

The Collapse of Heterosexism and Phallogocentrism in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*

Abdol Hossein Joodaki^[a]; Paria Bakhshi^{[b],*}

^[a] Assistant Professor, Lorestan University, Faculty of Humanities, English Department, Khorramabad, Iran.

^[b] M.A. Student, Lorestan University, Faculty of Humanities, English Department, Khorramabad, Iran.

* Corresponding author.

Received 22 November 2012; accepted 8 February 2013

Abstract

Caryl Churchill (1938-) is one of the most illustrious contemporary British playwrights whose theatrical productions are world-widely acclaimed. Churchill's theatrical innovations, her explorations with new forms, her double commitment to the causes of both socialism and feminism are among the reasons for which Churchill has been transatlantically awarded and acclaimed. In *Cloud Nine* (1978), that is going to be dealt with in the present study, what is intended to be undertaken is the analysis of the play on the basis of the Butlerian key concept of gender performativity in order to designate Caryl Churchill's anti-heterosexist and anti-phallogocentric outlook. According to Judith Butler, who is regarded to be an eminent poststructuralist theorist, gender identity is not an interior essence of the subject. By considering gender as something fabricated, and thus performative, Butler calls into question the basis of Western civilization, which is totally phallogocentric and heterosexist. Butler's performativity of gender identity, which reveals the baselessness of whatever Western Civilization centers on, is also something we can perceive in Churchill's *Cloud Nine*.

Key words: Caryl Churchill; Judith Butler; Gender identity; Gender performativity; Phallogocentrism; Heterosexism; Binary oppositions

Abdol Hossein Joodaki, Paria Bakhshi (2013). The Collapse of Heterosexism and Phallogocentrism in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 6(1), 127-131. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320130601.3105> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320130601.3105>

INTRODUCTION

In the present study, what is going to be dealt with is the exploration of Butler's concept of "gender performativity" in Caryl Churchill's award-winning play *Cloud Nine* (1978). By introducing her theorizations about "gender performativity", Butler challenges the foundations of not only the heterosexuality and phallogocentrism but also the binaristic frame of thinking. Caryl Churchill also acts accordingly and illustrates her opposition to the long-cherished and long-perpetuated concepts of femininity and masculinity in the dominant discourse of heterosexuality through her characterization and her innovative theatricalism especially her cross-acting and cross-dressing techniques. Churchill's highly-acclaimed play abounds in characters who do not show any conformity to the age-old and long-rooted standards considered to be appropriate for women and men in the dominant discourse of patriarchy, which is fundamentally heterosexist. Through the portrayal of her dissident characters, Churchill demonstrates not only the actualization of Butler's theory of "gender performativity" but also the fictitiousness and mythicity of the dominant discourse of "compulsory heterosexuality".

In order to detect these elements in Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, first: we will explicate such concepts as "gender performativity", heterosexuality, and phallogocentrism; then, we will deal with the exploration of the selected play in order to underline the key presented concepts in each part.

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

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. In the first chapter of her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler states that "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated