
The Expression of Homosexuality in Cloud Nine by Caryl Churchill

The reason I have chosen "Cloud Nine" by Caryl Churchill as a theatre landmark is because I feel as those the subjects the play touches on very sensitive subjects even today. When this play was written sexual repression was still a major thing when people didn't have as much freedom as they do now to express and be accepted by their sexuality, Gay marriages are now legal which is a big step since back then. Even though we still have countries today where homosexuality is illegal or looked down upon. "Cloud Nine" also talks about femininity which is still a big topic we talk about today.

"Cloud Nine" is a play written by Caryl Churchill in the 1970s and it was first premiered in Darlington College of Arts on 14 February 1979. Caryl Churchill began writing in the 1960s and some of her early key plays were "Owners" in 1972, "Vinegar Tom" in 1976, "Top Girls" in 1982.

"Cloud Nine" was not strictly written with a feminist approach, she began writing it with the concept of sexual repression and how it can affect a person on how they live and/or feel. The first Act takes place in Africa around the 1800s during the British Victorian era; Churchill completely avoids giving any specific dates. This generalizes the play so that even though the general era is given, specific times are not given the Act is, in some roundabout way, timeless. It also solidifies the idea that this play is fiction as there is no exact time stamp to refer to also the characters are played by the opposite gender which adds to the idea that this play is fiction, this idea also breaks the fourth wall which is a Brechtian technique. Act 2 is set in London around 1979 where all the British colonialism no longer existed but some of the repressions remained intact.

"Cloud Nine" starts with a song paying tribute to England; action immediately starts after the song is finished. Everyone except Clive and Betty leave the stage. This introduces them as significant characters. Churchill presents her first gender mismatch where men play women and women play men, this had to the comedic aspect to the play where the audience can't help but laugh. Churchill makes things more complicated by confusing genders and their sexual orientation. The characters who aren't played by the opposite sex have abnormal sexual orientations. One of the characters in the play, for example Harry, has sexual relations with a little boy. "... 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 any more?" (Act One, Page 25, Edward) Then Harry replies, "I do, but it's a sin and a crime and it's also wrong." (Act One, Page 25, Harry) Which shows that Harry knows it's wrong and sinful but won't stop because it feeds his sexual desires. You really must

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think outside the box with Caryl Churchill's work.

"Cloud Nine" makes a theatrical approach to making connections between sex, gender, colonialism and politics which we see multiple times throughout the play. In the play sex and politics are somewhat connected and the characters believe that you cannot separate the two, the idea that you can't have one without the other. "You can't separate fucking and economics" (Act 2, Page 75, Victoria). Harry and Betty show their attraction to each other by flirting and later Harry asks the servant Joshua to have sex with him and the pair leaves for the barn together which shows that Harry is bisexual.

When Clive discovers Betty's lust and desire for women he says that she must fight it or it will "swallow" her up. "We must resist this dark female lust, Betty, or it will swallow us up". (Act One, Page 34, Clive) This quote also shows us that Clive is in denial that his family is falling apart by saying it's something she can't control but must fight it and it also shows how homosexuality is/was viewed to everyone inside or outside of the homosexual community.

The way Churchill expresses homosexuality is a landmark within itself. Homosexuality between men was common but unspoken in society but lesbianism was practically unheard of.

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