

Tribhuvan University

**Rupturing the Boundary in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls***

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, for the Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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**Declaration**

I hereby declare that the thesis/research paper entitled,

*Rupturing the Boundary in Caryl Churchill's Top Girls*

as my own original work carried out as a Master's student at the Department of English at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus except to the extent that assistance from others in the thesis/research paper's design and conception or in presentation style, and linguistic expression are duly acknowledge.

All sources used for the thesis/research paper have been fully and properly cited.

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## Abstract

Set in the early 1980s, *Top Girls* depicts the lifestyle and life choices of its central character, Marlene. She is a successful career woman, who has just received a major promotion, and has unequivocally fought her way to the top. Famously using iconic female, historical figures, the play explores the realities of being female and the potential price of achieving success. The play is nonlinear in its structure, highlighting the different sides of being a thriving career woman in the 1980s. In the opening act, Marlene hosts a dinner party for several famous, female figures from history and literature, including the Victorian British explorer Isabella Bird, Pope Joan, and Patient Griselda from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The unlikely group discuss their own histories and reflect on what being a female meant for them in their own time. As the play moves on to focus on high-flying Marlene, it becomes clear that her professional success has irreparably damaged her personal life. Her relationship with her sister, Joyce, is strained and distant, while Joyce's daughter, Angie, does not realize that Marlene is actually her mother. Leaping back and forth in time, Marlene attempts to make sense of her life and come to terms with the mistakes she has made in the past.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Introduction of the Author**

Caryl Churchill was born in 1938 and spent most of her childhood years in London and Montreal. In 1957 she entered the prestigious Oxford University to study English Literature, and it was there that she first developed her strong interest in drama. Before receiving her degree in 1960, Churchill had already published and produced three plays. Soon after, she became well known as a radio dramatist. Churchill wrote many scripts for BBC radio drama until the early 1970s. Meanwhile, Churchill married a man named David Harter and gave birth to three children between 1963 and 1969. Her career as a radio dramatist proved very successful and between 1962 and 1973, she produced eight plays that actively enabled the listener to see and imagine the drama that Churchill so aptly displayed through a good choice of dialogue, music, and sound effects. In 1972, Churchill made the transition to theater and television, contributing six new plays to BBC by 1991 (Churchill, 87). However, Churchill soon came to the conclusion that television work was very unsatisfactory compared to theater work, where she was free to write without the pressures of politics and society.

In 1972 she got her chance to work with the Royal Court Theatre, which helped bring her into the sphere of the politically daring and artistically committed theatre of "The Court". In 1975 Churchill became the first woman to hold the position of resident dramatist, where she was able to constantly test the limits and vitality of traditional and orthodox theatre. With her continuous impulse toward theatrical experimentation, Churchill was able to incorporate expression of feminist insights into contemporary

views, all the while encouraging audiences to actively criticize institutions and ideologies that had been previously taken for granted both in theater and in society itself. This helped to develop Churchill into a feminist socialist critique of society. In plays such as *Top Girls*, Churchill links personal change of a character with large-scale society change. This underlines her belief in the ordinary person's ability to produce significant changes in themselves and their environment. The works generated by Churchill have had a lasting effect on theatrical practices, traditions, gender stereotypes, and social-economical ideals throughout the past two decades, and until the present day (Brown, Janet .117-129).

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

Marlene hosts a dinner party in a London restaurant to celebrate her promotion to managing director of 'Top Girls' employment agency. A *Top Girl* begins on a Saturday night. The protagonist, Marlene, is hosting a celebratory dinner for six people at a London restaurant. All of Marlene's guests are famous women from the past. The first to arrive is Isabella Bird, who congratulates Marlene on her recent promotion to Managing Director of the *Top Girls* Employment Agency (the reason for the party). Then, Lady Nijo arrives. At this point, the dialogue begins to fracture. As the remaining three guests Dull Gret, Pope Joan, and Patient Griselda arrive over the course of Act 1, they recount their life stories, constantly interrupting each other and interweaving their comments and narratives. They drink several bottles of Frascati wine and order a three-course meal, while their conversation becomes more animated. As the Act 1, opens, Marlene is in a trendy restaurant in London celebrating having been promoted to managing director of the *Top Girls* employment agency. Her dinner guests for the evening are five women

from varying historical time periods. Isabella Bird is a writer and explorer from the nineteenth century. Pope Joan is a woman who, it is said, disguised herself as a man and was Pope during the ninth century. Patient Griselda is a character, the obedient wife, from “The Clerk’s Tale” in *Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales*. Lady Nijo is a Buddhist nun who was once the Japanese mistress of an emperor. *Dull Gret* is a figure from a painting. She led a battalion of women into Hell to fight the devil. The women have all fought oppression in their lives, and Marlene finds a way to relate to each of them (Cousin 135).

The second act takes place at the *Top Girls* employment agency. A woman named Jeanine who is seeking to leave a dead end job is being interviewed by Marlene. She makes it obvious that she looks down on her client, who does not have firm plans for her career in the future and who hopes to marry and have children. The jobs that Marlene offers her do not match what Jeanine is hoping for. Marlene encourages her to remain confident and to represent herself in a way that will not reflect poorly on the employment agency or on Marlene. As the second act continues, the action shifts to the back yard of Marlene’s sister Joyce. In the yard are Joyce’s sixteen-year-old adopted daughter Angie, who is actually Marlene’s biological daughter, and Angie’s friend Kit. Angie and Kit talk about going to see an adult film. Angie says she wants to kill her mother and visit her Aunt Marlene in London. Joyce returns and has Angie clean up before going out. Angie puts on a dress and tells Kit that she put it on to kill her mother (Fitzsimmons, 40–63).

The next scene of the second act is a Monday morning at the employment agency. Marlene’s co-workers Win and Nell have arrived and are engaged in idle conversation. Marlene arrives and gives congrats for earning a promotion over the man, Howard,

with whom she was in competition. Nell reveals that she is somewhat jealous. During the workday Win interviews a client, Louise, who wants to leave her job because it prevents her from having a personal life and because young men are frequently promoted, while she is not. Win tells her that new opportunities will be difficult to find because they will likely go to young men. Next, Angie arrives at the agency to see Marlene, who initially does not recognize her. Angie asks for a place to stay and informs Marlene that she is there without Joyce's knowledge. While they are talking Howard's wife comes into the office and tells Marlene that losing the promotion has demoralized Howard; she asks Marlene to give it up for him because Howard is a man with a family to take care of. Marlene rebuffs her (Kritzar 138-150).

Act three flashes back to Joyce's house three years earlier. It is a Sunday night and the last time Marlene visited there. That night Marlene brought dress as a gift that Angie has in Act 1. It is learned that Marlene's visit was set up by Angie without Joyce's knowledge. The sisters discuss their past and at Angie's request, Marlene tucks her into bed. Once Angie is out of the scene, Joyce takes Marlene to task for moving away and leaving her to take care of their mother and of Angie, with whom Marlene was pregnant at seventeen. They go on to discuss politics, their parents, and the hardships that come with marriage. As the sisters talk about their different lifestyles and politics it becomes clear that, they will not rekindle any type of close relationship (Kritzar 138-150).

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

In the *Top Girls* women in the play have achieved their positions after making irreversible sacrifices. They have cut themselves off from normal relationships with men, women, and children. Knowingly, they have also made choices that require suppression

of common human impulses: the desire for intimacy, a trust in family ties, and a concern for others. Moreover, many of them have denied themselves the chance to occupy their own gender: the opportunity to give succor to children, to form real adult friendships with other women, to take pride in presenting themselves as women. Corrupting the "*Top Girls*" is their judgment that they must "pass as a man" to be successful. They believe that they must outplay men at their own game. Advancement depends on being more calloused, more manipulative, more dishonest than their male counterparts. Lady Nijo emulates the emperor by taking a lover of her own. Besting her competitor, Marlene outmaneuvers Howard Kidd for a promotion. As one of her colleagues puts it, "Our Marlene's got far more balls than Howard and that's that." Howard commits suicide in despair (Pugh 287).

Antiheroic are Caryl Churchill's characters that critics such as Walter Kerr have created a stir among feminists by asking why she is not more sympathetic to women. Such critics miss the point that these women are subject to the realities of the workplace as soon as they vie for position and affluence. Like any hard-bitten businessman, the career women may be destroyed by personal and economic betrayal. The real villain of the play is not the cold-blooded woman but the bourgeois feminist enterprise, which falsely accepts the notion of competition. These women mistakenly believe that the only viable standard for success is the bourgeois concept of glamour, which is linked to power and wealth. This is especially true of the women in the employment agency, who value shiny Porsches, weekends in luxurious surroundings, and the ability to make more money than they need. Pressured by economic concerns, they become vicious in the marketplace as they turn human beings into capitalist tools and objects for disposal when consumed. It

is through economic rivalry that Churchill links her feminist and socialist concerns. Tradition also conditions the lives of these women, who fly in the face of convention and pay for it. Represented here are women of all ages who break the traditional boundaries set for them (Rowbotham 370). Unflinchingly, they take full responsibility for their decisions to do so.

Yet the burden of time's unwritten laws weighs on them. The most visible effects are the predictable reactions of the men around them, who are threatened by female aggression and innovation. Howard is more humiliated by the prospect of Marlene as his supervisor than he is by the loss of income. Ironically, his wife supports his conventional attitude: "What's it going to do to him working for a woman? I think if it was a man he'd get over it as something normal." Marlene fails to argue convincingly that she is not "one of these ball breakers" but a fair-minded office manager who will treat Howard like any other employee. Marlene's intentions are suspect, because there is little historical precedent for them and because she has learned not to allow sentiment to intrude on the marketplace (Cousin 135).

## **Sex**

The differences between male and female sexes are anatomical and physiological. "Sex" tends to relate to biological differences. For instance, male and female genitalia, both internal and external are different. Similarly, the levels and types of hormones present in male and female bodies are different. Genetic factors define the sex of an individual. Women have 46 chromosomes including two Xs and men have 46 including an X and a Y. The Y chromosome is dominant and carries the signal for the embryo to begin growing testes. Both men and women have testosterone, estrogen and

progesterone. However, women have higher levels of estrogen and progesterone, and men have higher levels of testosterone (Millet, Kate, 67-83). The male/female split is often seen as binary, but this is not entirely true. For instance, some men are born with two or three X chromosomes, just as some women are born with a Y chromosome. In some cases, a child is born with a mix between female and male genitalia. They are sometimes termed intersex, and the parents may decide which gender to assign to the child. Intersex individuals account for around 1 in 1,500 births. Some people believe that sex should be considered a continuum rather than two mutually exclusive categories (Beauvoiede 786).

## **Gender**

Gender tends to denote the social and cultural role of each sex within a given society. Rather than being purely assigned by genetics, as sex differences generally are, people often develop their gender roles in response to their environment, including family interactions, the media, peers, and education. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2004) defines gender as "Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles, and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed." Gender roles in some societies are more rigid than those in others. The degree of decision-making and financial responsibility expected of each gender and the time that women or men are expected to spend on homemaking and rearing children varies between cultures. Within the wider culture, families too have their norms. Gender roles are not set in stone. In many societies, men are increasingly taking on roles traditionally seen as belonging to women, and women are playing the parts previously assigned mostly to men. Gender

roles and gender stereotypes are highly fluid and can shift substantially over (Marwick, 303).

## **Feminism**

Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men. Feminist movements have campaigned and continue to campaign for women's rights, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair or wages equal pay, to own property, to receive education, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to ensure access to legal abortions and social integration, and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. Changes in dress and acceptable physical activity have often been part of feminist movements (Lovenduski 388).

Feminist campaigns are generally considered to be a main force behind major historical societal changes for women's rights, particularly in the West, where they are near-universally credited with achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality in English, reproductive rights for women (including access to contraceptives and abortion), and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Although feminist advocacy is, and has been, mainly focused on women's rights, some feminists, including Bell Books, argue for the inclusion of men's liberation within its aims because they believe that men are also harmed by traditional gender roles. Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's

social roles and lived experience; it has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues concerning gender (Lovenduski 388).

Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have developed over the years and represent different viewpoints and aims. Some forms of feminism have been criticized for taking into account only white, middle class, and college-educated perspectives. This criticism led to the creation of ethnically specific or multicultural forms of feminism, including black feminism and intersectional feminism (Morris 232).

### **Theory of Feminism**

Feminism is theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially. This is the core of all feminism theories. Sometimes this definition is also referred to as "core feminism" or "core feminist theory." Notice that this theory does not subscribe to differences between men and women or similarities between men and women, nor does it refer to excluding men or only furthering women's causes. Most other branches of feminism do (Radicalesbians 153-157).

### **Feminist**

One who believes in that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially as defined above.

### **Cultural Feminism**

The theory that there are fundamental differences between men and women, and those women's differences are special and should be celebrated. This theory of feminism supports the notion that there are biological differences between men and women. For example, "women are kinder and more gentle than men," leading to the mentality that if women ruled the world there would be no wars. Cultural feminism is the theory that

wants to overcome sexism by celebrating women's special qualities, women's ways, and women's experiences, often believing that the "woman's way" is the better way (Rowbotham 370).

### **Eco feminism**

Eco feminism is a theory that rests on the basic principal that patriarchal philosophies are harmful to women, children, and other living things. Parallels are drawn between society's treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its treatment of women. In resisting patriarchal culture, eco-feminists believe they are also resisting plundering and destroying of the Earth. They feel that the patriarchal philosophy emphasizes the need to dominate and control unruly females and the unruly wilderness. Eco feminism views patriarchal society to be a structure which has developed over last 5,000 years, while considering matriarchal societies (a society in which females are centre of the societal roles and structures, to be the original hierarchy.

### **Individualist or Libertarian**

Feminism Individualist feminism is based upon individualism or libertarian (minimum government or anarcho capitalist) philosophies. The primary focus is individual autonomy, rights, liberty, independence and diversity. Individualist Feminism tends to widely encompass men and focuses on barriers that both men and women face due to their gender ( Radicalesbians 357-370).

### **Material Feminism**

A movement that began in the late 19th century focused on liberating by improving their material condition. This movement revolved around taking the "burden" off women in regards to housework, cooking, and other traditional female domestic jobs.

**Moderate Feminism**

This branch of feminism tends to be populated mostly by younger women or women who perceive that they have not directly experienced discrimination. They often believe that the ideals of the feminist movement are no longer viable, and therefore question the need for further efforts. They often view feminism as overbearing and too overt. Often this group espouses feminist's ideas while not accepting or wanting the label of 'feminist'.

**National Organization for Women (N.O.W.) Feminism a.k.a. Gender Feminism**

This theory is based on the notion that in order for men and women to be equal (as the core of 'feminism' states), women must be granted some special privileges, and men should not be the central issue or 'barrier' in feminism. N.O.W. feminism encompasses only women and fights to offer special privileges to women with the intent of making women equal to men.

**Radical Feminism**

Radical feminism is the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism. Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from approximately 1967-1975. It is no longer as universally accepted as it was then, and no longer serves to solely define the term, "feminism." This group views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions. Radical feminism questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on gender. Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically determined

behavior and culturally determined behavior in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles ( Radicalesbians 357–370).

### **Amazon Feminism**

Amazon feminism focuses on physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be, look, or behave as if they are passive, weak and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine (or feminine), and upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood. Amazon feminists tend to view that all women are as physically capable as all men.

### **Separatists**

Separatists are often wrongly depicted as lesbians. These are the feminists who advocate separation from men; sometimes total, sometimes partial. The core idea is that "separating" (by various means) from men enables women to see themselves in a different context. Many feminists, whether or not separatist, think this is a necessary "first step," for personal growth. However, they do not necessarily endorse permanent separation.

*Source: <http://www.amazoncastle.com/feminism/ecocult.shtml> Accessed: April 28, 2004.*

### **Feminism vs. Culture:**

The first act of Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* presents a dinner scene, which juxtaposes different women from history, mythology, art and literature. They differ in regard of nationality, race, education and historical moment, from the ninth to the twentieth century, and build up a kaleidoscope of female types connected by their experiences in life, especially the oppression of patriarchy that stood in the way of each

character's self-fulfillment. All characters are connected through the oppression of men, which is the main topic of the dinner discussion. The conversation turns around each one's life under a male world order and their experiences with the various forms of oppression they had to deal with ( Cousin 790–806).

The women Churchill chose to be part of the dinner scene are Isabella Bird, a Scottish lady of Victorian times who extensively travelled the world, Lady Nijo, a concubine of the Japanese Emperor and later Buddhist nun of the Kamakuran period, Dull Griet, a character of Brueghel's painting "Dull Griet" in which she leads a crowd of women through the gates of hell to fight against satan, the mythological figure of Pope Joan, who is supposed to have been pope between 854 to 856 until her male disguise was revealed, Griselda, a literary figure of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales characterized by blind obedience towards her father and her husband, and *Top Girls*'s protagonist and host of the evening, Marlene, a London businesswoman celebrating her promotion in the '*Top Girls*' employment agency( Cousin 790–806).

Although, the characters' lives strongly differ regarding that they lived in different centuries, different countries, different classes and with different educational backgrounds, all are connected through extraordinary experiences of oppression, suffering and having to make certain compromises and most of all did not live a fulfilled and happy life. Nonetheless, their whole lives are defined by a tension between heteronomy and the wish of self-determination. At the beginning of the first act, this common connection of the women suggests that they may be regarded as some kind of feministic role models, yet in the course of the dinner scene they are also shown as self-centered and unable to communicate well with the others, something Churchill

demonstrates through her often-used theatrical technique of overlapping speeches. They start to interrupt and ignore each other until the dialogue of the characters turns into a monologue of each person (Cousin 790–806).

However, despite all similarities, the women still differ in various ways from each other, ranging from complete denial to a reflected affirmation of female stereotypes that are imposed on them by men. In the following, I will pick up the similarities and differences and oppose them in relation to each woman's cultural background with the intention to identify, how far feminist criticism is valid in regard of the tension between feminism and culture (Cousin 790–806).

### **Socialist-feminist**

*Top Girls* is also a socialist-feminist play. It can be defined as socialist in that it takes a clear position against any sort of capitalist ideology, and it can be defined as feminist because it presents us with a parallel between socio-economic, by the use oppression and gender oppression. In fact, as we have seen, Churchill herself is a firm believer in the "inseparability of feminism and socialism". Besides, her uses of characters are true to life, she really generalizes the theme of her feministic play, by use of characters of different classes to connote that it is a play about all women. Different strategies of her to create a feminine setting is really of paramount importance, although in this play she showed women who have achieved the highest level of social life but they are not really satisfied. I think the main message of her is that women should know the limits, as she is a social feminist and she is criticizing the bourgeois feminists (Cousin 790–806).

## **Role of Male and Female: Classical**

A gender role, also known as a sex role is a social role encompassing a range of behaviors and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their actual or perceived sex or sexuality. Gender roles are usually centered on conceptions of femininity and masculinity, although there are exceptions and variations. The specifics regarding these gendered expectations may vary substantially among cultures, while other characteristics may be common throughout a range of cultures. There is ongoing debate as to what extent gender roles and their variations are biologically determined, and to what extent they are socially constructed. Various groups, most notably the feminist movement, have led efforts to change aspects of prevailing gender roles that they believe are oppressive or inaccurate. The term gender role was first coined by John Money in 1955, during the course of his study of intersex individuals, to describe the manners in which these individuals expressed their status as a male or female in a situation where no clear biological assignment existed (Wandor 730-3).

### **1.4 Review of Literature**

*Feminist Drama: The Politics of the Self: Churchill and Keatley* Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (1983) and Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* (1987) are plays with an all women cast. Men, though present in the stories, are absent from the stage. They occupy emotional space but not physical space. At the very outset there is a defining of space, a creation of a feminist world. Keatley deliberately kept the men offstage to provide a space for the women to interact among themselves, “to show the way women use language, silence and subtext when alone together”;

Churchill apparently does it for the purposes of sharing, for as Adrienne Rich has pointed out that unless women are prepared to share their “private and sometimes painful personal experience” it may not be possible to create a “collective description” of what is truly a woman's world. In both play women from different generations and backgrounds meet together to share and to interact but with two major differences. Keatley's characters in the child-scenes are child characters and represent the same lineage whereas Churchill's characters represent several centuries, from the ninth to the present and have altogether different backgrounds (Prowbotham 14-27)

The moment women are placed centre-stage they begin to interact and introspect, to analyze and to criticize; they cease to look at themselves through the male gaze, instead they begin to problematize their conflicts and the involuntary processes of their bodies. By defining space in female terms, women are transformed from objects into subjects and their passive acceptance of gendered roles is turned into an analysis of socially imposed codes of behaviour.

Plays by women need not be feminist, just as plays about women are not always so. But plays which concern themselves with women as subjects and explore their emotional realities acquire a feminist perspective. The sixties and the seventies witnessed the rise of women's theatre groups and collectives and a consciousness about women's roles. This was the beginning of a feminist theatre with, as already stated, overtly political aims. Women through exploring and talking about their experiences opened out their role confines, created female traditions and entered areas hitherto forbidden to them. Several all-women plays were also written.

Megan Terry's *Calm Down, Mother* (1965) was a transformation exercise for women and hailed by Helene Keyssar as the first real feminist play, while her later *Babes in the Big House* (1974) was about women prisoners and closed spaces where violence became a natural inhabitant. Eve Merriam's *Out of Our Fathers' House* (1975) was a projection of the struggles of exceptional women, while Wendy Wasserstein's *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977) examined the role conflicts in a lighter vein. Maria Irene Fornes's *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977) is located in the thirties and is a powerful statement about the violence implicit in heterosexual relationships; it is as Schuler has pointed out “impossible to ignore that explicit critique of patriarchy” (226) present in the play. Marsha Norman's *'night, Mother*, coming out the same year as *Top Girls* (1983), is a tense kitchen drama about a mother and a daughter with the daughter at the end committing suicide behind a locked door.

Plays with an all-women cast make a specific statement even before they put this female space to different and individual use. They discard supportive roles for women and provide them with the freedom to relate directly to each other rather than through sons and husbands, “Language, space and the body are loci for the woman playwright to dramatically challenge the images of women determined in dominant discourse” (Hart), Memory, history, the past are evoked for different reasons. Time too becomes an important factor, often being projected non-chronologically.

Both *Top Girls* and *My Mother* create hypothetical situations, which are historically not possible but are rendered so spatially and proceed to become emotional questionings. Both are 3-act plays but while Churchill after an initial juxtaposition of the

past and the present moves on, Keatley keeps on coming back to the childhood scene, which is a conjunction of 1905, 1941, 1961 and 1979.

*Top Girls* in the first act evokes the past, somewhat like Eve Merriam's *Out of Our Fathers' House* where six women are presented together in a "hypothetical conversation." They act out both for themselves and each other the stories of their lives. It is a journey into selfhood, and at each step, they need reassurance from their own selves. They belong to the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, Caryl Churchill, however, builds on a wider canvas and the dramatic purpose of the bringing together of six women from different backgrounds and periods is very different. The first act of *Top Girls* is in the nature of a prologue where Marlene, a top executive in an employment agency is hosting a dinner for five other women, three of whom are from the pages of history, and two from the world of male imagination. Pope Joan, a ninth century Pope who achieved this through cross-gendering, Lady Nijo an emperor's concubine and later a Buddhist nun, and Isabella Bird, a nineteenth century explorer are the three "real" women. Dull Gret, a woman from Breughel's 16th century painting and Patient Griselda from the pages of Petrarch, Boccaccio and Chaucer are the two others (Churchill 251-320)

Each one of them except Griselda has in some way violated the social code as imposed upon them. Joan learnt Latin, ran away from home disguised as a boy and later became a pope. But yielding to passion, she conceives and is detected during childbirth. Male priests have fathered children, but she has never learnt to understand or live with her body, thus alienated from this most fundamental space she might own, she pays for it with death. Lady Nijo on the other hand accepts the code but renders it hollow by creating space for herself. Handed over to the Emperor as his concubine, she takes lovers

to fulfill her emotional needs. Out of favour with the Emperor, she takes holy orders as directed by her father, but instead of being confined in a convent, she walks the breadth and length of Japan. But she does this at the price of motherhood. Isabella Bird also has to sacrifice marriage and family life in search of adventure. Because she is a woman, she finds it difficult to accept the idea of living for herself alone and therefore occupies herself with good causes. As contrasted with these women from real life, who have individually made space for themselves, questioned patriarchal structures like religion, ownership, love and motherhood, the two women from the world of imagination are limited in their projections (Radicalesbians 153-157).

### **1.5 Statement of Problem**

Rupturing the Boundary in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* explore the statement of problem that constitutes, What are the ups and downs faced by the female characters encountered in the play? How do they tackle with these problems? Female success and paints a nuanced portrait of its flawed protagonist, Marlene, an ambitious business woman who leaves her child in the care of her sister in order to pursue her career. Marlene's choices are neither sanitized nor demonized by the play. Instead, she, along with her own conception of what "success" entails, are shown in both a positive and negative light depending on context. Instead, she, along with her own conception of what "success" entails, are shown in both a positive and negative light depending on context. The play opens with Marlene hosting a dinner party at a restaurant for various famous real and fictional women from throughout history to celebrate a recent promotion at work.

This scene places Marlene and her ambitions in historical context and includes her in a pantheon of women who have achieved great things in spite of the patriarchal society that attempted to keep them down. In this scene, the portrayal of Marlene is overwhelmingly positive. Marlene's promotion is presented here, at least in Marlene's own mind, as being on the level of Pope Joan pretending to be a man and ascending to the highest role in the Catholic Church or explorer Isabella Bird's many discoveries. Though none of the women present can agree on what constitutes female success or the best way to achieve it, the play embraces the dialectical nature of their conversation. Marlene's way climbing the corporate ladder is not the only way, but it is no worse than any other. The following scenes of the play are written in a decidedly more realist mode, with characters from the present day only. The difference between the positive portrayal of Marlene in act 1, scene 1 which is a celebration of female empowerment and the grittier, negative portrayal of her in the scenes that follow is partially due to this tonal shift.

### **1.6 Hypothesis**

*Top Girls*, Marlene throws a dinner party to celebrate her promotion. She invites women from antiquity to join her and listens to their stories of becoming courtesans, nuns, wives, and even the Pope. In the end, Marlene hires the daughter she abandoned, but says the girl won't last long. Marlene has just been promoted at the *Top Girls'* Employment Agency. She throws a big dinner party and invites women from history, literature, and art, including Pope Joan, the female Pope. Marlene listens to their stories. One was the daughter of a clergyman, one a courtesan and then a nun. Griselda, a character from *The Canterbury Tales*, marries up on the condition that she obeys her

husband's every word. In flashback, it has revealed that Marlene abandoned her daughter Angie and left her to live with her aunt, Joyce, Marlene's older sister. Marlene later hires Angie, but tells one of her coworkers that the girl won't make it.

### **1.7 Limitation of the Study**

This research is completely based upon drama. In particular it tries to depict that, the rupturing the boundary in Caryl Churchill's *Top girls*. For this purpose, this research concentrates on womanhood and woman emancipation in contemporary society.

### **1.8 Organization of the study**

Chapter One, includes, Introduction about the Author, Introduction of the study, Sex, Gender, Feminism theory, Role of Gender, Significance of the study, Hypothesis Limitation of the study, Review of Literature: Statement of problem.

Chapter Two: Historical overview on Feminism

Chapter Three: Textual Analysis (Theories, Quote and its explanations)

Chapter Four: Conclusion

## Chapter Two

### Marlene's Boldness in *Top Girls*

#### 2.1 Feminism Evolution

Feminist evolution emphasizes participatory, empowering, and social justice agendas, while all evolution approaches are laden with their own, often implicit, values, few assert their values as openly as feminist evolution. Unlike most gender approaches, feminist evolution does not provide a framework or advocate a precise approach; rather, feminist evolution is often defined as a way of thinking about evolution (Gelb 267).

#### 2.2 Early Feminism

People and activists who discuss or advance women's equality prior to the existence of the feminist movement are sometimes labeled as proto feminist. Some scholars criticize this term because they believe it diminishes the importance of earlier contributions or that feminism does not have a single, linear history as implied by terms such as proto feminist or post feminist. Around 24 centuries ago, according to Elaine Hoffman Baruch, "argued" for the total political and sexual equality of women, advocating that they be members of his highest class those who rule and fight"(45). One of the most important 17th-century feminist writers in the English language was Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Her knowledge was recognized by some, such as proto-feminist Bathsua Makin who wrote that "The present Dutchess of Newcastle, by her own Genius, rather than any timely Instruction, over-tops many grave Grown-Men,"(97) and considered her a prime example of what women could become through education.

**18<sup>th</sup> century: the Age of Enlightenment**

The Age of Enlightenment was characterized by secular intellectual reasoning and a flowering of philosophical writing. Many Enlightenment philosophers defended the rights of women, including (Jeremy 21).

**19<sup>th</sup> centuries**

Feminists did not recognize separate waves of feminism until the second wave was so named by journalist Martha Lear, according to Jennifer Baumgardner. His reports criticism by professor Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz of the division into waves and the difficulty of categorizing some feminists into specific waves, argues that the main critics of a wave are likely to be members of the prior wave who remain vital, and that waves are coming faster. The "waves debate" has influenced how historians and other scholars have established the chronologies of women's political activism (Brown 18).

**Early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

In the Netherlands, (Drucker 75) fought successfully for the vote and equal rights for women through political and feminist organizations she founded. In 1917–19 her goal of women's suffrage was reached. In the early part of the 20th century, also known as the Edwardian era, there was a change in the way women dressed from the Victorian rigidity and complacency. Women, especially women who married wealthy men, would often wear what we consider today, practical. Books, Articles, Speeches, Pictures, and Papers from the period show a diverse range of themes other than political reform and suffrage discussed publicly. In Netherlands, for instance, the main feminist issues were educational rights, rights to medical care, improved working conditions, peace, and dismantled gender double standards. Feminists identified as such with little fanfare.

Pankhursts formed the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. As Emmeline Pankhurst put it, they viewed votes for women no longer as "a right, but as a desperate necessity. At the state level, Australia and the United States had already granted suffrage to some women. American feminists such as Susan B. Anthony visited Britain. While WSPU was the best-known suffrage group. It was only one of many, such as the Women's Freedom League and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett. WSPU was largely a family affair although externally financed. Christabel Pankhurst became the dominant figure and gathered friends such as Annie Kenney, Flora Drummond, Teresa Billington, Ethel Smyth, Grace Roe, and Norah Dacre Fox (later known as Norah Elam) around her. Veterans such as Elizabeth Garrett also joined (Drucker 75).

### **Females in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

It has been argued that stories serve as a representative of the era in which it was conceived. As such, it serves as a reminder of the ideals of its particular society, including those directed towards gender. Through literature, one can gain insight as to what was expected of a male and females during a particular era and how it has (or has not) changed over time. The Renaissance was a time where to be a woman brought about images of a meek person who bent to the will of her male superiors, whereas in the modern day, this image is not necessarily true.

During the English Renaissance, which included the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, such feminine ideals as chastity, obedience, and submissiveness were promoted. These qualities of females were seen in some way, shape, or form in the characters of many Renaissance authors, including such notables as William Shakespeare and Edmund

Spenser. Chastity is a virtue very much so prominently present in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*. Here, nearly all the females who appear are chaste, including the protagonist Britomart, who is the champion of Chastity. There is Belphebe, who avoids her suitors before falling in love with a squire who is kidnapped and imprisoned by Busirane on her wedding night. Of course, this is not to say there is not the occasional Malecasta (who one could argue is very much so a daughter of Eve by her representation as temptation), who, thinking Britomart to be a man (as Britomart dresses up as a Knight and many believe her to be male), attempts to seduce in bed. It is no coincidence that only when Britomart's chastity is called into question is another knight able to injure her.

Obedience and submissiveness, one could argue, is evident in, amongst others of his works, Shakespeare's comedy, here, *Bianca*, the favored and younger daughter of the wealthy Baptista Minola, is the silent and obedient daughter, as opposed to her sister, Kate, the shrew. It is Kate's temper, loose tongue, and failure to submit and obey her father, as well as society's expectations, that earns her the title of shrew and chases away many of her suitors. This indicates that an opinionated woman was not a particularly well thought of woman during the Renaissance. That it is a comedy could be symbolic as well-to have such a woman appear in anything but would threaten the idyllic image that the era's society had constructed, perhaps leaving some in the audience troubled. There are, of course, other Shakespearean works each of them with women in the passive role-there is *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, and a host of others.

Although gender ideals of the Renaissance indicated that more passive qualities were a feminine quality that is not to say that they were qualities all women naturally possessed. However, women who possessed more masculine qualities appeared only to

be acceptable in some circumstance—for instance, although Shakespeare's Kate inspired those around her to shun her, Spenser's heroine, Britomart, though chaste and beautiful, was masculine (as represented by her cross-dressing as a Knight and her magic spear) in her adventure, a strong character who very actively fought as a knight and saved lives. Although, not all female characters holding masculine qualities are male—Shakespeare's infamous Lady Macbeth (who is not chaste) is ambitious and driven, convincing her husband to kill the king even after he had convinced himself not to. That she cannot bring herself to do the deed herself is indicative of the "weakness" that comes with her being a woman—she can instigate the action, but is unable to follow through with it. This is quite different from works in the 21st century. Women in works of the modern day are not necessarily portrayed as particularly chaste or submissive. Although characters like Lady Macbeth surely continue to be conceived and born, it is not particularly a feminine trait that such a character is associated with. The character is not necessarily thought of as either being either male or female, but simply as someone who represents the adage of, "It is easier to say than to do."

As in the Renaissance, what is considered "masculine" and "feminine" traits still exist and are able to coincide in one character. However, being feminine is no longer indicative of the submissiveness seen in Juliet or Bianca. Gender perception has changed since the 16th century, and in today's modern world, although there unquestionably remains certain societal expectation based on gender, to break away from such expectations need not be portrayed merely in a comedy. The character of a strong woman is no longer limited to be only an occasional occurrence—for every Bianca, there is Kate

and the Britomarts of the modern day is not necessarily so chaste. Kate, in today's world, is no longer a shrew.

All in all, literature has allowed its readers a glimpse of what societal expectations, including towards gender was like during the time of the literary work. In the past, there were the passive Biancas that reigned through society's ideal image of woman, eclipsed by the occasional Kate or Britomart. In modern days, whereas continues to exist, the Kates and Britomart (perhaps altered as modern day Kate's do not necessarily capitulate to their husbands in the end and modern day Britomart need not be the champions of Chastity have gained an increasing amount of acceptance as well. It is not necessarily that society itself has done away completely with the gender stereotypes that existed in the past-rather, the stereotypes has merely become less obvious and society in itself has become more accustomed to seeing the Kates the Britomart of the world (Humm 234-249).

**Feminist evolution has a strong overlap with some of the key characteristics of other evolution and research approaches.**

First-wave feminism of the 19th and early 20th centuries focuses on overturning legal inequalities, particularly women's suffrage. Second wave feminism (1960s-1980s) broadened debate to include cultural inequalities, gender norms, and the role of play of women in society.

Third-wave feminism (1990s–2000s) refers to diverse strains of feminist activity, seen as both a continuation of the second wave and a response to its perceived failures. Although the waves construct has been commonly used to describe the history of feminism, the concept has also been criticized for ignoring and erasing the history

between the "waves", by choosing to focus solely on a few famous figures, and popular events

Second wave feminism (1960s-1980s) broadened debate to include cultural inequalities, gender norms, and the role of play of women in society. Don't you get angry? I get angry. (Marlene, Act 1, 5) Marlene says this after hearing about the struggles that her female guests have experienced in their lives. She finds their stories of patriarchal oppression unbearable, and wonders if these women recognized the injustice as they lived it, the way Marlene has always struggled against societal gender roles in 1970s England. Marlene's anger, meanwhile, fuels her determination to get away from her blue-collar roots and aspire to financial independence. Marlene's abject refusal to let her gender get in the way of her success emerges many times over the course of the play. She leaves behind her daughter, thus throwing off the vestiges of motherhood, and behaves condescendingly towards women who do not want to devote their lives to overthrowing the patriarchy. First-wave feminism of the 19th and early 20th centuries focuses on overturning legal inequalities.

Particularly women's suffrage, I thought God would speak to me directly. But of course he knew I was a woman. (Joan, Act 1, 14) Joan says this while explaining that as she rose through the Church hierarchy, she always believed that God, knowing she was a woman, approved of her ascent. However, when she became Pope and failed to establish a direct connection with God, Joan took this to indicate his disapproval. Joan's statement is deeply ironic, since to a modern audience the idea of speaking directly with God, even by the Pope, seems ridiculous. However, this statement also indicates the intensity of the gender divide during Joan's time. While women like Mrs. Kidd may look down upon

Marlene's promotion over a man, in Joan's time, the patriarchy was so deeply seated that people believed only men could communicate with the Almighty. Joan sacrificed her life in her rebellion against the patriarchy - so at least Marlene is living in a slightly more civil time. Second wave feminism (1960s-1980s) broadened debate to include cultural inequalities, gender norms, and the role of play of women in society. And I hit him with a stick. Yes, I hit him with a stick. (Lady Nijo, Act 1, 27)

Lady Nijo describes her spirited retaliation against the Emperor for allowing his attendants to beat her and his other concubines during an annual festival. Nijo concocts an elaborate plan with the other women, to surprise the Emperor while he is alone in his bedroom. Nijo springs upon him and beats him with a stick until he promises not to allow anyone else to hurt the women again. Like Joan and Griselda, Nijo grew up during a time when certain conventions of patriarchy were accepted. Marlene is surprised that Nijo does not harbor more anger for having to spend half her life as a courtesan, but during Nijo's time, this was considered an honor. However, Nijo battled her male oppressor from within the infrastructure. She accepted many injustices that were ingrained in her society - but to her, this particular demonstration was crossing a line. The beatings ignited Nijo's inner rebel. The women at the table in Act I help contemporary readers put all our own struggles in perspective - and demonstrate that men have been oppressing women for centuries. The situation may have gotten better, but it is by no means entirely resolved.

Second wave feminism (1960s-1980s) I think you could make me believe it if you put your mind to it" (Marlene, II, ii, 33).

This is a backhanded compliment that Marlene gives Jeanine during their interview. Marlene finds Jeanine's desire to be married at a young age, along with her

lack of ambition, frustratingly pointless. She sees little potential in Jeanine and moves quickly to assign her to lackluster applications at companies that manufacture knitwear and lampshades. To Marlene, Jeanine is the antithesis to her ideal of driven individualism that values professional success above all else. Therefore, she gives Jeanine some tips for how to succeed during her interview - because Marlene does not believe that Jeanine is smart or experienced enough to actually succeed in business. First-wave feminism of the 19th and early 20th centuries focuses on overturning legal inequalities, particularly women's suffrage. I put on this dress to kill my mother. (Angie, Act 2, Scene 3, 44)

Angie makes this harrowing statement to Kit when the two are standing in Angie's backyard in the rain. Angie is intensely aggressive towards her mother, Joyce. The dress is significant because we will later learn it was a gift from Marlene, who is also hostile towards Joyce, and also foreshadows the revelation that Marlene is in fact Angie's biological mother. Angie does not know that Marlene abandoned her to pursue success in the big city, but just thinks of Marlene as her successful, stylish Aunty. Meanwhile, Angie puts on the dress and speaks these cold and callous words - showing that she understands (and sides with) Marlene's aggression against Joyce. Angie wants to be like her Aunty Marlene - but little does she know that the only reason Marlene is successful is that Joyce took over the duty of raising Angie.

First-wave feminism *We'd rather it was you than Howard*. We're glad for you, aren't we Nell. - (Win, II, iii, 50) Win and Nell both applaud for Marlene after her promotion, while simultaneously revealing their envy. Win assures Marlene that they are happy she was promoted over Howard, but Nell then tells Marlene that she doesn't like

coming in second. Marlene bluntly responds, “Who does?” The exchange shows the mixture of admiration, envy, competition and support that characterizes the relationship amongst the women at the office. The conversations between Win, Nell, and Marlene mirror the surreal dinner party in Act 1- the women all bond over their struggles against patriarchy. Although they do get jealous of individuals at times, they can recognize the grander societal importance of Marlene, a woman, being chosen for a promotion over Howard, a man.

"Nobody notices me, I don't expect it, I don't attract attention by making mistakes, everybody takes it for granted that my work is perfect." Third-wave feminism (1990s–2000s) - (Louise, Act 2, Scene 3,52) In her interview with Win, Louise expresses frustration over the unfair sacrifices she has had to make and the double standards that she has endured to stay in good standing at her company for over two decades. The character of Louise represents hidden patriarchal structures that modern women still face in the workplace. Although Louise has the same human and spiritual rights as her male counterparts she is highly aware that society views her as inferior to the men around her. Instead of accepting it, though, she is finally ready to do something about it, even though Win reminds her how difficult it will be for an older woman to get a new job. Louise is a contrast to Marlene-and shows that even though the feminist movement had made significant advances by the 1970s, gender equality was still a long way off.

Third-wave feminism (1990s–2000s) Christ, what a waste of time. (Nell, II, iii, 63) Shona's interview with Nell starts off well, but eventually collapses when Nell realizes that Shona's eagerness and toughness are a façade, and that she has fabricated

her entire resume. At first, Nell finds Shona's individuality and spunk appealing, even suggesting she might be able to work for *Top Girls*. However, Shona's ridiculous story of driving a Porsche around the country and staying at luxurious hotels on the company's expense account reveal she knows nothing about the day-to-day life of professionals. Shona represents another female archetype, just like the other women who come to *Top Girls* for interviews. She does not have a grasp on reality, nor does she understand that she will have to work very hard to achieve the kind of life she dreams about. She is clearly sheltered and clueless - the antithesis of Nell and the other "tough birds" who work at *Top Girls*. Nell's dismissal of Shona, however, shows how Marlene and her coworkers are highly individualistic and unwilling to help a misguided young girl - because helping her would not do anything to advance their own careers. Second wave feminism I believe in the individual. Look at me (Marlene, Act 3, 84).

This statement is effectively Marlene's rallying cry, and she delivers it during her argument with Joyce over politics in 1970s Britain. Marlene believes in the conservative party's emphasis on personal responsibility and hard work, as well as the idea that class does not truly exist as a barrier to self-advancement. Her position mirrors the public statement delivered by Margaret Thatcher that only "individuals and their families" exist, not class. It also shows that Marlene fully embraces the ideology of late capitalism.

Second wave feminism: Marlene: I didn't really mean all that. Joyce: I did (Marlene and Joyce, III, 87)

At the end of their argument in Act 3, Marlene appears to want to reconcile with Joyce. She seems to regret some of her harsh criticism against unions, the working class, socialism and even Joyce herself. Joyce, however, holds firm to her position, recognizing

that Marlene will always be dependent on her pro-capitalist ideals to advance her own financial standing. Joyce's resolution implies her understanding of the deeply-seated class struggle in 1970s Britain, versus Marlene's desire to attribute their disagreement to marginally important personal differences (Brown 117-129).

## Chapter Three

### Textual Analysis

The opening scene of *Top Girls* takes place in a restaurant where the historical characters are gathering one by one for a luncheon. Marlene is proud to include herself among the group for “the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements.” Serving as their hostess, Marlene greets the dignitaries, introduces them to the others, and makes some attempt to draw them into the conversation. The “*Top Girls*” need little encouragement. Confident about their places in history, they unselfconsciously begin unfolding their stories. Their accounts, bizarre and disturbing, are related in fragments often interrupted by one of the others.

Lady Nijo, a courtesan to the emperor of Japan in the fourteenth century, tells about hiding the details of four pregnancies and secretly giving up babies to retain her position of favor in the court. She was eventually expelled from the court for her affair with another lover.

Pope Joan claims to have been pregnant without knowing it. Riding in a papal procession, she experienced back pain and dismounted. In a sudden swell of pressure, she gave birth to the baby in the streets of Rome. Shocked and outraged, the people stoned her to death at the edge of town. She assumes that the baby was murdered as well. Patient Griselda explains how she, too, lost her children, one after another, to a husband who took them away as babies. She accepted his decision without complaint, never mentioning them to him again. When he sent her home to her parents in disgrace, wearing nothing but a slip, she continued to obey his wishes unconditionally. Years later, she willingly agreed to prepare his wedding to a younger bride. These plans were never

completed, however, because he finally confessed that he had only been testing her loyalty to him. He restored her children to her, and they lived “happily ever after.”

The women chat casually, recounting the circumstances of complex personal relationships in which they have had to make difficult choices for success. Stories of abuse and debasement are intercut with Isabella Bird’s self-absorbed account of lost opportunities with people she loved. Although often filled with regret, these women never present themselves as victims but describe themselves unapologetically as shapers of their own destinies.

Marlene listens sympathetically to their tales, demonstrating outrage and concern for their rights as women. Yet the lessons she should have learned from history make little difference when she returns from lunch to her own workplace. Interviewing a client in the employment agency, she demonstrates no concern for the client’s integrity as a woman. Marlene advises her to compromise personal preferences for advancement and to lie about the circumstances of her marital status to land a job.

The remainder of the play focuses on Marlene’s story and that of her colleagues and clients. For every experience related by a historical character in the first act, there is a modern parallel, often portrayed by the same person. Doublecast as Lady Nijo, for example, is Win, who is having an affair with a married man. Many of the modern women, however, are composites of earlier figures. Among those interviewed is a client who, like Pope Joan and Dull Gret, is proud to “pass as a man at work” and, like Patient Griselda, has loyally worked twenty-one years for a firm that exploits her flawless record. More to the point, the second act reveals how much Marlene has in common with her famous friends. A visit to her sister, Joyce, sparks an altercation between them that

discloses Marlene's relationship as biological mother to the dim-witted Angie. Marlene, as a young girl aspiring to escape a small-town, working-class existence, gave up her illegitimate baby to her sister. Joyce was pleased to adopt the baby at first, because she was not able to get pregnant. Angie's deficiencies have, however, complicated her hopes for more children. Furthermore, Joyce resents the class differences now existing between her and her sister. Marlene has assumed a middle-class position and wants to keep it. When asked by Joyce whether she will help Angie, Marlene replies coldly that she probably will not do so, because the girl is "stupid, lazy, and frightened." She means that she herself refuses to risk her professional reputation for a weak candidate. It becomes clear to Joyce at that point that Angie's future is doomed. Marlene's maternal selfishness, her conservative politics, and her willingness to imitate and endorse the standards and practices of a male-dominated capitalist economy consign Angie to the bottom of the hierarchy. Marlene, however, is unconcerned. Although appalled by the social circumstances that forced her luncheon friends to relinquish their children, she fails to recognize the tragic consequences of her own ambitions (Kritzar 138-150).

### **3.1 Research Methodology**

I have briefly analyzed some extracts from Churchill's *Top Girls* using a Conversation Analysis- (CA) based 'interactive' approach to the overlapping dialogue. Consequently, interpreting overlaps as a disruptive interruption is to a large extent depend on the interrupter's response format. An interpretative resource had provided for the analyst with regard to the dramatic situation and characters are generalized.

## Chapter Four

### 4.1 Conclusion

#### "Marlene A Successful Entrepreneur"

*Top Girls*, Caryl Churchill's famous 1982 play about the cost to women who reach the summits of the male-dominated hierarchy of business, has been described as essentially not one but three excellent short plays all contributing to her central theme. The first play is a surreal dinner party, which the host and central character of the three plays, Marlene, has invited five women who have all succeeded but suffered in the playing of male roles. Her guests are Pope Joan, Chaucer's Patient Griselda, a Japanese courtesan who became a Buddhist nun, Isabella Bird the Victorian traveler, and Dull Gret whom Brueghel painted leading a group of women charging through hell and fighting with devils. The second play is a series of snapshots of smug, successful business women working at Marlene's *Top Girls'* Employment Agency interviewing women for dead-end jobs.

The third play zeroes in on family life and we discover the cost of emancipation and equality to Marlene who believes with Margaret Thatcher that the 1980s are a time when anyone can do anything if they have what it takes. We also discover the cost to her sister Joyce and her daughter Angie who don't have what it takes. The themes to shine through, particularly in the final, powerful scenes between Sally Richards' Marlene and Tina Cook's spunky Joyce, both of whom carried on seemingly unperturbed by a deafening and false fire alarm in the middle of their major scene. In fact, in *Top Girls*, appear in act one, taking place in a restaurant, a celebration that Marlene organizes, because of her recent promotion, we see other characters such as Lady Nijo, Dull Griet,

Pope, Joan who celebrate their femininity with each other. During the course of the night they gather together and supposed to speak about their victories, and of course there occurs an epiphany for them because they in fact had lost their own womanly manner in order to achieve men's world. The presence of these empty women is so well epitomized in the character of Marlene, as a kind of gap between past and present, this working class girl pregnant who left her home village to make a new one in London. So the old Marlene has died and no one is born and replaced by a cruel one, so we see here some assembly of dead women, who so naively consider themselves as the most alive ones. The structure of the play so excellently shows the sense of death of its main characters, in other words we can see a kind of parallelism, between their life and the structure of play. The play's denouement is somehow truncated, as the lives of women truncated and crooked. Of course, we can consider this kind of techniques used by her as feminist stances of denying the masculine pattern of plays inherited by Aristotle.

I think before the full analysis of the play, that's better to mention some characteristics of it that is so prominent: her adaptation of Brechtian drama by the use of alienation effects, a kind of aesthetic distance, the matter and technique is so excellently showed by successive interruption of waiter and of course their laughter. From the perspective of dramatic shape it consists of three acts. One consists of three scenes and acts two of tow scenes. I think the matter and division is because of creation of some chronological disruption, and it is done as a way of fulfilling a very good function in order not to create a kind of identification between the reader/audience and the actor/actress on the stage. Another important thing mentioned here is that, between different layers of this play, we have the working of the ideology. In this way, we have a

criticism of capitalism and capitalist regimes that the play puts forward. In another sense, it can be used to exemplify more feminist reading of the play in fact by occurrence of a complete climax and by in fact having a diametrically opposed position to the structure inherent to tragedy postulated by Aristotle. As Christopher Innes has stated Combining surreal fantasy with Shavian discussion, documentary case-histories, and naturalistic domestic drama. *Top Girls* breaks out of conventional methods of portraying life on the stage, and suggests new ways of seeing reality creating a dynamic that is liberated from cause-and effect logic. The fact that we have in the drama only women and not men, is really vital in comprehension of it. The fact that the actresses in *Top Girls* have to double or treble roles prevents us from identifying with them and, consequently, focuses the attention of the reader/audience on the political message of the play, which is feminism.

Thus, the woman-only cast illustrates the subject matter of *Top Girls* and reinforces the theme of feminism or that's better to say anti feminism. Although, the play deals with oppression of women by men in a capitalist regime, but we see the oppression of women by women as a result of being part of that regime. It can also mean that how women have internalized the rules and privileges of patriarchal societies, however, we do not see a manifest attack of Churchill on men, in other words we do not see the struggle of women but in fact the play turns on the analysis of class strife and economics. An example can be found in the case of Marlene, who sacrifices her own daughter and family in order to escape from her working-class origins, besides, here in this drama we see that all the women somehow have some masculine way of behavior, although they think that they have cut with them, as we see that they have just an illusion that they are successful women or we as a kind of reader find that it's just an illusion to consider the play just as

representation of a feminist drama. I think even the naming of character in the play; they exemplify the whole discussion about class struggle and economic strife that underlies it. So we have here a four-group classification. First group women of past as we have Isabella Bird, as her name reminds us the matter of travelling. It can also be considered as a reference to the several characters in the play (Marlene, Lady Nijo, Win, Angie, Jeanine and Shona), who long for escape from their reality and fly to other, sunnier lands. Here we see on the surface feministic tendency.

In *Top Girls*, the use of overlap is a sign of the female voice. Brecht's splintering of the ego is further problematical in Churchill's text by the female entry into the symbolic order of language. As along centric sign language places the female subject in a marginalized relation to its patriarchal order. By destabilizing the linguistic exchange and therefore unfixing identity, but at the same time giving predominance to a female voice, Churchill seems to be stressing in a radical way the destabilization and displacement of the female subject in relation to language, and consequently in relation to occupying a position in a patriarchal defined society.

All the women of *Top Girls* have conformed themselves to the male standards of behavior and that shows the theatricality of their works and glories. They are never satisfied with this new brand of gender, at least before they were just women now not men and not women belonging to one of them. From the researchers point of view all the characters are confined in the symbolic stage with the role of father. Since language is given in and by a system dominated by men, women's access to it is going to be clearly mediated. According to this, women's voice their identity will be totally artificial, a construct defined by patriarchy. This is precisely her powerful speech, in which she

equals the Symbolic Order to hell. A hell where all the devils are male. *Top Girls* has inserted a lot of messages some say that it is basically a play about capitalism and sexism: About capitalism in the sense that it analyses labor and social relations constituted by a capitalist economy about sexism in that these relations are seen from a female point of view which explores how female identity is put down by the politics of patriarchy. *Top Girls* is also a socialist-feminist play. It can be defined as socialist in that it takes a clear position against any sort of capitalist ideology, and it can be defined as feminist because it presents us with a parallel between socio-economic, by the use oppression and gender oppression. In fact, as we have seen, Churchill herself is a firm believer in the "inseparability of feminism and socialism besides, her uses of characters are true to life, she really generalize the theme of her feministic play, by use of characters of different classes to connote that it is a play about all women. Different strategies of her to create a feminine setting is really of paramount importance, although in this play she showed women who have achieved the highest level of social life but they are not really satisfied. The main message of her is that women should know the limits, as she is a social feminist and she is criticizing the bourgeois feminists.

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