

debbie tucker green and Dona Daley: Two Neo-millennial Black British Women Playwrights *

debbie tucker green e Dona Daley: duas dramaturgas britânicas negras do novo milênio

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Abstract

In the new millennium where white men still dominate the theatrical terrain, the staging of Black British women's drama remains at best, rare. debbie tucker green and Dona Daley distinctively dramatize articulations of the experientially uncharacteristic in British theatre. They produce sustained experimentation with form, style and subject matter in asserting black experience as universal not marginal. Whilst Daley employs unqualified naturalism in her dramatization of the mundane intimacies that weave lives together, tucker green blitzes the comfort zones of theatrical realism through linguistic free-fall and taboo topics. They exemplify women dramatists' articulations of sensibilities and perspectives as arising from positions within culture and theatre that are distinct from those of their male contemporaries.

Keywords

Black British, women playwrights, experimental writing, contemporary drama, feminism, African diaspora.

Resumo

No novo milênio, em que homens brancos ainda dominam o terreno teatral, o teatro de mulheres britânicas negras permanece, na melhor das hipóteses, raro. debbie tucker green e Dona Daley dramatizam distintivamente articulações do experimentalismo não-característico no teatro britânico. Elas produzem experimentações sustentadas em forma, estilo e assunto para exercer a experiência negra como universal, e não marginal. Enquanto Daley emprega um naturalismo não qualificado na sua dramatização das intimidades mundanas que nós vivemos juntos, tucker green ataca as zonas de conforto do realismo teatral através de linguística em queda-livre e tópicos tabus. Elas exemplificam articulações de sensibilidades e perspectivas das mulheres dramaturgas como se surgissem de posições de dentro da cultura e do teatro que são distintas daquelas dos seus contemporâneos masculinos.

Palavras-chave

Negros britânicos; mulheres dramaturgas; escrita experimental; teatro contemporâneo; feminismo; diáspora africana.

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ALEKS SIERZ COINED THE CONCEPT OF “in-yer-face” theatre as a means of accounting for new dramatic writing by young British playwrights from the mid-1990s onwards. Consolidated via his journalism and a website, the term titled his subsequent book *In-yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2000) and became a convenient sound bite wherein the staging of taboos, extreme violence, representations of graphic sex acts and the (initially) outraged responses of mainstream critics were combined to comprise a framework of reception for certain plays. Sierz declared that his intention was to “restore the writer to the centre of the theatrical process, and remind society at large that living writers are not only symbols of theatre’s vitality but also a crucial resource for the whole culture” (SIERZ, 2000, p.249). It is the sweeping claim—“resource for the whole culture”—which exposes the myopia of Sierz’s vision. The book is completely devoid of any black British playwrights. Former Royal National Theatre director Richard Eyre and co-author Nicholas Wright had also propagated this exclusion zone in their *Changing Stages: A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (2000), which garnered increased exposure when it became a television series that Eyre narrated. It does not, as Dimple Godiwala notes, “even pretend to include British black and Asian theatres as part of Britain’s recently changing stages” (GODIWALA, 2006, p.5)—changes catalysed, it should be added, by the increasing visibility of Black and Asian people as both practitioners and audience members in traditionally “all-white on the night” mainstream arenas of performance.

The preserving of white-led cultural production in Britain—at the expense of logging the presence of black people’s contributions—still clearly thrives in the new millennium and, in turn, perpetuates the distortions which have characterised traditional British theatre historiographies in relation to it. In addition, the theorisation and the calls for recognition of a Black British aesthetic—which have developed in relation to music and, increasingly, in relation to popular culture, film, visual arts, television, and various genres of literature—have not provoked concomitant research and application to the circumstances of Black British theatre and performance.¹ Moreover, Black women’s

¹ Only two anthologies of critical essays dedicated to Black British and Asian British theatre and performance have emerged to date: *Alternatives Within the Mainstream* (Godiwala ed.) and *Staging New Britain* (Davis and Fuchs eds.) both published in 2006. Other neo-millennial texts either privilege sex-gender (Griffin *Contemporary Black British and Asian Women Playwrights*, 2003 and Goddard *Staging Black Feminisms: Identity, Politics, Performance* 2007) or constitute a single chapter in a larger volume (Aston and Reinelt eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British*

writing in British theatre has experienced little mainstream visibility compared to of white women (only since the end of the twentieth century) and in the new millennium, black male playwrights. Although limited opportunities exist per se for Black dramatists and performers within the compass of contemporary theatre, when sex-gender dimensions are highlighted, the marginality of women is pronounced.

There are changing definitions of blackness in relation to dramatic literature and theatre which require separate consideration from critical treatments of prose and poetry. Most obviously, the performativity of the socially inscribed body and the body in performance is a visual fusion that excites simultaneity of receptive possibilities where - as Naoko-Pilgrim notes - “the physical is very present but the historical, social and political may also be articulated.” (RAPI and CHOWDHREY, 1998, p.71) What could be more visible and indeed “in-yer-face” than staging black experience with black actors? Black women and men in the British Isles have offered both a literal and representational presence which has been habitually consigned to the footnotes of history. Added to this, it is male subjectivity that has been primarily foregrounded in discourses relating to black identity in Britain; not only in the scarce historical documentation that exists but also in the context of theatre where, until the late-twentieth century, black women as both writers and performers had little agency to representation or access to critical frameworks by which to contest this occlusion.

The intricacies of carving out one’s access to cultural citizenship, frequently goes hand-in-hand with political gains and these reverberate across imaginary *and* national landscapes. Proclaiming a positive identity through the term Black counters the historical and political distortions effected by white hegemony which have become socio-culturally enshrined as institutionalised racism. Learning to love blackness (as bell hooks articulates from an American context) is an act of resistance and retrieval in a white-dominated cultural arena. (cf HOOKS, 1992) It requires the recognition of overt and systematic prejudice as well as domination through more subtle forms. It involves a mental and emotional decolonisation, a recalibration of attitudes and beliefs about black

Women Playwrights 2000, Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage*, 2003 and Aston and Harrison eds. *Feminist Futures?*, 2006). Osborne (ed) *Hidden Gems* 2008, is a collection of plays by both women and men prefaced by short critical essays by scholars with longstanding commitment to the field.

people - held by both black and white folk – that position and represent black people unfavourably against the monolithic norm of whiteness.²

Casting in theatre is an area which illustrates the complexity of this process. Ralph Berry draws attention to the fact that acting “depends upon casting, and casting is not commensurate with other rights in society. An actor is his body. Whatever his acting skills, he is inescapably his physical self.” (BERRY, 2000, p.35) However, historically there have been few opportunities afforded to actors - who are not white - in British theatre that are based upon the ideological positioning of the black body as inferior.³ As Berry observes, “Even a non-naturalistic play needs to be rooted in some kind of social reality”. Whilst contemporary demographic realities in the UK now render theatrical literalism problematic, Berry concludes somewhat enigmatically, “the dynamics of the play can be blocked by insensitive casting.” (BERRY, 2000, p.36) to imply that perhaps visual signification based upon readings of skin colour and its ideological associations can still determine the coherence of a production’s sign system.

The sociologist Jill Oluide argues that “Struggles over ethnic or racial classification are emblematic of struggles over the right to a social identity and over the matter of self-definition.” (OLUIDE, 2002, p.62) This clearly holds true for the coterie of British-born writers of African descent working in theatre today. As black indigenous Britons, these writers inherit the legacies of British theatre; theatre, practice and performance which has persistently restricted and even invisibilised black people’s presence and input until the mid-twentieth-century. Opportunities for experimentation, failure, and refinement have not habitually accompanied the genesis of black theatre in Britain as black theatre practitioners in all spheres of expertise have encountered

² Lorna Laidlaw, one of the first two black actresses in the Birmingham-based company, Women and Theatre commented on the restrictive expectations she faced in performing. ‘You can’t help but be aware of your colour when you perform. In a production I did with another company, I played the part of a young girl of seventeen who started a relationship with a young boy which culminated in teenage pregnancy. The discussion that followed after the performance highlighted the audience view of “Oh well, Black people always do that, they always have babies really young.”’ (ASHTON, 1997, p.132)

³(See KHAN, 1975, n.p). Debates around casting throughout the 1980s and nineties increased through reports commissioned by Actors’ Equity in response to the low employment rates of its black union members and calls to end “blacking up” in the theatre. (See *Plays and Players* July, September, October 1986) As the Arts Council forced the closure of Temba, Alby James the final Artistic Director whose professional trajectory charts the white theatrical establishment (the Royal Court, Royal Shakespeare Company, BBC and Gyndebourne) stated that “not enough of us had been given the opportunity to acquire the skills to improve the quality and variety of our work. I wanted Temba to gain national status. I didn’t want to stand around in community halls. I didn’t want to work on minimum finances. There had to be somewhere where black actors could go to earn a good salary.” (TAYLOR, 1990, p.6)

establishment roadblocks on their routes to development and practice.⁴ Whilst African-derived traditions of performance have been an acknowledged influence, a U.S./Euro-centric critical measuring stick has served as a definitive indicator of quality. Demands for instant expertise and success (in what has been scarcely a level “playing” field politically, financially, and culturally) have led to disparaging and dismissive critical responses to much black-led work. This history complicates overt identification of a uniquely Black British aesthetic in the theatre context. Moreover, dramatists seeking to have their work produced at the end of the twentieth century faced the familiar conundrum of representationalism vs. artistic individualism—a constraint that their white counterparts simply did (and do) not have to face.⁵ Such limitations can also be exacerbated by Black communities’ expectations of Black artists’ work. Baroness (Professor) Lola Young points out: “There is complicity on the part of black people too, who view anything that isn’t ‘street’ to be ‘inauthentic’ and not ‘really black.’” The Black theatre artist’s estrangement from mainstream (white-majority) audiences is increased by filtering access - as Christopher Rodriguez recognizes - “through a middleman [the venue]. This could create a situation in which the work may be limited to sensationalism, or easy narratives that compound what the audiences believe of non-whites anyway.” (GREER, 2006, p.23)

As long as theatre by Black practitioners is laced to issues-based contingencies, fears abound regarding the longevity of the work within cultural archiving and systems of historiography. The actor, playwright, and screen-writer Lennie James asks, “What happens to us when the ‘issues’ are no longer of interest to the programmers of today’s theatre?” (personal interview, 11 May 2005). Actor and playwright Kwame Kwei-Armah has noted the uphill battle to achieve canonical recognition that this situation produces: “History has taught us as black artists that our work is at best contemporary. Very few of our plays have fallen into the realm of the modern classic, revived again and again” (personal interview, 15 October 2004).

⁶ Recently American-born playwright and cultural commentator Bonnie Greer recalled that as she sat on a panel of ‘two black producers and a black director, casting a “non-black” show’, twenty years ago she had envisaged ‘that such a scenario would by 2006, be run of the mill. But it isn’t.’ (GREER, 2006, p.22) In the same article she quoted an anonymous ‘young black director’ who told her, ‘there are black people out there right now who start out far more qualified to run British cultural institutions [...] But for many boards we still represent a risk [...] that somehow a black person would lead their institution down some monocultural route that is race specific.’ (p.23) The irony of this observation is striking for (white-Eurocentric) monoculturalism is exactly what the past forty years of official British multiculturalism has supposedly redressed.

⁵ For a discussion of this in relation to the visual arts, see Mercer, Kobena. “Black Art and the Burden of Representation”, *Third Text* No.10. 1990.

How are the merits of indigenous black theatre to be evaluated and included in British theatre history? At the close of the twentieth century, Jatinder Verma (founder of Tara Arts, the longest-running Asian Theatre company in the U.K.) considered that “if there is going to be any point in using the term ‘black theatre,’ it has to find a theatrical form for itself. It has to be more than a question of equal opportunities or all-black productions” (SMURTHWAITE, 1991, n.p) whilst Felix Cross (Artistic Director of NITRO, formerly the Black Theatre Co-operative) asserted: “It is only when black theatre develops something white *theatre* doesn’t have that it will have the power and influence to move forward.” (CROSS, 1998, n.p) Both of these observations identify how an aesthetic component is vital in characterising Black British theatre, together with its liberation from inhibitors to experimentation. In her re-visionary account of possibilities for the aesthetic, Isobel Armstrong summarises a similar dynamic,

The aesthetic is emancipatory because access to the change of categories is possible in many ways and in many different areas of our culture and its productions. Categorical experiment—new kinds of knowledge—break down the binary of high and low culture because it is produced incessantly. (ARMSTRONG, 2000, p.42)

She furthermore advocates a politicised aesthetic, something arguably appropriate and inevitable when considering Black British theatre. It is a tool, moreover, to be wielded by women who enter into language and the symbolic “in different ways and on different terms” to men.

Women’s first object must be to disband the gender-neutral language round the classless society built on privilege, with its free choice predicated on an underclass, and to ask where women function in this structure – poor women, Black and Asian women. We will not do this if we lose one of our strengths, a politicised aesthetic. The aesthetic is not political, but it may make the political possible. (p.43)

In the first decade of the new millennium, white men continue to maintain hegemonic sovereignty in the realm of theatre despite certain governmental arts policies,⁶ contemporary media coverage highlighting the need for greater diversity,⁷ and

⁶ See Alibhai-Brown *The Independent* 9 July 2003. Indicative responses to the Arts Council of Britain’s Race Equality Policy (2005) are profiled in Hastings and Jones *The Sunday Telegraph* 2005:9 For a view from abroad see Riding *The New York Times* who in profiling the Policy notes, ‘Certainly no other Western country has tried to link culture and race so openly [...] It risks charges of cultural Stalinism if it cancels grants to groups that ignore its new policy. Yet it also has in its hands an instrument that can help people of all backgrounds accept the different colors, voices, customs and rhythms of a Britain in transition.’ (p.3)

the fact that the first home-grown (male-authored) Black British productions of Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Elmina's Kitchen* and Paul Sirrett's *The Big Life* appeared in London's commercial West End in 2005. Male power is the reality. The staging of Black British women's drama, in particular, still remains, at best, rare. Sex-gender and race disadvantages appear to fuse more acutely in this context than in other arts disciplines. Tania Modleski observes that "until there is an appreciable change in the power structure, it is unlikely that women's fictional accounts of their lives [...] will have the force to induce masculine *jouissance*." This reality of male power she concludes is "the most crucial factor in men's traditional disregard and contempt for women's writings and women's modes of existence." (DE LAURENTIS, 1986, p.123)

When considering the work of women playwrights, to use the prevailing aesthetic against itself can open up not only a counter-aesthetic but also aspects of Helen Tiffin's "counter-discourse" (TIFFIN, 1989, p.22). Whilst Gilbert and Tompkins address "forms of canonical counter-discourse in post-colonial theatre" specifically, theirs proves a useful model to bear in mind in considering the work of contemporary Black British women dramatists because, by definition, "counter-discourse seeks to deconstruct significations of authority and power exercised in the canonical text [...] to release its stranglehold on representation and, by implication, to intervene in social conditioning" (GILBERT and TOMPKINS, 1996, p.16). The canonical is, in this case, the all-pervasive genre of social-realism conditional to the staging of Black dramatists' work, or domestic dramas, diasporic dramas, and so on. Working against the tide of disregard, Black women dramatists in Britain, from Jamaican-born Una Marson onwards, have created their own vanguard in relation to mainstream theatres. Indeed, the habitually overlooked Marson wrote the very first play by a Black woman to be performed in London's West End, *At What a Price*, Scala Theatre (1933).

More recently, adding to the established legacy of contemporary playwright Winsome Pinnock, two more Black women dramatists—Dona Daley (1956-2002) and Debbie Tucker Green—provide compelling examples of the key ways in which contemporary women dramatists articulate sensibilities and perspectives—arising from their positions within culture and theatre—that are distinct from those of their male

⁷ See Gardiner 27 July 2005; Greer 17 May 2006. Recent appointments of new Artistic Directors to the Royal Court and Theatre Royal, Stratford East (both with established traditions of staging plays by Black writers) have again resulted in white men taking over from white men.

contemporaries. Their plays exemplify the types of inroads and aesthetic possibilities evoked by JatinderVerma, Felix Cross, and Isobel Armstrong. They experientially and linguistically take drama down new routes in the indigenous British theatrescape. Both tucker green and Daley distinctively dramatise articulations of the uncharacteristic in British theatre. The authority of Standard English occupies a secondary status as patois, choreo-poetical, and non-grammatical syntax are the means of articulating their dramatised dialogues. In fact, tucker green's idiom qualifies for Kristeva's revolution in poetic language. Her drama texts demonstrate a way of "shattering and maintaining position within the heterogeneous process" as her texts themselves become examples of what Kristeva calls a "semiotic device" (KRISTEVA, 1986, p.109).

Daley and tucker green both effect substantial forays into dismantling the identity-politics or issues-based contingencies in which Black drama in Britain traditionally has been housed—to the point of claustrophobia. Additionally, their *dramatis personae* challenge assumptions, expectations, and stereotyping regarding age and race in relation to casting. In contrasting ways, they produce sustained experimentation with form, style, and subject matter to assert black experience as more universal than marginal. While Daley employs unqualified naturalism in her patois-rendered dramatisations of the mundane intimacies that weave lives together, tucker green blows even this expectation apart with a blitz on the comfort zones of theatrical realism in her verbal freefalls and controversial or confrontational topics: incest, misogyny, female sex tourism, domestic violence, AIDS, genocide, and child soldiers. Daley's plays provide the gently familiar fizz of sea water that laps ankle high. tucker green's work offers a swift immersion into the often murky or uncharted depths of human experience.

Both writers can be characterised by a "less is more" aesthetic; the effects are the result of small casts, shorter than usual running-times on stage, lack of intervals between acts, pared-down language, single-set locations, or minimal props.⁸ This minimalism, however, diminishes neither the scope nor the vision of their drama. Of tucker green's play *trade*, Benjamin Davis noted: "An index of good writing seems to be having the confidence to tackle the big stuff in miniature form." He also observed

⁸ Writing in the year both Daley and tucker green premiered plays, Sierz lamented how, 'Many British plays are accounts of "me and my mates", often set on "sarf" London council estates. They have small casts, small ambitions and small subjects.' (SIERZ, 2004, p. 23)

that “the pithy treatment is made possible because the political is always refracted through the personal” (DAVIS, 2006, p.302). Of Daley’s *Blest be the Tie*, Ian Shuttleworth wrote, “Daley’s concerns emerge naturally through her characters rather than hammering an agenda [It is] the kind of drama that examines multicultural Britain from within the cultural mainstream” (SHUTTLEWORTH, 2004, p.494).

Blest be the Tie (2004) continues the epic trajectory of post-war Jamaican women’s experience of migration, which Daley established in *Weathering the Storm* (1997) and re-captured in the unfinished *Barber Shop*. Read in succession, these plays chart the socio-economic aspirations stimulated by migration and its associated cultural compromises as women struggle and respond strategically to settling and raising English-born children. Biological bonds to the country of origin are set against those that emerge from their nurture of new connections rooted in England. The implied comparison between those who were left behind and those who emigrated invites identifications and evaluations as to which factors actually comprise the diasporic inheritance for African Caribbean women in Britain. Lyn Gardiner outlines the course of diasporic drama —

Plays about diaspora often have a formula. The one who left home — whether it’s Ireland or Jamaica—returns in triumph or failure. Then they spend two hours discovering either that home is where the heart is or that the place of their birth has changed beyond recognition and the feelings that drew them back are nothing but nostalgia or a trick of memory.

— and notes that “Dona Daley’s play offers a variation” (GARDINER, 2004, p.494). The action remains in the U.K., and the result is not straightforward: “We are wooed into a homecoming narrative in which the reference points of where ‘home’ is and who is ‘returning’ are twisted and re-turned in a subtle undermining of certainties” (OSBORNE, 2006, p.143).

Arising from the phase of British theatre’s “in-yer-face”reductivist categorisations, the wistful qualities of Daley’s drama (it is no wonder) can appear out of synch with what critics believe theatre should be. Daley attested that acknowledging “the shoes that had pinched” the feet of those who came before her was part of her development and heritage (OSBORNE, 2001). *Blest be the Tie* is a fictional tribute to her own mother’s experiences. The *dramatis personae* of three women in their fifties calls to mind the scarcity of central roles for women of this generation on the British

stage. Two sisters, Martha (who stayed in Jamaica) and Florence (who emigrated), are re-united in Martha's council flat overlooking Clapham Junction station. Now calling herself "Cherise", Martha, the international prize-winning hairdresser, clearly has the economic upper hand and is disdainful of London's shabbiness ("plenty dirt and muck round de place..." *Blest be the Tie*, p.44) and her sister's circumstances ("People pee inna de lift, fighting to keep warm. Small balcony fe a garden. Yu don't have to live like this..." p.30). The very differing perspectives of giving and receiving material support and the feelings of sacrifice and deprivation these produce highlight the rupture between the sisters.

FLORENCE Tings woulda been better fe me coulda look straight. All the while I have to looking back. Mama have enough? Martha school fees pay dis term? [...] 'Dear Sister Florence ... I begging yu dis and, sis, I begging yudat!'

[...]

The help I was giving to you to get out of a hole meant I was pushing myself into a deeper one!

[...]

MARTHA [...] Whey yu was when me haffe a work and look after Mama? Whey yu was when me haffe get up soon and tek care of my kids them and then stand up fe twelve and fourteen hour fe a few dollar a day [...] Trouble was yu sending de wrong tings. (pp.55-56)

Martha's description of supporting her family in Jamaica ("No help. Me one and me pickneydem! No husband! No mother!") leads her to suggest that other means of survival were necessary, in a side to her life withheld from both Florence and the audience (p.56). "Me haffe do all kind of stinging femek sure me have money fe products fe do people hair! [...] No mind! I did what I did haffe do!" (pp.56-57). Here, Daley alludes to the complexities which fuel people's choices in life and enables non-judgemental conjecture regarding the potential source of Martha's earnings. As Florence misreads Martha's needs, in a reversal of their financial positions, Martha/Cherise similarly misreads Florence's. She seeks to exert her new economic power over Florence by purchasing a new (unasked for) sofa and then by compelling Florence to return to Jamaica: "Yu pension would carry yu far" (p.34). However, Florence is shown to "know her place" in a situation that, ironically, also recalls Martha's hardship as mother and breadwinner.

FLORENCE You know how I have to suck salt out of a wooden spoon to get that settee. Leave the kids them sleeping early morning gawnfe

clean. Run back to see to them. But it was worth it. Have a nice front room[...] Somewhere fe sit and consider de progress that me an Archie mek. (p.59)

Her place is unequivocally personified in her domestic landscape, a composite of the stages of her life in England, for better and for worse. Involuntarily re-located to a new high-rise estate, she remembers the demolition of her street: “I stand and watch how demtek down in a few minutes whey we did tek years fe build.” (p.66). In the (off-stage) textual periphery, Florence’s children and grandchildren thrive, testaments to the investment of her hardship. “Masters. I have two first-class degrees and a Masters! The children have done well!” (p.25).

Ian Rickson (Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre, London, which commissioned both Daley and tucker green) said that Daley had “the ability to write feeling, which is not fashionable.” In doing so, she encouraged the audience to go to a specific place “which we occupy in a liberated, non-judgemental way to present a subtle, rich, pure distillation of a particular world and heritage that tends to be undervalued” (OSBORNE, 2004). Paulette Randall (who as Artistic Director of Talawa, Britain’s premier black theatre company, directed the play as a co-production with the Royal Court) considered that Daley’s unique contribution to Black British drama lay in its uncompromising female-perspective (OSBORNE, 2004a). There are no on-stage male characters or children—traditional signifiers of female social identity—as the cross-race friendship of two women (rather than a woman and a man) is the primary relationship dramatised.

This subtlety clearly tested some critics’ endurance in what were in majority, positive reviews of the play. Sam Marlowe praised its poignancy, vivid and witty dialogue, and humanising of questions of race and nationality, but concluded that it was “schematic and predictable” and, whilst it was “impossible not to warm to” the three actors, “It’s a pity the play doesn’t give them a little more to work with” (Marlowe 494). Dominic Cavendish also found the play to be poignant and truthful, noting the ambiguously lesbian kiss⁹ between Florence and Eunice as “perhaps the first of its kind between middle-aged women, one black the other white, on the British stage.” However, he decided that “Much as you might chuckle at the patois-laden exchanges,

⁹ In discussing Maya Chowdhry’s plays Griffin follows Catharine Stimpson’s definition that, ‘The kiss has a particular and poignant history in lesbian cultural representation since it has figured as the symbol for lesbian sex.’ (Griffin 248 n.23)

after 100 minutes it's hard not to think: blest be the end" (Cavendish 494). Helen Chappell noted a domestic drama at work: "What Daley does so well is capture the tangle of affections and resentments festering in the bosom of every family," yet the play "stubbornly remains a piece with narrow horizons [...] a slice-of-life script without enough meat to sustain its two-hour running time" (Chappell 495). Rhoda Koenig offered the most slating critique of *Blest be the Tie*, a review which is also riddled with inaccuracies and indications that she had her own creative ideas about suitable subjects for theatre. "Eunice, the only white woman on this Brixton street" is her oblique comment on a play set in Clapham Junction. Koenig rails against "an actress in the part of Eunice who looks about 20 years younger and three stone lighter than her character"—based upon what? Certainly not the text!—and even offers her own storyline: "a different play, one that I would really like to see—about women who make themselves phony and gullible, colluding with their manipulators, because the truth is too painful to face" (Koenig 495). Her suggestion evokes the lives of millions of women across the centuries and proposes a topic that is neither radical nor original in theatre. Arising from the phase of British theatre's "in-yer-face" reductivist categorizations, the wistful qualities of Daley's drama (it is no wonder) can appear out of synch with what critics believe "theatre" should be. Daley's plays challenge preconceptions, calling into question theatre's production of certain kinds of knowledge.

tucker green's and Daley's plays challenge preconceptions, calling into question theatre's production of certain kinds of knowledge. YasminAlibhai-Brown has consistently drawn attention to the scarcity of black critics in British theatre and the distorting effect of white-male domination upon the reception and understanding of black dramatists' work: "we often get prejudice parading as expertise or patronisingtolerance" (ALIBHAI-BROWN, 2005). Like the auto-correction feature on MS Word[®] that unfailingly imposes capitalisation on tucker green's name, so too have many of this critical coterie sought to correct or point out tucker green's deviations from—and, by implication, her deficiencies in—what they conceive of as good theatre..

Sonia Boyce's remark on her having identified herself as a Black woman artist was "That's not necessarily who I am, but what I am" (BAKER et al., 1986, p.308). Boyce here places herself in a self-consciously constructed category of creative artists. Her art is not some socio-realistic extension of herself inexorably laced to manifesting

the personal. Similarly tucker green resists collapsing her personal identity into her work. As she observed, “Writing is just something I’m doing at the moment; as I’ve said, I’ve done a bunch of other jobs,” noting that “women are often clustered by what they write about” (TUCKER GREEN, 2005a). In her relatively short time as a commissioned playwright, tucker green’s achievements are impressive. Her first play, the two-hander *Two Women*(2000) for the Paines Plough Wild Lunch IV series was short-listed for the Alfred Fagon Award and her next play *born bad*(2003) won the Olivier Award for Most Promising Newcomer (2004).

tucker green’s plays tend to be delivered via internal monologues or dialogues that uncompromisingly jar (both in content and rhythm) against the familiarity of social realism. Their linguistic remorselessness and rawness are simultaneously alienating and compelling. She resists the imposition of Standard English, a fact that led one white male critic to mimic and deride it in his review of *dirty butterfly* (2003) as “Ali G-style patois [...] not so much ethereal as absurd. A no-go zone innit” (CAVENDISH, 2003), thus ignoring the emotional throb that this pared down language pounds out in delivery. In acknowledging her radical voice and style, critics tend to liken her to Sarah Kane. This comparison is irksome to green. She cites poet Louise Bennett and singers Lauryn Hill and Jill Scott as influences. Her style of specified active silences evokes Suzan-Lori Parks’s technique, but she has stated that NtozakeShange’s choreopoems and Caryl Churchill’s invention of multi-overlapping dialogue have also influenced her own dramatic strategies. In this respect, tucker green revives and revitalises the techniques of her woman dramatist forebears. Their innovations are embedded in her texts and, yet, taken in new directions. She has explained her creative method as listening to “a voice in her head that won’t go away”—voices that “grow into scraps of writing that she then fits together” (GARDINER, 2005, p.13).

Although her first play *Two Women* – her only unpublished play - adheres to conventional spelling, punctuation and standard English, it displays the origins of tucker green’s stylistic and aesthetic trajectory and her characteristic *topoi* of women’s social oppression as refracted through race. The characters speak in a phonetically-rendered slang set down with customary spellings to denote Jamaican patois-derived street parlance. “Yu looking fine star. Yeah, yuda lick as you ‘two’s’ it through the barriers pleading poverty ‘bout buying a ticket.” (TUCKER GREEN, p.3) There is little

overlapping dialogue, the overlap occurs through the structural interweaving of both characters (in the stated textual division of “prologue”, “scene” and “epilogue”) - Sweet (“UK Black young woman of W. I. parentage. Aged 15”) - and Roni, (“Mixed race (black / white) woman approx. 30”) as they articulate the plot through indirect dialogue. Never present together in the same stage-time, Tucker Green creates opportunities for the actors’ inter-referential acknowledgement as bearers of a character’s story. Like (white playwright) Rebecca Prichard’s *Yard Gals* (1996), the opening presents the two protagonists self-consciously narrating their lives for the audience or reader,

RONI I’ll be going first.
 (To Sweet) We’ll start with me.
 Mine.
SWEET **(Introducing)** Roni.

RONI Me just sittin.

SWEET As in Saffron.
 [...]
SWEET Cos she light.
 As in yellow.
 As in *Saffron*
 As in *Roni*.

while drawing attention meta-textually to the work that goes into maintaining their stage roles.

RONI Them ‘I’m serious’ lines showin all here [...] Imitate the
 ‘yeah I’m
 really interested,’ and them falling for my fraud
 ‘attentiveness’, if
 nothing else – (*Two Women*, p.6)

This opening establishes how Sweet and Roni act as barometers of each other’s experiences. They register and acknowledge what each goes through – a poignant recognition given that both have quite bleak prospects - in regards to their (yearned for) emotional happiness and financial security. The prologue creates a specific neighbourhood, its socio-economic circumstances and focuses the action upon a particular shop within it. Sweet who, at first seems to embody what her name describes, and Roni who works in an “eat out food” shop (p.4), present sage and streetwise indications of the street’s rituals. Commerce is personalised and rendered meaningful and intimate (in ways that their recounted interactions with people are not) as: “Pizza

Hut. Mickey D's, KFC". Sweet notes the stereotypical conflating of black people with sporting prowess in the abundance of sports shops – “cos we're all *that* athletic right.” Expectations of a superficial and brittle consumerist lifestyle reveal how an image (cultivated through designer sports clothes), is as vital to maintaining this, as is eating fast food. “Sour face, fierce lookin, baggy shit, bandana wearin, Fubu frontin, Moschino stylin, Versace blatant, ghetto fabulous, bal'ead, twis' up, locks up, fade, shave, hi top, lo top, chiny bumpin, afro sportin, gold teet' front teet' stylinniggah.” (p.11) Tucker Green evokes the desperate and deprived underside of the desire for *jouissance* in this brash (but grossly unrealistic) consumerism where the difference between needing to buy an image and having the means to do so, is striking.

SWEET 140 bucks worth of Nike on your feet and I'm seeing you creeping out a Pound Shop with your bags full and small change.

[...]

RONI They'll come. They will. Those that ent quite got enough for the Colonels so-called deals. [...] they'll turn up here, we'll get 'em, the rush'll happen. (p.3)

Tucker Green foreshadows the final destinies of the two protagonists through a series of episodic speeches and revelations. Roni's initially blasé “Infant to Primary/ Primary to Secondary” (p.6) of biographical information later becomes an account of the bullying she endured throughout school, providing retrospective insight into her extreme course of action at the play's end. These textual echoes endow the plot with multi-layered references that continually hook back into each other at some point – as though evermore strands of plot and reference accumulatively cohere – but in a non-chronological fashion. This technique mirrors a world where sudden reversals of fortune underscore the isolation of both women from nurture and positive regard. Roni's meticulously timed strategy to avoid the school bullies is undermined by a teacher randomly talking to her at home time and consequently forestalling her escape. As a result, she is terrorised by “ ‘Mr My Brother's Bigger 'n' Yours' machete poking out the bottom of his carrier bag and it ent even no name brand bag just a blue no style every day common as shit carrier bag with a machete hanging outta it.” (p.11) Tucker Green also implies an oppressively uncompromising chromatics of schoolground allegiances. Roni's skin hue not only separates her from the bullies (white), but also from those who might be allies (black) – ‘And the few black kids is there watchin. They

ent laughing. They ent – they just watching – a understanding they’re only gonna fight for they own’ (p.11)

The transitions between characters’ articulations, activates the sub-textual irony of sexual politics equals meat market. Sweet’s description of the lead-in to one of her many sexual experiences in the play - “Lyrical genius in his cussin, armoured wivnu’un but attitude an’ lookin like lovinent part of his vocab.” (p.14) wryly slips into Roni’s anatomising of the parts of the chicken her customers select, “So whatchuwant? You want breas’? You never said bout the thigh – so what – what is it? The two thighs now?” (p.18) The intertwining of images invested by tucker green’s linguistic dexterity, dispels fixity in unrelenting grimness in the dramatization of these two young women’s emotionally and economically destitute lives. Sweet’s experience appears to be (at first) genuinely reciprocated with the nameless “*nice*” man. (p.20) It is erotically recounted – in contrast to Roni’s “*fakin*” with customers at the shop counter.

SWEET Then the bite down, sweetest pressure I ever got
 His strong is that gentle an I’m b’lievin it only cos
 My belief’s slippin.

 And it’s the slowest pullin back and the quietest
 ‘Am I alright?’ he’s breathin [...]
An it’s the holdin and smellin, holdin an inhalin,
 [...]
 my legs over his, my arms around his-self and
 about he’s breathin me, (16)

Through succession of repeated verbs, “breathin”, “holdin”, “smellin”, “feelin”, their non-fericative enunciation, tucker green endows the recounting of this experience with an intimate tenderness that is personal and not voyeuristic. However, it soon becomes apparent that both Sweet and Roni are in the act of service. Roni the waitress, expected to smile, happy to serve someone’s every need is skilfully offset against the expectations placed upon and held by Sweet as her sexual encounters slip into prostitution.

Fantasy is the key to both women’s survival. Roni fantasises that her drudgery is “just the stop gap, *baby* – the part of the book that I can say was the ‘hard times’ – when I was ‘gallantly strugglin’” (p.21) In this respect, Roni’s ego protection strategies are open to interpretation as either deluded or canny, “See it don’t matter – iss me this side of the counter getting my minimum wage squeeze” (a “squeeze” meaning an advantage,

some leeway) which she rationalizes as “I’m getting paid to be fryin – Mohammed’s payin my arse – is you the sucker whose in at all hours still buyin.” (p.24) The reality she has previously asserted is, “Five days a week [...] Cos I ent got no choice” (pp.5-6). This segues into a recollection of being bullied, the implication rests that the daily trauma of bullying disrupted her schooling and is the reason she is in such a dead-end job at the Chicken House. Thus, tucker green creates a back story that disallows a pathologising standpoint on the part of reader or audience.

Sweet by name and nature, is “easy”(as Roni describes her). Her only expectations of men are, “No ‘previous’ and no pickney” (p.22).

SWEET So I go wiv the flow – little smile here, bit a the
 Feelgood pressure there...heh

Sweet’s second sexual encounter in the play,

(Proudly) ‘Al fresco’ you called it
[...]
 And iss fun.(Makes *me* smile).
 Yeah.(p. 25)

is punctuated by Roni’s repeating of “Fun” as a question and then a statement to reveal an alternative perspective - to which Sweet blinds herself. This is revealed in the actual brutality of the encounter.

Lookin past you.Lookin over you. Beyond your
Back.
Sweet.
An I’m lookin...
Then I’m hearin...
...And I’m sightin your spars
They all eyeballin...
Laughin.
Clock watchin...

And you clock ‘em. And you don’t stop. You
shoutin ‘em that you ‘soon done’. An’ you ‘soon
come’.
Bout how ‘this one won’t take long.’

Al fresco. (p.26)

tucker green charts Sweet’s demise, her emotional deadening, through the repetitive mantra of denial and automation. In the following extract, the anaphora, “Close

my eyes”, lulls both audience and Sweet into her inevitable loss of individuality as she becomes an object for sexual purchase.

SWEET You looking me up and down just to double check.
(Deadpan) Sweet ent I?

And I’m kinda...trying t’give it the...**(tries to force a fake smile)** You got what you wanted right, and I wanted to be got. Yeah right.

Close my eyes – as a lady’s s’posed to.
Close my eyes cos you – shout me to.
Close my eyes and pretend that you ent old enough to be my daddy.
Close my eyes and make like it’s bliss.
Close my eyes, act like music’s doin it.
Close my eyes and wish that we ain’t
[...]
...I can be whatever you want. (30-1)

This is interwoven with Roni throwing burning oil over a customer, whom she perceives (or misreads) to be her former schoolyard tormenter. Catalysed by the sight of, “Mr Carrier Bag walks in with jus a bag an it ent even no name brand jus a blue no style every day common as shit carrier bag.” (p.27), Roni replays the past trauma, Sweet likewise is caught in a cul-de-sac of emotional self-destruction which Tucker Green lyricizes through repetition. It is unconfirmed as to whether or not Roni’s customer is actually the boy who terrorised her at school, as the event is conveyed within her imaginary acceptance of a Grammy, the epiphany of her fantasising. Ultimately the play does not reveal whether Roni’s actions cause her to be sectioned in a mental health unit or in police custody, as the allusions to her actions merge utterly with her delusive fantasy world.

RONI They understood. They respect that whole privacy thing now, since that Dodi-Di thing.[...]
-they wanna profile me from all way back when. School days.
RONI **(Darkly)** You’re still asking – you also keep looking at your watch – **(mocking)** ‘getting it all down’ –
I keep tryina tell ya. I wouldn’t change a thing. (pp.34-5)

Sweet’s final disturbing encounter - she is raped by a man who has purchased her sexual services - compounds her vulnerability. At this point she is revealed as

having been under the legal age of consent throughout the play. She is fourteen, ‘Two years I’m legal...like you know. And your money’s still lying there on the floor, like it’s tired.’(p.35) The epilogue functions as a eulogising summary with Roni recounting her Chicken House preparations and Sweet referring to each of the men with whom she has had sex, as the final track of music, “The Comfort of Strangers” (sung by Skin) plays out to the end. Mirroring the prologue, tucker green repeats lines to develop the sense of an on-going cycle – a structure she re-visits in *trade* (2006). Roni’s final lines of the prologue become (retrospectively) an ominous prophecy of her violent revenge, revealing how tucker green’s design, even in her juvenilia, is a continual re-presenting and re-cycling of language and incident (through her signature of a pared-down poetic vocabulary)and its inter-play of the circumstantial with staged circumstances.

In addition to her linguistic inventiveness, tucker green forces casting revisions in her later plays:*stoning mary,trade* (2005) and *random* (2008). Ian Johns—from a clearly unabashed, mainstream, white-centred, perspective—summarised: “We tend to associate these three situations, respectively entitled The Aids Genocide: The Prescription, The Child Soldier and Stoning Mary, with Africa. Perhaps attacking our sense of detachment from these distant problems, Tucker Green brings them closer to home by giving them a white, British urban voice” (JOHNS,2005, p.424). The unproblematised “we” is, of course, the very viewing position tucker green seeks to destabilise. In specifying that “The play is set in the country it is performed in. All the characters are white” (*stoning mary*p.2), tucker green confronts associations of Africa as a generalised site for suffering, victimhood, exploitation and disaster. She forces Europe into the narrative as the play is the only one of her corpus that can be cast in white-dominant societies (those without a sizeable presence of black actors from which to cast it) as in all of her other work,the *dramatis personae* specifies black actors.

As staged by Marianne Elliott, each component of the plot was heralded in Brechtian fashion by a luminous white sub-title in the cavernous space of the playing area (designed by Ultz), a subliminal reminder of white Western imperial culpability for the tragedies dramatised. In what is the most detailed and discerning appraisal of the political theatre and aesthetics at work, Victoria Segal (one of the five female out of seventeen white reviewers), describes the result, “The impact is immediate and intimate, a headline you cannot look away from, human emotion spilling out from behind the flat,

stark words” (SEGAL,2005, p.425). tucker green’s play prevents the white-majority,middle-class audience (which the Royal Court demographically serves) from slipping into familiar generalisations, whilst for black audience members a dual viewing position is opened up, one of privilege derived from a European context and as black British citizens who are still separated from the whole through government-speak categories such as British Minority Ethnic.

In *stoning mary*, the AIDS afflicted characters, husband and wife (who can only afford one prescription), have their own “wife ego” and “husband ego” to dramatize repressed thoughts. They share equal dramatic status to reveal the destructive ritual of marriage.

HUSBAND EGO	Eyes to the floorin it like I’ve done her something. Playin powerless
WIFE EGO	play powerless
HUSBAND EGO	playin powerless badly.
WIFE	‘What if I wanna look after you?’
HUSBAND	‘What if I wanna live lookin after you? (I’d) look after you and love it.’
WIFE EGO	Liar.
HUSBAND EGO	Liar (<i>stoningmaryp.16</i>)

Another married couple (MUM and DAD) amplify the misogyny that underpins the institution of the family as enshrined in the Law of the Father. That couple’s son is now a Child Soldier - “two words which [as Jane Edwardes commented] should never be linked” (EDWARDES, 2005, p.428). The male-male bonds serve to erode the mother’s sense of self-worth and the original oneness she experienced with her son:

MUM	His time he’d / spend.
DAD	Laughin like that
MUM	his time he’d spend with me –
DAD	laughin at you like that
MUM	the time he’d make to / spend with me
DAD	laughin at your smell
MUM	The time he did spend with me.
DAD	Laughin at y’you and your smell, with me, like that. We did. That.

However, the echo of the Egos established at the beginning of the play have problematized motives in what characters articulate. As the son does not directly validate Dad’s deracination of Mum, the audience are left contemplating the dual (at

odds) perspectives of the same relationship. The dramatic silences enable non-verbalised action and reaction from the thunderbolt words.

MUM
MUM
DAD
MUM I wear it cos he bought it.
DAD He bought it for a joke.
MUM ...It reminds me of / him.
DAD You are a joke. (pp.25-26)

In his review, Michael Billington declared, “Words alone do not make drama: what one craves is a marriage between action and language” and stated that *stoning mary* “feels more like an acted poem than a play” (BILLINGTON, 2005, p.28). *trade* again up-ends Billington’s criteria for dramatic success, but confirms what Kate Bassett had declared in her review of *born bad* three years before: “I’d like to stick my neck out and say Debbie Tucker Green is one of the most assured and extraordinary new voices we’ve heard in a long while” (BASSETT, 2003, p.12). It is telling that tucker green’s critical advocates have been largely women. Most recently, Lyn Gardiner noted of *trade*, “While others struggle to find a distinctive voice, tucker green has developed her own unique way of saying things. [...] She makes you hang on every word” (GARDINER, 2006, p.38). In contrast, male critics are frequently fixated on length—deriding tucker green’s previous plays for their brevity, presumably in comparison to a “comfort zone norm” regarding acceptable length. (Harold Pinter does not get charged with such temporal shortcomings.) Michael Billington felt the need to mention duration for *stoning mary*—“this highly wrought 60-minute piece” (BILLINGTON, 2006, p.28)—as did Charles Spencer, who denounced “yet another dud” for which “theatregoers who have paid top whack for an evening out (£27.50) might feel rather less enchanted” (SPENCER, 2006, p.16). Although he responded positively to *trade*, Sam Marlowe opened his review with “It’s only 40 minutes long, but [...]” (MARLOWE, 2006, p.17); and Kieron Quirke noted early on that it is a “40-minute chamber piece” (QUIRKE, 2006, p.36).

It may be condensed, but *trade* continues the demands put upon actors in preceding plays, as characters’ voices interweave, overlap, complete each other’s thoughts, echo each other and, verbatim-like, re-state phrases with shifts in emphasis and pronunciation and hence proliferate meanings.

REGULAR 'Nice' / I / uh / haven't been called for...
years.

Beat.
I haven't been called anything for years.
I haven't called myself / even / well you
(don't) / for / uh / for / for...for...
years.

NOVICE 'Nice'?

'Nice' came with another drink?
'Nice' came with the drink did it?

LOCAL 'Nice'...ice and a slice –

NOVICE 'Nice' was what did it was it?
[...]

NOVICE Nice and easy.

LOCAL She is.
Emotional.
Emotionally easy.
You are.

REGULAR I –

LOCAL Juss too easy –
(reNOVICE) You are.
NOVICE ups the middle finger to LOCAL and

REGULAR
(p.14)

It is because she undermines conventional syntax and weaves together her own melodic version of a script that allows multiple voices and perspectives to co-exist, that the primacy of ensemble-playing applies equally to the demands of acting in all of tucker green's plays. Characters interrupting and continuing each other's sentences and thought processes—a method that accesses and displays language beyond formalising constraints—necessitates a choreography of line-delivery in order for the actors to communicate the written text. In Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, Lesley Manville described how “horrendously difficult” it was “to learn your lines” and “also the exact moment when you interrupt [...] it's a question of passing the baton successfully” (GOODMAN, 1998,p.83).

Timing and ensemble-coherence demand an intensive inter-play as the actors in *trade* must slide between sexes, ages, races, and nationalities to deliver an inversion of the world's “oldest profession”, played out in a consumer context where European women are travelling in ever-increasing numbers to former colonies to buy men for sex. The title evokes not only Kieron Quirke's glib “The times being what they are, I rather

expected *Tradeto* try and influence my choice of tea bag” (QUIRKE, 2006, p.16), but given the implied location, the Caribbean, the play’s title also reminds the audience of another, earlier trade in human bodies, the commerce relating to trans-Atlantic slavery. To represent a *dramatis personae* of eight characters, “three black actresses” play female, male, white, and black characters (*trade*, p.4). This authorial directive liberates casting expectations from both colour-blind and societal casting, which have dogged opportunities for black actors in British theatre.

tucker green’s paring down of language draws attention to the unnecessary effluvia of much contemporary drama. The plays’ mini-philippics confront Billington’s notion of drama (as a “marriage between language and action”) since in tucker green’s plays speech *is* the action of the drama. Although one internet critic referred to “The Novice, who jabbars incessantly and swears like a trooper with Tourette’s Syndrome” (BROWN, 2006), perhaps Kristeva’s linguistic model might more aptly account for the aesthetic at work here: “the semiotic pulverizes [the text]...only to make it a new device—for us, this is precisely what distinguishes a text as *signifyingpractice* from the ‘drifting-into-non-sense’ [*derive*] that characterizes neurotic discourse” (KRISTEVA, 1986, p.104). Exchanges among the play’s characters (The Local, The Novice, and The Regular) propel the plot, revealing European tourism’s footprints on both the geography and psyche of local people’s lives. Each woman positions herself as a cut above the context in which the action takes place and, evoking Aristotle’s template for tragedy, falls from this elevation. The Novice, “The Younger White Woman”, (*trade*, p.7) distances herself from the “ladette” excesses of Aya Napa or of “one a them Faliraki—out-on-the-piss-out-for-days-out-of-me-head-all-night-type-a-traveller. I don’t do that” (p.24). She is Thatcher’s child through and through: “I paid for it [...] so I can do what I want” (p.8). The Local initially has the upper hand: “I wouldn’t be buyin a second and third drink of anything for no man I didn’t know” (p.54). Exuding a tough capitalistic business façade through “Local Styles at Local Prices” (p.52), she is exposed as holding onto an illusion—which is rapidly reconfigured as a delusion—as much as the Novice and the Regular are.

LOCAL [...]

The me-an-the-he is a long-term ting.

[...]

The we of it/is inna long (term)/lissen –

me-an-the-he of it is long-term tings / me

and he been long-term from time/truss
me.
A trust ting.
Truss mi. (p.55)

She does not use a condom with her prostitute boyfriend—“flesh to flesh it / y’noh / wid nobody but we self / before” (p.56)—imagining herself special until the Regular reveals that she, too, has unprotected sex with him, based upon a fallacious trust: “...Do you want to know how much I trusted...?” she asks (p.58). The “trade” is held together by female collusion, which renders the three women inter-dependent, their need for sexual attention framed by misplaced romantic rationalisations.

The set of the production (designed by Miriam Buether), at London’s Soho Theatre, featured a circle of white sand on which the three actors sat or stood. It revolved almost imperceptibly throughout the performance, mirroring the subtle shifts of emphasis and meaning created by the characters’ verbatim-like playback of each other’s lines. This device ratified the play’s cyclical structure, (seen first in *Two Women*) which begins with three locals who say, “we juss live ‘there’” (p.5) and ends with “We just ... live/live here” (p.61). The ellipsis emphasises the indigenous inhabitants’ almost incidental worth in the relentlessness of the holidaymaking cycle to reinforce the fact that they are unable to travel “there” – the prerogative of European affluence – and yet, there is also an asserted sense of permanence, identity and belonging to tropical paradise which is presumably what the tourists’ sexual odysseys aim to access. As *trade* reveals, the cliché of the holiday romance has developed a distinctly sardonic edge where women might exercise a superior economic prerogative over local men, but still end up exploited and devalued from their transactions.

In Western culture where the printed word remains a definitive verifier of significance, anchoring artistic merit for perpetuity - a means of ultimate authorisation - tucker green joins writers such as bell hooks and NtozakeShange as a linguistic Luddite, in resisting the imposition of mechanical grammatical standardisation on her personal name, titles and syntax, to produce (Harryette Mullen’s term) “resistant orality”(MULLEN, 1992, p.244). tucker green’s work consolidates the crucial dimension of live performance for drama through its formal disruption to conventions of staged language, the arresting dominance of orature over physical enactment and the losses incurred when this becomes simply the published word. It confirms Jill

Thompson's observation that, '[...] plays don't, in fact, *mean* things, they *do* them.' (PAGE, 1992, p.28)

* * * * *

It has been much lamented in a variety of contexts: media, theatrical, academic, and political, that Black theatre in Britain has been unable to sustain the strong visible presence it achieved during the mid-1980s. The lack of continuity between the decades means that "consequently every generation then has to come and build again, start gain, believe actually in themselves that they are the beginning" (OSBORNE, 2005a). Caryl Phillips (2005) claimed that there was a relative dearth of new black writing for theatre in the 1980s and 1990s, thus effectively expunging women writers of the Second Wave Women Playwrights movement of 1982 and onwards. ("I hope the Second Wave becomes an ocean," its patron, Glenda Jackson, had declared in support in 1987). Phillips, furthermore, eradicates the impact of companies such as the Theatre of Black Women (1982), Imani-Faith (1983), Black Mime Theatre (1984), and Talawa (1985), where aspiring women playwrights and performers had the opportunities to develop their work throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Sue-Ellen Case has noted that, "the canon reproduces its history in its future" which is formed by members of the privileged sex-gender, class and race categories. The work of women in particular "will remain invisible, minor, or at best 'separate but equal' – ghettoised in women's anthologies, women's performance groups and women's studies." (CASE, 1983, p.535)

Despite Phillips's oversight, the paving stones were in place for Black women playwrights' entry into the main picture. Anthologies edited by women accompanied the momentum of this output (Brewster 1987,1989, 1995, Wandor 1985, Gray 1990, Griffin and Aston 1991, George 1993, Mason-John 1999). Academic critical work about Black women's drama also emerged in the 1990s (Croft 1993, Dahl 1995, Joseph 1998, Ponnuswami 2000), albeit, as Griffin points out, these essays are "explicitly political" (GRIFFIN, 2003, p.6) in discussing drama and theatre. The aesthetic dimension was not uniformly addressed, as cases were made for acknowledging and recognising the existence of contextual factors, impediments, and legacies concerning this work. But their writers provided initiatory steps in challenging de-limiting categories and exclusion zones in British culture.

Women playwrights have breached the citadels of British theatre, but are still battling for inclusion. Black women dramatists face the dual impediments of belonging neither to the dominant (male) theatre culture nor to the theatrical ethnic majority; and, as a result, they have difficulty gaining entry on their *own* terms. However, to recognize this reality is not to present a pathetic standpoint-politics based upon a hierarchy of oppressions. As has been the case for women writers *per se*, the dynamics of disappearance compromises any capacity to form a legacy, or power base. Griffin, for example, concluded that “Insofar as Black women’s production for performance has been analysed, this has occurred at the intersection of postmodern, postcolonial, and subaltern studies” (GRIFFIN, 2003, p.3), and it still remains the case that the critical infrastructure and archiving processes assumed for white dramatists by-pass their Black British peers. Furthermore, the dialogic relationship that white-male-dominated criticism engages with theatre is missing or mislaid in relation to the staging of black women’s plays. Critical responses smack of thoughts of being left out or imply some didactic expectation of the playwright—both as teacher and learner. The anticipated dispassionate authority of theatre criticism becomes destabilised when critics negotiate culturally unfamiliar territory in drama that tunnels under the bedrock of their expertise. Indeed, as Armstrong has argued,

[t]he further away some of our discourses are from everyday discourse through the transformation of categories, the nearer they are to critique. It is harder to make critique from within a discourse than through the drama of difference in linguistic experiment [...] And women, with, if I am right, that heightened sense of contradiction, may have a greater part of the work to do in redefining communality and formulating critique. (ARMSTRONG, 2000, p.42)

Whether staging intimacy and minutiae of lives easily overlooked or rendering the epic dimensions of humanity’s moral universe, Daley and Tucker Green in differing ways, incorporate linguistic innovations and the thematic complexities to texture contemporary Black British women’s drama and to charge British theatre with an extraordinarily challenging aesthetic.

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