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A Carnival with Restraint

Deconstruction of National Identity in Cloud Nine

Yangzi Zhou

In 1974, Caryl Churchill began collaboration with London's Royal Court Theatre, the influence of which persists beyond the end of her residency one year later (Aston and Diamond, xi-xii). The residency transformed the primary medium of Churchill's plays from radio broadcasting to theatrical performance. Royal Court's continuing association with a playwright whose works are laden with avant-garde techniques and feminist agenda endorses the intricate possibility of imbibing experimental drama into mainstream theatre. The first milestone of this long-time collaboration is *Cloud Nine*. Debuted at the Royal Court in 1979, and later transferred to Off-Broadway, it marked the first time that Churchill received wide-scale audience and critical attention on both sides of the Atlantic.

As a commission of a 1978 workshop "about sexual politics" (Churchill 245), *Cloud Nine* dramatizes issues of gender and racial identities with cross-racial and cross-gender dressing, which earns it the reputation of a "radical critique of patriarchy" (Diamond 227). The subversion of the fixed roles designated by patriarchal norms is presented in extremely visual terms against the Victorian African setting of Act I. Yet the almost complete elimination of this technique in the contemporary London of the second act,

along with the playwright's "essential" guide to how cross-dressing shall be conducted, entails criticism on the "consigning of certain other identities . . . to further subjection and invisibility" (Amoko 45) and on showing only "desire in terms that reinforce heterosexuality" (Harding 260). Varying observations about the production's gender and racial representation imply that these issues, apart from being the context of *Cloud Nine*, are themselves in need of contextualization. This essay adopts a historical approach to the portrayal of the British national identity in this play, the understanding of which is crucial to how Churchill conceives her characters and weaves them into the wider spectrum. I propose that *Cloud Nine* deconstructs the myth of national identity in a carnivalesque yet consciously restrained manner. While the satire of the "colonial and sexual oppression" (Churchill 245) during the formation and development of the national identity is palpably expressed in both acts, I detect, from in particular the second act, a sense of restraint in the celebration of this carnival status. Bearing in mind the call for a "carnavalesque theatre" from Churchill's contemporary David Edgar, I read the restraint as, apart from a signal for the return to the national identity the playwright challenges, a tactic invitation to the connection between theatricality and reality on the reader/audience's part, which is vital for the agenda of this genre of theatre.

In the first act of *Cloud Nine*, patriotism occupies the central stage briefly before sexism or racism takes over, and it is no less intractable than the latter two. Scene one opens with the entire cast—a family of seven living in Africa under British rule in the Victorian era, singing in praise of England's grandeur. Standing out between their outward identity as citizens of Great Britain and their inward recognition with the English ethnical identity is the intricacy of defining a "British" national identity. In her seminal work *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, Linda Colley contends that the years between the Acts of Union and Queen Victoria's ascent to the throne witnessed the formation of an overarching British identity that bonded the Britons with, among others, the idea of an empire against the country's religious and military rivals on the European continent (5–7). In this light, the major expansion of the British Empire in the Victorian era could further consolidate the British national identity. Given the overwhelming dominance of England in its representation at that time, in the current setting of Churchill's play, a picture of the British national identity can be

largely drawn from the language, manners, behaviour, etc. of this family of English origin.

Considering also that the play delineates two periods in the history of one nation, the historical aspect of its national identity, be it about inheritance or evolution, cannot go unnoticed. It seems appropriate then, to invite Anthony D. Smith's definition of a nation as "a named human population sharing an historic territory, *common myths* and *historical memories*, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (14, italics mine). In the first place, this definition involves fundamental elements that are related to the genesis of colonial and sexual oppression in Churchill's narrative. More importantly, Smith accentuates the past's presence in any national identity by mentioning "historical" twice, suggesting that even though national identity evolves with time, it always contains the territorial, mythological, and cultural memories from its earlier stages. The Victorian era, with its long stretch across most of the nineteenth century, has left considerable imprints on the national identity of Great Britain. Thus the Victorian setting of the first act cannot circumvent two myths, one being the colonial expansion crucial for the making of an empire, the other the prevalence of what is now recognized as the Victorian morality.

As Spivak puts it, to read any nineteenth century British literature one has to bear in mind the "imperialism, understood as England's social mission," because it "was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (243). While globally speaking colonization functioned as the main form of imperialism, within the domestic sphere the ideology seeped into the moral codes, regulating every member's behaviour and etiquette. As a typical family drama about the nineteenth century, the first act is haunted by the Victorian ghosts hidden behind an imperialist and sexist national identity. The opening stage direction, constituted by four concise phrases—"Low bright sun. Verandah. Flagpole with union jack. The Family" (251), taxonomizes the essence of Victorian Britishness. The "low bright sun" shines on "the Empire on which the sun never set," bringing back the memory when the country's colonial power was at its pinnacle. Verandah, as part of a popular style of colonial building in the mid-nineteenth century, impregnates the colonist's attempt to "adapt to the local environment and yet still try to remind the occupants of 'Britain' and of 'British values'" (Luscombe). The union jack flag is self-evidently a manifestation of Britain's territorial ownership over its African colony. Last but certainly not the least, the capitalized "Family"

expands the sheer physical embodiment seen in the previous three objects. It symbolizes, to appropriate Plato's terms, a universal form that unites all puzzle pieces of an ideal nuclear family in Victorian Britain. The union of the husband and wife consolidates the family tradition, which, with the heterosexual marriage, promises the continuation of prosperity with the births of a son and a daughter. Senile guidance is assigned to the mother-in-law, while the addition of the servant and governess furnishes the economic sufficiency of the Queen's upper-middle class representatives abroad. The reading of the first few lines evokes associations indicative of the play's theme and subjects as revolving around the establishment of a national identity at that particular time.

Each character is to the Family what each fragment of the identity that they represent to the holistic Identity of the British people, but there is some character that is more "representable" than others. In Act I this character is the colonist and husband, Clive. As the descendent of the patriarch archetype, Clive embodies the twin Victorian values of Empire and Family, and according to the confession of his explorer friend and admirer Harry, "the empire is one big family" (Churchill 266). By stringing together all other characters under the protection of the same roof, Clive demands their dependency or servitude in return. In the first scene, Clive's rhyming couplets speak through the lines of his family, friends and servants, formulating the audience/reader's preconception of the women, children, and African natives before they have the chance to speak. In Clive's descriptions of his wife—a delicate and sensitive little dove, his servant—"you can hardly notice that the fellow's black," and his son—who will be taught to "grow up to be a man", he writes a narrative for those who constitute the Empire with the white male patriarchs and colonists. In *his* discourse, women, children, and colonized natives are conditioned around the patriarchal centre. These marginalized groups become the othered object in juxtaposition with the male-written, male-toned myth of national identity. As a result, the codes of conduct of the marginalized groups are under strict regulation of the patriarch, to the extent that these people have internalized the values that are designed to execute their oppression. Under Clive's influence, his wife Betty repetitively exhorts herself and is told by others that she is not strong enough. When she and Ellen are playing balls, they are greeted by the men's "murmurs of *surprise* and congratulations" (Churchill 265, italics mine), and she stops immediately when her son

Edward demands her to stop—her character and action all abide by her husband's instruction and the social convention.

The internalization of gender roles is born out of the importance of duty in Victorian morality. Since most women of the Victorian era have no share in the public sphere, the private space of family becomes the only performing ground of their duties. Acting in accordance with proper femininity is one of the few, if not the only, means to fulfil such duties. Harold Perkin, when attributing the rise of modern English society partly to Victorian legacies, observes that the Victorian prototype of the "perfect lady" is the "completely leisured, completely ornamental, completely helpless and dependent middle-class wife or daughter" (129). The achievement of the feminine ideal is perhaps even more desirable in families installed overseas because feeling "the sentiments and shared institutional values" as well as building "family and community connections" are ways to mitigate the sense of diaspora and be spiritually closer to the homeland (Poore 6). Admitting that "this whole continent is my enemy" (Churchill 277), Clive expects that British boots are better than those in Africa, while Betty considers a good visitor as one "from home" (Churchill 252). For them, the desire to indulge in "materialized" homeliness, along with the practise of gendered social codes from home, is indispensable for the fostering of a patriotic sense of superiority.

Beautified as a citizen's dutiful services to the Queen, the inherent oppressive quality of imperial Britishness is revealed in the play as a parasite, for it thrives in the name of family yet distorts the very nature of family. Parental authority becomes a justification for unjustifiable inequalities. The advice from Betty's mother Maud, who constantly regulates her daughter that she should follow her parents and grandparents and remain a dutiful, sacrificing, patient wife under any circumstance, bears certain resemblance to Queen Victoria's letters to her newlywed daughter, in which she concludes that "the poor woman is bodily and morally the husband's slave" (254). While Maud's words are more of an inculcating guidance, Clive's authority emanates a threatening note when he tells Edward that "you should always respect and love me not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and loved my own father, because he was my father" (Churchill 276). According to this Victorian parent, Edward needs to love Clive not because Edward cares for him *like* a father, but for the mere reason that Clive *is* his father. Duty is hailed for its historical longevity in the national tradition, not for its innate value and content. The supposed parent-child love is deformed to suit social

requirements, and one's desire and preference is suppressed both externally and internally.

In deciding who shall be included as the nation's rightful citizen, it is the likes of Clive—the white heterosexual male, who make rules and then lead the game. The “others,” on the other hand, carry enormous risks, because their duty to the patriarchal centre is tenuously subject to the arbitrary manipulation of the patriarch. Their active or passive centrifugal tendency will possibly result in a complete loss of the national identity. Betty has to deny the affection she harbours for Harry because she shoulders the responsibility of a faithful British wife, yet when Clive is aware of her minor trespassing, he not only vilifies her, but also threatens to banish her from the native British land with the claim that “if I shot you every British man and woman would applaud me” (Churchill 277). Likewise, at the discovery of Harry's homosexuality, Clive also denounces it as “a betrayal of the Queen” (Churchill 283). Unlike Betty, her widowed neighbour Mrs. Saunders enjoys more freedom as a “stateless” woman, for without a husband, she is much less bounded by need to conform to gender roles in order to perform her national duty. There is no one to forcefully forbid her from riding outside or having an affair. The comparison between Betty and Mrs. Saunders at this early stage of the play conveys Churchill's notion that if one must exchange individuality and freewill for a national identity, then perhaps living without this identity is not necessarily worse than living with it. Although in her relationship with Clive, Mrs. Saunders is not exempt from being the victim of unfair rules, embodied in her is the play's urge to denounce an oppressive national identity.

It is evident that as a text, the first act of *Cloud Nine* integrally preserves the Victorian gender and social stereotypes which are the fundamental ingredients of a “good” British citizen. While traditional realist theatre also deals with these issues, it is the incorporation of cross-dressing that announces Churchill's breaking away from previous approaches that adopt such techniques for practical or mere comical effects. Her stage direction for the first act requires Betty, Joshua and Edward to be played by actors opposite to the characters' sex or race. Comic in its nature, it is befitting to critically approach cross-dressing with Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. Bakhtin's inquiry into the carnivalization of literature finds its origin in ritualistic events which, as he observes, become carnival in its interruption and suspension of the usual order of life. In place of the order,

the carnival festivals invite a new order that rejects, reinvents, subverts, and destructs the old one, the process of which is reproduced in literary works partially in the forms of “ambivalent images” and “parody” (Bakhtin 126, 127). Cross-dressing initiates what Bakhtin defines as a collection of metaphors “saturated with a specific *carnival sense of the world*” (107), so that the related events in the act serve as the site of carnival satire by ridiculing the stern image of the British national identity, making it the subject of performative parody—as the humour and farce is to be seen rather than be read—instead of an inviolable authority.

With cross-dressing, Churchill’s stage becomes what Bakhtin would call “the reverse side of the world,” the playground of “life turned inside out” (122). Apart from its “violation of the usual and the generally accepted” (Bakhtin 126), cross-dressing reveals Betty, Edward, and Joshua as constructed “characters” instead of actual individuals living in the “reality” on stage. Betty is played by a male actor because she is the product of male supremacy. Meanwhile, although Churchill notes that “Betty does not value herself as a woman” (245), her intense internalization of the Victorian femininity under the male gaze suggests quite the opposite. As a character, Betty values herself very much as a woman, while the deliberately unshielded maleness of her performer, when it is thrust into a corset in a farcical manner, interrogates the narrow set of signs that defines womanliness. Similarly, Edward is portrayed by an adult woman as a jocular tribute to the association between children and women, and between homosexuality and femininity. A white actor takes the role of Joshua in order to externalize his mental whitewashing, after he has renounced any attachment to his tribe and parents with the declaration that “my skin is black but oh my soul is white” (Churchill 251). In addition, the racial and gender subversion in *Cloud Nine* alters the Bakhtinian concept in that it is a reversal of the reversed. In the carnival festival cited by Bakhtin as an archetype, a slave who is crowned king anticipates the climax of the celebration, and such “profanation” is carnival because it involves a lower party that is “playing with the symbols of higher authority” (125). In *Cloud Nine*, however, it is the “king” (the white male) that plays the “slave” (the black and the woman); it is the higher authority that is forced to play with the lower symbols, denoting that the gendered and racial hierarchy is perched on changeable rules.

When its fundamental hierarchies are placed under scrutiny, the national identity is destabilized. When Clive addresses the male Betty, the white Joshua, and the adult and female Edward, the problematic nature of his commands, which in usual circumstances might be accepted without any second thought, is revealed and his authority discredited. The formidable embodiment of the national identity stoops to vulnerability with the exposure of his contradictoriness and pretension. Ostensibly Clive displays a dominant and rational self, holding a dubious view of women by condemning their dark side that “threatens what is best in us” (Churchill 282)—the best being the male camaraderie between him and Harry. Ironically, though, he surrenders to the dark side with an insatiable and uncontrollable lust for the sexual favour of Mrs. Saunders, a woman “dark like this continent” (Churchill 263). Act I contains a scene where Clive performs oral sex to Mrs. Saunders, but his orgasm arrives prematurely when he rushes to perform his patriarchal duty at a Christmas picnic, where he has to resort to Champaign stains to excuse the messy residue of unfinished sex. This moment of ruthless hilarity is criticized by Harding as an appropriation of what should be reserved for a more controversial, cross-racial gay sex scene between Harry and Joshua, but the exposure of Clive’s sexual impotency should not be invalidated as solely a means to “desexualize” (262) homosexual characters. Rather, “desexualizing” Clive is another option to directly overthrow the established, ascendant position of male heterosexuality in constituting the national identity. This otherwise tabooed joke attests to the carnival status of the ongoing theatrical spectacle.

The exposure of Clive’s sexual failure also prompts an investigation of the double standard with regard to sexuality. In the binary opposition of the oppressor and the oppressed, and almost all dichotomies, the peripheral existence of the secondary term is indispensable for the functioning and maintenance of the primary one, because the privilege of the “centre” will be annulled by the absence or disorder of the margins. It is not surprising, therefore, that Clive’s constant compliments of his mistress’s “amazing spirit” (Churchill 259, 260, 286) cannot conceal the paradoxical threat he feels by the overthrowing dark feminine power, and for fear of seeing that in his wife, he prohibits any disloyalty on her part. After discovering his friend Harry is gay, Clive is eager to marry Harry to his widowed mistress. Mrs. Saunder’s refusal leads to Harry’s match with Ellen, a lesbian governess who not long ago has professed her love to Betty. The patriarch’s attempt to put everyone

back into “normal” categories, together with the privileged sexual freedom he exclusively enjoys, reiterates the inequality between the citizens, and with it, the hypocrisy of a non-inclusive national identity that justifies hierarchy as a means to sustain order, which in return reinforces this hierarchy. The use of cross-dressing, which visually contradicts Clive’s initial, stereotype-saturated description of other characters, questions his position at the top of that hierarchy and allows the carnival breach of order seeps through the cracks of the identity’s formidable facade.

Carnival subversion culminates in the metaphorical collapse of Clive that concludes Act I. Joshua raises the gun at Clive, possibly to revenge for the murder of his parents by Clive’s troops. Edward is the only witness to Joshua’s action, but he acquiesces to it by covering his ears and doing nothing more. This scene acts out both the Oedipus complex of killing the father and Bakhtin’s idea of “decrowning the king” (124), and as Churchill does not reveal whether Clive is killed, the audience’s focus remains on the process of the killing. Therefore, when the Victorian era take the curtain call, it finishes on the climax of a carnival celebration of “the shift itself, the very process of replaceability” (Bakhtin 125), leaving the suspense to the next act, where the contemporary setting, provides contemporary devices to deconstruct the national identity.

The above analysis of Act I illustrates how the Victorian and colonial setting complicates the representation of gender and race within the drastically expanded national border. Equally important is the 1979 London in the second act, where the concept of national identity expands in pluralistic ideology despite the postcolonial shrinking of Britain’s territorial area when after World War II, multiple colonies succeeded in claiming independence. Regional cultural differences and military disputes within Britain also arise as a relatively evident concern with the Northern Irish connection of the character Lin and her family. Departing from the previous act where Englishness and Britishness are somewhat interchangeable, this act witnesses the multiplication of the “constituents” of the British national identity, while paradoxically, with the rising prominence of ethnic identities in different regions, the term itself, as observed by Colley, is perhaps insufficient to contain and reflect all the sub-identities (373–375). These condensations and expansions, being synchronic with the composition of the play, are what the playwright brings into further

scrutiny, but simultaneously, she is inevitably influenced and occasionally encumbered by the ramifications of the transition.

Compared with the previous act, Act II radiates a more palpable optimism for some solid historical reasons. The late Victorian years witnessed the women's suffrage movement becoming a national cause, which eventually gained vote for all women above the age of 21 in 1928. In 1967, the abolishment of buggery laws decriminalized homosexual conducts. Hence Churchill's re-arrangement in the stage direction, which now dictates every role except Cathy be played by an actor of that role's own sex, is an acknowledgement of the improved conditions for the women's and LGBT rights, showing that in 1979, more people can live according to their own will and be the rightful citizens without the renouncement of certain rights in exchange for a recognized national identity. The comic tendency also relies heavily on carnivalization, and this time its target is some overarching motifs such as space and time. Their proximity to issues of territory, history, and literature denotes that their participation in the playwright's carnival review of the British national identity is of significant implications.

Space is transformed from a gendered one to now a public arena similar to Bakhtin's "carnival square" (128). The moralist philosophers of the Victorian era have conspired to create the myth of "separate spheres" (Marsh), which allocates conventional women as "the Angels in the house." Back in *Cloud Nine's* Victorian Africa, the gendered roles that define the national identity for men and women are characterized by spatial segregation. African bushes and jungles are alienated into a taboo area of considerable risks so that the British people can "imagine themselves as safe" (Freedgood 131). Women are not allowed to transgress into these regions—hence comes Betty's comparison of her extramarital affinity toward Harry with "going out into the jungle" (Churchill 261). The outside belongs to the white male colonists, and their exploration is considered an act of great valour of national service, with the potential to defeat, assimilate, and even "civilise" the native people lying in ambush in the jungle. When the local rebels are being flogged by Clive and Harry, the blinds of the house are drawn to prevent women from witnessing the bloody, inhumane punishment. Contrary to the confinement of women to the interior of the house, the entirety of Act II takes place in a park, where the idea of carnival reaches out to "the whole people" (Bakhtin 128). The most carnival event in the play would happen later in the same park. The description of its setting, composed of a similar set of crisp phrases

like the opening of Act I, draws a sharp contrast to the Victorian and colonial rigidity seen previously. It reads: "*The park. Summer night. Victoria, Lin and Edward drunk*" (Churchill 307).

The setting prefigures an important device to carnivalize the space—the carnival fire that can "simultaneously destroy and renew the world" (Bakhtin 126). Under the influence of alcohol, Edward, Victoria, and Lin try to conjure up an ancient "Goddess of many names" who creates life "before Christ" (Churchill 308). As is known that the goddess initiates creation, she hints back to the great goddess in Joshua's African creation story in the first act (Churchill 279-80). Joshua's immediate denial of the verisimilitude of his story and his acknowledgement of the truthfulness of the Christian one concur with the notion that "the rise of Victorianism...is usually attributed to...the Evangelicals," or the promulgation of Christianity in the British colonies at large (Perkin 231), and thus, Christianity helps both to connect the overseas citizens/colonists of the British Empire and to extend the religious side of identity assimilation to the colonized. As Victoria calls the goddess by the name of "Innin, Inanna, Nana, Nut, Anat, Anahita, Istar, Isis" (Churchill 308), the goddess turns out to be Astarte, whom "the heathen idol worshippers of the Bible" pray to (Stone 9), so her temples are very likely to have been burnt by Christians.

In this light, this fire rings bell to the scene in Act I where Clive and Harry set fire to the houses of non-Christian natives to whom Joshua belongs, yet the dynamics of the two scenes are different. The African natives of the nineteenth century, with their pagan religion, is consumed by the imperial fire, but for the three characters in the late 1970s, although they are outcasts of the Empire's heterosexual-oriented ideology and therefore "pagans" in a non-religious sense, their recalling of the burning of the goddess's pagan temples against the backdrop of a public "carnival square" on a hot dark night evokes the image of the fire as liberating and reviving, especially given that by this time, both Edward and Victoria have grown out of the confinements of parental expectations and accepted their bisexuality. Edward is played by a male actor, and Victoria is no longer a dummy as she is in Act I. The transition signals the death of the previous performed self and hopefully the birth of a new spontaneous self. With the following sex orgy and the visit of Lin's dead brother as a ghost, the carnivalesque combines with the grotesque. The blasphemous dallying with the country's dominant religion, accompanied by orgasm and sexual freedom, sends the characters literally on "cloud nine."

The carnival space temporarily invades into the rational territory of the country with the life force of chaotic parody.

The simultaneity of death and life in the act of becoming draws attention to the defamiliarization of time. Originally, the historical time is “riddled with issues of power and hegemony”—even the calendar, the apparatus of time which people have taken for granted, is established by and honoured in the name of a pope (West-Pavlov 8). Time is valuable to the national identity in terms of the cultural heritage and ancestral authority it houses. As one enters into the carnival space, however, the starting point and destination of one’s life, which supposedly is separated by decades of years, is accommodated in delicate harmony, and even braided together into a moebius strip. The historical time is brought upon an infinite trail without an “end,” always returning to the original locus. There is then a transition in time, to quote Matthew Arnold, from “a having and a resting” to “a growing and a becoming” (62); its believed objectivity is veiled by a Bahtkin touch of “joyful relativity” (132). The “time difference” between the 100 years between the acts and the mere 25 years added to the characters timely works as the reminder of time’s subjectivity. Churchill explains the choice of compressed timeline by recalling that during the workshop, the entire company felt that their sex and marriage education was conventional, “almost Victorian” (246). The temporal dislocation between two acts shows that the predominance of memory that looms large behind the present, as is the case with the old national identity that extends far beyond the Empire’s historical reality. Colonialism has its resurgence when Lin mentions that her soldier brother is killed in a dispute with Northern Irish troops. Similarly, although Clive is physically absent from Act II, his patriarchal influence still hangs “in the air” around his wife and children. For them, growing and becoming means to break the shackles of the past identity yet also to be injured by it. In the carnival celebration of the “death” of the old identity, one remains conscious and acutely aware of the pain from time’s arrow.

The quandary of the characters who are confronted by the reinterpreted time narrative discloses a restraint in Churchill’s carnivalization of national identity. Peculiarly stood out is her ambivalent attitude towards how children should be brought up in the new female experience she unequivocally advocates. Victoria’s rejection of domination falters when Tommy requires the continuous care and attention of the mother. Lin’s refusal to cultivate submissive femininity in Cathy induces a child of unsettling verbal and

physical violence. Churchill requires that Cathy shall be played by a man, yet the role's impression on the audience absentmindedly underlines the playwright's subjection to stereotypes, and thus undermines her rationale that "the size and presence of a man" befits "the emotional force of young children" (Churchill 246). It seems that due to the rule of moderation that has contributed to the popular characterization of Englishness, the playwright inadvertently identifies with the national identity on which multiple theatrical devices are employed to deconstruct.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that the restraint in unresolved situations, in the slight sense of indecisiveness and frustration forge the link between theatricality and reality. Churchill's own experience juggling child rearing and playwriting in the early 1970s mirrors those "working mother" characters in *Cloud Nine*, recorded as a feeling of guilt when she had to hire babysitters to make room for writing time. She raises the perpetually perplexing question "are plays more important than raising kids?" (Keyssar 79-80), a theme she continued to explore, and left an also somewhat ambivalent, not completely "subversive" answer in her next major work *Top Girls* (1982). Toward the dénouement of *Cloud Nine*, characters from Act I return to the stage to address the "new woman" Betty, and their words are unsurprisingly more Victorian than modern. Particularly noticeable is Clive's lament that "I used to be proud to be British" (Churchill 320). To some extent, Clive and his mention of the communal concept of a nation function as a social commentator. Together with the revisits of other characters from the previous act, he recontextualizes the second act to highlight that the social environment tends to move forward ideologically at a slower pace, and in return exerts scrutinizing impact on individuals that develops ahead of it. Further, although characters in the second act do "change a little for the better" (Churchill 246), the subtle timing of 1979, which is caught between the two waves of feminism, suggests that at that moment, the evolvement of a more inclusive national identity, particularly the gender-related portion, is a tendency without a concrete direction, and that *Cloud Nine* inevitably carries an element of tentative experimentation whose quality of innovation fades with the procession of time. This possibly explains why the criticism of under- and/or misrepresentation of gender and race took nearly two decades to arrive at the late 1990s.

The four decades that stride between the composition of *Cloud Nine* and the present urges the contact of the ingrained theatricality of a play

with a reality which, provided that the play text is “frozen,” has now gone ahead of it. Understanding this necessity is crucial if *Cloud Nine* intends to avoid the verdict that it is “only for the 1980s.” To realize this implies that Churchill’s restraint in the carnival deconstruction be considered as less the misgiving of the magnitude of effectiveness of the carnival deconstruction, but more of a contemplation, or a proposal to contemplate, on the dilemma faced by progressive movements when they encounter opposing forces in a realist setting. More importantly, the awareness on the play’s own historicity can buttress the aim of carnivalesque theatre, as David Edgar professes, to combine Brechtian alienation with Bakhtinian sensuality (31) as an attempt to free the carnival out of its limited timeframe and evoke the audience’s critical thinking. Further, it also works to negotiate between the estrangement that paves way for the sociological function of the theatre (Brecht 254–55) and the same awareness of distinction that renders anything theatrical as irrelevant to reality (Butler 527). As the production history of *Cloud Nine* features multiple alterations to the placement of lines and the doubling of the cast (Godiwala 161–71), it is also worthwhile to investigate how the playwright’s casting arrangements, made in the early 1980s on cross-dressing, can be modified to maximize its agenda while retaining the necessary humour and farce for current audiences.

The most recent commercial revival of *Cloud Nine* opened in late 2015 to generally favourable reviews, the exclamation that “1979 feels not like yesterday but today” (Brantley) is not unmixed with, once again, regrets of certain flaws the production “makes no attempt to remedy” (Soloski). Carnavalesque in its juxtaposition of incongruous elements, *Cloud Nine* is regarded till this day as the site where people of various backgrounds expect to see their specific exigency noticed and performed. This is, without doubt, an enormous mission, and engages are both presenting the play’s interpretation and reinterpreting the play—a product of confined spatiality and temporality—as an attempt to expand or redefine its scope and ethics. National identity and its related historical and social issues can perhaps cooperate as a modest assistant, for its dawns on the possibility for theatre’s participants to wonder what it takes in reality to be a national, an individual of, in *Cloud Nine’s* case, Britain, and of any other country as well.

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