

# Cloud Nine Study Guide

## Cloud Nine by Caryl Churchill

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# Contents

<a href="#">Cloud Nine Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Introduction.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Author Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Scene 1.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Scene 2.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Scene 3.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Scene 4.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Scene 5.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Scene 1.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Scene 2.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Scene 3.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Scene 4.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Historical Context.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Critical Overview.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Further Study.....</a>	<a href="#">49</a>
<a href="#">Compare and Contrast.....</a>	<a href="#">50</a>
<a href="#">What Do I Read Next?.....</a>	<a href="#">51</a>
<a href="#">Further Study.....</a>	<a href="#">52</a>
<a href="#">Bibliography.....</a>	<a href="#">53</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">54</a>



# Introduction

*Cloud Nine*, by British playwright Caryl Churchill, was first performed at Dartington College of Arts in February 1979 by the Joint Stock Theatre Group. It was then performed on tour at the Royal Court Theatre in London and was first staged in New York in 1981.

*Cloud Nine*, which can be found in Churchill's *Plays One* (London and New York, 1985), was a popular and critical success. In addition to frequently being very amusing, the play highlights colonial and gender oppression. The first act is set in the nineteenth century in an African country ruled by Britain, and Churchill satirizes the repressive nature of the Victorian family, the rigidity of narrowly prescribed gender roles, and the phenomenon whereby oppressed peoples in colonized countries take on the identity of the colonizers. Act two takes place in London one hundred years later with mostly the same characters, who have aged only twenty-five years. In this act, Churchill explores such topics as women's liberation, gay liberation, and the sexual revolution, all of which were prominent social movements in Britain, as well as the United States, in the 1970s.



## Author Biography

Caryl Churchill was born on September 3, 1938, in London, England. She spent most of her early childhood in and near London before her family moved in 1948 to Montreal, Canada, where Churchill attended the Trafalgar School until 1955. Churchill began to write as a young girl, and she also developed an early interest in the theater. She continued these interests during her undergraduate years, which began in 1957 when she enrolled at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, in England. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English in 1960. During her university years, two of her plays received student productions, and in 1962, *The Ants*, her first professional radio play, was broadcast.

In 1961, she married David Harter, a barrister, and from 1963 to 1969 the couple had three sons. During this period Churchill continued to write radio plays, including *Identical Twins* (1968), and to develop a socialist and feminist approach to drama. Churchill's first professional stage production was *Owners*, performed at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London in 1972. The play premiered in New York the following year. During the 1970s, Churchill wrote a number of plays that were broadcast on BBC television, including *Turkish Delight* (1974) and *The After-Dinner Joke* (1978). Her two stage plays, *Objections to Sex and Violence* (1975) and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), brought her critical attention. The latter play was the result of Churchill's involvement in London's experimental Joint Stock Theatre Group. Another play written for Joint Stock was *Cloud Nine*, which in 1979 became Churchill's first big success. It was also a hit in the United States, where it opened off-Broadway in New York at the Theatre de Lys in May 1981 to positive reviews and large audiences. *Cloud Nine* won the Obie Award in 1982. Churchill followed this success with *Top Girls*, a play that portrays women achieving success by imitating the worst of male behaviors. It was staged at Royal Court Theatre in 1982 and transferred to New York later that year. It also won an Obie Award. In 1983, Churchill wrote *Fen*, which was the result of a group of Joint Stock actors and playwrights living for two weeks in a hard-pressed farming community in the Fens of England. *Fen* was a critical and popular success in London and New York, and it won the 1984 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize.

After *Softcops* (1984), which was performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, and *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), co-written with David Lan, Churchill wrote *Serious Money* (1987), a play about greed and financial scandal on London's stock exchange. Two short plays followed, *Ice Cream* and *Hot Fudge* (1989), and then *Mad Forest* (1990), in which Churchill examined life in Romania before, during, and after the downfall of the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. During the 1990s, Churchill wrote *Lives of the Great Poisoners* (1991); the surreal and mythic *The Skriker* (1994); *Thyestes* (1994), a translation of a play by Seneca; *Hotel* (1997), in which all the parts are sung; and *This Is a Chair* (1999).



# Plot Summary

## Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1 of *Cloud Nine* is set in a British African colony in the nineteenth century. The first scene takes place on the verandah of a house. After an opening song introduces the characters, Clive tells his wife, Betty, that he is expecting a visitor, Harry Bagley, an explorer. Betty tells Clive that their black servant, Joshua, insulted her, and Clive makes Joshua apologize. Then the family gathers: their children Victoria and Edward; the governess, Ellen; and Betty's mother, Maud. Edward is looking after Victoria's doll, which annoys his father because he thinks this is unmasculine. Betty is nervous at the thought of entertaining a guest. Mrs. Saunders, a widowed neighbor, arrives to take shelter; the local tribes are preparing for war, and she is afraid to stay in her own house. Harry arrives, and he and Clive speak about the dangerous situation, exhibiting a disdainful view of the indigenous people. Harry and Betty are left alone; they are romantically attracted to each other. The scene ends as Harry, who is bisexual, propositions Joshua for sex.

## Act 1, Scene 2

A couple of nights later, in an open space some distance from the house, Mrs. Saunders meets with Clive. It is revealed that Clive has already seduced her and has a sexual passion for her, which she goes along with even though she does not like him. The family gathers for a Christmas picnic. They play a ball game, but the men monopolize it, claiming that the women cannot catch. Then everyone plays hide and seek. Joshua warns Clive that the stable boys are not reliable and are carrying knives. Harry and Betty exchange endearments, and Betty bemoans the fact that they can never be alone. Edward says he loves Harry, and it is clear that they have on former occasions had sex with each other. Betty confides in Ellen that she loves Harry, and Ellen reveals that she is in love with Betty.

## Act 1, Scene 3

In the house, the women discuss the fact that the stable boys are being flogged, and Mrs. Saunders goes to investigate the situation. Edward is still fond of Victoria's doll, but Betty takes it away from him and slaps him, and Ellen slaps him also. Edward confesses to the returning Clive that he said bad things about his father, but Clive forgives him because he owned up. Clive reveals that he knows of Betty's feelings for Harry and is ready to forgive her, but he says she must resist her lustful feelings or they will destroy their marriage.



## Act 1, Scene 4

On the verandah, Clive tells of a raid by British soldiers on a nearby village. Edward pleads with Harry to stay, while Ellen says she only wants to be with Betty forever. Clive tells Harry that he values male friendship; Harry misinterprets this and makes a sexual advance, which disgusts Clive, who tells Harry that he must save himself by marrying. Mrs. Saunders informs Clive that Joshua's parents were killed in the British raid, but when Clive offers him a day off, Joshua sides with the British, saying his parents were bad people. Harry proposes marriage to Mrs. Saunders, who is not interested, and then to Ellen.

## Act 1, Scene 5

On the verandah, there is a wedding reception for Harry and Ellen. Ellen confesses to Betty that she knows nothing about lovemaking, but Betty says there is nothing to it. Mrs. Saunders announces that she is leaving the next day, and Clive kisses her, which prompts Betty to lunge at her in a jealous assault. Clive blames Mrs. Saunders and says she must leave instantly. After her departure, Harry makes a speech, the wedding cake is cut, and then Clive makes a speech also, congratulating the couple and saying that all is well. But at that moment, Joshua readies himself to shoot Clive. Edward sees this but does nothing to alert the others.

## Act 2, Scene 1

This scene takes place one hundred years later on a winter afternoon in a London park. Some of the characters from act one reappear, but they are only twenty-five years older. Victoria is married to Martin, and they have a son, Tommy. Victoria's friend Lin, who is divorced, has a four-year-old girl, Cathy. Cathy plays with a gun as the two women talk about the problems of parenting; Lin says that she is a lesbian and hates men. Edward, who is a gardener at the park, arrives and tells Victoria that their mother is walking there. This is not good news for Victoria, since she does not like her mother. Betty appears with Tommy, who has a bruise from playing rough games. Betty announces that she is going to leave Clive. When Betty leaves, Edward and Victoria express their surprise and consternation, believing that now, both their parents will need a lot of attention. As the scene ends, Lin propositions Victoria for sex.

## Act 2, Scene 2

In the spring, Edward and his gay lover Gerry are outside in the open air. Edward seeks an explanation of where Gerry was the previous night, but Gerry is evasive. After Edward leaves, Gerry tells of his sexual adventures in a soliloquy. Victoria and Betty talk. Betty says she is worried that she will not be able to manage on her own, now that she has left Clive. She is frightened. Martin tries to offer Victoria support in her dilemma about whether to accept a job in Manchester, but his advice is not much use to her



because he is more concerned with demonstrating how good and understanding he is than with helping her. Lin is in love with Victoria and asks her to live with her. Then Lin reveals that her brother, a British soldier, has been killed that morning in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Gerry tells Edward he is bored with their relationship, which is too much like that between husband and wife. Gerry says he is moving out of the apartment they share. Edward expresses amorous interest in his sister, touching her breasts, and she does not object.

## **Act 2, Scene 3**

In the park on a summer night, Victoria, Lin, and Edward are drunk. They perform a farcical ceremony in preparation for a sexual orgy. Martin arrives, and the three of them jump on him and try to make love to him. They are interrupted by a stranger who turns out to be Lin's dead brother, Bill, who is there because he wants sex. As the others leave, Gerry arrives on his own and tells the audience how he picks up lovers in the park. Then all the characters sing a song called Cloud Nine, which is an expression for sexual ecstasy.

## **Act 2, Scene 4**

It is an afternoon in late summer. Lin, Edward, and Victoria now live together along with the two children. Betty arrives and announces that she has a job as a doctor's receptionist and enjoys it. When Betty, Lin, and Victoria leave, Gerry arrives. Edward tells him that he is now unemployed and that in his new domestic situation, he does the housework. Gerry tells him of another sexual adventure; they arrange to meet for a meal. When they leave, Betty returns and tells of her sexual awakening. Victoria reveals that she has decided to go to Manchester. After she leaves, Betty befriends Gerry and invites him to dinner. She says she knows that both her son and Gerry are gay and that this does not distress her. Then Clive appears for the first time since act one and says that he does not feel the same way about Betty that he used to. He also bemoans the loss of the British Empire. Finally, Betty from act one enters, and she and Betty from act two embrace.





# Act 1, Scene 1

## Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

This act is set in the late 1800's in Africa, during the period when it is being ruled by the British Empire. The play begins with a patriotic song celebrating the joys of British society. Clive, the father, introduces his family: his wife Betty (played by a man); his son Edward (played by a woman); his daughter Victoria (played by a doll); his black servant Joshua (played by a white actor); his mother-in-law, Maud; his best friend, Harry (an adventurer); and the family's governess, Ellen. Clive, Maud, Harry and Ellen are all played by actors of the same gender as their characters.

After the song, the actual story begins. Clive arrives home from a trip to visit several native villages. Betty welcomes him, telling him about all of the womanly things (such as playing the piano and reading poetry) that she's been up to. Clive approves, and then tells her to expect some excitement: a visit from Harry. Betty protests that she doesn't like him, but Clive orders her to be a good hostess. Betty meekly agrees, and then hesitantly tells Clive that Joshua had been rude to her. Clive calls Joshua in for an explanation, and when Joshua tells a different story from Betty; Clive believes him. As Joshua leaves, Clive sends for the children. Before they arrive, Maud enters and urges Clive to pay more attention to Betty. As Ellen appears with the children, Clive tells Maud that since he looks after the Queen's lands, he can certainly be trusted to look after his own wife.

Once the children enter the room, Clive plays with Victoria, and Betty reveals that Edward has been caught playing with Victoria's doll. Clive tells Edward to let Ellen or Victoria take care of the doll and adds that the next day, Edward can go riding with the men. He takes Edward out to meet Harry, leaving the women alone. When Betty seems happy about the possibility of seeing Harry, Maud warns her to remember her place as Clive's wife.

Clive reappears with Mrs. Saunders (played by the actress who plays Ellen), whom he says has narrowly escaped an attack by the natives. He reassures an alarmed Betty and Maud that they're perfectly safe, and comforts Mrs. Saunders. Betty goes into the house to say goodnight to Victoria.

Harry and Edward arrive. Clive introduces Mrs. Saunders to Harry, and then sends Edward to bed even though the boy is excited about seeing Harry. Maud helps Mrs. Saunders indoors, leaving Harry and Clive to discuss the uneasy situation with the natives. Clive calls for Joshua and asks what he has heard about discontent in the villages. Joshua describes the restless natives as "bad people" and emphasizes that they are not his people.

As Clive and Joshua go out to secure the barn, Betty appears and greets Harry. They confess to a secret passion for one another, and as Joshua returns unnoticed, give in to



that passion and embrace. Betty soon runs away, Harry sees Joshua, and after some small talk about the safety of the farm, Harry asks Joshua to go into the barn and have sex with him. Joshua agrees, and they go off.

## Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

This play is a satirical exploration of sexual and gender roles. This means that the casting of the characters makes an important thematic statement about the tension between how people feel like behaving and how they're required to act by society. For example, having a man play Betty and a woman play Edward makes a comment about how sexual passion in women and a desire to nurture in men are both viewed as negatives that must be suppressed. The fact that Victoria is played by a doll makes a similar comment: little girls in this society are expected to behave like silent, soulless playthings. In the second act, Victoria will have one of the sharpest minds of all the characters. This illustrates another aspect of the play's theme: that society's expectations can, and must be, overcome.

The same thematic principal behind the cross-gender casting also applies to the cross-racial casting of a white man as the black servant, Joshua. In this case, it is Joshua's African nature that is surrendered to meet the demands of the white male in charge, just as the true natures of Betty, Edward and Victoria are surrendered. Joshua, in fact, represents all of the natives in the play, who in turn represent the natural world as feared and resented by Clive, who himself represents the white, male dominance of society. An important point to note is that even though this first act is set in Victorian England, many of the gender roles and restrictions the play satirizes are still in place today. This is why the second act of the play sees Betty, Edward and Victoria continuing their lives in a contemporary setting and, in the case of Betty and Edward, discovering the strength within the characteristics suppressed by Clive in Act 1.

Finally, the reason that the characters of Ellen, Mrs. Saunders, and Harry are all played by actors of their own respective genders is that even though all of these characters each attempt, in their own ways, to break out of the restrictions imposed upon their behavior and feelings by society, they all remain trapped within those restrictions. Therefore, they remain exactly as Clive and society see them. Ellen and Harry marry, while Mrs. Saunders (in spite of her professed independence) continues to need the protection of men. Clive and Maud, also played by actors of their corresponding genders, are symbols of the status quo and the rigidness with which its rules are maintained.



# Act 1, Scene 2

## Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

In an open field away from the house, Clive struggles to convince Mrs. Saunders to have sex with him. She resists, proclaiming her desire for independence, but when he dives beneath her skirt and performs oral sex on her, she gives in.

The rest of the family soon arrives to begin the Christmas picnic. As Betty and Maud unpack the food, and as Harry, Edward and Victoria play, Clive opens champagne and deliberately spills some on his trousers to conceal evidence of the orgasm he had with Mrs. Saunders. Ellen and Betty play catch with a ball from the hamper but are quickly ordered by Edward to stop, because they can't throw or catch; the implication is that they can't do so because they are women. Edward tries to play catch with Harry and Clive but is no better than Betty and Ellen. Clive taunts him, and Edward bursts into tears. Harry saves the situation by suggesting that they all play hide and seek.

As everybody else goes off to hide, Harry tells Clive how much he admires the life he (Clive) lives, describing it as "the empire." Clive, embarrassed, tells Harry to start seeking. When Harry is gone, Joshua tells him that the stable boys - who are members of another tribe - have been whispering among themselves and going out at night. He also hints at something going on between Harry and Betty. As Clive and Joshua go, Harry and Betty race on. They speak briefly about their mutual passion, but are interrupted by Maud, who is quitting the game after being stung by an insect.

Then begins a fast-paced series of comings and goings as the hide-and-seek game continues and the players take various opportunities of being alone with each other to urgently confess secret feelings. Maud expresses her disappointment in Betty's behavior toward Harry; Betty and Harry continue to struggle with their feelings for each other; and Edward offers Harry the gift of a necklace he stole from his mother. When Harry tells him he must put it back, Edward asks if he and Harry can do again what they did before, and even though Harry protests, he agrees that, yes, they can do it again. As they run off happily, Betty and Ellen run on, giving them the opportunity for mutual confessions. Betty admits to Ellen that she wants to run off with Harry, while Ellen tries to convince Betty to stay because she's in love with her. Betty (deliberately?) misunderstands her and says that she's her only friend. The women embrace just as Clive returns and starts some carol singing.

## Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene is fairly straightforward development of the various relationships. As we become aware of more and more layers of sexual and emotional desire, the differences between the genders begin to break down, and we see that just about everybody appears to need contact and comfort. In some cases - particularly Clive and Mrs.



Saunders - it comes through purely sexual relations. In most cases, though - Ellen, Betty, Harry and Edward - there's emotional need involved as well. This is another aspect of the play's theme, that the need for emotional expression and connection is universal.

There is an element of foreshadowing in the subplot involving the restless natives, when Joshua warns Clive about the stable-boys. This is information that plays an important role in setting up the next scene, which is key both thematically and dramatically.



# Act 1, Scene 3

## Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

Betty, Mrs. Saunders, Maud and Victoria wait inside the darkened house while Clive whips the stable boys. Betty and Mrs. Saunders wonder what will happen to the stable-boys next, but Maud sternly rebukes them, saying it's none of their concern.

Edward comes in, saying that he couldn't stand to watch any more. Mrs. Saunders goes out to see what's going on. As Maud warns Betty against becoming as unwomanly as Mrs. Saunders, Betty catches Edward playing with Victoria's doll and takes the doll away, saying he must never play with dolls again. Edward protests that Victoria doesn't love or play with the doll. Then, in a rapid sequence, Betty slaps Edward, Edward cries, Ellen comes in, Betty yells at Ellen, and Ellen slaps Edward and sends him to bed. She then bursts into tears at being rebuked by Betty and runs off. Maud slaps Victoria, and makes a comment about how children should honor their parents.

Joshua comes in, followed shortly by Mrs. Saunders, who asks whether Joshua's arm aches and whether he minds beating his own people. As he protests that the stable-boys are not his people, Harry and Clive come in, open the shutters, and let in the light.

Edward rushes in and confesses what happened with the doll before Clive can hear it from Ellen. Clive congratulates Edward for being honest and manly and tells him he may spend more time with him and Harry. He then suggests they all go out on the porch. As everybody else leaves, Clive holds Betty back. He confesses how difficult the whipping was, and when Betty comforts him, he talks about how difficult it is to hold up the standards of the Empire - especially when his wife, by falling in love with another man, is herself eroding those standards. Betty asks for his forgiveness, and he gives it, encouraging her to resist her passions. She promises to do so, and together they go out and join the others.

Edward sneaks back in and retrieves the doll, and Joshua calls him names as he passes through with drinks. Betty comes in looking for Edward and asks Joshua to fetch her sewing basket. When Joshua is rude to her, Edward stands up and orders Joshua to obey. When Betty congratulates Edward, he tells her to not touch him and moves away.

## Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

There is a great deal of violence in this scene, between the whippings offstage and the slapping onstage. This represents what happens when tensions build uncomfortably between what people desire and what society deems appropriate: Society responds with extreme measures, often including violence. Because the stable-boys are a symbol of the human nature that society is constantly struggling to suppress, the whipping also represents both society's desperation to restrict natural human impulses and the



ruthless lengths to which society will go to crush the desire to rebel against those restrictions. The fact that the women (including the feminine Edward) remain inside - literally, in the dark - suggests that it is feminine desires more than anything that male-dominated society wants to control. When Clive comes in, opens the blinds, and suggests that everybody go outside, it represents society's belief that in enforcing its restrictions, it makes the world safe and right again. The slapping of the children represents another aspect of control: the idea of "spare the rod, spoil the child." That is to say, if children aren't disciplined early and hard, they will grow up uncontrollable. This violence continues in the second act in the character of Lin, and plays the same sort of thematic role then as it does in this scene.

We also see the results of such violence. For a while, the rebellious spirits do what's expected of them. Betty agrees to restrain her feelings for Harry, Edward tries to act extra manly around Joshua, and Joshua becomes unusually servile. The lesson of the play, however, as we'll see in the next couple of scenes (and in the character of Betty in the second act) is that such discipline doesn't always last.



# Act 1, Scene 4

## Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Out on the porch, Joshua stands alone and still for a long moment, until Edward runs out and asks Joshua to tell him a story. Joshua tells him a legend of his people about the creation of the world, but then tells him it's a bad story and that the true creation happened the way it says in the Bible, with Adam and Eve.

Clive and Harry appear. Clive allows Edward and Joshua to listen as he tells Harry about recent trouble with the natives that has been put under control, but which has made it unsafe for anyone to leave the house. He says that a village has been destroyed and that the army is coming in. Clive and Joshua then go in for breakfast.

Edward asks Harry why they don't spend time together anymore and asks if he can go with him on his explorations. Harry refuses, saying he has his duty to the empire. As Harry goes in, Ellen and Betty come looking for Edward, and then send him in for breakfast. Ellen again confesses her love for Betty, but Betty again misunderstands and sends Ellen in. As Ellen, goes inside, in tears, Clive comes looking for Betty and sends *her* inside.

Harry comes out and joins Clive, who tells Harry he's spoken to Betty and that everything is back to the way it should be. Clive speaks at length about the importance and sanctuary of the affection between men, which Harry takes to mean that Clive is interested in a romantic relationship. When Harry physically indicates his affection, though, Clive reacts with disgust. Harry immediately admits that he's disgusted with himself. Clive suggests that Harry marry Mrs. Saunders, but when Mrs. Saunders comes out and Harry asks her, she refuses, saying she'd rather be alone.

Mrs. Saunders then tells Clive that she just heard that Joshua's parents lived in the village destroyed by the fire and are both dead; she then leaves. Clive calls Joshua to come out, and when Joshua appears, he apologizes. Joshua says his parents were bad people, calling Clive his "mother and father." As Betty comes to find out what's wrong, Clive sends Joshua in for drinks. Other members of the family come out to see what's going on, and Clive sends them all back in - but then calls Ellen out and arranges for her to marry Harry. As Harry and Ellen run off, Joshua returns with news of the affection between Ellen and Betty. Clive dismisses him, saying he's gone too far.

## Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

The subplot about the rebellious natives takes the main narrative focus in this scene, but since this plot is actually a metaphor for all the rebellious tension building in the main characters, what we're actually hearing about is a representation of what's going on in their hearts and minds. Betty's hopes for romance are in ruins, Harry's and Ellen's true natures are being suppressed, Edward's desire to escape is being crushed - their

inner natures are being destroyed in the same way as the native village was destroyed. It's all happening for the same reasons that Joshua's native-inspired version of the creation myth is described as a bad story; it's not the way things are done in society. The narrative and thematic tension escalates dramatically in this scene, leading to the climactic events of the following scene.





# Act 1, Scene 5

## Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

It is the morning of Harry's wedding to Ellen. As Joshua sets up the table for the wedding banquet, Edward appears with Victoria's doll. Joshua takes it, slits it open, and trails sawdust across the ground. Just then the rest of the family arrives for the celebration. Ellen takes Betty aside and asks about sex with a man. Betty tells her to just keep still, that Harry will know what to do, and that she didn't get married to enjoy herself. Ellen disappears, and Betty rejoins the celebration, telling Clive about her missing necklace, which she had wanted to wear for the wedding. Edward accuses Joshua of stealing it, but Harry announces that Edward had taken it. Edward denies the accusation and runs off just as Mrs. Saunders arrives, announcing that the sale of her property is complete and that she's returning to England. As Clive kisses her goodbye, Betty attacks her, and the two women fight. Harry and Clive separate them, Clive dismisses Mrs. Saunders (who leaves), and embraces Betty, who asks to be loved as she used to be.

Edward returns with the necklace, saying he was keeping it safe because of all the trouble with the natives. Clive compliments him again on being manly, and tells him to fasten it around his mother's neck. Ellen returns, and Harry makes a brief speech about how happy he is. As the cake is being cut, Harry discovers the destroyed doll. When Edward says that Joshua had done it, Clive slaps him and tells him to not tell lies. Clive then makes a speech about the joys of married life in general, and of Harry and Ellen's marriage in particular. Edward is the only one who notices that Joshua has taken out a concealed gun and is aiming it at Clive. He says nothing, and covers his ears.

## Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

This short scene contains the climax of the first act. The wedding of Harry and Ellen, the dismissal of Mrs. Saunders, and Edward's returning the necklace all represent ultimate victories of society over impulse and emotion. The final tableau, however, with Joshua aiming the gun at Clive, represents the fact that human nature can't and won't be suppressed for long and will ultimately rebel against too much control. This rebellion continues into the second act, which narratively and thematically is all about how people cope *after* such rebellion succeeds, and how they live fulfilling lives once they've become free to live according to their true natures.



# Act 2, Scene 1

## Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

This act takes place approximately a hundred years later, in present day London. Three characters from the first act - Betty, Edward and Victoria - have aged twenty-five years since we last saw them.

The first scene takes place in a city park, where Victoria sits reading, as her friend Lin keeps an eye on her four-year-old daughter, Cathy (played by a grown man). As Lin tries to get Victoria involved in a conversation, Cathy sings a rude skipping song. Lin convinces her to play somewhere else. As Cathy leaves, Victoria yells out a comment to her (unseen) son Tommy, and then Lin tries again to talk to Victoria. As they make small talk about the violence of children's games, Lin reveals that she's got a brother in the army keeping the peace in Belfast. They then talk about the men in their lives. Lin admits she's a lesbian and that she's glad to be away from her husband, who beat her. Victoria is non-committal about her husband Martin.

Cathy comes back and starts a painting, as Edward arrives to warn Victoria that Betty is in the park. As Victoria runs off to meet her, Lin admits to Edward that she's attracted to Victoria. Victoria returns with Betty, who chatters on about Tommy, Cathy's painting, her past life in Africa, Edward's work as a gardener, Victoria's taste in clothes, Martin's vagueness, the fact that she's leaving Clive, and her inability to grow plants. As Betty lets Cathy play with her accessories, Edward and Victoria react with shock to the news that Betty is leaving Clive. Everybody gets distracted, though, when Cathy refuses to give back Betty's things. Betty manages to get everything back and, dodging another question from Victoria, hurries away on her walk.

As Lin struggles to get Cathy ready to go home, Edward and Victoria sympathize with each other about the impending divorce of their parents but agree that it makes sense. Cathy runs off, Edward goes back to work, and Lin asks Victoria to have sex with her. Victoria wonders whether it counts as adultery if she has sex with a woman. Lin says she'd enjoy it.

## Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

The struggle for sexual freedom for the two characters who were fighting for it the most in Act 1 - Betty and Edward - continues in this act. They're joined by Victoria, whom we're not surprised to see fighting the same fight since, she was literally a non-person in the first act. Continuing their struggle in the present day suggests that many of the sexual/gender roles and restrictions placed on individuals in the Victorian era are still present, albeit in somewhat different form.

This sense of contemporary sexual/gender oppression is represented in this scene by Lin. Determined that Cathy not act like a girl, she encourages her to reject femininity



(Betty's accessories) and act in stereotypically masculine ways (playing with toy guns and beating up boys). In other words, Lin is imposing her views on gender and sexuality on Cathy in the same way that Clive had imposed them on Betty and Edward. Later, similar attitudes are represented by Gerry, Martin and the Dead Hand Gang.

Cathy's role being played by a man makes the same thematic point as the cross-gender casting in Act 1. It represents the tension between who she is (a little girl) versus who someone else (Lin) is trying to turn her into.



## Act 2, Scene 2

### Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Edward works on the gardens in the park, as his boyfriend Gerry lounges nearby. They bicker about how Gerry had gone out the night before and hadn't called to let Edward know where he was. Tired of the argument, Gerry says he's going to the pub, and then turns to us and tells a story of how he had had anonymous sex with a man on a train but left quickly when the man wanted to meet for a meal. Gerry leaves; Cathy sings a rude skipping song, and then Betty, Victoria and Martin (Victoria's husband) appear.

As Martin keeps a close eye on Tommy, who's playing near a duck pond, Betty confesses to Victoria how confused she is since leaving Clive. Victoria tries to reassure her, but Betty seems to not want to hear what she has to say. Leaving Betty on a park-bench, Victoria goes to Martin, who tries to convince Victoria that it's okay for her to take a job that's been offered to her in another city. As Victoria begins to cry, Lin joins Betty and complains about Cathy wanting to wear dresses to school because the other girls have called her a boy. Cathy pretends to kill Victoria with her pretend gun, and then runs off to play with the Dead Hand Gang. Martin, meanwhile, explains to Victoria how difficult it is to be her husband, trying to convince her to try new things when she doesn't really want to. They go off to continue their conversation

Betty tells Lin how strange it is to be single again after being part of a couple for so long, and how she often wonders who to do things for. When Lin suggests that she should do things for herself, Betty calls that selfish - and when Lin suggests that Betty should learn to enjoy the company of women, Betty complains that she's never enjoyed that and tells Lin to not take it personally.

Martin and Victoria return, Martin still talking and Victoria saying she wants to go home. Betty asks Martin to walk her back to her new flat. Once they've gone, Victoria's pent up emotions explode. Lin comforts her, and then her own pent up feelings come to the surface. She confesses her love for Victoria, her confusion about Cathy, and that her brother in Belfast was just killed. Cathy overhears this part of the conversation, and when she asks for her uncle's gun and won't take no for an answer, Lin loses her temper and slaps her. Cathy runs off, and Lin and Victoria realize that Tommy has disappeared. Cathy comes back and helps them find him. Lin comes back to collect Cathy; they watch Victoria leave with Tommy, and then go home themselves, their earlier anger forgotten.

Gerry comes back and waits for Edward, who has just finished work. They argue about how Gerry is uncomfortable with Edward doing wifely things like cooking, knitting, and wanting Gerry to be around. Gerry says he doesn't want Edward to be a wife, but Edward tells him that he's just being who he is, and if he wants to, he can leave. Gerry says he'll collect his things from their apartment in the morning and goes off.



Edward sits on the bench and is soon joined by Victoria, who has come back to look for one of Tommy's lost toys. They sit quietly for a moment, and then Edward confesses that he loves women and thinks he might like to become one. He asks to feel Victoria's breasts. She lets him and confesses that she's enjoying the sensation. They both admit that they're sick of men, and Edward wonders whether he's a lesbian.

## Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The play's central conflict - between society's expectations and individual desires - is developed on several levels in this scene. The conflicts between Cathy and Lin play out this conflict most overtly and directly, with Lin resorting to violence in the same way that Clive had resorted to violence with the African natives and with Edward. The difference in this scene, though, is that Lin realizes her mistake and begins to see that she must accept Cathy for who she is.

When we meet Martin and Gerry, we see immediately that they, like Lin and many of the characters in the first act, have clear preconceptions about gender roles. The fact that they are different kinds of ideas doesn't make them any less restrictive. Martin has conceived of himself as a very modern man and therefore insists that Victoria should try harder to be more than just a woman, which will give him the chance to be what he thinks he should be: exceptionally supportive. Gerry, on the other hand, thinks that other men - including Edward - are there primarily to provide him with sexual pleasure. He and Martin both seem to have detached themselves from emotion. Martin is supportive not because he cares, but because he thinks he should be, while Gerry favors sex without any kind of emotional context. This leads to increased tension between them and their partners, Victoria and Edward respectively, who really just want to be cared for and respected. The fact that Victoria and Edward are able to stand up for themselves and what they believe in suggest that their journey to freedom is already well underway.

It also becomes clear that Betty is further behind in her journey toward fulfillment. She's taken the first steps toward independence, but they have left her tentative, lost and confused. In her conversation with Lin, she continues to hold onto her earlier attitudes toward women, which seem to be keeping her from having a positive attitude towards herself. Her attitudes will change in later scenes, but for now she's sad and a bit pathetic.

Finally, the end of this scene suggests the possibility of sexual relations between Victoria and Edward. It's never overtly stated, here or later in the play. All we learn in later scenes is that they sleep together. Nevertheless, incest - one of the most powerful sexual taboos - is hinted at and not overtly condemned. This suggests that the play's theme of accepting the true nature of others covers even broader territory than we first imagined.



## Act 2, Scene 3

### Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Late at night, Edward, Lin and Victoria - all very drunk - come to the park and perform their version of an ancient ritual invoking the spirit of ancient female goddesses. Victoria, who's done a lot of reading on the subject, lapses into lectures about the origins of the various goddesses, while Lin keeps trying to get her to have sex. Edward suddenly sees someone coming, maybe a spirit; it turns out to be Martin. They pull him down and begin to have sex with him just as someone else approaches. This time it's an actual spirit, Lin's dead brother, who has come back to have sex one last time. Lin collapses, and the soldier disappears. Martin tries to get Victoria to come home with him, but she goes home with Edward and Lin. Martin goes home alone.

Gerry comes to the park and tells us that sometimes he comes to pick somebody up, but most of the time he comes to just be alone. Suddenly he calls out for Edward, and Edward from Act 1 comes, asking Gerry if they can do together what they did before. Gerry promises they can do it.

### Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

The goddesses invoked in the ritual - Nut, Ishtar, Isis and others - existed in classical Egyptian, Aztec, Babylonian and other ancient cultures. They were Earth Mother figures, goddesses of birth, farming, the moon, and the mysteries of nature, and they represent a way of living that pre-dates the more male-dominated philosophies of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The ritual, therefore, is a comic representation with serious undertones of everything that Edward, Lin and Victoria are trying to achieve; it represents breaking free from society's restrictions and living according to ancient laws of nature and their true selves.

The failed attempt to be sexual with Martin represents the superficiality of both Martin's empathy and society's willingness to accommodate the change represented by the ritual. The appearance of the dead Soldier and Lin's subsequent collapse represent the ultimate power of nature - death - and our fear of nature in general and death in particular.

The appearance of Edward from Act 1 comes as quite a surprise, since it's the first time the two worlds of the play have interacted. Edward I represents the innocence and vulnerability that still exists in Edward II. His appearance awakens in Gerry an awareness of that innocence and begins a change in Gerry's attitude that foreshadows what we see of him in the next, and final scene.

## Act 2, Scene 4

### Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

Martin and Edward come into the park, keeping an eye on Cathy while she's playing. Edward gives Martin instructions on how to take care of Tommy and tells him not to be angry when he wets the bed. Martin admits that he doesn't like saying Tommy is his son.

Betty comes, talking about how she enjoys the sunshine after being at work all week. She lets Cathy play with some of the money she's earned, saying that she feels like a child herself having so much money, since Clive took care of the finances when they were married. As Cathy counts the money, Betty tells Martin not to worry; Victoria will come back to him. She also comments on the current living arrangements, and so does Cathy, who tells us that Edward, Victoria and Lin all sleep together in the same bed. The bells of an ice cream truck ring, and Cathy pulls Martin and Betty off to get ice creams.

Gerry comes to see Edward, and we learn that Edward has quit his job and is keeping house for Lin and Victoria. Gerry asks Edward to go out for a meal. Edward agrees, and then joins Cathy, Martin and Betty. Harry from Act 1 comes, and he and Gerry pick each other up and go off.

Betty returns and sits for a moment on the bench. Maud from Act 1 comes and expresses her disappointment, which Betty counters by telling her mother she has a job. Ellen from Act 1 comes, asks again what happens with a man, and hopes that Betty will not forget her.

When they've both gone, Betty has a long monologue about re-discovering the joys of masturbation, which she enjoyed as a child and has recently begun to enjoy again. She's found a new sense of freedom and joy through enjoying and pleasuring herself, and has finally discovered herself as a separate person from her husband and her mother.

Victoria and Lin come in, and Betty asks them whether they'd accept the idea of her buying a large house for them all to live in. Lin likes the idea, but Victoria doesn't, which Betty seems to expect. Just as Betty is saying that they might begin to like each other, Cathy comes on screaming and bleeding after an attack by the boys of the Dead Hand Gang. Martin comes on after her, and Lin accuses him of neglecting Cathy. Cathy keeps trying to get everybody's attention as Martin complains that he can't look after her all the time and that he shouldn't have to look after her at all, since the only child he's really interested in is Tommy. Victoria tries to get them to calm down, but Lin goes off to take care of the gang. Martin takes Cathy to get another ice cream. Victoria asks if Betty wants one as well but Betty says no, but tells Victoria it was a nice thought.





Gerry returns. He and Betty remember each other, having met at Edward's flat. They discuss the pleasures of being alone, but Betty admits she gets lonely and invites Gerry to drop over any time. Gerry says he might be going to live with Edward again, but Betty tells him that he lives with two women and it might not be possible. Suddenly, Betty realizes that Edward and Gerry are gay, and thinks she has made a fool of herself by trying to connect with Gerry. Gerry says he could still come and see her, and reminds her that not everybody's gay. Betty comments that "that's lucky," and Gerry goes.

Clive appears and rebukes Betty, suggesting that she's betrayed the ideals of the Empire. He goes, and then Betty from Act 1 appears, and the two Betty's from two different times embrace each other - that is, they embrace themselves.

## Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

There are two significant dramatizations of the play's central conflict (between society and the individual) in this scene. Both are climaxes, but of different kinds.

Cathy's confrontation with the Dead Hand Gang is a high point in the action, or a dramatic climax. Because the Dead Hand Gang represents society, this (offstage) confrontation is about the same thing as the confrontation between Clive and the natives in Act 1. It represents the violence that can result when society feels its rules and standards are threatened by outsiders; the gang perceives Cathy as both different and a threat, and therefore punishes her. Another similarity to the confrontation with the natives is that both confrontations represent the confrontations that all the characters are having with society. Nevertheless, this moment is still a secondary climax, with the primary climax having been Betty's story about masturbation.

This is the play's emotional climax, where the character who all along has been the most repressed by society achieves for the first time freedom, fulfillment and joy on her own terms. This makes the final moment of the play, when the two Betty's embrace each other, the play's thematic climax. Betty from Act 1, who represents society's idea of a woman, embraces Betty from Act 2, who represents a woman's idea of herself. This clearly represents the theme of the play as a whole - that it is both possible and joyful to escape the restrictions of society and live a joyful life.

The resolutions of the other, perhaps smaller conflicts of the play echo this theme. Lin, Victoria and Edward have found a way to live in harmony with each other and their respective personalities and drives. Victoria hasn't yet found a way to embrace her mother, but in the offer to buy an ice cream we get the sense that the door is starting to open. Through his conversations with Betty, Gerry discovers other aspects to his true nature and other possibilities for connection with others. His meeting with Harry from Act 1 suggests that he's finding a way to accommodate both the sexual side and the compassionate side of himself. Cathy is finding ways to both fit in and be herself. The only character who doesn't transform to at least some degree is Martin. He remains self-absorbed and artificially compassionate to the end, in spite of his protests that he's exactly the opposite.



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# Characters

## Harry Bagley

Harry Bagley is an explorer and a friend of Clive. Clive regards him as an eccentric—a bit of a poet as well as a hothead. Betty says he is a bore and a heavy drinker, but when Harry visits Clive and his family, she falls in love with him because he kisses her and says he needs her. However, Harry is bisexual, and his main interest appears to be males of any description. It is revealed that on a previous visit he seduced Edward, and he also propositions Joshua and Clive. Clive is horrified by this and tells Harry he must marry. So, to keep up the appearance of propriety, Harry marries Ellen.

## Betty

Betty is Clive's wife and is played by a man. Betty accepts her role as the dutiful Victorian wife, living only for her husband. But she finds her life monotonous and boring. When Harry arrives, she allows herself to develop a passion for him, which Clive, who finds out about it through Joshua, tells her she must overcome. Betty's unfaithfulness, however, does not prevent her from becoming jealous when Clive kisses Mrs. Saunders.

In act two, Betty reappears and is twenty-five years older. This time she is played by a woman. She has decided to leave her husband, and at first she has difficulty building an independent life for herself. But she finds her feet when she gets a job as a receptionist in a doctor's office. She also learns to explore her own sexuality through masturbation. She no longer lives entirely for and through a man.

## Cathy

Cathy is the four-year-old daughter of Lin. She is played by a man. In the park, Cathy amuses herself by painting and playing with guns, and she also likes to play with a group of boys called the Dead Hand Gang. But she has refused to wear jeans at school since the other children called her a boy. She now wears only dresses.

## Clive

Clive is a British colonial administrator, married to Betty. He is a loyal, patriotic servant of the British Empire, and he has a patronizing and sometimes brutal attitude toward the local Africans, whom he does not trust. Clive is soaked in Victorian moral values. He takes great pride in presiding over his family and has rigid ideas about the way each member should behave. He believes that his son Edward should not play with dolls, for example, and he would take any show of independence by a woman as an insult. He is also shocked by homosexuality, as is seen when his friend misinterprets his comments



about male friendship and makes a sexual advance. But Clive is also a hypocrite because he wastes no time in seducing Mrs. Saunders and constantly lusts after her. Clive returns briefly at the end of act two to say that he does not feel the same about Betty as he once did.

## Edward

Edward is the nine-year-old son of Clive and Betty, and he is played by a woman. Edward likes dolls, although this displeases both his parents. His father wants him to act like a man, and his mother instructs him not to tell anyone at school that he likes dolls, because then they will not speak to him or let him play cricket. Edward may harbor a secret hatred of his father, because he does nothing to intervene in the last moment of act one, when Joshua is about to shoot Clive.

In act two, Edward is shown as a man in his thirties. He is gay and lives with Gerry. But their relationship breaks up, and he moves in with Lin, Victoria, and Cathy. He is happy doing housework.

## Ellen

Ellen is the young governess in charge of Edward and Victoria. She is a lesbian and falls in love with Betty.

## Gerry

Gerry is a gay man who lives with Edward. He boasts a lot about his sexual life and conquests. After a disagreement with Edward about the terms of their relationship, he moves out of the apartment they share. Gerry is later befriended by Betty.

## Joshua

Joshua is a black African who is the servant in Clive and Betty's home. He is played by a white man. Joshua has internalized the values of his employers; he hates his own tribe and does not condemn the killing of his parents by the British. He serves his master, Clive, informing him that the stable boys are not to be trusted and then whipping them as Clive instructs. Joshua also reports to Clive on the illicit attraction between Harry and Betty and on Ellen's sexual love for Betty. But he also harbors resentment about his subordinate position, which is suggested by his insulting Betty on two occasions. And in the last moment of act one, Joshua points a gun at Clive and is ready to shoot.



## **Lin**

Lin appears only in act two. A working-class friend of Victoria, she is a divorced mother (of Cathy) and is also a lesbian. Her husband used to beat her, and she says she hates men. Lin is sexually attracted to Victoria, and eventually the two of them live together along with Edward.

## **Martin**

Martin is Victoria's husband in act two. He is a novelist who claims to be writing a novel about women from the woman's point of view. He prides himself on being in favor of women's liberation and believes that he goes out of the way to make his wife happy, but in fact he gets impatient with her indecisiveness and only serves to confuse her. Victoria believes that she is more intelligent than he is, but she is still dominated by him.

## **Maud**

Maud is Betty's mother, and she enjoys giving Betty old-fashioned advice about life and love.

## **Mrs. Saunders**

Mrs. Saunders is an independent-minded widow who comes to the home of Clive and his family for safety after the local Africans become threatening. She is seduced by Clive, though she does not like him. She does, however, enjoy the pleasures of sex.

## **Victoria**

Victoria is the daughter of Clive and Betty. In act one, she is two years old and is represented only by a doll. In act two, she is married to Martin and has a child, Tommy. Victoria, who reads widely and likes to offer her intellectual insights to her less educated friend Lin, is in a dilemma about whether she should accept a job as a teacher in Manchester that would separate her from her husband. Since she is beginning to assert herself and not be so subordinate to Martin, she eventually decides to take the job. She also experiments with bisexuality, embarking on a sexual affair with Lin. Victoria does not get along with her mother, remarking that after a ten-minute conversation with Betty she needs to take a two-hour bath to get over it.



## Themes

Churchill wrote in her introduction to the play that she wanted to show "the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression." She meant that it is the same mentality of the colonial power, reflecting male values, that also results in the oppression of women.

The colonial attitude can be seen in Clive, who has contempt for those he refers to as the "natives." His attitude is paternalistic. He thinks of himself as a father to the natives, just as he is a father to his family. He also has a low opinion of the natives' capabilities. After praising his black servant, Joshua, as a jewel, he adds, "You'd hardly notice that the fellow's black." Clive regards the local African population as little better than savages, commenting that he knows three different tribal leaders who "would all gladly chop off each other's heads and wear them round their waists." He exerts harsh discipline on the black stable boys when he learns that they cannot be trusted to be loyal servants of his interests.

The point Churchill wishes to make is that Joshua, the only black man in the play, has internalized the values of his white colonial masters and therefore cooperates in his own oppression. As he says at the beginning of the play, "My skin is black but oh my soul is white." His goal is to become what white men want him to be; he says he lives only for his master, a comment that clearly echoes the way Clive's wife Betty regards her own life. Betty's own attitude contributes to a sexism that pervades the play, especially in act one. Men such as Clive and Harry Bagley go out and have adventures, but the women (Betty, Maud, Ellen) lead dull, monotonous lives. Betty's place is in the home, reading poetry, playing the piano, and waiting for Clive, around whom her life revolves, to return. Gender roles are clearly defined, and the women accept them as part of the nature of things. "The men have their duties and we have ours," says Maud, and Betty regards her own loneliness as a form of service not only to her husband but also to the British Empire. She believes that she is perfectly happy, although she has little understanding of what her true nature and capabilities might be. She has allowed herself to be formed entirely to fit a male image of what a woman should be.

The men have very patronizing ideas about women. Clive regards his wife, and most likely all women, as delicate, sensitive creatures given to fainting and hysteria. But he may prefer things this way, since the weakness of women enables him to feel strong and chivalrous. He regards any sign of independence in a woman as an insult; it is he who must be the protector. Similarly, Harry, when he declares his love for Betty, reserves for himself the active life and allocates to her a purely passive role: "I need you, and I need you where you are, I need you to be Clive's wife. I need to go up rivers and know you are sitting here thinking of me." The sexism of the men extends to other areas. In act one, scene two, Ellen and Betty begin to play catch, and the men express surprise and congratulations whenever the women manage to catch the ball. Obviously, women are not expected to possess such an ability. Then Edward, who is only nine years old but has learned well from his father, tells his mother, and then Ellen, that they shouldn't play ball because they cannot catch. It is a judgment that Betty is all too ready to agree with. Then the men take over. Edward cannot catch and is mocked by Harry



and Clive; it appears that this is a test of masculinity. And when Betty informs Clive that he has hurt Edward's feelings, Clive reveals another of his unconscious gender stereotypes: "A boy has no business having feelings."

The aim of the play is to deconstruct these gender stereotypes. Edward, for example, although a boy, likes to play with dolls, even though he is told by his elders that such behavior is not considered masculine. The playwright invites the audience to question this and other assumptions, such as the passivity of women. Mrs. Saunders, for example, shows that a woman can enjoy sex for its own sake, just as a man may, and this is in contrast to Betty's dreamy, romantic notions of love.

The theme of liberation from the false, socially induced constraints of gender becomes even more pronounced in act two, which shows how the characters, especially Betty and Edward, break free of the rigid roles that were formerly prescribed for them. Society has changed, too, making it easier for them to do so. Betty is able to acquire a real job of her own, and she also relearns the pleasures of autoeroticism, initially as an act of rebellion against her husband and her mother. Betty's discovery shows how women are now more able to accept their bodies and sexual desires as natural, not something to be ashamed of or repressed. This theme is also apparent in act two, scene three, when Victoria and Lin chant in praise of ancient female goddesses. In addition to the liberation of women, in the world portrayed in act two, homosexuality is not the shameful thing it was to Clive or Harry. Edward and Gerry can live as an openly gay couple, and Betty is not distressed at her knowledge that her son is gay or that her daughter is involved in a sexual relationship with her girlfriend, Lin.

There are changes in the way the family is constructed, too. If act one is a satire on the Victorian family, in which desires and sexual orientation are repressed in order to present a false appearance, act two shows the forming of alternative family structures. For example, a gay man, Edward, lives with two women and their two children. One of the women, Lin, is a confirmed lesbian, while the other, Victoria, is experimenting with bisexuality. This is a long way from the image of the family that Clive presents in the first scene of the play.

Churchill also sets out to undermine the ideology of colonialism. Since such a system is based on exploitation, violence, and the belief in the inferiority of the colonized people, it can only result in resentment and, ultimately, violence, as is apparent several times in the play. Joshua, for example, for all his dutiful attempts to act as his master wants him to, brazenly defies Betty's orders (which also reveals the powerless position of women). When Joshua aims a gun at Clive's head in the final scene in act one, it hardly comes as a surprise. Whatever surface appearances might suggest, Joshua will never wholly succeed in becoming "white." (The specter of colonialism returns in act two, when Lin's brother, Bill, a British soldier, is killed in Northern Ireland, where the British are fighting a guerrilla war against Irish nationalists. This time the emphasis is on the dispiriting life led by the soldiers who serve in the British army, which the Irish nationalists believe to be the arm of a colonizing, oppressive power.)



# Style

## Gender Reversals

The play uses a number of unconventional techniques to create its effects. One of these is for some of the characters to be played by actors of the opposite gender. This reinforces the theme of undermining gender stereotyping. For example, Edward as a nine-year-old boy is played by a woman, which visually reinforces for the audience the notion that Edward does not behave in the way his Victorian family believes a boy should. Betty is played by a man because, as Churchill states in her introduction to the play, "she wants to be what men want her to be." She does not value herself as a woman. Her true nature is therefore hidden from herself and others. Joshua is played by a white man, to reinforce the idea that he has embraced the values of white culture and behaves as his white employers expect of him.

In act two, the characters are played for the most part by members of their own gender. Betty is now played by a woman, which visually reinforces for the audience the fact that for the first time she is discovering who she really is. Edward is played by a man, to show that he has found his own identity and is comfortable with being gay.

The only exception to this is that four-year-old Cathy is played by a man. This has the same effect as the playing of Edward by a woman in act one. It subverts traditional expectations of how a girl should behave and what interests she should have. Cathy, for example, likes to play rough games with the boys, and she also plays with a toy gun. The other reason for having Cathy played by a man is, as Churchill writes, "because the size and presence of a man on stage seemed appropriate to the emotional force of young children."

## Structure

Another unconventional technique in the play is the use in act two of many of the same characters from act one, even though the action takes place one hundred years later. Churchill managed this by having the characters age only twenty-five years from act one to act two.

The two acts are different in other ways, too. The first is dominated by men, especially Clive, who tries hard to keep everything under control, arranged the way he believes things should be. But the second act is dominated more by the women and the gays, who show a capacity for change and a willingness to entertain new ways of being and living. Those who were powerless earlier—Betty in particular—now grow into positions in which they feel more in control of their destinies. The fact that when the play was first staged the actor who played Clive in act one also played the child Cathy in act two reinforces this idea of the reversals that have taken place—the powerlessness of the old ideals in a new world. (Churchill wrote the play for seven actors, which means that



some parts must be doubled. It is not essential, however, that Clive be doubled with Cathy; other combinations are possible.) In act two it is the man, Martin, the equivalent of Clive in act one, who must struggle to come to terms with the new feminist consciousness rather than have everything his own way.

Another way in which the structure of the play allows the playwright to convey her themes occurs at the end of act one. The final scene appears to have the form of a typical romantic comedy. Enemies are banished, order is restored, love triumphs, and there is a wedding celebration for the happy couple. Clive appears to sum things up when he makes a speech in neatly rhymed verse that ends, "All murmuring of discontent is stilled. / Long may you live in peace and joy and bliss." But, of course, the reality is somewhat different. Not only is there a nasty little quarrel about the doll, as a result of which Clive hits his son, but there is also the more fundamental fact that all the words in praise of the marriage and in celebration of the ending of discontent are false. Nothing is what it appears, since Ellen and Harry are in fact gay and are marrying merely to shore up appearances, and a drunken Joshua is about to take a shot at Clive. The ostensibly comic form is belied by the reality of the situation.





# Historical Context

## Women's Liberation Movement

Britain in the 1970s was marked by vigorous and politically effective campaigns for women's rights and gay rights. The First National Women's Liberation Conference was held in Oxford in 1970. The goals it decided upon were equal pay for women, equal opportunity in education and employment, abortion rights, day care, and free contraception. The women's liberation movement aimed to raise women's consciousness about social issues and encouraged them to challenge some of the basic underpinnings of a male-dominated society—the assumption that women should always be secondary to men, for example, or that women are important only through their relationships with men. Women increasingly challenged the traditional division of labor in the family and in the workplace. They rejected the idea that certain roles, such as child-rearing and housekeeping, were suited only to women, and they fought for the right to pursue careers in areas traditionally open only to men. They argued that traditional gender roles had been constructed by a male-dominated society rather than being inherent in the nature of human life. And what had been socially constructed could also be changed.

During this time, there was a feeling of excitement among many women that a new era was dawning. Gillian Hanna, one of the founders of the feminist theatre company Monstrous Regiment, recollected:

We wanted to change the world. At the time, this didn't seem like such an outrageous project. All around us, women in every area of the world we knew were doing the same thing. It seemed as natural as breathing.

The women's movement made a measurable impact on 1970s British society. The Equal Pay Act of 1970, which was implemented in 1975, established the principle of equal pay for equal work. In 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act banned discrimination on the grounds of gender or marital status and established the Equal Opportunities Commission. Women also gained the right to maternity leave.

## Gay Liberation Movement

A major landmark in the acceptance of homosexuality in Britain was the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, which decriminalized homosexuality between consenting adults in private. The age of consent was fixed at twenty-one, five years older than the age of consent for heterosexual acts. (In 1994, the age of consent for homosexual acts was lowered to eighteen.) But gay people still faced discrimination, such as being fired from their jobs or denied custody of their children. In 1970, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed. That year, the first gay rights demonstration in Britain took place in London. More than one hundred members of the GLF protested police harassment and



intimidation. The first Gay Pride march was held in London in 1972, and a newspaper, *Gay News*, was published from 1972 to 1983. Adapting a slogan from the American civil rights movement ("black is beautiful"), gays proclaimed that "gay is good." They rejected the shame and guilt that had often accompanied gay life in the past, due to disapproval of homosexuality by church and state and to almost universally negative portrayals of gays in the media.

The GLF also organized radical protests involving sit-ins at pubs (the British equivalent of a bar) that refused to serve gays, and GLF activists disrupted a lecture by noted psychiatrist Professor Hans Eysenck after he advocated electric-shock aversion therapy to "cure" homosexuality. The increasing visibility of gay people encouraged many to "come out" and live openly (as Edward and Gerry do in *Cloud Nine*), without having to disguise the fact that they were gay. Many gays (as well as feminists) linked their oppression to the structure of the traditional family. By learning to form nontraditional family structures, many gays declared that they had rejected the masculine and feminine roles that society had designed for them. During this period, gays became freer in discussing the ways in which a masculine identity had been imposed on them in their upbringing although such an identity did not correspond to what they felt themselves to be (just as in the play, Edward comes to realize that the kind of man his father expected him to become was not who he was).

## Women's and Gay Theater

The 1970s saw the emergence of feminist and gay theater in Britain. Cultural historian Michelene Wandor, in *Carry On, Understudies*, divides this period into four phases. From 1969 to 1973, avantgarde and experimental writing flourished, and street theater companies performed plays that probed social issues from a socialist and feminist viewpoint. Theater was viewed as a means of raising women's social consciousness. Phase two was from 1973 to 1977, during which alternative theater gained some stability as a result of receiving state subsidies. This was the period when women's professional theater companies, dedicated to producing work by women or emphasizing women's issues, began to spring up. The most prominent of these were the Women's Theatre Group (1974) and Monstrous Regiment (1975-76). Churchill became involved in Monstrous Regiment and wrote her play *Vinegar Tom* for the company. During the same period, Gay Sweatshop, a theater company made up of lesbians and gay men, was also formed. Phase three, from 1977 onward, was a period of contraction for alternative theater groups, as the Arts Council reduced its subsidies. Phase four, according to Wandor, was from 1979 onward, when numerous female and gay playwrights came to prominence. These were either new writers with confident voices as a result of the work done by others over the previous decade or experienced writers who had worked through the previous stages and developed a stronger theatrical voice. These writers included, in addition to Churchill and Wandor herself, Pam Gems, Mary O'Malley, Nell Dunn, and Claire Luckham.



## Critical Overview

When *Cloud Nine* was first produced in England in 1979, it was a commercial success, establishing Churchill as a leading British playwright. However, critics were divided as to the merits of the play. Robert Cushman in the *Observer* (quoted in *Plays in Review*) described the second act as "almost the best thing to arrive in the London theatre this young and dismal year." And John Barber's verdict in the *Daily Telegraph* (quoted by Erica Beth Weintraub in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*) was also positive; Barber described it as "cheerfully entangling itself in the problems of fitting complex human instincts into workable social patterns." But a different view was taken by J. C. Trewin of the *Birmingham Post*, who expressed puzzlement about the play's themes. Whether the play was "a treatise on bisexuality" or "a view of parents and children," Trewin regarded it as "superfluous." He argued that the satirical approach to the British Empire in the first act was a hackneyed theme, and he dubbed the second act a "wholly muddled fantasy." Peter Jenkins, in the *Spectator* (quoted in *Plays in Review*), was also less than enthusiastic, writing that the play's "most constant danger is degeneration into a mere sequence of acting exercises, or cabaret turns, loosely plotted together." When the play reached New York in 1981, critics were lavish with their praise. Rex Reed, in the *New York Times*, called it "the most rewarding surprise of the theatrical season," and Clive Barnes in the *New York Post* wrote that it is "a play that has something to say about kindness, affection, perversion, and most of all love" (both reviews quoted by Weintraub).

Scholars of the theater continue to write about the themes and techniques of the play, which has acquired a permanent place in the history of British theater.

### Bryan Aubrey

*Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses how two books, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, influenced Churchill as she developed the main themes of *Cloud Nine*.*

Churchill has stated in interviews that two of the books that influenced her writing of *Cloud Nine* were Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. Millet's book was published in 1970 and became something of a bible for the emerging women's movement. Although today *Sexual Politics* is less well known than the work of other feminists of the period, such as Germaine Greer and Gloria Steinem, it was in its time a revolutionary work that awakened many American and European women to an awareness of the nature of the patriarchal society in which they lived. Fanon was a black psychiatrist from Martinique, a French colony, who wrote about his own experience of how the psychology of black people had been warped by the culture of the white colonizers. Churchill had already used Fanon's work as a basis for her play *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution* (first published in *Churchill: Shorts: Short Plays* in 1990), in which Fanon himself appears as a character. The two books together



(*Sexual Politics* and *Black Skin, White Masks*) helped Churchill make the link between colonial oppression and gender oppression, a connection that she noticed had also been made by the French playwright Jean Genet, who called it "the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorised repression" (quoted by Churchill in her introduction to *Cloud Nine*). Fanon's study was first published half a century ago, in 1952. He wrote of the various ways in which the colonizing white man treated the black man as inferior. He noticed this operating in his own profession: the doctors in the public health service usually spoke pidgin English to their black or Arab patients in a way that was demeaning. They did not treat people of color as equals. This kind of attitude on the part of whites led blacks to a mentality that accepted their own inferiority. They believed that if they were to become fully human, they had to bring themselves as quickly as possible into step with the white world. Fanon characterizes the typical thought process: "I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human." Fanon describes a dream reported by one of his black patients who was having problems in his career. The man dreamed that he was in a roomful of white men, and he too was white. Fanon concluded that this was simply wish fulfillment; the man wanted to be white. This was because "he lives in a society that makes his inferiority complex possible, in a society that derives its stability from the perpetuation of this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race." The black man in the colonized world thus is faced with a choice: "turn white or disappear." In the play, Joshua, the black servant, has chosen to "turn white" rather than disappear. Those who choose the opposite are either flogged (like the stable boys) or run the risk of being the victims of a punitive raid by British soldiers, their lives considered of no importance. Joshua's words, "My skin is black but oh my soul is white" are an allusion to "The Little Black Boy," a poem by William Blake that carries the same theme:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,  
And I am black, but O! my soul is white.  
White as an angel is the English child:  
But I am black as if bereav'd of light

In "turning white," Joshua renounces his own parents and regards Clive as both his mother and father, an illustration of the paternalism at the heart of the colonial exploitation of indigenous peoples. Joshua is treated as a dependent; he is regarded as being like a child. Clive refers to him as his "boy" or a woman.

The legacy of colonialism also appears in act two, in the reference to Lin's brother Bill, a British soldier who is killed in Northern Ireland. The struggle in Northern Ireland was the legacy of centuries of British rule. From the 1970s through the 1990s, many British soldiers were killed by the Irish Republican Army, a terrorist organization fighting to free Northern Ireland from British rule. Churchill noted that when the actors in *Cloud Nine* conducted workshops about the play, they suggested that Britain's relations with Ireland were much the same as a stereotypical male/female relationship. "The traditional view of the Irish is that they're charming, irresponsible, close to nature, all the things that people tend to think about women," said Churchill (quoted in Aston).



Thus the link is made between colonial and gender oppression. It is also interesting that Joshua, although obsequious toward Clive, feels relatively free to insult Clive's wife, Betty. He refuses to fetch her book when she asks for it, and later, when she asks him to fetch some thread from her sewing box, he tells her that she has "legs under that skirt" (and so can do it herself) and then adds the lewd remark, "And more than legs." Joshua is able to defy Betty because he perceives that as a woman in the white, British family, she has no authority. It is likely that he believes waiting on a woman to be against the natural order of things. It is, after all, the job of women to wait on men.

For her critique of this kind of gender stereotyping, Churchill turned to Millett's *Sexual Politics*. Millett's argument is simple in its outlines but carried through with relentless conviction and intellectual power. It is a sustained attack on patriarchy, the universal system by which males rule over females simply by virtue of being male. According to Millett, patriarchy as a means of perpetuating and justifying the rule of a particular group is more uniform and enduring than any class system or any other form of segregation in history. Each sex is socialized into the system at the psychological, sociological, and political levels. Personality is formed along stereotypical lines based on what the dominant group finds acceptable: aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy are assigned to the male, while passivity, ignorance, docility, and "virtue" are given to the female. This is reinforced by the roles society assigns, in terms of codes of conduct, attitudes, and approved activities. Domestic service and the raising of infants are allocated to the woman; everything else, such as achievement and ambition, is reserved for the man. At the political level, this is reflected in huge disparities in status and power; in many societies women are considered little more than the property of men.

Underpinning all this is the assumption that such arrangements rest on a biological basis. They are "natural." Against this, Millett argues that such patriarchal structures do not originate in human nature at all but are a result of human culture. She suggests that there are no significant inherent differences between male and female beyond the obvious ones relating to the physical body. There is no evidence of any mental or emotional difference; the studies that purport to show otherwise merely reflect the biases of their authors. Gender is in fact an arbitrary notion and may even run counter to biological fact, so ruthlessly is gender identity ("I am a girl," or "I am a boy") instilled in the first eighteen months of childhood. According to Millett, gender, as opposed to physical sex, is a learned behavior. *Sexual Politics* was at once a scholarly examination of the origins and nature of patriarchy and a revolutionary manifesto. Millett called for the end of the institution of the family as well as of the notion of monogamous marriage that accompanied it, since the family was the chief enforcer of patriarchal values. Millett also derided the concept of romantic love, which she claimed was a form of "emotional manipulation" on the part of the male and which was useful to patriarchy because it obscured the woman's low social status and economic dependence.

Millett's argument formed the core beliefs of the women's movement in the 1970s. Today, many (not all) of her views may not sound so radical—a sign of how successful the women's movement has been in changing deep-seated attitudes in America and Europe, although few would dispute that Western societies today remain patriarchal in most important respects.





*Cloud Nine* is Churchill's Millett-inspired attack on patriarchy, using the theatrical weapon of comedy. The family structure that Clive values so highly ("the family is all important") is clearly unworkable because it is essentially unnatural, not conforming to the facts of the matter as they appear. Edward will not grow up into the man Clive wants him to be, whatever his parents do or say to him, and Betty's denial of her own sexuality is a denial of the truth of her being. "You just keep still" is the best advice she can offer to Ellen about sex, and when Ellen asks whether it is enjoyable, Betty replies, "You're not getting married to enjoy yourself." Millett pointed out in *Sexual Politics* that one of the consequences of Victorian patriarchy was that "the vast inherent potential of female sexuality had come . . . to be nearly totally obscured through cultural restraints." The assumption was, as Betty clearly also believes, that "sex is for the man." Underlying this suppression of female sexuality are the male fear of women and the association of women, sex, and sin that goes all the way back, as Millett points out, to the Genesis story of Eve leading Adam into sin. This belief is expressed by Clive after he has praised male friendship to Harry. "There is something dark about women, that threatens what is best in us," he says. This is one reason why Mrs. Saunders, who is an independent woman who likes sex and expects to get pleasure from it (something that fails to happen in her encounter with Clive), has to be expelled from the wedding party. She does not fit in the world that Clive chooses to believe he lives in, even though he has been quite willing to use her for his own sexual pleasure.

It is sex and sexual orientation that loom large in *Cloud Nine*, the very title of which is a reference to sexual ecstasy (as the song that closes act two, scene three makes clear). And it is the repressing of the sexual instinct, particularly same-sex attraction, that leads the characters into the lies and cover-ups that feature in act one. The infinitely varied nature of human sexuality simply cannot forever be squeezed into the narrow heterosexual and monogamous channels that patriarchy decrees. This seems to be the message of the play. Although the sexually liberated world of act two may also have its problems—Victoria's struggles to break free of Martin's dominance and the failure of the gay relationship between Gerry and Edward—it is at least a world in which the characters' relationships start to have a closer resemblance to who they really are.

**Source:** Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Cloud Nine*, in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## Apollo Amoko

*In the following essay, Amoko examines the text of Cloud Nine and criticisms of the drama, identifying in both a lack of attention paid to acts of colonial violence and the generalization of white women in Africa to represent the experience of all women.*

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



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

In a bid to trace a certain coherence of effects in Western feminist practices of writing and reading, this examination of *Cloud Nine* concerns itself as much with the playtext as with its critical reception. Critical reaction to the play has focused disproportionately on what are perceived to be its "feminist accomplishments" to the near total exclusion of any in-depth or sustained examination of race and colonialism. Where passing review of colonialism has been made, it has been merely to point out how racism and sexism occasionally interpenetrate or how racism, the play's "other" concern, illustrates sexism, the play's "central" or "ideal" concern. Critical discourses generated by *Cloud Nine* seem to imitate the structure of racialized omission inadvertently reproduced in the play. Acts of colonial occupation, mass murder, arson, and violent repression by colonial settlers in Africa depicted in passing in the first act of the play have attracted little critical attention. Visually no attempt has been made in the critical writing on this play to investigate the manner in which the peculiar experience of African women under British colonial occupation has been effaced in *Cloud Nine*. Nor has any attempt been made to investigate the ways in which the experiences and struggles of white settler women (complicit, however contradictorily, in the colonial project) have been generalized, in a play set substantially in colonial Africa, to represent the plight of all women in a manner comparable to the way men were historically generalized to represent all humanity.

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



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

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

To pose the colonial question is to realize that the problematic representation of cultural and racial difference cannot be read off from the signs and designs of social authority that are produced in the analyses of class and gender differentiation. As I was writing in 1982 the conceptual boundaries of the west were being busily reinscribed in a clamor of texts—transgressive, semiotic, semanalytic, deconstructionist—none of which pushed those boundaries to their colonial periphery; to that limit where the west must face a peculiarly displaced and decentered image of itself in "double duty bound," at once a civilizing mission and a subjugating force. Bhabha's insights enable a reconsideration of the ways in which Churchill and her critics may have reproduced an undifferentiated African landscape as the limit text of their critiques of gender and sexual differentiation. They allow, as well, for an examination of the ways in which various empowering white subjectivities seem to materialize against the dark reflection of a generic and stereotypic African man (Joshua). Churchill's feminist critics appear to use colonial and racial difference to produce social and critical authority for Westernized notions of gender and sexual difference. *Cloud Nine* enacts a multiple and highly differentiated structure of oppression that constructs the prevailing gender, sexual, and racial definitions. Churchill demonstrates, as much by her silences and contradictions as by effective and self-conscious dramatization, that these categories are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are inextricably interconnected. While patriarchy forms the foundational basis for this structure. Churchill deploys a number of dramatic devices in attempts to disclose and then dispute these oppressive categories and their informing ideology. These include instances of cross-casting, the destabilization of racial, gender, and sexual identities as discrete categories in character development, and Brechtian alienation attained through a non-linear dramatic structure and a historicized plot. As a result of the complex dynamics of power ceaselessly and contradictorily at play, the disruption of these categories is simultaneously facilitated and invalidated throughout the play. Churchill identifies white patriarchy as the philosophical basis of the multiple structure of social





organization early in the play. In his opening statement, Clive, a senior administrator in the colonial Empire in (undifferentiated) Africa, says:

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

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

Churchill's exposition of the prevailing social hierarchies is enacted most powerfully, in my view, in Act One, scene three, during which scene Clive and Harry (both white colonial settlers and both males) are supervising the flogging of their native domestic servants. Joshua, Clive's senior domestic servant and trusted ally, flogs the other African workers—the stable boys—for not being "trustworthy," for "whispering," for "visiting their people," for "going out at night," and for "carrying knives." While the men are administering this punishment the white women are kept indoors; under patriarchy, acts such as flogging (and violent components of colonial empire-building) are constructed as male acts from whose rigors the women and children are shielded. Significantly, the women embody and reinforce their oppression by performing and embodying their apportioned gendered roles: "The men will do it [the flogging] in the right way. . . . We have our own part to play." "Luckily this house has a head, I am squeamish myself but Clive is not." The "part" the domesticated women have to "play" is the consistent reproduction, in a deeply theatrical sense, of docile, obedient bodies useful in support of the colonial economy. Churchill specifies that the role of Betty be played by a male actor during the first act of the play. This casting choice physicalizes and concretizes the occupation of her body and that of other women by patriarchy. She says in self-introduction: "I am a man's creation as you can see. And what men want is what I want to be." She displays (as, indeed, do all the other women in this scene) a crucial facet of "colonial occupation" as she seems to consent to her oppression, a consent at once authorized and undermined by the glaring inequalities in power. Embodiment and enactment are dramatized early in the play as the principal ways through which an oppressed identity, "woman," is normalized in a colonial setting. The history of colonialism (both of territories and of bodies) is replete with instances in which it entrenches itself through the materialization of subjects as "oppressed bodies." The introduction of Edward into this scene presents the final facet of social construction portrayed in the play—the "colonization" of (white) children by a patriarchal family structure that seeks to script onto their bodies a "natural" bipolar gender identity and a "natural" heterosexual disposition. Edward reveals the ways in which the colonial margin functions as a space for the cultivation of the ideal (white, male) subject. He is beaten for playing with a doll because, as he has been told before, "dolls are for girls." In a powerful illustration of the intersection of the discourses of race, gender, and class in the colonial arena, Churchill parallels the flogging suffered by the colonized Africans for their "misbehaviour" with the beating suffered by Edward for transgressing



prescribed gender roles. The on-stage beating occurs concurrently with the beatings suffered by the Africans off-stage. *Cloud Nine* demonstrates the nonvoluntary manner in which bodies are forcefully compelled to materialize within prescribed gender, racial, and sexual forms. At the very outset of her play, Churchill illustrates some of the multiple but inter-related sites of white patriarchal oppression: the colonization of Africa and the enslavement of African bodies, and the metaphorical colonization of women and children.

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

As she exposes—but also replicates—the multiple modes through which a white patriarchal structure variously manifests itself, Churchill deploys a number of dramatic strategies to disrupt the categories inherent in this epistemic regime, including what Diamond and Reinelt classify as "crossracial" and "cross-gender" casting. The elaborate use of "cross-casting" in *Cloud Nine* anticipated and in some instances seems to have triggered debates over gender identity in contemporary Western culture and in Western theatre theory. Such debates would include, for example, the works of Diamond and Butler. In an uncanny sense, Churchill's enactment of gender constitution seems to anticipate Butler's contentions regarding the performativity of gender. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (as well as in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*), Butler adopts the philosophical doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition in order to demonstrate the performativity of gender. (The analysis of the ways bodies materialized as various racialized, sexual, and gendered subjects in *Cloud Nine* undertaken above drew much of its implicit authority from Butler's work). Basing her argument on Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, one becomes a woman." Butler explores the potential for deconstructing and subverting the gender script. She argues:



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

Butler's conception of gender affirms de Beauvoir's assertion that "woman" is a historical construction and not a natural fact. Butler makes a firm distinction between "sex as biological facticity and gender as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity," even as she contests the given-ness of sex as a natural fact. She argues that discrete and polar gender identities are punitively regulated cultural fictions whose reproduction sustains a system of compulsory heterosexuality based on a notion of opposing "natural" sexes with "natural" attractions for each other. This argument is forcefully enacted throughout *Cloud Nine*, particularly in the scene examined above (Act One, scene three). In that scene, such mundane acts as bodily comportment, floggings, playing with dolls, and speech acts are coded in race- and gender-specific ways. These race- and gender-inflected bodily codes are violently enforced in order to ensure that bodies materialize in very specific ways. Butler's project aims beyond providing women, as oppressed subjects, with the capacity to effect social change. It points to the ontological insufficiency of the falsely essentializing and oppressive category "woman." It seeks to disrupt the reification of sexual difference as the founding moment of Western culture and calls, in conclusion, for contestation of the gender script, for a different sort of stylized repetition of acts to be accomplished through "performances out of turn" and/or "unwarranted improvisations." Although the play predates Butler's arguments by nearly a decade, the casting choices and character realizations in *Cloud Nine* enact Butler's call for contestation of the gender script through myriad gender performances out of turn and unwarranted improvisations. In a separate attempt to deploy the notion of performance in order to grapple with the problematics of female identity and representation in Western culture, Diamond embarks on an insightful intertextual reading of Brechtian theory and feminist theory in "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards A Gestic Feminist Criticism." This essay seeks "the recovery of the radical potential of the Brechtian critique and a discovery, for feminist theory, of the specificity of the theatre." Diamond envisions the site of performance as simultaneously a site of feminist resistance. She appropriates key Brechtian concepts□*Verfremdungseffekt*, the "not, but" historicization, and *Gestus*□and reinterprets them using feminist concepts. Emerging from this intertextual reading is a theatre-specific aesthetic□ gestic criticism□that seeks to use the theatre as a site for enactments of feminist resistance. Diamond suggests, for example, that the Brechtian concept of *Verfremdung*□the defamiliarization, in performance, of words, ideas or gestures in order to provoke fresh appreciation and insights□be deployed to critique gender differentiation. She provides as an example of this feminist *Verfremdung* the "crossdressing" (a rather erroneous description) that occurs in *Cloud Nine*.

The construction of character and the casting choices directed in *Cloud Nine* ought then to be apprehended against the background of the disparate theorizing outlined above. The use of crosscasting and of other theatrical strategies to demonstrate and subvert



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

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

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



man." Considering the emphasis that has been placed on the fact that the company in the play's first production consisted of actors of "plural sexualities and sexual experiences," this racial and colonial exclusivity seems odd—or perhaps is instructive.

The character of Joshua goes beyond obsequiousness and develops an active desire to be white, effectively renouncing claims to a black identity. In his disruptive construction Joshua purports to become a white man with a black skin—black skin, white masks?! He seems to embody that form of subjectification that Homi Bhabha classifies as "colonial mimicry." Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a *subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage." Churchill seems to construct Joshua as a "mimic man": almost the same but not quite; almost white, but not quite; anglicized, but not English. He says in self-description: My skin is black but oh my soul is white. I hate my tribe. My master is my light. I only live for him. As you can see. What white men want is what I want to be. He regards Clive as his father and mother, disowning his own parents after their murder by the forces of colonial occupation during an arsonist raid on his native village. He asserts that black people are bad people, that they are not his people and that he does not visit them. He flogs his African coworkers as part of his duties—this punishment is in fact administered at his instigation. He has been Christianized (he prays to Jesus) and is domesticated. Despite being black, he seems to enjoy considerable power over Betty, Clive's wife. He continually spies on her, reporting her "misbehaviour" (just like that of "the stable boys") to a grateful Clive. He defies Betty's orders with misogynous insolence and a degree of impunity, with the none-too-subtle connivance of his master. He has become an ingratiating subordinate enforcer—concurrently a target and an instrument of power—of white patriarchy in conspiracy with white men.

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

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





creation story they are both required to proclaim. Asked by Edward to narrate, in the secrecy of early morning, another "bad story," Joshua replies. "First there was nothing and then there was the great goddess. She was very large and she had golden eyes and she made the sun and the earth. But soon she became miserable and lonely and she cried like a great waterfall and her tears made all the rivers in the world. . ." At the conclusion of the lengthy recitation of this unauthorized creation story, Edward says, "It is not true, though." Joshua concedes, "Of course it is not true. It is a bad story. Adam and Eve is true. God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all trouble." Although Joshua and Edward end their encounter with a reaffirmation of the official creation story, "the bad story" they conspiratorially indulge in powerfully illustrates the menace of mimicry. In Bhabha's terms, Joshua as a mimic figure can be seen simultaneously to cohere to the dominant strategic function of colonial power and to pose an immanent danger to normalized knowledge and disciplinary power. As if to contain the menace latent in mimicry, Joshua's final and dramatic act in the play (an act that concludes the first act) is a decontextualized act of violence. He unexpectedly shoots at Clive, his erstwhile master. Rather than elaborating the menace of mimicry, this decontextualized act appears to be a contrived re-enactment of the stereotype of the randomly violent and murderous African. A colonial stereotype is seemingly evoked to finally erase the menace immanent in mimicry. Churchill may have intended Joshua's violence at the end of the first act to represent a belated act of native resistance. Indeed, my analysis above of the menace in Joshua's mimicry lends some credence to this reading. However, the completely decontextualized nature of the shooting undermines its dissident potential. In its unexpectedness and unexplainedness, Joshua's shooting of Clive seems to hark back to white supremacist stereotypes that assign a tendency for atavistic violence and incorrigible duplicity to the black character. In its belatedness—and it is not so much the belatedness, as such, as the unexplainedness that is importantly at issue here—this act of native violence seems to legitimate the paranoia that colored many of the actions of the white settlers earlier in the play. These acts of white paranoia include an arsonist raid on a native village, Mrs. Saunders's flight from her home to Clive's, and the racial diatribes of Clive and Harry. This reading may seem unfair and one-sided until one considers the fact that Joshua's shooting of Clive has attracted very little critical attention; as a singular act, this eruption of native violence seems in harmony with the subordination of race and colonial history to gender and sexuality in the world of the play and its interlocutors.

It is instructive that the one black character portrayed on stage in *Cloud Nine* does not seek to disrupt the fundamental assumptions of hierarchical racial identification. Joshua self-denigratingly affirms the existence of a racial bipolarity in colonial Africa and idolizes whiteness. It is also instructive that the other Africans in this drama—the "stable boys" as well as the invisible African women and children—who have, presumably, not mimicked whiteness in quite the same fashion as Joshua, are denied representation except on the periphery: offstage, being flogged. The antithetical (re)production of the colonial subject—the absent but always already criminalized "stable boys"/ native villagers in contrast to the obedient and obsequious Joshua—authorize the reproduction of the discourses of colonialism. Further, in view of Diamond's elaborate analysis of the potential in Churchill's plays to remove women from historical and conventional



invisibility, it is instructive that, while seeming to offer white women the prospect of non-romanticized representation, *Cloud Nine*, as if in conspiracy with colonizing white power, has sustained the continued invisibility and entrapment of African women. Not only does this play seem to be trapped within an ambivalent bipolar racial identification, it ultimately reifies whiteness as the Ideal Subject and casts blackness as the Other, at best the mimic, even in the heart of Africa. It is instructive that, in an act set in colonial Africa, white existence occupies center stage and black deprivation is stereotyped (on stage), marginalized (off stage), or erased. Further attesting to the location of this drama in a white epistemic regime is the fact that Churchill, in her cast list and throughout the play, does not feel impelled to specify the racial identities of the (other) characters in the play, with the exception of Joshua, whom she pointedly identifies as "black." Whiteness, as if by irresistible inference, is the given circumstance to which Joshua provides the lone (in)visible exception of a mimicking inferior. Is the generally laudatory critical reaction to the play's contestation of gender and sexual difference similarly located in a white epistemic regime? Is whiteness, for instance, (in)visibly inscribed on the female bodies purporting, as Diamond puts it, to refuse the romanticism of identity?

Race and colonialism are not as centrally at issue in the second act of the play. The comparison between sexual or gender oppression in contemporary Britain and British colonial settlement in Africa in the nineteenth century is abandoned at the end of the first act, following the uncontextualized and unexplained end of the colonial presence in Africa.

The treatment of race and colonialism seems to serve primarily as a backdrop (in Bhabha's terms, as a limit text) that underwrites and sustains a critique of Western gender and sexual difference. *Cloud Nine* features a sustained attempt to use crosscasting to critique Western gender and sexual ideology. The actors (whose race we know by omission) involved in the out-of-turn gender performances or unwarranted improvisations are all white. The whiteness of all these characters and actors is at once presumed and effaced by Churchill and especially by her critics, who generalize these racially exclusive gender or sexual recon.gurations. An implicit assumption of the West as a primary referent underwrites these readings.

At the level of casting, by assigning "men," as perceived sexed bodies, to play "female" roles, and "women," as perceived sexed bodies, to play "male" roles (Betty is, in the first act, played by an actor identified as a "man"; Cathy as a young child is, in the second act, played by a grown actor described as a "man"; and Edward, as a young child, is, in the first act, played by an adult actor identified as a "woman"), Churchill uncouples gender and sexual identities and appears to fulfill Butler's call for disruptive gender performances, for a different sort of stylization of acts. This is accomplished by the presentation of images of actors, as perceived sexed bodies, playing gender roles or repeating performative acts in conflict with the genders that dominant ideology "naturally" and unalterably assigns them—"women" acting "masculine" and "men" acting "feminine." The uncoupling of gender and sexual identity is reiterated by doubling, where an actor plays more than one role in the course of a performance, in some instances across the boundaries of biological sex. In the first production of the play the following roles, among others, were doubled: the same actor, identified as a "woman,"



played Edward in the first act and Betty in the second; and the same actor, identified as a "man," played Clive in the first act and Cathy in the second. This demonstration of the performativity of gender and the possibility of transformation through gender performances out of turn is contained by its specific theatrical setting. The actors "real" sex and "real" gender cannot altogether be subverted in the theatre. As in cross-racial casting, the scheme to illustrate theatrically the performativity of gender (and consequently to undermine it) is simultaneously invalidated by the same means that set it in motion. The stability of "masculinity" and "femininity" as discrete and polar categories must first be affirmed and reified, before the seeming disruptiveness of cross-casting can be achieved and appreciated in performance. Toward the conclusion of *Cloud Nine* Africa makes an abrupt return into the world of the play. Clive's authority as father to his family has by this point been seriously undermined. In his final failure, his newly liberated wife, Betty, divorces him and begins a life of sexual exploration and self-fulfillment. Clive's empire seems to be crumbling. Conceding this, a despairing Clive remarks at the end of the play: "You are not that sort of woman, Betty. I can't believe that you are. And Africa is to be communist, I suppose. I used to be proud to be British. There was a high ideal. I came out of the verandah and looked at the stars." The irony in Clive's remark is that the discourses of empire in the play's imagination and in its critical reception continue to be everywhere foundational.

**Source:** Apollo Amoko, "Casting Aside Colonial Occupation: Intersections of Race, Sex, and Gender in *Cloud Nine* and *Cloud Nine* Criticism," in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 42, No. 1, Spring 1999, pp. 45-58.





## Topics for Further Study

Are there innate differences between men and women, in terms of their interest in or aptitude for certain careers or leisure pursuits, or are most differences a result of social conditioning? Do research to learn what experts have to say on this question. What are some of the ways in which social conditioning is changing today?

To what extent is being gay considered acceptable in America today and to what extent is there still prejudice and discrimination against gays? What forms does that discrimination take? Should laws be passed to make discrimination against gays illegal?

Is homosexuality innate, or is it a learned behavior? In other words, are people born gay, or do they choose to be gay? Investigate the current research on this question.

In order to succeed and be accepted in American society, do blacks have to "act white" (like Joshua in the play)? Explain your answer.



# Compare and Contrast

**1880:** The British Empire is at the height of its power. More than a quarter of the world's landmass is under British rule, including large portions of Africa.

**1980:** Britain has long since renounced its empire and is now a middle-sized European power and a member of the European Community (EC). There is an ongoing debate in Britain about how much national sovereignty should be surrendered to an EC bureaucracy.

**Today:** Britain's colonial legacy is apparent in the sometimes troubled relations between the races in what is now a multi-ethnic nation. The majority of non-white Britons are descendents of Asian or West Indian immigrants (former subjects of the British Empire) who were admitted to Britain beginning in the 1950s. In 2001, race riots erupt in three northern English cities.

**1880:** In Britain, women are not allowed to vote, and educational opportunities are limited. In the better-off families, a woman's place is in the home, supervising the large household and entertaining visitors. Only working-class women take paid employment, in the textile industry, for example, or as domestic help.

**1980:** The women's movement is a powerful force in British society, and discrimination by gender or marital status is illegal. Britain has its first woman prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the number of women in the professions increases, as does the number of women in the workforce as a whole. But women's earnings still lag behind those of men.

**Today:** Economic inequalities between men and women remain. In Britain, women's earnings are only 81 percent of men's. Women still face obstacles to career success, including the so-called glass ceiling (a barrier that is invisible but is nonetheless there), which make it difficult for women to be promoted to the highest levels in business.

**1880:** The growing suffragette movement, with its aim of securing voting rights for women and access to the professions, helps to bring more women into work in the theater. Many actresses play important roles in producing and performing plays.

**1980:** As a result of the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, an impressive number of plays are written and produced by women, many of which dramatize issues that are important in the lives of women.

**Today:** Young women playwrights now start writing, confident of their equal status with men. But women involved in British theater also say that women need to have greater access to money and resources, that there should be more women in positions of power in theater management, and that more plays by women should be produced in large theaters.

## What Do I Read Next?

*Rites* (1970), by British playwright Maureen Duffy, is an imaginative recasting of *The Bacchae*, a play by the ancient Greek dramatist Euripides. Like *Cloud Nine*, it is a feminist play that brings traditional gender roles into question.

Wendy Wasserstein is a leading American playwright; her play *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988) is a satirical approach to the successes and failures of two decades of the feminist movement.

Churchill's *Plays Two* (1990) contains four of her best plays: *Softcops*, *Top Girls*, *Fen*, and *Serious Money*. Churchill's introduction and her notes on each play provide an illuminating commentary.

Elaine Aston's *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (1994) is a lucid introduction that explains difficult theoretical issues in a way that a reader new to the field can understand.

## Further Study

Betsko, Kathleen, and Rachel Koenig, *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights*, William Morrow, 1987, pp. 75-84.

In this interview, Churchill talks about her work, including *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*, *Fen*, and other plays.

Gray, Francis, "Mirrors of Utopia: Caryl Churchill and Joint Stock," in *British and Irish Drama since 1960*, edited by James Acheson, St. Martin's, 1993, pp. 47-59.

Gray examines the far-reaching consequences of the plays that emerged from Churchill's work with the Joint Stock Company, which added a political dimension to her work. He includes an analysis of *Cloud Nine*.

Itzin, Catherine, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968*, Eyre Methuen, 1980.

This is a year-by-year account of the development of what Itzen calls the theater of political change from 1968 to 1978. She includes sections on Churchill and the important women's companies of the period as well as other companies that gave opportunities to women writers and performers.

Wandor, Michelene, *Drama Today: A Critical Guide to British Drama, 1970-1990*, Longman, 1993.

This is a concise guide to themes, writers, and works in contemporary British drama. Wandor discusses Churchill along with Nell Dunn, Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, Alan Ayckbourn, and others.



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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized





Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

DfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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