

Chapter Three: Applying Butler, Case, and Torr's Theories to Texts

Introduction

The following chapter applies the theories of gender and sexuality from Judith Butler, Sue-Ellen Case, and Diane Torr to a selection of scenes from *Take Me Out* by Richard Greenberg, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America, Part I: Millennium Approaches*, and *Cloud 9* by Caryl Churchill in order to analyze textually how identities based on gender and sexuality are oppressed by patriarchal ideology. Additionally, examination of the plays will make it possible to comprehend how the context of the written text relates to my critical question: How can I as an actor negotiate the signifiers of gender and sexuality in performance and recognize the fluidity between both ends of the gender spectrum? The scenes from these three plays not only challenge strict constructions of gender and sexuality, but also allow for the opportunity to explore the hidden signifiers of its main characters. With an application of the theories from Butler, Case, and Torr to the plays and scenes through a textual analysis, it will become possible to create a devised performance that challenges strict constructions of gender and sexuality in culture.

***Take Me Out* Scene**

The first scene of the devised performance entitled *The Electric Current* opens with a moment from *Take Me Out*, which demonstrates how Darren's appearance as a hyper-masculine male is complicated by his sexuality. In *Take Me Out*, Darren Lemming,

an all-American, bi-racial baseball star, decides to come out of the closet during a press conference. As the baseball team becomes increasingly uncomfortable with Darren's sexuality and presence, the racist and homophobic Shane Mungitt arrives as a new team player, and causes more tension among the team. Darren then struggles to understand and accept his identity as a baseball player who is now openly gay.

Darren is considered the best player on the baseball team, the New York Empires, and possesses a god-like complex, making him appear untouchable and all-mighty. His best bud on the team, Kippy Sunderstorm, who serves as a narrator and commentator throughout the play, shows the most compassion for Darren during the entire controversy. Shane Mungitt, a new team member from the minor leagues, shows little respect for Darren because of his race and sexuality. Mungitt has poor speech and is treated as an idiot on the team. While Mungitt does not make an appearance in the scenes that I will be analyzing, his homophobic and racist remarks are the primary catalysts for complicating Darren's outward masculine identity.

My first scene opens with William R. Danziger writing a letter to Darren where he appears supportive of Darren's identity at first, but then he reveals that he cannot accept having him play baseball. While Danziger only makes one appearance during the beginning of Act II, he serves as a microcosm of the average male's reaction to Darren playing baseball once he is out of the closet. Danziger is communicating how Darren's revelation of his sexuality has ruined his perception of baseball as a purely

heterosexual activity and environment. His letter to Darren demonstrates how Western society's perspective considers baseball to be a space for heterosexual males. As he begins to write the letter to Darren, he states that he feels outraged by Mungitt's racist and homophobic remarks made towards him and commends him on his "brave and unprecedented revelation of [his] sexual preference" (47). While Danziger appears to be supportive of Darren, he considers Darren's sexuality as a sexual preference. He further reinforces this notion by also remarking that being gay is an option when he mentions that if his son declared if he was gay, he thinks that Darren would make a great lover (47). This makes Danziger's behavior problematic at this point because since he considers Darren's sexuality to be a choice, he is less likely to acknowledge it within the patriarchal construction of a heterosexual male. In terms of Case, Danziger recognizes that the sign of Darren's sexuality disrupts his outward signals as a straight male, which causes a separation of his identity from patriarchal ideology.

Danziger attempts to then construct Darren as a straight male by indulging in what he thinks are the good positive qualities that Darren possesses. He mentions that Darren is a sterling example of a young man and would be proud if he was his eight-year old son's math and chemistry teacher, with a particular emphasis on being a gym teacher (47). In terms of Butler, Danziger is considering that Darren is embodying the ultimate construction of a male identity, because he fulfilling these masculine roles to continue reinforcing these strong qualities of masculinity, causing Danziger to align

Darren's identity within a patriarchal construct. Though he seems accepting of Darren's sexuality, he is not acknowledging how it fits into these strong masculine qualities and roles. Essentially, he is ignoring it by focusing on what his outward appearance is communicating semiotically: heterosexual male baseball star. Interestingly, when Danziger continues writing to Darren, he notes that if he was a religious instructor, he would hope that he could imbue within his son a true sense of Christian charity (47). Christian Charity in this instance can be interpreted as patriarchal ideology because Danziger considers Darren to be a masculine element (religious instructor) that reinforces the patriarchal ideology of heterosexual male construction within young boys through Christian values. But, Danziger then refers back to Darren's identity as a gay male by noting that while being gay is an option that is open for his son, he would hope that his son would find a lover like Darren (47-48). At this point, Danziger begins to move away from Butler's view of restrictive patriarchal ideology by acknowledging his identity as an alternative because he recognizes that his sexuality still has a presence.

We see Danziger's true motivation when he questions Darren why he has to play baseball (48). Though he wishes Darren the best, he notes that him playing baseball "hurts his feelings" (48). Danziger is arguing that Darren's sexuality disrupts the notion that baseball is a straight masculine sport that has no room for gay men. His consideration of how Darren's sexuality is incompatible in the masculine world of baseball is similar to Butler's theory of how gender and sexuality is tightly controlled by

patriarchal ideology. In terms of Case though, Darren is acting as a sign here that is changing the code of baseball as a non-exclusively heterosexual sport. Instead, baseball is coded as a sport that can also attract identities that are gay. But with Danziger representing the enforcement of patriarchal ideology, we notice that baseball according to him is coded as a heterosexual and masculine activity that is not open to homosexuality. With Torr's theories of typical male behavior in mind, Danziger feels as if his space, baseball, is threatened. According to Torr, since men use their bodies to mark their presence in a specific masculine territory, Danziger is afraid that homosexuality will make baseball a site of weakness and not one that reinforces the dominance of masculinity.

My second scene finds Darren angrily entering the locker room, telling Kippy how frustrated he is with the increased attention from the media and with Mungitt's homophobic and racist comments broadcast during the TV interview. Darren tries to reject this image as a poster boy, furious that the discussion of his sexuality and Mungitt's comments have garnered him more attention about his sexuality. Throughout the scene, Darren struggles to operate as a straight male identity, but the revelation of his sexuality prevents him from fully accepting his image as a baseball player who is gay. He tells Kippy in a somber moment his belief that the public thinks his secret is out, and it will follow with a "cavalcade of revelation" (49). He denounces the possibilities for more revelations about his identity by noting that his secret is not his sexuality, but

that he is a secret (49). Darren is attempting to shift the focus away from his sexuality. His outward appearance as the big shot baseball player perfectly fits within the straight male gender construction, so he is attempting to keep himself aligned with that patriarchal image. In terms of Torr, Darren is attempting to hold on to his typical male behavior so that he does not break the confidence he has in the construction of his image as a straight male.

Darren's secret though is he is struggling to accept his new identity as a baseball player who is gay. Though he revealed his sexuality to the public, he is still uncomfortable about his image as a baseball player who is gay. As he attempts to stop the focus on his sexuality, he is oppressing his hidden signifier (his sexuality) which has the ability to disrupt all the other signals within his straight outward appearance. Therefore, he does not like his identity being completely associated with his sexuality. In terms of Case though, he is eliminating the association of his signifiers towards patriarchal ideology because as he tries to suppress the recognition of his sexuality, it continues to complicate his overall image as a heterosexual male.

With Butler's understanding of strict gender binaries, it is possible to picture how he should operate as a male. One can imagine him tall with an intimidating stance, and a quality of movement that is strong and appears masculine, with no hints of any feminine gestures. Darren has to remain within the confines of his gender construction or he will be considered weak. Therefore, Darren needs to think like a dominant straight