

# WINDOWS INTO

## HOW TO CATCH CREATION

*"That all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: 'Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.'" —bell hooks*

### **BLACK GAZE**

With a title like *How to Catch Creation*, how can a play be anything other than life affirming? Christina Anderson begins her play with the most primordial of all creations: reproduction; the very first line is "I think I want to have a kid." Creation is, after all, the very antithesis of destruction. But in creating, affirming, Anderson also destroys: She turns stereotypes on their heads, she eschews harmful tropes and she defies the white gaze so dominant in storytelling.

Two foundational works on media and literary representations of Blackness, bell hooks's *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship* and Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, unpack the paradigm of Blackness in the dramatic imagination and discuss the ways in which the white gaze has been the destructive norm. Anderson amplifies what hooks calls an oppositional gaze; *Creation* is told from an exclusively and undeniably Black point of view. Black characters do not exist in response or antagonistic to, or juxtaposed even, to white folk. Anderson's characters perhaps live parallel lives to white counterparts, but those counterparts make no appearance in the play. Whiteness is not pertinent to the action of the play, and Anderson's rejection of a white lens means her characters are not marginalized, they are not othered, they are at the center. In Anderson's world, and for the time that we are in it, the center of creation and central to creation is Blackness.

### **LECHEROUS LESBIAN TROPE**

Anderson's world is also one in which queerness is normalized. There are multiple expressions of queer identity in *Creation* and none of them require a character to "come out." Anderson grew up with few representations of queer people, lesbians in particular. Of the damning tropes she was exposed to, she found the covetous, lecherous lesbian the most pervasive. To that end, she sought to subvert this trope with renderings of lesbians who are fully human, complex, conflicted, loving and kind. In *Creation*, there is no monolithic lesbian and certainly none that are lecherous, seeking to convert or making unwanted advances on straight girls.

Intimate relationships in *Creation*, in fact, are not all sexual. The most meaningful relationship in the play is a 25-year platonic friendship between a lesbian and a heterosexual man—yet another way Anderson subverts stereotypes and challenges tired thinking about relationships between Black men and women, showing that there can be intimacy, deep trust, lasting friendship and true partnership and understanding between the two.

### **A FATHER AND A FEMINIST**

The play has no protagonist. Anderson has not written a lone central conflict, but rather posed a large existential question: How does one catch creation? The play is about six intersecting lives, each the main character in their personal story, and that first utterance, "I think I want to have a kid," becomes a thread linking them all. And in another act of subversion, these words are spoken by a man who is patterning his life after his feminist heroes. He is literally a freed man who has adopted a "womanist" ideology and knows his liberation is linked to eradicating oppression against Black women. He is part of a legacy and seeking to leave his own. Anderson doesn't placate any stereotypes of absentee or derelict Black fathers. She opens the play with the very notion that Black men, who love and respect Black women, want to be fathers and strongholds in their communities.

—Dawn Monique Williams