

The Crisis of Sexual and Gender Identities in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979)

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Abstract

*This article concerns the moral environment in terms of today's sex and gender issues as people confront many challenges to do with gender and sexual identities in a fast-changing world. Many people across the world try to disguise their natural sexual and gender identities, with some men adopting effeminacy and emasculation and some women questioning their sex and gender identities. All these topical issues in our postmodern world are fashionably in full swing in Caryl Churchill's comic play aesthetically titled *Cloud Nine*. This article therefore intends to highlight the phenomenon of gender orientation and sexual reassignment as reflected in the characters. Psychoanalytical criticism, together with womanist or motherist feminism, are the critical tools in the exploration and approach to the problematic announced above.*

Titre en français: La crise identitaire de sexe et de genre dans *Cloud Nine* de Caryl Churchill

Résumé

*L'article que voici concerne l'environnement moral en matière générique et sexuelle de nos jours. Nous faisons face aujourd'hui à beaucoup de défis quant aux identités liées au sexe et au genre dans un monde en pleine mutation. Beaucoup de gens à travers le monde essaient de déguiser leur identité naturelle relative au sexe et au genre. Beaucoup d'hommes adoptent un comportement efféminé et émasculé alors que beaucoup de femmes mettent en cause leur propre identité sexuelle et générique. Toutes ces questions d'actualité dans notre monde postmoderne sont esthétiquement représentées dans la pièce de théâtre de Caryl Churchill intitulée *Cloud Nine*. L'article par conséquent, projette de mettre en exergue le phénomène d'orientation*

du genre et de réaffectation sexuelle affiché par les personnages dans la pièce de théâtre soulignant ainsi la nature complexe de l'identité sexuelle et générique des gens aujourd'hui. Les théories psychanalytique et féministe seront mise en œuvre dans l'approche critique de la problématique ainsi annoncée.

Introduction

It stands in Romans 1: 26-27:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error (Holy Bible, ESV 2007:1132).

These scriptures powerfully portray the deviations of sex and gender identities I intend to study in Caryl Churchill's play titled *Cloud Nine*. The reading of *Cloud Nine* has thrilled me on the matters of homosexuality which I mean to discuss in the course of this critical paper. The play shows that people nowadays are no more easily identifiable in terms of sex and gender. The complex identities of sex and gender of the characters in the play show us that there is a crisis about our sex and gender printing. Churchill's characters are quite experiencing gender reassignment and sexual orientation in the play. These characters are challenging because they are trying to cast our traditional sexual values upside down as if they are no more on our planet earth which means they are living on *cloud nine*, a strange world alien to ours.

Through the use of feminism, precisely womanism in American tradition or motherism in English tradition and perhaps psychoanalytical criticism, this article aims at discussing the perversion of sex and gender identities in Caryl Churchill's play metaphorically and satirically titled *Cloud Nine*. The article intends to highlight sex and gender reassignment and sexual orientation in the play around the issues

of homosexuality, gayness, lesbianism, pedophilia and effeminacy commonly in vogue in our modern and postmodern world today.

The Concepts of Sex and Gender

According to Craig Donnellan, “boys and girls are born biologically different. Their differences lie in their sex printing. But after birth, other differences between the two sexes are created by society. These are called gender differences, and they often lead to unequal opportunities – particularly for girls and women (Donnellan 2003:1).” This quotation highlights the fact that sex is biological while gender is a social construct. The sex of a child is determined when it is born. Sex determines whether a child is a boy or a girl, a male or female. However, gender rises from the social role assignment to people on the basis of their sexes. It means that sex conditions gender and while sex comes as a gift from God the creator, gender comes as a result of social discrimination and role mapping.

Moreover, there are also genetic considerations such as hormonal climate and chromosomal variables that come into play in defining sex and gender. Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin argue for instance that gender does not mean chromosomal sex, with which it is usually – but not always – congruent. Chromosomal sex is merely one influence on gender, which is best defined as one’s psychological sense of one’s self as female or male. At least two other forces help determine gender. These are hormonal climate of the body and the gender label given the individual (Crawford and Chaffin 1986:13). As Juanita H. Williams argues, although chromosomes and hormones are biological variables, the gender label can override them when the three are not completely congruent (Williams 1977: 90). Gender is thus socially defined and constructed, becoming “the means through which we attempt to apprehend sex (Williams 1977: 90).” Gender identity usually develops unambiguously and early in life. Individuals then develop various degrees of gender-typing, or acceptance of the culture’s views of masculinity/femininity as appropriate for and characteristic of themselves. The terms gender-typing and sex-typing are interchangeably used to refer to one’s degree of acceptance of sex-role norms for one’s self. Therefore, an individual at birth is given a gender label (female or male); develops a gender identity (I am a male); is

exposed from birth onward to prescriptions and proscriptions consistent with that label and identity (sex-role or gender-role norms); and comes to behave and evaluate himself or herself in terms of those norms (sex-typing).

Traditionally, masculinity and femininity have been viewed as opposite poles of a single dimension and, thus, as mutually exclusive and incompatible; a person could no more be both masculine and feminine than both short and tall. Psychological assessment measures were therefore constructed in which the test taker was obliged to choose between masculine and feminine alternatives. Underlying this approach was the belief that a high degree of gender-typing is necessary to and associated with psychological well-being: the well-adjusted person should be masculine, man or feminine, woman (Crawford and Chaffin 1986:13-14). This means that normally one individual cannot claim to be both male and female at the same time. You are a man or you are a woman; you belong to masculine gender or you belong to feminine gender, but not both. Both masculinity and femininity are exclusive just like manhood and womanhood.

Marie Richmond-Abbott argues that People have long been preoccupied with what it means to be male and what it means to be female. In all cultures, including ours, being a man or a woman is not limited to one's biological sex. Being a man means that one is also likely to be "masculine," and being a woman means that one is likely to be "feminine." Thus, not only do we have a gender or sex (male or female), we also have a gender role (masculine or feminine) (Richmond-Abbott 1992:3). Roles are therefore attached to sex typing. Definitely, gender is contingent upon sex. Sex is biological and conditions gender-typing or role-play in a community or society. While human reproduction depends on sex, social roles determine gender-typing.

Sex and Gender Reassignment in the Play

Sex and gender reassignment is the phenomenon that consists of people changing their gender roles assigned to them on the basis of their sex schemata. In every society, things are normally organized in such a way that people play their roles according to their sexes. Therefore, when a

man identifies himself with a woman or a woman identifies herself with a man in his or her role play, there is sex and gender reassignment.

Caryl Churchill is trying to demonstrate a sort of gender mismatch with her casting specifications. In Act I, the gender confusion is literal: men play women, and women vice versa play men. It stands to reason that the issue of gender mismatch is closely linked to the comic effects of the play. Thus, one cannot help but laugh at the male Betty's subservience to Clive. Betty who is normally a woman is playing the role of a man while Clive who is a man is playing the role of a woman. Clive the husband is made wife and Betty the wife is made husband. This emasculation does not only create comic effects but also brings about confusion in terms of sex and gender identification.

Furthermore, Churchill complicates the gender confusion with a sexual confusion. Even those characters which are not played by the opposite-sex actors or characters, do have nontraditional sexual orientations. Harry, an adult man for instance, has a sexual relationship with Joshua, a little boy making both homosexual gays and Harry specifically a pedophile.

However, Edward a son of Clive and Betty stands as the character which illustrates best the phenomenon of sex and gender reassignment in the play. He is really going through the crisis of sex and gender identities. Edward plainly confuses the reader about his sexual and gender identities. Biologically, he is born with a masculine gender, yet he is always putting himself in the shoes of a feminine gender. Because of Edward's abnormal gender reassignment and sexual orientation, the fellows around even criticize him. He once allowed his gay partner Gerry to know that he is not only effeminate and heterosexual but he is also homosexual: "**Gerry:** Just be yourself. **Edward:** I don't know what you mean. Everyone's always tried to stop me being feminine and now you are too. **Gerry:** You're putting it on. **Edward:** I like doing the cooking. I like being fucked. You do like me like this really (Churchill 1985:306).

This conversation offers insightful discoveries about Edward's passion for womanhood and femininity. Despite the fact that he is a man, Edward

prefers acting and behaving like a woman, giving the reader a difficult task when telling his sex and gender identities.

As his mother will let us understand, Edward has become a bisexual, he goes with other men and he goes with women also making him both a homosexual gay and a heterosexual. His mother Betty complains to Gerry who is Edward's Gay partner about the complex sexual nature of her son Edward in these terms:

Betty: I think Edward did try to tell me once but I didn't listen. So what I'm being told now is that **Edward is 'gay'** is that right? And you (Gerry, the gay partner) are too. And I've being making rather a fool of myself. But Edward **does also sleep with women**. **Gerry:** he does (**does also sleep with women**), yes, I don't. **Betty:** Well people always say it's the mother's fault but I don't intend to start blaming myself. He seems perfectly happy (Churchill 1985:319-320).

One can also infer from the conversation above that the mother is not ready to refuse the son his immoral and ambiguous sexual practice. Compared to postmodern societies today, Edward's mother and almost all other characters in the play or in the fictional world, are suffering from moral laxity and permissiveness. She knows well that her son is involved in a complex sexual behaviour, yet she claims that as long as her son looks comfortable with that bad behaviour, she will not worry herself about that. Similarly, our postmodern communities are standing helplessly watching gays, pedophiles and lesbians putting human sex and gender identities in a total chaotic mess.

This issue of gender mismatch extends into Act II, with Edward insisting that he would rather be a woman. Most importantly, Edward's fondness of women's dolls shows that despite his natural and innate male gender, he has a preference for female gender: "**Clive:** What's that you're holding? **Betty:** It's Victoria's doll. What are you doing with it, Edward? **Edward:** Minding her. **Betty:** Well I should give it to Ellen quickly. You don't want papa to see you with a doll (Churchill 1985:257).

According to the aforementioned conversation, Edward adores and cherishes what is supposed to be a woman's property, a woman's toy,

knowing well that his father is against such an effeminate behaviour of gender reassignment which questions traditional human values.

In addition, Edward's admiration for his mother's necklace and his will to give it to his gay lover Harry who is a man like him makes him equally effeminate denying his natural male gender to the advantage of an artificial female one. Through his conversations with his sister Victoria and his gay partner Gerry, Edward shows clearly his self-willed emasculation:

Edward: Wait. I've got something for you. It was in mama's box but she never wears it. [*Edward gives Harry a necklace.*] (p. 269) **Edward:** I like doing the cooking. I like being fucked. You do like me like this really. **Gerry:** I'm bored, Eddy. ... **Gerry:** Or knit. You could knit me a pair of socks. **Edward:** I might knit. I like knitting. /**Gerry:** I don't mind if you knit. I don't want to be married. **Edward:** I do. **Gerry:** Well I'm divorcing you. **Edward:** I wouldn't want to keep a man who wants his freedom. ... **Edward:** I like women. **Victoria:** that should please mother. **Edward:** No listen Vicky. I'd rather be a woman. I wish I had breasts like that, I think they're beautiful. Can I touch them? **Victoria:** What, pretending they're yours? **Edward:** No, I know it's you. **Victoria:** I think I should warn you I'm enjoying this. **Edward:** I'm sick of men. **Victoria:** I'm sick of men. **Edward:** I think I'm a lesbian (Churchill 1985:306-307).

Dialogues and conversations constitute powerful techniques of character revelation in drama as a performed art. Thus, through these utterances by Edward, it will be difficult for the audience to determine Edward's sex and gender; Edward tries to confuse the reader about his gender identity. He is attached to the feminine attributes or qualities of 'knitting, cooking, being fucked' which are untypical of a man. Traditionally, the activities of knitting clothes and cooking meals belong to women, yet Edward is fond of them as if he were a woman. Also traditionally, a man fucks a woman or a woman is fucked by a man. However, as if he were a woman, Edward claims to enjoy being

fucked. Edward is not only womanly in manners but he is also womanly in appearance; he wishes he had *breasts* like a woman. Through this complex character, Caryl Churchill tries to enact the gender-typing dilemma of the modern, postmodern and contemporary man. Our world today is going through the same sex and gender-based challenges. Both some men and women try to change their natural sexual and gender identities in many ways; they can even change their morphological appearance through medical and plastic surgical interventions; they can also change their morphology through their physical disguise and style of dressing, which is across races and cultures today.

Another good example of sex and gender reassignment in the play concerns Ellen. In fact, Ellen is a woman, yet she refuses to have a husband and rear children, which is traditionally a woman's vital duty. She prefers to love another woman and cherish her as if she were a man. The conversation below gives us the insight into her gender reassignment:

Betty: If you go back to England you might get married, **Ellen.** You're quite pretty, you shouldn't despair of getting a husband. **Ellen:** I don't want a husband. I want you. **Betty:** Children of your own, Ellen, think. **Ellen:** I don't want children, I don't like children. I just want to be alone with you, Betty, and sing for you and kiss you because I love you, Betty. **Betty:** I love you too, Ellen. But women have their duties as soldiers have. You must be a mother if you can (Churchill 1985:281).

In drama as said earlier, one of the main functions of dialogue is to contribute to character revelation. As a matter of fact, through the dialogue above one can understand that Ellen refuses to play her role of a woman, that of having a husband and raising children up, which is traditionally crucial for a woman's womanhood or femininity. However, Ellen is fond of leading a couple life with another woman as if she were a man. As a result, her behaviour result in gender-role reassignment, falling thus in the traps of emasculation.

Churchill argues that the placing of gender personalities and different sexual orientations in physical bodies is almost random. However, the great challenge of life is learning to reconcile one's upbringing and one's physical identity with one's true sexuality.

Sexual Orientation in the Play

Sexual orientation consists of fictional people or characters' sexual leanings or tendencies encountered in the play. Some characters show the homosexual tendencies of Lesbianism while others show the homosexual tendencies of gayness. Some characters again show bisexual tendencies or leanings making thus the sexual life very complex, highly unusual and quite unnatural.

Since sex is biological, everybody is born with their sexual identity; however compared to present-day world, some real people just like the fictional people, try to recreate and reconstruct an artificial, manmade sexual identity for themselves. Naturally, a man is supposed to be sexually attracted to a woman because both of them are of different sexes. When this sexual attraction takes place between people of the same sex, there is a problem; for Harry, a homosexual and heterosexual in the play, and Cleve, a head of family in the play, such an unnatural sexual orientation is a disease: "Harry: It is not a sin, it is a disease. Clive: A disease more dangerous than diphtheria. Effeminacy is contagious (Churchill 1985:283).

Unlike heterosexuality, homosexuality is unnatural. Women, Coletta Reid claims, "could choose to be lesbians, lesbians weren't born, they were made (Reid 1975:97). Similarly, Barbara Soloman states: "Lesbians are not born. We have made a conscious choice to be lesbians" (Soloman 1975:40). For Faderman, lesbianism is, "a natural impulse and a choice made in a healthy response to one's environment" (Faderman1981:323).

All these scholars agree with me that to be homosexual is not innate; one has to choose to be so; this choice whether it is done consciously or unconsciously, and perhaps for the playwright, it is a serious disease which needs to be addressed without delay. One should not excuse and tolerate homosexuality on the ground that there may be our body's possibilities and a predisposition toward lesbianism or homosexuality (Faderman1981:323). If there is really a predisposition for someone to become a homosexual either a lesbian or a gay, then man is also endowed with the freewill to discipline himself in order not to fall in sexual immorality as social norms and values call it.

In Act I, characters are dubious about their sexual identity and when they find themselves in secret places, like during the game of hide and seek they try to reveal their subconscious abnormal sexual orientation. Joshua, a servant in the house of Cleve reports to his master Cleve that his wife and his wife's comrade Ellen the governess are getting in a lesbian sexual relationship: "**Joshua:** The governess and your wife, sir. **Clive:** What's that, Joshua? Joshua: She talks of love to your wife, sir. I have seen them. Bad women (Churchill 1985: 285).

The other time when Betty was complaining to her fellow Ellen about her adulterous love for Harry, Ellen reassured her that she herself loves Betty, meaning that she is a lesbian, a woman sexually oriented to another woman, which is quite abnormal: "**Betty:** Oh, Ellen, you don't know what I suffer. You don't know what love is. Everyone will hate me, but it's worth it for Harry's love. **Ellen:** I don't hate you, Betty, I love you. **Betty:** Harry says we should go away. But he says he worships me. **Ellen:** I worship you Betty. **Betty:** Oh Ellen, you are my only friend. [*They embrace...*] (Churchill 1985: 271). This conversation shows that Ellen the governess would like Betty to love her rather than loving Harry who is a man. She wants Betty to be a lesbian with her, which Betty seems to accept if we have to consider the stage direction in square brackets: "They embrace..." meaning that she does not object to her fellow's dirty and filthy proposal.

However, Ellen's husband Clive's value system calls for a covering of one's unnatural sexual identity if that identity disrespects English social norms. Clive believes that nontraditional sexual identities are sicknesses or diseases that might be cured because of their contagious and corrupt nature. If the diseases of homosexuality and lesbianism are not cured in time, the English society specifically and the world societies in general will be one day invaded and thoroughly infected by these sexual plagues and abnormalities. The few cases that exist here and there today, must be quickly cleared off, if not the whole world will one day end up accepting homosexuality and lesbianism as social norms because of their contagious nature. For Clive as a head of family, the heterosexual traditional marriage is very important in terms of a family foundation: "Clive: There is the necessity of reproduction. The family is all important (Churchill 1985:282). Probably, the character of Clive embodies the playwright's opinion about sexual orientations. If our

postmodern world has to be invaded by lesbians and homosexuals, then what will our human societies become tomorrow? Are we as mere human beings putting an end to a world whose origin and creation we ignore? The playwright is trying to highlight the modern man's lack of sense and irrationality through his unusual and irregular choices concerning sexual matters. When Clive realized that his wife Betty was becoming immorally a lesbian, he rightly accused her of women's irrationality: "Women are irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful, and they smell different from us (Churchill 1985:282).

Once again, Caryl Churchill's plea in her play *Cloud Nine* where things are upside down is that our sexual orientations must contribute to founding families and rearing children towards the survival of our world in the future:

The wife's lover's Children and my lover's wife,
Cooking in my kitchen, confusing my life. / And it's
upside down when you reach Cloud Nine./ Upside
down when you reach Cloud nine." (...) Cathy: ...
True love for you my darling,/ True love for me my
darling,/ When we are married,/ We'll raise a family./
Boy for you, girl for me...(Churchill 1985:282).

From the quotation above, a literary ideology one can detect in the play is the one that reveals the sexual immorality of today's world which lacks a high moral sense and responsibility toward the survival of mankind. If we have to allow lesbians and gays to get multiplied and populate our world, how will we produce children and rear them as people who will take over when we are dead? How can a woman impregnate another woman? Is it possible for a man to make another man pregnant? People will say it is not possible, but these homosexuals can adopt children. Then, to these people I will simply say that it is not fair that people who refuse deliberately to produce children be allowed to adopt them. Human societies around the world should not allow homosexuals to draw near children, let alone adopt them; if our societies do that, then they are falling in the traps of moral laxity and permissiveness that is dangerous for human survival. Rather than following them in their character weaknesses and sicknesses, our

present-day societies should seek for cure and remedy for these gays and lesbians invading our world.

In her literary strategies to convince the reader about normal sexual choices, the playwright creates some homosexual characters that are conscious that their sexual choices are made out of disease, abnormality and irregularity: "Harry: It is not a sin, it is a disease. Clive: A disease more dangerous than diphtheria. Effeminacy is contagious (Churchill 1985:283). This dialogue esthetically presents us two people with different sexual orientations condemning homosexuality. Clive is heterosexual but Harry is a gay, yet the latter knows that his sexual choice is bad, as bad as a sickness indeed. Through Harry's attitude toward his own sexual choice, the dramatist would like the postmodern human society to acknowledge the wrong sexual choices people are making today so that they put in place the methods of treatment and cure in order not to be too late one day. It goes that cancer can be curable at its early stage, but when it is advanced there is no more remedy for it.

Edward sometimes, displays androgynous and bisexual behaviour, having both male and female features. Sometimes, he claims to be a gay, sometimes he claims to be a lesbian, sometimes he is heterosexual. Churchill seems to suggest otherwise, that while gender can be rearranged, sexual identity cannot be, one unchangeably has a penis or a vagina.

Like the postmodern man, the characters in the play show many difficulties in terms of defining their sexual identities which are no more static but dynamic. Unlike gender roles, the sex of the individual is supposed to be stable, static and unchanging. According to Eithel Spector Person's theory of sex printing, one has to nurture his nature, his sexual potential even if our sexual preference can be felt as deep rooted and deriving from our nature. According to her there is a relative irreversibility of the sex print, which is nevertheless a learned behaviour (Person 1980:605). However people make these immanent and immutable realities of sex identity malleable and mimetic after the properties of a chameleon to adapt its skin colour to the immediate surroundings. In the second act, Betty, Edward, and Victoria, now distanced from Clive, continue the difficult search for their sexual

identities. Although they are now free of Clive's direct influence, they face the new challenges of establishing a sexual identity in a world far different from the Victorian period's Africa.

As it is shown earlier on, homosexuality is much like a communicable disease; if one person is affected by homosexuality he will quickly transmit its virus to people around. As a gay, Harry and many others have almost ruined all the household of Cleve; Cleve's wife, children and servant have become homosexuals due to their unfortunate promiscuity with gays like Harry and Gerry and lesbians like Ellen and Lin. As it goes, bad companies corrupt good manners. The conversations below show that the human society in Churchill's fictional world known as Cloud Nine is sexually immoral, depraved, perverted and turned upside down:

Harry: Shall we go in a barn and fuck? It's not an order. **Joshua:** that's all right, yes. [*They go off.*] (Churchill 1985:262).

Edward: Harry, I love you. **Harry:** Yes I know. I love you too. **Edward:** you know what we did when you were here before. I want to do it again. I think about it all the time. I try to do it to myself but it's not as good. Don't you want to anymore? **Harry:** I do, but it's a sin and a crime and it's also wrong. **Edward:** But we'll do it anyway won't we? **Harry:** Yes of course (Churchill 1985:270).

Harry an adult white man is inviting a black boy to go in a barn to have sex as if both were husband and wife. Imagine two men all endowed with testes and a penis having sex, what a horror! What an abomination! On the other side, Harry, a man is making Edward another man his wife, which is equally horrible. Despite the fact that Harry knows that being a gay is abnormal, he indulges in gayness with a young man he is supposed to protect. Lin is also aware of Edward's homosexuality. "**Lin:** You're a gay, aren't you? **Edward:** I beg your pardon? ... **Edward:** Don't go around saying that. I might lose my job (Churchill 1985:292).

Lesbianism is also depicted ironically in the play. Lin as a woman, proudly tells Victoria her fellow woman that she is a lesbian: “**Lin:** And your husband? How do you get on with him? **Victoria:** Oh, fine. Up and down. You know. Very well. He helps me with the washing up and everything. **Lin:** I left mine two years ago. He let me keep Cathy and I’m grateful for that. **Victoria:** You shouldn’t be grateful. **Lin:** I’m a lesbian (Churchill 1985:291).

Without a clear reason, Lin lets us know that she has abandoned her husband to become a lesbian. The playwright is strategically hiding the reason for Lin’s divorce with her husband because no reason can really justify a woman’s decision to leave her husband to become a lesbian. Indeed, Lin is just taking liberties in a lax and permissive feminizing world.

As Cleve argued before, homosexuality is a contagious disease; Lin is trying to pass her lesbianism on her friend Victoria against the latter’s fears: “**Lin:** Will you have sex with me? **Victoria:** I don’t know what Martin [my husband] would say. Does it count as adultery with a woman? **Lin:** You’d enjoy it (Churchill 1985:296).

After this invitation for sex, Lin goes so far as to demand her comrade Victoria to leave her husband to come to live with her as husband and wife, a lesbian couple:

Victoria: Why the hell can’t he just be a wife and come with me? Why does Martin make me tie myself in knots? No wonder we can’t just have a simple fuck. No, not Martin, why do I make myself tie in knots. It’s got to stop, Lin. I’m not like that with you. Would you love me if I went to Manchester? **Lin:** Yes. **Victoria:** Would you love if I went on a climbing expedition in the Andes Mountains? **Lin:** Yes. **Victoria:** Would you love me if my teeth fell out? **Lin:** Yes. **Victoria:** Would you love me if I loved ten other people? **Lin:** And me? **Victoria:** Yes. **Lin:** Yes. **Victoria:** And I feel apologetic for not being quite so subordinate as I was. I am more intelligent than him. I am brilliant. **Lin:** Leave him Vic. Come and live with me. **Victoria:**

don't be silly. **Lin:** Silly, Christ, don't then. I'm not asking because I need to live with someone. I'd enjoy it, that's all, we would both enjoy it. Fuck you. Cathy, for fuck's sake stop throwing stones at the ducks. The man's going to get you (Churchill 1985:302-303).

This conversation brings one to understand that the two women are disconnected from their social values. In fact, they have lost their natural sexual identities, identifying themselves with men. So, one can talk of sexual emasculation whereby these women deny their real sexual identity in their yearning to have the sexual identity nature denied them. Lin and Victoria are somehow challenging nature, defying God and the English society where they evolve. Despite the fact that she is a woman, Lin lets us know that sleeping with another woman who is somebody's wife is not enough for her; she would like to make her her own wife, thus challenging male chauvinism. Therefore, Lin totally changes her sexual identity, moving from natural femininity to manmade masculinity, which is simply an abomination, a symptom of moral decay and human depravation. They are really living on a strange planet, an upside down world which Churchill esthetically and poetically terms *Cloud Nine*.

Churchill infers that today we are all living in a strange and alien world whose values and moral standards have fallen low, trodden down and turned upside down by both men and women. As Ethel Klein argues: "people recognize that women's lives have changed. Most of the public today (70 percent) acknowledges that women are more independent, working in jobs that in the past were open only to men, and have a great deal more sexual freedom (Klein 1984:166). Similar to Ethel's remark, Victoria's husband refuses her to go to army, but she challenges male chauvinism claiming that she is more intelligent than the latter whom she thinks is stupid and will never listen to him. Victoria wants to embrace at all cost the traditional men's career, because she thinks she is more intelligent than her husband. She is challenging her society that thinks army is not meant for women. However, according to Churchill's aesthetics Victoria is too ambitious by leaving her husband and children for the army. Before going there, she must weigh the consequences and outcomes of such a choice; if she loses her life there in the war what will be the fate of her children and her husband; if she does not care for

her husband at least she has to care for her children's education and welfare.

Martin addresses and lectures his wife Victoria in a long serious speech that sums up the matter with the so-called women's emancipation, which means to me women's libertinism and shallowness to do whatever they please at leisure and to challenge whatever goes against natural commonsense:

Martin: So I lost erection last night not because I'm not prepared to talk, it's just that taking in technical information is a different part of the brain and also I don't like to feel that you do it better to yourself. I have read the Hite report. I do know that women have to learn to get their pleasure despite our clumsy attempts at expressing undying devotion and ecstasy, and that what we spent our adolescence thinking was an animal urge we had to suppress is in fact a fine art we have to acquire. I'm not like whatever percentage of American men have become impotent as a direct result of women's liberation, which I am totally in favor of, more I sometimes think than you are yourself. Nor am I one of your villains who sticks it in, bangs away, and falls asleep. My one aim is to give you pleasure. My one aim is to give you rolling orgasms like I do other women. So why don't you have them? My analysis for what it's worth is that despite all my efforts you still feel dominated by me. I in fact think it's very sad that you don't want to do it just because I encourage you to do it. But don't you think you'd feel better if you did take the job? You're the one who's experimenting with bisexuality, and I don't stop you, I think women have something to give each other. You seem to need the mutual support. You find me too overwhelming. So follow it through, go away, leave me and Tommy alone for a bit, we can manage perfectly well without you. I'm not putting any pressure on you but I don't think you're being a whole person. God knows I do everything I can to make you stand on your own two

feet. Just be yourself. You don't seem to realize how insulting it is to me that you can't get yourself together (Churchill 1985:300-301).

Through this tirade by Martin, Victoria's husband highlights the licentious and irresponsible life of the so-called emancipated women of modern and postmodern times. Through the aesthetics of narration, Churchill is comparing here American feminism to English feminism. Her own life experience has shown her that American feminism is individualistic leading the American women to mind their own businesses forgetting their sexual duties with husbands who become impotent losing their virility as men. However, through this tirade Martin reminds his wife that he is not emasculated like the American men, he is simply being purposely patient with her in such a way that whatever he does to please her she mistakes it for male domination or male chauvinism, which leads her to foolishly fight back and retaliate against the immutable English social norms and values.

Conclusion

The article has studied the gender and sex identities of characters involved in Caryl Churchill's play known as *Cloud Nine*. The analysis of the play has shown that many characters have willingly gone through the phenomenon of sex and gender reassignment, a process through which people lose their own sexual identities and gender roles to become emasculated and effeminate. Moreover, the analysis of the play has underscored the unnatural and ambiguous sexual choices of characters in the play. Some characters have proved homosexual lesbians, others have been gays or pedophiles, others again have displayed bisexual tendencies of homosexuality and heterosexuality in a strange complex manner, a proof that we are living in a world of falling moral standards. The lesson is that mankind should not challenge nature because to challenge nature is to corrupt our moral values, which can be disastrous not only for us but also for the future generations. All these sexual and gender deviations should be cleared off from human environment because they are fruitless and futile.

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