Thatcherism in Caryl Churchill’s Top Girls

Abstract: Margaret Thatcher is broadly presumed to have opined, conceivably on more than one event and maybe underhandedly. This at first shocking claim can be caught on in terms of a few critical progressions between radical Thatcherism. This article centers in this regard on the legacies of the neoliberal administration move foundations beneath Mrs. Thatcher in Caryl Churchill’s Top Girls. In addition, women in her plays are not just depicted as victims in a patriarchal society but as fighters and survivors. Churchill wrote her plays when Margaret Thatcher was elected as Prime Minister of England as such her plays depict the dilemmas and conflicts of women living in the late seventies and eighties under the rule of the “Iron Lady”. In essence, her plays explore issues surrounding gender. In addition, she also examined the complexities surrounding the relationships among family members, gender stereotyping and class struggles.

Keywords: Caryl Churchill, Top Girls, Thatcherism, Post-Modern literature, British Feminist Theatre, empowering women.

INTRODUCTION

The play is written by Caryl Churchill in 1982. Top Girls, henceforth (TP) 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 (Appleton, 50, 2013).

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 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.

TP was one of the first plays to engage directly with Thatcherism. The play focuses on the character of Marlene, the head of a London employment agency, and explores the compromises that she has had to make to achieve her hugely successful career. The opening scene is also the play’s most famous. Marlene hosts a dinner party for a group of famous women from history, all of whom have had to give up some vital piece of themselves along the way. The guests include Pope Joan, who famously disguised herself as a man, the explorer Isabella Bird, Dull Gret, Lady Nijo (the Japanese courtesan) and Patient Griselda, the wife from Chaucer’s The Clerk’s Tale (Peacock, 95, 1999).

The structure of the play is non-linear and collage-like. The first scene of Act 2 depicts two girls, Angie and Kit, at play. Angie is volatile and argumentative, and at one point says that she is going to kill her mother, Marlene’s sister Joyce. The girls discuss sex, though this is something they have no experience of yet. In the next scene the action shifts to the TP employment agency and we see Marlene at work, competing and interacting with her male contemporaries.

Born into poverty, Marlene has had to fight her way to the top and give up things along the way. She states: ‘I don't believe in class; anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes’. According to Guardian theatre critic Michael Billington, TP is ‘a work of art rather than a social tract; and it acquired a real emotional momentum in the final act’ (Ramazanoglu, 20, 1989).
It is in this scene, which takes place a year before the office scene, that it is revealed that Angie is Marlene’s daughter, and that in her eyes the girl is ‘stupid, lazy and frightened’. In her aggressive individualism Marlene is 1980s Thatcherism incarnate. By underlining the emotional and social cost faced by women, the play challenges the fact that women have had to mimic the excesses of male behavior to acquire a degree of power and agency. TP is a feminist play and shows Thatcherism and feminism to be antithetical. Churchill has said that she believes ‘there is no such thing as right-wing feminism’.

Churchill also uses language as an indicator of class status and social differentiation, Churchill’s depiction of 1970s Britain. The female characters who work at TP-Nell, Win, and Marlene- speak in a casual, slang-heavy manner that places them inside an elite and competitive circle of professional women. Meanwhile, Joyce and Angie use caustic, curse-laden language that marks them as working-class individuals. Angie’s simple vocabulary, however, also carries an emotional intensify and directness that recalls Dull Gret’s speech in Act I.

2. Literature Review

Caryl Churchill has publically acknowledged that Margaret Thatcher’s rise to the position of British Prime Minister was an important inspiration for writing TP. Churchill is deeply interested in feminism and the ongoing consequences of the women’s liberation movement. There was a certain irony in Margaret Thatcher’s ascent to power in the wake of feminism since Thatcher’s polices were deeply conservative and anti-feminist. The feminist movement in Britain has been typically connected to left-wing political positions, especially socialism. In TP, Churchill draws upon this contradiction in her depiction of Marlene, a woman who is extremely successful in the professional world, but whose victories on this front appear to come at the cost of ignoring her personal life. Churchill clearly depicts the conflicting views over Thatcher in the conversation between Joyce and Marlene. Marlene is proud that Thatcher, a woman, has become such a powerful elected official, while Joyce does not consider Thatcher’s gender in her assessment that the Prime Minister polices are suffocating the working class (Facilitator, 12, 2012).

TP depicts political economic conditions of oppression in 1970s Britain. Many working-class families, like Joyce and Angie, experienced nothing but difficulty, and saw no opportunities for advancement. Joyce and Marlene’s blue-collar upbringing was marked by parental conflict and constant disappointment due to their father’s limited opportunities for work. This led him to beat Marlene and Joyce’s mother, who was effectively trapped in a situation of domestic abuse. However, the play also suggests that there may be opportunities to resist structures of oppression that stem from conventions surrounding class and gender. For example, the dinner party in Act I allows Churchill to draw surprising connections between women from vastly different classes and historical ages, through their common resistance to patriarchal oppression. Also, the success of women at the TP agency a form of empowerment, although it is qualified by the fact that women use their intelligence to further their individual situations rather than to critically engage the patriarchy that undergirds their professional environment.

The main theme of TP is women and careers and the adjustments they make to their personal life to achieve success. The main character, Marlene, is a successful woman but she has achieved success at the cost of a normal private life. Marlene has abandoned her child to be a professional. Her sister Joyce, on the other hand, is a stay-at-home mother but her views regarding politics and economics are less conservative than her sister’s. The guests to the surreal dinner party are mostly women who transcended traditional gender roles. But their lives weren’t complete. Caryl Churchill brings issues that vex women who seek balance in their professional and private lives to the forefront (Goldsmith, 10, 2010).

Some characters in the play reflect this ideology, for example, Marlene is the central character in the play. She has just been promoted and now heads the employment agency where she works. Success means a lot to her. She has abandoned her daughter, leaving her in the care of her sister to pursue her career unhindered. Marlene does not bond with her biological daughter, and she is ruthless when it comes to preserving her job. She wastes no sympathy on Harold when he suffers a heart attack brought on by his inability to get promoted (Alicia, 23, 2011).

Marlene’s adult life has been focused on her career, to the exclusion of nearly everything else. She previously worked in the United States and has done well for herself. Marlene has little to no contact with her family. Her alcoholic father is dead, and her long-suffering mother is in some sort of home. Marlene does not get along with her sister Joyce, who has remained part of the working class and lives in the same neighborhood where they grew up. Joyce is Marlene’s sister who adopts Marlene’s child because Marlene wants to pursue her career. She loses her child because of a miscarriage, and she is resentful. She recognizes that Angie, the daughter she brings up has no special talents and isn’t intelligence. Her politics are left of center, and she is not impressed by Thatcher’s polices (Facilitator, 12, 2012). Angie is Marlene’s biological daughter, but she does not know that. She thinks her mother is Joyce. Her equation with Joyce is poor and she tells Kit that she plans on killing her mother. Joyce’s assessment that Angie is neither intelligent nor hardworking is true to a certain extent.
3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY
3.1 British Feminist Theatre

Feminist historiography in Britain, which called for an extremist revision of the historical record as well as a to give new designation of the personal as political, was at first closely tied to the project of socialist history in general and to local or community history in particular. Such gathering and compensatory projects initially sought to write herstory by recovering ignored narratives of female agency or byreinterpretating the official history in the light of this new evidence: Sheila Rowbotham’s *Hidden from History* (1973), for example, was widely influential during the mid-70s. But by the late 1970s, feminist historians began to emphasize the need for freedom feminist histories which could go beyond conventional analysis of revolutionary politics and provide an independent space for feminist analysis (Samuel, 11, 1981).

Thus, *History Workshop*, a key journal in the development of British socialist-feminist historiography, was established in 1976 as a socialist journal devoted to rescuing history from historians but by 1982 had turned to the tasks of “contributing to the sexual enlightenment of socialist history” as well as to the “construction of a new autonomous feminist history” (Rendall, 49, 1991). “This does not mean that our socialism and feminism are unconnected,” argued the editors, “but simply that one cannot be reduced to the other”.

The feminist theatres had, several years before *History Workshop* announced its new historiographical crucial, begun to be confused herstory projects and to insist on “rereading all history. Even such early renewed plays as Claire Luckham and Chris Bond’s *Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing* (1976), Caryl Churchill’s *Vinegar Tom* (1976), and Pam Gems’s *Queen Christina* (1977) locate involvement documentary within broader a hostile argument concerning how both private and public identities have, historically, been sexualized and domesticated. Gems, for example, specifically rescues the 17th-century Swedish queen from Hollywood (rather than Ibsen), questioning the ideological program of commercialized historical spectacles in popular culture as much as the absence of gender analysis in conventional histories. In *Scum*, Luckham and Bond’s recovery of feminist revolutionaries of the Paris Commune of 1871 entails an examination of militarism, work, and economics (Luckham, 31, 1991).

Because the “herstory” genre targeted the ways in which official English history had ignored women altogether, it also developed an implicit analysis of the indigenist project: while herstory plays sought to insert English women into the record of the English past, the need to re-read “all history” also required a more internationalist attempt to recover an “autonomous” history which all women could be shown to have shared. The task of Marxist historiography had been to recover a continuous tradition of class consciousness rooted in an evolving sense of identification with English nationhood, but the feminist history plays of the 1970s reshaped the site of fighting in a manner which rendered indigenism (or Englishness specifically) irrelevant to the task of bring back, even when the silenced voices of English women were in question. A glance at the several feminist history plays produced during the mid-to-late 1970s suggests that feminists in the theatre were not content to derive materials or models from the English record alone: Women’s Theatre Group staged a tribunal documenting the lives and letters of three imprisoned Portuguese feminists; Monstrous Regiment’s *Scum* depicted the role of women in the Paris Commune; Women’s Company staged Marianne Auricoste’s *My Name is Rosa Luxemburg*, translated by Pam Gems, as well as Gems’s own musical revue about American pioneer society, *Go West, Young Woman*: Gems soon after wrote *Christina*, her play about the Swedish queen (Sheila, 55, 1995).

The editors of the first volumes of British “herstory” plays insist that feminist history must incorporate “woman’s version of the events of the past both factual and mythological” (Griffin et al., 7, 1991). Fact and mythos are, however, seen to be so clearly separable (the first volume includes mythological or “archetypal” plays while the second features “realist” histories) that there is little room in the editors’ analysis for a discussion of the interplay of fact and myth or of specific material conditions and ideological formations in the writing of history. In practice, however, feminist history plays, including most of the plays in the *Herstory* volumes, have from the beginning complicated the boundaries between fact, fiction, and myth. Further, in the kinds of historiography practiced by a variety of postmodernist plays written during the 1980s (notably Churchill’s *TP* and Deborah Levy’s *Pax*), the movement from the historically specific to the universal has produced a metahistorical analysis which enables a self-critical interrogation of the project of feminist history itself.

The eurocentrism of the plays cited so far (which may be said to represent the mainstream of British feminist theatre) suggests that the feminist theatre’s analysis of nationhood has been supposed upon an elision of race and ethnicity. As late as 1991, for example, nearly ten years after the publication of Hazel Carby’s influential analysis of the racialized structures of white feminist thought in Britain (1982), even token
gestures towards an inclusionary practice seem to have been considered unwarranted by the editors of the first volumes of British women’s history plays (Griffin, 7, 1991). Feminist history in the theatre has confused negotiations of imperial history and the postcolonial present; and its attempts to evolve suitable forms for a feminist metahistory.

Gems’s Queen Christina and Churchill’s Light Shining in Buckinghamshire and Vinegar Tom appeared in the mid-’70s (within a year of each other), when, in a series of history plays, New Left theatres developed a particularly concentrated analysis of the production and control of revolutionary consciousness. Churchill appears to have written her two plays of 1976, Light Shining and Vinegar Tom, as complementary but separate socialist-feminist histories of the 17th century. Both plays consider competing histories of the revolutionary period: in Light Shining, a dominant Cromwellian narrative is challenged by a Marxist history which is complicated in turn by histories of countercultural radicalism; while in Vinegar Tom, a universalist and across history narrative of the persecution of women competes with materialist, feminist, and popular histories. Vinegar Tom, however, specifically provides an analysis of the ideological factors that support male imaging of women, and marginalizes its superficial analysis of political economy, the relationship between growing capitalism and the patriarchal construction of gender. As such, it seems a more focused feminist intervention than Light Shining, which subordinates feminist voices to what seems to be perceived as a larger democratic socialist movement, a political landscape which remains for the most part male (Schmidt, 10, 2005).

3.2 Thatcherism

Thatcherism is a branch of Conservative belief that began from the standards and lessons of Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister from 1979 until 1990. Basically, Thatcher believed in the primacy of competition and a free advertise and had a fundamental doubt of the control of government. She, moreover, believed within the right of people to have the liberty to decide their possess lives, if they remained inside certain boundaries. For this reason, Thatcherism has also been called “neo-liberal”. Thatcher had an enthusiastic dislike of any powers exterior Parliament interfering with the part of government. This included trade unions, the civil service, and local authorities. The context for this is that the country had been run from 1945 until 1979 on a broadly agreed consensus that the government should aim for full employment, intervening whenever that was threatened, the government should also own and run certain production (e.g., energy and communications) and that decisions should be made in consultation with the trade unions and business community (Goldsmith, 10, 2010).

The economic situation at the end of the 1970s, with the UK having needed a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as suffering the effects of a series of strikes (leading to the 1978 ‘Winter of Discontent’ in which rubbish piled up on the streets of London), meant the public gave Margaret Thatcher a mandate to make the changes she did. Thatcherism can be contrasted with ‘one-nation’ Conservatism, in which government has a duty to look after the unfortunate and narrow the gap between rich and poor. Thatcher managed over time to force those Conservatives who still believed in this old approach out of Government and her approach became part of what is called the New Right (Foucault, 23, 1979).

The political term ‘Thatcherism’ started life as a Kampfbegriff, that is, one used in struggles against Margaret Thatcher’s conviction legislative issues and neoliberal approaches instead of as a self-description of what was at first a terrible financial and political extend. The term’s logical legitimacy as contradict to political convenience has long been talked about. Here it alludes to “the improvement and specificity of the rising strategic line sought after by Thatcher and her different circles of political and ideological supporters.” (Jessop et al., 8, 1988). Creating a strategic line includes selecting and requesting goals; choosing on a design and arrangement of activities consider reasonable to achieve these goals; observing performance and advance; and altering strategies and objectives as the conjuncture changes. It does not imply logical consistency taken out of time and place. If a strategic line does appear, it is more through trial-and-error experimentation on a changing strategic land than through systematic pursuit of a pre-planned course of action.

3.3 Post- Modern British Feminist Theatre

Postmodernist theatre is characterized by "disjunctive, displaced, or indeterminate forms, a discourse of fragments, an ideology of fracture, a will to unmaking, an invocation of silence - [it] veers toward all these and yet implies their very opposites, their antithetical realities" (Hassan et al., P. 16). The use of ambiguous and unstable potential of signs and performance makes it possible for playwrights to challenge assumptions. Hence, postmodernism can expose and dislocate the assumptions that govern conventions so that traditional ways of reading are dislodged. In other words, conventions can only be effectively challenged if the form also changes radically. This investigation is necessitated by the fact that dominant features and techniques of postmodern concepts in theatre have often been disregarded by scholars: for instance, Bigsby maintains that "theatre has commanded very little interest from the major theorists or those who have taken up their theories" (Schmidt, 9, 2005). Hence, only a selected few playwrights such as Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, Shepard...
and Wilson are considered as postmodern dramatists in literary circles worldwide.

Basically, this study is based on the premise that limited attention has been given to the exploration of postmodernism in theatre compared to other literary genres and most scholars tend to scrutinize narrative fiction to establish interpretations of postmodern techniques and concepts such as collision, hesitation, banality, displaced fantastic, hypertrophy and hesitation as it is often more appropriate to fiction than that drama (Jernigan, 43, 2008). This study, hence, is a bold attempt to locate the application of postmodern techniques in theatre via the analysis of five of Churchill’s works although the range of postmodern concepts/techniques which are appropriate to this genre of literary work is expected to be much lesser than in other genres.

Essentially, elements of postmodernism are often compared in contrast to what was the norm in modernism. For instance, unlike modernism, postmodernism does not concern itself with rationality and logical thinking and hence, it does not attempt to provide a clear meaning. In other words, postmodernism challenge the conventional notions of modernist writings. As clarified earlier, postmodernism techniques and concepts dismantle the traditional style of playwriting by adopting unconventional forms in language and performance. In his classification of postmodernism, this study will utilize Mason’s proposal (2007) who suggests that postmodern writings tend to be characterized by 1) a poststructuralist critical approach and 2) a set of aesthetic and textual devices” (Mason, 32) which this study hopes to uncover in the analysis of the selected plays.

There are several playwrights who worked on women’s oppression. For example, Micheline Wandor’s plays focus on chief feminist issues such as women and work, concern for children, custody and divorce. Her Care and Control, (1977) for example, deals with motherhood under attack and attempts to “challenge those who are socially empowered and use their roles to uphold the heterosexual, nuclear family above many other human values and it must fight to assure that women are treated as full and equal human beings” (Keyssar, 137, 1984). Another writer, Megan Terry explores the relationships between males and females, the notion of power and traditional gender roles. Basically, the play is about the condemnation of traditional social and gender roles in contemporary society. This is undertaken in a manner that diverges from traditional plays: the actors and actresses in the play shift roles. Thus, it becomes ‘impossible’ to detect the unequal power relations between men and women because both sexes are illustrated in the same manner. Caryl Churchill is a pioneer woman playwright. Her Vinegar Tom, Light shining in Buckinghamshire, and Cloud Nine are examples of plays that highlight the social roles of women through history. Churchill’s collaboration with Joint Stock Theatre group had provided an avenue for her to use innovative theatrical devices that helped to conceptualize the internal dialogue related to women issues of her characters.

3.4 Autobiographical Elements

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 1981, including The Ants (1962), Lovesick (1967) and Abortive (1971). The Judge's Wife was televised by the BBC in 1972 and Owners, her first professional stage production, premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London in the same year (Ozden, 66, 2009).

However, Churchill soon concluded 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 society itself.

This helped to develop Churchill into a feminist socialist critique of society. In plays such as TP, 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-economic ideals throughout the past two decades, and until the present day.
Caryl Churchill who began her illustrious career as a playwright in 1958 with *Downstairs* is considered as the pioneer of English feminist theatre. However, Churchill was also a postmodernist and as such, postmodernism concepts were also prevalent in many of her plays. (Keyssar, 34, 1984). Caryl Churchill is a pioneer woman playwright. Her *Vinegar Tom, Light shining in Buckinghamshire*, and *Cloud Nine* are examples of plays that highlight the social roles of women through history. Churchill’s collaboration with Joint Stock Theatre group had provided an avenue for her to use innovative theatrical devices that helped to conceptualize the internal dialogue related to women issues of her characters. In addition, women in her plays are not just depicted as victims in a patriarchal society but as fighters and survivors. Churchill wrote her plays when Margaret Thatcher was elected as Prime Minister of England as such her plays depict the dilemmas and conflicts of women living in the late seventies and eighties under the rule of the “Iron Lady”. In essence, her plays explore issues surrounding gender. In addition, she also examined the complexities surrounding the relationships among family members, gender stereotyping and class struggles (Swanson, 49-53, 1986).

4. ANALYSIS

*TP* is one of the enormous collections of literary works that women produced amid 20th. These literary works presented women’s experiences to achieve a respectable position in patriarchal societies and to prove that they are rightfully equal to men. Women were always taken for granted and they were treated as second place beings. While

males as a group have and do benefit the most from patriarchy, from the assumption that they are superior to females and should rule over us. In return for all the goodies men received from patriarchy, they are required to dominate women, to exploit and oppress us, using violence if they must to keep patriarchy intact.

So, women, according to gender roles and the social generalization women have to be tame, obedient, dependent, and they should remain at home to raise the children without any right to work, learn or to be independent. Therefore, women had to adopt masculine qualities to break the gender roles and to attain few successes. As a response to the increasing oppression and to the improvement the world had seen, women began expressing themselves and their needs in a movement called Feminism. "Feminist theory seeks to analyze the conditions which shape women's life and explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman … feminists refuse to accept the inequalities between women and men or naturally inevitable and insist that they should be questioned". (Jackson et al., 1, 1998).

It is worth noticing that this play is written as a reaction against the Capitalist system of Britain, that when the “Iron Woman”, Margaret Thatcher, was the Prime Minister of England. People thought that the election of Thatcher is a great advantage for women, but as time passed her politics turned out to be useful only to the middle class and the rich families of society while the working class kept struggling in the same toiling. Thatcher did not do anything remarkable considering women due to her conservative politics. Caryl Churchill wrote this play as a response to Thatcher’s election. In this regard, Rowbotham, criticizes Thatcher’s views towards feminism and women’s rights, saying:

The fact that a woman could become prime minister had a symbolic meaning; modern women, it seemed, could do anything now. However, like many of her generation, Margaret Thatcher, born in 1925, did not want to be seen as a woman in politics. She preferred to be a politician who happened to be a woman and she had little sympathy with the post-war generation's preoccupations with women’s right and wrongs (Rowbotham, 427, 1974)

Churchill expressed her view on Thatcher's politics vividly through a clear disagreement between the two characters, Joyce and Marlene, in the third act. In one hand, there is Joyce who was against Thatcher because she was a working single mother who belonged to the working class, and she had seen the suffering of this class. On the other hand, there is Marlene who supports Thatcher because she is benefited from her politics and to criticize her capitalist values. Marlene said, "she's a tough lady, Maggie, I'd give her a job". (*TP*, P.229)

4.1 Representation of *TP* Generalization image:

"Oh God, why are we all so miserable?" (*TP*, P.125)

This passage above by Marlene, the most protagonist of *TP*, reflects her realization of the sufferings and hardships that her extraordinary guests, whom she welcomes to celebrate her advancement to a managing director at *TP* business office, went through in their lives. These visitors are women from myth and from different historical periods are persecuted by the patriarchal system of their society. Yet, they show resistance and they do not give up; instead, they fight and struggle to prove themselves to the patriarchal society. Even though they are unlike each one of them has sacrificed something precious to keep walking on the way of success and freedom, whether this sacrifice is a child or a family. Commenting on this point, Elaine Aston, says that "unless women, in the interest of economic and professional advancement are prepared to make sacrifices, particularly of the domestic and maternal kind, and espouse masculinity values then they do not 'get on'" (Aston, 22, 1991).
Churchill is seen as a women’s activist who displayed the issue related to class distinction and other issues such as sacrifice, adopting masculine qualities and the control that women gain when they are in lead. Social feminism calls for women’s solidarity to attain their rights and freedom, women started to split from each other according to race, culture and class. "Working-class women are financially misused in ways that the women of the bourgeois are not" (Ramazanoglu, 17, 1989). Working class women are much more persecuted than the middle-class women, the later have more liberty and power to fight for their rights. In general, they are benefited from the labor of the working class especially women who are paid less than men. Women from the middle class who reach a position of power to control others, they start to behave like men, oppressing women from the working class and taking away any chances for them to improve, even though feminism was at its most spreading point.

Socialist feminism is like Marxist feminism, both were influenced by Marx analysis of society and class, and both call for the equality between women from different classes.

Marxists agree that once the organization of production is dominated by capitalism then two main classes have appeared: workers, who sell their labor power to produce good worth more than they receive in wages, and capitalists who expropriate this surplus value, and live by accumulating capital. (Ramazanoglu, 97, 1989).

Socialist feminism is for the most part concerned with the social layers or classes. It "Critiques the historical and material conditions of class, race, and gender oppression, and demands the radical transformation of social structure" (Aston, 8, 1998). This kind of feminism takes into consideration the differences between classes as they are not equal in their rights, freedom and they vary in the amount of oppression they undergo. The working-class women are more oppressed and exploited than the middle-class women since they get paid less than what they deserve for their labor so they can hardly afford the expenses of life and they have fewer chances to be free and to practice their rights.

4.2 Marlene’s Celebration

Within the beginning of act one of this play we see Marlene, the recently promoted managing director, celebrating her advancement by having a dinner party at a restaurant in London. She welcomed five women to the party, but they were neither ordinary women nor Marlene’s companions. These women crossed the countries and time to be at this party. They are the famous Victorian traveler, picture taker, and writer. These women are the world traveler, Isabella Bird, the thirteenth century Japanese courtesan who turned to a nun and walked across Japan on foot, Lady Nijo; the pheasant woman who is the subject of Brueghel's surrealist painting, Dull Gret; The legendary Pope Joan, and finally the obedient wife from Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer, Patient Griselda. Caryl Churchill did not choose those women randomly to be Marlene’s guests, instead, she chose them carefully, and each one of them reflects some aspect of the modern woman.

Moreover, Marlene thinks that just because she came to this position, she became equal to these women. From the general point of view each one of these women reflected an aspect of the modern woman and they shared their stories of how they used different methods to fight for who they really are. They challenged their societies and the oppressive forces, they even pushed the limits of the gender roles, they did not accept to submit like any other ordinary woman, "women’s ambitions are limited to marriage and motherhood, and where-these are the only respectable achievements that are socially permitted" (Ramazanoglu, 20, 1989). The only tamed guest was Patient Griselda who accepted all methods of oppression from her husband; she also defended him by saying "I had to obey him" (TP, 134). The guests also mentioned the role of men in their lives and their stories, whether they were fathers, husbands, or lovers.

Johnson asserts "an inescapable result of patriarchy is the persecution of women, which takes few shapes. Historically, for example, women have been executed from major institutions such as church, state, colleges and jobs" (Johnson, 15, 2014). This reflects the case of Isabella Bird and Pope Joan since they are the historical characters at the dinner party. Isabella Bird was the daughter of a clergyman who raised her properly and taught her different knowledge including Latin. She also did her duty toward her father. She was aware that women were not allowed to be educated so she said, "My father taught me Latin although I was a girl" (TP, 101). Isabella is somehow an exception or a special case because she was not like any other woman from her generation. She is educated, gives priority to work than religious actions and she has no interest in falling in love and getting married “I didn’t get married till I was fifty”. (TP, 100).

Both Isabella and Joan had their strategies of fighting the persecution. Isabella chose to do it obviously, she remained showing up as a woman without being pushed as well distant, she said “I always travelled as a lady and I repudiated strongly any suggestions in the press that I was other than feminine” (TP, 110). But Joan on the other hand, did the very opposite way to fight persecution; she stepped on every feminine aspect of herself and followed her dreams. She left her family and dressed like a boy and set herself to receive the education she thought that she deserves. Joan kept being indulged in knowledge that she neglected herself to the point of being ignorant about
her pregnancy, which destined her because she gave birth at a public ceremony and people were shocked because they thought that she was a man, so they stoned her to death. Both Joan and Isabella can speak Latin which is a language spoken only by men and it is an indicator to these women's education.

Another visitor was Patient Griselda; she is the commonplace female who has all the cliché qualities. She obeyed her husband, the marquises, in every possible way and she did not accuse him, instead, she justified his actions by saying "a wife must obey her husband" (TP, 129). She also admitted that she did not find it difficult to obey him. Her husband took her two kids away from her and denied her the simplest right of all women, which is motherhood. Griselda defended him by saying that he was testing her love and loyalty. Griselda was from the working class and her husband belongs to the middle class, after they got married each one's behavior remained the same, she kept being like a servant who was treated without love or compassion, but she remained loyal and obedient to her husband. Her love to her husband was expressed in her loyalty and serves, but her husband kept using his powers to control her the same way the middle class, in general, is controlled the working class. "Except Griselda, they (the guests) have all assumed a masculine stand-point to act against patriarchal oppression or in some cases to assert their own identity" (Dere, 63, 2009).

Another guest is lady Nijo, she is a Japanese Courtesan who was raised by her father to be sent to the emperor to fulfill his wants. Her father's only advice was, if she falls from the emperor's favor she would run away and to be a nun. She obeyed her father and became a Buddhist nun who crossed Japan on feet. She said: “the first half of my life was all sin and the second all repentance” (TP, 104). It was clear that Nijo was persecuted by her own father by choosing to send her to the emperor while she was young and unaware of that. She was oppressed again in the court by the Emperor, she said: “I can't say that I enjoyed my rough life, what I enjoyed most was being the Emperor's favorite and wearing thin silk” (TP, 102) which gives the idea that she enjoyed being the favorite one and being superior to others and the fact that she wore fine clothes and appearing as a 'Top Girl'. When she realized that she is no longer allowed to wear fine silk and that she fell from the emperor’s favored women’s list, she left everything and ran away to be a nun. Nijo had four children, the first one was from the emperor, but he died, the second one was from Akebono who loved her since she was thirteen; their baby was born at the court without the knowledge of the emperor and Akebono took the baby away right after the birth. The third one whom she never saw after its birth was from Ariake the priest. The fourth child was also Ariake's but she gave birth at the hills alone.

Children were one of the various topics that were discussed during that dinner party. Most of the guests had children and all of them lost their children in a way or another. Nijo for example had four children. Pope Joan also had a child but they both, she, and her child, were stoned to death. Patient Griselda suffered from the separation of her two kids and that was done by her middle-class husband who wanted to test her loyalty, ignoring her motherly feelings. As Griselda explains, “Walter found it hard to believe I loved him. He couldn’t believe I would always obey him. He had to prove it” (TP 22). All the three did not have the chance to do anything serious to restore their children but there was that revolutionary woman who wore armor and charged an army of women and led them to hell to fight the evil because the Spanish army killed her son and her infant baby. This woman was Dull Gret who is the subject of the famous painting by Brueghel.

All these women are dramatized as courageous women who changed their lives and had extraordinary achievements. However, through a deep analysis of their stories and the atmosphere in the dinner scene, it can be claimed that the feminist voice operating in the scene is actually radical because all female historical figures suffered from patriarchy and the decisions they had to take to escape from patriarchal oppression includes a radical and subversive motif with the exception of Griselda (Dere, 63, 2009).

Act two shows that all the guests were busy talking about their lives and experiences, but there was that waitress who belonged to the working class, she represented her class among these high-flying guests. Gret is a silent character who serves them and receives orders from Marlene who is behaving as if she is better than this waitress even though she, Marlene, belongs to the working class in the past. Marlene is using that laboring waitress to get her things done. During the play we see that Marlene's using others without caring for them if she is benefitted is a part of her character.

4.3 Marlene’s True Identity

Joyce is Marlene’s older sister, and she is the one who embraced Angie and raised her like her own. Both Joyce and Angie belong to the working class, whereas Marlene, because of her successful career, became a member from the middle class. During act three all of Marlene's hidden secrets are going to be revealed through the conversation between her and Joyce. When Marlene was a teenager, she gave birth to Angie, and then she left her daughter and her family and ran away to America to chase success, leaving her daughter to Joyce. Marlene ran away because she did not want to be tamed like her mother who accepted to live with her husband who was bad with her. Joyce, on the other hand, is a traditional woman who chose to remain with her family to take care of them. Churchill belittles policy of the patriarchal society depends largely on
suppressing women’s voice, dominating women and using them as tools. That leads women who want to prove their abilities and potentialities to exceed the natural limits, sometimes and to neglect their emotions and feelings towards their families.

Marlene was so indulged with her work and career that she neglected the ties between her and her family and now she doesn’t know what they are like," Marlene: I don’t know what you are like,… How do I know what she is like? " (TP, P. 205) Marlene did not come to visit her family and daughter for years and she did not keep in touch with them during that time. When Marlene and Joyce met, there wasn’t the feeling of sisters between them; they were like strangers from different worlds who were forced to stay together in one place. It was obvious that they didn’t like each other.

Joyce: I didn’t want to see you.
Marlene: Yes, I know. Shall I go?
Joyce: I don’t mind seeing you.
Marlene: Great, I feel really welcome. (TP 206)

Angie, to both Marlene and Joyce, is a stupid lazy girl who is anticipated to be a failure in the future. "Marlene: She is not going to make it." (TP 201) Because Angie is not bright; she might never get a job to support herself in the economic circumstances that favors the middle class. "Angie, who is psychologically retarded, illustrates the concept of "TP" also implies that others will be at the bottom of the social pile"(Peacock 95, 1999).

Marlene always thought that children and family will hinders her way to a successful career, but in this act we see Marlene accuse Joyce of taking Angie away from her, she says " You were quick enough to take her" (TP 221), and since Joyce could not have a baby, she was "lucky" that Marlene gave the baby up. Then we see Marlene being ready to take Angie with her to London when Joyce was in quarrel with her about Angie and the matter of raising her up. After that Marlene contradicts herself by saying "I know a managing director who’s got two children, she breastfeeds then in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that." (TP 222), here we see Marlene admit that a woman can have a successful career and a family at the same time. But Marlene was a teenager and she preferred to leave her daughter behind and starts her journey to success, so leaving Angie was a matter of choice not a sacrifice. Marlene preferred success on her own daughter.

Both Marlene and Joyce are independent women, and both made sacrifices. Marlene sacrificed familial ties to achieve success, while Joyce sacrificed the possibility to be a successful woman. Joyce had the potentials to be successful, but she chose to remain with her family and to take care of them. "Marlene: You've got what it takes. Joyce: I know I have." (TP, p.234) Marlene oppressed her own working-class sister and used her labor as a helping factor to her success. “Women are clearly divided by class. Some women benefit directly and indirectly from the exploitation of other women” (Ramazanoglu, 20, 1989).

This play was written by Caryl Churchill to satirize the first female prime minister of The United Kingdom Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher built the economy of The United Kingdom in a way that it only benefited the wealthy people who belonged to the middle class, and she didn’t put any observed plans to help the working class, which remained as it is with no progress. "The Thatcherite government, with its emphasis upon competitive capitalism, will do nothing to help them" (Peacock, 95, 1999). Thatcher was a woman who was elected in this high-power position, in a time that most women in the society were fighting to achieve their right of equality and freedom. People, especially women, had high expectations of what would the things that Thatcher would do to women in the society, but she was from the conservative party, and she was a woman who adopted masculine qualities, "For her, nothing more was needed to correct women's conditions in society" (Peacock, 25, 1999). Caryl Churchill built her main character, Marlene, to be very similar to Margaret Thatcher. Both are unwilling to help women in the society, both hold a high position that uses the power to control others, and both adopted masculine qualities to the extreme that both act like men. Both, Margaret, and Marlene, are not interested in helping women and they like to stand alone at the top.

4.4 Marlene’s Agency

The beginning of act two starts with Angie and Kit squeeze in their junk shelter at Joyce’s backyard. They are hiding from Joyce who keeps calling for Angie. The significance of Angie and Kit's hiding is that they are hiding from an unsafe world which does not guarantee their future and rights. Angie and Kit do not respond to Joyce’s calls no matter how many times she calls for them, because she is no longer the mother figure to Angie. Since Angie already knows that Joyce is not her real mother. For Angie, Joyce is the oppressive force that keeps her hushed; Angie hates her so much that she wants to kill her. She bosses Kit around and tells her stories to make her scared. However, Marlene is the model that Angie believes to be special.

At one point, Angie decides to leave her family and run away to London to achieve her dream which is her real mother’s acceptance and to live with her. This reminds us of Marlene when she left her family and her daughter and ran away to America to chase success. Angie loves Marlene even though she left her when she was a baby. Angie wants to be successful like Marlene, she even wants a job at TP employment agency " Angie: It's where I most want to be in the world."
Marlene is known to be ignorant of what other women feel. She could not cope with Jeanine, and she did not understand Mrs. Kidd. When Jeanine came to the interview, she was expecting to find a better job than the previous one, but unfortunately, her interviewer was no better than Marlene. When Marlene knew that Jeanine is engaged, she started to underestimate her by offering jobs that are no better than the previous one. Marlene thinks that a woman has to choose between a family and children and a successful career. Also, the fact that Marlene is an individualist made her uncompassionate about other women. Jeanine was thinking of advertising, but Marlene refused to give her the opportunity for a better career. "Marlene: … I have got a few vacancies but I think they are looking for someone glossier." (TP 173). Marlene believes that to be successful a woman, she should not mention marriage and children and to leave them aside just like Marlene herself. Marlene refuses to grant Jeanine the job she wants; instead, she offers two jobs like the old job. This situation emphasizes the point that Marlene is of no help to other women in the society. She does not like others to be like her; she wants to stand alone. By this, Churchill criticizes Thatcher. She thinks that Thatcher has done nothing to the middle class, and she has used her position for her own benefit, behaving like men, and a supporter to the patriarchal rules.

Marlene's assertion that "We've all come to a long way" (TP180) seems ironic as we gradually realize that the careeristic triumphs of women are marginal. The Second Act, which shows Marlene interviewing other employees, on the contrary, challenges individual achievements and advancement as the TP Employment Agency symbolizes the economic status of women in the field of employment. The following scene dramatizes Angie, the assumed daughter of Joyce, Marlene's sister, discussing violence, money, and matricide with her friend Kit. The slow-witted Angie decides to visit her successful aunt Marlene in London. After meeting Marlene, Angie falls asleep in Marlene's office and this incident makes Marlene predict that "She's not going to make it" (TP 199).

In the climactic quarrel scene between Marlene and Joyce, the vagueness of Marlene's economic independence becomes clear. Marlene believes that her own progress is a sign of the collective progress for women. But it is the socialist Joyce who shatters such mistaken ideas. It is Marlene who is detached from the family and remains quite indifferent to the problems that cropped up in the family. She is even reluctant to provide any sort of support to her poor sister who has been obliged to look after Marlene's illegitimate child, Angie. Marlene's snobbery and unfulfillment in life get expressed in the conflicting conversation between the two sisters:

MARLENE: America, America, you’re jealous. I
have taken the position of her husband. Mrs. Kidd goes
to the extent to tell Marlene to withdraw from her
promotion and accusations like “you’ll end
up…miserable and lonely. You’re not natural” (TP113)
directed at Marlene. The endurance, individuality
and toughness in Marlene can be claimed to reflect the
Thatcherism. The character of Marlene reversed
the notion of oppression faced by women. The problems on
women reaching a higher grade when compared to men
will be tougher to handle yet the fictional character
Marlene and the iconic Margret Thatcher achieved
glory in their fields.

Finally, it is Marlene who emerges to be the weaker.
She weeps and shouts, pleading for emotional
sustenance from her sister. On the contrary, Joyce's
words gain momentum as she points out that in her
glamour world there is no place for the underprivileged
women like Joyce and Angie. Her assertion prefigures
the real failure of the 'top girl' Marlene.

MARLENE. If they’re stupid or lazy or
frightened, I'm not going to help
them get a job, why should I?
JOYCE. What about Angie?
MARLENE. What about Angie?
JOYCE. She's stupid, lazy and frightened, so
what about her?
MARLENE. You run her down too much. She'll
be all right.
JOYCE. I don't expect so, no. I expect her
children will say what a
wasted life she had. If she has children. Because
nothing's
changed and it won't with them in.
MARLENE. Them, them./ Us and them?
JOYCE. And you're one of them.
MARLENE. And, you're us, wonderful us, and
Angie's us I and Mum
and Dad's us.
JOYCE. Yes, that's right and you're them (TP
201).

As Marlene exposes her political views embracing
Thatcher’s role model, Joyce’s response is questioning
whether it was an advance to have a woman Prime
Minister if it was someone with polices like hers. When
it comes to expressing their hopes for the future, the
sister’s opinions diverge again dramatically:

Marlene : I know a managing director who’s got
two children, she breast feeds in the board room,
she plays a hundred pounds a week on domestic
help alone and she can afford that because she is
an extremely high powered lady earning a great
deal of money (TP 80).

However, in real life most women suffered under
the burden of ‘superwoman’ image. Studies on the
employment situation of women at that time show that
the reality was in fact harsh: there were very few TP
most women being situated at the bottom of hierarchies
in terms of pay and promotion opportunities.

While Marlene is very optimistic about her future
and as before tends to generalize her positive prediction
to others, Joyce is quick to point out that the future is
bright only for Marlene and her class. Marlene is the
top and oppressor girl, Whereas Joyce is the working
class and the oppressed girl. Moreover, Joyce’s
Marlene: Them, them. Us and them.
Joyce: And you are one of them.
Marlene: And you are us, and Angie’s us and Mom and Dad’s us.
Joyce: Yes, that’s right. And you are them? (TP 86).

Here in this paragraph above, Joyce clearly marks the class distinction between them, making the emphatic point that Marlene has become (them), (the oppressors), even if she insists to include Joyce in the same circle as hers.

Marlene had to overcome all the accusations her own female world throws on her. For instance, Mrs. Kidd, wife of Howard the male counterpart of Marlene accuses her to have taken the position of her husband. Mrs. Kidd goes to the extent to tell Marlene to withdraw from her promotion and accusations like “you’ll end up… miserable and lonely. You’re not natural” (TP 113) are directed at Marlene. The endurance, individuality and toughness in Marlene can be claimed to reflect the Thatcherism. The character of Marlene reversed the notion of oppression faced by women. The problems on women reaching a higher grade when compared to men will be tougher to handle yet the fictional character Marlene and the iconic Margaret Thatcher achieved glory in their fields.

Isabella, who is a Victorian traveler. She internalizes the values imposed upon her by her father to such an extent that she is not aware that she is in a situation of self-denial. In Act1, Scene 1:

ISABELLA: A I tried to do what my father wanted [...] I tried to be a clergy man’s daughter. Needle work, music, charitable schemes [...] I studied the metaphysical poets and hymnology. My father taught me Latin although I was a girl. But really I was more suited to manual work. Cooking, washing, mending, riding horses. Better than reading books [...] My father was the main string of my life and when he died I was so grieved. (TP 120).

Since patriarchy considers women to be men’s property, inferior, ignorant, and incompetent, its value system claims that women cannot take their own decisions and need to be led by a male figure. Since the early ages, females have been thought of as lesser beings. In general, the position of woman in patriarchy is a continuous function of their dependence. This is achieved through the systematic ignorance of patriarchy towards the demands of women. Women’s social position is vicarious because traditionally patriarchy has permitted women to achieve occasional minimal literacy.

Nijo, a Japanese imperial courtesan of the thirteenth century, is another example of a female who is exposed to violence. Her story explicitly depicts how she is forced to lead a life in service of the emperor to be one of his lovers. When she was only fourteen, her father sent her to the emperor and told her to obey the rules of patriarchy. In Act 1, Scene 1:

NIJO: In fact, he was the ex-emperor. [...] Well, I was only fourteen, and I knew he meant something, but I didn’t know what.
He sent me an eight-layered gown. [...] I belonged to him; it was what I was brought up for from a baby. [...] Just before he (my father) said to me, Serve His Majesty, be respectful, if you lose his favor, enter holy orders (TP 2).

The history of patriarchy presents variety of cruelties and barbarities like the sale and enslavement of women under one disguise or another, involuntary and child marriages, and prostitution to impose the male authority and female inferiority. In Nijo’s case, she is enslaved and deprived of her three children; two of them by her lover; one by the emperor. She is also beaten by the emperor himself and his attendants before and after sexual intercourse. In Act 1,

Scene 1, referring to Japanese men, Nijo says; “they beat their women across the loins so they’ll have sons and not daughters. So the emperor beats us all very hard as usual. That’s normal; what made us angry, he told his attendants they could beat us too” (TP 17).

Patriarchal societies typically link feelings of cruelty with sexuality, equating both with evil and power. The emotions of aggression, hatred, contempt, and desire to break or violate personality take a form of sexuality. Patriarchal violence particularly appears in the act of rape. Wife-beating is another of several ways to express hostility towards women. In all artistic forms of hostility in patriarchy, misogyny is common since its aim is to reinforce both sexual factions and their status.

5. CONCLUSION

TP is a play which presented many women issues that were common during its time, but when it is read now it is seen that these issues are still the same in this time. This paper discussed some of these issues, the most important one is the control of a woman who reached a level of power and success on other women who are helpless or did not get the chance to prove themselves. This issue is presented by Marlene and how she controlled everyone around her since she is at the
top and she did not give any chances to others to improve their lives.

Class distinction is obvious in this play; women were defined by their position in society. If a woman was from the middle class, she could do things with much more freedom than the women from the working class. Working class women during that time were suffering because of the terrible economic circumstances. One of the reasons that the working class was suffering is because Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister of The United Kingdom, she was conservative and she did not pay much attention to help the working class; rather, she focused on supporting the middle class to raise the economy of the country. That is why the working class especially women were oppressed by the middle class which was in control of the economy, and it was benefited from Thatcher’s politics.

This play satirizes Margaret Thatcher because she was a woman in a position that enabled her to change everything in the country, if she was a truly feminist, she could have made all the difference, she could have transformed women’s situation in her country. But she was a woman who adopted masculine qualities to the point that she did not care anymore for women.

The women in this play gave a variety of methods to resist oppression of men and society, for example, Pope Joan wanted to continue her education, but since she was a girl, she was not allowed to receive education, so she left her identity and adopted new form just to receive her right education. Lady Nijo who felt that she is not at the top, she refused to remain at her place and ran away from the palace and became a nun. Beside that Churchill presented examples of women who simply accepted their lives as oppressed women, like patient Griselda and Mrs. Kidd.

REFERENCE