

## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to give an account of Judith Butler's theory of performative gender in order to analyse Sandra Cisneros's short stories. The primary sources include Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, and Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Short Stories*. The thesis also provides interpretation of other complementary primary sources; *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Foucault, *Antigone's Claim* by Judith Butler, "Signature Event Context" by Jacques Derrida, and *Borderlands* by Gloria Anzaldúa. The variety of primary sources hints on the interdisciplinary nature of the methodical approach of this thesis; from feminist theories, philosophy of language, and criticism of discursive power to literary analysis. The necessity to look at the question of performative gender from various perspectives stems from a wide scope of Butler's complex argumentation. The primary sources draw attention to different aspects of this thesis. *Gender Trouble* allows for deeper understanding of gender from Butler's point of view and enables us to observe the deconstruction of the sex/gender dichotomy, a basis for her disapproval of the supposed naturalness of the division of sexes. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler further develops the concept of performative gender while she draws her argument from the aforementioned works of Foucault and Derrida to stress the power to represent and produce, and the investment of bodies in maintaining the prevailing power relations through the regulatory techniques of reiterative sets of acts that are disguised as stable cultural norms and values.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler also emphasizes the notion of a political agency from the perspective of marginalized groups or individuals. She clearly focuses on the abjection of queer bodies, however, her theory is more than appropriate for the analysis of Sandra Cisneros's characters. Sandra Cisneros portrays marginalized characters - Chicanas; Mexican-American women that are brought up within the culturally specific kinship ties with clear rules to compel them to assume the given role of a selfless mother who suffers for love and tolerates any abuse from the part of her husband whom she depends on. Gender is not considered to be a parallel to race. On the contrary, these two social burdens are explored on the basis of intersectionality. The analysis of the means of facilitating the normative ideals is stressed throughout the whole interpretative chapter. Subsequently, possible liberalization of the protagonists

is focused on in relation to the movement of Chicana feminists, who have subverted the traditional imagery, and hence acquired political agency. Inasmuch as Cisneros's work relies chiefly on the specific context, the explanation of culturally specific myths and traditions is provided through Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and other secondary sources.

**Key words:** gender, performativity, Chicana feminism, power, discourse, agency, kinship