked upward mobility, marrying may have been a chance for advancement. Behn's love life is another avenue which is offered as an explanation for her motivations in writing. While her romantic encounters did not directly inspire her plays, it certainly can shed light on her feminist tendencies. Behn's first and only marriage is a matter of speculation. It seems to have occurred between her leaving

⁶¹ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, 16.

⁶² John Dryden also implied, after Behn's death, that she was lowly born. For more discussion on this see "Aphra Behn" entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press 2004-8.)

⁶³ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, 18.

Surinam and her arrival back in London. However, there exist no written documents to support such a marriage, only listings of a Mr. Johan Beane⁶⁴ who may have been on the ship Behn sailed back on to London. Shortly after the return to London Mr. Beane disappears from the records and it is probable, and generally believed, that he passed away. Solitary life allowed Behn time to work and write, and she would have to do so considering a husband's death may have forced a woman to support herself. Having such a short-lived (if at all) marriage also provided for Behn an objective position to view the marital institution and its demands on the female partner.

Behn never did remarry but rather took up some form of a relationship with John Hoyle. Hoyle was known to be a "bisexual lawyer with a reputation to violence, republicanism, and freethinking."⁶⁵ Hoyle was not all that interested in Behn, perhaps more interested in men, yet he typically came back to her, even after stints away kept her in good company, but seems to have generally refused any sort of sexual interaction with Behn. She wrote letters complaining of neglect, posthumously published as "Love Letters to a Gentlemen," and it is thought that these were written in complaint of Hoyle.⁶⁶ In fact, Hoyle kept her at a relative distance. The character, Abdelazer, is thought to be in the manner of Hoyle, at least in his manner toward women. As Todd mentions Behn seemed

⁶⁴ According to *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* the spelling is Johann Behn, but the story is similar, differing only slightly in that *DNB* assumes the marriage actually took place in London, as opposed to Todd's not naming a location for the ceremony.

⁶⁵ Janet Todd, "Aphra Behn," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: University Press, 2004-2008), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/view/printable/1961>>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

to have yearned for Hoyle's love and attention, though it rarely was given.⁶⁷ In *Abdelazer*

Behn writes:

Love in fantastick Triumph sat
Whilst Bleeding Hearts around him flow'd,
For whom Fresh Pains he did create,
And Strange Tyrannick Pow'r he shew'd;
From thy bright Eyes he took his Fires,
Which round about in sport he hurl'd;
But 'twas from mine, he took Desires,
Enough to undo the amorous World.⁶⁸

What supports Todd's assertion that *Abdelazer* is a product of Hoyle's influence on Behn is her argument that it is not a political play but one based more around lust and the "impossibility of fulfilling human desire."⁶⁹ Still, although human desire is certainly an element of *Abdelazer* the political nature of this play is its center. *Abdelazer* is based on Marlowe's *Lusts Dominion* which similarly centers around a foreign king unjustly being kept from what should be his throne. Correspondingly, *Abdelazer* fights for his restoration as king because it should have been his position and right. This play, as with most of Behn's plays, comes at a time when kings and monarchs were taken from their thrones and *Abdelazer* is clearly a reflection of such acts. The intertextuality of life in art it almost unavoidable as Behn conveys in *Abdelazer* and many other plays.

Although Behn may have been upset by Hoyle's lack of attention towards her, and even written elements of his neglect into *Abdelazer* she could hardly have chastised his behavior, for she herself was also believed to take on lovers of the same gender. The focus on a homosexual, or at least bisexual Behn, however, is less interesting in how she

⁶⁷ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, 188.

⁶⁸ Aphra Behn, "Abdelazer," *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol 2*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 9.

⁶⁹ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, 188.

dealt with love or romance, and more so in what it says about her ideas about gender roles. During that time period, so many things she wanted, such as playwriting, were often only attained by males. Behn, through her pursuit of male-dominated aspirations displays a disregard for gender disparity or recognition.⁷⁰ In *The Widdow Ranter*, Ranter, herself, dresses like a man because she cannot acquire what she wants when dressed as a woman. What Ranter wants is Lieutenant Daring who even acknowledges that he noticed her only when she was dressed like a man and had she never donned breeches he may never have fallen in love with her. Behn's openness to bisexuality mirrors her respect for the rights of women to do as they please, even if what they like to do is considered male work, and her attitudes toward libertinism allowed "gender-bending" in many of her plays.

Scripting Gender

*"Nay even the Women now pretend to reign;
Defend us from a Poet Joan again!"*

-Aphra Behn⁷¹

Susan Staves, in her discussion of Behn's writing choices, settles on a "libertine ideology, the one that Behn in many ways found attractive, but one that seemed to work better for men than for women."⁷² By focusing mostly on the libertine ideology which was devoid of many restraints, Behn was limited in the women she could portray. This sort of

⁷⁰ Though not known to Behn at the time she may have agreed with the *performative gender* theories of Judith Butler. This concept will be discussed further in the following chapter.

⁷¹ Aphra Behn, "Sir Patient Fancy," *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol. 4*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 8.

⁷² Susan Staves, "Behn, Women, and Society," *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*. Ed. Janet Todd. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

hedonism, as Staves mentions, was more easily enjoyed by men who did not face the same scorn as women. Thus, for Behn to try and elevate the status of female rights to engage in similar behaviors as men she had to stay within the middle to upper-class structure in which libertinism was acceptable. Clearly, her upper-class contemporaries and royal dignitaries would likely never be induced to endorse libertinism in lower classes, thus Behn would have been limited to press female libertinism with upper-class women.

Although she was not upper-class, Behn's aspirations for class mobility may have affected her identification with libertinism as she was at times a bit hypocritical in her approach. Many of the things she bashes her characters for such as drinking and a masculine ideology are aspects of a libertine attitude. Most likely drawing her to libertinism was the fact that the King himself embraced libertinism and Behn embraced the King. Behn's inner conflicts with libertinism aside, the licentious behaviors influenced and allowed theatrical conventions that Behn could use to portray her ideas of cultural injustice.

The increased debauchery within the Restoration such as masquerading, drinking, and other libertine festivities allowed for easier acceptance of cross-dressing and transgender manners. An example of this less hostile critique is Hellena in *The Rover* who dresses as a young boy to aid in confronting the rakish lover who is courting her and the courtesan, Angelica. The ability for on-stage cross-dressing in an attempt to subvert an enemy allowed gender mobility that was scarce in Behn's time, but conforms to the ideas of performative gender and explains Behn's distaste of gender roles. What forces

her to fall short of full gender dis-identification is her viewing audience. If she were to push the envelope too far and allow women to fully attain male gender roles she might have upset her viewing audience, including the upper-class, something Behn, an aspiring member of the gentry, would not blatantly do. Such a situation is depicted in the end of *The Rover* when Angelica threatens to shoot Willmore. Before she does, however, the male Antonio sweeps in, Angelica easily hands the gun over to him and exits.

Illustrating how men are still able to engage in libertine behaviors unpunished is the fact that in the same play the buffoonish rake, Willmore, is often drunk which causes him to land in precarious situations and on multiple occasions. Although Behn had royal approval to assign men licentious behaviors in her own time, by the eighteenth century writers like Richardson and Fielding “vilified her as unwomanly” for her imagery.⁷³ The accusation of being unwomanly was also unwarranted as her male contemporaries were often writing with much of the same bawdiness and imagery. Excessive drinking, although nothing completely new to Britain, was a more acceptable excuse for immoral behavior in men and as such Willmore was not as harshly chastised for his actions.⁷⁴ However, in a just and right universe, he is punished, and Behn crafts his punishment through the death of his newly acquired love, Hellena.

Audience expectations for the chastisement of debauchery in women, but acceptance of a rake, is featured to a great extent in *The Rover*. As mentioned earlier, by

⁷³ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life*, 2.

⁷⁴ The court of Charles II found great humor in libertinism which allowed Behn to go to such lengths with female libertinism in *The Rover*. See pg. 86 in *The Rakish Stage*, by Robert D. Hume.

adapting plays authors are able to engage in conversation with the preceding playwright and play; in this case Thomas Killigrew and *Thomaso*. According to Heidi Hutner:

Killigrew's female characters are depicted either as prized, angelic virgins or as deformed and grotesque "others." ... In contrast, Behn's play rebukes the patriarchal concept of women and "others" as property.⁷⁵

When Shift and Fetherfool attempt to fool the Giant and Dwarf, in *The Rover Part II*, into marrying them so they can steal their fortunes, the women are crafted as intelligent and feeling, as opposed to simply "deformed and grotesque" in Killigrew. The Giant shows she is a rational thinking human as she questions Fetherfool's intentions:

Feth. Why then, Madam, without enchanted Sword or Buckler, I'm your Man.

Giant. My Man? my Mouse. I'll marry none whose Person and Courage shall not bear some Proportion to mine.

Feth. Your Mightiness I fear will die a Maid then.

Giant. I doubt you'll scarce secure me from that Fear, who court my Fortune, not my Beauty.⁷⁶

Though the Giant and Dwarf may be momentarily swayed to "loving" these men, they are ultimately thinking, rational, human beings. In fact, in the end it is the "normal" male characters, Shift and Fetherfool, who are fooled and exposed as cheating, lying, rogues. This difference between Killigrew and Behn can be further illustrated in Behn's depiction of the courtesans in *The Rover*. Angelica, a courtesan, has been raised to "prostitute as heroine" as opposed to the old "prostitute as outsider."⁷⁷ Upon discovering that Willmore

⁷⁵ Heidi Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II," *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 102.

⁷⁶ Aphra Behn, "The Rover (Part II)," *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol. 1*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 156.

⁷⁷ Heidi Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body," 103.

had been using her she is able to reflect upon herself and becomes humanized for the audience:

But when Love held the Mirror, the undeceiving Glass
Reflected all the Weakness of my Soul, and made me know,
My richest Treasure being lost, my Honour,
All the remaining Spoil cou'd not be worth
The Conqueror's Care or Value.⁷⁸

Behn actually allows, of all women, a prostitute, perhaps because she is in charge of her sexuality, to divorce herself from a dependency on men and obtain agency for the female character.

Another way that Behn combats the masculine ideal of female passivity is through her placement of Hellena's narrative as the opening scene in *The Rover*. Like Serulina in *Thomaso*, Hellena refuses to be sexually repressed and held to such high virginal standards, but Behn's choice in placement highlights the difference between the characters and their respective plays. Killigrew places Serulina's narrative late in *Thomaso* while Behn "highlights the heroine's self-assertiveness by making Hellena's refusal of the nunnery, masquerade, and pursuit of love the very first events in *The Rover*."⁷⁹ By placing Hellena's narrative early in the play, Behn focuses attention on the idea of feminine oppression.

Furthering the feminist narrative Angelica, seeking revenge on Willmore for making her believe he loves her, dresses as a man and aspires to shoot him. Not only does she dress like a man but the choice of a pistol represents a "weapon symbolic of her

⁷⁸ Aphra Behn, "The Rover (Part II)," 95-6.

⁷⁹ Heidi Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body," 106.

attempt to usurp phallic control.”⁸⁰ In her failure to regain the affections of Willmore, she disappears, leaving Hellena at the helm, to continue the struggle against male dominance. Although Hellena does eventually fill the heart, or perhaps bank account, of Willmore she fails in her attempt to do so under the disguise of a man.⁸¹ Both women’s failure to persuade Willmore to respect and love them as women, while in men’s clothing, illustrates that the impersonation of man, or the taking on of male roles, will not necessarily empower the woman. Remaining is the tired and traditional dichotomy of roles that the women had previously been assigned, those of wife or prostitute.⁸²

Another way Behn shows abhorrence for masculine double standards is through *The Rover’s* character of Florinda and her lover, Belvile. Florinda is romantically aligned with Belvile who is her equal in piety and goodness. This, as Hutner asserts, is Behn’s way of saying that if women are expected to be good and respectable then men should be held to the same standards of decency.⁸³

Considering that she wrote for profit and that the political climate changed Behn had to slightly reform her representation of gender roles in order to meet audience interest. This change can best be highlighted in *The Roundheads*, which Susan J. Owen mentions as an “exception within Behn’s *oeuvre*.”⁸⁴ At this point in Britain’s history “the political tide had turned in the King’s favour” and:

there was a specific context and a substantial motivation for Behn to make a vigorous effort at this time to subordinate her capacity for feminist

⁸⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁸¹ See previous conversation about Hellena dressing as a young boy to confront Willmore.

⁸² Heidi Hutner, “Revisioning the Female Body,” 108.

⁸³ Ibid., 109.

⁸⁴ Susan J. Owen, “Behn’s dramatic response to Restoration Politics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*. ed. Janet Todd, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 69.

insight to the sexually conservative tropes of Toryism in order to demonize the Whigs' attempt to 'turn the world upside-down'.⁸⁵

Lady Lambert and Lady Cromwell somewhat serve as the ideal wife, but they are punished when they stray away from the ideal, and when not punished are written as though they should be. The *Roundheads* is a good example of Behn's willingness to camouflage her plays amongst Tory standards while still subtly conveying her feminist agenda. The feminist agenda is more than clear when the ladies meet to discuss their rights as women, but what is equally apparent in this section is that Behn is writing to praise her royal monarchs. Before they even begin to list their grievances Lady Lambert defends her husbands honor:

My Husband earn'd it with his Sword,
Braver and just than thy bold Usurper,
Who waded to his Glory though a Sea
Of Royal Blood –⁸⁶

In the above passage Behn shows how royalty must be given praise, even when praise is not necessary due. Only after honoring royalty, the women lay out their grievances which include such things as “my neighbours think he calls me Whore,” “defam'd and profan'd the Woman and her Children,” and “he never kisses me.”⁸⁷ After they list a few more grievances a Page enters with a letter saying that Lady Lambert's husband's army has deserted him and he will be ruined. She immediately gets upset that her poor lord does not deserve such a fate. With this episode Behn allows her women to speak their mind while assuring a male audience that it's simply talk and the women really do support their

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Aphra Behn, “The Roundheads,” *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 412.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 413.

husbands and their subordinate feminine position. It is also clear, at least with Lady Lambert, that she wants to have her true love in Loveless and her royalty in her husband. This allows the audience to feel Lady Lambert deserves punishment for adultery, and keeps Behn from being accused of looseness.

Dialectic Tory

*“Heaven bless the King that keeps the Land in Peace,
Or he’ll be sweetly served by such as these.”*

-Aphra Behn⁸⁸

While many of Behn’s plays present female and gender issues, they also focus heavily on the political climate’s effect on individuals in general, including those of different classes or races. Although one must keep in mind that first and foremost, Behn was not only a feminist (even though the term had not been coined) but also a royalist. One thing must be clearly noted here: because Behn entertained one group (the Royalist) or thought (feminism) more so than another, does not negate her from taking a dialectical approach to each. Todd suggests that even in her presentation of issues there are discrepancies:

For the people, slaves, or the London rabble, and for democracy of any sort she expressed nothing but contempt...From a modern point of view she was not even consistent in reaction: she was a patriarchalist in state politics, a Cartesian in psychology, and a contract theorist in family matters.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Aphra Behn, “The Young King,” *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol. 2*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 108.

⁸⁹ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life*, 5.

One thing that is certain about Behn is her aspiration to achieve an elite status, or that of a gentleman. Keeping this in mind, nothing about her inconsistency is surprising. However, as devoted to the crown as Behn may be, there are still aspects of her humanity present in her texts. Even while discussing a king being unrightfully dethroned she is still exploring the idea of civil rights even if she focuses, for the moment, only on those in power.

Taking into account Todd's idea of Behn as Cartesian in psychology it only makes sense that she does not pity the poor. As an impoverished individual, Behn believed in the ascendancy of mind over matter, and if she could climb to higher ranks, at least for a time, there is no reason she would not expect the same from anyone else. Her issue, then, is not being lower-class, or poor, but suffering an injustice, and by supporting her absolute sovereigns she may have been blinded to injustices inflicted on the lower classes.

Behn's work often features kings or rulers that have unjustly been denied their right to rule. She sympathizes with the slave Oroonoko, because he is a king to his people and she pays little to no attention to any other slaves. In *The Widdow Ranter* she feels bad for the indigenous people of the Americas not because the British colonists are killing them and taking their land, but because their royalty are being killed in the process. However, she also believed that as long as land or power was acquired through skill or battle, and that fate played a hand, there was no injustice. Janet Todd dwells on this through *The Widdow Ranter*:

The Native Americans were, indeed, innocent, and their innocence suggested their fate to her: since like children they would be

controlled and disciplined and she expected the corrupt Europeans to dominate them where they could.⁹⁰

Her views on the Native Americans' situation in *The Widdow Ranter* provides a parallel to how she viewed the lower-class situation in her own country as well. As long as the rightful king was in power, she believed that he could do what was right for the innocent (lower-class) people. Her desire to be of a higher class does not preclude her from sympathizing with those a lower station, but she still prioritizes her arguments, because of her upper-class aspirations.

Behn viewed those of other races or ethnicities with acceptance as long as she deemed the individuals in question as deserving. Todd explains this point further:

Behn was certain that heroes and people of 'Quality' should not be badly treated. About ordinary plebeians, black, brown or white, she was less concerned.⁹¹

In many of her plays, for instance *Abdelazer*, Behn tears down people who try to achieve rank and honor when she feels they do not deserve to climb to such a height of accomplishment after their past transgressions. Abdelazer makes clear in his speech to Alonzo:

Altho my Skin be black, within my Veins
Runs Blood as red, and royal as the best. –
My Father, Great *Abdela*, with his Life
Lost too his Crown; both most unjustly ravish'd
By Tyrant *Philip*, your old King I mean.⁹²

Although this passage is focused on the unjust usurpation of Abdelazer's throne, there is here a clear beginning of Behn's notion of racial injustice. Abdelazer on multiple

⁹⁰ Ibid, 58.

⁹¹ Ibid, 61-3.

⁹² Aphra Behn, "Abdelazer," 14.

occasions mentions that the color of his skin will not preclude him from being a good and rightful ruler. In fact, Behn has a habit of vilifying any leader who is not considering, within his rights, to take over a kingdom. As many of the colonies were guided and lead by formal criminals Behn makes sure to remind audiences that just because a character became of a leader of a colony does not erase the fact that they may be a crooked civilian.

Behn's opinion of her English countrymen and women, especially those sent to America, can best be seen in her posthumously published *The Widdow Ranter* (1689). The play depicts a society that seems ultimately "pre-political" in that there is no definite ruling individual or group, and that the group that seems to have the status of "ruling" is actually unable to control or claim any real power over those around them.⁹³ Without clear delineations in what we may call modern day job descriptions, various members of their seemingly governmental establishment are unable to be on the same page causing trouble throughout the entire play. In a court scene Hazard helps point out how their current political appointments are not working:

Tim: Mark that, Brother, he drew.
Haz. If I did, it was *se defendendo*.
Tim. Do you hear that, Brothers, he did it in defiance.
Haz. Sir, you ought not to sit Judge and Accuser too.⁹⁴

The members of the court are made up of the crooks sent over by Britain to maintain order. Of course, they are incapable of this which is why Behn accepts Bacon's dominance over the land, which includes the Native Americans.

For Behn, as for other Stuart sympathizers like Dryden, without the

⁹³ Elliott Visconsi, "A Degenerate Race: English Barbarism in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and *The Widdow Ranter*," *English Literary History*: Vol. 69:3 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 674.

⁹⁴ Aphra Behn, "The Widdow Ranter," *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol 4*. ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 268.

check of an absolute sovereign guaranteeing the rule of law and without the proper filial bonds of love and duty between subject and sovereign, the English nation's intrinsic barbarity cannot be contained.⁹⁵

Behn's support for the idea of absolute monarchy is echoed by the character Bacon. She fashions him a "great-soul'd Man, no private Body e'er contain'd a nobler; and that he cou'd have conquered all *America*."⁹⁶ Her description of Bacon in *Ranter* is similar to that of Oroonoko who "had an extream good and graceful Mien, and all the Civility of a well-bred great Man."⁹⁷ As Visconsi points out, "[*Ranter*] echoes *Oroonoko* as a conflict between a warrior patriot and an explicitly barbarous mob in power."⁹⁸ Both stories are thought of by Visconsi as her two works that most overtly display Behn's desire for the reinstatement of monarchy. "In keeping with Stuart mythography, the only hope is a sovereign across the water who will reinstate civic obligations and bring about peace."⁹⁹

While the characters of Bacon and Oroonoko can both be seen as honorable men representing the ideal monarchy, it is important to draw a distinction between the two. Bacon, unlike Oroonoko, is often made to look foolish which somewhat undermines the theme of British conquest in a postcolonial way. Bacon wages war on the "Indians" because he *believes* the territory to be his property to fight for. Bacon tells the Native American King "I will not justify the Ingratitude of my Forefathers, finding here my Inheritance, I am resolv'd still to maintain it so; And by my sword which first cut out my

⁹⁵ Elliott Visconsi, "A Degenerate Race," 675.

⁹⁶ Aphra Behn, "The Widdow Ranter," 305.

⁹⁷ Aphra Behn, "Oroonoko," *A Norton Critical Edition: Oroonoko*, ed. Joanna Lipking (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 13.

⁹⁸ Elliott Visconsi, "A Degenerate Race," 691.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 691.

Portion, Defend each inch of Land with my last drop of Bloud.”¹⁰⁰ Oroonoko also wages war, but from what would be the perspective of the Native American King in *Ranter*. They both wage war for the purpose of procuring some civil liberty which they believe to be their own, conveying Behn’s dialectical, or uniformed, approach to the stealing vs. conquering of land. If there is any idea that Behn may support more heavily, it would be that of injustice, and in this case, that lies with Oroonoko. Although Behn supports Bacon, she is at times critical of his actions, contrasted with Oroonoko who receives little else but her sympathy. Though each of these characters represent different sides of the argument, each of which Behn can be sympathetic to, they do not offer one clear cut idea or answer.

If Oroonoko, Bacon, and the court of transgressors and common thieves are not able to solve the colonies’ problems then who does Behn suggest could? As mentioned in *The Widdow Ranter*, the colony is waiting for the governor to arrive from overseas and that man shall be able to save the colony. “Here we can see an echo of Behn’s domestic Stuart loyalism after the flight of James II and the Williamite Succession: England too wants a legitimate governor and waits for the promised return of the gallant man across the water.”¹⁰¹ Yet again, all of Behn’s opinions, no matter how dialectical they may be, are steeped in her death grip on absolute sovereignty.

¹⁰⁰ Aphra Behn, “The Widdow Ranter,” 245.

¹⁰¹ Elliott Visconsi, “A Degenerate Race,” 694.

Limited Mobility

*“Such homely Fare you’re like to find to night:
Our Author
Knows better how to juggle than to write.”*

-Spoken by Mr. Betterton¹⁰²

Behn’s success as a playwright is a testament to her skill as a writer, but it is equally illuminating of her grace at balancing tense topics in times of stifling censorship. Behn wanted success and opportunities for the advancement of herself and other aspiring lower-class female royalists. As such, she wrote what she knew she could get away with, while at the same time sneaking in sub-plots that echoed her awareness of unfair gender roles and subjugation of other races. Given the time Behn worked in she was constrained by theatrical conventions, political approval, and stifling female oppression. As such, she was limited in what she could say, and pushed the envelope as far as she safely could. Although burdened by boundaries Behn is a sure beginning for feminist and postcolonial movements, and incorporates both theories into her plays. In fact, it is her combination, and inability to separate them, that proves feminism and postcolonialism work better when they work together.

It would be interesting to see what Behn would have to say about the issues discussed in this chapter if she were writing in a time when there was more freedom of expression. Perhaps the closest we can get to ever knowing how her work might be different in another time period is to explore a contemporary playwright. Although Aphra Behn and Caryl Churchill have a great many disparities, their awareness of unnecessary

¹⁰² Aphra Behn, “Sir Patient Fancy,” *The Works of Aphra Behn: Vol. 4*, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 9.

gender and race inequalities is clear. In the following chapter, I will explore how Caryl Churchill, not subjected to political censorship, incorporates themes of gender and race into her plays.

Caryl Churchill

“Thatcher had just become prime minister; there was talk about whether it was an advance to have a woman prime minister if it was someone with policies like hers.”
-Caryl Churchill¹⁰³

Socialist Voice

Unlike Behn, who was interested in her own upward mobility, therefore loyal to the royals she thought could influence her success, Churchill is less concerned about being censored by the government. By 1968 censorship bans on theatre were lifted and she was at liberty to write what she wished without political interference. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Churchill has spent her life trying to change her economic situation, and she seems comfortable in her upper-to-middle class status. In 1960 she received her B.A. in English Literature from Lady Margaret Hall College of Oxford, where she also produced her first play.¹⁰⁴ Playwriting was not her intent upon entering college, but she found her interest while writing to help a friend who needed a directing project.¹⁰⁵ She wrote a few more plays, during and just following college, but switched to radio plays

¹⁰³ Kathleen Betsko, “Caryl Churchill,” 78.

¹⁰⁴ Victoria D. Sullivan, “Caryl Churchill,” *British Writers: Supplement 4*. (Scribner Writers Series, 1997), 180.

¹⁰⁵ Erica Beth Weintraub, “Caryl Churchill,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 13: British Dramatists Since World War II* (Pennsylvania State University: Gale Research, 1982), 118.

after marrying barrister David Harter in 1961.¹⁰⁶ Churchill took on the role of wife and mother, and it was in this time that she truly began recognizing her disdain for the imperial, capitalist system.

Churchill, like Behn, was politically aware of power structures in Britain, and while the climate and familial surroundings in which Churchill was immersed were different, she still manages to discover groups oppressed by white male imperial powers.¹⁰⁷ Churchill mentions that “the years she spent at home with the children ‘politicized’ her.”¹⁰⁸ As little as Churchill talks about her private life the episode involving her identification as woman, wife, and worker is commonly discussed:

[S]he has discussed with several interviewers this period of domestic change, clearly seeing it as providing a necessary adjustment for a woman who was a wife, mother, playwright.¹⁰⁹

Through the various accounts of Churchill’s life as mother, wife, and author, it is clear that she has a feminist agenda, but her feminism includes political agendas as well. Churchill states in a 1984 interview that “socialism and feminism aren’t synonymous, but I feel strongly about both and wouldn’t be interested in a form of one that didn’t include the other.”¹¹⁰

Some half a century before Churchill began writing the Empire began dealing with decolonization. During World War I it seemed as though Britain and its Empire were standing to fight together and that the cumulative Empire was at its strongest.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Churchill, unlike Behn, is a wife and mother. Though Behn was speculatively married, it was short-lived, unlike Churchill who spent many years as a stay-at-home mother.

¹⁰⁸ Frances Grey, “Caryl Churchill,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 310: British and Irish Dramatists Since World War II, Fourth Series*, ed. John Bull (Michigan: Gale, 2005), 51.

¹⁰⁹ Victoria D. Sullivan, “Caryl Churchill,” *British Writers: Supplement 4* (Michigan: Gale, 1997), 182.

¹¹⁰ Kathleen Betsko, “Caryl Churchill,” 78.

However, the imperial rule was still enforcing a color bar which listed whites as the superior race. As a result of the color bar tension began rising in regards to race and civil rights.¹¹¹ The imperial rulers started to see that their Empire did not work well with the idea of democracy and what they thought was an Empire at its strongest was beginning to crumble.

Gender and race were essential to the Empire as pro-imperialist bourgeoisie believed that only strong, sexually moral, white, rugged, men who were driven by a militaristic sense of duty would be able to restore order. As for the weak, immoral, men and women of various races, they were viewed as the degeneration of the Empire. In Churchill's *Owners*, Worsely is seen as one such man. Due to his lack of action he is viewed by what we believe to be a strong, white, shop-owner as worthless and not participating in society by getting a job and supporting his family. However, in the end, it is Clegg, the shop-owner, who is not able to keep his shop open. As the Empire was being weakened by democracy, and thus decolonization, formerly subjugated groups were able to advance their own agendas.

By the 1970s, in Britain, things were changing on the feminist and socialist fronts. 1971 saw a women's liberation march in London, in 1975 the Equal Pay Act took effect, and in 1981 race riots took place around the United Kingdom. These landmark moments are only a very small sampling of the civil equality actions, and revolt, taking place in London and the United Kingdom at the time. Struggles for liberation and equality

¹¹¹ Barbara Bush, "Gender and Empire: The Twentieth Century," *Gender and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 79.

permeate the environment in which Churchill is actively producing, and it is clear that events of the time affect her work.

Epic Theatre

“I realized I preferred things as plays. It has something to with...liking things actually happening.”

-Caryl Churchill¹¹²

In her first stage play, *Owners* (1972), Churchill dove immediately into issues of power and gender relations, a subject from which she rarely deviates. Although the political climate of late twentieth century England influenced many playwrights, including males, to work toward leftist causes, Churchill added depth to the issue by backing her argument with historic as well as modern scenarios. By writing characters throughout different time periods, who encounter similar situations, Churchill is able to represent the argument of oppression, the fact that it is a problem affecting many, it is not just a modern problem, and therefore needs serious attention so it does not continue any longer. Her plays include characters and situations from time periods spanning hundreds of years. *Pope Joan* is from the ninth century, and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976) takes place in the seventeenth century – Behn’s time.

By incorporating a range of characters throughout different moments in time Churchill is able to cover a wide range of human conditions. Unlike Behn, who was more interested in displaying dissent among royalty, Churchill portrays political or world

¹¹² Erica Beth Weintraub, “Caryl Churchill,” 118.

events from the perspective of oppressed. Grey writes that it is precisely this realness of character that makes an audience unable to view the play as a mere fantasy:

To watch *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, for example, is to experience a disorienting shift of focus. The play presents the experiences of the ordinary people who made the English revolution in the seventeenth century.¹¹³

In Act I of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* Churchill has a preacher tell the poor they too are worthy and “A noble can be damned and a beggar saved.”¹¹⁴ By focusing the play on ordinary people Churchill allows the audience to associate with the characters more easily. In appealing to the audience she prevents them from writing off the character, and their situations, as a something that could not or would not happen to them.¹¹⁵ She also illustrates the fact that the stories we are often told, even by feminists such as Behn, are the stories of those in power and not the unheard masses:

We are told of a step toward today’s democracy but not of a revolution that didn’t happen; we are told of Charles and Cromwell, but not of the thousands of men and women who tried to change their lives.¹¹⁶

Churchill warns that the big picture is not best told by the big players, but by the ones which it affected. The experts on the histories of oppression are not the oppressors such as Cromwell or kings, but the thousands who were affected by those in positions of power.

¹¹³ Frances Grey, “Caryl Churchill,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 310: British and Irish Dramatists Since World War II, Fourth Series*, ed. John Bull (Michigan: Gale, 2005), 53.

¹¹⁴ Caryl Churchill, “Light Shining in Buckinghamshire,” *Plays: One* (London: Methuen, 1985), 201.

¹¹⁵ This is associated with the notion in Epic Theatre that the audience should always be aware they are watching a play, and can therefore approach its subject matter critically.

¹¹⁶ Erica Beth Weintraub, “Caryl Churchill,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 13: British Dramatists Since World War II*, ed. Stanley Weintraub. (Michigan: Gale, 1982), 121.

The way in which Churchill achieves investment of the audience is through the use of Brecht's alienation effect. The goal of Epic theatre, the type in which Churchill frequently operates, is to keep the audience critically aware that they are watching a play in order to encourage dialectical thinking and discussion about the plays socially critical subjects. Epic theatre arose in reaction to Naturalism, Melodrama, and the Theatre of Cruelty, each of which either absorb audiences into their worlds or create strong emotional reactions in audience members rendering them incapable of logically contemplating a play's presented subject.

Churchill addresses her audiences directly in plays such as *Vinegar Tom* by pulling the actors out of character, period costume, and having them sing to the audience (a Brechtian procedure).¹¹⁷ One such song occurs in the last scene after two experts on witchcraft, played by women, come in to discuss why women are weak and prone to witchcraft. The dialogue preceding the song showcases the arguments used to validate the torture of women, and therefore witches:

Sprenger: A defect of intelligence.

Kramer: A defect of inordinate passions.

Sprenger: They brood on vengeance.

Kramer/Sprenger: Wherefore it is no wonder they are witches.

Kramer: Women have weak memories.

Sprenger: Follow their own impulses.

Kramer: Nearly all the kingdoms of the worlds have been over-thrown by women.¹¹⁸

Having Kramer and Sprenger played by women heightens the illogical assertions they are making about women. Creating a scene that could be written of as comedic, Churchill

¹¹⁷ Spontaneous songs were common in Restoration drama as well, however, in the plays of Behn, such as *Abdelazer*, songs are present but there is no proof whether in performance they were delivered while in or out of character.

¹¹⁸ Caryl Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," *Plays: One*, (London: Methuen, 1985), 177.

follows up with a direct address, through the medium of song, shocking the audience, and ending the play:

Evil women
Is that what you want?
Is that what you want to see?
On the movie screen
Of your own wet dream
Evil women...

Does she do what she's told or does she nag?
Are you cornered in the kitchen by a bitching hag?¹¹⁹

Not only does the song serve as a direct address to the audience, but it also takes the play out of the time period in which the action operates. Clearly, there were no movie screens in the seventeenth century, making the lyrics a direct question to the audience, forcing them to reflect on their expectations, as well as stereotypes, of women. *Vinegar Tom* also allows Churchill to present her feminist and political messages as always operating in tandem. While the political regime said they were combating the witch problem, the excuses made by Kramer and Sprenger illustrate how it was mostly used as a way to punish women specifically. Churchill discovered the extent of feminine oppression within witch hunting in workshops of the play in its early stages with the Joint Stock theatre:

I discovered for the first time the extent of Christian teaching against women and saw the connections between medieval attitudes to witches and continuing attitudes to women in general. The women accused of witchcraft were often those on the edges of society, old, poor, single, sexually unconventional.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 178.

¹²⁰ Caryl Churchill, *Plays: One*, (London: Methuen, 1985), 129-30.

In this statement, Churchill also reinforces the idea that marginalization does not occur in a vacuum, rather, all marginalized people are oppressed by the same power institutions and therefore can work together, or through each other, fighting for the same causes.

Churchill's mission to be inclusive of the audience members she involves is echoed in her writing process. The best way to predict what the audience can sympathize with is to gather the input of the masses. Churchill often works or gets inspiration from a collaborative setting, allowing her actors the opportunity for improvisation; stating and acting out what they would say or what they believe characters would say. Churchill mentions in regard to the writing of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* that "many of the characters and scenes were based on ideas that came from improvisation at the workshop and during rehearsal."¹²¹ Although Churchill has worked collaboratively on multiple productions, she does work alone as well. Even when working alone it is evident she is aware of the various struggles individuals encounter.

Unscripted Roles

"I had the image of the black man aspiring to white values and literally being a white negro. And the idea of a woman who has taken on men's values, a sort of man-made woman who has no sense of herself as a woman."

-Caryl Churchill¹²²

Perhaps the play the best highlights the feminist/socialist relationship is *Top Girls*, a play that brings together the disparity between American and British feminism. The play begins as a feminist one in which Churchill highlights the accomplishments of various

¹²¹ Ibid., 184.

¹²² Erica Beth Weintraub, "Caryl Churchill," 125.

women such as Pope Joan, who folklore tells as having attained the status of Pope which was a position only to be held by men, and Dull Gret who led women into battle through the mouth of hell. Then, Churchill moves the play into a more socialist theme by focusing on the character Marlene whose only achievement that seems beyond ordinary for a woman is becoming the top executive at a job placement agency. Churchill's female protagonists often exist in a climate of dissension between what some of their male, and sometimes even female counterparts, want them to be and the feminine desire for autonomy. In one scene of *Top Girls*, Mrs. Kidd, the wife of the man who was competing with her for the top position comes to ask Marlene to resign so her husband can have the position. Mrs. Kidd even goes so far as to plead, woman to woman, that Marlene understand what Howard's not getting the position does to her:

Mrs. Kidd. It's me that bears the brunt. I'm not the one that's been promoted. I put him first every inch of the way. And now what do I get? You women this, you women that. It's not my fault. You're going to have to be very careful how you handle him. He's very hurt.

Going further yet, Mrs. Kidd adds that this is reverse sexism:

Marlene: Naturally I'll be tactful and pleasant to him, you don't start pushing someone around. I'll consult him over any decisions affecting his department. But that's no different, Mrs. Kidd, from any of my other colleagues.

Mrs. Kidd: I think it is different, because he's a man.¹²³

Though Mrs. Kidd may not be completely in order going to Marlene's office asking for a position for her husband, she does represent the woman on the other side of the house wife/working mother dichotomy. Whether Mrs. Kidd is a house wife or Marlene is a working mother, they are both pressured by the males around them, but more importantly

¹²³ Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*, (Ontario: Samuel French, Inc.), 69.

Churchill holds both women responsible for their own choices. While Mrs. Kidd comes to talk to Marlene in an attempt to change her situation, Marlene having neglected her own child for her advancement, is insensitive to concerns of a housewife. The working mother/housewife issue is explored more between Marlene and her sister, Joyce, who has taken in Marlene's daughter, Angie, as her own. Marlene was so convinced that she could not be successful if she was a mother that she left Angie with her sister. They argue about their own lives and how they let children and men affect their choices:

Joyce: Turned out all right for you by the look of you. You'd be getting a few less thousand a year... You didn't want to take her with you. It's no good coming back now, Marlene... Listen when Angie was six months I did get pregnant and I lost it because I was tired looking after your fucking baby.¹²⁴

After they finally admit that Marlene abandoned Angie for her career and Joyce would have rather gotten rid of her so she could have her own children, they then move on to how they let men affect their lives:

Marlene: So what's this about you and Frank?
Joyce: He was always carrying on, wasn't he. And if I wanted to go out in the evening he'd go mad, even if it was nothing, a class, I was going to go to an evening class.¹²⁵

After Joyce discovers that she let Frank influence her decision regarding her education Marlene makes clear that she will not let men affect her dreams:

Marlene: There's fellas who like to be seen with a high-flying lady. Shows they've got something really good in their pants. But they can't take the day to day. They're waiting for me to turn into the little woman. Or maybe I'm just horrible of course.
Joyce: Who needs them.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 90.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 93.

Marlene: Who needs them. Well I do. But I need adventures more. So on on into the sunset. I think the eighties are going to be stupendous.¹²⁶

Marlene communicates the idea that she believes the country is in for a change, and one that will profit her even more than equality for women in the workplace. By showing Joyce, Marlene, and other characters in *Top Girls* as empowered and simultaneously oppressed, Churchill engages in a dialectical conversation that is often seen in her plays. She challenges the conventions of sexuality, race, and traditional British politics.

The play in relation to which Churchill is most touted for her ability to destroy all sorts of pre-scripted conventions is *Cloud 9*. Churchill's technique in destroying conventions of gender, class, and race, is to assign traditionally unacceptable traits to characters and have the white powerful male attempt to fix them. In Act I, Uncle Harry has homosexual tendencies and preys on the young son of Clive, Edward. Another character in the play, Ellen, is interested in Clive's wife, Betty. Betty corrects Ellen's lesbian advances by telling her "women have their duty as soldiers have. You must be a mother if you can."¹²⁷ In order to correct the "problem" of Ellen and Harry as homosexuals, respectively, Clive the morally righteous white male imperialist decides to have Ellen and Harry marry each other. Clive tells Harry that his "disease... can destroy an empire" and that Harry "must get married."¹²⁸ During the conversation they are ranking "sins" such as adultery, homosexuality, and suicide, and Clive uses the Empire and Christian doctrine to back his arguments. They even blame women, citing Eve as the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 94.

¹²⁷ Caryl Churchill. "Cloud 9," *Plays: One* (London: Methuen, 1985), 281.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 283.

cause of the downfall, in order to prove that “God made man white like him”¹²⁹ thus, ranking the white male at the top of the hierarchy.

In addition to dealing with traits of gender and sexuality, *Cloud 9* critiques imperial rule and colonization as well. In Phyllis R. Randall’s *Casebook* on Churchill she mentions that in viewing some of Churchill’s early work one can find her “concern with the narrowness of Western bourgeois values, their potential to affect innocent or questing lives, and the underlying violence inherent in such a system.”¹³⁰ The worry of bourgeois values affecting the innocent transfers directly into the idea of colonization, and in *Cloud 9*, these values are portrayed in the treatment of Joshua. The first thing Churchill does with Joshua is cast him with a white actor, which causes an audience to see the absurdity of oppression in that if you take away physical characteristics humans are essentially the same.¹³¹ By cross-racially casting Joshua, Churchill also makes it impossible for the audience to be completely pulled into the world of the play. In maintaining distance the audience is able to hear and reflect on the message more clearly as it does not seem like oppression specific to only one character, instead it becomes a problem that affects multiple types of people and supported by someone who is clearly an actor.

The first time Joshua enters the play he is stifled in his freedom of speech. Trying to communicate to Betty, through a joke, that she can get a book that is clearly within her reach, Joshua is chastised for his forwardness:

¹²⁹ Ibid., 280.

¹³⁰ Phyllis R. Randall, “Beginnings: Churchill’s Early Radio and Stage Plays,” *Caryl Churchill: A Casebook*. ed. Phyllis R. Randall (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 5.

¹³¹ While the character of Joshua was originally played by a white man because the Joint Stock Company had no black actors, the idea stuck and in subsequent publications of the play text, edited by Churchill, Joshua continues to have the casting direction “black servant, played by a white.”

Clive: You didn't pass it at once?
Joshua: No sir, I made a joke first.
Clive: What was that?
Joshua: I said my legs were tired, sir. That was funny because the book was very near, it would not make my legs tired to get it.¹³²

Clive not only stifles Joshua and forces narrow bourgeois values on him, but onto his children as well. When his son, Edward, wants to play with a doll Clive reestablishes what he deems the appropriate hierarchical roles:

Clive: What's that you're holding?
Betty: It's Victoria's doll. What are you doing with it, Edward?
Edward: Minding her.
Betty: Well I should give it to Ellen quickly. You don't want papa to see you with a doll.
Clive: No, we had you with Victoria's doll once before, Edward.
Ellen: He's minding it for Vicky. He's not playing with it.
Betty: He's not playing with it, Clive. He's minding it for Vicky.
Clive: Ellen minds Victoria, let Ellen mind the doll.¹³³

In this exchange Clive has the final word in telling the family how it will run. In the scene, Betty and Ellen both try to convince Clive that Edward is not doing anything wrong but Clive refuses to listen to them, almost throughout the entire play.

A further complication of female expansion into the white colonial structure was encountered when the women were sometimes not welcomed graciously by males. Before imperialists began encouraging women to move throughout the Empire, or join their husbands in other areas of British rule, men sometimes inhabited their house in the colonies without any female residents. As a result, when women moved to them there was often tension between the male servants in the home who had ran the household thus

¹³² Caryl Churchill, "Cloud 9," 255.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 257.

far “pretty well without any female influence.”¹³⁴ These women could often be seen as creating breaches in male camaraderie, something Betty is blamed for in *Cloud 9* when she lusts after Clive’s friend, Harry, thus causing dissention among the male friends. The threat to male camaraderie can also be seen in the scenes involving Betty and Joshua, such as the book scene already discussed, when Joshua will not do as Betty wishes unless instructed by Clive.

In *Cloud 9*, Churchill expands disparities in civil rights to the arenas of gender, age, and race. She incorporates feminism and postcolonialism in this one piece and tears down countless divisive boundaries. The strongest element that she incorporates in the play to demolish boundaries is the notion of performative gender, age, and race. By casting female roles with men, young roles with older actors, and even human roles with non-living dolls, Churchill displays that people do not have to behave certain ways or live under certain rules simply because of their gender, age, and race. She crafts a play that portrays how humans assign meaning, and that the meanings we assign to signs are often created by those in power. Duty is something defined by patriarchal power structures exemplified in Clive saying to his son:

You should always respect and love me, Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and loved my own father, because he was my father. Through our father we love our Queen and our God, Edward. Do you understand? It is something men understand.¹³⁵

Clive goes on to tell him that he spends too much time with the women and that he should spend more time with his father and Uncle Harry. Churchill illustrates how

¹³⁴ Barbara Bush, “Gender and Empire: The Twentieth Century,” 92.

¹³⁵ Caryl Churchill, “Cloud 9,” 276.

traditional meaning suggesting that male characters will be the best influence does not always hold true considering that Uncle Harry has actually been engaging in sexual acts with his nephew.

Perhaps the best example of Clive's power as the white male father is when he establishes what family roles will mean.

Clive: I am a father to the natives here,
And father to my family so dear.
(He presents BETTY. She is played by a man.)
My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be,
And everything she is she owes to me.¹³⁶

Betty even agrees with Clive that she is "man's creation." His son mentions that he would like what his father wants him to be, even though it does not agree with his own desires. Placing Clive's speech on what people should be at the very beginning allows the audience to bear in mind the ridiculous roles Clive has ascribed to his family members.

In Act II, Betty is able to realize that her life used only to be viewed through Clive's lens, and that it did not belong to her. She tells Ellen "I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there."¹³⁷ However, by the end of Act II it is evident that Betty has been able to value herself separately from the opinions of Clive. In fact, the last action of the show is Betty from Act I embracing Betty from Act II. However, Silverstein cautions that an audience should not take this conclusion to mean that the character of Betty has now become whole. He suggests that:

[T]he embrace of actor and actress images the "ceaseless exchange of herself with the other" that Irigaray codes as internal to the female body. It is precisely because this exchange is "ceaseless" that the other can

¹³⁶ Ibid., 251.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 316.

preserve its otherness, rather than being absorbed and cancelled, within the self.¹³⁸

Because the exchange continues to take place it “refuses to distinguish subject and object, self and other; pleasure is neither given nor received, but endlessly circulates between the two figures who are ‘neither one nor two.’”¹³⁹ In this way, signs and meanings can never fully take hold as a way to create uneven power situations. “Churchill thus stages an economy of female pleasure in which auto-eroticism, homo-eroticism, and hetero-eroticism all coexist without competing for hierarchical pride of place.”¹⁴⁰ All-embracing alterity evident in *Cloud 9* and well as Churchill’s other plays conveys her sense of collaboration within the discourses of feminism and postcolonialism from the goals of socialism.

A Blank Stage

“For the first time I brought together two preoccupations of mine – people’s internal states of being and the external political structures which affect them, which make them insane.”

-Caryl Churchill¹⁴¹

Churchill, like Behn, gives countless examples of how oppression against women and colonized people is often caused by the detrimental signs created by those in power. Fortunately, for Churchill, she writes at a time with greater freedom of expression in theatre, and in an environment encouraging of political and economic critique.

¹³⁸ Marc Silverstein, “Make Us the Women We Can’t Be: *Cloud Nine* and the Female Imagery,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, (Kansas: University of Kansas, Spring 1994), 19.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Erica Beth Weintraub, “Caryl Churchill,” 123.

Surrounded by liberation movements, Churchill was in an environment already harboring tendencies toward gender and race equality, and in the presence of an audience willing to hear such issues boldly presented. Here is where we encounter the major difference between Behn and Churchill's agendas – based on the political structures and its level of control on the action of individuals, the two authors were forced, or allowed, to write with varying levels of openness. As Behn had to disguise her dialogue under socially acceptable material, Churchill can cut straight to the point. Furthermore, Behn's insistence on absolute sovereigns is what contributed to her acceptance of political submission whereas Churchill displays a complete lack of concern for what her government's heads of state think of her plays. Different though they may be, in the Epilogue I will discuss how the plays of Aphra Behn and Caryl Churchill, in tandem, critique power systems that have for a long time oppressed others, and continue to do so today.

Epilogue

“If repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost.”

-Michel Foucault¹⁴²

Apparent throughout the works of Aphra Behn and Caryl Churchill is that forms of othering are not simply often grouped together, but inseparable. In *Cloud 9*, the enslavement of Jonathan is not a mere postcolonial issue but also a class, race, and gender issue. Similarly, it would be remiss to believe that women or the gender dichotomy, as it exists, has no influence whatsoever on colonization. As *Cloud 9* illustrates it was the gradual female involvement in the colonized lands that increased the tension in the master/slave relationship. Similarly, the oppression of women by men is often a form of colonization. Women are ruled, controlled, and in some places, even to this day, owned.

In *Abdelazer*, Behn clearly shows that foreign and female “others” are those who suffer for the property and power quests of white ruling class males. Abdelazer has been denied the right to rule his native land while women, in this case the Queen, are thrown about by multiple men as pawns for their own advancement into power. Even when females may seem to be of some humane interest, such as the love Bacon has for the

¹⁴² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, (England: Vintage Books, 1990), 5.

Native American Queen in *The Widdow Ranter*, when it comes to fighting for property or power they are no longer first in the mind of a man.

What Behn and Churchill make very clear is that alterity is often perceived within multiple frameworks. People are “othered” for myriad reasons and more important than the individual affronts is that oppression and subjugation are happening in general. As long as oppressed peoples divide themselves further into subgroups defined by categories such as gender or race they will never be strong enough to fight against the massive body of oppression. Just as armies realized they could increase their number of troops by allowing women and people of other races to fight, so should this fight against oppression realize that if discourses can collaborate where possible they can bulk their argument against similar dominant ideologies of oppression. When compatible collaboration is not possible, discursive theories of analysis can examine their tensions and how differences help to further define their own area of study, and help to understand oppression in general.

Part of the problem with theory is that it often has no hard proof that is tried and true; but in this case, Aphra Behn and Caryl Churchill provide some clear evidence. It takes the Widow Ranter, herself, in breeches, alongside a man to help win a battle, just as it takes the masculine, work-driven Marlene and her effeminate, housewife sister Joyce to raise and support a child. Not only do characters illuminate that wars of oppression should be fought, but the authors do as well. Both women conveyed their messages to the masses by achieving success in a male-dominated field. Behn often adapted the works of male playwrights, working with them by building on what they had already produced and

in many cases presenting a more successful result. Churchill worked with all sorts of different people in workshop environments, producing a more powerful message of subjugation by assembling the masses into one, much stronger, voice of the play.

Theatre accentuates the dialogic nature of art and the play is a media by which many voices, those of the author and the characters, are finally allowed to discuss from various viewpoints the issues it presents. Out of the many creative art forms playwriting offers the most in depth and realistic presentation of the world as it exists. Actors are three dimensional and they can interact with and speak to the audience. They can take on various opinions, most of which are always related by the actors and characters themselves. Gone are the days of the epic where one narrator relates the whole story, and we follow one practically flawless character through this quest for and ascent to recognition and power. The characters of the play allow an audience to identify with tangible people, settings, and events, and thus flexibility to break down preconceptions that lead to othering. Female characters can be played by male actors, black characters can be played by white actors, and women can don breeches to fight in a battle. It is the possibilities of theatre and playwriting, which Behn and Churchill capitalize on, that can truly present what otherness is, how it affects people, and how it can best be fought, by an ensemble cast with many different players.

As successful playwriting may be in influencing recognition of social issues the war has not been won. After three-hundred-fifty plus years of plays depicting the mistreatment of the lower classes, women, and people of other races, oppression is not eradicated. Sure, steps have been made, but as Foucault argues, “it stands to reason that

we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost.” If that is the case, what would the considerable cost be? A complete over throw of male imperial systems, the failure of the global economy, or the extinction of the entire human race? These questions and more can continue to be discussed in the discourses of oppression, which at this time operate individually. So far, the separation of discourses has not achieved the overall eradication of oppression, therefore, discourses such as feminism and postcolonialism may only find better answers if and when they work together.

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Vita

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