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# A Critical Examination of Symbolic Interactionism in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*

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### ABSTRACT

World-famous sociologist Herbert Blumer, a proponent of empirical reading of the sciences, transformed the science of sociology and gave rise to what is now known as modern sociology. One of the main theories he proposes is that of the symbolic interactionism. In this theory, interaction between individuals in society is considered to be based on the individual's objective interpretation. Responses from the individual are derived according to the situation in which s/he is and in parallel to the past experiences s/he has had. Many studies have been conducted by critics and sociologists on the theory from the time Blumer proposed the theory to date. Caryl Churchill employs non-naturalist techniques and has serious feminist orientations. Her dramaturgy is concerned with the depiction of the exploitation of power and the exploration of the repressed sexual desires and tendencies. Like Blumer her dramaturgy has been subject to myriads of studies. The present study, though, undertakes to apply Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism to Caryl Churchill's play, *Cloud Nine* (1979) in order to bring to light the fact that social norms and conventions act as prerogatives for acting units through which world views are shaped by social conventions. By taking sociology into consideration, the study validates symbolic interactionism's analytical power for cultural texts. And, by modelling liberation as daily reinterpretation, identity politics is addressed.

## 1. Introduction

Herbert Blumer's theories have been appreciated by sociologists and psychoanalysts alike and applied in many studies. The theory of symbolic interactionism is significantly assigned further recognition for it has the ability to alleviate misrecognitions of the everyday interactions of individuals in society. This theory is a momentous means for scholars and researchers alike in the field of literature notwithstanding, the field of sociology. It is a source and origin for the study of everyday behavior. *Cloud Nine* (1979) is a play by Caryl Churchill

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in which different political, sociological, and sexual repressions are portrayed. The playwright succeeds in the depiction of human life in the framework of her non-naturalist and feminist orientation, which adds to the play's significance and qualification as a socio-drama. Comparativistics has transcended from the comparison of world literatures and is nowadays preoccupied with the studying of and finding the similarities and connections between different cultures, sciences, and fields of study. The aim of the present study is to apply the theory of symbolic interactionism, one among many of the theories, of Blumer to Caryl Churchill's play, *Cloud Nine*.

## 2. The Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The present study was carried out through a theoretical and non-empirical approach. By consulting published academic articles, books, and theses the sources for the article were provided. Despite the abundance of published material on Caryl Churchill and her plays or on the sociological theory of 'symbolic interactionism' by Herbert Blumer, I was unable to find any published academic study applying Blumer's symbolic interactionism to Caryl Churchill's works, let alone the play, *Cloud Nine*.

In order to better grasp what social interaction is all about it is better to pore over textbooks on sociology. One such book is Peter L. Berger's 1963 *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, in which he undertakes the feat of introducing the field from the very basic to such matters as sociology as a pastime to the "humanistic justification of society," man in society, society in man, society as drama and sociological Machiavellianism and ethics which all form part of the chapters of the book (p. 24). *The Eye of Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern*, is a 1987 publication by Herbert Blau taking into consideration the theatre of the 1960s to the present from diverse perspectives of postmodern theory. Its chapters include such subjects as Drama, Experimental Drama, and Social Science/ Popular Culture, to name a few. In order to contribute to a growing interest among social scientists in the nature of insight and proof in the interpretation of social phenomena, a book under the title, *Critiques of Research in the Social Sciences* by Herbert Blumer was published in 1939. Book is an amalgamation of Critiques of research in the social sciences and Blumer's critique of Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant*, among others.

A number of published material is available to scholars around the world focusing on Symbolic Interaction and its resonance in everyday life and activity. Also, a few articles and theses have been published, which revolve around Caryl Churchill and her celebrated play *Cloud Nine*. The mentioned material takes on such theoretical lenses as that of gender and

sexuality as performance, which undertakes the extensive analysis of the play's cross-gender casting and exploration of non-normative desires as exposing gender and sexuality as performative constructs, not inherent essences. Then, colonialism and power, dissects how colonial power relations are enacted and symbolized within the family structure and the character of Joshua (the Black servant played by a white actor). As for the lens of family as a site of negotiation, recognizes family as a primary site where societal norms are transmitted, enforced, and contested through interaction. Therefore, it is revealed how Betty learns the meaning of *wife* through Clive's expectations and her interactions with others and how Edward interprets the meaning of *son* and *male* amidst conflicting pressures. And last but not least is temporal disjunction and identity fluidity. Ultimately, meanings of gender, sexuality, and family are portrayed as context-dependent. They are regarded as identity categories having the capability of evolving through changing social interactions and interpretations over time. The same character (e.g., Victoria/ Betty) is able to interact within vastly different symbolic universes.

One can come to the conclusion that with the lack of any explicit study on the play applying a Blumerian framework of any kind resulted in the carrying out of the present paper. I hope that this study opens a new avenue for examining plays from a symbolic interactionist perspective and contribute to both the play and the theory being better understood. The prosperous body of scholarship on *Cloud Nine* consistently struggles with the play's core concern: how identities are formed, constrained, and liberated within specific social and historical contexts. Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism provides a vigorous and underutilized theoretical framework for analyzing this process at the coarse level of character interaction. By focusing on how meanings are assigned, symbols interpreted, and situations defined through social exchange within the play's world, symbolic interactionism offers a powerful tool to dissect the mechanisms of social construction, performance, and resistance that Churchill so brilliantly stages.

## 2.1. Herbert Blumer

Herbert Blumer's inauguration to academic publication is with the publication of his dissertation, *Method in Social Psychology*, in 1928. He continued to publish numerous essays and papers until the year of his death in 1987. For Blumer (1969) “methodology embraces the entire scientific quest and not merely some selected portion or aspect of that quest” (p. 23). His methodological publications ended with ‘Methodological Position Statement’ in 1969. Blumer believes in an empiricist type of science asserting that science is only feasible with

objective experience. Objective experience is tripartite in Blumer, the first phase insists on a recurring and long lasting experience. The second is that which can be experienced by all, in other words it must be accessible. Last but not least is one that can be spread through discourse (Blumer 1928). This is the main tenet of his Science of Interpretation.

Both an Ontological and a Methodological premise is the base for Blumer's notion of interpretation. Blumer begins with his teacher's assertion of symbolic quality of social interaction. He rejects the claim by stating that human interaction is not the consequence of the influence of external stimuli on an individual. Instead he proposes that individual action is the result of the interpretation of the situation according to the context and the choosing of a course of action on the part of the individual. Blumer states that "the meaning of an instance is likely to vary with the interpreter" (Blumer 1928, 352). Blumer (1939) indicated that "the identification of the human experience or subjective factor, seemingly, is not made at present in ways which permit one to test crucially the interpretation. Identification and interpretation remain a matter of judgment" (pp. 79–80). His methodological premise is the direct result of this interaction. The consequential premise acknowledges the stated interpretive process. Ergo, science of interpretation denotes Blumer's tripartite objective experience, rendering it examinable in light of empiricist enquiry, as is reflected in the following paragraph by Blumer (1940):

. . . [a] judgment based on sensing the social relations of the situation in which the behavior occurs and on applying some social norm present in the experience of the observer; thus one observes an act as being respectful, for example, by sensing the social relation between the actor and others set by the situation, and by viewing the act from the standpoint of rights, obligations, and expectations involved in that situation. (p. 715)

In order to depict theories and methods put forward by sociologists and social psychologists, Herbert Blumer introduced Symbolic Interactionism in 1937. With the coinage of the term scholars began to use the label to distinguish themselves. The appreciation of the theory has led to the initiation of different societies, quarterly newsletters, quarterly journals, annual conventions and annual symposiums all over the globe. The fact that different scholars and different researchers bring with them their scholarly heritage adds to Symbolic Interaction's importance. It is required to argue that the subject matter of Blumer's dissertation is not science of interpretation. In his dissertation, he aims to prove that the science of psychology is like physics and biology. Three phases for science are proposed, the

initial phase is functional, the second is logical and the last phase is the technical. The function of science is the simplification of a complicated reality. Its logic is encapsulated as hypothetico-deductivist. And finally the techniques are the tools helping to classify the universals of each field of science.

The sharing of logic and function makes diverse fields of study fit for the category of sciences. The techniques of sciences should vary for they rely on the nature of their various fields and categories. The unrestrained use of quantitative measures of sciences like biology and physics by certain sociologists in the science of sociology is denounced by Blumer. This claim opens the room for Blumer to add social psychology to the group of sciences. In 'What Is Wrong with Social Theory?' (1954) Blumer asserts that the fault found in social theory is that it undermines the significance of the tangible qualities of the world and empirical analysis. The unclear concepts employed by researchers hinder the deduction of observable consequences of theories.

*Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (1969) is Blumer's book arguing that social life is made up of individuals' making uniform their lines of action. This fact highlights the assumption that social structures are heavily dependent upon individual interaction. Another assumption of the book is that social interactions, basically social life, are interpretive. As Blumer (1969) argued symbolic interactionism has three simple basic premises, explicated as follows:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Such things include everything that the human being may note in his world'. 'The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows'. 'The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 2)

Furthermore, elaborating on his meaning of interactionism he indicated that Symbolic interactionism is grounded on a number of basic ideas, or 'root images', ' and they 'refer to and depict the nature of the following matters: human groups or societies, social interaction, objects, the human being as an actor, human action, and the interconnection of the lines of action. (p. 6)

Symbolic interactionism views society as being made up of individuals actively engaged in the process of living. This process involves people continuously forming their actions in response to the countless situations they face. Their interactions must be coordinated with these evolving courses of action. This ongoing process includes suggesting actions to others and interpreting the suggestions received from them. People live in a reality defined by objects and are directed by the meanings those objects hold for them. Because people belong to various groups and hold different social positions, they perceive the world in distinct ways and operate based on different sets of meanings. However, regardless of whether the group is a family, a corporation, or a gang, the activities of any collective are always shaped by this fundamental process of defining situations and interpreting meaning.

Blumer introduces the basic unit of society as the 'acting unit'; this could be individual people, groups, or organizations. The actions occurring in a society are carried out by the acting units. The situations or settings in which action takes place must be considered. Action is formed as result of the interpretation of a situation. After interpreting and analyzing every situation, acting units choose to carry out the perfect action resulting in the appropriate response on behalf of that very acting unit. The adoption of repetitive and cliché forms of behavior is referred to as 'structure'. This is basically the common understanding of appropriate forms of activity in particular situations based on past experience.

Blumer concludes that, “respect the nature of the empirical world and organize a methodological stance to reflect that respect. This is what I think symbolic interactionism strives to do” (Blumer, 1969, p. 60). He differentiates himself from the conventional sociologists by both regarding society as the determining factor for social action, and maintaining that the changes in society result from the actions of the acting units and not the forces undermining acting units. The introduction of this method of analysis has brought about great change to the field of sociology.

Considering the fact that the present era is the era of performing polarized identities, Blumer’s framework offers nuanced interpretation, that is, the interpretation put forward is neither free-floating, as it is in postmodern relativism nor determined like structural determinism. What *Cloud Nine* attempts to portray is the dramatization of this balance. Therefore, characters are constrained by structures such as colonialism and heteropatriarchy, yet capable of reinterpetive agency, the best examples of which are that of Betty’s awakening and Lin and Victoria’s queer kinship. As Churchill’s temporal collapse suggests, the past weighs upon but does not foreclose the future.

Universalizing tendencies in theory are also corrected by Blumer's emphasis on empirical specificity. Where Butler's performativity can feel untethered from historical context, Blumer roots interpretation in situations. Such situations as that of Clive's Victorian masculinity held against Gerry's 1970s gay liberation. This specificity makes symbolic interactionism urgently relevant—not as grand theory but as a tool for mapping how meaning is made, contested, and remade in the theatre of everyday life.

## 2.2. Caryl Churchill

Born in London, 3 September 1938, Caryl Churchill collaborated with the BBC, writing for both radio and television in the 1960s and early 70s. Her groundbreaking and famous plays were produced when she was at the “Joint Stock”, “Monstrous Regiment”, and the “Soho Poly”. Caryl Churchill depicts in her works “the material conditions which testify to the power relations within society at a given time in history” categorizing her as a materialist playwright. Her depiction of different situations is based on a thorough research on subjects and topics like, 17<sup>th</sup> century puritan witch- phobia, free sexual relations of modern day England, and life in the world of stock marketing. Despite “the limitations posed by oppressive conditions”, equilibrium is achieved through Churchill's employment of “a uniquely theatrical expression of... belief in the possibility of change” (Kritzer, 1989, p. 1).

The binary combination of “material reality and imaginative possibility” (Kritzer, 1989, p. 2) gives the audience/ readers a path to follow in order to understand the conditions and have the knowledge to question their situation. Indeed, “the traditional structure of plays, with conflict and building in a certain way to a climax” (Churchill, 1987, p. 76) and audience passivity are declined and rejected by Churchill. The audience is to visualize with the playwright to come up with answers. Herbert Blau believes that the critique of the “illusory apparatus’ of representation may be a powerful rhetoric” but consists of “a pretty feeble politics”. This assertion is supported by Churchill's plays (Blau, 1987, p. 191). “A feminist critique of representation through questioning of and experiment with the time and space boundaries of theatre” is utilized by Churchill in her plays (Kritzer 1989, pp. 125-133). Her narrative structure depicts the oppression imposed on society by the patriarchal hegemony. Churchill's dramaturgy emphasizes the depiction of the desires of those members of society who do not have the ability to realize those very desires. The desires oscillate from erotic to political. Taboo desires, deviation from the social conventions, especially those of women are the focus of Churchill's plays.

### **3. *Cloud Nine***

Clive begins the play by introducing himself in a song. In his introduction song, he highlights the fact that he is the father of the family and hence, the ruler. One by one members of the family introduce themselves in the song. The family is a strict patriarchal example of families representing the British Empire in the colonial Africa with the duty of keeping the natives under control. On the surface they are living a very happy and organized life. But Clive gradually comes to realize that it is not rainbows and butterflies as he had expected it to be. Betty, Clive's wife, loves Harry Bagley, Clive's best friend. Harry, a pedophile, is taking Joshua and Edward, Clive's sons to Church in Hozier's sense of the phrase. Clive is also having an affair with Mrs. Saunders, a British neighbor of theirs. Furthermore, the tribes are uniting to revolt against the British rule. This uprising results in the massacre of the native villages.

Clive forces Harry to get married or he would lose popularity were it to be revealed that Harry is homosexual. After the speech by Clive, his adopted son, Joshua, is on the verge of shooting him that the first act closes and the audience are left to decide whether Clive gets shot or not. The second act is one hundred years later, 1979, but the characters have only aged twenty-five years. Victoria is Tommy's mother, and she is friends with Lin who has a four-year-old daughter, Cathy. Lin is a single mother and starts an affair with Victoria, and they move in together. Edward who is a gardener in a park also has a partner who is called Gerry. The characters overcome the sexual and social oppressions and repressions they have endured, and come out of the closet revealing their real selves and taking their social masks off.

Betty who has come to feel and appreciate freedom from the patriarchal world has found carnal freedom and is inviting all sorts of strangers for dinner. This results in Clive coming on stage and rebuking her. She has been a very conventional woman and she has always tried to gain men's respect and attention. Transgression from this norm evokes Clive's rebuke and criticism. By the end of the play she gains the will power to appreciate herself for who she really is and denounce the oppressions of social conventions. She does this by confessing that she likes to masturbate and hopes to have more sexual relations with different partners in her life. The play closes when Betty from act one, played by a man, embraces Betty from act two denoting Betty has resolved to come to terms with herself and controls her life now. As a result of the happy outcome "all the characters in [the second] act change a little for the better" (Churchill, 1985, p. 246).

#### **4. 'Symbolic Interactionism' applied to *Cloud Nine***

In his 1969 foundational book *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, Blumer states that individual human beings have significant importance in social interactions. Individual human beings in social interaction are referred to as 'acting units' in Blumer. In Churchill's *Cloud Nine* the acting units are as follows, Clive, Betty, Joshua, Edward, Victoria, Maud, Ellen/ Mrs. Saunders, Harry Bagley, Martin, Lin, Cathy, and Gerry. These are on the individual level. Families are also considered to be acting units. Clive for instance is the head of his family, Betty, Joshua, Edward and Victoria, his mother-in-law, Maud is also a member of his family. Lin and his daughter Cathy; Victoria, Martin, and Tommy are also a family. The British Empire colonizing Africa is another acting unit, the head of which is the Queen.

In a subjective world of meaning people respond to situations based on their perceptions of that situation. Meaning making is achieved and perception of situations is enhanced with the passing of time and experiencing new and multiple situations. With the above mentioned facts about the diverse kinds and numbers of acting units, the most significant acting units of the play are to be studied and analyzed.

##### **4.1. Clive and Symbolic Interactionism**

As a representative of the Empire in Colonized Africa, Clive has an assertive attitude in his interactions with other acting units. He has a way of getting his say to be the final word in the majority of situations. All the acting units do their best in satisfying his needs and wishes. His wife is obliged to fulfill the role of an obedient wife and a caring mother for Clive's children. In order to achieve this feat, she has to do what Clive says and expects of her. This is apparent in act I scene I as Clive is introducing the members of his family; Betty asserts that 'I live for Clive, the whole aim of my life is to be what he looks for in a wife' (I, i, 6).

The response Betty is giving is based on the structure of an obedient wife. Acting units gain a significant amount of experience from past life experiences and these experiences become a touchstone for the acting unit when s/he is put into a significant situation in which s/he has to interpret the options and choose to act. In this patriarchal world, the structure is set and the duties of men and women are defined, men are expected to work outside and fulfill their duties, and in this case, the requirements of the Empire and women are to be patient, entertain, and satisfy the needs of the men. They are also expected to rely on men for support. Hence, both parties are serving the British Empire but in different forms.

Clive's response to his wife's kissing Harry is again based on the structure of conventional behavior of women; therefore, he does not produce as harsh a response as in the last scene of the last act wherein he is portrayed as not able to believe Betty's behavior to be that of his wife. Clive's interaction with Joshua is significant and different than with those of the others. Clive and Joshua have apparently saved each other's lives according to Clive in act I, scene i, page 9. When Betty orders Joshua to bring her book, he resists and does not comply with the wishes of his master. Betty informs Clive of this matter and expects him to punish Joshua for his behavior. Clive on the other hand only pretends to rebuke Joshua and when his fake scolding is over 'Clive winks at Joshua unseen by Betty' (I, i, 11). The need for a trusted servant requires Clive to keep Joshua as an ally rather than an enemy, thus Clive's dubious performance.

Furthermore, as Clive is the white patriarch, Joshua, the subaltern native African, is doing his utmost best to denounce his background and become white through gaining a white mentality. Joshua earns Clive's respect through his obedience and through mimicking the standard behavior of the colonizers and denouncing his native standards. This is a result of the interpretation of the colonial situation on behalf of the acting unit, Joshua, and his consequent appropriate behavior in respect to his inferior situation. For Edward the response from Clive is quite different. He interprets most of the situations on the basis that his son's behavior is manly and anything but effeminate. Edward's holding the doll is interpreted by him to be symbolic of Edward's tendency for protecting his family. The instance of Edward taking his mother's necklace is interpreted to be again that of protection, the protection of women by men. Clive wants 'to teach him to grow up to be a man' (I, i, 6). 'A boy has no business having feelings' according to Clive (I, ii, 25). Clive continually asserts the qualities and attributes of a man so that Edward would grow up to have masculine qualities.

Victoria is a baby and cannot talk therefore, having interpretations of the situations she is in is quite futile, in the first act. But, in Act Two, where she is an eloquent mother, she does not have any sort of dialogue with her father. As a matter of fact, Clive only reappears in the last act of the play for a very short period giving him little chance for commencing in dialogue. Clive thinks very highly of Harry Bagley, initially. He takes him to be a national hero and a respectable man. As the play gradually continues with Clive's realization that Harry is starting an affair with Betty, his opinion of Harry changes, making him lose respect for Harry. In act I scene 4 the situation is that of Harry telling Clive that the relationship and friendship among men is different from that between men and women. Harry's interpretation is that Clive is trying to hit on him and embraces Clive. It is here that Clive realizes that

Harry is a homosexual. The situation changes and Clive's response to, and interpretation of Harry's masculinity are transformed.

Next in line is Mrs. Saunders, who is a neighbor of Clive's. With the tumultuous situation she is in with the natives, she flees from her house and seeks refuge at Clive's. Although she has fled in order not to be raped by the inhabitants, Clive takes the opportunity to have sex with her. Considering her situation, Mrs. Saunders interprets that taking refuge to Clive's residence will provide her with safety, but this act has been interpreted differently by Clive resulting into his taking advantage of her situation and sexually abusing her.

Yet Blumer insists on meanings destabilize through interpretive failure. Clive's downfall begins when his definitions unravel, the first of which is Sexual Betrayal. Discovering Harry's affairs with Betty/Edward, Clive's cry "Are we all degenerate?" (I. iv, 32) reveals shattered illusions of control. Next is Colonial Revolt, in which the tribes uniting to revolt defy his "tame natives" narrative. And lastly, is the Act II Irrelevance of his ghostly reappearance "My Betty?" in Victoria's lesbian household underscores his interpretive obsolescence.

#### **4.2. Edward and Symbolic Interactionism**

The introduction of Edward is like the rest of the family members but his interpretation and comprehension of the situation of the patriarchal family is different. He blatantly confesses that he is finding "it rather hard" to be raised like a man by his father (I, i, 6). The numerous situations in which he is caught in the act of playing with a doll are interpreted differently by the play's different acting units. His father's interpretation was stated in Clive and Symbolic Interactionism. His mother and the nurse/babysitter interpret him to be an effeminate male. Initially he is rebuked for playing with the doll, which in his defense he protests that he is just minding it for his sister. When he is caught again, his mother interprets the situation as it really is and tells him that he is not to allow the boys at school to find out that he plays with dolls. By the end of the first act Joshua also becomes aware of the situation and in the wedding ceremony tears the doll so that Edward would stop playing with it.

As in real life, everyone projects their interpretations onto the event based on their past experiences. In the case of Harry Bagley, it is apparent that Edward has a different opinion of the man. Harry who has not been to Clive's house for some time is welcomed by everyone for they have different inclinations towards him. Edward who has had sex with Harry the last time he came for a visit is fond of the man's revisiting them. Edward loves Harry and is willing to have sex with him again although he is a minor. The interpretation of

this situation for Edward is reciprocal in that he too is positive that he will be able to have sex with Harry.

Edward who interprets the situation and is aware of the homophobic patriarchal society does his best to repress and hide his sexual tendency towards men until the very end of the play. His concealment is initially for his life then for his job and reputation. All his life, Edward has been repressing his feminine tendencies and qualities. In the second scene of the second act Edward and Gerry have a quarrel over Edward pretending to be the wife of the relationship. Edward's interpretation is that it is time for him to act as he has always been and stop pretending. But the interpretation for Gerry is quite the opposite. Gerry assumes that Edward is acting and pretending. All the bickering results in Gerry taking the opportunity he has been waiting for and leaves Edward.

### **4.3. Minor Acting Units Unraveled**

#### **4.3.1. Betty**

Betty's arc epitomizes Blumer's "meaning modification," that is, transforming from object to meaning-maker. This is best portrayed in Betty's body signifying reproductive duty. Her line "I feel I'm not there" (I, iii, 25) shows alienation from self-signification. And then, her yearning for Harry manifests as guilt depicted in her "God sees my thoughts," (I, iii, 28), internalizing Clive's moral definitions. The next phase is taken from the transition from Act I to II. Here, two subcategories are also examined: a) awakening wherein reading feminist texts (implied in Churchill's drafts), she begins "testing new meanings" (Blumer, 1969, p. 17), and b) experimentation in which dating strangers rejects monogamous signification.

Additionally, delineated by the means of Blumer's theory is the reclamation of Betty's body from the patriarchal semiotics. This is seen in the Climax of Act II wherein Betty, spurring out the monologue "I belong to myself" manages to do so. Churchill's stage direction—touching herself with curiosity—literalizes Blumer's "interpretive handling" (1969, p. 5). Finally, integration during the process, embracing her Act I self (played by male actor) Betty signifies meaning synthesis.

#### **4.3.2. Joshua**

In further analysis one is brought to understand that key scenes are considered as interpretive battlegrounds. Hence, the breakdown of the following scenes is taken into consideration. The first scene is the Doll Destruction (I, v, 44). Tearing Edward's doll symbolizes destroying his own repressed identity. It can be concluded that by killing the child within, Joshua attempts

to survive the colonizer. The next scene scrutinized is that of The Wedding Sabotage, wherein, Spiking Ellen's drink exposes marriage as imperial farce. But his laughter turns to sobs, showing failed meaning. The final scene in coordination with the study's analysis is that of The Gun Moment. This scene which is meant to be portrayed as a frozen picture, helps to the embodiment of what Blumer terms "interpretive arrest" (1969, p. 19)—the colonized trapped between meanings.

#### **4.3.3. Maud and Lin**

The final acting units in the list are Maud and Lin. Maud is the unit who represents Blumer's structured behavior. Her absence in Act II signifies dying traditions. On the other hand, Lin is the Embodiment of intersectional reinterpretation. As a working-class lesbian single mother, she rejects Martin's nuclear family model. Therefore, she creates matriarchal kinship with Victoria/Cathy, and her affair with Betty bridges feminist and queer liberation.

### **5. Conclusion**

Blumer asserts that in human social interaction, the basic unit is the individual whom is referred to as the acting unit in his concept of Symbolic Interactionism. These acting units have different interpretations of different situations, leading to a diverse array of responses. The world of sexual and social repressions represented by Caryl Churchill in the play *Cloud Nine* is a significant case study for the application of the theories of Herbert Blumer. But the present paper undertakes to apply the theory of Symbolic interactionism to *Cloud Nine* which has not been carried out before. Through the analysis of different situations experienced by two of the main characters of the play from the perspective of symbolic interaction it can be concluded that each of the acting units will for better or worse interpret the situations they are left in based on their own mentalities and situations, Clive for instance comprehends Mrs. Saunders taking refuge to his abode as her wanting to have an affair with him. But her intention and act is only based on her interpretation of trusting her own people in such an emergency as hers will be safer for her, despite the outcome.

Furthermore, through the study of the play through the lens of symbolic interactionism one better comprehends the fact that the acting units are misguided and disillusioned by their interpretation of affairs based on their deluded take of events. For instance, Clive's taking Harry to be national hero is only because he does not really know Harry and upon his epiphany of the truth his opinion changes.

Edward's comprehension of Harry's character is different in that he has had a different past and set of experiences with Harry, namely his having had sex with the man. Therefore, Edward's fondness of Harry's visit and Clive's distaste of Harry, for his being a homosexual. The social norms and conventions act as prerogatives for the acting units in that their world view is shaped by social conventions. As an example for this conclusion, one can refer to Clive's interpretation of his wife's interactions with other acting units based on what is expected of a wife and a mother. Furthermore, Edward who is aware of the homophobic society he is a part of, he does his utmost best in concealing his homosexual nature in according to the indefinite rules and norms.

Future research can fruitfully employ symbolic interactionism's core premises to conduct detailed scene analyses, explore the nuances of self-indication amidst conflicting symbols, and further illuminate the dynamic negotiation of identity that makes *Cloud Nine* a perpetually relevant theatrical masterpiece.

#### **Bio-data**

**Pouyan Rezapour** is an assistant professor of English Literature at Lorestan University and his fields of interest involve comparative literature, film studies, comparative cultural studies, and film criticism.

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**Author's Contributions:** The author takes responsibility for the entire content and approves the final version.

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