



The Social and Political Affect in *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*

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Abstract

This paper explores the social and political impacts depicted in Caryl Churchill's plays *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*, utilizing affect theory as conceptualised by Brian Massumi. By examining the emotional and affective dimensions of these works, the study highlights how Churchill's dramaturgy engages with and critiques societal norms and power structures. *Cloud Nine* deconstructs colonial and gender identities through its non-linear narrative and cross-gender casting, while *Top Girls* addresses the complexities of female ambition and societal expectations.

Churchill's plays are not far from her life and career development, instead, they are related. In the two plays, one can notice how the socialist and feminist ideas were conveyed professionally and how the playwright managed to convey to the audience her main perspectives. The paper tackled the professional life of Churchill, her gradual development as a playwright and the distinctive theatrical techniques used in the two plays.

Through the lens of affect theory, this paper argues that Churchill's plays not only reflect but also actively shape the audience's emotional responses, fostering a critical awareness of the social and political issues at play. The analysis demonstrates how affective engagement in drama can serve as a powerful tool for social critique and transformation.

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التأثير الاجتماعي والسياسي في السحابة التاسعة وفتيات القوة

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المستخلص

يستكشف هذا البحث التأثيرات الاجتماعية والسياسية الموضحة في مسرحيات كاريل تشرشل "السحابة التاسعة"، و"فتيات القوة"، وذلك باستخدام نظرية التأثير كما تصورها بريان معصومي. من خلال دراسة الأبعاد العاطفية والعاطفية لهذه الأعمال، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على كيفية تفاعل دراما تشرشل مع الأعراف المجتمعية وهياكل السلطة وانتقادها. تقوم "السحابة التاسعة" بتفكيك الهويات الاستعمارية والجنسانية من خلال سردها غير الخطي واختيارها بين الجنسين، بينما تعالج "فتيات القوة" تعقيدات طموح الإناث والتوقعات المجتمعية.

مسرحيات تشرشل ليست بعيدة عن حياتها وتطورها الوظيفي، بل هي مرتبطة ببعضها البعض. وفي المسرحيتين يمكن ملاحظة كيف تم نقل الأفكار الاشتراكية والنسوية بشكل احترافي وكيف تمكنت الكاتبة المسرحية من نقل وجهات نظرها الرئيسية للجمهور. تناول البحث الحياة المهنية لتشرشل وتطورها التدريجي ككاتبة مسرحية والتقنيات المسرحية المميزة المستخدمة في المسرحيتين.

من خلال عدسة نظرية التأثير، يجادل هذا البحث بأن مسرحيات تشرشل لا تعكس الاستجابات العاطفية للجمهور فحسب، بل تشكلها أيضًا بشكل فعال، مما يعزز الوعي النقدي بالقضايا الاجتماعية والسياسية المؤثرة. يوضح التحليل كيف يمكن للمشاركة العاطفية في الدراما أن تكون بمثابة أداة قوية للنقد الاجتماعي والتحول.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الشدة، الاستعمار، معصومي، التأثير الاجتماعي والسياسي، التاتشيرية.

"There is nothing permanent except change."

Heraclitus

Drama is a mirror that reflects the complexities of human life and experience. It captures the essence of human emotions, political landscapes, and societal norms from ancient Greek tragedies to contemporary plays. The themes of drama are diverse, covering all aspects of human life and providing a window into the experiences and lives of people across different historical periods. It explores moral and philosophical questions and reflects the concerns of the time and societal values ("How Is Drama a Reflection of Life? – Mass Initiative").

In the medieval period, drama tackled religious topics and took a didactic tone, such as the morality and mystery plays that depict biblical stories to concentrate on moral lessons. After that, Renaissance drama revived the classical themes and focused on humanism, which led to the development of characters and plots. Additionally, the Renaissance drama explored themes of love, power, and betrayal, which reflect the social and political upheavals of their time. Then, the drama of the 19th and 20th centuries shifted towards realism and naturalism. It addressed social issues and the human psyche. Ibsen's (Norwegian playwright and theatre director) plays, for instance, challenged societal norms and focused on the struggles of individuals against oppressive structures. Chekhov's (Russian playwright and short-story writer) works focused on human relationships and everyday life. His plays provided a detailed portrayal of the complexities of human experience (Elsie G. May 161-171).

Drama continues to evolve in the contemporary era. It reflects the interconnectedness and diversity of the contemporary world. Caryl Churchill used drama to address identity, gender, and race issues, which provides a platform for marginalized voices. Her innovative use of techniques and the non-linear narratives allowed her to examine the complexity of the human experience in a rapidly changing world (April De Angelis). Churchill's life and career influenced her works, including *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*.

Cloud Nine is a play written in 1978 and premiered in 1979. It explores gender, colonialism, and sexuality themes. The playwright used cross-gender casting and non-naturalistic techniques to challenge traditional notions of identity and power. The structure of the play and its themes are influenced by affect theory because it delves into the emotional and social dynamics of its characters (Misbah . 11).

Top Girls explores women's sacrifices for success in a world dominated by men. The play features multiple periods and a non-linear narrative, which reflects Churchill's innovative style. It aligns with affect theory by emphasising the societal pressures and the emotional struggles faced by women at work or at home. Churchill employs new theatrical techniques and challenges traditional narratives.

Affect theory is central to understanding Churchill's work, as it examines the role of feelings and emotions in human behaviour and social dynamics. So, the plays can be analysed through affect theory because, in both plays, Churchill delves into the complexities of sexuality, gender, and societal expectations. Churchill's plays reflect her perspectives and professional evolution. Additionally, the plays provide a thoughtful analysis of the human condition.

Caryl Churchill

Caryl Churchill, a prominent English playwright, was born in London in 1938. Churchill was educated at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University, and graduated in 1960. There, she wrote her first play, *Downstairs*, which was staged in 1958, when she was a student, she won an award at the Sunday Times National Union of Students Drama Festival. She wrote numerous plays for the BBC radio including *The Ants* (1962), *Lovesick* (1967) and *Abortive* (1971). In 1972, her first professional stage production, *Owners*, premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London. So far, she has written more than 30 plays.

Churchill moved from earlier plays on the radio, which were words and sounds alone, to a greater emphasis on movement and space in her recent work. Churchill's dramaturgy is the staging of desire generally, and the desires of the society members who can hardly realise them specifically. These desires are sometimes erotic, but they are almost always political. The desires of the oppressed, and mostly women which social and political structures are unwilling to accommodate. Churchill always has the sense to explore excessive utopian desires, but she recognises the obstacles they come up against. Many of her plays show a near frenzy of anti-social passion. Churchill is a playwright who writes on historical themes and is concerned with portraying the fate of groups (Buse).

Churchill was appointed as the Court's first woman writer in residence in 1974–1975. The time of 1970s was of feminism prominence both in England and the United States, which meant identifying the social and sexual inequalities in women's lives and seeking ways to change them. In 1976, Churchill worked with the then-newly formed, women's theatre company, Monstrous Regiment, which was one of the leading feminist theatre organisations in the UK. Churchill's work in a feminist theatre context brought her artistic and intellectual stimulation. Also, a recognition that she was part of the women's movement ("The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill").

Sexual politics surfaced in several of Churchill's major plays from the 1970s to the early 1980s, including *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*, due to the feminist and leftist climate of the seventies. Churchill acknowledged that socialism and feminism are not synonymous. For this, she made it clear that she felt 'strongly about both and wouldn't be interested in a form of one that didn't include the other'(Aston).

Churchill took up an anti-capitalist stance in her plays and considered gender issues when discussing her topics. In the seventies, she worked with the writing company, Joint Stock, which was an influential politicising experience for her that influenced her evolving dramaturgy. In her plays, Churchill reflected Britain's social, economic, and political scenes. She addressed the main issues in these respects to expose the weak areas to her audience. Furthermore, she offered methods for de-identifying with living under the strictest multinational capitalist regimes. She was adamant about reviewing the horrifying, frightening, and destructive effects of the contemporary world, which is running towards ecological and economic conflict in addition to the constant state of worldwide terror. She insisted on reassessing the things that demand people's attention. To highlight the need to correct the blinkered view or narrow-minded personal considerations of the bigger political picture. She ensured to engage her audience's curiosity and imagination through political critique and historical texts ("The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill").

Churchill is well known for her infinite ability to reinvent theatrical technique and language from play to play. In rehearsals, she prefers to discuss form or effects rather than meaning. Many of Churchill's plays are nonlinear, and what occurs on stage cannot fully meet our expectations of reality because those expectations are affected by dramatic conventions of chronological and causal sequence. Churchill developed a dramaturgy that included a touchable experience of what was later identified by Postmodern theorists as 'time-space compression' and 'radically discontinuous realities'. Today, she is one of the most prolific and appealing in the contemporary playwright's profession.

Churchill's characters are unforgettable, those startling voicings that register psychic and social disturbance. For instance, in her satiric plays, the characters have a kind of extreme recognisability. The gender, class and historical moments of the characters can be identified instantly through styles of speech that crash for political and comic impact.

Through fast readings of Churchill's plays, one can notice that the outstanding figure and language is the isolated woman whether she is a daughter, mother, or wife. The words of isolated women in Churchill's plays are unsentimental accounts of confusion, longing, rage, and fear. Churchill added to her plays nonhuman characters such as vampires, goblins, ghosts, angels and figures out of a shared cultural past to unsettle the present deliberately.

As the political landscape in England changed over decades, with these changes, the subjects of Churchill's plays changed. However, most of her plays were premiered at The Royal Court Theatre. Churchill found a home in it since the production of *Owners* in 1972. The Court provided many important theatre relations to Churchill; for instance, her association with Max Stafford-Clark, the Court's manager throughout the 1980s till 1993. Churchill likes to be out of the limelight by keeping a low profile and rarely gives interviews and even when she does, she is always selective. Lawson wrote:

One of my biggest regrets as an interviewer is that Caryl Churchill declines to speak publicly about her work. It's a resolution she has stuck to through the quarter-century in which she has established herself as one of theatre's most innovative and provocative dramatists.

Most of Churchill's plays were performed in the Royal Court Downstairs. In 2008, Churchill's special relationship with the Court was celebrated on her seventieth birthday. For this, the theatre hosted a series of Caryl Churchill Readings.

In 2009, Churchill wanted to respond to the war in Gaza quickly, and the Court was willing to stage her short, politically outspoken play, *Seven Jewish Children*. Churchill's dedication to the publicly subsidized, state-funded arts is clearly shown in her enduring allegiance to the Court. She avoids the more profitable, commercial opportunities of theatre such as film or television.

Churchill is anti-capitalist, as proof of this, she resigned from the theatre's council in 1989, when the Court decided to accept the sponsorship offer from Barclays Bank for a 'New Stages' festival of work, she declared:

I can understand and respect the view that what matters is to keep the work going and so the theatre should take whatever money it can get. But I can't share it. I feel that my plays are saying one thing and the theatre something else (See Aston and Diamond 2-11)

Churchill's voice is presented in her plays. She conveys to her audience her ideas and presents the plays that reflect the situation of their time, allowing her audience to be affected by what they are watching. Two plays will be tackled in the next section, *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*. The context in which the two plays were written, will be explained. In addition, the theatrical techniques used to support the plays' themes and how they were employed by the playwright to affect the audience, will be discussed.

The Social and Political Affect in *Cloud Nine*

Cloud Nine reflects the social and political scene of the 1970s in Britain, and compares its features with the situation in the past (specifically 100 years ago). It presents how the social norms and political system have changed, and how these changes affected people's lives and perceptions. Affect theory is an approach to culture and focuses on the non-linguistic aspects of affect. In this case, the performance of the actors presents and transmits these affects to the audience by showing the similarities and differences between the two eras through their movements, costumes, and the language they use in their dialogues and conversations.

Cloud Nine was written after workshops with the Joint Stock Theatre Company in late 1978. It was premiered in 1979, at the Dartington College of Arts in Devon, England. It is divided into two acts; the first was set in colonial Africa during the Victorian era and the second act in 1979 London.

Act One occurred in the nineteenth century in the Colonial Africa, at Clive's house. Clive is a British colonial administrator, who has a wife, Betty, and two children (Edward and Victoria). In addition, Ellen (the governess), Maud (Betty's mother), and Joshua (the African servant) are living with the family. All of them sing a song to glorify England. Harry Bagley and Mrs. Saunders are family friends who also appear in the first act, the two are British people living in Africa.

Act Two is set in contemporary London in 1979, supposedly one hundred years later than Act One, but the characters have grown up by 25 years. Victoria has a lesbian friend who asked her for a date. Betty planned to leave Clive, and Gerry (Edward's lover) left him. Lin, Edward, Victoria and Martin (Victoria's husband) conducted a pagan sex ritual. In the end, the characters expressed their sexual orientation freely in a sharp contrast to their concerns in Act One.

One of the most prominent events in the second half of the nineteenth century (in Europe) is characterised by colonising other countries. Africa was colonised by Europeans and Britain was colonising

30% of the African people (Guggemos). Colonisers had only learnt two things from Africans and about Africa: they believed that Africans were an inferior race; and they were a helpless group of people. Therefore, they needed to be protected (Jones 2-4).

Victorian philosophers portrayed Africans as savages and barbarians, while the white Europeans were considered supreme and depicted as civilised. The Africans were regarded as inferior to the more civilised European groups, which were ever ready to help by bringing “civilisation” to the “uncivilised”. The colonisers undermined the African’s lifestyle (Mokhoathi 6-10).

Colonialism impacted the lives of Africans. Europeans adopted economic policies that destroyed the colonies, rather than help them. As a result, Africa was damaged economically, politically, and culturally. The African’s traditional lifestyles and culture were destroyed, as the Europeans did not have an interest in traditional African culture. The negative effects of colonialism became evident after the independence of many African nations. Colonial governments selectively chose the best lands in Africa to take over and use them for their personal or commercial purposes. British conquered lands in South Africa and Kenya. The nice climates and fertile soil in Central, East, and South Africa encouraged the British and other colonisers to settle in. The colonisers started to create farms and mining companies in Africa, and they used the natives as cheap labour. These labourers were paid in cash and food rations, while the working conditions were terrible, with corporal punishment and low wages (Lincoln County Schools).

In addition, colonisers were taking taxes from the Africans to run their businesses, especially after the Second World War. As the forced labour increased, only men were used to work in farms and mines, and many African men were separated from their families. As a result, the African villages lost the manpower to produce food, which eventually led to famine. The economic structure of Africa deteriorated because cash crops (cotton, cocoa, tea, and coffee) were introduced by Europeans to meet their industrial needs. The use of these crops is for basic needs, instead of food. In addition, Africans couldn’t trade these cash crops because the colonisers prohibited them from doing so. To sum up, the colonisers did not plan to industrialise or modernise Africa, instead,

sum up, the colonisers did not plan to industrialise or modernise Africa, instead, they exploited the natural resources and workforce for their interests, which created exhausted dependent countries (Lincoln County Schools).

The first act of *Cloud Nine*, shows a society that is male-dominated, and firmly structured. Clive imposed his ideals on his family and the natives. He wants a son with masculine features, a faithful wife, and an obedient servant. All the characters were placed in fixed positions (Victorian customs) that determined their attitudes. Clive’s attitude towards Joshua indicates how he considers him an inferior and a follower who has no right to tell jokes. For instance, Betty complained to Clive that Joshua told her something improper, he immediately reproached him:

Now Joshua, it won’t do you know. Madam doesn’t like that kind of joke. You must do what madam says, just do what she says and don’t answer back. You know your place, Joshua. I don’t have to say any more. (Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, 1.1, 87)

Clive’s actions as a colonial administrator show how he looks at the natives and how he treats them. He led the other men to flog the natives, then he justified what he did by telling Betty:

It was my duty to have them flogged. For you and Edward and Victoria, to keep you safe.... You can tame a wild animal only so far. They revert to their true nature and savage your hand. Sometimes I feel the natives are the enemy. I know that is wrong. I know I have a responsibility towards them, to care for them and bring them all to be like Joshua. But there is something dangerous. Implacable. This whole continent is my enemy. I am pitching my whole mind and will and reason and spirit against it to tame it, and I sometimes feel it will break over me and swallow me up. (Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, 1.3, 68&70)

In addition, the British soldiers killed the parents of Clive's African servant, Joshua. All these actions demonstrate the context of the colonised Africa under Britain. According to Massumi, the affect has a body-environment coupling feature. In the play, Joshua embodies Clive's ill-treatment towards natives.

Act One presents the events to the audience in a way that enables them to rethink past actions, to consider the truth from the other side of the fence, and to think of the feasibility of such strict rules and attitudes both on the social and political levels. The play addresses issues of colonialism and imperialism, even though the era passed, the lessons and impacts are still to be considered. The characters behaved in what Massumi named, the zone of indistinction, which is where the affect operates. In the play, the zone lies between the mental and physical, the collective and the individual where the character's bodies and environment intermingle and the affect flows openly.

As for the sexual orientations, the first act presents unconventional sexual relationships in a comic way, such as Ellen's same-sex attraction towards Betty, and Harry towards Edward and Joshua. In the Victorian era, such unconventional attitudes were not tolerated. So, the characters had to hide their sexual orientations, and aspirations to commit to the norms.

In fact, the fight for women's rights made progress in the first wave of feminism, following World War II until the 1960s. In 1970, over 500 women in the UK formulated demands for equal pay, education opportunities, 24-hour nurseries, and free contraception and abortion. These demands reflected a desire for material changes to improve women's status in society (Alkhafaji 5308). In the play, Betty longs for independence and adventure. She feels muffled by the limitations placed on women in the Victorian society. Her feelings for Harry Bagley, the explorer and her husband's friend, represent a craving for the thrilling world he embodies, a world that is mostly closed off to women. Betty's inner desires represent a journey about self-discovery. She struggles with her desires and disappointments within the constraints of her roles as a wife and mother. Though she doesn't wish to be a man but yearns for the opportunities and freedom connected to masculinity during that particular period.

In addition, the pressure on Edward to conform to masculine ideals that clash with his natural inclinations, leads him to hide his effeminacy and attraction to Harry, which represents emotional distress that he struggles to solve. He cannot please his father, who embodies rigid colonial masculinity and struggles to perform the right kind of masculinity within a power framework that reinforces colonialism.

Furthermore, Joshua's position as a servant restricts his emotional expression. He must consistently regulate his emotions to satisfy Clive, repressing any feelings of resentment or anger. This emotional suppression drives his future act of disobedience. Joshua's personality as a perfect servant, is a performance imposed by the colonial power hierarchies. The negative emotions experienced by Betty, Edward and Joshua are related to social constraints, they are the product of power structures that limit their self-

expressions. The bodies of these characters became battlegrounds to express or suppress their emotions (Klein 64).

The characters in *Cloud Nine* struggle with societal expectations and norms surrounding gender roles and sexual orientation. The play examines how these expectations can be oppressive and limiting. Also, it explores the idea of breaking free from them to live authentically. Churchill presents the sex lives in contemporary London, which is built on detailed research of the situation. Additionally, she demonstrates the power relationships within society at a given time by examining the material conditions of the society at the time (Ravari 2).

Churchill explores the notion of power in the family and society, and the impact of power structures on individuals' behaviours, thereby aiding in the formation of diverse social subjects. *Cloud Nine* is a clear example of the affects of socially imposed identities, practices, and hegemonic power on people. It represents social forces that produce dependent persons, who are denied their right to create their identities according to their convictions (Kritzer 129).

Churchill believes in change, as the patriarchal society and the political ideology have a materialist affect on the individuals' conditions. This means that exploiting the women and the subjugated groups (native Africans in *Cloud Nine* represented by the African servant Joshua) in a male-dominated world affected everything that concerned them. They could not express themselves and had no power to decide, their roles were limited to domestic duties and obeying Clive's orders. Churchill calls for personal and social change, through using the theatrical tool available to her, and the way she treats her plays to trigger thoughts and calls for solutions.

The Affect of Theatrical Techniques in *Cloud Nine*

The stage is made up of a density of signs, which makes the theatre characterised by complexity. In addition, theatre can convey conflicting messages to the audience through multiple staging elements. Most traditional plays are rooted in the Aristotelian tradition, based on Aristotle's teachings, the Aristotelian tradition of drama emphasises the importance of a well-structured plot as it is considered the most important element of drama. Also, it advocates for the three unities of action, time, and place. In addition, the purpose of Drama is to arouse in the audience feelings of pity and fear to purge these emotions (catharsis). Consequently, people become more emotionally resilient ("Aristotle, the Poetics"). These plays limit the complexity and the range of possible meaning through imposing thematic unity and narrative standards (Kritzer 127).

However, Churchill's plays use theatre's numerous, diffuse, and paradoxical meanings to challenge the deconstruction of artificial audience units. Churchill created complex plays by juxtaposing linked episodes rather than integrating them, overlapping conversation and action, as well as the temporal shifts and visual paradoxes that she is known for. Churchill used diverse theatrical techniques in *Cloud Nine* that would affect the audience. For instance, one of the most well-known techniques Churchill used within the text is the non-linear structure. This technique helps in creating a sense of intensity within the narrative. The audience needs to follow the events and trace them carefully in order to have a sense of understanding and engagement with the play and its main theme.

Additionally, she utilises theatrical form to alter the relationship between the play and the audience, while the themes and issues discussed in her plays may be found in those of other politically oriented playwrights in contemporary Britain, because the traditional theatre has served as a platform for discussing patriarchy and the ruling elite. Nevertheless, Churchill demonstrates how oppressed communities can utilise their collective power to overturn and reshape society as she revitalises theatre and harnesses its inherent force to subvert the patriarchal forms with which it has been associated (Kritzer 126). Churchill uses narrative and thematic elements in the play to illustrate the structural elements of oppression while simultaneously utilising the formal elements of theatre to challenge the inevitability of oppression and empower the audience to change it.

As for casting, Churchill employed a cross-gender casting to blur the boundaries of gender and question societal constructs. Roles were played by actors from different sex and race. For instance, Clive's wife, Betty is played by a man (Jim Hooper), Clive's black servant, Joshua is played by a white man (Tony Rohr), and Clive's son, Edward, is played by a woman (Julie Covington). In addition, the whole play is dynamic, there is an interaction with historical conditions rather than a simple reflection. These changes represent what Massumi called, lines of flight, which are driven by the affect. They are the potential pathways for transformation and change. These lines emerged through the unpredictable interplay of intensities environments and bodies. The actors were compelled to show these interactions and changes especially when playing a role that is different from their sex, age and race.

In Act One, the play depicts a scene in which all characters follow the Victorian system (socially and politically). Then, in Act Two, all the characters change their behaviours and become more liberated. For instance, Betty is no longer under the complete submission to Clive (her husband). This change is relatively positive for Betty and negative for Clive as he lost much of his power and dominance.

Churchill's technique of fragmenting the actor's presentation into many, contradictory, and sometimes opposing roles equalises and opens up the relationship between the actor and the text. Churchill's plays were created through a workshop approach, centred on research and improvisation, with the company performing the final written text. Churchill acknowledged that many of the ideas in these plays came from workshop improvisations. Rewriting during rehearsals, even for plays not produced in workshops, demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between performer and text in Churchill's plays. Churchill's major plays promote a materialistic perspective of the individual and society, the individual as a subject formed by society and a subject acting to support or change that society. Ideology and history influence this human subject (Kritzer 129).

Moreover, Churchill employs Brechtian epic devices throughout the play. Derived from Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright, the Brechtian epic theatre employs the *Verfremdungseffekt* or the alienation effect techniques to prevent the audience from emotional engagement in the narrative. Also, to promote critical thinking and reflection on the presented issues on stage. These devices include direct addressing to the audience, visible stage machinery and lighting, and incorporating songs and slogans to disrupt the illusion of reality, to provoke social change and thinking instead of providing escapist entertainment (Lewis).

Additionally, Churchill challenged the traditional realistic drama of Ibsen. The realistic drama of Henrik Ibsen focuses on everyday situations and ordinary characters. It depicts the complexities and difficulties of real life (Emon 2). She uses songs that refer to history and historical events. She uses

alienation effects to keep the audience awake, and alert to things that are not going as planned. She employs the alienation effect with her characters in order to subvert and undermine the widely accepted values. For instance, some women's roles were played by men and vice versa.

Also, characters were played by different actors from Act One to Act Two. For example, the actor who played Clive (the male dominant figure) in Act One played Cathy (Clive's daughter) in Act Two. Some of the characters' features were totally reversed, such as Victoria, who was presented as a dummy in Act One, but she appeared as an intellectual woman who could stand on her own feet economically in Act Two. The use of these techniques is to question the gender assumptions and to reveal that they are indeed nothing but constructions and social expectations.

Moreover, Churchill used chronological disruption to distance the story, defamiliarise the audience, empower them, and as a result, force them to think. Additionally, she used songs to describe the events and satirise the situations. The song "Sons of England" informed the audience colonisation, as the characters sing loyalty to England in a colonised country:

Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your pride. Now meet the world united, now face it side by side; Ye who the earth's wide corners, from veldt to prairie, roam. From bush and jungle muster all who call old England 'home'. Then gather round for England, Rally to the flag, From north and south and east and west Come one and all for England! (Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, 1.1, 1)

Joshua sang a British Christmas song "In the Deep Winter" as a Christmas song. It is a song of a world that he does not have any clue about. It is also a useless song for Joshua because it is about winter, something that he cannot imagine or comprehend as an African:

In the deep midwinter Frosty wind made moan, Earth stood hard as iron, Water like a stone. Snow had fallen snow on snow Snow on snow, In the deep midwinter Long long ago. What can I give him Poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb. If I were a wise man I would do my part. What I can I give him? Give my heart. (Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, 1.2, 223)

The fourth wall convention in theatre is an imaginary wall that separates the audience from the stage, to produce a realistic effect, the actor performs as though he or she is a real person, and the audience is not there. In *Cloud Nine*, the players identify themselves to the audience, allowing them to converse as though they were not on stage. For example, Clive introduces himself and his family in Act One to the audience:

This is my family. Through far home We serve the Queen wherever we may roam I am a father to the natives here, And father to my family so dear. (Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, 1.1, 2)

Breaking the fourth wall, adds an additional factor that affects the audience's reactions towards what they are watching. Also, history is used in epic theatre as a way to set dramatic events aside and conduct an unbiased analysis of the issue. Additionally, because historicisation is designed to provoke an inquiring attitude towards the present through the past and change dominant versions of history, the audience is compelled to draw comparisons between Victorian era living conditions and modern society.

Churchill in this play maintains self-consciousness and gender roles are changing in society. The usage of cross-gender and cross-racial casting not only alienates the audience but also brings the subject of gender roles and racism into the spotlight. Churchill shows the shift to modern life by moving the play from

the past to the present. Since the play was written in 1978, changes have just recently begun, particularly concerning women's roles, for example, they have only recently begun to work. She can simply bring this topic to the forefront thanks to its spectacular theatre feature.

Act Two does not involve the African servant Joshua because slavery has been abolished. Furthermore, since Act Two marks the end of patriarchy, Clive is absent from the action, with Betty, the shift is most noticeable. The portrayal of Betty by a female character marks the shift from the conventional old world to the current world that acknowledges the woman (Şıklar 346-350).

Churchill's depiction of liberty in the second act is disturbing because it disrupts social relationships and causes disorientation. When the characters get freedom in the second act, they are confronted with pure anarchy. Churchill realises the difficult character of modern relationships, understanding that freedom can be tyrannical and disorienting. Churchill demonstrates the consequences of having greater unrestrained freedom, which can lead to chaos, as seen in Act Two (Misbah 11).

Cloud Nine explores various aspects of lifestyles and cultures and their impact on individuals and society. Additionally, the play aims to highlight the influence and significance of Victorian conduct on societal norms. By juxtaposing two historical periods, the play effectively manipulates the past and present. The first act is set in an African country colonised by the British during the height of the Victorian era. In contrast, the second act takes place in 1970s London, a hundred years later. This juxtaposition impacts the audience in a way that enables them to address the themes tackled in the play. The modern audience can realise easily the difference and how society changed completely in many aspects as it is presented in an intensified manner through many theatrical techniques.

The Victorian setting portrays a rigid, patriarchal system where social conventions take precedence over individuality, and the dynamics of sex and gender are solely based on duty rather than personal desires. The scenario in Act Two represents a total contrast to Act One. It exhibits a modern sense of liberation and disorder, where various forms of sexual connections and gender roles are explored, eradicating conventional expectations, and establishing novel, adaptable human relationships driven by desire. According to Massumi, one of the main aspects of affect is its dynamic nature. Many of the strict roles and social expectations drifted and changed in this case.

Affect theory examines the emotional and bodily dimensions of human experience. Bodies are shaped by social and cultural norms. Clive represents colonial and patriarchal oppression. While he must maintain a proper social image of the father and the husband. He asks for loyalty, while he is not loyal to his marriage. He makes orders and puts rules that he doesn't follow.

Clive's absence in Act Two, indicates that the Victorian affect on individual conduct (bodily movements and attitudes) is reduced but never disappears as some leftovers of these conventions apply to the span of the play, the late seventies (Silverstein11). In 1979 London, sexual liberation in contrast with the strict regularities in the nineteenth century. Betty was submissive to Clive in Act One, but almost independent in Act Two. She was dependent financially and physically on Clive, then she divorced Clive eventually.

As mentioned, the genders were strictly defined in the Victorian era, in manners, appearances, duties and responsibilities of each sex. This is what shaped the relationship between Betty and Clive. Clive must

look like a good husband and father. But in fact, he has an affair with another woman. Since Victorian society is patriarchal, Clive's behaviour is tolerated, but Betty's attraction to Harry is not (Silverstein 12).

In the seventies, identity became flexible, as it appealed to the needs and desires of the characters. Edward, for instance, openly expressed his feminine side and desires that he couldn't show freely in Act One. This change proves Brian Massumi's claim of the dynamic nature of bodies, that bodies are never static. The affect in one era is different from the other era and nothing lasts forever.

The Social and Political Affect in *Top Girls*

Top Girls was premiered in 1982 in three acts, at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs and directed by Max Stafford-Clark. Act One is set in a luxurious restaurant where Marlene (the protagonist) is hosting a dinner party with historical and fictional women (from history, art, and myths) from different periods, to celebrate her new promotion as the Managing Director at Top Girls Employment Agency in London. There were five women in the party; the first was Isabella Bird who is a real-life, nineteenth-century English explorer, writer, and naturalist. She led a successful life, though she never got a child, and was abused by men to some extent. She navigated the traditionally male areas and participated in adventures. Her success was not financial or monetary, this point is important to convey to the audience that there are many options for women to succeed.

The second woman is Lady Nijo, a real historical thirteenth-century concubine, who turns into a Buddhist nun. In her life, she was sexually exploited and psychologically abused by the emperor. Nijo's father had a major role in this exploitation, as he gave her to the emperor. Each time Nijon had female babies, the emperor would take them away. Eventually, Nijo left the Emperor's court and became a nun.

The third woman is Patient Griselda, who was a character from European folklore. She was famous in Boccaccio and Chaucer's tales. She was a peasant who married a powerful, handsome and rich Marquis. He wanted to test her obedience, by taking her children away and dismissing her from his palace. After proving her obedience and showing no opposition to the Marquis, he returned her to the palace and gave her children back.

The fourth woman is Pope Joan, a legendary figure, disguised as a man in the Middle Ages and reigned as Pope for two years until she got pregnant, and her true identity was discovered. As a result, people stoned her to death with her child.

The fifth woman is Dull Gret, the subject of a Flemish Renaissance painting by Pieter Brueghel the Elder. She was an old lady, dressed in long skirts and armour. She led women to pillage Hell and watched their children dying in a war. The historical and mythical characters expressed, via their conversation together, the oppressing circumstances they had been through and the nature of the society they lived in, especially being females. A universal female resentment continues on various levels throughout the play (Can 206-209).

Act Two is set in contemporary London, in two locations. Scene one was set in Joyce's backyard and scene two was set in Top Girls Employment Agency's Office in which women were seeking jobs and the employees interviewed them to help them get their dream job that suited their abilities.

Act Three is a year earlier than Acts One and Two. Three women appear in this Act, Marlene, Joyce, and Angie. It is set in Joyce's kitchen (Marlene's sister) where a confrontation between the two sisters, Joyce and Marlene, takes place.

In the play, all challenges were represented by the different characters, the main and the secondary ones. It is noteworthy to say that the cast were all females, sixteen female characters were represented on the stage by six female actors. So, each actor played more than one role. For instance, Deborah Findlay played three roles (Isabella Bird, Joyce and Mrs Kidd), and Lindsay Duncan played two roles (Lady Nijo and Win). Men's characters were mentioned in the text of the play, but their roles were never performed.

As for the political scene in England, Margret Thatcher (who represents the Conservative government) was elected in 1979 as the first UK female prime minister, she remained in power until 1990. Thatcher created a Britain divided by wealth and class, promoted private ownership of nationalized industries, and reduced public subsidies, especially for the arts. In theatre, this meant harsh economic times: cuts rather than expansion and an active pursuit of corporate sponsorship (Blundell 93).

Labour's party returned in 1997 with Tony Blair as prime minister. The new tendency of Labour's party with its cool Britannia, distanced itself from the old ideologies of socialism and feminism. These two terms lost their political power. In this period, the nineties, Churchill wrote plays that tackled the questions of identity and self-knowledge in a world that offers no personal or political means of self-knowing. She emphasised in her plays the question of how to further ourselves democratically in the absence of any ideological base from which to challenge the status quo (Blundell 95).

The play was performed during the Margret Thatcher regime (1979-1990), which was a very distinctive time in the UK. At that time, the term Thatcherism was coined, and it was first used by political commentators and journalists (critics and supporters) to describe her ideology and policies. Over time, the term has been widely used in history, economics, and political science. *Top Girls* gives a caustic glance at Thatcher's Britain, exposing her policies that push women to gain power by acting as men. The social standards imposed on women in Thatcher's era were harsh (Blundell 95-98).

Thatcher (the Iron Lady) was known as an anti-feminist, which contradicts the aspiration of feminism in Britain, as they were aspiring for more liberation. Instead, women were forced to abandon their domestic lives and confront friends to fulfil their dreams and ambitions. The political system supported and encouraged capitalism rather than socialism. Thatcher's reformation of economics was an imperative privatization (Alkhafaji 5307-5309).

Churchill, as mentioned before, always supports socialism as an ideology throughout the plays she wrote. In her plays, there is a hidden accusation that Thatcher supported both capitalism and a patriarchal society.

The guests (the five historical and fictional ladies) and Marlene share something in common. This was clearly uttered by Marlene in Act One when she said: "Oh God, why are we all so miserable?" Here, Churchill is interested in the emotional space of women. Indicating that being a woman, in all times and through different areas around the world is such a misfortunate thing. The unjust treatment and the rarity of opportunities offered to them were on top of their concerns. The situation of women in the UK was the same when the play premiered, women were still facing challenges.

Although Marlene embraces the enterprise culture, a business environment that emphasises innovation, risk-taking, and individual entrepreneurial initiatives. It fosters a mindset where employees are encouraged to pursue new ideas and opportunities, leading to continuous growth and competitive advantage, encouraged by Thatcher, and supports monetarism regardless of the social consequences, she is suffering another calamity. Marlene had to abandon her child in order to follow her dream and achieve success in her career. It is only through the conversation that the audience will know Marlene's secrets and will discover the truth that Angie is her daughter. The audience had to follow the events and concentrate on the characters' conversations to fill the gaps that were left empty till the end (Paul 12-14).

In Act One, Nijo, who was one of the invited characters to Marlene's dinner, narrated her story. Her story shows the patriarchal domination over her, she lived in an environment that despises women and their feelings. Nijo was conversing with the other ladies at the dinner party, she expressed her rage against what she witnessed of mistreating women at her time:

I'll tell you something that made me angry. I was eighteen, at the Full Moon Ceremony. They make a special rice gruel and stir it with their sticks, and then they beat their women across the loins so they'll have sons and not daughters. So the Emperor beat us all / very hard as usual – that's not it. (Churchill, *Top Girls*, 1.1, 431)

Marlene has freed herself from the constraints imposed on Nijo, Joan and Isabella. She does not depend on relationships with men to give meaning to her existence. She travels alone with confidence, and in comfort. She has achieved and retained a position of supreme authority in the social structure in which she is no longer a marginalised being. She found a voice and a room of her own. Marlene appears to be both creative and evolutionary. The audience would suppose, at first glance, that this is the ideal of the successful strong woman of the eighties. They might consider Marlene's promotion and freedom as an incentive for women's success, but the play goes on.

In Act Two, one can see that women are oppressed women, as they are divided by class. Women's vulnerability was increased in Thatcher's era because they were considered individuals, not groups and with all the vulnerabilities they had at her time, their suffering was increased and expanded. They faced new challenges and difficulties (Sood 178-182).

Churchill reflects on these challenges and opportunities. She always raises critical questions about gender and society. She is a distinctive voice in feminist theatre. She belongs to the second wave of feminism as her career began in the span of the rise of second-wave feminism (1960s-1980s), and she explored the themes that they were raising such as challenging gender stereotypes, sexual liberation, and reproductive rights. She criticized the patriarchal structures, challenged traditional gender roles, and explored female sexuality and societal constraints on women's desires and bodies (Dandapat 295).

The affect will unconsciously be transmitted to the audience through women's speech and actions. Each woman has a certain issue or challenge that affect the spectators in one way or another, especially if they resemble the same situations that the audience shares with the embodied characters on stage. When someone sees the same obstacle, they feel either enthusiastic, optimistic or pessimistic or even feel that they see their future or past faults, then they will produce bodily reactions, they might get shocked, frown, smile or cry as a response to what they are watching on the stage.

In Act Three, Joyce and Marlene were conversing, and Marlene admitted that she voted for Thatcher, because she admired her policies and embodied them: “And for the country, come to that. Get the economy back on its feet and whoosh. She’s a tough lady, Maggie” (Churchill, *Top Girls*, 2.3, 382).

Marlene represents Thatcher’s ideologies of politics. However, she paid a precious prize to be on top. She has abandoned her familial commitments towards her mom, sister and most importantly, her child. She could not maintain a balance between having a family and a job. Marlene’s success was a pyrrhic victory in which she had to sacrifice the essence of womanhood, motherhood, and family (Melany 25).

Marlene’s success after all is hollow and isolating. The play confronts the traditional notions of womanhood and success. This raises questions for the audience’s assumptions about ambition, gender roles, and societal expectations (Priya 2). In *Top Girls*, women used the same male mechanisms to oppress each other, which was not one of the objectives of feminism or what they fought for.

Marlene as a capitalist woman, expressed her scorn on the working class in Act Three. She talks to her sister Joyce, who was working as a cleaning lady and representing the working-class woman, she said: “I hate the working class” (Churchill, *Top Girls*, 2.3, 416). The audience can see that Joyce in her turn, has a class realisation and expresses her anger and envy towards the capitalists when she says that she spits when she sees a Rolls Royce and would scratch it with her ring. Also, she said that she hates the cows that she works for. The play is a sharp critique of Thatcher’s social and economic policies, in which limitations were put on women under the individualism brand of Thatcher. Despite some advancements, women’s ongoing struggle for power and equality continues over centuries.

The Affect of Theatrical Techniques used in *Top Girls* to Convey Social Challenges.

Top Girls is not a traditional play neither in its form nor in its content. The tackled theme was ultra-modern in its time. The innovative form used by the playwright has a lot of indications, implications, and references.

Churchill’s use of overlapping and interrupting a conversation among the five guests who recount their individual histories with horror, dismay, humour and celebration shows the strong affect of oppression they have been through and the challenges they faced. They were all eager to jump into each other speech, cut each other lines to comment or add their own opinions, questions and comments. For instance, in Act One, Nijo starts speaking before Isabella has finished her sentence:

Isabella This is the Emperor of Japan? / I once met the Emperor of Morocco.

Nijo In fact he was the ex-Emperor.

Also in Act One, Nijo continues speaking right through Isabella’s speech:

Isabella When I was forty I thought my life was over. / Oh I was pitiful. I was

Nijo I didn’t say I felt it for twenty years. Not every minute.

Isabella was pitiful. I was sent on a cruise for my health and I felt even worse. Pains in my bones, pins and needles in my hands, swelling behind the ears, and – oh, stupidity. I shook all over, indefinable terror. And Australia seemed to me a hideous country, the acacias stank like drains. / I had a

Nijo You were homesick. (Churchill, *Top Girls*, 3, 296-299).

In addition, in their discussion, Marlene and Joyce interrupted each other a lot. On the stage, this technique is obvious, but Churchill indicated it in the text by using slashes between the overlapping dialogue or dashes to indicate that a character is cutting another character's speech, or she expressed this in the stage directions. The interrupted conversation went on throughout the whole play.

In Act Three, Marlene and Joyce were talking about Angie (Marlene's daughter) and how she left her in order to work, their dialogue is full of interruptions:

Joyce You'd be stuck here / like you said.

Marlene I could have taken her with me.

Joyce You didn't want to take her with you. It's no good coming back now, Marlene, / and saying –

Marlene I know a managing director who's got two children,

she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money.

The language of the play expresses class distinction where the working class uses vernacular words and phrases. For instance, Marlene (coming from a working-class family) uses inappropriate words with Mrs. Kidd (who represents the middle class) when she pleads with her to give up her position to Howard (her husband): Well you've done it, you've seen me. I think that's probably all we've time for. I'm sorry he's been taking it out on you. He really is a shit, Howard. (Churchill, *Top Girls*, 1.2, 189)

Churchill did not comment on her works, she let them speak for themselves and she did not want to lead the imagination or limit the thought of her audience. She employed Brechtian techniques such as the fragmented scenes and breaking the fourth wall, which distance the audience and urge their critical thinking rather than their emotional involvement with the play. She juxtaposes the past with the present to show that conditions are still the same for the ambitious women, who claim their rights, of having equal chances as men.

Caryl Churchill was influenced by Bertolt Brecht and his epic theatre. This influence is obvious in her use of theatrical techniques. Brecht distanced the audience from the characters and story aiming to create the alienation affect or "Verfremdungseffekt". Churchill employed techniques such as historical juxtapositions, fragmented timelines, and addressing the audience directly to promote critical thinking and to prevent a smooth linear experience. Brecht challenged power structures by criticising social hierarchies and capitalism in his plays. Churchill shared the same political concerns as Brecht and used her plays to explore power dynamics within families, the impact of war on society and gender inequalities. In addition, Brecht used non-naturalistic techniques such as stage directions that are delivered by a narrator, songs, and projections to keep the audience actively engaged and disturb the flow. As in Epic Theatre, projections are used as a tool to display images, text, or information on a screen or backdrop during a performance. Churchill also used projection, songs, and non-realistic elements to emphasise the constructed nature of theatrical experience (Maneerat).

Both Brecht and Churchill focused on historical and social context in enhancing the affect elements. Brecht set his plays in historical periods to find connections with present concerns. Churchill explored in her plays how the past influenced the present and contrariwise. However, Churchill included in her work feminist themes and complexities, she expanded the class struggle that Brecht focused on. She also pushed the limits of theatrical structure and created innovative forms such as non-linear narratives and overlapping dialogue.

Top Girls prevents simple emotional responses and encourages the audience to think and analyse the social and political messages in it. This affected the audience of 1983 to challenge the established power structures. Though Marlene did not deliver monologues or address the audience directly, the dinner party can be seen as breaking the fourth wall and inviting the audience to consider and feel what is presented. Churchill presented multiple viewpoints in the play, she let the audience of 1982 receive and evaluate the message that they wanted, or that touched them mostly, and hence affect looms obviously.

Conclusion

In examining the social and political affect in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*, this paper underscores the playwright's incisive critique of gender dynamics, colonialism, and capitalism. Through intricate character portrayals and innovative narrative structures, Churchill crafts a powerful commentary on the oppressive frameworks that shape individual and collective identities.

Cloud Nine deconstructs the rigid social norms of the Victorian era while drawing parallels to contemporary society. By juxtaposing the colonial past with modern gender politics, Churchill highlights the enduring impact of imperialism on both personal and societal levels. The play's exploration of identity, sexuality, and power dynamics offers a profound critique of the social constructs that govern behaviour and relationships. The non-linear structure and cross-gender casting serve to further disrupt traditional narratives, challenging audiences to rethink their perceptions of identity and power.

Top Girls, on the other hand, delves into the feminist discourse of the late 20th century, critiquing the notion of success within a patriarchal capitalist framework. The play's protagonist, Marlene, embodies the complex intersection of gender and ambition in a male-dominated world. Through the play's fragmented structure and the interweaving of historical and contemporary figures, Churchill explores the sacrifices and compromises women must make to achieve professional success. The dinner party scene, featuring historical and mythical women, poignantly illustrates the diverse struggles and triumphs of women across different eras, emphasizing the persistent inequalities that women face.

Both plays utilize Brechtian techniques to engage the audience in critical reflection rather than passive consumption. Churchill's use of alienation effects, non-linear narratives, and symbolic staging compels viewers to critically engage with the underlying social and political issues. This theatrical approach not only enhances the plays' impact but also reinforces their thematic concerns, encouraging audiences to question and challenge the status quo.

In conclusion, *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* are seminal works that illuminate the intricate interplay between personal identities and broader societal structures. Churchill's adept use of dramatic techniques and her incisive exploration of social and political themes underscore her contributions to contemporary theatre and feminist discourse. By foregrounding issues of gender, power, and identity, these plays continue

to resonate with contemporary audiences, offering a timeless critique of the systems of oppression that shape our world. The insights gleaned from this analysis underscore the enduring relevance of Churchill's work in understanding and challenging the social and political forces that influence our lives.

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