

Feminism in Churchill's *Cloud 9*


Feminism is the theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially (Morris, 1993). Our feminist reading of *Cloud 9* contains an analysis of the representation of "gender difference and how far they may be said to reinforce or question gender role stereotypes" (Bennett and Royle, p.153).

In using different text passages of the play we discuss feminist Stereotypes, male domination and female inferiority, traditional binary opposites and the role of women which represent the main parts of the presentation.

Feminist Stereotypes

Cathy. They're coming to tea and we've got
 to have trifle. Not trifle you make,
 trifle out of a packet. And you've got to
 wear a skirt. And tights.

(Act 2, Scene 2, p. 62)



In this passage Cathy refers to Lin's unfeminine appearance. Here, Cathy's understanding of traditional values finds the expression through female clothes such as skirts and tights. Cathy is confronted with the understanding of femininity in school and free time and wants to be in accordance with it. One passage before Cathy's friends call her a boy because she did not wear dresses. This, although Cathy is played by a man and thus male, is not acceptable for her. The social vision of female gender still exists and requires traditional appearance. It is interesting that playing with guns, which is used to be seen as boys' toys, does not trouble Cathy.


Thus, although the 2nd act in general is more liberated there are traditional values, which have a lasting effect on the distinction between girls and boys. This distinction and deep gender conflict find an important expression through the stereotypical view of clothing and appearance.

However, another passage of feminist stereotypes can be found in the following dialogue between Edward and Gerry.

Feminist Stereotypes

Edward. Go to the sauna.
Gerry. And you'll stay home and wait up for me.
Edward. No, I'll go to bed and read a book.
Gerry. Or knit. You could knit me a pair of socks.
Edward. I might knit. I like knitting.

(Act 2, Scene 2, p. 71)




Edward as a female man feels himself to be the wife of Gerry. The text passage shows the stereotypical pattern of a traditional wife reflected on a female thinking man. Yet, the typical picture of the injured, passive wife becomes distorted and is presented as something laughable and ironical. There is a cynical reference to a stereotypical female behaviour, which implements an underlying weakness.

Through this ironic use of stereotypes Churchill shows that such a weakness in fact does not exist. Rather this passage let the reader accept Edwards' preference for knitting as his own decision. Edward tries to personify and identify with female stereotypes because for him, as a man, this is the embodiment of femininity; this is what Clive taught him femininity is.

Male domination: female inferiority?

Martin. Do you think you're well enough to do this job? You don't have to do it. No one's going to think any the less of you if you stay here with me. There's no point being so liberated you make yourself cry all the time...

(Act 2, Scene 2, p. 62)



Martin is played by the same character as Harry in the 1st act. He does not trust Victoria to master the new job in Manchester and represents one of the common conflicts women very often face in our society.


At the outset there is this general male opinion of female failure in career and also this mistrust in female competences. Martin's negative predictions and the foreseeing of her crying cause fear and insecurity in Victoria. This can be seen as a psychological method of male domination and thus represents another, still occurring form of it.

However this passage also indicates Martin's weakness. Martin does not want to be left behind and can not deal with his wife's success. He can be seen as a lost, selfish character, an insecure personality in his fear of staying alone and managing life without Victoria. So in a sense he personifies the stereotypical picture of a weak wife dominated by his female husband.

Role of women:
Independent women

Betty.	I find when I'm making tea I put out two cups. It's strange not having a man in the house. You don't know who to do things for.
Lin.	Yourself.

(Act 2, Scene 2, p. 64)




In this passage Lin represents the understanding of herself as a woman and independent person. Betty is still in the learning process of self-recognition and acceptance of her gender. Although she has done the first step by leaving Clive there is still a long way to go. The thought that feminism starts in respecting oneself as a woman and furthermore as an equal person can be seen as the basis of feminist thinking. Betty is on the right road and might find her happiness within her journey.

By now we have presented to you different text examples of feminist stereotypes, male domination and inferiority, traditional binary opposites and role of women. Consequently we have given you different possible feminist accesses to the

play. Our feminist reading shows that the development of the different characters through the two acts is an important theme in the play and our conclusion will summarize the main points.

Conclusion

- Betty
- Clive
- Victoria and Edward

A collage of four small images related to the play 'Clybourne'. The top-left image shows the book cover for 'Clybourne' by Ann Douglas, featuring a woman's face and the title. The top-right image shows a man in a suit, likely Clive. The bottom-left image shows a woman in a green dress, likely Betty. The bottom-right image shows a woman in a blue dress, likely Victoria.

Betty's character finally explored sexual liberation in the 2nd act and so developed into an individual character. This is strengthened, by her character being played by a woman in the end rather than a man in the 1st act. Although Betty is constantly held back by stereotypical ideas and her traditional views of women her character shows immense courage and strength by leaving Clive in the 2nd part. Clive, who dominated Betty completely throughout the 1st act, is not present in the 2nd. This might enable the discovering and developing of Betty's identity and sexuality in the 2nd act. In the first act there is evidence of independence only through Mrs Saunders whereas in the 2nd act all women show some form of independence and liberty.

Clive's absence might also enable Edward and Victoria to live their life free from stereotypical constraints. Edward at last is free to express his feminine tendencies and chose to embrace the life of a stereotypical wife. Victoria, although educated in traditional values, does not choose the life of a traditional housewife but chooses in a sense more the male way of self-assurance and adventure when she takes the job in Manchester. So Clive's children live his Victorian values in the end; only, the opposite gender and thus "upside down" (Churchill, act 2, scene 3, p. 78).

Bibliography:

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