



# MA in Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities

## Gender Politics and Feminism in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*

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**To my family, especially my niece, Cansu, and my nephews, Ahmet, Onuralp and the  
one on the way**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979) with the help of an eclectic theoretical framework enriched with a critical approach drawn from the ideas prevalent around the discussions of feminism, gender politics, and the construction and the representation of gendered identities. Reading *Cloud Nine*, this study argues that gender and sexuality are discursively constructed in accordance with the interests of the patriarchal and heteronormative regulations. It also traces how a distinction between sex and gender is forged with a view to securing patriarchal kinship systems, which maintain the binary oppositions based on the sex/gender dichotomy. Reading a range of theorists analyzing the notions of sex and gender, this dissertation upholds that the assumedly stable and unalterable distinction between the two is illusory. Laying bare the constructedness of the notions of sex/gender, this work asserts that these notions are fashioned through the repetition of the stylized acts pertinent to a sanctioned gender. As gender is understood to be a social and cultural construct predicated upon the repetition of various acts, this project asserts that the patriarchal notion of gender could be subverted by repeating such acts in an unorthodox way, thereby contesting patriarchy's grand narratives of gender. Thus, it explores how gender could be 'done' subversively by using the patriarchal and heteronormative machinery that purports to repress the non-conforming gender identities and sexualities. Heralding the possibility of subversion within the patriarchal regulation of gender and sexuality, this dissertation claims that gender-bound expectations from women and other marginalized groups could no longer be valid. In addition, this study analyzes how a feminist practice of theater challenges the patriarchal assumptions of an abiding hierarchy between the male and the female through the analysis of a number of feminist theorists. By the same token, it explores how feminist playwrights could write plays against the grain to challenge the central position of patriarchy within conventional theater as a site of power relations. Providing the theoretical framework fundamental to the analysis of *Cloud Nine* as a feminist play resisting patriarchal and heteronormative impositions, this dissertation argues that *Cloud Nine* subverts the patriarchal and heteronormative grand narratives with the aim of vindicating subjective power for women and other peripheral groups through both its content and its deployment of non-Aristotelian theatrical techniques. This project, thus, aims at deconstructing the taken-for-granted assumptions concerning the notions of sex/gender and subverting the patriarchal hierarchy that restrains women from occupying central positions in theater and in society as a whole.

“I am walking rapidly through stations of light and dark thrown  
under an arcade.

I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers  
and those powers severely limited  
by authorities whose faces I rarely see.

I am a woman in the prime of life  
driving her dead poet in a black Rolls-Royce  
through a landscape of twilight and thorns.

A woman with a certain mission  
which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact.

A woman with the nerves of a panther  
a woman with contacts among Hell's Angels  
a woman feeling the fullness of her powers  
at the precise moment when she must not use them  
a woman sworn to lucidity  
who sees through the mayhem, the smoky fires  
of these underground streets  
her dead poet learning to walk backward against the wind  
on the wrong side of the mirror”

—Adrienne Rich, “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus” (1984: 119-20)

## INTRODUCTION

When I heard the sad news that Adrienne Cecile Rich had passed away on March 27, 2012, I had the feeling that feminism had lost one of its pillars, whose contribution to the field as a feminist poet and essayist exceeds humble measuring. Hence, I decided to begin my work with one of her most powerful poems, “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus” (1968), in which “invisible authorities severely limiting the potential power of the woman are precisely the naturalized fiction of gender differences, the Law of the Father depriving woman of speech, forcing silence upon the feminine” (Petrović 1997: 259). Challenging the forced silence upon the feminine, Rich wrote extensively with a view to vindicating the right of women for equal treatment and subverting the “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich 1980: 632) dominant in patriarchal and heteronormative ideology. Taking Rich’s theorization of feminism and sexuality as one of its points of departure, this dissertation starts off with the assumption that the question of gender-based identities and sexuality has always attracted many theorists. It was initially a futile attempt to trace back the true roots of sexuality and gender for the purpose of reinforcing rather heteronormative and misogynist theorizations of human civilization predicated upon the allegedly primordial roots of the fallacious distinction between the notions of sex and gender. Then, in our contemporary times, it has become a way of contesting the taken-for-granted assumptions about the stable gendered identities and the marginalization of non-conforming identities. As an ardent supporter of the latter, Simone de Beauvoir vindicates a subject position for women by laying bare the very constructedness of the supposedly sacred and inherent division between the notions of sex and gender, thereby challenging the stability of gender-based categorizations. Taking de Beauvoir’s argument further, Judith Butler claims that gender is not something that one already is, but rather something that one acquires through the practice of socially and culturally established codes of gender-based identities.

Refuting the assumedly internal coherence of sex, gender and desire, Butler asserts that gender is produced through the very acts that are said to be its results, and thus, it is understood as the stylization of various repeated acts under the heteronormative mask of its depiction as an inherent and unchanging entity. Thus, Butler argues that gender is not a noun on the grounds that it requires the subject, who does not preexist the deed, to do certain socially and culturally determined codes with the aim of being intelligible according to the standards of the heterosexual matrix. This follows that gendered identity is performative in the sense that it necessitates the subject to emit the relevant signs in order to be eligible to acquire an acceptable gender identity. Upon its recognition as a performative construct, gender becomes vulnerable to subversion since “[i]n its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status” (Butler 1988: 520). Contesting the patriarchal narrative of an inherent gender identity, Butler claims that since socially and culturally presupposed gendered identities are produced through the repetitions of various acts, without these acts there would be no such thing as gender. As the naturalized notion of gender is discredited, then, the taken-for-granted connection between sex and gender becomes untenable, by corollary, with the consequence that the assumed distinction between the two becomes rather dubious. Hence, gender is understood to be separated from sex as “a free-floating artifice” (Butler 1999: 10). Taking this point further, Butler asserts that sex has always been gender, so that “the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler 1999: 11). However, the heteronormative social regulation attempts to make the alleged distinction between sex and gender seem primordial and unchanging with a view to ensuring the perpetuation of the hierarchy between heterosexuality and non-heterosexuality through, using Adrienne Rich’s terms, the reinforcement of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’. Nevertheless, Butler demonstrates the socially and culturally established and maintained norms of gender identity, thereby revealing the possibility of subverting the notion

of sex/gender within the very system that constitutes it. Thus, she asserts that gender could be ‘done’ in such a way that its constructedness could be recognized so as to invalidate the vicious circle of the assumed unidirectional coherence of sex, gender and desire. Hence, she argues that the use of drag could prove effectual to subvert the heteronormative matrix in that it lays bare the disjunction between the corporeality of the player and the gender that s/he attempts to perform. In this sense, it could be argued that “[i]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency” (Butler 1999: 175; emphasis in original).

Considering the argument that gender does not refer to a predetermined phenomenon, on the contrary, gender is fashioned through the repetitions of various acts congealed into the appearance of the evidence of a primordial inner core that produces one’s gender, it could be argued that the stylized repetitions of these acts could be subverted with a view to contesting the socially and culturally expected roles from a gendered identity. Thus, the imposed social roles on individuals on account of their gendered identities could no longer hold sway over the standards of cultural and social intelligibility. This reveals the fabricatedness of the patriarchal grand narratives of the assumedly stable categorization of the intelligible sexuality and gender identities, thereby demonstrating that such a categorization is an illusion that serves as an ideological apparatus for the sake of the perpetuation of the established social structure. In this respect, gender is understood to be the embodiment of patriarchal ideology.

As feminist theater aims at deconstructing the exclusionary practices of patriarchy, gender could be argued to provide “a perfect illustration of ideology at work” (Diamond 1997: 46). Therefore, the feminist practice of theater “seeks to expose or mock the strictures of gender, to *reveal* gender-as-appearance, as the effect, not the precondition, of regulatory practices” (Diamond 1997: 46; emphasis in original). Hence, feminist theater challenges the patriarchal regulation that excludes women from subjective power under the pretext of the

social roles expected from them and other marginalized groups as a corollary of the illusion of stable gender identities, and subverts it with the aim of vindicating their right of equal treatment in the representational economy of patriarchal social systems. Thus, a feminist practice of theater aspires to contest the objectified representation of women both through the adoption of groundbreaking theatrical techniques and unorthodox subject matter. As a feminist adherent to social reformation in the areas of class, race, gender and patriarchal ideology, Caryl Churchill is acknowledged as an established playwright endowed with a theatrical ability to question and challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions about the situation of women in society as a whole. She, thus, writes plays against the grain with a view to encouraging the reader/audience to take critical stance on patriarchal norms regarding the instituted hierarchy between what is purported to be intelligible and what is not within the patriarchal and heterosexual matrix. Hence, blending her socialist-feminist approach with certain Brechtian theatrical techniques, Churchill attempts to lay bare the no longer credible nature of the patriarchal and heteronormative grand narratives on the basis of the above-mentioned notions for the purpose of empowering the reader/audience to challenge the patriarchal ideological apparatuses and bringing about social reformation.

Accordingly, Churchill elaborates on the argument that gender could be subverted by virtue of its very constructedness. She, therefore, explores a myriad of ways to challenge the illusion of an abiding gender through her adoption of non-Aristotelian theatrical strategies mingled with an ardent desire to break the boundaries of provincialism in the representation of women and other marginalized identities. First performed in 1979, *Cloud Nine* stands out as one of her best plays in which Churchill pursues her theatrical objective of writing against the grain to invite the reader/audience to see what is intentionally not seeable. *Cloud Nine*'s first act is set in a British colony in Africa, whereas the second act takes place in London in the 1970s. A hundred years pass between the two acts, but the characters age only twenty-five

years. The unconventional treatment of temporalities is reinforced by the disjuncture between the player's body and the character. Subverting the one-only temporality of conventional theater, Churchill offers new ways of perceiving the historical position of women, together with marginal groups, thereby unsettling the conventionally passive position of reader/audience. The disjuncture between the body of the player and the character that s/he purports to perform "separates the signifier from the signified, pointing [...] this time to the significance of language in the construction of the sex-gender system" (Herrmann 1990: 314), which underlines the ambiguity and arbitrariness of the socially imposed gender roles encoded in language. Through the adoption of cross-gender, cross-racial and cross-generational theatrical devices, Churchill challenges the fixed and assumedly unalterable notions enforced on society, and urges the reader/audience to take up an active role in the production of provisional meanings.

With respect to the specific interest of this dissertation, I have structured this study as follows: Chapter 1, "Troubling Genders", analyzes the patriarchal hegemonic construction of the notion of gender and sexuality. It traces how the patriarchal dominance regulates the grand narratives of the primordial and inherent assumptions concerning the assumedly internal coherence of sex, gender and desire that could only be experienced for the opposite sex. In order to do so, the opening part analyzes the credibility of the notion of sex, which institutes and maintains the heterosexual kinship system. The chapter then mainly draws from Judith Butler's analysis of the discursive constructions of the notions of sexuality and gender. It also aspires to explore the Oedipal narrative of the formation of psychosexuality through an analysis of Sigmund Freud's theorization of the notion of mourning and melancholia, which will be followed by an analysis of the reception of Freud's Oedipal narrative by critics explored with a special focus on Butler's deconstructive reading of Freud and her theorization of gendered identities that are performatively constructed but fabricated as anatomical

facticity. Additionally, Michel Foucault's theories on sexuality and the 'repressive hypothesis' are analyzed through a Butlerian lens by concluding that gender is neither primordial nor unalterable, but rather a discursive construct, which could mean that gendered identity could be subverted on account of its 'performative' nature. Finally, this chapter analyzes the notion of performativity, which heralds the possibility of subversion by drawing attention to the constructedness of the notion of a stable and inherent gender identity.

Chapter 2, "Feminism and Theater", analyzes a feminist practice of theater, which challenges the patriarchal tendencies that deprive women of subjective power and objectify them. It also traces how women are made to be mystified constructs divested of subject positions. In this regard, it analyzes the 'otherization' process of women at the hands of patriarchy on the grounds that the center/self needs the 'other' in order to be what it purports to be. Drawing from Stuart Hall's theorization of identity formation, it could be argued that this idea, by corollary, necessitates the perpetuation of a tenacious hierarchy between men and women. Thus, feminist theater attempts to challenge the patriarchal constructions based on binary oppositions, and vindicates subject positions for women. At the same time, this chapter traces the phallogentric theatrical conventions that exclude women from subjective power in their representational economy. Besides, it analyzes the role of the reader/audience in the production of meaning in a 'writerly text', to use Roland Barthes' term. It also draws an analogy between the cinematic pleasure of the fetishizing gaze at women and their theatrical representation that reflects a male fantasy rather than their 'realities'. Finally, this chapter also traces how feminist theater draws much from Brechtian theatrical techniques with a view to empowering the reader/audience to challenge the grand narratives of patriarchy and resist hegemonic oppression on accounts of race, class, gender and ideology. Hence, it explores such unorthodox theatrical techniques of Brechtian theater as the alienation effect, the 'not...but' and historicization, together with the notion of *gestus*, analyzing the ways in which

feminist theater could make use of Brechtian theatrical strategies with the aim of subverting patriarchal hegemonic practice implicit in conventional theater.

Chapter 3, “A Sex/Gender of One’s Own in Feminist Theater: Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*”, reads Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* in the light of the theoretical framework of this study by drawing much from the theoretical works of a range of theorists and feminist critics. With this in mind, it begins by exploring Churchill’s position as a socialist-feminist playwright. After the necessary background information is provided, it analyzes the production process of *Cloud Nine*, together with its implications for Churchill’s objectives to deal with different points of view with the aim of analyzing the diversity of sexual preferences and assumptions on the notion of sex/gender. Then, it explores the main plot of the play with a view to grasping how Churchill makes use of non-conventional theatrical materials to express her concerns in terms of basically racial and sexual oppression. Besides, it analyzes Churchill’s cross-casting technique, taking Butler’s theorization of sex/gender into account. It also traces how such an unorthodox way of relating the disjuncture between the body of the actor and the character could empower the reader/audience to challenge the naturalized perceptions of the stability of a gendered identity. It analyzes how patriarchy silences non-conforming identities and renders them unintelligible so as to perpetuate its central position in the heteronormative matrix of binary oppositions, in addition to the ways in which Churchill challenges patriarchal heteronormativity by using the “density of signs” (Barthes qtd. in Kritzer 1989) inherent in theater. It finally explores Churchill’s use of theatrical techniques entwined with Brechtian underpinnings, and how her theatrical approach serves to satisfy her feminist vindication of subjective power for women and marginal groups in society. Ultimately, the very final section, “Conclusions”, explores a number of conclusions drawn from the preceding chapters with the intention of demonstrating the ways in which patriarchal and hegemonic heteronormative conventions in theater could be subverted through the adoption of non-

conforming theatrical techniques combined with an ardent interest to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions on sexuality and gendered identities. Hence, adopting an eclectic approach drawn from a number of theorists and feminist critics, this dissertation deploys a theoretically-informed methodology in the analysis of the play under consideration.

# 1. TROUBLING GENDERS

## 1.1. Introduction to Sex/Gender

As a heterosexual and patriarchal structure, society produces social, political and cultural requirements with the aim of preserving the domineering values and traditions. To this end, these requirements are sought to ensure the “sexual reproduction within the confines of a heterosexually-based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system” (Butler 1988: 524). Thus, the alleged relation of a naturalized notion of sex to the idea of gender only serves to secure that ‘kinship system’ with the help of the presumption that desire is exceptionally experienced for the opposite sex. However, as Michel Foucault claims, the body and sexuality are culturally and socially constructed entities rather than supposedly natural phenomena which function as power regulators in society:

The notion of “sex” made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified. (1978: 154)

Foucault’s rendering of the association of the notion of sex with power relations and authority ‘as a unique signifier’ paved the way for the changes in the perception of the social and cultural construction of sexuality and gender in the essentialist tendencies of feminism.

Judith Butler, who is one of the most influential feminist theorists “whose ‘commitments to feminism are probably [her] primary commitments’” (Butler qtd. Disch 1999: 545) is an ardent supporter of the defiance of essentialist notions of sex and gender. Hence, through a Foucauldian reading, Butler claims that “gender is a discursive construct, something that is *produced*, and not a ‘natural fact’” (Salih 2002: 51; emphasis in original). Accordingly, such works of hers as *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*

(1990), which I will mainly analyze in this work, functioned like “a provocative ‘intervention’ in feminist theory” (Butler 1999: vii), for she challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions in feminism and criticized feminism’s idealization of expressions of gender. Thus, she questions the essentialism in feminist discourse, which gives rise to the exclusionary practices in the politics of representation on the grounds that “gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (Butler 1999: 6). Therefore, Butler claims in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*:

In 1989 I was most concerned to criticize a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory. I sought to counter those views that made presumptions about the limits and propriety of gender and restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity. It was and remains my view that any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism, often with homophobic consequences. (1999: vii-viii)

Thus, Butler raises important questions about the taken-for-granted assumptions of feminist literary theory towards the category of ‘woman’, which leads to the fact that naturalistic explanations about the construction of identity and gender restrict the social and cultural intelligibility of women in a heterosexual matrix, which implies “a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire” (Butler 1999: 30). Above all, creating the category of sex in clear-cut terms “only makes sense in terms of a binary discourse on sex in which ‘men’ and ‘women’ exhaust the possibilities of sex, and relate to each other as complementary opposites, the category of ‘sex’ is always subsumed under the discourse of heterosexuality” (Butler 1987: 136). Therefore, Butler rejects the innate categories, and instead highlights the artificiality of the stable gender construction by demonstrating the constructed ‘nature’ of gender-based identities, which are “capable of being constituted differently” (1988: 520).

In *Gender Trouble* Butler begins by analyzing the status of “‘women’ as the subject of feminism” (1999: 3). She criticizes the feminist theory for the assumption that “there is some

existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interest and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued” (1999: 3). By making the assumption of an already existing feminine identity acknowledged as ‘woman’, some feminist critics want to vindicate the rights of women and make women’s political arguments more visible and recognizable. However, the notion of the woman as a stable and fixed subject cannot be valid anymore. As Simone de Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex* (1949): “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. [...] It is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (1997: 295). Thus, de Beauvoir implies that neither biological nor psychological characteristics could define one’s ‘gender’. In contrast, one becomes a ‘woman’ only after one goes through certain life experiences. Besides, “femininity is neither a natural nor an innate entity, but rather a condition brought about by society, on the basis of certain physiological characteristics” (De Beauvoir qtd. in Andrew 2003: 31).

Butler takes de Beauvoir’s point further in *Gender Trouble* and elaborates on her analysis:

Beauvoir is clear that one “becomes” a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become one. And clearly, the compulsion does not come from “sex”. There is nothing in her account that guarantees that the “one” who becomes a woman is necessarily female. If “the body is a situation”, as she claims, there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along. (1999: 12)

Butler comments on de Beauvoir’s differentiating sex from gender. This leads to the understanding that gender is acquired in time through undertaking various actions. Making the distinction between sex and gender is a groundbreaking step that takes the argument towards the fact that “it is no longer possible to attribute the values or social functions of women to biological necessity, and neither can we refer meaningfully to natural or unnatural gendered behavior: all gender is, by definition, unnatural” (Butler 1986: 35). Furthermore, Butler

asserts that de Beauvoir's contribution to the feminist struggle to break the supposedly necessary relation between sex and gender raises questions about the stability of the category of 'woman':

If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. [...]Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the "congealing" is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. (1999: 43; emphasis in original)

Drawing her theorization from prominent feminists like de Beauvoir, Butler upholds that the assumption of a 'natural' gender is no longer valid because gender is already "a tacit project to renew one's cultural history in one's own terms" (Salih 2002: 47). Accordingly, anatomy is not fate, but rather a construction and a 'doing' in a 'heteronormative' matrix. Due to the heteronormative formation of society, social and cultural institutions regulate gender intelligibility, which "assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender" (Butler 1999: 194). Therefore, it becomes clear that so as to be 'intelligible' in the heterosexual matrix, one needs to conform to the norms of the cultural law that presupposes a 'natural' relation between sex and gender, so that one protects oneself from "the bias of compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich 1980: 632). This raises the question of how regulatory authorities dominate the 'production' of culturally intelligible gender identities by predicating upon socially reinforced heterosexual norms and imposing them on people who cannot adapt themselves to "the politics of 'compulsory heterosexuality' that is one of the major linchpins of the patriarchal power structure" (Madsen 2000: 2).

In line with the above-mentioned argument, Butler claims that the distinction between sex and gender "turns out to be no distinction at all" because "this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender" (1999: 11). Thus, calling into question the unstable nature of gender-based categorization, she argues that gender is performative. Furthermore, as she claims, "gender is always a doing, though not a

doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed”, since “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1999: 33).

Having established that gender is a constructed notion rather than a natural and inherent fact, I argue that Butler undertakes to analyze and challenge “the tacit conventions that structure the way the body is perceived” (Butler 1988: 524). For this reason, she aspires to deconstruct the heterosexual matrix “by a deconstructive analysis of the Oedipal scenario, the cultural narrative that both epitomizes the matrix and helps to reproduce it” (Disch 1999: 548). Therefore, she aims at perceiving the Oedipus complex from a deconstructive point of view, as she makes use of Sigmund Freud’s theories to analyze heterosexual melancholy, which “is based upon a socially imposed primary ‘loss’ or rejection of homosexual desire” (Salih 2002: 9). Before analyzing Butler’s reading of Freud’s theories on sexuality, I will touch upon some basic concepts in Freud’s theorization of heterosexuality.

## **1.2. Calling the Oedipal Narrative into Question**

Freud bases his theory of the Oedipus complex on the story of a mythical Greek king of Thebes, Oedipus. According to the legend, Oedipus unknowingly slays his father, Laius, and marries his mother, Jocasta. Freud applies this legend to his psychoanalytic theory and claims the existence of “the desire for the parent of the opposite sex and the competition with the same-sex parent” (Muckenhoupt 1997: 114). Freud asserts that the Oedipus complex occurs in the phallic stage of psychosexual development. At the phallic stage, the child wants to have sexual gratification through the parent of the opposite sex. Freud argues that “in the process of ego formation a child’s primary object-cathexes are transformed into an identification” (Salih 2002: 53), and this identification “is not that which binds one to an object that exists, but that which binds one to an abandoned object-choice” (Hall 1996: 3). In this respect, in order to

resolve the conflict, the child first identifies with the parent of the same sex and then perceives him/her as a rival. However, the child is forced to relinquish the desire for either of the parents on grounds of the taboo against incest. Making the distinction between mourning and melancholia, Freud attributes this unresolved desire for sexual gratification to a state of melancholia which “is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious” (1917: 244). In this sense, Sara Salih comments on the child’s identification process and states: “[L]ike the melancholic who takes the lost object into her- or himself and thereby preserves it as an identification. [...] The ego is therefore a repository of all the desires it has had to give up” (2002: 53).

Taking his argument further, Freud questions whether the development of human civilization could be explained in terms of the Oedipus complex. After telling the story of a savage tribe, the leader of which is killed by his sons due to his keeping “all the women for his own sexual use” (Muckenhaupt 1997: 118) in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud endeavors to explain the evolution of the notion of the incest taboo in human civilization. Thus, he claims that human civilization’s development “depends on believing that there is a ‘collective mind’ [...] and this ‘collective mind’ can persist for thousands of years”, and he believes that “guilt could be inherited” (Muckenhaupt 1997: 119). Hence, this argument on the inheritable guilt shapes his theories on psychosexual development and the progression of human civilization.

The reception of Freud’s theorization of the Oedipus complex by critics was considerably different. As an early example, Iago Galdston favors Freud’s framing of the Oedipus complex on the grounds of the fact that “[h]e literally gave contemporaneous meaning to the Greek tragedy of more than twenty-three hundred years ago” (1949: 319). Defending Freud from harsh criticism, Galdston argues that “it stands not to the credit of

Freud that he ‘pictured’ or appreciated the scene in the Oedipus, but rather that he recognized in it the primal and prototype tragedy that confronts every man, and which every man must meet effectively at the peril of his soul” (1949: 319). However, as the feminist movement gained prominence, Freud’s theorization was called into question by many feminist critics due to the misogynist nature of Freud’s theorization and his “postulation of innate sexual ‘dispositions’” (Salih 2002: 54).

Freud’s theory is questioned by feminists on grounds of its conceptualization of penis envy in connection with the Oedipus complex, which presupposes: “When girls see that they do not have their brothers’ cherished penises, they begin to feel inferior. Girls then reject their mothers, who may have taken their penises away or at least allowed their daughters to be born inferior. Then the girls become smitten with the penis-bearing father” (Muckenhoupt 1997: 128). Notwithstanding some of Freud’s most passionate supporters, many feminist critics discredit this theory on grounds of the claim that such a theory basing the psychosexual development of females on ‘castration anxiety’ has misogynistic tendencies. Since it leads to the assumption that “[f]emininity is an effect of castration (often euphemistically renamed ‘lack’)", and “woman is a void, a nothingness” (Moi 2004: 843). On the other hand, this conceptualization takes the argument to a dead end, as Karen Horney subtly claims, “an assertion that half of the human race is discontented with the sex assigned to it” (qtd. in Hitchcock 2005: 35).

By the same token, some other feminist critics like Luce Irigaray are harsher on Freud’s theory. Irigaray passionately objects Freud’s ideas in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (first published in French in 1977) by first blaming patriarchy for defining the parameters in evaluating female sexuality, and she claims, “the opposition between ‘masculine’ clitoral activity and ‘feminine’ vaginal passivity, an opposition which Freud and many others saw as stages, or alternatives, in the development of a sexually ‘normal’ woman, seems rather too

clearly required by the practice of male sexuality” (1985: 23). After dealing with the unreliable nature of the masculine parameters, Irigaray goes on questioning Freud’s controversial theorization of sexual development, which reduces the complex female psychology to solely a protest against, or rather protection from, a ‘lack’ of something that supposedly fails her:

About woman and her pleasure, this view of the sexual relation has nothing to say. Her lot is that of lack, “atrophy” (of the sexual organ), and “penis envy”, the penis being the only sexual organ of recognized value. Thus she attempts by every means available to appropriate that organ for herself: through her somewhat servile love of the father-husband capable of giving her one, through her desire for a child-penis, preferably a boy, through access to the cultural values still reserved by right to males alone and therefore always masculine, and so on. Woman lives her own desire only as the expectation that she may at last come to possess an equivalent of the male organ. (1985: 23-4)

Thus, Freud’s theory is refuted by many critics in feminist circles. Butler’s reading of Freud has more to do with a deconstructive analysis of his theory. She refutes Freud’s ideas on sexual disposition, which means “the infant’s innate desire for a member of the opposite sex or the same sex” (Salih 2002: 54). She rejects the idea that these ‘dispositions’ are innate and natural. Rather, she aspires to explain how “‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ dispositions can be traced to an identification, and where those identifications take place” (Salih 2002: 54). For this reason, she subverts the process of identification that “takes place through *introjections* and *incorporation*” (Salih 2002: 53; emphasis in original), and asserts that “dispositions are not the primary sexual facts of the psyche, but produced effects of a law imposed by culture and by the complicitous and transvaluating acts of the ego ideal” (Butler 1999: 81). She refutes the arguments that dispositions are the causes of identifications, not the effects of them. Drawing from Freud’s theorization of ego formation as melancholia, she asserts that:

In melancholia, the loved object is lost through a variety of means: separation, death, or the breaking of an emotional tie. In the Oedipal situation, however, the loss is dictated by a *prohibition* attended by a set of punishments. The melancholia of gender identification which “answers” the Oedipal dilemma must be understood, then, as the internalization of an interior moral directive which gains its structure and energy from an externally enforced taboo.

Although Freud does not explicitly argue in its favor, it would appear that the taboo against homosexuality must *precede* the heterosexual incest taboo; the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual “dispositions” by which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible. [...] In other words, “dispositions” are traces of a history of enforced sexual prohibitions which is untold and which the prohibitions seek to render untellable. (1999: 81-2; emphasis in original)

In this way, Butler asserts her argument that gender and sex identities are the effects of prohibition. It follows that not only gender, but also sex is culturally and socially constructed due to the taboo against homosexuality. Doing away with the intrinsic notions of sex and gender, Butler claims that “gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity” (1999: 81). Subverting the melancholic structure of ego formation, Butler argues that the heterosexual incest taboo succeeds the prohibited homosexual desire to have sexual gratification with the same-sex parent. Thus, she goes on to argue that “it would appear that the taboo against homosexuality must *precede* the heterosexual incest taboo; the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual ‘dispositions’ by which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible” (1999: 82; emphasis in original). Then the following reasoning becomes inevitable: “If melancholia is the response to real or imagined loss, and if heterosexual gender identity is formed on the basis of the primary loss of the same-sexed object of desire, it follows that heterosexual gender identity is melancholic” (Salih 2002: 55).

Furthermore, Butler aims at locating the ‘place’ where identification, based on a melancholic structure, is developed. She comes to the conclusion that identification is “*on* the body as its surface signification such that the body must itself be understood *as* an incorporated space” (1999: 86; emphasis in original). Upholding that the notion of sex as an innate and unstable entity is no longer credible, Butler claims that “[a]s an antimetaphorical activity, incorporation *literalizes* the loss *on* or *in* the body and so appears as the facticity of the body, the means by which the body comes to bear ‘sex’ as its literal truth” (1999: 87;

emphasis in original). This idea of the inscription of the loss on the body resonates with Foucault's theorization of the effects of the prohibitive law on bodily expressions, which asserts that "[t]he prohibitive law is not taken into the body, internalized or incorporated, but rather is written on the body, the structuring principle of its very shape, style, and exterior signification" (Butler 1989: 605).

Hence, through the above-mentioned conceptions, the body *per se* becomes an area of representation of 'object-cathexes' that are encrypted on the surface of it. This could be argued to demonstrate that the body comes to obtain its sex through the constitution of object-cathexes. Therefore, the body could be considered "not as a ready surface awaiting signification, but as a set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained" (Butler 1999: 44). Hence, the assumption that the body is a natural and an innate entity becomes an illusion because the body functions as a surface, on which lost desires are encrypted. This leads to the conclusion that "the body is the effect of desire rather than its cause" (Salih 2002: 57), which highlights the 'unnaturalness' of the notion of body as an innate fact.

In the light of this argument, Butler holds the idea that sex and gender are discursively constructed and represented as anatomical facticity "to establish the appearance of bodily fixity" (Salih 2002: 58). Consequently, she claims that as sex and gender are performative actions that are conventionalized through repetitions, they could be enacted in a subversive way, which is a groundbreaking idea to emphasize the possibility of challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions about gender identities and sexuality. As Fiona Webster reflects upon Butler's theory of performativity in terms of its enabling power for subversion, she claims: "This repetition rigidifies and institutionalizes gender. At the same time, the very activity of this repetition of norms suggests for Butler the possibility that those norms can be subverted" (2000: 4).

Drawing attention to the idea of performativity, Butler argues that gender identities, as much as sexual identities are not stable points of agency, because the repetitions of socially and culturally regulated actions in a heterosexual matrix create a fallacy that these identities are stable and natural. To put it differently, Butler argues that:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*. (1999: 179; emphasis in original)

Thus, Butler contests the naturalized notions of gender identities and concludes that gender is indeed “a free-floating artifice”, which is divorced from the regulatory frame of sexuality “with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (1999: 10; emphasis in original). Thus, this point will prove to be a fruitful idea in the analysis of Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* (1979). As Butler draws much from Foucault’s theorization of sexuality, I will briefly attempt to analyze Foucault’s theories from a Butlerian lens.

### **1.3. Judith Butler Reads Michel Foucault**

Michel Foucault postulates that the assumption of natural and innate sex could no longer be tenable and consequently undertakes to theorize his idea that “the deployment of sexuality, with its different strategies, was what established this notion of ‘sex’” (1978: 154). He discredits the assumption that sex is a natural phenomenon, but rather he argues that sex is discursively constructed and made to seem to be a ‘mute facticity’. Thus, analyzing Foucault, Shane Phelan claims that “[r]ather than being natural, a ‘pre-given datum’ which was distorted or described through the apparatus of sexuality, sex is a product, the sign of a

particular organization of the (personal and political) body” (1990: 426). Butler, similarly, defends the conceptualization of sex as a discursive product fashioned for one in order to fit in the heterosexual matrix of power relations. Thus, as she claims in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), sex is “not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (1993: 2).

Furthermore, elaborating this idea, Foucault argues that through the application of a unitary parameter, the explanations of the notion of sexuality are made to seem facticity and to refer to an already existing reality. To put it more precisely, Foucault claims that:

[B]y presenting itself in a unitary fashion, as anatomy and lack, as function and latency, as instinct and meaning, it [the notion of sex] was able to mark the line of contact between a knowledge of human sexuality and the biological sciences of reproduction; thus, without really borrowing anything from these sciences, excepting a few doubtful analogies, the knowledge of sexuality gained through proximity a guarantee of quasi-scientificity; but by virtue of this same proximity, some of the contents of biology and physiology were able to serve as a principle of normality for human sexuality. (1978: 154-5)

He also argues that it is possible to subvert the supposedly natural notion of sex not outside the law, but rather “subversion must exist *within* existing discursive structures” (Salih 2002: 59; emphasis in original). More precisely, Foucault asserts that “sexuality is produced by the practices and exclusions effected by disciplinary power” (Dean 1994: 274). Butler interprets Foucault’s theorization of sexuality and power relations in accordance with her idea of power as a proliferating source. As Salih notes, Butler claims that “the law produces the inadmissible identities and desires it represses in order to establish and maintain the stability of sanctioned sex and gender identities” (2002: 59). This theorization of generative and at the same time repressive mechanisms of power are reminiscent of Michael Holquist’s conceptualization of censorship, as a result of which he says that “the fundamental quality of censorship” implies that “its authority to prohibit can never be separated from its need to include” (1994: 14). In this sense, it could be argued that the prohibitive function of censorship does not only repress

the ‘inappropriate’ material, but it also operates “as a crucial factor in the *production* of social (and academic) discourse and knowledge” (Wortham 1997: 501; emphasis in original).

In this regard, Butler has convincingly argued that sex and gender are the effects of socially instituted and maintained discourse and the law. Furthermore, she highlights “the plurality of a law which *produces* sexed and gendered identities that are presented as innate and ‘natural’ before they are subjected to prohibition” (Salih 2002: 59; emphasis in original). Thus, she draws her analysis from Foucault’s critique of the repressive-hypothesis in *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction* (first published in French in 1976), where he challenges the assumption that “the history of sexuality was the history of increasing repression from which ‘liberation’ was desirable” (Dean 1994: 282). He, therefore, argues that the productive and repressive functions are dependant on one another, which could take us to the conclusion that subversive acts are to be done ‘within’ the framework of the law. Thus, the notion of sexual liberation becomes tricky in that “sexual liberation was itself a ruse of power since there is no escape from power, since power produces all sexual subjects, all sexuality in its ‘intentional and nonsubjective’ interests” (Dean 1994: 283). Therefore, he concludes that defying the power for liberation purposes only serves for enlarging the scope of it at the cost of strengthening its grip. Accordingly, Carolyn J. Dean comments on this theorization of the relation between sexuality and power:

All promises of liberation thus do not oppose power but extend its grasp. By claiming that the emphasis on sexual liberation could not “dismantle” the “deployment of sexuality”, Foucault meant that liberationists conceived sexuality as a natural, essential drive instead of the product and expression of power itself, of the normative production and regulation of bodies. In contrast, Foucault insisted that we, including our sexuality, are never outside of power and thus can never be liberated from it. (1994: 283)

In connection with the taboos against homosexuality and incest, through Foucault’s ‘productive hypothesis’, Butler reaches the conclusion that through prohibition, the law “simultaneously invents and invites them” (Salih 2002: 59). Hence, the prohibitive power

both represses and produces what is forbidden, which is an indicative of the generative nature of the taboo. Butler, therefore, makes use of this theorization in explaining the gender construction and considers “the incest taboo and the prior taboo against homosexuality as the generative moments of gender identity, the prohibitions that produce identity along the culturally intelligible grids of an idealized and compulsory heterosexuality” (1999: 172).

Through the reasoning of generative power of the prohibitions, Butler draws the conclusion that the taboo’s existence requires the counter-existence of the repressed desire. Analyzing Foucault’s ideas, Butler argues that “he proposes ‘sexuality’ as an open and complex historical system of discourse and power that produces the misnomer of ‘sex’ as part of a strategy to conceal and, hence, to perpetuate power-relations” (1999: 121). Therefore, she asserts that homosexuality has a constitutive part in the conceptualization of heterosexuality in that the former helps the latter maintain its existence in discursively constructed mechanisms of power.

The theorization of an interactive relation between heterosexuality and homosexuality alongside that of power and sexuality influences Butler to argue that “the law is generative and plural, and that subversion, parody and drag occur *within* a law that provides opportunities for the ‘staging’ of the subversive identities that it simultaneously suppresses and produces” (Salih 2002: 60; emphasis in original). To reach this conclusion, Butler analyzes Foucault’s rendering of the process of the construction of the body and the power, which is “not a pre-given, pre-discursive condition” (Grassi 2011: 19). She also comments on his way of thinking by saying that according to him “[t]he culturally constructed body is the result of a diffuse and active structuring of the social field with no magical or ontoteological origins” (qtd. in Grassi 2011: 3). Therefore, in connection with Foucault’s theorization of the body and sexuality, Butler asserts that the notion of a naturalized and stable conception of the body becomes invalid, for “the body is not a ‘mute facticity’ [...], but like gender it is

produced by discourses” (Salih 2002: 62) in order to create socially and culturally intelligible identities.

The fact that the naturalized notion of the body cannot be justified anymore leads to the conclusion that “[t]he body becomes a ‘political field’, inscribed and constituted by power relations” (Deveaux 1994: 224). Butler’s ideas in the theorization of the body resonate with those of Foucault’s in that according to her, “there is no ‘natural body’ that pre-exists its cultural inscription” (Salih 2002: 62), which takes Butler to the assertion that “*gender* is not a noun” (1999: 33; emphasis in original), because “gender is not something one *is*, it is something one *does*, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’” (Salih 2002: 62; emphasis in original). In the light of this argument, Butler claims that gender is ‘performative’.

#### **1.4. Performing Performativity**

Drawing from Foucault’s theories in *Discipline and Punish* (first published in French in 1975), which mainly deals with the notions of the body and the prison system and traces how power turns individuals into ‘docile’ bodies, Butler postulates her conception of ‘signification’ on the surface of the body. As she analyzes Foucault’s ideas on the law and prisoners, Butler writes that “[t]hat law is not literally internalized, but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify [*sic*] that law on and through the body”, and furthermore, that “the law is at once fully manifest and fully latent, for it never appears as external to the bodies it subjects and subjectivates” (1999: 171). Thus, Butler argues that owing to the fact that bodies are produced through the constant and organized repetition of the law, they bear its signification on their surface. Hence, the notion of a pre-existing and natural gender is discredited. Because, gender is already “a sequence of repeated acts that harden into the appearance of something that’s been there all along” (Salih 2002: 66). Therefore, Butler

asserts the idea of performativity, “not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993: 2). As has been discussed previously, expanding on the illusion of a natural and inherent gender identity, she explains her conceptualization of performativity:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the “integrity” of the subject. In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (1999: 173)

Underlining the performativity of gender, Butler refutes the notion of a gender identity, which pre-exists the expressions of gender, because “that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1999: 33). By the same token, Butler argues against the postulate of “a pre-linguistic inner core or essence by claiming that gender acts are not performed by the subject, but they performatively constitute a subject that is the effect of discourse rather than the cause of it” on the grounds of the fact that “the gendered body is inseparable from the acts that constitute it” (Salih 2002: 65), and that gendered identities operate through “the discursive construction of a constitutive outside” (Hall 1996: 15). The fact that there is no ‘doer’ behind the gendered body paves the way for the understanding that gender identities are discursively constructed and maintained by language *per se*.

In relation to the role of language in the construction of gender identities, Butler asserts that an independent human subjectivity outside language is beyond the bounds of possibility. Therefore, it could be argued that “[t]here is no ‘I’ outside language since identity is a signifying practice” (Salih 2002: 64). Accordingly, language as a ‘signifying practice’ produces the illusion of culturally and socially intelligible identities in a heterosexual matrix

and tries to make these allegedly substantive identities seem natural by obscuring the fact that they are the effects of that signifying practice rather than its causes. For this reason, “to understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life” (Butler 1999: 184; emphasis in original).

In the light of this discussion, Butler establishes her idea that gender identities are merely constructions, and as they are constructed in the heterosexual regulatory frame, it is possible to ‘do’ gender identities in a subversive way. In order to subvert the culturally intelligible signification on the body, the construction of coherence between sex and desire and the linear signifying practice of “acts, gesture and enactments” must be distorted, because “[s]uch acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler 1999: 173; emphasis in original). In this respect, emphasizing the fabricated structure of gender expressions, Butler asserts that “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (1999: 173). Through the disruption of the boundaries of this ‘obligatory frame’, gender expressions could be subverted with the aim of differentiating and multiplying the signification process, thereby calling attention to “the constructedness of heterosexual identities that may have a vested interest in presenting themselves as ‘essential’ and ‘natural’” (Salih 2002: 65).

Having established that the notion of a stable and essential gender identity is an illusion, Butler elaborates on the possibility of ‘enacting’ gender differently. Regarding this possibility of subversion within the regulatory framework, Butler talks about the performance

of drag, which “plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed” (1999: 175), thereby drawing attention to the ‘constructedness’ of gender unity that is made to appear natural. Therefore, as she claims, “[i]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency” (1999: 175; emphasis in original). Thus, through the use of drag, it becomes possible to subvert gender identities so as to reveal the performativity thereof.

Asserting her idea of gender parody, Butler writes:

The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original; just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a “figure” in that double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. (1999: 175; emphasis in original)

In this sense, Butler proposes the possibility of recontextualization of gender identities whose expressions are contingent upon their signification in the culturally and ideologically regulated framework.

To sum up, establishing her postulate that sex and gender are constructed as much as the alleged distinction between them for the sake of fitting into the category of socially and culturally intelligible identities in a heteronormative matrix, Butler contests the credibility of a stable and natural notion of the category of ‘woman’ and challenges the essentialist tendencies prevalent in certain forms of feminism. Furthermore, as gender identities are ‘enactments’ rather than the expressions of an inner core, and thus they could be enacted in an unorthodox way with the aim of subversion, she upholds that through the restylization of bodily expressions like the performance of drag, gender identities could be liberated from “the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (1999: 179). Refuting the misconception of an essential sex and innate gender identity, she also claims that “[g]enders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived”, and adds, “[a]s credible bearers of

those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible*”  
(1999: 180; emphasis in original).

## 2. FEMINISM AND THEATER

“Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement”.

—Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”  
(1976: 875)

In many academic fields feminism has challenged patriarchal hegemony and provoked the questioning of patriarchal rules that govern social values. By virtue of its political and ideological systems of signification and representation, theater has been perceived as a male-dominated field and thus challenged by feminism in order to “find ways to reshape a material practice that has been used to legitimize and maintain male hegemony” (Kritzer 1991: 7). As from the onset of literary activities, women are excluded from literary production on grounds of economic limitations and lack of private space, as Virginia Woolf underlines in *A Room of One's Own*: “[A] woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (1989: 4). Devoid of opportunities to write and produce, women are made to occupy peripheral positions in the production of literature. They, similarly, are excluded from “the prominent positions in recognized cultural production” (Fortier 2002: 112). In this respect, notwithstanding the obstacles, with the aim of letting women break the boundaries of patriarchal literary conventions, Hélène Cixous urges women: “To write. An act which will not only ‘realize’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (1976: 880).

In this regard, analyzing Cixous’ urging women to write themselves, rather than passively waiting to be written upon, Elaine Aston argues that Cixous “proposed that the desire to exit from the symbolic in order for women to come out of silence was the first stage

in the journey of modern women's theater" (Aston 1995: 45). Elaborating on this idea, she adds: "For 'woman to write herself' she needs to be re-located, un-made in the pre-Oedipal space of the Lacanian Imaginary, i.e. the pre-symbolic. [...] It requires a bursting, a violent breaking up of the symbolic order/language which has denied women their 'voice', their identity" (Aston 1995: 43). In this sense, drawing from Lacanian underpinnings in Aston's argument, it could be claimed that "the access to the Symbolic Order, a consequence of the mirror stage, comes together with the acquisition of language and the surrender to the Law of the Father", and furthermore, that "[s]ince language is given in and by a system dominated by men, women's access to it is going to be clearly mediated" with the consequence that "women's 'voice', their 'identity', will be totally artificial, a construct defined by patriarchy" (Monforte 2001: 152).

Theater, "a practice that represents gender relations in and through the 'grammar' of theatrical production" (Kritzer 1991: 6), does not constitute an exception to the constant exclusion of women from subjective power in that it employs a phallogocentric postulation of women as the 'others' and keeps them from occupying subject positions. Phallogocentrism, to use Jacques Derrida's term, in the construction and privileging of the male as the authoritative figure to decide on and censor the construction of meaning in theater could be traced back to the appropriation of the Aristotelian theatrical ideal, which is "one of structural and stylistic unity based on a narrative plot that builds progressively to a climax and resolution, presenting an instructive example of character development" (Kritzer 1991: 2). Therefore, Aristotelian theatrical conventions serve to perpetuate a phallogocentric theatrical structure, which "mirrors the process of masculine erection, ejaculation and return to flaccidity" (Monforte 2001: 32). Thus, it could be argued that "Aristotle and endowing dramatic structures with an ejaculatory potential is as if readers/spectators can share in the pleasure of the shot with the patriarchal playwright, but always as a male fantasy of female pleasure" (Monforte 2001: 32). Hence,

feminist theater aspires to subvert the Aristotelian ideal of drama “in its protest against patriarchal authority and struggle to create forms of expression that affirm the subjectivity of women” (Kritzer 1991: 2).

In the light of this argument, feminist theater tries to develop new possibilities to vindicate subject positions for women, rather than “validating a phallic paradigm of creativity” (Kritzer 1991: 2). Therefore, feminist theater aims to deconstruct the phallographic formation of theater, which is as such a system of signification that is regulated by male hegemony. To this end, feminist theater draws attention to the ‘maleness’ in traditional theatrical formulations by deconstructing “the social ‘construct’ known as ‘Woman’” (Monforte 2001: 20). Thus, a feminist practice of theater intends to subvert the established theorizations of the structure of theater by challenging the conventional approach to perceive ‘woman’ as a stable and innate category that is regulated by a male-dominated power paradigm. As Mark Fortier claims, “feminism attempts to understand the ideologies which have limited women’s ways of becoming subjects or agents, and to open up new patterns in which women are free to escape the confines of the subjectivity patriarchy sets up for them” (Fortier 2002: 111).

### **2.1. Demystifying of the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Feminist Theater**

With the aim of emancipating woman from the grip of patriarchal societal conventions, feminist theater seeks to deconstruct the socially and culturally imposed and supposedly stable assumptions about the construction of the “‘mythic subject Woman’” (Monforte 2001: 29). Through the notion of a stable category of woman, the patriarchal and heterosexual matrix regulates the social position of women in order to perpetuate the hegemonic existence of the gender-based formation of society. As Mary Poovey argues, “[i]nstead of reflecting a unitary ‘self’, identity is relational; as such, ‘woman’ is only a position that gains its

(provisional) definition from its placement in relation to ‘man’” (1988: 51). Thus, this binary opposition only serves to marginalize the existence of women, which feminist theater challenges and aims to subvert. In this sense, as Amelia Howe Kritzer postulates, “[b]ecause masculine subjectivity depends upon identification of the feminine as other, within the closed structure of the subject/object opposition, the male elite has appropriated the space, apparatus, and products of culture to the on-going project of reifying the repression of femininity and the objectification of women” (Kritzer 1991: 7).

Following Kritzer’s ideas on the ‘otherization’ of women, one could argue that as the formation of binary categorization of man and woman is one of the ideological tools to reinforce the alleged superiority of man over woman, feminism refutes the already established notion of a stable hierarchy between man and woman that is based on such binary categories. The patriarchal authority tries to assert the centrality of the category of man through the marginalization of the category of woman. Thus, men are granted with center positions, whereas women are placed on the periphery of a patriarchal power pyramid. This resonates with the ideas of Edward Said on the construction of the ‘Orient’, i.e. ‘woman’ in this case, as the ultimate opposite of the Western culture, i.e. ‘man’, so that the Western culture affirms its identity and perpetuates marginality of the ‘Orient’. As Said claims, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (1979: 3). Furthermore, so as to maintain its status as the center, the patriarchal system labels the category of the ‘other’ as stable and uniform. To put it differently, “the female is positioned as static obstacle or as nondynamic to be entered by the male and transversed” (Diamond 1990: 94). In this sense, patriarchal ideology names and categorizes women as the alleged ‘others’ so as to be what it purports to be. As Camille Paglia brilliantly argues, “[n]ame and person are part of the west’s quest for form. [...] To name is to know; to know is to control” (1991: 5).

The formation of the male identity is, therefore, strictly connected with that of the female, which follows that sexual identities are constructed through a differentiation process. As Stuart Hall claims, “[identities] emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity—an ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation)” (Hall 1996: 4). In this respect, by dint of Hall’s theorization of the unstable identities that are constructed through difference, the category of man is understood to be in a close relationship with that of woman as a basis of its construction. Hall asserts his ideas about the construction of identities:

[I]dentities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term—and thus its ‘identity’—can be constructed (Derrida, 1981; Laclau, 1990; Butler, 1993). Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected. Every identity has at its ‘margin’, an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it ‘lacks’. (1996: 4-5; emphasis in original)

In line with Hall’s conceptualization of identity, it could be asserted that the male identity formation is realized through its relation to the ‘other’, i.e. the female. This leads to the claim that the category of man becomes only intelligible through its repression of the threat caused by the ‘othered woman’ as a coercive measure. Considering the exclusive function of identity formation, Hall quotes from Ernesto Laclau: “Derrida has shown how an identity’s constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles - man/woman, etc.”, and adds, “[w]hat is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first” (1996: 5). In order to break the boundaries of this “violent hierarchy”, a feminist

practice of theater, which is a sign-system *per se*, aims at deconstructing the ‘otherization’ of woman as the ‘negative inversion’ of man.

Deconstructing the mythical contextualization of women, feminist theater draws attention to their marginalized subjectivity, which is caused due to the fact that the stability of patriarchal conventions become at stake when faced with difference, i.e. ‘Woman’. Because, as Barbara Freedman argues:

Difference produces great anxiety. Polarisation, which is a *theatrical* representation of difference, tames and binds that anxiety. The classic example is sexual difference which is represented as a polar opposition (active-passive, energy-matter). All polar oppositions share the trait of taming the anxiety that specific differences provoke. (1996: 81; emphasis in original)

Feminism, which is “predicated upon subverting the figuration of difference as binary opposition” (Freedman 1996: 81), aspires to highlight and consequently challenge the long-established binary oppositions that perpetuate patriarchal regulation in theater both as a dramatic text and a performance text.

In view of this argument, semiotics could offer an analysis of the dual textuality of the theatrical text as a ‘sign-system’ that asserts that “the written text/performance text relationship is not one of simple priority but a complex of reciprocal constraints constituting a powerful *intertextuality*” (Elam 1980: 209; emphasis in original). Nevertheless, “the priority of the written play over the performance” (Elam 1980: 208) is fallaciously assumed to be the norm because the relationship between the dramatic text and the performance text “cannot be accounted for in terms of facile determinism” (Elam 1980: 209). Therefore, it follows that a static binary opposition between the supposedly contrasting poles does not prove fruitful in the analysis of the theatrical text as a ‘sign-system’ and in the further discussion of “the cultural code of the sign, its ideological imprint, and [...] everything that controls the connotations of the sign in the culture” (Monforte 2001: 21). Since there is a “move away from the notion of the text as a closed system to consideration of its unfixing in the plurality

of signifying processes generated through the activity of reading/spectating” (Aston and Savona 1991: 15). For this reason, decoding the patriarchal representation of ‘woman’ as a sign in the frame of the dramatic text and the performance text is one of the challenging objectives of feminist theater.

In this regard, another point to take into account in the analysis of duality in theater is the relationship between player/role. As traditional theater is based on binary oppositions to reinforce the subject position of males, it creates a sense of doubleness with respect to the relationship between player/ role in much the same way as it fabricates a self/other distinction in the formation of subjectivity. Thus, as Kritzer claims, “[t]he operation of patriarchal ideology in structuring theatrical conventions mimics its structuring of subjectivity in male-dominated culture” (1991: 6). The binary opposition between public/private and male/female resonates with the clear-cut distinction between player/role. Roland Barthes expands on this differentiation: “The actor’s body is artificial, but its duplicity is much more profound than that of the painted sets or the fake furniture of the stage; the grease paint, the imitations of gestures or intonations, the accessibility of an exposed body—all this is artificial but not factitious” and characterizes theater “as the site of an ultrincarnation, in which the body is double, at once a living body deriving from a trivial nature, and an emphatic, formal body, frozen by its function as an artificial object” (Barthes 2000: 27-8).

The opposition between player/role holds a mirror up to the operation of the patriarchal ideology by reinforcing “the masculine/feminine opposition fundamental to patriarchal subjectivity” (Kritzer 1991: 9). Taking the argument further, Kritzer analyzes the relation of the opposition between player/role to that of masculine/feminine:

Theater’s player/role opposition mimics the division and hierarchization of masculine and feminine. The player is real, while the role makes visible the false man—i.e., the feminine—that must be repressed in the attainment of subjectivity. Stage parlance, which places the player ‘in’ a role, confirms the penetrable, ‘feminine’ quality of the role, as well as the unitary, ‘masculine’ quality of the player. [...] Theater reifies the substance/shadow or true/false

division inherent in the demands of patriarchal subjectivity. This division between true man and false man (player and role) has governed traditional theater. Theater assures the audience, through the enactment of the player/role relationship, that true man—unitary man—exists. The false man of the role reinforces the construction of the subject as phallic unity by offering the concept of the role as an ‘other’ upon which tendencies or qualities that threaten this wholeness can be projected. (1991: 9-10).

This analysis requires the feminist practice of theater to subvert the theatrical conventions of doubleness in order to make room for females in the multiple productions of meaning. By highlighting “the possibility of a subjectivity based in multiplicity and relationality rather than binary opposition and separateness” (Kritzer 1991: 11), feminist theater attempts “not only to fracture the subject into multiple identities, but also to disassociate oneself from all identities in the sacred taste of a void in thought, which is also the fullness of consciousness as pure witness” (Haney II 2007: 85). Thus, feminist theater aspires to break the boundaries of patriarchal operation of individual subjectivity by answering “Cixous’s call for an *écriture féminine*, which aims to break the controlling link between the phallus and word that marks the discourse of man” (Kritzer 1991: 10).

## **2.2. Spectatorship and Reception: Deconstructing the Fetishizing Gaze**

Spectatorship and reception theories analyze the construction of meaning through the contribution of both the author and the reader/spectator. Rather than being reduced to the position of passive receivers of meaning, the reader/spectator becomes actively involved in its production. With respect to the relationship between the author and the reader/spectator, Kate Davy claims that:

Reader response or reception theory posits that there is a reader or spectator implicit in every text or performance piece. It rejects the notion of an a priori text. Instead, the text exists as a result of the activity of reading. While reader response theory does not assume that a text is an objective entity that exists totally separate from our reading of it, it also does not imply that the text is merely a subjective invention generated by the reader's imagination. (1986: 43-4)

In this regard, the reader/spectator is demanded to produce his/her own interpretation instead of adopting the author's point of view, thereby defying the ultimate authority of 'the Author'. Rejecting "the mystique of the Author", this approach undermines the idea that "the romantic mythology of the Author defines both the matter and manner of critical rituals undertaken in and around the literary work" (Lehmann 2002: 3). Thus, the idea of a sovereign Author is challenged in order to "liberate critical practice from a mode of interpretation 'tyrannically centered' on the author-king" (Barthes qtd. in Lehmann 2002: 3). Announcing the death of the Author, Barthes theorizes his idea of the 'readerly text' and the 'writerly text': "the readerly text leads the reader along by limiting and imposing its meaning; the writerly text is open to, and encourages, the reader rewriting and recreating the text in the joy of open reading" (qtd. in Fortier 2002: 132).

In this respect, the 'writerly text' engages the reader in the process of interpretation and multiple productions of meaning of "heteroglot texts" on the grounds that "every text offers itself as an invitation to be rewritten" (Leitch 2007: 16). Hence, it could be argued that the hierarchy between the author and the reader/spectator is no longer valid, and furthermore, the reader/spectator takes up an important place in contemporary theater productions. In contrast, as Fortier draws from Susan Bennett's ideas, "the audience in the traditional theater enters into a 'social contract' in which audience members agree to be passive in their behavior but open, eager and active in their acceptance and decoding of the signs presented to them" (2002: 137). In order to subvert the passivity of the audience, he argues that "[Bennett] calls for the 'emancipation of the spectator' evident in non-traditional and often marginalized theater practices which allow for a more active role for the audience" (2002: 137).

In the light of this argument, Keir Elam elaborates on the central position of the spectator in the production of various forms of interpretation and argues, "[e]very spectator's interpretation of the text is in effect a new *construction* of it according to the cultural and

ideological disposition of the subject (1980: 95; emphasis in original), and furthermore, that “the text [in being decodified] is subjected to a new codification” (Lotman qtd. in Elam 1980: 95). Such is the reader/spectator’s role that s/he becomes responsible for the creation of meaning in accordance with his/her ‘cultural and ideological baggage’. As Elam argues, “[i]t is the spectator who must make sense of the performance for himself, a fact that is disguised by the apparent passivity of the audience” (1980: 95). He, accordingly, adds, “[h]owever judicious or aberrant the spectator’s decodification, the final responsibility for the meaning and coherence of what he constructs is his” (Elam 1980: 95). Positing the ‘responsibility’ of the spectator as ‘the meaning producer’, Elam goes on to analyze the communication between the spectators:

Spectator-spectator communication, meanwhile usually ignored as a semiotic factor, has three main effects, important to an overall homogeneity of response: *stimulation* (laughter in one part of the auditorium provokes a similar reaction elsewhere), *confirmation* (spectators find their own responses reinforced by others) and *integration* (the single audience member is encouraged, in consequence, to surrender his individual function in favour of the larger unit of which he is part). (1980: 96-7; emphasis in original)

Elam’s ideas on the ‘integration’ of the spectator implies his/her ‘surrender’ to the overall reception of the theatrical production, which follows that the reaction of the target theater audience is influenced by the interpretation of the others. Hence, the theatrical pleasure, “the involvement of the audience in the interpretation of the multiplicity of signs, both transparent and opaque” (Bennett 1990: 78), is, in a way, affected by certain determinants.

Thus, the filmic pleasure could prove useful to analyze the theater audience’s reaction to the theatrical production with a feminist objective to call the fetishizing gaze at women into question. Notwithstanding the obvious constraints of a direct comparison of the reaction of the audience between cinema and theater, following Laura Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), one could analyze the spectator’s pleasure and desire for the gaze. Explaining Mulvey’s theorization of the pleasure of the gaze, Bennett states that:

The spectator's unconscious (which, according to the Lacanian model, structures responses) is [Mulvey] argues, formed by the dominant order. Mainstream film, 'as an advanced representation system' (Mulvey 1975: 7) within that dominant order, encodes the erotic language of that order. For this reason (the dominant order being, of course, *inter alia*, patriarchal), woman is presented in a passive role. The on-screen female functions as icon; she is an erotic object both for characters in the filmic narrative and for spectators in the cinema. (1990: 81)

Analyzing the objectification of women in cinematic representations, Mulvey questions "the paradox of phallogentrism" in that "it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world" (1975: 6). She goes on to draw her ideas from Freud's theorization of scopophilia, and analyzes the association of "scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (1975: 8). She relates this idea to the cinematic experience, where "conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world", and furthermore, she asserts that "the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer" (1975: 9).

Mulvey challenges the fetishizing look at women in cinema, which "satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking" (Mulvey 1975: 9) on the grounds that it reduces women to the point of simplicity and stability and neglects "*the differences among women*" even though "[t]here are women who masquerade and women who wear the veil; women invisible to men, in their society, but also women who are invisible to other women, in our society" (De Lauretis 1985: 164; emphasis in original). With respect to the fetishizing gaze at women, Mulvey goes on to assert that "[t]he determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (1975: 11). This follows that feminist practice of cinematic representation of women is to refute women's "traditional exhibitionist role", in which "women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (Mulvey 1975: 11; emphasis in original), thereby aspiring to emancipate women from

being represented as mere sexual objects. In relation to this, taking her argument from “[t]he subject/object relations delineated by pornography”, Jill Dolan asserts that:

Feminist film and performance critics argue that representation is addressed to the gaze of the male spectator. He is invited to identify with the active male protagonist portrayed in the narrative through voyeuristic and fetishistic viewing conventions. The male spectator shares in the pleasure of the hero's quest to fulfill his desire for the story's passively situated female. (1989: 59)

Following Dolan's ideas, the feminist practice of cinematic representation needs to attempt to challenge the conventions of representation of women in the search of “the possibility of an alternative tradition, a tradition that aims to subvert the gender-specific hierarchies inscribed in patriarchal cinema” (Hansen 1984: 95). The afore-mentioned ideas are also relevant to the representation of women in feminist theater because, similar to film, representations of women in theater are traditionally based on a male fantasy that neither reflects the ‘realities’ of women nor places them in subject positions, thereby making women being entangled in gendered narratives. Therefore, representations of women are to be emancipated from the grip of the authoritative male gaze, and a feminist practice of theater needs to underline both “a female body in representation that resists fetishization and a viable position for the female spectator” (Diamond 1988a: 83). Such a practice will, at the same time, subvert the conventional ways of representation, so that the readers/spectators, as the bearers of meaning-making ‘responsibility’, could produce personal interpretations of theatrical texts which, being ‘heteroglot’ texts, function as intentional invitations to create a myriad of meanings.

### **2.3. Brechtian Theater and Feminism**

Feminist theater draws much from Brechtian theatrical conventions as opposed to those developed by Constantin Stanislavsky. As Enric Monforte explains, “[w]hereas the latter emphasizes identification between actor and character through a psychological approach to character, Brecht amplifies the identificatory process, and at the same time offers more

possibilities in the sense of political consciousness” (2001: 35). In other words, Brecht discredits the supposedly necessary identification between actor and character, and furthermore, he attempts to expose “the very quotation marks that the actor assumes in representation, thus allowing him to become ‘opaque’ as a vehicle” (Elam 1980: 9), which is of great importance in feminist criticism. In addition, as Janelle Reinelt argues, feminist theater makes use of Brechtian techniques and feminist transformation of such techniques illustrates “Brecht’s notion of the criticism of the received past from the standpoint of a concrete present” (1996: 46). She goes on to assert the influence of Brecht’s theater on feminism and states that:

Brecht’s theorisation of the social gest, epic structure, and alienation effect provides the means to reveal material relations as the basis of social reality, to foreground and examine ideologically-determined beliefs and unconscious habitual perceptions, and to make visible those signs inscribed on the body which distinguish social behavior in relation to class, gender, and history. For feminists, Brechtian techniques offer a way to examine the material conditions of gender behaviour (how they are internalized, opposed, and changed) and their interaction with other socio-political factors such as class. (1996: 35-6)

In this regard, Brecht’s theatrical techniques such as “demystifying representation, showing how and when the object of pleasure is made”, and “releasing the spectator from imaginary and illusionary identifications” (Diamond 1988a: 83) are made use of in the analysis and deconstruction of the conventions of traditional theater. Thus, analyzing the main *topoi* in Brechtian theater that resists “the idea of an obvious and fixed perceptive process” (Bennett 1990: 32), Elin Diamond’s ideas on Brecht’s theories and her ‘gestic criticism’ prove fruitful to have a better understanding of Brecht’s influence on feminist criticism of theater.

The foregrounding element of Brecht’s theory is the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the Alienation effect (A-effect), which consists in “the technique of defamiliarizing a word, an idea, a gesture so as to enable the spectator to see or hear it afresh” (Diamond 1988a: 84). To put it differently, as Brecht explains, “[t]he A-effect consists in turning an object from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible into something peculiar, striking, and

unexpected” (qtd. in Diamond 1988a: 84). The A-effect requires the actor to alienate himself/herself from the character that s/he purports to play, thereby highlighting the ‘disidentification’ of himself/herself with the set of behaviors of the character. This also functions as a rupture in the fabric of “the mimetic property of acting [...], the fact that the performer’s body conventionally resembles the object (or character) to which it refers” (Diamond 1988a: 84). By the same token, through the use of the A-effect, the notion of a stable gender identity is questioned. Drawing from Butler’s ideas on gender, Diamond expands on the influence of the A-effect:

When spectators ‘see’ gender they are seeing (and reproducing) the cultural signs of gender, and by implication, the gender ideology of a culture. Gender in fact provides a perfect illustration of ideology at work, since ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ behavior usually appears to be a ‘natural’—and thus fixed and unalterable—extension of biological sex. And yet, as Judith Butler argues, ‘the “body” is itself a construction; [that is,] bodies...*come into being* in and through the mark(s) of gender.’ This rigorously antifoundationalist argument insists on the fictionality—yet the persistence—of gender taxonomies and the critical role of performance. [...] A feminist practice that seeks to expose or mock the strictures of gender, to *reveal* gender-as-appearance, as the effect, not the precondition, of regulatory practices, usually uses some version of the Brechtian A-effect. (1997: 45-6; emphasis in original)

The next point to take into account from Brechtian theatrical strategies is the ‘not...but’, which requires “[k]eeping differences in view instead of conforming to stable representations of identity, and *linking those differences to a possible politics*” (Diamond 1997: 48; emphasis in original). This technique encourages the actor to perform in such a way that s/he will invoke what is not ostensibly obvious in his/her acting. In other words, explaining the ‘not...but’, Brecht states that “[w]hen [an actor] appears on stage, besides what he actually is doing he will at all essential points discover, specify, imply what he is not doing; that is he will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as clearly as possible” (qtd. in Diamond 1997: 48). For this reason the ‘not...but’ makes visible the difference that is concealed from the audience. Furthermore, it “ruins classical mimesis: the truth-modeling that produces self-identical subjects in coherent plots gives way utterly to the pleasure and

significance of contradiction” on the grounds that “[e]ach action must contain the trace of the action it represses, thus the meaning of each action contains difference” (Diamond 1997: 48-9). Therefore, the ‘not...but’ urges the audience to see what is ‘unseeable’ and not to be satisfied with what is already presented on stage, thereby realizing the ‘repression’ of difference in traditional theatrical representations. As Monforte argues, “[t]his can provide [the feminist spectator] with an awareness of the mechanisms of repression that can eventually prove empowering” (2001: 37).

Historicization is another influential technique of Brechtian theater that is related to the key *topoi* in a feminist practice of theater on grounds of the importance of “[t]he understanding of women’s material conditions in history, and the problematics of uncovering ‘women’s history’” (Diamond 1997: 49). The underlying objective of historicization is, thus, to urge the audience to change the class-based matrix by observing the scope of their perceptions, thereby commencing the process of change. To put it differently, Diamond claims that “[h]istoricization is, then, *a way of seeing*, and the enemy of recuperation and appropriation”, and furthermore, “[o]ne cannot historicize and colonize the Other or, as Luce Irigaray would have it, ‘reduce all others to the economy of the Same’” (1997: 50; emphasis in original). Expanding his argument, Brecht asserts that the gaps between the different historical periods are not to be filled in:

We must drop our habit of taking the different social structures of past periods, then stripping them of everything that makes them different; so that they all look more or less like our own, which then acquires from this process a certain air of having been there all along, in other words of permanence pure and simple. Instead we must leave them their distinguishing marks and keep their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen to be impermanent too. (1964: 190).

Thus, Brecht draws attention to the need of avoiding the annihilation of distance with a view to “encouraging a critical attitude” rather than a “serene acceptance of an apparently inevitable fate” (Kritzer 1991: 3). In this regard, Brecht’s historicization turns the tables, and

gives the audience an active role for the sake of resistance against “the presumed ideological neutrality of any historical reflection” (Diamond 1997: 50). In this sense, “[e]xposing hidden aspects of the past and exploring their consequences for contemporary experience has provided a fruitful undertaking for feminist playwrights” (Reinelt 1996: 43).

The last point to analyze in Brechtian theater is the notion of the *gestus*, which is “[t]he explosive (and elusive) synthesis of alienation, historicization, and the ‘not...but’, [...] a gesture, a word, an action, a tableau, by which, separately or in a series, the social attitudes encoded in the playtext become visible to the spectator” (Diamond 1997: 52). In addition, as Patrice Pavis states, *gestus* lays bare ‘the class behind the individual, the critique behind the naive object, the commentary behind the affirmation’”, thereby presenting the audience “the key to the relationship between the play being performed and the public” (qtd. in Diamond 1997: 53). The *gestus* encourages the audience to observe the contradictory relations between discursive ideologies, and it “signifies a moment of theoretical insight into sex—gender complexities, not only in the play’s ‘fable,’ but in the culture which the play, at the moment of reception, is dialogically reflecting and shaping” (Diamond 1997: 53). Expanding on the notion of the *gestus*, Elaine Aston asserts “the potential of a feminist/Brechtian *Gestus* for removing the sight/site of the female body out of its objectified position in the ‘male gaze’ to a site/sight of ‘looking-at-being-looked-at-ness’” (1995: 89). Accordingly, gestic feminist criticism proves helpful in the analysis of the representation of female body in that it encourages the audience to “‘alienate’ or foreground those moments in a playtext when social attitudes about gender and sexuality conceal or disrupt patriarchal ideology” (Diamond 1997: 54). “In generating meanings”, thus, “[gestic feminist criticism] would recover (specifically gestic) moments in which the historical actor, the character, the spectator, *and* the author enter and disrupt the scopic regime of realist representation” (Diamond 1997: 54; emphasis in original).

Having analyzed a feminist practice of theater, which subverts patriarchal and heteronormative conventions dominant in conventional theater through the adoption of a range of unorthodox theatrical strategies, I argue that Churchill's *Cloud Nine* stands out as one of the most distinguished examples of a resisting and groundbreaking practice of feminist theater. Even if it was first performed in 1979, it could still be regarded as an innovatory play in our *zeitgeist* in terms its liberal treatment of the notions of gender and sexuality. Hence, the following chapter aspires to explore Churchill's position as a feminist playwright and analyze *Cloud Nine* in accordance with the already-established theoretical framework of this study.

### **3. A SEX/GENDER OF ONE'S OWN IN FEMINIST THEATER: CARYL CHURCHILL'S *CLOUD NINE***

Caryl Churchill stands out as one of the most prestigious British playwrights by virtue of her outstandingly innovative theatrical techniques and her critical stance on the mainstream patriarchal hegemony. For a long period of time, she was regarded to be “one of only two contemporary women playwrights in the English theater to receive critical and scholarly attention (the other was Pam Gems)” (Aston 2003: 18). The attention drawn to her as a playwright lies in her adoption of pioneering theatrical structures, together with her passionate concern for social reformation and feminism alike. Churchill, thus, criticizes the established notions in a heterosexual power matrix by arguing against the status quo. Starting from the late 1950s, she, accordingly, has written plays for radio, television and stage with the constant objective to write against the grain and provoke the questioning of intractable concerns of her contemporary society. The pivotal concern of her plays is shaped around the tenacious desire to challenge the taken-for-granted societal conventions and to empower audiences “to ask further questions and seek satisfactory answers in the world outside theater”, which heralds “[a] dual fascination with ideas and theatrical forms” (Kritzer 1991: 1).

As a woman playwright, “who began writing professionally in the activist climate of the post-Brecht British fringe and the socialist debate in the women’s movement” (Diamond 1988b: 188-9), Churchill aspires to explore most demanding issues such as class consciousness, socialist-feminism and sexual politics with a view to paving the way for social awareness. Thus, with the aim of pursuing her theatrical agenda of raising questions about the enforced norms of patriarchy, Churchill experiments with the content and the theatrical structures in her plays through the employment of non-Aristotelian theatrical conventions. Furthermore, her brilliance as a playwright “is matched by an unusual ability to perceive and analyze the basic patterns that maintain an oppressive society” (Kritzer 1991: 2). Therefore,

Churchill is exceptionally revered among the theatrical circles for her “distinctive approach to playwrighting, distinctive because of her peculiar ability to connect with concerns of the contemporary moment and her particularly innovative manipulation of dramatic form and style” (Adiseshiah 2009: 1).

Accordingly, with the aim of questioning the status quo of the contemporary moment, she mingles her theatrical approach with a socialist-feminist point of view so as to highlight, and thus undermine, the patriarchal norms of social and cultural intelligibility. In line with Churchill’s approach to feminism that “begins with a keen awareness of exclusion from male cultural, social, sexual, political, and intellectual discourse”(Dolan 1988:3), I aspire to explain certain forms of feminism that flourished during the 1970s, namely bourgeois or liberal feminism, radical or cultural feminism and materialist or socialist feminism. According to Elaine Aston:

[B]ourgeois or liberal feminism proposes the amelioration of women’s position in society without any radical change to its political, economic, or social structures, e.g. through legislative reform. Radical feminism locates the oppression of women in the patriarchal domination of women by men, and advocates the abolition of the man-made structures which reinforce gender-based inequality. (Radical feminism has more recently been termed cultural feminism, especially in American contexts) [...] Materialist feminism [...] critiques the historical and material conditions of class, race, and gender oppression, and demands the radical transformation of social structures. (1995: 8)

As Churchill herself asserts, “socialism and feminism aren’t synonymous but I feel strongly about both, and wouldn’t be interested in a form of one that didn’t include the other” (qtd. in Betsko and Koenig 1987: 78), and thus expresses her identification with socialism and feminism. In this regard, Churchill embraces socialist-materialist feminism, which “aims to analyze and understand the way in which power relations based on class interact with power relations based on gender—again, at both the individual and the social level” (Wandor 1986: 136) on the grounds that it “deconstructs the mythic subject Woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations” (Dolan qtd. in Austin 1990: 5).

Furthermore, socialist-materialist feminism could be deployed with the aim of “stripping the notion of sexuality of its assumedly ‘natural’ character and [exposing] it as an ideological construct, just like Brecht wanted to reveal the economical and social constraints that determined the dominant view of reality, by laying bare its historical character” (Borowski 2004: 135). Thus, as an ardent supporter of the social questioning of women’s position in society, Churchill attempts to maintain the essential elements of socialist-materialist feminism in her plays by preserving “the prominent position given to questions of race, class, and sexual preference, which receive little treatment in either liberal or radical feminism” (Austin 1990: 5). Hence, Churchill’s socialist-materialist feminist approach assists her in the exploration of contemporary concerns of women in general, thereby setting itself an example in the feminist commitment to open up further questioning of patriarchal hegemonic norms. Therefore, not only is she credited with her “pioneering approach to theatrical form, a form that consistently breaks down barriers in its discovery of new dramatic structures”, but also with her “diversity of content, which gives full expression to the abundant experiences of individuals and groups of people struggling to make sense of themselves and their social contexts” (Adiseshiah 2009: 219). As a result, she becomes an influential figure in theater by virtue of her manifestation of its “limitless possibilities” (Billington qtd. in Aragay and Zozaya 2007b: 115).

In accordance with her distinctive approach to feminism in her writings, Churchill has produced plays laden with thought-provoking issues by making use of “the inherent density of theater to actuate its potential for multiplicity, relationality, and unresolved contradiction” (Kritzer 1991: 12). Thus, her theater is remarkable for paving the way for multiple productions of interpretation, thereby subverting the established notions of intelligibility in terms of race, sex/gender, class and culture. In this way, her plays constitute a deliberate challenge against patriarchal societal conventions regarding the content hereof, which proves

analogous to her defiant theatrical forms in the pursuit of raising strident criticism of uncontested norms of propriety in the heterosexual matrix of power relations. Considering her *oeuvre*, it becomes conducive to assert that Churchill ardently attempts to contest the non-disputed standards of patriarchy by repudiating the socially and culturally determined ways of perceiving the status of women. This idea proves fruitful for the interests of this study in that Churchill's challenge to the monolithic norms of patriarchy in terms of sexual, gender and racial oppression forms the pivotal argument of *Cloud Nine* (1979) that does away with the paradigmatic notions of social and cultural intelligibility in the framework of a heteronormative world.

### **3.1. *Cloud Nine*: A Mirror Held up to Nature?**

“Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you [...] For anything so o’erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end both at the first, and now, was and is, to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature”.

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.ii. 2-22

In the players' scene (III.ii) of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*, when Hamlet talks to the players about how to act in *The Mousetrap*, the play-within-the-play, he holds a mirror to each player's face and advises them to act in such a way that they could function as mirrors held up to nature. However, “[t]heater doesn't hold the mirror up to nature, but is the quintessential simulation of simulations, a hyperreality” (Freedman 1996: 100). In this sense, Churchill takes Hamlet's argument further in *Cloud Nine*, and breaks the unidirectional relationship between the signifier and the signified, so that the sign does not necessarily reflect the true nature of the characters by virtue of her cross-gender, cross-racial and cross-generational theatrical techniques.

The burden of this work is to analyze Churchill's contribution to the theoretical framework discussed in the preceding chapters through the analysis of *Cloud Nine*. Thus, my analysis starts off with the argument that in *Cloud Nine*, a two-act play, Churchill explores the issues of sex/gender construction within a patriarchal and heterosexual framework alongside its connections with sexual and racial oppression, thereby challenging the established norms of sexuality and the linearity of desire that could be solely experienced for the opposite sex. Furthermore, as Katherine E. Kelly argues, her daring approach in *Cloud Nine* "emerges from her rejection of linear, date-focused history in favor of a thematically driven political historiography, enriched by comedy as an ironizing prism for viewing the past" (2010: 648).

With a view to opening the play up to multiple points of view, and thus avoiding the narrow-minded provincialism of heteronormative societal structures, Churchill developed *Cloud Nine* with a three-week Joint Stock workshop with Max Stafford-Clark, who considers her to be one of the Royal Court Theater's "archetypal figure[s]" (qtd. in Aragay and Zozaya 2007a: 33). For the purposes of the workshop Churchill and Stafford-Clark began to work with various participants so as to obtain as many personal experiences and insights as possible. To this end, "the collection assembled for the workshop included a straight married couple, a straight divorced couple, a gay male couple, a lesbian, a lesbian-to-be, at least two bisexual men and [...] the usual number of heterosexuals" (Stafford Clark qtd. in Roberts and Stafford-Clark 2007: 70). The idea of setting up a workshop proved successful with respect to the main objective of Churchill in that it helped the participants to "[explore] stereotypes and role reversals in games and improvisations, read books and [talk] to other people" (Churchill 1996: 245), which eventually provided Churchill with "a varied diet of testimony and improvisation" (Stafford Clark qtd. in Roberts and Stafford-Clark 2007: 69). The workshop, in addition, encouraged the participants to bear personal testimony to gather and analyze the rich multiplicity in terms of sexuality and gender-based identities.

Churchill apparently desires to include the very diversity of much of everyday life by trying to obtain a minute observation from people who lead different walks of life. Janelle Reinelt rightly asserts Churchill's openness towards the relationality and plurality of the allegedly stable notions of a heteronormative world:

This workshop makes it clear that Churchill was never a separatist— it was not that she wanted only to work with women and write about women; rather she wanted to write about the changing identities of all people at this time, with attention and privilege accorded to oppressed voices in an economy of social relations that was struggling with new interventions from gays and lesbians, men who were trying to adjust to change and offer themselves as 'feminist men', and eventually transsexuals who complicated the equation by seeming to reify gender categories while clearly being outside the norms of typical categories of sexual behavior. (2009: 28)

Churchill intends to be more accessible to different points of view through working with other people who could help her grow a broader understanding of their experiences. To put it in her own words: "If you're working by yourself, then you're not accountable to anyone but yourself. [...] You don't get forced in quite the same way into seeing how your inner feelings connect up with larger things that happen to other people" (qtd. in Cousin 1988: 4). In this regard, Churchill expresses her overt enthusiasm for the need of empathy with other individuals' distinct perceptions and mutual understanding. Her theatrical zeal for breaking the violent hierarchy and being accessible to a myriad of standpoints in life is such that she bases the title of the play on the personal account of "a woman who ran the snack bar in the building where the company met" (Kritzer 1991: 128). During the workshop this woman in question related her sexual relationship with her husband by saying that "[w]e may not do it as often as you young people, but when we have our organisms [*sic*], we're on Cloud Nine" (Kritzer 1991: 128). Churchill's openness to different perspectives is very telling in terms of her interest in the exploration of diversity in the verbalization of individual accounts of sexuality in that she bases the title on "the authority of this woman's (and her husband's) experience", thereby demonstrating her "recognition in all people, even those not possessed of

education or high-status job, the potential for personal empowerment and change through the enjoyment of sexual pleasure previously denied by societal constraints” (Kritzer 1991: 128). Thus, Churchill gives evidence of her all-embracing approach to non-conforming identities and guilt-free sexuality in *Cloud Nine*, a play which empowers individuals to accept and respect the multiplicity of sexual preferences without submitting to the provincialism of heteronormativity.

Churchill’s adherence to “a multi-leveled paradigm of change” is reflected on her structuring the play in two acts, which “emphasizes discontinuity through contrasting dramatic styles, different time periods, and partly different casts of characters” (Kritzer 1991: 116). To begin with, Act One of *Cloud Nine* is set in a colonized African country during the Victorian era and depicts a white upper-middle class British family with a husband (Clive), a wife (Betty), her mother (Maud), a daughter (Victoria), and a son (Edward), together with a black servant (Joshua), children’s governess (Ellen), a widow (Mrs. Saunders) and finally an explorer (Harry Bagley). Act One starts with a patriotic song addressing the “sons of England” (Churchill 1999: 251)<sup>1</sup> that is sung by all and later, to the amusement of the reader, Clive takes the opportunity to introduce the family members, which becomes contradictory and rather ironical through the employment of the cross-casting technique.

The idea of challenging the credibility of patriarchal norms of intelligibility within a heterosexual and white matrix constitutes a pivotal argument in the consideration of the parallel between sexual and colonial oppression in *Cloud Nine*. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak once argued, “[t]he constitution of the sexed subject in terms of the discourse of castration was, in fact, something that came into being through the imposition of imperialism” (qtd. in Aston 2003: 126). In this respect, Churchill aspires to explore “[Jean] Genet’s idea that colonial and sexual oppression are similar” on grounds of “the femininity of the

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<sup>1</sup> All following references to *Cloud Nine* will be to the page only.

colonized person” (Churchill qtd. in Fitzsimmons 1989: 46), which tacitly perpetuates “the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorized repression” (Genet qtd. in Churchill 1996: 245). In this act Betty is played by a male actor because “she wants to be what men want her to be” (Churchill 1996: 245), which “makes gender visible by separating feminine gender from the female body” (Kritzer 1991: 113). Accordingly, Joshua, a black servant blindly committed to his manly colonial master and all that he represents, is played by a white male actor. Edward, the vulnerable effeminate boy who is stuck in the grip of conventional expectations based on his sex/gender is played by a female actor, although “[he] find[s] it hard as [we] can see” (252). This highlights the role of the social contract predicated upon the construction of gender-based identity. Furthermore, Victoria is played by a dummy, which perfectly embodies the social role imposed on her and depicts the social inequality practiced by the representative of patriarchy, Clive, to the extent that she is dehumanized and reduced to the position of an object whose corporeal existence is at the hands of patriarchy, and thus always at stake.

Act One begins with Clive’s arrival home following his attempts to silence the rebellious natives, which causes great anxiety in Betty. She is also concerned about the fact that Joshua disrespects her by reminding her that “[she’s] got legs under that dress” (255), after refusing to fetch a book for Betty, only to be reproached by Clive tongue-in-cheek. While they wait for Harry Bagley, who is said to visit them, Mrs. Saunders, to Clive’s prurient joy, shows up unexpectedly so as to protect herself from the disobedient natives. In this rather troublesome atmosphere the characters pursue their lecherous desires and common interests. Thus, Clive seduces the now helpless widow in order to take sexual advantage of her. In the meantime, Betty regards Harry as the object of her affections, but is tacitly rejected on the unreal grounds that Harry likes her most as the submissive wife of Clive, thereby obscuring the fact that he is a homosexual, and previously had a guilt-ridden sexual

relationship with her son. As a result of his linguistic incapacity to name his sexual experience with Harry, Edward resorts to refer to it by implication, and says that he wants to “do it again” (270) with ‘Uncle Harry’, thus seeking his sexual gratification through him. On the other hand, Edward is constantly caught when he plays with Victoria’s doll under the pretext of minding it, as a result of which he is sternly rebuked by Clive on accounts of the values and interests expected from ‘a man-to-be’. Illusionary as it is, Clive aspires “to *teach* him to grow up to be a man” (252; emphasis added), through which Clive inadvertently supports the idea that manhood is not something to be taken for granted, but rather something to be learned and practiced.

As the family and friends hold a Christmas picnic despite the rebellious actions, Clive tries to have sexual intercourse with Mrs. Saunders, to the dissatisfaction of the latter. The group starts to play hide-and-seek, through which Betty, Ellen, Harry and Edward pursue their chance of gaining the favor of their would-be partners. Joshua reports much of the action to Clive, serving as the omnipresent eye of the *paterfamilias*. As a result, Clive reproaches Betty for having “the weakness of [her] sex” (277) for allowing herself to be seduced by Harry. Clive talks to Harry complaining about his ruining “the friendship between [men]” because of Harry’s letting himself “spoiled by the weaker sex” (282), and thus Clive reproaches him for destroying their homosocial bonds, which, by corollary, require a sense of homophobia and ‘compulsory heterosexuality’. To his ultimate perplexity, Harry reveals his homosexuality by making a pass at him. Clive gets exasperated and forces Harry to marry in order to cleanse his soul from “the most revolting perversion” (283). Therefore, the two homosexuals, Ellen and Harry are made to get married. In the meantime, everybody learns that Joshua’s parents are killed by the British soldiers. This unexpected news reduces Clive to an ostensible lament, and immediately after that he orders Joshua “to bring [them] a drink” (284). However, Joshua keeps saying that he is not sorry for his parents because “[his] mother and father were bad

people” (284). Previously, Joshua reports to Clive that Ellen loves Betty, but gets admonished owing to Clive’s steadfast refusal of even the possibility of any kind of lesbian relationship. Finally, during the wedding ceremony of Harry and Ellen, Clive is asked to give a speech and toasts this dysfunctional couple, while Joshua produces a gun with the intention of shooting Clive. Edward is understood to be the only witness to see the action, but does nothing to prevent it.

In Act Two the setting is moved from Victorian Africa to London, and the action takes place in 1979. While one hundred years pass between the acts, the characters age only twenty-five years. As Aston argues, “[t]he continuity of linear history is, therefore, displaced by a historical memory of sexual politics; the past is physically marked in and on the body of the performer, present” (1997: 32). Besides, this chronological disruption is aimed at providing the reader with “more energy [coming] from the women and the gays”, while Act One, “like the society it shows, is male dominated and firmly structured” (Churchill 1996: 246). This radical change in the structure of the second act demonstrates “[t]he uncertainties and changes of society, and a more feminine and less authoritarian feeling” (Churchill 1996: 246), which becomes more lucid as the plot unfolds. Thus, “all the characters in this act change a little for the better” (Churchill 1996: 246). Accordingly, partly through the new characters, Gerry and Lin, who seem to be both homosexual, Betty, Edward and Victoria accelerate the process of their emancipation from the grip of patriarchy. Nevertheless, and ostensibly liberal as he is, Martin, Victoria’s husband, tries to control her only to trigger the breakdown of their relationship. Except for Cathy, the daughter of Lin, who is played by the same actor that plays Clive in Act One, all the characters are performed by actors of their own sex. In the case of Betty, Churchill justifies this change on the grounds that “Betty is played by a woman, as she becomes real to herself” (Churchill 1996: 246). Even though patriarchy’s sexual oppression is

seemed to diminish in the act, “the bitter end of colonialism is apparent in Lin’s soldier brother [Bill], who dies in Northern Ireland” (Churchill 1996: 246).

Act Two begins with Cathy, a disobedient 4-year-old, singing a rather scatological song, which creates a direct contrast with the patriotic and discriminatory song of Act One. At the same time, the use of songs helps to create a psychological distance between the reader/spectator and the actors, thereby alienating the former to urge him/her to take part in the critical productions of meaning. Besides, Lin, a working-class lesbian divorcee, and Victoria, now a middle-class woman considering a job transfer to Manchester, develop a relationship regardless of their mostly contradicting points of view. Edward, now a gardener and a practicing gay man, has a stereotypical relationship with Gerry on account of his wish to perform the traditional feminine roles. Betty, in the meantime, announces that she is leaving Clive. Then, Lin, Victoria and Edward start to live together and become “involved in a *ménage à trois*” (Kritzer 1991: 115). Feeling free from Clive’s oppression for the first time, Betty learns to live by herself. Not knowing that Gerry is gay like her son, she even attempts to arrange a date with him. She acknowledges her lack of interest in Edward’s sexual preferences, and thus she says: “I think Edward did try to tell me once but I didn’t listen” (319). On the other hand, Victoria, Edward and Lin start to call up a mythical goddess in the park so as to ask her to “give [them] the history [they] haven’t had, make [them] the women [they] can’t be” (308). Nevertheless, Victorian values are not easily done away with in that Betty sees spectral figures from the first act, when she gradually becomes more real to herself. This reconciliation with her past is embodied with the embrace of Betty from Act One and Betty from Act Two in the final scene of the play.

### 3.2. Troubling Genders on Stage

“A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God”.

—Deuteronomy (22:5)

“We're all born stark naked;  
To dress is bizarre.  
And that's the reason why  
Everybody's in drag”.

—Lynn Lavner, "You Are What You Wear"  
(qtd. in Herrmann 1990: 294)

One of the most important theatrical techniques employed by Churchill in *Cloud Nine* is the use of drag and cross-dressing, which challenges the notion of stable gender identities in a heteronormative framework, and could even be regarded sacrilegious by moralists or religious extremists. As Paola Pugliatti argues, cross-dressing is “disguise in the theater” (2003: 83). Therefore, it could also be criticized by conservatives on the grounds that disguise is blasphemous “since God established for us an outward appearance, a social position, a sex and a gender as well as a role inside the community”, and “to disguise ourselves means to betray and deface all that has been decreed for us on high”, which leads to the argument that “[i]n secular terms, disguise is an eminently social infraction, one that characteristically threatens the social order and, consequently, political stability” (Pugliatti 2003: 65).

Using “the machinery of theater, which is always suspended on the borderline between illusion and reality” (Borowski 2004: 137), Churchill adopts the technique of drag and cross-dressing with the aim of subverting the naturalized notions of gender by demonstrating that “gender and sexuality form in a constant, ongoing exchange between social dictate and personal resistance or acquiescence” (Dolan 2010: 14), and furthermore, that gendered identity is a construct that could be fashioned incongruously as a result of its factitiousness.

Thus, in our contemporary times, it could be tempting to regard Churchill's theatrical use of drag as a bow to Butler's theorization of gender, considering the fact that Butler argues that "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [*sic*]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (1988: 519; emphasis in original), adding furthermore that "gender [...] must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (1988: 519).

This argument proves helpful for the interests of this study since Butler goes on to assert that:

This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of a constituted *social temporality*. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (1988: 519-20; emphasis in original)

Hence, a gendered identity could be understood to be a factitiously abiding identity, which could herald the possibility of subversion within the heterosexual matrix.

Moreover, drawing from Brecht's theatrical techniques, Churchill "does away with the seamless realistic strategies of representation which concealed the problematic relationships between sex and gender" (Borowski 2004: 137). Following the argument of Butler, one could argue that *Cloud Nine* disproves the unidirectional continuity of the construction of sex and gender with the intention of asserting that one's body does not once and for all determine one's gender in a hegemonic discourse predicated upon heterosexuality, as gender itself is "a free-floating artifice" (Butler 1999: 10). Butler, accordingly, argues the ostensibly natural relationship between sex and gender:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit,

the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies. (1999: 10)

This follows that, as has been articulated in the first chapter of this study, “*man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler 1999: 10; emphasis in original), which follows that “gender and sexuality aren’t innate ‘essences’ but social constructions that can be contested and redefined” (Dolan 2010: 14). In this regard, Churchill subverts the assumedly linear interaction between the notions of sex and gender through the representation of the mis-signifying processes in the staging of the play. By the same token, the actors’ bodies as socially and culturally constructed ‘sites’ cease to signify the taken-for-granted signs through the subversion of “the traditional patterns of representation by making visible the tension between the real and the fictitious, the actor and the role, the body and the costume” (Borowski 2004: 143). Thus, Churchill manifests the fragility of the ties that hold the gender and sex dichotomy, thereby “[allowing] the spectator the possibility of seeing beyond ‘institutionalized gender roles and sexuality’ by crossing vestimentary signs of masculinity and femininity” (Aston 1997: 32).

In relation to the discussion shaped around reality and fiction, talking about the complex relationships between a theatrical and a social role, Butler argues that “although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions” (Butler 1988: 527). She goes on to analyze the theatrical conventions that facilitate the creation of the distinction of realities in theater and non-theatrical contexts, and argues that because of this distinction:

[O]ne can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements;

the various conventions which announce that 'this is only a play' allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life. Clearly, there is theater which attempts to contest or, indeed, break down those conventions that demarcate the imaginary from the real [...] Yet in those cases one confronts [...] that the act is not contrasted with the real, but *constitutes* a reality that is in some sense new, a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated into the pre-existing categories that regulate gender reality. [...] [O]ne may want to claim, but oh, this is *really* a girl or a woman, or this is *really* a boy or a man, and further that the *appearance* contradicts the *reality* of the gender, that the discrete and familiar reality must be there, nascent, temporarily unrealized, perhaps realized at other times or other places. (Butler 1988: 527; emphasis in original)

In view of Butler's argument, it could be argued that through the use of drag and cross-casting strategies, Churchill contests the naturalized notions of an abiding gendered identity by subverting the linear relationship between one's physical appearance and one's gender.

Elaborating on this idea, Butler argues that drag "fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (1999: 174). Hence, *Cloud Nine* could be said to argue that there is no essence or primordial core of gender, and thus that gender is performative. Jill Dolan expands on this idea:

Our socially constructed gender roles are inscribed in our languages and in our bodies. The stage then, is a proper place to explore gender ambiguity, not to expunge it cathartically from society but to play with, confound, and deconstruct gender categories. If we stop considering the stage as a mirror of reality, we can use it as a laboratory in which to reconstruct new, non-genderized identities. (1992: 8)

As gender roles are encrypted on the body and in the language, theater becomes a helpful site to question the gender construction upon the recognition that the stage does not serve as a looking glass, on which reality is reflected. Then, as Churchill does, the stage could function as an effectual site, where non-conforming gender identities could be explored with a view to pursuing a myriad of possibilities in terms of gendered identities. This empowering idea is reinforced by Sue-Ellen Case: "The feminist in theater can create the laboratory in which the single most effective mode of repression—gender—can be exposed, dismantled and

removed” (qtd. in Austin 1990: 19). In the light of this discussion, one could argue that gender reality is “created through sustained social performances”, and furthermore, that “the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed” (Butler 1988: 528). In relation to this, it could be claimed that the theorization of “gender as a performed style” could help feminist playwrights, who do away with the naturalized notions of gender, come up with “a strong explanation for how styles of femininity and masculinity become established through cultural and theatrical performances, and how they might be challenged by modifying or exploding those styles in representation” (Reinelt and Roach 2007: 313).

In addition, cross-gender and cross-casting, together with the doubling of roles are pivotal theatrical techniques to “Churchill’s destabilizing of fixed sexual identities determined by dominant heterosexual ideology”, through which the characters’ “‘offside’ bodies disrupt the construction of sexual, and in the case of Joshua, racial identities” (Aston 1997: 32). The tragicomic relationship between heterosexual and non-heterosexual identities is taken to its most farcical point with the purportedly heterosexual marriage between the two homosexual characters, Harry and Ellen, whose sexual orientations are unintelligible in the heterosexual matrix. This farcical element in *Cloud Nine* could be regarded as a critique of the reproductive interests of patriarchal structures since “cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate and guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself” (Butler 1988: 524). As kinship systems depend on heterosexual marriage, “they therefore transform males and females into ‘men’ and ‘women’, each an incomplete half which can only find wholeness when united with the other” (Rubin qtd. in Clum 1989: 92). Hence, it could be argued that “[b]ecause all cultures seek to reproduce themselves, and because the particular social identity of the kinship group must be

preserved, exogamy is instituted and, as its presupposition, so is exogamic heterosexuality” (Butler 1999: 93).

Besides, Harry’s homosexuality is regarded as a disease that “can destroy an empire” (283). Hence, homosexuality is regarded as a pathological criminal condition that is “more dangerous than diphtheria” (283). Clive’s steadfast ignorance of non-heterosexuality is such that he does not even acknowledge the existence of lesbianism in that he outrageously refuses to acknowledge Ellen’s sexual preference, which all but reduces Ellen to the position of an invisible and unintelligible object. As Butler argues, this attitude could stem from the fact that “[d]iscrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (1999: 178). Thus, Churchill’s use of cross-gender casting sheds light on “the visibility of heterosexuality, marking the invisibility of lesbian identity and desire” (Aston 1997: 33). The ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ leads feminist critics to contest “the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring the right of physical, economical, and emotional access”, which means “the rendering invisible of the lesbian possibility” (Rich 1980: 647).

As the representative of patriarchy and an oppressive regulation of society during the Victorian era, Clive embodies the anxiety felt by the heteronormative world. With the aim of securing his place, he incessantly creates a violent hierarchy between himself, i.e. heterosexuality, and non-conforming sexual orientations in a heterosexual societal structure. His desperate urge to render homosexuality invisible and pathological stems from his motivation to define himself as its ultimate opposite, and thus maintain the stability of his position. This idea has been suggested in the previous chapter of this study, when it has been argued that “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (Hall 1996: 4) as opposed to the erroneous notion of “integral, originary and unified” identities (Hall 1996: 1). This argument becomes effective in the analysis of the ideological approach of patriarchal

regimes to non-heterosexual orientations. Ironic as it is, heterosexuality needs non-heterosexuality in order to be what it purports to be. Moreover, heterosexual identity is predicated upon its allegedly stable and primordial distinction from different forms of sexual orientations, and it needs to forge a pellucid difference between itself and the 'other'. One can argue that the center/heterosexuality only becomes intelligible in the gender-oriented hegemonic discourse through the exclusion of the 'other'/non-heterosexuality, thereby repressing the alleged threat of the difference posed by the 'other'. In this regard, curiously enough, the publication of *Cloud Nine* "coincided with the English translation of Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis in *The History of Sexuality*" (Kelly 2010: 648). Thus, Churchill's argument on sexual repression could aptly be associated with Foucault's theorizations of the 'repressive hypothesis', according to which "the liberal sexuality of the seventeenth century was repressed during the Victorian period", and furthermore, "sexuality [is] neither a product of nature nor of biology", in contrast, "sexuality is a historical construct produced by the proliferation of discourses by the end of the nineteenth century" (Borowski 2004: 136). This leads to the argument that "speaking about sex is a way of simultaneously producing and controlling it [...], since there is no position that can be taken up outside the law, subversion must occur *within* existing discursive structures" (Salih 2002: 59; emphasis in original). Hence, Butler assertively argues that "[t]he notion of an 'original' sexuality forever repressed and forbidden thus becomes a production of the law which subsequently functions as its prohibition" (1999: 97).

By the same token, drawing from Foucault's argument, Kelly claims that "Victorian sexual repression produced, rather than suppressed, a greater knowledge of sexuality out of its will to know, name, and consequently control it" (2010: 648) because of "a multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself; an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more" (Foucault 1978: 18). Arguing that sex and gender

are not inherent or primordial, but rather they are discursive constructs created by discourse and the law, Butler underlines her idea that the law is plural, and therefore, preceding the subjection of sexed and gendered identities to prohibition, the law *per se* produces them. Accordingly, she asserts that the law produces the very allegedly unintelligible identities that it purports to silence in the heterosexual matrix with a view to securing the central position of intelligible identities and ensuring the perpetuation of the violent hierarchy between the two. Thus, the incest/homosexual taboos are understood to produce the homosexual/incestuous orientations. Articulating her theorization of “the generativity of that taboo”, Butler underlines that “not only does the taboo forbid and dictate sexuality in certain forms, but it inadvertently produces a variety of substitute desires and identities that are in no sense constrained in advance, except insofar as they are ‘substitutes’ in some sense” (1999: 97). Namely, she claims that the repressive and productive function of the homosexual/incest taboos cannot be isolated from one another in view of the argument that “the law which prohibits [the homosexual/incestuous] union is the selfsame law that invites it” (1999: 97).

Having established that the taboos against homosexuality and incest that ostensibly prohibit such unions actually invent them, one could argue that in *Cloud Nine* Clive, i.e. the representative of the heterosexual patriarchal regime, produces the inadmissible sexual orientation for the interests of ensuring the stability of heterosexuality as the sanctioned type of sexuality and desire. With this in mind, Clive reduces the non-heterosexual unions to the point of a pathological condition. Therefore, he firmly condemns Harry for failing the patriarchal requisites expected from a man on the grounds that homosexuality is something that degenerates what is best in men. Through this homophobic discourse, Clive attempts to secure his established position in the patriarchal pyramid and the hierarchy between himself and the ‘constitutive other’, which resonates with Butler’s argument:

[T]he operation of [a productive] law is justified and consolidated through the construction of a narrative account of its own genealogy which effectively

masks its own immersion in power relations. The incest taboo [like the homosexual taboo], then, would repress no primary dispositions, but effectively create the distinction between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ dispositions to describe and reproduce the distinction between a legitimate heterosexuality and an illegitimate homosexuality. (1999: 92)

Thus, it could be argued that Butler’s theorization of the ‘productive law’ indicates that homosexuality is fundamental to the construction of heterosexuality with the consequence that “for heterosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it *requires* an intelligible conception of homosexuality and also requires the prohibition of that conception in rendering it culturally unintelligible” (Butler 1999: 98; emphasis in original).

In the light of what has been argued thus far, *Cloud Nine* could be understood to contest the naturalized conceptions of gendered identities through the use of drag and cross-casting techniques, thereby presenting a world that is devoid of a stable center and no longer exclusively heterosexual. This idea is upheld more liberally in the second act, where the characters, formerly lacking linguistic capacity, let alone the physical liberty to practice their sexuality, are emancipated from the grip of patriarchy. Consequently, the characters seek their sexual gratification, be it heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual, without feeling guilt or contempt. This is taken to its ultimate point in this act when Edward, Lin and Victoria start to live together and experience a *ménage à trois*, which is finally accepted by Betty, and her approval is reinforced by her suggestion for their living all together under the same roof. Besides, through distinctive theatrical strategies, Churchill demonstrates that gendered identity is a construct that is intentionally made to seem abiding and primordial with the intention of securing the maintaining of patriarchal norms in a heterosexual matrix with the consequence of marginalizing the non-conforming identities. However, as gender is discursively constructed, it could be performatively reconstructed in a subversive way, which breaks the unidirectional understanding of the relationship between sex and gender by arguing that sex has always been gender all along, thereby arguing that “the distinction between sex

and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler 1999: 11). This innovative treatment of patriarchy’s factitious assertion of the stable gendered identities serves as a means of contesting the socially and culturally determined roles for individuals by letting the characters ‘do’ their gender identities subversively. This idea is particularly reinforced in the second act of the play, in which heterosexual norms of gender roles are subverted. As an example, Edward is no more dictated to act like a man as opposed to the first act, in which “[e]verybody’s always tried to stop [him] being feminine” (306). Now performed by a male actor, Edward’s body is opened to subversive repetitions of stylized acts. He renders his socially determined gender anew, thereby performing the traits that are associated with femininity. He ‘becomes’ a woman, and states that “I think I’m a lesbian” (307). Thus, the stability of gender-based identities is discredited. Similarly, previously having been in a heterosexual marriage, Lin leads a lesbian relationship with Victoria, but she is well aware of the still existing restrictions on individual sexual preferences. Thus, she says, “I’ve changed who I sleep with, I can’t change everything” (303). The patriarchal societal conventions tenaciously impose the stereotypical notions of gender roles on individuals. As a result, Cathy is bullied at school because of Lin’s non-feminine vestimentary choices, which could be regarded as the use of drag in non-theatrical contexts with the aim of deconstructing the heterosexual matrix, but always at the expense of marginalization and being rendered unintelligible.

### **3.3. A Feminist Vindication: “Make Us the Women We Can’t Be”**

“Goddess of many names, oldest of the old, who walked in chaos and created life, hear us calling you back through time, before Jehovah, before Christ, before men drove you out and burnt your temples, hear us, Lady, give us back what we were, give us the history we haven’t had, make us the women we can’t be”.

—Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine* (1996: 308)

*Cloud Nine* could be read as a play vindicating a subject position for women, rather than granting them an object position at the hands of patriarchy. To this end, Churchill subverts the established codes of femininity and masculinity alike both in terms of content and theatrical form. The harsh criticism of patriarchal oppression becomes obvious in the analysis of the representation of the marginalized characters and their objectification by the *paterfamilias*.

Subjected to the destructive male fantasy and its constant supervision, female characters are devoid of subjective power. Thus, Betty is made to submit to Clive's patriarchal values, as a result of which she attributes secondary importance to her individuality and desires. She becomes the embodiment of the female construction by patriarchy to the extent that Clive claims authority over her because "everything she is she owes to [him]" (251). This explains much about Clive's egocentric behavior towards Betty, on whom he projects all his desires. As a result, she is trapped in patriarchy's power regulations, and states that "Clive is [her] society" (258), which symbolizes her absolute belonging to Clive's world that perpetuates her exclusion from subjective power. Rare as they are, her tenuous anarchic feelings are silenced by Maud, who substitutes the patriarchal authority in the absence of Clive. Thus, Maud lectures Betty about her roles in the family, and she says, "Betty you have to *learn* to be patient. I am patient. My mama was very patient" (258; emphasis added), which implies the vicious circle of female oppression. Besides, Maud asserts that womanhood in terms of the values of patriarchy is something to learn and practice constantly in order not to cease to emit signs of social and cultural intelligibility. According to this understanding, "to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman', to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler 1988: 522; emphasis in original).

Joshua, likewise, tries hard to be accepted in the world of his oppressors. His submission to the colonial discourse of Clive is such that he denies all his cultural values, including his skin color, which is eradicated from his body by the colonial gaze, and thus he becomes a perfect example of the tamable 'other'. His being played by a white actor also reinforces this idea, and he becomes the paradigmatic figure of a neither-nor dilemma in that he is not totally accepted by the colonizers as an equal human being, but rather he is solely recognizable when he serves the white men by becoming complicit in their oppression of the natives. Furthermore, he adopts the colonizer's religion, and prays to Jesus to protect them from his former tribe. At the same time, he also oppresses Betty with his power, which is passive, but still there, only to wake up to the fact that he must know his place and respect her little son.

Overwhelmed by the socially accepted norms of masculinity, Edward is constantly oppressed by Clive. However much he wants to play with Victoria's doll, he is prevented from doing so by Clive because "dolls are for girls" (274), thereby teaching him stereotypical notions of gender-based assumptions. Clive's anxiety over Edward's non-masculine attitudes is understandable because "gender is a *project* which has cultural survival as its end" (Butler 1999: 177; emphasis added). Thus, Clive tries to ensure the continuity of his cultural and social predominance. Furthermore, as "gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (Butler 1999: 178), Clive oppresses Edward to be just like him. According to Maud, even if Victoria does not want to play with her doll now, she "will *learn* to play with her" (275; emphasis added), which underlines the argument that gender-based divisions are constructions that are repeatedly stylized through submission to the patriarchal standards of propriety with the alarming consequence that gender-based divisions are copies of copies with no reliable origins, thereby parodying the notion of original and primordial values of femininity and masculinity. This takes the argument to the Baudrillardian terrain of simulacra

which is the result of “a loss of the distinction between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth” (Barry 1995: 87). Accordingly, as Butler argues, “there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates [*sic*] the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (1988: 522). Therefore, there is only one way for Edward to assert his own identity through a relieving and at the same time burdening recognition that he lives in a world of representations, and that the only way out is to acknowledge his ‘reality’ as an imagined subject by society and amidst ever-persisting gender-based conventions. Besides, he is constantly observed by the others, and punished when he is tempted to play with the doll. This produces great anxiety in Edward, making him think that playing with it “is very bad of [him]” (276), which emphasizes the ways in which patriarchal culture “through its custodians in the family, discipline the body, force it to ‘emit signs’ of clear masculinity and femininity” (Diamond 1988b: 196). However, with respect to his representation on stage by a female actor, Edward does not totally become a ‘docile’ body, as “[we] can see” (252). Not being completely submissive to patriarchal and colonial regulations, Joshua and Edward, two marginalized characters, take part in “a faked deconstruction of patriarchy, with the imagined death of the patriarch” (Monforte 2001: 95). Besides, through this false death of Clive, it could be argued that “Edward the son gets rid of his father, who blocks his way to his mother”, and thus, “[he] intends to go back to the Imaginary Order, to find himself again in a state of fusion with his mother [by] unmaking the step into the Symbolic”, which serves as “a reenactment of the ancestral Oedipal triangle” (Monforte 2001: 96).

As has been discussed before, stripped of the patriarchal figure owing to ‘the imagined death’ of Clive, Act Two could be regarded as a radically different act in terms of sexual liberation. Victoria finally becomes a flesh and blood individual, and asserts herself by

seeking her sexual desire without submitting to the heterosexual societal conventions instead of leading a guilt-ridden relationship with Lin and Edward. She becomes willing to explore non-heterosexual relationships, after being asked whether she is going to have sex with Lin through Lin's quite tempting promise that "[she]'d enjoy it" (296). This could be contrasted with the submissive and unpleasurable idea of sexual intercourse prevalent in Act One, in which Betty lectures Ellen on "what happens with a man", after Ellen asks her whether it is enjoyable by saying rather critically: "Ellen, you're not getting married to enjoy yourself" (286).

Similarly, Edward starts to enjoy his sexual life, but not without being always aware of the still existing prejudices. Therefore, after being asked openly by Lin whether he is gay, he answers cautiously: "Don't go around saying that. I might lose my job" (292). Fed up with the forced hypocrisy and clandestine life non-heterosexuals lead, Lin answers, "[i]t's not true and I never said it and I never thought it and I never will think it again" (292). Edward's reserved attitude in life is reflected in his relationship with Gerry, after which he finds comfort in the *ménage à trois* with Lin and Victoria. Therefore, all previously demonized actions, homosexuality and incest, are freely experienced without feeling any need to hide them from people, including Betty. Furthermore, in the incantation scene in the park Victoria, Lin and Edward invoke a female goddess, which represents female power and is reminiscent of Joshua's goddess in the story he relates to Edward in Act One, Scene Four. They ask her to "give [them] what they were, give [them] the history [they] haven't had, make [them] the women [they] can't be" (308). The prayer to the goddess of "breasts", "cunts", "fat bellies and babies" and "blood blood blood" (309) "invokes the absent 'offside' female body, which they need to remake desire and identity beyond the conventional ordering of sexuality" (Aston 1997: 36). Nevertheless, this yearning for power and subjectivity does not produce the desired outcome. Painfully enough, the incantation only brings Martin to the scene and the ghost of

Bill, Lin's soldier brother from Northern Ireland, who "testifies to England's continuing, if reduced, capacity to dominate and oppress" (Kritzer 1991: 125).

Betty herself pursues her sexual pleasure, after her decision to leave Clive. She entirely becomes real to her existence by starting to love herself as she is. Previously talking to Lin, Betty despises women by listing her erroneous reasons:

BETTY: They don't have such interesting conversations as men. There has never been a woman composer of genius. They don't have a sense of humor. They spoil things for themselves with their emotions. I can't say I do like women very much, no.

LIN: But you're a woman.

BETTY: There's nothing says you have to like yourself. (302-3)

Thus, Betty epitomizes the ultimate internalization of patriarchal values. She cannot even justify her self-loathing, but simply resorts to the simplification that there is no such rule that says the opposite, which could mean that there is no room for female self-love in patriarchal societal conventions. Only after she realizes that her body and desires do matter, can she lay claim to her individuality. In the final scene of the play Betty sees spectral figures from her past that try to inhibit her from entirely liberating herself from the grip of patriarchal values. She relates her painful discovery of her sexuality:

One night in bed in my flat I was so frightened I started touching myself. I thought my hand might go through space. I touched my face, it was there, my arm, my breast, and my hand went down where I thought it shouldn't, and I thought well there is somebody there. It felt very sweet, it was a feeling from very long ago, it was very soft, just barely touching, and I felt myself gathering together more and more and I felt angry with Clive and angry with my mother and I went on and on defying them, and there was this vast feeling growing in me and all round me and they couldn't stop me and no one could stop me and I was there and coming and coming. Afterwards I thought I'd betrayed Clive. My mother would kill me. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them. And I cried because I didn't want to be. But I don't cry about it any more. Sometimes I do it three times in one night and it really is great fun. (316)

Betty, in this sense, begins to value her own identity separate from any other person following her exploration of sexual gratification without feeling guilty, thereby asserting the importance of her feelings and desires.

In this regard, Betty becomes true to herself, and Betty from Act One embraces Betty from Act Two, after Betty ignores Clive's spectral figure from Act One. This embrace between Betty and Betty, therefore, could be argued to create a sense of female genitalia "as simultaneously one and more than one" with the evocation of "autoerotic pleasure of the self touching the self (Kritzer 1991: 127, 129). This scene also shows that "Betty of Act Two now feels herself, for the first time, to be separate from her Act One self, but acknowledges as well their continuing oneness" (Kritzer 1991: 127). This resonates with Irigaray's ideas of woman's touching herself:

[A woman] touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman 'touches herself' all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two—but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other. (1985: 24)

The play's final scene represents and highlights female subjectivity, thereby underlining the possibility of practicing sexuality subversively in the patriarchal matrix. These two different Bettys embracing each other could be said to argue that "[t]ouch transmits the consciousness of a reciprocal relationship between past and present", and furthermore, that "the double image of the embrace breaks apart the unitary patriarchal construction of woman and creates an empowering moment of theatrical doubleness for women audience members" (Kritzer 1991: 27). This reciprocal relationship also helps to undermine "the traditional belief in the continuity and unity of the self" (Speidel qtd. in Kritzer 1991: 128) by arguing that behaviors and values are shaped by the societies people live in, and therefore, they are always contingent upon the socially determined codes.

### **3.4. Theatrical Techniques as Forms of Resistance in *Cloud Nine***

Considering the theatrical techniques adopted by Churchill, *Cloud Nine* is understood to be a radical play that deploys a defamiliarizing critical distance between the reader/spectator and

the dramatic/performance text. Expanding on the definition of radical drama, Aston and Savona argue that it is a theatrical paradigm which appeared in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and which is:

[M]arked by an anti-illusionistic aesthetic posited upon the foregrounding of the means of representation in order to maintain a critical distance between spectator and performance. [...] [T]he spectator is again accorded an active role. Performance is offered frankly *as* performance, and the lure of emotional identification, on the part of both actor and spectator, with fictional constructs is in consequence countered. The attention of the spectator, rather, is now directed outwards, from the enactment to the social reality inscribed therein. (Aston and Savona 1991: 92-3; emphasis in original)

Thus, *Cloud Nine* challenges the naturalistic tendencies in theatrical representation. In this regard, it also takes sides with Brechtian theatrical strategies in its interest “to show mankind in the process of change, not as fixed individuals as in the concept of Aristotelian drama” (Aston and Savona 1991: 32). Hence, in *Cloud Nine* Churchill makes use of certain Brechtian techniques in tandem with the materialist/feminist devices. It, thus, deploys cross-gender, cross-racial and cross-generational techniques along with the use of songs throughout the two acts, the doublings of roles, chronological disruption and the subversion of Aristotelian theatrical conventions.

For the purposes of this study, I will particularly concentrate on the cross-gender casting and the doubling of roles in the sense that they help Churchill “disrupt the doubleness of theatrical representation to create the possibility of a non-patriarchal subjectivity” (Kritzer 1991: 10) on the grounds that the grand narratives of ‘unitary man’ are not credible. Theatrical doubleness in terms of the relationship between the player and the role replicates the exclusion of women from subjective power since “theater’s player/role opposition mimics the division and hierarchization of masculine and feminine” (Kritzer 1991: 9). The hierarchization of the relationship between the player/role “constitutes one of the major thought patterns in patriarchal society”, and furthermore “[t]his separation of diverse phenomena into unequal oppositional pairs, such as sun and moon, culture and nature, mind and body, separates everything in the universe into two categories— the masculine and the

feminine” (Kritzer 1989: 128). Thus, “[i]n specifying the doubling and re-doubling of roles”, Churchill subverts the patriarchal hierarchical positioning of the player/role, and one could argue that “[i]n place of the static and closed player /role dyad”, Churchill offers “an active engagement of player and role in a multiplicity of relationships” (Kritzer 1989: 128). Hence, in *Cloud Nine* the actors enact different and rather irrelevant roles without “disguising the doubling” by virtue of Churchill’s adoption of the technique of the “deliberate player/role discontinuity” with a view to “replac[ing] the aura of inevitability in player/role pairings (whether in theater or in society) [...] which implies the possibility of experiment and choice” (Kritzer 1989: 129). Furthermore, on account of the player/role hierarchization, “a woman playing a role would be not-man enacting false man, and the reassuring value of doubleness would be lost” (Kritzer 1991: 10). As a result, women are dually marginalized both in patriarchal society and theater, thereby demonstrating the “‘double displacement’ of woman in ‘the discourse of man’” (Kritzer 1991: 9). Therefore, as Kritzer argues, “[Churchill] uses the doubleness inherent in theater as a means of analyzing and resisting the ideology of gender division” (Kritzer 1991: 13) with the aim of representing the allegedly stable identity as multiple and changing by making visible the falsity of established binary oppositions.

Another point of consideration is Churchill’s deconstruction of the phallic paradigm through the concept of the gaze in terms of the theatrical experience of the reader/spectator, which is particularly caused by the cross-casting techniques. To illustrate this point, as mentioned earlier, through the use of cross-gender casting, Betty is played by a male actor. This creates a farcical element, as she is introduced to the audience/reader as the perfect example of a proper and dutiful woman. However, “[t]he loss of the sense of ‘the normal’, [...] can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when ‘the normal’, ‘the original’ is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody”, and thus, “laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived” (Butler

1999: 176; emphasis in original). Besides, Betty's inability to have a female body represents her lack of recognition as a woman in the patriarchal hegemonic system. Thus, she is presented to the audience/reader as the perfect male fantasy to the extent that she becomes "a man's creation" (251). As Herrmann argues, "[t]o be 'a man's creation' means to conform to masculine expectations not by mimicking the misogynist or murdering the feminine, but by leaving nothing to the woman except the name and the clothes" (1990: 311), which alienates the reader/spectator through the dysfunctional relationship between the actor and the character. Hence, Churchill's deconstructive approach to women's peripheral existence becomes evident in the exclusion of Betty from the patriarchal representational economy through the body of a male so as to underline the conscious exclusion of women from subjective power. Thus, this also alludes to the argument that the male gaze fetishizes and objectifies women in the patriarchal systems of representation. Nevertheless, through Betty's enactment by a male actor, Churchill subverts the male gaze, thereby highlighting the ambiguity of the socially and culturally established norms of femininity as a way of celebrating sexual fluidity. This also paves the way for "dismantling the conventional representation of female character" that emphasizes the female position "as static obstacle or as nondynamic to be entered by the male and traversed" (Diamond 1990: 94). In Betty's particular case, her body is literally penetrated and occupied by the male only to be given up when she becomes real to her self, and lays claim to her body.

In Act One, thus, Betty is represented as the paradigmatic example of the patriarchal fantasy. Her internalization of the values of the *paterfamilias* and patriarchy is such that she introduces herself by saying that "I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life/ Is to be what he looks for in a wife./ I am a man's creation, as you see,/ And what men want is what I want to be" (251), although what is seen on stage is quite opposite to her remarks. Nevertheless, "Churchill is concerned to represent Betty's status concretely, for 'what [we] can see' is a

walking contradiction of the verbal and the iconic” (Diamond 1990: 96). Analyzing the representation of Betty on stage in a way that does not conform to the conventional stage image of women, Elin Diamond argues:

We see a man representing a woman, mouthing her inanities, making typically female fluttering gestures with distinctly male arms. There is no transvestism here—that is we are meant to see Betty included in the symbolic order only insofar as she is male. The point is not that the male is feminized but that the female is absent. What remains is a dress, a palpitation, a scream, all encoded female behaviors adding up to a trace denoting absence. The *woman* Betty is not represented; *she* lacks symbolization in culture. (1990: 96-7; emphasis in original)

Furthermore, Betty’s absence is reinforced through her adoption of the oppressor’s discourse and her valuing herself less as a woman, as a consequence, “[w]hat we see is what [...] cannot be seen” (Diamond 1988b: 194). However, the radically disturbing recognition comes with the analysis of the doubling of roles of Mrs. Saunders, the representation of the non-conforming liberal woman, and Ellen, the silenced lesbian, that “[s]haring the same body they must never meet [...] because in patriarchy women are divided not only from other women (in this case the ‘woman’ Betty) but from themselves” (Diamond 1990: 97). This idea resonates with de Lauretis’ argument that is analyzed in the previous chapter of this work, according to which “[t]here are women [...] invisible to men, but also women who are invisible to other women, in our society” (1985: 164).

Churchill’s feminist project in *Cloud Nine* is partly to analyze “the ideological nature of the seeable” in view of the fact that “[s]eeing is never a neutral act” (Diamond 1988b: 191). Therefore, the body of the female is mystified in the representation process, which “serves as a metaphor for the concealments of [...] female experience, under patriarchy” (Diamond 1988b: 191). Hence, *Cloud Nine* could be said to argue that within the limits of “*permissible* visibility” that determines “what can, and more importantly, cannot be seen”, “there is no ‘writing the body’, but rather a foregrounding of the apparatus that makes the writing impossible” (Diamond 1988b: 191; emphasis in original). In this sense, like Victoria, who is

played by a doll, Betty, as a woman oppressed under the Victorian values, does not fit into the framework of 'permissible visibility'. Thus, through the doubling of roles and cross-gender casting, Churchill disrupts the "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" (Mulvey 1975: 11; emphasis in original) of women, thereby challenging the authoritative and fetishizing gaze of the male spectator.

Through the use of cross-casting and the doublings of roles, Churchill challenges "the sexual and historical specificity of the actor's body" that is "absorbed into a representation of the body of a character, as defined and delimited by the author's text", and this is "one of the theater's most destructive mystifications since it produces a seamless (i.e. ahistorical, apolitical) illusionism" (Diamond 1988b: 190). Thus, Churchill intentionally requires the reader/spectator to be in a critical distance by using the Brechtian alienation effect through the representation of characters. Therefore, by using the A-effect, Churchill adopts "[a] feminist practice that seeks to expose or mock the strictures of gender, to *reveal* gender-as-appearance, as the effect, not the precondition, of regulatory practices" (Diamond 1997: 45; emphasis in original). As a result, Churchill could be said to alienate "the mimetic property of acting" that argues the fact that "the performer's body conventionally resembles the object (character) to which it refers" (Diamond 1997: 45). Accordingly, Churchill provides readers/spectators with the experience of A-effects with the aim of encouraging them to come up with a sense of critique of the taken-for-granted values of the Victorian era and contemporary society in terms of sexuality and gender-based identities. Thus, Churchill shows the invisible female body only in "its masculine citation" (Diamond 1997: 46). Furthermore, through the A-effects caused by the exposition of gender as a discursive construct, Churchill lays bare the performativity of gender by denaturalizing what is deliberately made to seem natural, i.e. the notion of a stable gender identity. Because "[w]hen gender is 'alienated' or foregrounded, the spectator is able to see what s/he can't see: a sign system *as* a sign system", and thus "[t]he appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes that constitute the gender lexicon become

illusionistic trappings that are *nevertheless* inseparable from, embedded in the body's habitus (Diamond 1997: 47; emphasis in original). Hence, as has already been discussed, it could be argued that Churchill demonstrates the possibility of deploying *gestus* with a view to "removing the sight/site of the female body out of its objectified position in the 'male gaze' to a site/sight of 'looking-at-being-looked-at-ness'" (Aston 1995: 89). Moreover, it could be argued that, by revealing the constructedness of gender-based identities as stylized repetitions of acts that could be repeated in a challenging way, Churchill offers new ways to perceive gender regulatory systems of representation. Additionally, through the use of the 'not...but' technique, Churchill makes visible the formerly concealed notions in that "[e]ach action must contain the trace of the action it represses, thus the meaning of action contains difference" (Diamond 1997: 48-9). As a result, "[t]he audience is invited to look beyond representation—beyond what is authoritatively put in view—to the possibilities of as yet unarticulated motives, actions or judgments" (Diamond 1997: 49). Hence, in *Cloud Nine*, a 'writerly text', Churchill places the provisional meaning-making responsibility upon readers/spectators by divesting them of this conventionally passive position.

Churchill also makes use of Brechtian historicization so as to urge the reader/spectator to take critical stance on the ever-persisting struggles of class, race and sexual politics with a view to creating an awareness of contemporary societal conventions. As Anne Herrmann argues, "[n]ot only does Churchill 'historicize' racial, sexual, and class oppression, but she puts into question 'history' as a coherent, truth-telling narrative" (1990: 310). This objective could be achieved by the actor who "alienates or distances the audience from the character" in order to "suggest the historicity of the character in contrast to the actor's own present-time self-awareness on stage" (Diamond 1997: 50). Besides, the chronological disruptions serve to alienate readers/spectators, thereby empowering them to come up with critical interpretation, rather than expecting them to serenely accept the linearity of narration. The unconventionally

radical shift of time between the two acts disrupts the Aristotelian understanding of plot development, thereby deconstructing the unified and unidirectional narrative style. Thus, Churchill “violates the theatrical convention that character time will be coterminous with the time frame of the text” (Diamond 1990: 97). In this regard, considering Churchill’s choice in Act Two to age the characters only twenty-five years while a hundred years have passed between the two acts, Diamond argues the subversiveness of non-chronological narrative:

By disturbing diachronic time Churchill lays bare the problematic history of female identity. [...] Because of the time shift, the fears and indecisions we witness in Act II are lifted out of the causality of personal history and become evidence of the socio-sexual configurations we saw represented in Act I. Churchill thus succeeds in semiotizing, making readable, the narrative of history in which the parts for women are written by patriarchal law. [...] The time shifts in *Cloud 9* also challenge audience narrativity, our desire to construct a coherent narrative from events presented in sequence. (1990: 97)

Additionally, the unconventional way of treating theatrical one-only temporality is deployed by feminist playwrights in order to “exploit the coercive structure of narrative” by assuming another temporality, “a story-line or narrative which is inferred by the spectator on viewing the dramatic representation”, as opposed to theater’s emphasis on “one temporality”, “a series of ‘presents’” (Diamond 1990: 95). As Diamond elaborates on the two temporalities employed in feminist practice of theater, she claims that this violation of one-only temporality in theater challenges the spectator’s identity with regard to audience narrativizing:

Since audience narrativizing enters into enactment, spectating requires a double awareness of one’s own response and of the activity of responding. Thus spectatorship loses its ahistorical innocence and enters into the play of forces producing (and being produced by) the dramatic texts. The result—perhaps—is that the identity of the spectator (qua spectator) becomes as problematic as the identity of the female protagonists, not merely because the latter are refused whole coherent representation, but because the spectator’s act of narrativizing them is put in crisis. (1990: 96)

Thus, this radical shift of time urges the reader/spectator to take part in the multiple productions of meaning abandoning his/her previously passive position. Because, as Keir Elam argues, the spectator “anticipates events, attempts to ‘bridge’ incidents whose

connection is not immediately clear and generally endeavours to infer the overall frame of action from the bits of information he is fed” (1980: 120). Thus, shifting time could be said to serve as a functional technique of alienating the reader/spectator in order to make him/her analyze the present and past with a questioning consciousness, hence, coming to realize his/her position in hegemonic power relations. As Guy Debord expands on this idea, “time is a necessary alienation, being the medium in which the subject realises himself while losing himself, becomes another in order to become truly himself” (1983: 93).

In the light of what has been suggested thus far, in *Cloud Nine* Churchill is understood to reject and subvert the ‘maleness’ in conventional theater both in terms of the plurality of its content and its non-conforming theatrical structure. In this regard, with respect to the role of a feminist playwright, Churchill would probably agree with Gayle Austin:

Writers and performers need to blend with and supplement each other, to use theatrical means to go beyond words alone, but not leave the words behind entirely; to appropriate the machinery of theater to the same degree women have taken on the novel and poetry; to break the barriers limiting us all without filling in all the white spaces for the audience. Use the proscenium or smash it. Banish decorum. (1985: 190)

Thus, Churchill adopts a subversive perspective in her theater, and does not provide the reader/spectator with any climax, thereby doing away with the notion of traditional catharsis that would contradict the main interests of the play through a phallogentric theatrical formulation. Hence, Churchill adheres to a persisting theatrical interest in finding non-limiting ways of relating people that do not confine them to being mere objects devoid of subjective power. She encourages the reader/spectator to begin to question the credibility of the grand narratives present in the patriarchal hegemonic system in the hope that the allegedly unintelligible and marginalized identities could leave their peripheral position in a no longer heteronormative world, and be treated equally. Thus, this approach could raise a materialist/feminist awareness in that it addresses women and men together “as human beings with no deep biological differences between them, and as both being oppressed by

patriarchy”, and it underlines “the material conditions of production” (Monforte 2001: 113) through the treatment of issues related to history, race, class and gender. Besides, throughout the play, the idea of individual development becomes fundamental to the overall change in the corrupt social structure. Moreover, laying bare the constructedness of the notion of gender, Churchill subverts the gender-based regulatory matrix with a view to emancipating non-heterosexual orientations from the grip of patriarchal heteronormativity. By virtue of her concern for multiple perspectives, Churchill finishes *Cloud Nine* with an open-ended scene, thereby empowering the reader/spectator to assume the meaning-making responsibility, and deferring any definitive assessment of the issues discussed therein. In *Cloud Nine* Churchill, accordingly, contests the received representations of women and other marginal groups with the aim of opening up new possibilities to deal with their experiences without submitting to the patriarchal paradigms neither in its content nor in its dramatic shape.

## CONCLUSIONS

“Playwrights don’t give answers, they ask questions”.

— Caryl Churchill (qtd. in Fitzsimmons  
1989: 85)

This dissertation has aimed at analyzing contemporary theories of feminism, gender studies and their application to theater with a special focus on Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* (1979). In that sense, I have deployed a theoretically-informed approach in my analysis of the play under consideration. Having established the eclecticism of the theoretical framework used, this study has shown that theater, as a site of power relations and ideological representation, is based on a phallogentric matrix that could be subverted by the very theatrical material that ostensibly reinforces the patriarchal and heterosexual superiority over the non-conforming and assumedly unintelligible identities within a patriarchal societal structure based on binary oppositions. The subversion of patriarchal and heteronormative hierarchies in theater could be achieved through the adoption of non-conventional theatrical techniques entwined with a critical approach in terms of the subject matter with the intended consequence that gender and sexuality are both discursive constructs and representations of representations with no original source. Hence, the social and cultural impositions based on such fallacious notions could no longer be binding.

Chapter 1, “Troubling Genders”, has explored the notion of gender and sexuality through the analysis of groundbreaking theories on the construction of the myth of gender/sex division and the monolithic understanding of unidirectional desire that could only be experienced for the opposite sex, together with the analysis of power as both repressive and proliferative. Thus, this chapter has traced how these notions of gender and sexuality have congealed into forms that obscure their constructedness with a view to regulating society and

producing the heterosexual kinship system, in accordance with the interests of securing a patriarchal power pyramid that renders peripheral identities aberrant and dysfunctional. Analyzing the deconstruction of the boundaries of heteronormative foundations of the predominant patriarchal discourse, this section has demonstrated that the erroneous distinction between sex and gender is no longer tenable, and, that the notion of a primordial and stable gender only serves to perpetuate the patriarchal power relations. This chapter has furthermore argued that as the notion of gender does not refer to an inner core, but to the repetitions of various stylized acts, it could be subverted by repeating these acts in unconventional ways that highlight their very constructedness, thereby underlining the performative nature of the notion of gender.

Chapter 2, “Feminism and Theater”, has analyzed a range of feminist and pertinent critical theories elaborated on the discursive limits of the representational economy for women and marginal groups, their social position and exclusion from subjective power within a patriarchal hegemony, together with their representations in theater. These analyses led to an exploration of the theatrical possibility of vindicating subject positions for women instead of their being reduced to object positions fetishized by the male gaze. In doing so, this chapter has traced the ways in which the idea of ‘woman’ could be demystified with the aim of contesting the non-dynamic objectification of women without submitting to the exclusionary and over-simplistic practices of the patriarchal and heteronormative matrix. Bearing this in mind, this chapter has analyzed identity construction by reaching the conclusion that identities are constructed through difference. This has shown that the patriarchal and heterosexual identity needs exactly what it represses in order to be that which it purports to be. Hence, the idea of power as merely repressive is discredited on the grounds that power also produces the very unintelligible identities that it renders aberrant. This heralds the possibility of subversion within—not outside—the discursive limits of the patriarchal power relations. As the elements

of conventional theater are based on a patriarchal phallic paradigm, their deconstruction could also be exercised by making use of the prevailing theatrical techniques, contesting and disrupting the assumed credibility of such prosaic conventions.

Chapter 3, “A Sex/Gender of One’s Own in Feminist Theater: Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*”, has explored how Churchill’s theater contributes to the theoretical framework of this study. To this end, it has analyzed Churchill’s position as a socialist-feminist playwright, who seeks to empower the reader/audience to see what is deliberately made ‘unseeable’. Hence, this chapter has aimed at analyzing Churchill’s distinctive theatrical techniques and the critical content in *Cloud Nine* that challenge mainly the conventional ways of perceiving the notions of gender and sexuality. Churchill’s approach to the notions of gender and desire proves subversive in that through the use of cross-casting and non-Aristotelian theatrical strategies, she contests the provincialism in the representation of women and marginal groups, fundamental to the patriarchal and heteronormative mentality. Hence, this chapter has shown how she refutes the patriarchal grand narratives of the allegedly inherent and unalterable gendered identities by profoundly challenging the patriarchal gaze on non-conforming individuals through the intentional rupture in the assumedly stable parallel between the body of the player and the character that s/he is supposed to perform. Thus, Churchill lays bare the constructedness of the notions of gender and sexuality through her representation of troubling genders on stage and the wide discrepancies in the social impositions dictated on individuals. Furthermore, Churchill seeks to urge women and oppressed groups to vindicate their rights of subjective power by upholding the idea that the supposedly stable and unalterable notions of gender, sexuality and the assumed inferior positions of women and marginalized groups within the patriarchal hierarchical system are illusory. Moreover, she empowers the reader/spectator into assuming the meaning-making responsibility so as to demonstrate the possibility of challenging the taken-for-granted conventions and assert that individual change

brings about social change. Besides, through the adoption of a feminist critical approach mingled with Brechtian theatrical techniques, Churchill invites the reader/spectator to contest the established notions of gender and sexuality with a view to initiating a social revolution that could turn the patriarchal and heteronormative matrix upside down.

This study has drawn various conclusions from the analysis undertaken in the respective chapters. However, it is still intentionally open to new conclusions. I tend to use the word conclusion, but my lexical choice does not entail the exact sense of the word since I have argued that the theories explored and the play *per se* are bound for a myriad of ‘conclusions’ that cannot be exhausted. Churchill’s deliberate choice of finishing the play with an open-ended final scene is indicative of her position as a playwright who does not provide the reader/audience with a clear final message, but rather encourages him/her to take up an active role in the multiple productions of meaning with the intention of opening up new questions to be answered. In this regard, as has been quoted above, playwrights like Churchill do not merely answer the prevailing questions. In contrast, they pose new questions, which “may help [them] to answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subjects and new form” (Churchill qtd. in Fitzsimmons 1989: 85). Hence, Churchill invites the reader/spectator to constantly question the credibility of the taken-for-granted notions with a view to subverting the patriarchal and heteronormative hegemony.

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