



An Exploration of the Gendered Stylization of the Body in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*

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Abstract

What has been undertaken in the present study is the exploration of Caryl Churchill's selected drama *Cloud Nine* (1978) with an eye to Judith Butler's theorizations in regard to "gender performativity". According to Judith Butler, gender identity is a socio-political construction that achieves legitimacy and naturalness via perpetual observation, repetition and "a stylized repetition of acts". This stylized repetition of acts along with continuous surveillance, observation and correction leads to the construction of gender identity. In *Cloud Nine* (1978), we witness how Caryl Churchill (1938-), who occupies a lofty position in the world of theater due to her theatrical expertise, realizes Butler's conviction and vividly portrays the stylization of gender identity under the sovereignty and hegemony of phallogocentrism and heterosexuality.

Key Words: Caryl Churchill, Judith Butler, *Cloud Nine*, stylization of gendered identity, surveillance, correction

1. Introduction

1.1 Literary Overview

It was in the 1980s that "theorizing about gender became the center of a new phase of critical study" and some feminists manifested a shift in focus from feminist studies to gender studies (Aston, 2000, p. 88). This newly-emerged area of study is extremely complicated for its theorists utilize "the strategies of other critical schools in their analysis of gender and sex" and have been "divided into different sub-schools that interweave the insights of disparate approaches (eg. Materialist feminists, Foucauldian theorists of gender, and psychoanalytical feminists; psychoanalytical feminists can, in turn, be divided among Freudian, Lacanian, and Kristevan thinkers)" (Felluga & Allen, 2012). What these theorists have long pursued has, from the beginning, been emancipatory since they have tried to create "a new field of knowledge production which could gain impact on science and scholarly practices and theories" ("A Brief History of Gender Studies", 2013). One of these outstanding theorists whose seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990) has been very influential in this field of study is Judith Butler who is highly indebted to such theorists and their insights as Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Julia Kristeva (1941-), Monique Wittig (1935-2003), and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in the formation of her theories in regard to gender and gender studies. Judith Butler's theorizations, especially her theorizations about "gender performativity", do constitute the focal point of analysis in the analysis of Caryl Churchill's mostly acclaimed drama *Cloud Nine* (1978).

1.2 Theoretical Background

Butler's theorizations about "gender performativity" reveal that our bodies are not fundamentally and intrinsically sexed; they "become sexed through a continual process of acting and re-enacting certain gendered roles; this repetition occurs within a hegemonic system that shapes the very possibilities of the roles we can enact. If the creation of the sexed being comes from repeatedly enacting certain social norms, we may be able to knowingly disrupt the system by acting against those norms" (Oliver qtd. in Payne and Barbera, 2010, p. 270).

"Unlike what essentialists assume and unlike the popular belief in the existence of natural and innate differences between the categories of men and women, Butler considers identities as constructed within language and discourse" (Joodaki & Bakhshi, 2013, p.2). She believes that "Gender is a kind of enforced cultural performance, compelled by compulsory heterosexuality, and that, as such, it is performative" (Jagger, 2008, p. 20). As Butler has asserted, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990, p.43). In Butler's opinion, "gender" is the fabrication of "compulsory frames" and its social appearance is incessantly policed by the various forces in order to be stylized in a specific way (Butler, p.44). Gender is thus "socially approved and politically regulated rather than dictated by some kind of internal nature" (Jagger, 2008, p. 27).