YORK UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
EN 3191/HUMA 3013, COMEDY, Winter 2019, Course Director:

LONG ESSAY ASSIGNMENT (25%)

Due: March 27, 2019
You must:

1) upload the essay to Turnitin on Moodle, and
2) hand in a paper copy in tutorial (printed double-sided); *essays will not be accepted by email.*

Length: 8-10 pages (2400-3000 words), Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced.

Format and citation: MLA 8
For pointers, please see: https://spark.library.yorku.ca/wp-content/themes/glendonits-spark-20151125/resources/MLA%20Style%20Overview%20(8th%20edition).pdf
and/or consult Purdue University's excellent site on MLA style:
https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/

Sources: You are expected to rely on course plays and theory and you must cite these according to MLA standards. Likewise, any other secondary sources must be cited. Only scholarly websites will meet the academic requirements of the assignment.

Lateness Penalty:
Assignments not uploaded to Turnitin and handed in in tutorial on the due date will be considered late. You will be penalized 5% for every day after the assignment deadline (including weekends). **Assignments that are more than 5 days late will not be accepted.** Late essays must be submitted to Turnitin (dated) and a hard copy left in the essay drop-off box at Stong College, 3rd floor (near Room 347). **Please note that late work will be graded without comments.**

Extensions for medical reasons or on compassionate grounds may be requested up to 3 days before the due date and will require supporting documentation. For medical reasons, please send a scan of the York U Attending Physician's Statement to me within 48 hours. http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/petitions/academic/package

Essay Topics

The objective of this assignment is to consolidate and apply the knowledge you have gleaned from the comedies and comedy theory in this course. To that effect, you are expected to write on **two plays** and to use at least **two theory articles** to support your arguments. Re-reading and re-writing is fundamental to the academic process so you may build on the plays and topics analysed in your short essay, if they are relevant to the ones listed below. *(Careful: "build on" does not mean re-submitting your short essay with added pages -- you must develop your ideas.)*

1. Examine the comic situations brought about by cross-dressing in *Twelfth Night, Cloud Nine* and/or *Good Night Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*. Use the ideas on comedy of the following writers to support your thesis: Stott, Frye, Bergson, and/or Langer.

2. Discuss physical comedy in two of the following plays: *Twelfth Night, Cloud Nine, alterNatives, Good Night Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet),* and/or *The Shipment*. Make connections with the concepts outlined in Peacock, Bergson, Langer and/or Taylor.

3. Consider wit in *The Country Wife, The Rover* and/or *The Importance of Being Earnest* with support from Stott, Bergson, and/or Langer.

4. Issues of class, race, and/or gender are central to *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Cloud Nine, Good Night Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), alterNatives,* and *The Shipment*. Choose one issue and discuss the comic approaches employed by two of the playwrights with support from Stott. Bergson, Langer and/or Taylor.

5. Analyse the comic potential of the female characters in two plays by female playwrights on the course syllabus: *The Rover, Cloud Nine, Good Night Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and *The Shipment.* What, if any, is the significance of the playwright's sex? Support your argument with two theory readings.

6. Discuss comedy as a literary genre and the staging of comedy in two of the following plays: *Twelfth Night, The Country Wife, The Rover, The Importance of Being Earnest*, and/or *The Shipment,* with the support of the theatre videos shown in class and two theory readings of your choice.

7. Consider a different play by one of the course playwrights and use two comedy theory readings to analyse a central theme or aspect.

Be sure to:

- have a strong, clear thesis on the first page
- explain how you will defend your argument
- support your assertions with examples from the plays and theory readings
- cite lines from the plays correctly
- express your ideas clearly and concisely
- provide transitions to ensure your paper has continuity
- use correct grammar and spelling
- italicize play and book titles; article titles should be within quotes
- number your pages
- include word count on last page
- proof your paper

For concise and compelling writing, read William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White's *The Elements of Style* when preparing your essay (available at Scott library).

Consider using the resources of the York U. Writing Centre to improve your essay writing skills:
http://writing-centre.writ.laps.yorku.ca

Jerome Paul

Comedy 3191

26 March 2019

The Comedy of Tragedy in *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Cloud Nine*

Karl Marx once observed that "all great world-historic facts and personages appear… twice… the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."[1] This transition from tragedy to comedy on the heels of repetition echoes the latter's conception by various theorists, such as the cyclical ritual pattern of "death and revival" that Northrop Frye identifies (16); or the 'Jack-in-the-box' element in Henri Bergson's *elan vital* theory of comedy, where physical, discursive, or moral repetition discloses the strings that reveal the human as puppet, in this case a puppet of history (49). Here is also the germ of Frye's contention "that tragedy is really implicit or uncompleted comedy…[and] comedy contains a potential tragedy within itself" (16). This foregrounding of repetition as a crucial structural element of comedy is particularly evident in the conceptualization of parody, which characterizes the two texts examined herein. Both Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* are parodic comedies in which the echo of tragedy still sounds, and it is the parody of the tragic conception of those past narratives that produces their comic and political effects. Act I of *Cloud Nine* functions as a structural tragedy overlaid with the comedic affects of parody, satire, and excess, lampooning a tragic conception of the narrative of colonial history that reads in the death of the patriarch Clive a tragic but heroic fate. In *Goodnight Desdemona* it is the structural transposition from tragedy to comedy that forms the conceit of the entire play, wherein the tragic fates of Shakespeare's characters are the backdrop against which the comic action unfolds. Both

[1] Marx, Karl. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." *Marxists Internet Archive*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm. Accessed 21 March 2019.

Churchill and MacDonald subvert, sabotage, parody or reconceive the structural elements of tragedy to achieve their comic effects, enacting theatrical images that seem to 'pun' or play on the tragic trace, suggesting that the comedic form may serve to mobilize a more emancipatory politics than those afforded by tragedy.

In regards to Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, much criticism has been leveled against its purportedly progressive gender and sexual politics. James Harding contends that "the play, in its abstract texuality, tends to reassert liberal ideology, [giving] naïve illusions of acceptance that translate into inadvertently repressive social practices and that create in the realm of sexual politics a kind of dialectic of Enlightenment—a moment of perpetuated repression that masquerades as acceptance" (259). For Harding, Churchill's Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*s of cross-casting in Act I and doubling in Act II "ironically bolsters some of the play's worst stereotypes" (264). While this critique is resourcefully and cogently argued—both in terms of the performative and textual registers—the outright dismissal of the play's political project as a failure doesn't take into full account the import of the generic elements at play in the two, vastly different Acts. With its century-long gap and the reshuffling or doubling of the cast, Act II of *Cloud 9* could more accurately be construed as a sequel to the completed drama of Act I, with all of the ambiguity that attends the contingency of the temporal gap, with the Act proceeding in a more-or-less traditional comic structure, albeit one subverted by feminist critique. Act I, on the other hand, is *structurally* tragic, and Churchill makes it a comedy via mainly affectual and discursive *excess*. The cross-casting is a visual exaggeration – by representing the success of colonizing ideology in such stark terms (making the discursive material) she undermines the legitimacy of that success, and in the case of Edward, the manner in which that ideology figures its own failure. Within the framework of the play, the tragic conception of historical narrative is

aligned with the dominant ideologies of colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism, while the undoing of that tragic conception in the excesses of parody becomes the performative representation of a resistance and reorganization of those dominant flows of power (which also constitutes normative performativities).

In his analysis of feminist parody in theatre, Ryan Claycomb states that parody is a critique of representation, and that "The parodic *image* evokes a cultural image already available to the audience, but signifies through its difference from the original its otherness from the dominant codes. This difference creates a narrative of critique, one that accounts for the known original and resistance to that original generated by the parodic image" (106). Claycomb draws on a history of the theatrical attenuations of this 'narrative of critique', both performatively via the Brechtian alienation effect produced by the gestus, and theoretically in Judith Butler's analysis of gender performativity. Claycomb observes the structural similarities between the Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* and the techniques of parodic narrative; both work by "*highlighting* the semiotic otherness inherent in the actor/character relationship [and] Brecht's actor in the epic theatre, like the parodic performer, denaturalize the performances so as to produce an alienation effect" (107). The various gender and racial disjunctions represented by Churchill's cross-casting in Act I of *Cloud 9* also have some sympathy with Butler's conception of corporeality, where "the way that the body is perceived is a direct product of the linguistic formations used to describe it, and everything from race to sex is subject to these corporeal constructions" (Claycomb 108). The cross-casting of the colonial administrator Clive's family (which he himself is exempt from) can be performatively read as a representation of how subjectivities are constituted within the patriarchal and colonial logos, not only discursively but materially as well, and this logic itself embodied by its most successful performer, Clive. What

the audience 'sees' is not what Clive sees, but *how* Clive comes to see what he sees, and in this sense Harding's critique that "aside from Churchill's statement of intent, there is little in the play that would thwart the audience's ability to identify with Clive's gaze" (265) remains valid, but the same content gains a different comedic charge when the entirety of Act I is read as exemplifying the parodic form, repeating and taking to excess what can only be implicit in the mode of reproduction of dominant practices. What is represented performatively and discursively is not the objective relations between individualized subjects, but the disjunction that structures the relation between discursive practices and their embodiment. Churchill offers a material representation of what is, off the stage, invisible, thereby gesturing towards how dominant codes inscribe and *constitute* corporeal as well as discursive subjectivity, a representation that can only be achieved by evoking an alienating gap between the constituting and constituted—producing a theatrical image for a theoretical turn.

Subtending this parody of gender norms is a satire of the tragic conception of the historical narrative of colonization. Following Andrew Stott's analysis of satire, Act I of *Cloud Nine* seems to adhere to the Juvenalian satiric tradition as opposed to the Horatian; the former is "the satire of *saeva indignation*, or savage indignation, the bitter condemnation of venal and stupid humanity… Juvenal starts from the position that vice is at its highest point and virtue has been virtually extinguished" (158-159). This form of satire takes aim at a powerful edifice, that of a tyrant or a state or dominant ideology, seeking to deflate their presumptions to authority via techniques of exaggeration, absurdity and facetiousness. For Churchill, the primary targets are not only the normative values inscribed by empire and family—"The empire is one big family", as Harry Bagley states—but also the narrative of tragedy that conceives the history of the decline of empire and family within its structure (20; Act 2.1).

In this frame the character of Clive becomes a parodic echo of the tragic hero, undone by his *hamartia*. In his analysis of the inherently coercive and conservative aspects of tragedy, Augusto Boal formulates the Aristotelian definition of the tragic: "Tragedy imitates the action of man's rational soul, his passions turned into habits, in his search for happiness, which consists in virtuous behaviour, remote from the extremes, whose supreme good is justice and whose maximum expression is the Constitution" (24). Clive fits the bill of the virtuous tragic hero. All his rational actions are toward the political good: "I look after Her Majesty's domains" (Churchill 7; Act 1.1); and the political good entails the administration of justice: "It was my duty to have them flogged" (33; Act 1.3). He exemplifies the colonial ideal in both the political and personal domains, and indeed, he sees the one as merely an extension of the other: "Through our father we love our Queen and our God" (32; Act 1.3). His colonization of both family and country is virtually uncontested and largely successful, so what then is his hamartia, and what is the tragic frame in which his downfall becomes fated?

Just like many a tragic hero from Oedipus to Daedalus, it is his hubris that undoes him – it is Clive's complete identification with the success of the dominant codes that fashion subjects in accordance with their own logics, without regard to any prior or resistant agency. None of his phallic libidinal outbursts with Caroline are transgressive in any way; even his excesses have been ordained and authorized. But the perfection of the colonial project does not lie in the complete identification of colonized to colonizer – that might well be its event horizon, but colony subsists in the *process* of its own constitution, and the utopian achievement of some perfect conflation of self to other, master to slave, can only serve to negate the pleasures and adventures of the colonizing spirit. In a brief but brilliant analysis of T.E. Lawrence's *Lawrence of Arabia*, James Baldwin captures the tragedy of the imperialist dilemma:

> Nothing the world holds, from Australia to Africa, to America, India, to China, to Egypt, appears to have made the faintest imprint on the English soul: wherever the English are is—or will resist, out of perversity, or at its peril, becoming—England… It would appear that this island people need endless corroboration of their worth: and the tragedy of their history has been their compulsion to make the world their mirror… But when [the 'lesser breeds without the law'] *are* civilized, they may simply 'spuriously imitate [the civilizer] back again,' leaving the civilizer with 'no satisfaction on which to rest.'
>
> Thus, it may be said that the weary melancholy underlying *Lawrence of Arabia* stems from the stupefying apprehension that, whereas England may have been doomed to civilize the world, no power under heaven can civilize England.

Clive's tragic flaw is that he assumed he could (and should) rest in the satisfaction his success, of regarding the reflection of the colonial script in its various mirrors, especially that of Joshua, from whom the fatal betrayal emerges. The tragedy of Clive is the tragedy of British Imperialism, and the self-abnegating impulse of colonialism itself. Clive no longer views Joshua as a Black African subject, but a wholly subsumed body. He makes a separation between Joshua and the rest of the 'unruly' natives:

> CLIVE. You can tame a wild animal only so far. They revert to their true nature and savage your hand. Sometimes I feel the natives are the enemy. I know that is wrong. I know I have a responsibility towards them, to care for them and bring them all to be like Joshua. But there is something dangerous. Implacable. This whole continent is my enemy. I am pitching my whole mind and will and reason and spirit against it to tame it, and I sometimes feel it will break over me and swallow me up.

Here is a moment of almost perfect anagnorisis, the recognition by the hero of his own shortcomings. Except in Churchill's hands, this passage of admission becomes a vehicle for grand irony: it is precisely *because* Clive underestimates Joshua's status as 'other' that he neglects to see his own fate. What Churchill comes to lampoon are the discursive practices that have structured the history of colonization within a tragic narrative. For tragedy ennobles its heroes even as it plots their catastrophes; it reaffirms the social order that its tragic heroes *almost* uphold.

Churchill constructs a theatrical image that presupposes an identification with the patriarchal hero, and then parodies that identification via the comic effects within Act I itself, as well as, crucially, *continuing* the 'tragedy' beyond the death of its nominal hero into Act II. While the stock comedic character of the *senex* is alive and well in Clive, the outcome of Act I—the forced marriage between Ellen and Harry, the thwarted desires of Betty—play against the traditional usurpation of the *senex* that marks the end of a typical comedy, for as Frye states, "The normal comic resolution is the surrender of the *senex* to the hero, never the reverse" (14). Nevertheless the *senex* is defeated—violently and fatally, another un-comedic outcome—and in true Aristotelean fashion the mantle is taken up again by Martin in Act II, but Churchill's structure once again swerves away from what would be the endpoint of a traditional comic arc. The *senex* function in Martin, the "formal cause in the social order" (Frye 14), is once again refuted by the reorganization of the social unit that excludes or ignores his dominance.

In Act I, it is via performative excess that the colonization of subjectivities is made visible. There are certainly horrors both explicit and implicit in the Act, perhaps the most egregious being the massacre of a native village, in which Joshua's parents are also killed. Clive's recounting of the incident is blasé to the point of excess: "We did a certain amount of

damage, set a village on fire and so forth" (Churchill 37; Act 1.4). The atrocities of colonial violence are parsed as banal via an extreme exaggeration of the droll British understatement, foregrounding how the domain of colonial violence is often occluded by the antiseptic rhetoric of administration. Elsewhere, Clive's various pronouncements on the nature of women take on a Biblical and bathetic quality: "We must resist this dark female lust, Betty, or it will swallow us up" (Churchill 34; Act 1.3). Semantically, Clive's ideology is 'correct' – as a colonial patriarch, these are the values he must espouse. And yet, by merely stating them in the excessive purity of their intent, uncouched in softening or 'realistic' rhetoric, Churchill renders up those values to the unvarnished gaze of the absurd. As well, the cross-casting of Edward proposes that, *in Clive's eyes*, his son's subjection to the ideology of manhood isn't quite successful, and his failure is figured as some essential aspect of femininity, materially represented to highlight the disjuncture of sexist discourses that constitute subjects in binary ways. In fact, throughout the course of Act I, much of the humour arising from these colonized characters is due their over-determined aspects clashing with some remnant of unruly desire. This 'mechanization' speaks to Bergson, a reversal wherein the puppet-likeness of the characters is presented as their 'default' states, and it is the occasional breaking out of resistant subjectivities and desires that produces the comic effects of the structurally tragic plot.

In contrast to the more implicit critique of the tragic lens in a dominant context, Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* immediately presents the scholar attending to it with the explicit dilemma of its central conceit, which is that of a scholar attending to two of Shakespeare's tragedies with a hypothesis of her own. Igor Djordjevic, in his own analysis, cautions that "In fact, the 'thesis' of Constance Leadbelly's research is misleading and should not be confused with the 'thesis' or rhetorical motive of MacDonald's play" (96).

Djordjevic recognizes that Constance's focus on the entrance of a Fool into the tragedies as what would defuse their heroes' or heroines' fates is unnecessary, since all that is needed is any intervention whatsoever, regardless of whether it is by a fool or a mute servant. The essential point is that this intervention should occur at each of the play's *Augenblick*, what Northrop Frye calls those "crucial moments [in a tragedy] from which point the road to what might have been and the road to what will be can be simultaneously seen" (qtd. in Djordjevic 91). The two moments in the plots of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* that Constance stumbles into are clearly points of *Augenblick*, and the discursive or performative aspects of the play that cast Constance as the Wise Fool are then turned towards the more affective characteristics of the comic or satirical genres, beyond the purely structural operation to sabotage the tragic pivot. Nevertheless the sabotage occurs, and this alien intervention "destroys the inevitability inherent in the action of the tragic heroes based on their *hamartia*" (Djordjevic 91), their fatal flaws turned moot.

Within the framework of the *elan vital* theories of Susan Langer, this structural subversion marks the point at which the internal inexorability of tragic Fate is alchemized into the external ineluctability of comedic Fortune:

> Destiny in the guise of Fortune is the fabric of comedy... Destiny viewed in [the tragic way], as a future shaped essentially in advance and only incidentally by chance happenings, is Fate; and Fate is the 'virtual future' created in tragedy. The 'tragic rhythm of action'… is the rhythm of man's life at its highest powers in the limits of his unique, death-bound career. Tragedy is the image of Fate, as comedy is of Fortune. There basic structures are different; comedy is essentially contingent, episodic, and ethnic; it expresses the continuous balance of sheer vitality that belongs to society and is

> exemplified briefly in each individual; tragedy is a fulfillment, and its form therefore is closed, final, and passional." (60-61)

Certainly, the contingent and episodic character of MacDonald's plot pushes it further into comedic realms—Act II especially descends (or perhaps ascends?) into the cross-wired mayhem of misplaced desires and ardent misunderstandings—but more than this, the generic transformation of Shakespeare's originals speaks to a refutation of the "closed, final, and passional" – tragedy's necessary curtailment of action to a unique but always death-bound career. Constance, in the final scene of the play, tired of both Desdemona's bloodlust and Juliet's death-wish, exclaims:

> CONSTANCE. Nay nay!! – Nay. Just… nay… both of you. I've had it with all the tragic tunnel vision around here. You have no idea what – life is a hell of a lot more complicated than you think! Life – real life – is a big mess. Thank goodness. And every answer spawns another question; and every question blossoms with a hundred different answers; and if you're lucky you'll always feel somewhat confused. Life is -!... Life is…
>
> A harmony of polar opposites,
>
> With gorgeous mixed-up places in between,
>
> Where inspiration steams up from a rich
>
> Sargasso stew that's odd and flawed and full
>
> Of gems and worn-out boots and sunken ships (MacDonald 86; Act 3.9).

Despite Constance's intervention in each of the play's *Augenblick*, some remnant of that tragic force has persisted within the characters of Desdemona and Juliet, urging them on the final, calcified reckoning of tragedy. In transferring the tragic impulse from Othello and Romeo,

MacDonald also shifts the tragic "rhythm of man's life at its highest powers" onto the women, foregrounding the power of their own agencies in perpetrating their own downfalls. Yet, in order to remain in the domains of comedy—or more precisely the satyr play according to Djordjevic—Constance must endeavor not towards finality but ambivalence, the crucial aspect of the comic that Andrew Stott identifies as "a division of consciousness that enables the subject to see the world with bifurcated vision" (15). This is also the first time within the 'reality' of the plays that Constance doesn't speak in blank verse, only *choosing* to speak in it when illustrating the 'big mess' of life with some appropriately Shakespearean images. This is the teleological endpoint of Constance's journey, a coming into the full measure of her subjectivity, free to shape her own expressive forms. Djordjevic posits Constance's journey over the course of the play as the symbolic progression of heroine's journey in accordance with Jungian tropes, especially that of the 'tripartite woman' consisting of the aspects of the 'woman of action' (personified by Desdemona), the 'sensuous woman (personified by Juliet), and the intellectual, Constance herself. For Djordjevic, "The teleological ending for Constance is not the legitimization of a love match with a male hero, or even with another woman, but with a mystical marriage to herself. With the three poles of her personality in balance, the ideal woman attains the health and wisdom to live a fulfilling life" (112 – 113).

Regardless of whether one accepts this archetypal reading or not, what is clear is that the point at which Constance makes her grand speech on "the harmony of polar opposites", signals the creation of the new permissive society that is the endpoint of the comedic structure. This "moral norm and… pattern of a free society" (Frye 14) is not the traditionally heterosexual marriage ceremony, but rather the cementing of a female solidarity, and the wising up of the Fool. Following Frye's structural analysis, MacDonald's construction of the Constance character

and her journey also falls neatly into comedy's injunction towards "not morality but deliverance from moral bondage. Comedy is designed not to condemn evil, but to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge" (14-15). Constance's gnosis is therefore the endpoint of the play, and her ejection back into the 'real' world of academia, her lead belly transformed into a golden pen, the image of a 'base' humor or appetite transmogrified into a willed instrument of creation.

Of course, Constance's role isn't limited to being a participant. Crucially, she is both Author and Fool, writer and performer, a "dual role [that] redefines the play as a metacomedy concerned with itself and its own writing, and imbues the art form with distinctly postmodern and theoretical concerns" (Djordjevic 100). These 'postmodern' and theoretical concerns have to do with theatrical genres themselves, and the complex, mutually reinforcing relationships between tragedy, comedy, and the satyr (satiric) play. In his analysis, Djordjevic comes to view MacDonald's play as adhering to the form of Old and not New Comedy. To support this claim, Djordjevic identifies several elements such as "the contextual gap… that occurs in the minds of the members of the audience, [belonging] to the element of *dianoia*, or meaning", a gap produced "simultaneously between the 'mindsets' of the two authors and the 'mindsets' of their respective audiences" (101). It is via the competing *Weltanschauung*s of past tragedy and present comedy that the primary parodic effects of the play are wrought by MacDonald, concerned as she is with the corrective and reappropriative functions of feminist art, as much as by the concerns of traditional generic tropes. By the end of the play, "social codes of behaviour, gender roles, and sexual practices all become fluid and lose their 'natural' or 'proper' stratification, thus giving birth to MacDonald's vision of a new society… In this way she appears to banish her play decisively from the family of New Comedies symbolically concerned with fertility festivals and brings it closer to the socially corrective club of Old Comedies" (Djordjevic 102).

And yet the various images of Constance in her role as the tumbling, bumbling, but ultimately irrepressible Fool would seem to belie the purity of this conception. MacDonald's stage directions highlight the intense physicality of the role: her arm jerked downwards before she is pulled into the wastebasket (22; Act 1.1); Othello gripping Constance in a bear hug (28; Act 2.1); her extreme squeamishness at the exaggerated violence and gore in Act II Scene ii (35; Act 2.2); suddenly fainting after her fight with Iago (47; Act 2.2); tumbling into the fight between Mercutio, Tybalt, and Romeo in her long-johns, which ends up with Romeo sitting on her (50; Act 3.1); and the various slapstick moments in the boneyard of the final scenes. MacDonald's Constance is defined as much by her physicality as by her discourse, and amply fulfils the function of the eternally reviving fertility spirit that animates New Comedy's characteristic Fool. In fact, in the final scenes of the play, Constance does go through a cyclical rebirth, pretending to be dead for Tybalt—"The worms line up to feast on thee!" (82; Act 3.7)—and then reviving herself again to save Juliet from herself:

JULIET: Not dead?

[CONSTANCE shakes her head]

Not yet quite dead?

CONSTANCE: Not one bit dead. (MacDonald 84; Act 3.9)

All three phrases form a complete line of iambic pentameter, a full representation of the resilience of the fertile Fool, from cautious optimism to affirmative resurrection. Constance is very much an embodiment of New Comedy's "immemorial paganism" (Frye 16), and furthermore, the play itself exemplifies this category in its movement from the grey, war-hungry world of Cypress to the farcical, passion-infused green world of Verona. Djordjevic's view that

the corrective functions of *Goodnight Desdemona* place it in the category of Old Comedy is complicated by its other structural allegiances, including the spectre of tragedy that haunts it.

In contrast to Act I of Churchill's *Cloud 9*, MacDonald's play is structurally comic and unified across its three Acts. The evocation of prior tragedy—the countless times both Juliet and Desdemona, as well as Othello and Romeo, have died—depends entirely on the audience's dianoetic response, which is contingent on their familiarity with Shakespeare's texts. The comedy would not work without some conception of this echo, the 'every bit dead' that is both Comedy's past and its future. And yet, MacDonald seems to suggest that, at least in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the tragedy that befalls the men need not be imbricated with the tragedy that befalls the women. Each of the points of *Augenblick* Constance intervenes in revolve around masculine contests, either of insight, wit, or violence. And yet, somehow, these pivotal points prove deadly to the women, who have little to no agency in their own fates. In parodying the structure of tragedy (at least how it is conceived in the two Shakespearean plays), MacDonald is critiquing the unitary and monadic view of Destiny that the tragic entails. Unlike comedy, which gleefully and anarchically holds to a multiplicity of views without allowing one to usurp another, tragedy can only ever be tragic for its hero. For those others caught up in the violence of his fate, what ensues is not tragedy, but something related to the pure contingency of farce. MacDonald rescues the unwitting heroines from a fate not largely of their own making, and she does this by inserting them into a dramatic form that allows for suspension and co-existence of opposites, a thrumming site of comedic ambivalence.

In Act I of *Cloud 9*, Churchill overlays parodic comic effects onto a tragic structure, enacting a critique of the tragic conception of historical narrative that valorizes dominant modes of oppressive power. By satirizing and parodying tragic tropes, and by bringing to material and

discursive excess the ideological logos of the colonizing state of affairs as the political good, Churchill undermines their ennobling or dignifying features, and makes visible the forces by which dominant narratives and practices are embodied and reproduced. MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona* parodies tragic conceptions without inhabiting its structure, relying on a shared cultural fabric for the perception of tragic echoes and the play of contrasting rhythms. The play contains elements of both Old and New Comedy, but the corrective aspects of the former speak to not thematic but structural concerns. What MacDonald highlights in her transposition of character and incident from tragedy to comedy is tragedy's individualistic and circumscriptive idea of Destiny, at least when it comes to the two Shakespearean tragedies she subverts. For MacDonald it is comedy's concern with the "gorgeous mixed-up places in between" those unyielding poles that allows for a more democratic conception of community, where men's fates need not circumscribe the women's. For both Churchill and MacDonald, comedy's ambivalent terrain mobilizes a more emancipatory politics that discloses the operations of subjectification of dominant practices, and allows for the jostling, endlessly renewing co-existence of differing destinies.

Word Count: 4,663

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