

Phallacies: Androgyny, Miscegenation and the Masculine Imaginary

Richard L. W. Clarke

This study contributes simultaneously to the Postmodern critique of Western rationality and the Feminist and Post-Colonial projects to revisit canonical texts with an eye to the important role played by gender and race especially in their production. In it, I discuss selected pre- and early modern plays by Euripides and Shakespeare with the goal of exploring the gendered and raced constitution of the Cartesian subject that rose to ascendancy during the modern period of the history of Western European philosophy as well as demonstrating, consequently, the falsity of the paradigm of knowledge which it subtended.

My theoretical outlook in this thesis is informed by the critique of both empiricist and rationalist models of knowledge inherent in the Freudian and Lacanian decentering of the subject, the Structuralist and Post-Structuralist critique of the sign, Althusser's rethinking of traditional Marxist concepts of ideology, and in Foucault's notion of 'discourse' (as well as their Feminist and Post-Colonial interlocutors). My argument is based on the premise that, in the course of his psychic maturation, the white European male has historically been socialised into an imaginary problematic which, precisely because organised around the primacy of the phallus and of white skin, is predicated upon the existence of binary opposites. Such a predisposition to see the world entirely in terms of dichotomies consequently informs his apprehension and articulation of the Real. It is responsible, as a result, for his discomfort with the phenomenon of hybridity and informs the Procrustean measures taken that are designed to reinstall binary opposites precisely where these latter are most menaced by the play of difference.

Drawing upon the view that to discover the complete horizon of a society's symbolic values, it is necessary to map out its anomalies, my focus in this thesis is, accordingly, on plays such as the Ion in which there are bewildered chief protagonists whose uncertainty and anxiety are a function, I argue, of their confrontation with hybrid human figures. In the persons of the latter, I contend, hitherto unquestioned gender and racial binaries in particular deconstruct themselves in a way that foregrounds the inherent alterity of the perceiving white masculine subject, to wit, the inevitable suspension of his identity in relation to otherness.

As pawns inevitably caught up in the play of difference between genders and races, I suggest that the most important ideological function of canonical texts such as King Lear may be to intervene in order both to reinscribe those boundaries in danger of elision in this way and to fashion compensatory images of masculinity and whiteness for contemporary male members of the audience to

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internalise and identify with. In the final analysis, I suggest, many texts such as The Winter's Tale would have played an indispensable role in the genealogy of the Cartesian subject: Romances such as these were designed ultimately to reinforce the audience's faith in the naturalness of the social and the political *status quo*, the providential working of the universe and, ultimately, the possibility of absolute knowledge.