

INTRODUCTION

Caryl Churchill is arguably the most accomplished female playwright to emerge in Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century. Her appointment as writer-in-residence at the Royal Court Theatre (1974), the winning of several prestigious awards¹, and the wide performance and publishing of her plays, testify to her success. Most importantly, she is an icon for feminist theatre. The relatively 'mainstream' acceptance of her 'alternative' theatre can be attributed largely to her skilful exploration of issues of 'power and oppression', which has urged her audiences to come to terms with the corruptive forces of a materialistic, patriarchal society. She offers strong social commentaries on the practices of colonialism, racism, the problems of identity and gender roles, and the impact of acquisitiveness and greed on members of society. While Churchill's dissection of the traditional relations of power in Western culture provides an insightful critique on women's oppression, homophobia, capitalist tendencies and race issues, the innovative methods she employs to give expression to these ideas endow them with a new lustre. In the words of John Russell Taylor: 'One thing about Caryl Churchill, you are never bored. Or hardly ever...' (1982: 22). The element of humour in her work renders it highly entertaining. She avoids any uninspiring rendition of some familiar concepts, retaining a strong 'theatrical' element in her work that encourages creative thinking and enlarges the concept of 'possibility' for all established 'forms', be they literary, social or political.

The dense social and historical texture of class and gender relations in Churchill's plays locates her work more specifically in the area of socialist feminist drama. Churchill herself has, nonetheless, indicated in various interviews that she is wary of 'labels': 'If pushed to labels, I would be prepared to take on both socialist and feminist, but I always feel very wary. [I still have] a massive sense of my own political uneducatedness – a feeling of having started personally and emotionally and still groping towards finding what that means in political terms' (Itzin, 1980: 279). Essentially, socialist feminism analyses power in terms of its class origins and its patriarchal roots, and is based on the premiss that 'materialism (class / economics) and gender' are inextricably linked. But it is only one of several routes that feminism has taken to redress the fact of male dominance.

The overarching concern for the purposes of this study is the matter of unequal power relations, in a society beset with inequalities, many of these under the flimsy guise of altered gender

¹ Caryl Churchill has been the recipient of the Obie Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Olivier Award and the *London Evening Standard* Award.

practices. The focus is unequivocally the ‘...prevailing social conditions that formulate women’s position as outside of dominant male discourse [i.e. cultural, social, sexual, political, and intellectual discourse]...’ (Aston, 1995: 8). In the course of the dissertation I seek to examine the two aspects of this unequal balance of power that are pervasive concerns in Churchill’s work, namely materialism and gender, which are key issues for socialist feminists. However, my intention is not to adopt a prescriptive approach or to single-mindedly evaluate theoretical approaches to feminism. While value judgements may inevitably be drawn at various points – by myself as writer, and by the reader of the dissertation, I hope to move beyond the theoretical framework of any specific feminism(s). The meanings that the terms ‘power’ and ‘oppression’ take on in a socialist feminist context cannot be overlooked, and are informing influences in the analysis of the plays, but they are employed as evaluative tools for their relevance to the subject matter at hand. Thus, while the study closely analyses how class and gender systems conspire to oppress women, thereby effectively affirming Churchill’s socialist feminist outlook, it does not strive to measure the success of the plays in their capacity as socialist feminist plays, or to evaluate socialist feminism per se, but rather to evaluate the challenge contained within these plays to the power dynamics in society. Specifically, I seek to establish the extent to which five of Churchill’s plays offer a meaningful critique of ‘power and oppression’, in the context of the oppression of women.

For socialist feminists, women’s oppression derives from economics as well as from patriarchy since capitalism and patriarchy are mutually dependent. Patriarchy, where men are systematically placed in positions that enable them to wield power over women, is institutionalized in the nuclear family. A patriarchal culture is carried over from one historical period to another to maintain the sexual hierarchy of society, a system whereby some men benefit economically and historically through gender inscription. Churchill herself became ‘politicized’ when she married and had children. Within the enclosures of marriage and motherhood she found herself isolated from life outside these institutions. Her political identity was formed within this social context. Socialist feminists are particularly interested in studying the historical construction of the categories of gender and in analysing the importance of culture in the representation and transformation of those categories. In this perspective, socialist feminist criticism offers an alternative to ‘ahistorical’ and idealist categories of feminism.

In terms of Marxist analysis, oppression is the result of the exploitation of workers in capitalist society. Women’s oppression parallels this. The reduction within Marxist analysis of oppression to exploitation rests upon equating the economic class structure with the structure of power in society. Socialist feminists refute this with their claim that women’s oppression is rooted in more

than class position: the position of women within patriarchy, both structurally and ideologically, must also be addressed. Thus, for socialist feminists, oppression and exploitation are not equivalent concepts for women or for members of minority races. In terms of their approach, exploitation refers to the economic reality of capitalist class relations for men and women, whereas oppression refers to women and minorities defined within patriarchal, racist and capitalist relations. Exploitation is what happens to men and women workers in the labour force, while women's oppression results from their exploitation as wage-labourers as well as from the relations that define their existence in the patriarchal sexual hierarchy. They are defined as mothers, domestic labourers and consumers. Racial oppression would locate women within the racist division of society alongside their exploitation and sexual oppression. Oppression is thus inclusive of exploitation, but reflects a more complex reality. It reflects the hierarchical relations of the sexual and racial division of labour and society. Gender, race and class have been used to maintain a status quo, allowing some sectors of society to control the means to education, and access to the language with which to write the literature and history of each age. Power and oppression are manifested through both the material and ideological dimensions of patriarchy, racism and capitalism, but the aspect of racism, for the larger part, falls outside the scope of this study.

In the broad feminist perspective, patriarchal oppression consists in the imposition of certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order to make women / society believe that the chosen standards for femininity are 'natural'. Feminists are thus faced with the task of elucidating the confusion between the terms femininity and 'femaleness'. In her book *Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Toril Moi explores Kristevan theory: 'Though political reality (the fact that patriarchy defines women and oppresses them accordingly) still makes it necessary to campaign in the name of women, it is important to recognize that in this struggle a woman cannot *be*: she can only exist negatively, as it were, through her refusal of that which is given...' (1985: 163). Accordingly, for feminists the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' refer to social constructs, representing patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms. The terms 'female' and 'male' are used to refer to the exclusively biological aspects of sexual difference. American feminist writer, Betty Friedan, presents femininity as an artificial construct in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Eva Figes, in *Patriarchal Attitudes* asks, 'What is a 'natural' man or woman? One is forced to answer that there is no such thing...' (1970: 13).

The rejection of the notion of 'femininity' as a derivative of biology also features in the work of influential French writer, Simone de Beauvoir. In her landmark feminist study, *The Second Sex*

(1988), de Beauvoir describes how one isn't born a woman - one becomes one. She claims that '...it is not the body-object described by biologists that actually exists, but the body as lived in by the subject. Woman is a female to the extent that she feels herself as such...It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life' (1988: 69). Biology, for de Beauvoir, does not determine woman's nature, but powerfully affects and partially explains her history: woman is what humanity has made of the biological female in the course of its history. She refutes the view that woman can be understood either in terms of her biological function or in terms of the idea of the 'Eternal Feminine'.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990: preface), Judith Butler refers to gender as 'a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real'. This perception, underpinned by the assertion that there is no 'Eternal Masculine' or 'Eternal Feminine', motivates Churchill's frequent use of cross-dressing as a dramaturgical device. Butler asks:

'Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established? Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?' (1990: preface).

She asserts that 'gender practices within gay and lesbian cultures often thematize 'the natural' in parodic contexts that bring into relief the performative construction of an original and true sex' (1990: preface), and questions what other foundational categories of identity can be exposed as productions that create the effect of the natural, or original. Churchill's work grapples determinedly with these multi-layered identities, bringing theory onto the level of practical display.

Socialist feminism seeks to locate oppression in terms of the complex matrix of gender, class, race and ideology, and to identify the historical sitings of such oppression(s) in order to radically transform society. The acting method which was widely adopted by feminist groups in the 1970s to demonstrate this was a method based on the theory and practice of Brechtian theatre. Here, an anti-illusionist performance aesthetic challenged the form and ideological content of the classic realist tradition. Brecht, an ardent socialist, espoused the idea that the theatre could create the intellectual climate for social change. He viewed a successful theatre production as one that engaged the audience on an intellectual, as opposed to an emotional, level. He developed the convention of what he termed 'epic theatre'², though he was not, of course, the first to employ

² This type of theatre was, as the term implies, epic in scope.

epic techniques. Plays written in this convention break down the unified work of art with the goal of instructing. Such plays are predominantly episodic in structure, usually dealing with history or foreign lands, covering a great period of time, shifting locale frequently, with intricate plots and a large number of characters. Brecht's reference to theatrical works created purely for mass consumption and entertainment as 'culinary art' highlighted his insistence upon the alienation of the audience from the dramatic action. In her drama, Churchill adapts epic theatre conventions into a style uniquely suited to her socialist-feminist vantage point, particularly in her disregard for the linearity of traditional drama.

The intersection of the practice of the art of playwriting and the theory concerned with both art and society in Churchill's work can translate as the intersection of political and aesthetic dimensions. The experimental forms of her plays dismantle conventional expectations of theatre, and disrupt conventional attitudes to issues of women's oppression. There is certainly commonality of artistic intent with Brecht, as both seek to empower their audiences as opposed to encouraging a tacit acceptance of an apparently inevitable fate. The degree of Churchill's engagement with Brechtian theory will be considered in the analysis of each play as this is an aesthetic dimension to her work that has major 'political' repercussions.

The study focuses on plays written in the 1970s and 1980s for two reasons. Firstly, the time period in question was a particularly significant and interesting one for British feminists. Censorship laws pertaining to theatre were abolished in 1968 and the first British National Women's Liberation Conference was held in Oxford in 1969. The rise of the women's movement in this period influenced the first specifically gender-oriented political demonstrations since the suffragette movement. Such active representation by and of women in the public sphere influenced the growth of women's playwrights on both sides of the Atlantic, but it was only in the mid-seventies that the British feminist movement began to gain momentum. It was at this time that feminist consciousness-raising groups began to form throughout the United Kingdom. Feminists began to locate the oppression of women in their reproductive labour for capitalism, and in their wageless work in the home. Male domination was challenged in all fields.

It was in the 1970s that feminism scrutinized the theory and practice of Marxism and Socialism for its gender bias(es), and contended that gender had not been considered in the analysis of class politics. A re-evaluation of class politics became an integral part of socialist-feminist theatre. At the same time, women's organizations emerged, including the first women's theatre collectives. Churchill produced some noteworthy plays – such as *Vinegar Tom* – with socialist and feminist

theatre collectives. The growth of 'fringe' and 'alternative' theatres was influential in providing experimental spaces where playwrights, including many women, could take the stage.

In the 1980s Churchill, already a successful playwright, began her long-term collaboration with Max Stafford-Clark, the artistic director at the Royal Court Theatre. This was a theatre that was known in the 1960s and 1970s as the most radical venue for new work by 'angry young men' and few women. They worked together on a number of Churchill's plays, including *Top Girls*, which constituted a powerful statement on the status of women in the 1980s. Analysis of intra-sexual class oppression became a dominant feature of socialist-feminist playwriting of the 1980s, as feminism had a 'new' oppressive factor to contend with: the 'superwoman'.

The percentage of plays by women increased from eight percent in the 1970s to thirty percent in the 1980s. Thus, the 1980s were years of rapid advancement for women in several areas of the business world without the concomitant but necessary organized child-care systems or benefits for working mothers. In this context, the idea of the 'superwoman' emerged - a woman who participated in both professional and domestic activities, excelling in both the public and private spheres. In reality, however, women, as well as those specifically dependent on them, suffered under the strain of this image. Thatcherite politics promoted the image of the high-flying female achiever who was capable of transcending class boundaries and of attaining material success at home and in the workplace. But the reality was somewhat different. Few women were in a position to gain access to paid positions of power that would enable them to combine work and family life. *Top Girls* (1982) directly critiqued the 'superwoman' ethos, and the following year *Fen* offered a critique of capitalism and its effects on the working-class community of East Anglia's Fenlands.

The second reason for the particular selection of plays is that, in addition to being plays written in a significant time period for feminists, the five plays under discussion are effectively the plays with which Churchill made her reputation. They rank amongst her most successful, both in commercial and in literary terms. As such, they stand out in bold relief against her chronology of plays. The first, *Vinegar Tom* (1976), heralded a new maturity in Churchill's work. In this play, created through the workshop method, Churchill presents a shocking connection between medieval attitudes to witches and continuing attitudes to women in general. *Cloud Nine* (1979) places human sexuality in a framework consistent with socialist feminism, and encompasses the question of homosexuality in this framework. It presents the life and death of a patriarchal gender system. In *Top Girls* (1982) the convocation of women from diverse backgrounds allows Churchill to illustrate how assumptions about roles in society can determine commonly held

thinking patterns, and how bourgeois society can dehumanize ambitious women. Churchill exposes the futility of individual solutions, embracing a cause for the radical transformation of society. In her 'play about potato-pickers', *Fen* (1982), Churchill focuses on women labourers at the bottom end of the economic spectrum, and questions workers' acceptance of oppression. The women in *Fen* are oppressed on two levels, both as workers and as women. Here the critique of capitalist production and class exploitation is combined with an examination of intra-sexual oppressive power relations. Finally, *Serious Money* (1987) parodies the greed for massive earnings in 'post-Big Bang' society, calling into question the 'freedom' in a system where the participants are effectively enslaved. It mocks the crassly sexual way in which capitalists equate money with women, judging both as objects to be exploited. Importantly, it also shows women who have been thoroughly appropriated by the prevailing system.

The plays will be examined in chronological sequence as a means of establishing a realistic framework within which to conduct in-depth analysis. The methodology employed for the study is the close analysis of the plays themselves, with each play dictating its own format for analysis. The focus is, however, centred by the consistent application of the following enquiry: to what extent, and how effectively, do the plays in question offer a critique of male dominance and women's oppression, which from Churchill's socialist feminist perspective is rooted in economics and gender?

CHAPTER ONE

VINEGAR TOM

In *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill uncovers traditional history from a socialist feminist perspective, revealing the economic and gender bias of the seventeenth-century witchhunts. Although the play is not based on any precise historical events, it is set during a time when English society was moving swiftly from a feudal-type structure to a capitalistic one, when the rising professionalism of the male doctor was forcing out the herbal medical tradition, and when the last of the major English witchhunts was taking place. It is in the context of this social upheaval that Churchill presents the women who become society's scapegoats. Although capitalism as an institution was still emergent in terms of the time period of the narrative, the contemporary translation of the 'materialism', or economics, in the play can be expressed as capitalism. As a 'play about witches with no witches in it; a play not about evil, hysteria and possession by the devil but about poverty, humiliation and prejudice, and how the women accused of witchcraft saw themselves' (Churchill, 1985: introduction to *Vinegar Tom*), it grapples with issues of class and gender in a patriarchal seventeenth century society. The women in *Vinegar Tom* are not witches but are defined as such because they do not conform to the (male) construction of female identity, or are economically disadvantaged. They are the seventeenth century's victims of destructive capitalist patriarchy, but Churchill forces the audience to question what form witchhunting has taken in the present.

Written in 1976, *Vinegar Tom* pinpoints significant developments in Churchill's career as a playwright. As one of her first collaborative works, together with *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, it marks the onset of her new approach to playwriting. Written in collaboration with Monstrous Regiment, a socialist feminist theatre company formed in 1975, it signals a significant departure from her earlier work. Churchill, in her introduction to *Vinegar Tom*, states: 'My previous work had been completely solitary...so this was a new way of working...I felt briefly shy and daunted... then happy and stimulated by the discovery of shared ideas and the enormous energy and feeling of possibilities in the still new company' (p.129). Churchill and Monstrous Regiment had both agreed upon the witchhunts as the subject of *Vinegar Tom*, with Churchill attributing much of her interest in the subject to her reading of *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*. She decided that her focus would not be on the idea of witchcraft as a hangover of pagan rituals of the past, but as something existing in the minds of its

persecutors. Her attendance of a rehearsal for *Scum*, another Monstrous Regiment play, further motivated her to examine the relationship between gender ideology and changing socio-economic conditions.

Churchill and Monstrous Regiment compared ideas, but Churchill, for the most part, conducted her research alone. She also wrote the first draft alone, in a period of three days. After completion of the first draft, Churchill turned her attention to *Light Shining*³, and after her completion of this play with Joint Stock, she returned to Monstrous Regiment to rehearse *Vinegar Tom*. During the rehearsal period she refined the script, expanding it slightly, and wrote in a character. She also wrote the songs, with assistance from the acting company, director and composer. By immersing herself in the collaborative process, Churchill was able to transcend the inevitable limitations of individual perception and experience, viewing issues from several perspectives, and expand her range of expression. Her association with Monstrous Regiment was pivotal in the development of her socialist feminist analysis of society. The social and political perspectives characteristic of her later work begin to emerge in *Vinegar Tom* (as well as in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*), while concerns foreshadowed in her earlier work are developed in the play in the context of a belief in the capacity for change, both on societal and personal levels. It is in *Vinegar Tom* that the perspicuity of Churchill's vision becomes clear, and it is her first straightforwardly feminist work. The play is infused with the new inspiration and enthusiasm Churchill gained through the collaborative process of writing, while the refined theatrical techniques testify to her eighteen years experience in writing plays for the stage.

Monstrous Regiment was extensively influenced by Brecht's theatrical techniques and political orientation. *Vinegar Tom* was, therefore, written within a Brechtian sphere of influence. The key elements of the Brechtian model can be identified in the play's historicization, in the use of song, multiple role-playing, cross-casting, short episodic scenes and *Gestus*⁴. Structurally, historicization, also used in *Softcops* (1978) and *Mad Forest* (1990), compels the audience to think critically about it is viewing, allowing it to determine its own history. Placing the events of the plays in the past, while it is apparent that the concern is with contemporary events or issues that parallel historical events, distances the audience from the dramatic action. The contemporary relevance of issues is underlined in *Vinegar Tom* by the insertion of contemporary songs, sung by actors in modern dress. In Brechtian theatre, music serves solely as a vehicle for the expression of

³ A considerable overlap between *Vinegar Tom* and *Light Shining*, in time and ideas, was the inevitable result of the contemporaneous creation of these works.

⁴ According to Brecht, the actors in Brechtian plays should not express feelings. Instead, the basic attitudes in us should be shown, that is, be expressed in the 'gestus'. In this approach, the investigation of human nature is replaced by a study of human relations.

ideas: song and/or dance disrupts illusionistic theatre. The resulting emotional detachment is necessary for an objective examination and evaluation of events and perceptions. The narrative poses questions about social and/or political relations in the time period of the songs, and vice versa. No one actor dominates the action on stage. Churchill keeps the community and its socio-economic-sexual systems at the centre of the play through the adept use of the Brechtian disruption devices.

Vinegar Tom functions thematically and structurally to stimulate re-evaluation of the past and of the present, from the perspective of women and other marginalized groups in society - groups that have been largely misrepresented in traditional accounts of history. Thematically, the play determinedly challenges traditional versions of history, probing the accepted accounts of the past to reach an all-encompassing, unobstructed historical view. Historical context is, for Churchill and other socialist-feminists, critical for any possibility of dismantling the oppressive power structures and for eradicating the concomitant attitudes and behaviour patterns in existence in the present. For Churchill, the past intervenes in the present, shaping and colouring perceptions. It is historical perceptions that falsely legitimize those who have empowered themselves on social and economic levels in the patriarchal system. At the same time, the construction of the past hinges on these very perceptions. By historicizing the narrative of *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill problematizes the traditional interpretation of that history, and points to the proliferation of such thinking in contemporary times. The play is intercut with modern songs to place Churchill's concerns in a contemporary perspective, while the distancing effect of the historical epoch provides a safe space for members of the audience to interrogate their own discursive subjectivity. An awareness of history as a pervasive, contextualizing narrative is necessary to understanding how woman has historically been constructed. Through rearrangement of linear time and history, the metatext of the drama becomes an explicit commentary on the dramatic action, creating a liminal space which allows for reinterpretation and deconstruction.

The problem of locating or establishing 'women's time' in linear time is articulated by French feminist Julia Kristeva, and is registered in the play. The concept of 'women's time' arises out of the Kristevan symbolic and semiotic: Kristeva links female subjectivity to two types of temporality which she calls 'cyclical' and 'monumental'. There are cycles, or the ongoing recurrence of a biological rhythm which is in harmony with that of nature, and there is a monumental temporality, which has little to do with linear time. Female subjectivity is alienated from the time of history. *Vinegar Tom* is both historical and monumental as a text in that it combines an historical, oppressive past with the monumental temporality of patriarchal oppression to articulate the oppression of women. Thus while there is a desire for women to claim

a place in the linear time of history, there is a simultaneous refusal of linear time in the interests of finding 'the intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past' (Aston, 1995: 54). The play refuses linear structures which do not encompass women's experience.

The play, in twenty-one brief episodes separated by song, presents events in a village where economic inequalities and patriarchal attitudes work together to bring about a witchhunt. Four women are persecuted and condemned to torture and hanging because of the 'crimes' of being poor, old, single or unconventional. Churchill exposes the punishment of women whose acts of non-conformity threaten the sexual and economic hierarchy. She lays bare how low value within the economic hierarchy increases vulnerability and marginality.

In a rapid succession of short scenes, the play introduces the characters: Jack and Margery, tenant farmers who operate a dairy and are pre-occupied with propriety and material expansion; Betty, the landowner's daughter who does not want to marry the man her family has chosen for her; Joan Noakes, who is old and poor and whose requests for handouts meet with disapproval; Alice, Joan's daughter who is a single mother and publicly acknowledges her enjoyment of sex; Susan, a poor housewife with three children who is anguished over the abortion she induced; Ellen, the healer or 'cunning woman' who offers herbal healing to members of the community. The four women accused of being witches, Joan, Alice, Susan and Ellen, all try to act in an autonomous manner, sexually or economically, and are violently expelled from society. On the narrative level, the play focuses primarily on relationships between women, while the songs in *Vinegar Tom* explicitly combat the male gaze. It is proposed that 'The undisguised rejection of male privilege in this play probably accounts for the disproportionate share of negative comments...that it has received from male critics, who have referred to *Vinegar Tom* as 'graphic', 'shrill' and 'hysterical' (Kritzer, 1991: 95).

The central action of the play involves Jack and Margery, who represent a couple striving for economic success. Their language is filled with economic references, and they dream of prosperity. Jack is both financially and sexually frustrated, and lusts after Alice. Margery's sexual frustration is evident in her repeated complaints that the 'Butter won't come' (p. 142) and her chant, 'Come butter come, come butter come...' (p. 143-5) while churning butter without results, is an aspect of the sexual imagery that permeates the play. Their dreams of economic prosperity are threatened when their cattle start dying, and they immediately search for a scapegoat. Jack initially blames himself, suggesting that 'it's my sins those calves shaking and stinking and swelling up their bellies in there' (p. 152). Margery, however, proposes that it is the work of a witch: 'If we're bewitched, Jack, that explains all' (p. 152). Jack welcomes the idea of witchery,

as it clears his conscience: 'Then it's not my sins. Good folk get bewitched' (p. 153). They find their scapegoat in Joan Noakes, with whom they have both exchanged angry words, and request Ellen to confirm their suspicion. They also believe Joan to be responsible for Jack losing the use of one of his hands and Margery's headaches. Ellen gives Jack and Margery a mirror and tells them to look for the face of their misfortunes in this mirror: 'Look in the glass and think on all the misfortunes you've had and see what comes' (p. 157). They both see Joan, and this echoes Churchill's belief that witchcraft existed, or exists, in the minds of its persecutors. Jack and Margery fail to see their own images in the mirror, and fail to come to any realization that they are, in fact, the only perpetrators of witchcraft in the play. Margery practices 'true' witchcraft as a means of 'proving' that Joan has cast a spell on her by boiling her urine, and when Joan enters the room she states that 'It's a foul stink brings a witch...proves you've a spell on me...' (p. 159).

Despite Margery's collusion with the dominant order, she too is oppressed as a woman in that she is exploited as Jack's wife, as 'domestic labourer' through her wageless work in the home, and her labour for capitalism. As patriarchy is institutionalized in the nuclear family, the family under capitalism reinforces woman's oppressive condition: Jack orders Margery to 'Hurry up with that butter, woman...There's other work to do' (p. 142). His words, 'You don't churn. You sit gossiping...Get on now with the butter and don't be always gossiping' (p. 143) resemble those of employer to employee, defining Margery's existence in the patriarchal sexual hierarchy. His order, 'Lazy slut, get on with it' (p. 143), demeans her both as woman and as labourer.

Joan Noakes is the 'ageing body' in the play. She is an economic burden, and is the first to be accused of witchcraft. Joan defies the economic and social hierarchy by her impertinence to her economically superior neighbour, Margery. Joan tries to appeal to Margery's religious code and desire for social standing to procure 'a little yeast' to 'do a little baking now and brew a little beer maybe...' (p. 143). She states, 'A little small crumb of yeast and God will bless you for kindness to your poor old neighbour...lend me a little yeast like a good woman...you'll die without a friend in this parish when if you gave yeast to your good neighbours everyone would bless you...' (p. 144). When Margery refuses Joan's request and orders her to 'get out' of the dairy, Joan curses, 'Damn your butter to hell...Devil take you and your man and your fields and your cows and your butter and your yeast and your beer and your bread and your cider and your cold face...' (p. 144). By enumerating a list of Margery's material possessions, Joan indicates that the overwhelming difference between Margery and herself is one that is materially determined.

The appeal to Margery's religious conscience foreshadows the prayer Margery recites while Joan and Ellen are being hanged. Her prayer conflates capitalistic pursuits and Christian salvation, and

she focuses primarily on personal concerns: 'I have scrubbed the dairy out...Help me work harder and the harvest will be to your glory...Bless Miss Betty's marriage...Bless Jack...and let him love me...' (p. 174). The witches have been hanged and the threat to her economic prosperity has been eliminated. Thus, she can continue in the conventional life that presupposes that prosperity. Margery gives thanks that the wicked have been destroyed and the good have been blessed, when in reality Joan has suffered a humiliating and excruciating death on her account, for the 'sins' of poverty and social impropriety.

Joan, soon before she is hanged, knows that she is condemned and claims to be a witch. Utterly powerless and defeated, the pretence of being a witch endows her with imaginary power, and she fantasizes about the power she might have wielded:

'...And I asked them to kill Mary Johnson who crossed me and she wasted after. And everyone knows Anne that had fits and would gnash her teeth and took six strong men to hold her. That was me sent those fits to her. My little imps are like moles with four feet but no tails and a black colour. And I'd send them off and they'd come back in the night and say they did what I said. Jack is lucky I didn't bewitch him to death...' (p. 173).

She adds, 'But now I'm in prison my power's all gone or I'd call down thunder and twist your guts' (p. 173/4). Joan's age finally prevents any hope of clemency from her persecutors: when asked by the witchhunter Packer, 'Is there any reason you shouldn't be hanged?', Joan replies, 'I'm with child'. Goody incredulously asks, 'Who'd believe that' (p. 174).

Alice, a young, unmarried mother, represents the 'sexually active body' in the play. The unknown man with whom Alice has a sexual encounter in a roadside ditch opens the play with the question to her, 'Am I the devil?' (p. 135). In *Malleus Maleficarum, The Hammer of Witches*,⁵ the handbook on witches by Dominican monks James Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, it is claimed that a common practice of all witches is carnal copulation with devils. This assertion, propounded by men who have come to be regarded as two of history's arch-misogynists, underlies these opening words. The equation of socially unacceptable sexual conduct with witches and the underworld highlights the irony of the situation about to be played out. The evil, it would seem, lies with the accusers rather than the accused. The unknown man's continued references to the devil, and related questioning of Alice about their sexual encounter, 'Have I not got great burning eyes then?...Didn't the enormous size of me terrify you?...Didn't it hurt you?', have undertones

⁵ Kramer and Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum, The Hammer of Witches*, written in 1486, stresses the susceptibility of women to witchcraft, and maintains that this is as a result of their physical, intellectual and moral inferiority. In terms of this book, the typical witch is female.

of a sense of pleasure at the power he might have wielded over her. He asks her, 'Will you do everything I say, like a witch with the devil her master?' (p. 136). The masculine power that he imagines, and continually tries to reinforce, is realized later in the play when Alice is hung as a witch.

The man in black is surprised by Alice's refusal to regard their sexual encounter as sinful: 'Any time I'm happy someone says it's a sin' (p. 136). As a married man who has followed his desire, his talk of sin and his condemnation of Alice reveal religious and sexual double standards. He curses her for being the object of his desire, and the play's closing song, 'Evil Women' addresses this. The two have little prospect of any relationship, as social and economic constrictions prevent any such likelihood, and he attempts to categorize her: 'You're not a wife or a widow. You're not a virgin. Tell me a name for what you are' (p. 137). Unable to find a suitable category for an unattached, sexually liberated woman, he classifies her as a 'whore' and a 'witch' (p. 137). Each of the categories he mentions, wife, widow, virgin and whore has economic connections: a wife can be kept by her husband, a widow can live off her husband's estate, a virgin can await a husband, and a whore can earn her keep by demanding money for sex. French feminists Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous emphasize in their writings how women have been historically limited to being sexual objects for men: virgins, prostitutes, wives or mothers. Irigaray states in *This Sex Which is Not One*:

'Mother, virgin, prostitute: these are the social roles imposed on women. The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorization of reproduction and nursing; faithfulness; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men's 'activity'; seductiveness, in order to arouse the consumers' desire while offering herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself...Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure' (1985 [1977]: 186/7).

The final line of the scene jarringly proclaims the rejection of unconventional women: 'You won't be seeing me' (p. 138).

Alice voices her desire for sexual pleasure, asserting to Susan that, 'I want a man I can have when I want, not if I'm lucky to meet some villain one night' (p. 147). But she also asserts that, 'I hate my body...Blood every month, and no way out of that but to be sick and swell up, and no way out of that but pain. No way out of all that till we're old and that's worse. I can't bear to see my mother if she changes her clothes...' (p. 146). Her enjoyment of sex in what Jeanie Forte, in her essay *Focus on the Body: Pain, Praxis, and Pleasure in Feminist Performance*, refers to as a 'uterine social organisation' is problematic:

‘Insofar as the clitoris embodies, literally and symbolically, women’s pleasure outside of reproductive functions, it is not useful to (and in fact must be suppressed in) a ‘uterine’ social organization; advanced capitalism, for example, dependent on home buying and, therefore, the sanctity of the nuclear family, must negate any but the uterine norm of motherhood’ (1992: 251).

Forte quotes a study of this phenomenon that claims that ‘it is this ideologico-material repression of the clitoris as the signifier of the sexed subject that operates the specific oppression of women’ (p. 251). The ‘uterine social organisation’ serves to subjugate women both directly and indirectly. As a result of what Forte terms ‘the effacement of the clitoris’ in favour of the ‘uterine norm of motherhood’, women are prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves. The body that is no longer capable of ‘motherhood’ is discarded by uterine society, and Alice reveals how women have internalized this contempt for the ageing body. Alice hates her body because it is materially and sexually abused, and her desire is inexpressible. Her only means of expressing her sexual desire is through an imaginary life as a male: ‘If I was a man I’d go to London and Scotland and never come back and take a girl under a bush and on my way’ (p. 146).

As an unmarried mother, Alice is representative of the economically disadvantaged single-mother group. Elaine Aston, in *Caryl Churchill*, (1997: 30) draws a parallel between Packer’s cross-examination of Alice, when trying to force her to confess to being a witch, and the attempts in the 1990s by right-wing English politicians to stop single women having children before they formed stable relationships:

Packer: Why won’t you confess and make this shorter?...

Alice: ...I want my boy.

Packer: Then you should have stayed home at night with him and not gone out after the devil.

Alice: I want him.

Packer: How could a woman be a filthy witch and put her child in danger?

Alice: I didn’t.

Packer: Night after night, it’s well known.

Alice: But what’s going to happen to him? He’s only got me.

Packer: He should have a father... (p. 171)

Aston terms it the ‘crusade against ‘lone-mothers’ and ‘home alone’ children [by right-wing politicians]...who, for example, have argued that it is ‘good Christian doctrine’ to stop single women having children...or have ‘defended the Government’s right to speak out against the impact of single parenthood on crime and social breakdown’’ (p. 30). In Western Europe, in the middle ages, the unmarried mother was often assumed to be a witch, and, historically, ‘to bear a child out of wedlock has been to violate the property laws that say a woman and her child must

legally belong to some man, and that, if they do not, they are at best marginal people, vulnerable to every kind of sanction' (Rich, 1977: 260).

Alice's rejection of Jack's advances, largely as a result of her infatuation with the man of the first scene, confirms the hollowness of her previous categorization as a 'whore'. Jack tries to ply Alice by bringing her two apples as a barter for sex, and tells her 'Alice, you must. I have dreams...I'm no good to my wife. I can't do it. Not these three months. It's only when I dream of you or like now talking to you...' (p. 147). He exploits Alice's economic position in the social hierarchy, that of a poor woman close to starvation, for sexual gain: 'Alice, I'd be good to you. I'm not a poor man. I could give you things for your boy...' (p. 148). Further, the *Gestus* of Jack tempting Alice with the apples subverts the biblical story of Eve: Churchill represents the sinfulness of the man, rather than the woman. Unsuccessful in his attempts to seduce Alice, he later accuses her of bewitching him by removing his penis⁶. In an ironic contrast to the first scene of the play, where Alice is branded a witch for succumbing to her sexual desires, Alice is, in effect, now branded a witch for resisting Jack's sexual advances.

In a Brechtian *Gestus* that demonstrates what Elin Diamond calls 'the crude double-bind logic by which innocent women were condemned as witches' (Diamond, 1989: 267), Churchill reveals how Alice, as a sexual woman, is perceived in the phallogentric order as a castrating figure. Alice avenges her sexual loneliness by constructing a mud man representation of the lover who abandoned her, and while Susan watches, she pricks between its legs so that he 'can't get on with his lady' (p. 162). Then Jack arrives on the scene and accuses her of removing his penis: 'Give it me back...You bewitched me. You took it off me' (p. 163). He chokes her, and she finally '*puts her hand between his thighs*', saying 'There. It's back' (p.164). Jack replies, 'It is back. Thank you, Alice. I wasn't sure you were a witch until then' (p. 164). Diamond explains how this gest 'reveals the male terror that fuels such [crude double-bind] logic':

'...the economy of sight (as of commodities) is a phallic economy based on castration fear or the disavowal of a feared absence. The female shores up that economy by functioning as a lack (absence) in relation to phallic presence; as the male's complement and opposite the female acts as guarantor against castration' (1989: 267).

⁶ It was believed, in terms of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, that witches had the power to render any man impotent at any time with any woman, be it his wife or mistress. Thus a man able to perform for his wife may be impotent when with his mistress, or vice-versa. It was further believed that witches had the power to make a man's penis 'appear to disappear', or to disappear entirely and reappear in a bird's nest or box.

After endowing Alice with the 'power of the phallus' to 'give him back his penis', Jack seeks to nullify this power by seeing her as a witch. Susan, the spectator, believes Jack's claims: 'Don't touch me. I'll not be touched by a witch' (p. 164). She exemplifies the female who 'shores up that economy'.

Susan, a wife and mother who is constantly either pregnant or miscarrying, represents the 'birthing body'. She is anxious over her pregnancy and the prospect of having to give birth again, after numerous miscarriages and the fact that she 'Nearly died last time' (p. 146). Her husband is insensitive to her fears, and remarks, 'let's hope a fine child comes of it' after intercourse (p. 145). Proving his virility takes precedence over his wife's needs. Patriarchy requires that '...women shall assume the major burden of pain and self-denial for the furtherance of the species...' (Rich, 1977: 43). Men choose to interpret and use for political gain the fact that women are the reproducers of humanity, and from this fact of reproduction, and men's political control of it, the relations of reproduction have arisen in a particular formulation of woman's oppression. 'The woman's body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected' (Rich, 1977: 55), and an attempt to control the body constitutes a challenge to the symbolic order. Although Susan is certain about not wanting the baby, she is afraid of taking control of her body, and in this fear and uncertainty she functions as the lack (absence) in relation to phallic presence.

She uses religion to try to rationalize her lot: 'They do say that pain is what's sent to a woman for her sins. I complained last time after churching, and he said I must think on Eve who brought the sin into the world that got me pregnant. I must think on how woman tempts man, and how she pays God with her pain having the baby' (p. 146). Susan, as a mother, 'bears the weight of Eve's transgression (is, thus, the first offender, the polluted one, the polluter) yet precisely because of this she is expected to carry the burden of male salvation' (Rich, 1977: 45). Churchill conveys the notion that religion has often been used as a convenient tool in the oppression of women, sanctifying society's patriarchal power arrangement, and allowing men to purge themselves of any sense of guilt at their unjust wielding of that power.

Alice persuades Susan to visit the 'cunning woman', as she too seeks her assistance in luring the man of her infatuation. Ellen offers Susan the option of her services as a midwife, or of a potion to induce a miscarriage. Susan, agonizing over the decision, states, 'I don't want it but I don't want to be rid of it. I want to be rid of it, but not do anything to be rid of it' (p. 155). Ellen's words, 'If you won't do anything to help yourself you must stay as you are' (p. 155), echo

Kramer and Sprenger state: 'there is no doubt that certain witches can do marvellous things with regard to male organs'.

Churchill's hope that women will progress from a state of passive acceptance to one where a meaningful attempt is made to challenge the existing order. At the same time, patriarchal society will actively resist such attempts. Susan finally takes the potion, and must ultimately suffer the consequences for her act of independence when she is hanged: 'The experience of maternity and the experience of sexuality have both been channeled to serve male interests; behavior which threatens the institutions, such as illegitimacy, abortion...is considered deviant or criminal' (Rich, 1977: 42).

As a woman who has internalized the prevailing social and religious codes, Susan is consumed with guilt over the abortion. She is further aggrieved by the sudden death of her baby the day after a meeting with Alice, and condemns Alice as a witch. She tells the witch finder, 'she took me to the cunning woman and they made me take a foul potion to destroy the baby in my womb...and she made a puppet...but that was my baby girl, and the next day she was sick...and she died' (p. 167). Susan tries to deny any responsibility for taking the potion, and in this refusal to affirm her right to independence, she fails Alice, and all women. However, in her final conversation with Alice, she states, 'I was a witch and never knew it. I killed my babies. I never meant it...I repent...' (p. 174/5). She thus acknowledges, albeit in a distorted manner, that she acted independently, but regrets doing so. Susan's confusion and her ultimate betrayal of Alice are indicative that 'resistance, for women, proves extremely difficult and complex, inevitably involving some degree of identity crisis' (Forte, 1992: 252). Churchill reveals how women can remain unconscious of their oppression and can, in fact, victimize themselves and others.

Betty, a member of the upper class, initially refuses to marry the man her father has chosen for her, and this act of independence is treated as sickness. As a member of the privileged class, her rebellion is managed with a little more leniency, and she escapes being hung as a witch. She must, however, bear the consequences of her rebellion: 'They lock me up. I said I won't marry him so they lock me up...' (p.140). These words are reminiscent of characters such as Maria in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman*. Maria is committed to a mental institution by her husband, and to her the madhouse becomes symbolic of all the man-made institutions, such as marriage, that confine women and drive them to insanity. She can find no purpose in fighting for her freedom or her sanity in the madhouse, as the world itself is a prison, and women are born slaves. Betty will have to pay the price of sexual submission for her 'freedom', by acquiescing to her father's request, and she will therefore, in reality, still be imprisoned. In a scene where Betty is literally constrained, tied to a chair to be bled by a doctor for her 'irrational behaviour', she asks herself:

‘Why am I tied? Tied to be bled. Why am I bled? Because I was screaming. Why was I screaming? Because I’m bad. Why was I bad? Because I was happy. Why was I happy? Because I ran out by myself and got away from them and – Why was I screaming? Because I’m bad. Why am I bad? Because I’m tied. Why am I tied? Because I’m happy. Why was I happy? Because I was screaming’ (p.149).

Elaine Showalter, in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, calls madness the ‘desperate communication of the powerless’ (1987: 5), and Betty’s circular reasoning conveys this desperation. Showalter claims that it is ‘certainly possible to see hysteria within the specific historical framework of the nineteenth century as an unconscious form of feminist protest, the counterpart of the attack on patriarchal values carried out by the women’s movement of the time’ (1987: 5). Betty’s ‘madness’, or more specifically, ‘hysteria’, represents ‘a defiant womanhood, whose opposition, expressed in physical symptoms and coded speech, subverted the linear logic of male science’ (1987: 5). Further, it is suggestive of being ‘locked in’: Betty is trapped in her own (‘female’) rhetoric. Her language cannot accommodate a fracturing of the symbolic order: immediately after recalling how she ‘got away from them’, her sentence breaks off and she reverts to her repetitive self-questioning. Betty’s independence will literally be drained away so that she will agree to the marriage at the end of the treatment.

Showalter supplies the gender analysis and feminist critique missing from the history of madness, asserting that ‘madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady’ (1987: 4). She analyses how hysteria, the quintessential female malady, had by the end of the nineteenth century become central to definitions of femininity and female sexuality, how ‘hysterical’ had become interchangeable with ‘feminine’. F.C. Skey, a former president of the Royal College of Surgeons who is mentioned in *The Female Malady* (1987: 132/133), claimed to have observed that ‘the parents of these [hysterical] girls were unusually interfering and controlling. In one case a patient had been treated unsuccessfully for pain under the ribs by her own father, a physician who had applied leeches by the hundred and ‘blisters, the sum of which might be calculated by the square yard’. The notion of hysteria being unreasonably equated with femininity, as well as the case referred to by Skey, is echoed in Churchill’s representation of Betty’s oppression when the doctor attending to her asserts:

‘Hysteria is a woman’s weakness. Hysteron, Greek, the womb. Excessive blood causes an imbalance in the humours. The noxious gases that form inwardly every month rise to the brain and cause behaviour quite contrary to the patient’s real feelings. After bleeding you must be purged. Tonight you shall be blistered. You will soon be well enough to be married’ (p.149).

In the second scene of the play, she manages to escape, albeit briefly, from the constraints that have been placed upon her: 'I'm not let go where I like' (p. 139). She appeals to Jack and Margery to allow her to spend the night, but as the guardians of the patriarchal system, they tell her, 'Hadn't you better have him, Betty, and be happy?...everyone loves a wedding' (p. 140). Betty's attempt to reminisce with Jack and Margery over childhood events meets with mechanistic references to material affairs. She states, 'I milked the red cow right into it [a mug] one day. I got milk in my eye', and Jack replies, 'She died, that red cow. But we've four new cows you've not seen' (p. 140). It is clear that Jack and Margery speak the language of capitalist patriarchy, and Betty will find no sympathy with them. They are unequivocal in wanting to send Betty back to her father's house, the prison-house of patriarchy: 'Shall Jack walk home with you, miss...' (p. 140). The end of the scene invokes a sense of the inevitable accusation of witchery that will follow any resistance: 'On my way here I climbed a tree...I could see the other side of the river. I wanted to jump off. And fly' (p. 140).

Ellen, the 'cunning woman' or healer, is a self-sufficient woman who works outside of the sanctioned (male) medical establishment, dispensing herbal medicines and advice to the villagers. As a woman living alone, and one who operates outside of the monetary system - requesting token gifts rather than money for her services ('I don't charge but you'll bring a little present' (p. 156)) - she seriously challenges the prevailing socio-economic precepts. She poses no threat in the practicing of her craft, and the absence of malevolence is apparent in her words to Betty, when discussing the man Betty's family has chosen for her: 'I won't harm him for you, so don't ask' (p. 156). Ellen is unable, however, to offer any real alternatives to the troubled women who seek her help. She asks Betty, 'Do you want a potion to make you love the man?' (p. 156), and later advises her, 'You get married, Betty, that's safest...your best chance of being left alone is marry a rich man...' (p. 169). Ellen can only aid the other women by numbing their consciences: 'The best thing I can do for you is help you sleep' (p. 156). This is reflected, too, in her words to Alice: 'For your heartache I'll give you these herbs to boil up in water and drink at night. Give you a sound sleep and think less of him' (p. 155). Ellen's advice to Alice that as a 'clever girl' she should 'learn a trade' (p. 155), and that she teach Alice healing powers, is the closest she comes to offering any of the women a way of life free from convention. Her wish for the villagers to take responsibility for their actions is demonstrated in her insistence that Susan make her own choice regarding the abortion, and in her offering of the mirror to Jack and Margery. Ellen's social status thrusts her before the unrelenting gaze of the witchhunter: 'These cunning women are worst of all...yes, all witches deserve death, but especially good witches' (p167). Ellen reiterates, 'I've done nothing wrong' (p 169/70), but she is powerless.

Packer's assistant Goody, like Margery, participates in and benefits from the patriarchal economic structure. Her willingness to do the job of witchhunting that 'tires a body out' (p. 171) in return for a good wage places her within the institutions of capitalism. Both she and Margery impersonate men in their actions and fail in their duty to other women for economic gain. Goody readily shares in the profits of the system:

'...He's [Henry Packer] well worth the twenty shillings s time, and I get the same, which is very good of him to insist on and well worth it though some folk complain and say, 'what, the price of a cow, just to have a witch hanged?' But I say to them think of the expense a witch is to you in the damage she does to property...For two pounds and our expenses at the inn, you have all that saving...Yes, it's interesting work being a searcher and nice to do good at the same time as earning a living. Better than staying home a widow. I'd end up like the old women you see, soft in the head and full of spite with their muttering and spells...' (p. 168).

Goody acknowledges her potential similarities to the powerless women she abuses, but she believes that she has overcome her oppressed position as a woman, and takes pride in her identification with Packer. Sheila Rowbotham, a committed socialist feminist, points out that 'A dominant group is secure when it can convince the oppressed that they enjoy their actual powerlessness and give them instead a fantasy of power' (Rowbotham, 1974: 39). When Alice is tied up in a prison cell awaiting her fate as a witch, Goody sits beside her eating, which constitutes a powerful visual representation of Goody's betrayal: Alice is bound and victimized by the social system, while Goody participates in the system and enjoys its economic rewards.

The pricking scene in the play, where Packer and Goody try to find out witches by 'finding the place on the body of the witch made insensitive to pain by the devil' (p. 165), is harrowing in its representation of the victimization of women. Particularly horrifying in its conveyance of women's victimization is Goody's explanation to Susan, prior to pulling up her skirt to look for the devil's marks: '...Devil hides his marks all kinds of places...I knew one witch had a great pink mark on her shoulder and neck...And a woman last week with a big lump in her breast like another whole teat where she sucked herimps...Now let's see your secret parts and see what the devil does there' (p. 172). Packer probes women's parts with a sharp metal prod, and his statement 'Though a mark is a sure sign of a witch's guilt having no mark is no sign of innocence for the devil can take marks off' (p. 173) avers that there is no escape for the women branded as witches. He legitimizes his inhumane treatment of these women by proclaiming that his methods of torture were shown to him by God. Fear, superstition, and institutionalized hatred of women are, however, the only witches. Churchill points out in the production note that 'The pricking scene is one of humiliation rather than torture and Packer is an efficient professional, not a sadistic maniac' (1985: 134).

According to Jeanie Forte, a 'crucial aspect of contemporary feminism is the expression of pain, the pain of a female body in patriarchal culture...' (1992: 252). Further, 'the pain women experience because they are female in a patriarchal culture would seem to resemble torture: that is, the bodies do not 'consent' to their being used. The 'torture' is a fact of political power through covert systems, however, and not an overt act of war, perhaps partially explaining how it is possible for many women to participate in or support the activities that result in the torture of other women, or even of themselves'. Goody's collusion in Packer's brutal practices may be better understood when considering how a grandmother could hold a child for a clitoridectomy. Forte contends that 'Such collusion, I believe, does not make it any less torture but heightens the need for an analysis of feminine praxis' (1992: 252).

Alice's bitter outburst as she waits to be hanged in the public square, with the corpses of her mother and Ellen dangling behind her, vents the anger of women at their oppression. Her anger is palpable: 'I'm not a witch. But I wish I was. If I could live I'd be a witch now after what they've done...Oh if I could meet with the devil now I'd give him anything if he'd give me power...' (p. 175). Although Alice's speech in the end makes no difference to the outcome of the narrative, it does, however, serve a political purpose in that it 'breaks the silence that has aided her oppressors throughout history', and 'by renouncing powerlessness even at the price of embracing an imagined evil, Alice offers a political response to the narrative from within that narrative' (Kritzer, 1991: 94).

Alice is drawn to the idea of self-empowerment from the beginning of the play. In the opening scene, she questions the man about a witch he saw burnt in Scotland, and states, 'I long to see that...Will you take me with you, to London, to Scotland? Nothing happens here.' (p. 137). These words resonate in the scene where she is about to be hanged. Watching a witch being burnt implied, for Alice, a sense of power. Her imaginings of power, however, have never been realized, and it is in the hanging scene that she shows a desire, albeit too late, to actively change the system that abuses and imprisons her. Alice and the women in the community have all, however, operated within a system that has distorted perceptions, and Alice's earlier words indicate that she has not been immune to its influences. Alice believes until the very end that Ellen was a witch: in her final speech, when she wishes she was a witch, she states, 'I shouldn't have been frightened of Ellen, I should have learnt' (p. 175). Susan believes Alice is a witch: 'Alice, you know you are...' (p. 175). She also thinks that she herself is a witch: 'I was a witch and never knew it...I didn't know I was so wicked...If we're hanged, we're saved, Alice...It's done to help us...' (p. 174). Betty believes there are witches: 'If the witches are stopped, maybe

I'll get well' (p. 169). Ellen tells Betty: 'You'll get well, my dear, and you'll get married, and you'll tell your children about the witches'. Churchill illustrates how women have internalized their own oppression and perpetuated it, passing it down through history. Although Goody and Margery appropriate power from the patriarchal order and benefit economically from betraying other women, all the women have been complicit in their own subjugation, and have been potentially or actually complicit in the subjugation of other women.

The key alienating-gender device in feminist theatre, the construction of the female body as a site/sight of 'looking-at-being-looked-at-ness' arises in *Vinegar Tom* through cross-gendered display. In the final scene of the play, any emotional involvement the climax of the historical narrative may have brought on is dissolved when *Malleus Maleficarum*'s Kramer and Sprenger appear, played by women and anachronistically dressed as Edwardian music-hall comics⁷. In addition to removing the sight/site of the female body from the male gaze, Churchill's specification that Kramer and Sprenger are to be played by the 'hanged' women, Joan and Ellen introduces the dimension of multiple-role playing. This theatrical device is based on the belief that the actor representing and the character represented must remain differentiated, and that an actor should not identify with a role during performance. The resurrection of Joan and Ellen as the men who predetermined their executions allows for a constructive disengagement of the speaking body and its signifiers. Churchill's simultaneous presentation of two time periods, neither related to that of the historical narrative, further removes the audience from the 'story' of the play. It (the audience) is prevented from identifying with any individual characters, and it becomes clear that Churchill's overriding concern is not with these characters or the seventeenth century, but with an idea. More specifically, her concern is with the ideology on which the oppression of women is based: 'This scene promotes a realization that the entire recorded history of women has been created in and through patriarchal ideology' (Kritzer, 1991: 92).

The comics' routine consists of a few opening lines of original rhymes and jokes, followed by authentic misogynist cant from *Malleus Maleficarum*, expressed in the style of the Edwardian vaudeville. The impersonation of misogynists by women augments the concept of women participating in and benefiting from the patriarchal economic structure, betraying women for economic gain. The audience is reminded here - as with the play's other impersonators of men, Margery and Goody - that there are female participants in patriarchy. Women denigrate women, but deliver the lines as men.

⁷ The male impersonation was an authentic music-hall tradition in the Edwardian era.

Churchill employs Brecht's episodic structure, in which each scene is isolated and has a central action or turning point, and his social gest, to great effect. The gest, fundamentally a simple action that reveals the power structuring a situation, is used for the purpose of illustrating the relationship between economic and gender oppression. The social gest replaces the conveyance of feelings with that of attitudes, so minimizing the emotional involvement of the audience. It allows it to move beyond empathetic involvement and imaginative constraints to a rational, multi-faceted evaluation of the meaning of the play: '...the revolutionary message of the theatrical form becomes the power of the play' (Kritzer, 1991: 99). In her essay '*Beyond Brecht, Britain's New Feminist Drama*' (1996: 45), Janelle Reinelt uses scene six, where a doctor bleeds Betty, to exemplify how the use of social gest and episodic scenes achieve this in *Vinegar Tom*. The gest of bleeding is the central action of the scene, and 'the scene itself is a potentially independent vignette in which a discrete situation portrays how middle-class women are controlled and socialized'. The other scenes of the play which deal with economically disadvantaged women are also individually distinct, while the collusion of church and state in perpetuating patriarchy cuts across all the different classes, linking the women in the different scenes in this respect. Reinelt maintains that in each case 'intervention could have changed the particular instance, but the isolation of the women from one another because of class made such collective action impossible' (1996: 45). These theatrical techniques bring to the attention of the audience the interrelation of class and gender, demonstrating the material conditions of a gender-and class-based oppression. Churchill looks to a collective representation of women-centred oppression as opposed to a study of a persecuted (male) individual, and the scenes have consequently often been dismissed as sketchy by the mainstream (male) critics.

The seven songs, sung by women in contemporary dress, create a critical distance from the events of the play, serving to comment on the action rather than complement it. They are to be heard as the personal urgings of the women playing these roles, and Churchill's raw language deals with life issues in a realistic way. The songs shift the audience's attention from the events onstage to the reality of the oppression of women in the present. Churchill vigorously reminds the audience of the overlap in attitudes to women in the past and in the present. The rupturing of the flow of narrative emphasizes the possibilities for intervention and change. Some theatre critics have called the songs didactic and have criticized them for being too disruptive and undermining the complexity of the narrative. Notwithstanding, the songs do succeed in their purpose of interrupting the narrative to stimulate intellectualization. Gillian Hanna of the *Monstrous Regiment* defended the use of the songs as follows:

'We had a very real feeling that we didn't want to allow the audience to get off the hook by regarding it as a simple period piece, a piece of interesting history. I believe

that the simple telling of the historical story, say, is not enough...You have to choose between what you keep in and what you leave out. It's at that point of choice where women on the whole find that they get left out. Our experience is that life is not the simple story, and that you have to find some way of recognising that in dramatic form' (Case, 1988: 44).

Aston, in *Caryl Churchill* (1997: 27), highlights that as the songs are 'to be performed out of character and in modern dress, they create the opportunity for the performer to insert her body into the performance text as a si[gh]te of disruption. This...offers a way of representing the marginal and the absent in dominant systems of representation'. The songs create a critical space in which to see beyond the limits of representation.

The first two songs of the play, 'Nobody Sings' and 'Oh Doctor' are specifically concerned with the invisibility of women represented by the sign of Woman. The plea to men to 'Give me back my body' in 'Oh Doctor' (p. 151) registers the phenomenon of female invisibility. Through her lyrics Churchill reveals that she is infinitely aware of the incongruity of female subjectivity with a body that is defined through its invisibility and its lack. 'Nobody Sings', is sung immediately after the scene where Alice and Joan discuss the absence of men in their lives (p. 141/2). It points to the cycles in women's lives that 'nobody sings about, but it happens all the time' (p. 142): from the day they begin to menstruate, to menopause, and the day their 'cunt[s] get sore and dry' (p. 142). It laments the fact that nobody 'sings' about the body-based realities of women's maturing sexuality: 'And they say it's just your hormones / If you cry and cry and cry' (p. 142). When they are young and attractive, women are 'nobody' because they have been objectified by the male gaze, and when they are old they are 'nobody' because they are no longer representable:

'Nobody ever saw me,
She whispered in a rage.
They were blinded by my beauty, now
They're blinded by my age.' (p. 142)

References in the lyrics to the menstruating body and ageing women are 'a way of showing the threat which women pose to the symbolic (i.e. the dominant order)...' (Aston, 1997: 27). French feminists Catherine Clement and Helene Cixous claim that the menstruating body signifies both order and disorder, thus making the absent bodies of menstruating and ageing women present defies the symbolic order. Aston points to the significance in the juxtaposition of 'Nobody Sings' with the *Gestus* of Margery churning the butter which 'won't come' (p. 142): 'The 'phallogocentric order is disturbed by the 'unnatural' presence of the 'offside' body' (1997: 27).

In 'Oh Doctor' Churchill focuses on 'woman's body and its desecration by this new medical profession that sees her only as parts...not as a total person' (Palma, 1992: 52): 'You're putting me back all back to front' (p. 150). The distinction between the biological body and the body as object of representation is of critical importance. A woman pleads to know what is wrong with her, and asks to have her body put back together again: 'What's wrong with me the way I am?...Stop cutting me apart before I die...Put back my body...I want to see myself...' (p. 150). Women are denied ownership of their bodies and cannot be represented as a whole. The song is located in scene six, where Betty is about to be bled as a means of silencing her through control of her body. In its relation to this *Gestus* of Betty's bleeding body, the song allows women to move beyond the patriarchal prison where the female body is abused and fragmented, to a space where possibilities for change can be imagined. Her plea to the doctor to 'Stop looking at me with your metal eye' (p. 150) is suggestive of feminist/psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), which is both the speculum with which the gynaecologist examines a woman's womb, and the speculum with which a woman is gazed upon by men. It is in this 'specular' male gaze of desire that the woman is represented as the marginalized 'Other'.

Not all of the songs focus on the body. 'Something to Burn' highlights the marginalization of oppressed groups, and society's need to find scapegoats: 'What can we do...about sickness and hunger and dying...Find something to burn...Burn your troubles away...Sometimes it's witches...It's blacks and it's women and often it's Jews...(p. 154). By 'placing witch-burnings in the context of holocaust and genocide, Churchill forces her audience to confront the socio-economic basis of fear and prejudice' (Randall, 1988: 80). 'Lament for the Witches', sung after Joan and Ellen are hung, reminds the audience that this phenomenon is not insulated in the past by asking: 'Who are the witches now?...Look in the mirror tonight. / Would they have hanged you then?...Ask how they're stopping you now...' (p. 176). It asks modern women to look at themselves in relation to the witchhunts and to reflect on how they are different from the witches.

The song at the end of scene twelve, 'If Everybody Worked as Hard as Me', defines the place of women in the patriarchal order:

'Oh the country's what it is because
the family's what it is because
the wife is what she is
to her man'(p.160).

Husband, family and country all depend on women's acceptance of her object position. Acceptance of their position protects women against the dangers of marginality: 'So nobody

comes knocking at your door in the night / So the horrors that are done will not be done to you' (p. 161). Survival hinges on home and husband. Ellen tells Betty, 'You get married, Betty, that's safest', and comments that as an unmarried woman, 'There's no doctor going to save me [Ellen] from being called a witch...' (p. 169); Joan tells Alice, 'If we'd each got a man we'd be better off...We'd have more to eat, that's one thing' (p. 141). Alice comments to her mother that 'You weren't better off...Think how he used to beat you' (p. 141): with a man in the house the women suffer abuse, without one they suffer starvation. She tells Susan that 'I don't want to be married. Look at you. Who'd want to be you?' (p. 147), but her words to the man in the first scene, '...I'll go with you. There's no one round here knows me going to marry me. There's no way I'll get money...' (p. 135), substantiate Susan's claim that Alice says she does not wish to marry 'because no-one's going to ask you round here, because they know you' (p. 147). The notion of wife as commodity is expressed in the narrative of the play when Ellen encourages Betty to get married: 'Your best chance of being left alone is marry a rich man, because it's part of his honour to have a wife who does nothing' (p. 169). The man in the first scene asks Alice, 'Will you do everything I say, like a witch with the devil her master?', and she replies, 'I'll do like a wife with a husband her master and that's enough for man or devil'. Susan regards herself reasonably fortunate in her marriage in that 'He doesn't beat me' (p. 147).

'If You Float' is a critique of 'patriarchal logic' which manipulates sign systems, arbitrarily inventing and re-inventing the 'signs' of Woman's 'evil' doing' (Aston, 1997: 29). In terms of this patriarchal 'logic', 'If you float you're a witch. / If you scream you're a witch / If you sink, then you're dead anyway' (p. 170). It further reveals patriarchal society's wholesale intolerance of anyone who deviates from what, in its terms, is 'normal' or acceptable: 'They'll damn you to hell' (p. 170). The song poses the question 'They're coming to get you, do you know what for?', stressing the arbitrary nature of the witches' 'offences'. It laments:

'If you complain you're a witch
Or you're lame you're a witch
Any marks or deviations count for more.
Got big tits you're a witch.
Fall to bits you're a witch' (p. 170).

Women are persecuted for the smallest acts of resistance that do not signify any degree of power. Joan's cat Vinegar Tom, who periodically wanders through Margery's dairy, is no 'familiar'. Alice's fashioning of a mud figure to represent the man she desires does nothing to contravene the constrictions of her economic and sexual status. But, as a woman, 'Whatever you do, you must pay...They're coming to get you...' (p. 170).

The final song, 'Evil Women', acknowledges the continuing power of the male gaze to create the 'movie dream' of fetishizing women, asking men, 'Is that what you want? / Is that what you want to see? / On the movie screen / Of your own wet dream / Evil women' (p. 178). Churchill reveals how the historically received notion of witches' evil power survives in contemporary mystifications of women as possessing dark, evil, secret power: 'If you like sex sinful, what you want is us. / You can be sucked off by a succubus. / We had this man, and afterwards he died' (p. 178). The sexual mythology of succubi '...coincided with the assumption of women's voracious sexual appetite' (Ehrenreich and English, 1973: 13). She further reveals how men blame women for their sexual inadequacy or impotence, and for their own lust: 'Do you ever get afraid / You don't do it right?...If we don't say you're big / do you start to shrink?...Did you learn you were dirty boys, did you learn / Women were wicked to make you burn?' (p. 178/9). 'Evil Women' questions the extent to which a history of cultural conditioning has influenced present attitudes and, as the song ending the Kramer and Sprenger act, appeals to women to examine their attitudes to one another.

In *Vinegar Tom* the power and interdependence of patriarchy and materialism is seen as a complex reality, which none of the women in the play are able to fully understand. Goody's comment that 'some folk complain and say, 'what, the price of a cow, just to have a witch hanged?'' (p. 168) is a glaring indicator of this interaction. Women's oppression, represented graphically onstage by torture and hanging, derives from non-compliance with the economic system, like Ellen and Joan, and/or the sexual system, like Alice and Susan. A patriarchal culture is carried over from one historical period to another to protect the sexual hierarchy of society, and women are therefore products of their social history, but they are capable of shaping their own lives as well. Churchill frees herself from convention and empowers herself by the very structure of the play: 'The anarchic and recuperative power of play points to a Brechtian way out for contemporary women' (Kritzer, 1991: 95). Her attempt to bring the audience to a new, or greater, level of consciousness is a means of initiating change, and the anger and grim determination contained in the language of Joan and Ellen at the close of the play further locates a possibility for change: the powerless challenge their oppressors by imagining alternative social structures. Churchill appeals to members of the audience to examine their roles in the perpetuation of victimization and discrimination, and stimulates women to reflect on 'how they're stopping you now'. Echoed throughout the play is the question posed in the song Lament for the Witches: 'Where have the witches gone? / Who are the witches now?

CHAPTER TWO

CLOUD NINE

In *Cloud Nine* Churchill directly addresses issues of sex, gender and power, with a sharp claim true to her socialist feminist position that 'It never hurts to understand the theoretical background. You can't separate fucking and economics' (1985: 309). In two acts she highlights the extent to which patriarchal structure, gender definition and sexual orientation are interrelated, presenting one setting where an ostensibly rigid patriarchal sex and gender system is in operation, and another where the traditional sex and gender system has been broken down. The women, homosexuals and natives of the first act are shown to be the victims of the patriarchal power system, and Churchill uses images to equate sexual repression and sexual imperialism with economic repression and political imperialism. Thus dramatizing the workings of sexual oppression, Churchill lays bare the pervasive reality of oppression.

Written in 1978/9, *Cloud Nine* was Churchill's second play for the Joint Stock Theatre Company, and her first theatrical triumph. It was directed by Max Stafford-Clark and devised collaboratively: the workshop period for *Cloud Nine* lasted three weeks, the writing period for twelve, and the rehearsal for six. Max Stafford-Clark had originally been interested in the theme of people changing their lives in terms of emigration. The intention was that one half of the play would be set in Europe and the second in America, with workshops and performances in both England and America. When the arrangements for the American part of the project collapsed, Churchill suggested that she would like to work on a play on sexual politics instead. *Cloud Nine* was first performed at Dartington College of Arts on 14 February 1979, and then on tour at the Royal Court Theatre, London. It premiered at the Royal Court's main theatre, was later revived for a second run, and opened Off-Broadway in New York at the Theatre de Lys in May 1981 where it met with enthusiastic reviews. The play won Churchill the Obie award in 1982, and has been described in many sources as her 'ticket to success'. Critics continue to applaud the play's originality and capacity for 'unfixing' theatrical convention.

Churchill wanted to write a play about sexual politics that would not focus on only one sexually oppressed group, but encompass the broad spectrum of sexual politics. Elaine Aston quotes Churchill to illustrate this:

‘One of the things I wanted very much to do, in *Cloud Nine*...was to write a play about sexual politics that would *not* just be a woman’s thing. I felt there were quite a few women’s groups doing plays from that point of view. And gay groups...There was nothing that also involved straight men. Max [Stafford Clark], the director, even said, at the beginning ‘Well shouldn’t you perhaps be doing this with a woman director?’ He didn’t see that it was his subject as well’ (1997: 37).

Work on the play began one year after Kate Millett’s feminist work *Sexual Politics* (1970) was released in Britain (1977), and the impact of Millett’s theories on the play’s political and social background is noteworthy. Millett developed the idea of ‘sexual politics’, after the term had been coined by Wilhelm Reich, a psychoanalyst and prominent member of the Austrian Communist Party, who held that the repressing structures of civilization and the sexual repression of the patriarchal family were intimately connected. For Millett, sexual politics meant a power relationship whereby one group of people was oppressed by another. In terms of this theory, she maintained that patriarchy, the control of male over female, was the most fundamental and far-reaching power structure in society. She further held that the family, patriarchy’s basic institution, was a microcosm of the state. According to Millett, only a sexual revolution could overturn the patriarchal system, and this revolution involved the eradication of preponderant taboos attached to homosexuality, lesbianism, bastardy and sexual intercourse before and outside marriage. In terms of sexual politics, sexual distinctions are political definitions.

Michel Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978) further influenced Churchill. According to Palma (1992: 88), Churchill acknowledges these germinal works in terms of their role in the construction of her theoretical background. In short, Foucault argued that sexuality was a historical construct, and that the sexual repressiveness of the Victorian era gave rise to the middle class and to capitalism. This claim was based on the notion that sexual repressiveness redirected sexual energy into the reproduction of the labour force and into the dominant social institutions, particularly marriage. The fact that the workshop for *Cloud Nine* was to be based on ‘sexual politics’, although it eventually came to include colonial oppression, is an acknowledgement of the influence of these books on Churchill.

The actors who participated in the *Cloud Nine* workshop in the autumn of 1978 were selected for their varied sexual backgrounds, as well as for their acting ability. The group was comprised of a married couple, a divorced couple, lesbians, two bisexual men, a gay male couple, ‘lesbians-to-be’ and some heterosexuals, with the inherent perspectives of these participants as the starting point for research. The participants, not all of whom acted in the play, read books, talked about themselves and shared different attitudes and experiences. They examined the relationship between gender and status, and explored stereotypes and role reversals through games and

improvisations. Churchill states in her introduction to the play that although the play's situations and characters were not developed in the workshop, 'it draws deeply on this material and I wouldn't have written the same play without it' (1985: 245). She further maintains that when it came to writing the play, she returned to the idea which had been dealt with briefly in the workshop, namely 'the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression, which Genet calls the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorized repression' (p. 245).

The assumption that power most frequently lies with men became a key issue for the group. Max Stafford-Clark devised a card game whereby numbers and images on playing cards represented varying degrees of power. The players were randomly dealt cards assigning them numerical power, with two as the lowest level and ten the highest, as well as a sexual identity, and they then had to improvise situations and relate to one another according to their given power. It was found that the players who received cards identifying them as men would repeatedly assert more power than those who received cards identifying them as women. Situations were gradually developed where a character's status could be altered, and one character would therefore 'experience' different levels of power.

The first approach Churchill considered was based on three generations of a family. The opening scene would take place at a grandfather's funeral, where the dead man spoke with his wife while the children and grandchildren quarrelled with one another. Finding this too static, she returned in November 1978 to the idea of the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression, and set the first half of the play in a British colony in Africa at the height of the Empire. Churchill wanted the second act to take place in the present day with less constricting views and roles, and needed the structure to be less restrained than the first act to reflect this greater freedom. She wrote a series of monologues, and, after rejecting these, wrote a version set in Betty's retirement bungalow on the rainy southern coast of England. She rejected this, too, and finally decided to set the second act in a park. Churchill explained that the title of the play is based on the experience of a woman who ran the snack bar in the building where the company met:

'She wanted us to sit down and drink our tea and not stand about making a lot of noise...And finally she came forward, voluntarily...to sit on a chair in front of everybody else and talk about her childhood and her life. She had come from a large, poor family, had married at sixteen, and had a very violent and unhappy marriage, with no pleasure from sex at all...and after thirty years she had remarried...Finally she said 'We may not do it as often as you young people, but when we have our organisms [sic], we're on Cloud Nine'' (Kritzer, 1991: 128).

Key elements of the Brechtian model are present in *Cloud Nine*: historicization – Victorian Africa at the height of imperialism – the alienation effect and *Gestus*. These critical distancing techniques intervene in the gaze, as Elin Diamond argues: ‘we [feminist theatre studies], through Brechtian theory, have something to give them [feminist film theory]: a female body in representation that resists fetishization and a viable position for the female spectator’ (Diamond, 1989: 83). For Elaine Aston, the key alienation technique - in terms of gender - in feminist performance is ‘the construction of the female body as a site/sight of ‘looking-at-being-looked-at-ness’ in performance, through playing with the vestimentary codes of gendered costume in relation to the body’ (Aston, 1995: 94). Aston refers to a shift in feminist consciousness during the 1980s, where theorizing gender became the centre of feminist critical study, and quotes a perception of this shift:

‘[The shift] is best characterized by the awareness and the effort to work through feminism’s complicity with ideology, both ideology in general (including classism, or bourgeois liberalism, racism, colonialism, imperialism, and, I would also add, with some qualifications, humanism) and the ideology of gender in particular – that is to say, heterosexism’ (1995: 92).

The entire gender category ‘Woman’ has been under feminist semiotic deconstruction (‘Semiotics’ being a science dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in society) as there is a need to ‘deconstruct the dominant cultural codes that enforced the sexualization of women in systems of representation’ by deconstructing ‘the alliance between sign systems and the patriarchal order’ (Case, 1988: 114). For feminists, gender is ‘the crucial encoding of the subject that has made it historically a position unavailable for women to inhabit’ (Case, 1988: 121). A ‘self’, a biological or natural entity, can in fact be perceived as a cultural construction and a semiotic function. Social conventions about the female gender are encoded in all signs for women. These social conventions produce a meaning for the sign ‘Woman’, based upon cultural associations with the female gender. Feminist semiotic theory has attempted to examine and deconstruct this sign for ‘Woman’ in order to ‘distinguish biology from culture and experience from ideology’ (Case, 1988: 118). In *Cloud Nine* the costumed body is cross-displayed to deconstruct gender.

The cross-gender casting (a theatrical device marginally employed in *Vinegar Tom*), together with the doubling of roles and cross-racial casting, are employed in the first act to visually disrupt sexual and racial identities. The visual inconsistencies also constantly remind the audience that the roles which the characters play are stagings. The casting arrangement effectively originated from the play’s workshops. The theatre group ‘talked about their sexuality, and ... did improvisations about stereotypes. One person would have a stereotype they would lay on another,

and the first person would find themselves [sic] becoming like that – how people would expect them to be. A wife expects her husband to be dominating and he expects her to be hysterical. We made those things happen’ (Itzin, 1980: 279).

These casting techniques are central to Churchill’s destabilizing of fixed sexual identities determined by dominant heterosexual ideology: they serve to overturn rigid perceptions of sexual identities and challenge gender definitions that are based on physical differences. Elin Diamond claims that ‘cross-gender and cross-racial casting demonstrate that gender and servitude are culturally coded effects that effectively erase the body and its desires’ (Diamond, 1989: 265). The inconsistency between Betty’s gender and sex ‘sets up a reciprocity between player and role that exposes every gesture and speech to question, as each gesture or speech becomes a gest of gender construction’ (Kritzer, 1991: 120). Betty, as a woman played by a man, and Clive may be viewed as either a homosexual or heterosexual couple, based on whether one views Betty in terms of gender or biology. These perceptions become farcical as the patriarch unwittingly bows to alternative ‘sexual politics’: the sight of the paterfamilias introducing a man as ‘all I dreamt a wife should be’ (p. 251), and relating to him/ her as such, is one that is amusing in its improbability.

Elaine Showalter articulates in *The Female Malady* (1987: 122) how theories of biological sexual difference generated by Darwin gave scientific confirmation to narrow Victorian ideals of femininity. She states that, ‘Female intellectual inferiority could be understood as the result of reproductive specialization, and the ‘womanly’ traits of self-sacrifice and service so convenient for the comfort of a patriarchal society could be defended in evolutionary terms as essential for the survival and improvement of the race’. She reveals how ‘The theories of sexual difference adumbrated by Darwinian science were incorporated into a highly prescriptive late Victorian psychology of women’ (p. 122). Thus, from the 1870’s onwards, numerous rigid views on gender roles were presented. Showalter elaborates:

‘While the fundamental differences between the sexes were, of course, physical, Darwinian psychiatrists insisted that...there is sex in mind as distinctly as there is sex in body’...It was the totality of the physical and the mental differences that made up the essence doctors confidently called woman’s ‘nature.’ By *nature*, then, woman was constituted to be ‘the helpmate and companion of man’; her innate qualities of mind were formed to make her man’s complement rather than his equal. Among these qualities...were...cheerfulness, vivacity, and powers of endurance...’ (1987: 122/3).

The sexual division of labour was advocated by psychiatrists based on these beliefs. Women were believed to be mentally constituted to take care of children, and 'Woman's work was clearly motherhood, which fulfilled and exercised her nature as it also served the needs of society and the race' (p. 123).

Cross-dressing, a timeless theatrical device, dismantles the institutionalized constructions of gender and sexuality: it exposes the artificiality of conventional gender, while creating a new state of being. Aston (1997: 32), claims that 'The ideological pleasure of cross-dressing in *Cloud Nine* is that it allows the spectator the possibility of seeing beyond 'institutionalized gender roles and sexuality' by crossing vestimentary signs of masculinity and femininity with the 'wrong' body'. The cross-gender casting in the context of the colonial setting is suggestive of the connection between dominant ideology and prescribed gender roles and sexuality. This is displayed at the beginning of the play as the patriarch, Clive, introduces his family around the flagpole displaying the Union Jack: Betty his wife, 'man's creation', is played by a man; Edward his son is played by a woman; his black servant, Joshua, is played by a white actor, and Victoria, his daughter, is represented by a doll. Although the characters verbally consent to the imperialist roles assigned to them by Clive as what they 'want to be', visually their 'offside' bodies rupture the construction of sexual and racial identities.

Churchill further contrasts the verbal and the iconic: Joshua recites a line from William Blake's poem *The Little Black Boy*, and he extends it, revealing how even his expression has been shaped by the language of white men. He is played by a white man because he is what white men want him to be. Thus although the characters are speaking subjects who affirm their identities through their language, a system itself based on fixed hierarchies, there is a visual tension between the characters' personalities and their public roles. In the cases of both Betty and Joshua the discord between character and actor reflects how imposed or adopted roles do not necessarily fit the natural character. Geraldine Cousin, in *Churchill: The Playwright*, points out that 'one day the two of them might begin to wonder what they are really like' (1989: 41).

Churchill has stated that Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) and Jean Genet's *The Blacks: A Clown Show* (1960) influenced her decision to cast Joshua as white, and contributed to her idea of altered casting in general. Fanon examines the effects of colonialism on the people of Antilles, while Genet gives a theatrical account of blacks playing the parts of court figures, wearing white masks. Genet developed Fanon's ideas by suggesting that sexually oppressed groups experience the same displacement experienced by racially oppressed groups. Both Joshua and Betty are the products of white men, and both have been conditioned to exist for white men -

in their case, for Clive. Betty does not value herself as a woman, and Joshua does not value himself as a black person. In her introduction to the play Churchill points out that Edward is played by a woman for different reasons, partly to do with the stage convention of having boys played by women and partly to highlight the way Clive tries to impose traditional male behaviour on him. Several sources, however, also attribute this to the fact that Edward is unwilling to accept the narrow representation of masculinity that is forced upon him.

By confusing sexual identities Churchill suggests non-representability. Identity is based on ideology, and, in particular, the patriarchal order does not represent women. Representing Betty as a man does not imply that the man is feminized, but that the female is absent. Betty as a woman is not represented. She is a man-made woman, and her identity is constituted by encoded female behaviour. A powerful social *Gestus* is seen when Betty rearranges the folds of her (his) skirt, as the very awkwardness draws attention to the fact that feminine social graces are learned behaviour. Sexual identity in the patriarchal family amounts to gender codes. Feminine and masculine patterns and codes of behaviour force the characters into gender roles. Mrs. Saunders and Ellen, two versions of female marginality, are played by the same actress. They are indicative of how women are divided from themselves. The coming together of their shattered selves potentially constitutes the woman of the future: Ellen's lesbianism and Mrs. Saunders' uninhibited sexuality and desire for independence constitute the woman portrayed in Act Two. When considering this interpretation of the text, however, one should remain mindful of Churchill's comment that the doubling of Mrs. Saunders and Ellen is not so much intended to make a point as for sheer fun, and to keep the company to seven in each act.

In the first act, Churchill critiques the Victorian values of Empire and family in a colonial setting, and in the second she traces the characters from the first act to a 'contemporary' (for the audience in 1979/early 1980's) London setting, yet the time shift for these characters is only twenty-five years. Thus, a period of more than one hundred years divides the two acts, although the characters age by only twenty-five years. This syncopation of time⁸ was inspired by the actors' talk about attitudes to sexual morality prevalent in their youth - 'Victorian' attitudes - and their feeling that they had made great changes and discoveries in their lifetimes. The dramatic technique also reflects Churchill's view of the slow progress of social change. John M. Clum, in his essay '*The Work of Culture*': *Cloud Nine and Sex/Gender Theory*' calls it 'a bow to the theory of relativity which replaces the absolutes of Clive's empire' (Randall, 1988: 104).

⁸ This syncopation of time was a device used by Virginia Woolf in her 'biography' *Orlando* (1928). Inspired by her friend Vita Sackville-West, Woolf traces the history of the youthful and beautiful Orlando, who has both male and female manifestations, through four centuries.

Churchill's 'collapsing and shifting of temporalities' registers how 'Explorations into finding a form to represent the 'broken backed' experience of women which has been repressed, necessitated the explosion of the linear, the masculine' (Aston, 1995: 55). *Cloud Nine* refuses the subjective limitations imposed by historical time. In Kristevan terms, it refuses linear time in the interests of finding the intrasubjective and corporeal experiences silenced by culture in the past. The logical sequence of linear history gives way to a historical memory of sexual politics. In the sexual politics of *Cloud Nine*, the body is taken as a critical site/sight of gender representation, and as the continuity of linear history is disrupted, 'the past is physically marked in and on the body of the performer, present' (Aston, 1997: 32).

Cloud Nine opens with a song, *Come Gather Sons of England*, simultaneously evoking British imperialism and patriarchy. In its location in Victorian Africa, the setting of the first act serves as a metaphor for the oppressive patriarchal structure that defines the roles of women, homosexuals and black people. Clive is the stereotype of the paternalist imperialist: he acts as caretaker of his wife and children, a larger family of other British colonials and the country's native population. Churchill's critique extends beyond patriarchal gender construction to the assertion that patriarchy depends on notions of racial supremacy. Clive imposes his ideals on his family and the native African people, while the natives agitate against imperial rule - symbolically reflected through the experiences of the single colonial family. The scene itself is set on the verandah of Clive's house, solidifying the sense that Clive's home is the bedrock of the system.

Throughout the act, Clive is intent on maintaining society in the state he would wish it to be. As in *the Hospital at the Time of the Revolution*⁹, the patriarch/colonizer tries to define the family and the nation, and works hard to resist any expression of experience and identity that may contradict his definitions. He determinedly clings to his ideals of a faithful wife, a devoted servant and a manly son. In the middle of a native rebellion, Clive and his family celebrate Christmas, and while the Empire collapses around them, Harry does a magic trick with a union jack. Despite escalating evidence to the contrary, Clive clings to his superficial perceptions of the other characters. For him, Mrs Saunders, a widow of independent means, represents sex, and her 'amazing spirit' (p. 259) results in his state of permanent sexual arousal. Edward is, or should be, manly, and should not try to play with Victoria's doll. Joshua is Clive's 'boy' (p. 251), and is 'devoted' to him: he is 'a jewel...you'd hardly notice that the fellow's black' (p. 251). From

⁹ This play was written by Churchill in the early 1970's. The play closes on the notion of the link between colonialism and patriarchy.

Clive's perspective, the natives look to the colonizers as those who will lead them to maturation, but in reality they resist imperialist rule.

Harry's homosexuality is abhorred, and Ellen's is invisible: 'Both Harry and Ellen are 'offside' bodies in the symbolic which have to be 'corrected'' (Aston, 1997: 33). But this world is precarious from the start as beneath the appearances, the prescripts of patriarchy are flouted.

Described as the 'central controlling agent of Act one' (Cousin, 1989: 39), Clive, the representative of the queen in Africa, master of the house and head of the family asserts his patriarchal position by introducing his wife, son, daughter and servant to the audience: 'This is my family...we serve the Queen wherever we may roam...I am a father to the natives here, And father to my family so dear' (p. 251). When the characters introduce themselves after Clive's cue, the pervasion of patriarchy becomes abundantly clear. Betty, Clive's wife, tells the audience that she is 'a man's creation as you see', and declares that 'what men want is what I want to be' (p. 251). She has no sense of her self-worth as a woman, but strives to live her life by male-specified codes of behaviour. Victoria, Clive and Betty's two-year-old daughter, is of such diminished regard that she is played by a dummy: she is petted like a toy, or ignored. She is of such insignificance that Clive heaps her together with his mother-in-law and Edward's governess when introducing her. A dismissive wave of the hand encompasses Victoria, Maud and Ellen, and in this action he marginalizes the roles of all three women. He states, 'No need for any speeches by the rest. My daughter, mother-in-law and governess' (p. 252). Clive's treatment of Edward, their son, contrasts with that of his treatment of his daughter. He takes an active interest in inculcating in Edward the tenets of patriarchy: 'I'm doing all I can to teach him to grow up to be a man' (p. 252). Edward in turn says of himself, 'What father wants, I'd dearly like to be'. He is, however, homosexual, and adds that 'I find it rather hard as you can see' (p. 252). In turn, Joshua, the black servant, aspires to be what white men want him to be. Reciting a line from *The Little Black Boy*, he states, 'My skin is black but oh my soul is white...What white men want is what I want to be' (p. 251/2). He stifles his own identity and bows to the exploitative social order: 'I hate my tribe. My master is my light' (p. 251). He even goes so far as to subscribe to his masters' racist and sexist interpretation of Christianity: 'God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble' (p. 280). Clive and the members of his household speak in rhymed couplets in the opening introduction, suggesting the artificiality of the situation: the characters are positioned into various roles by a smooth veneer of words.

At the beginning of the play, Clive, Betty, their children, black man-servant, governess and friends all appear to be exaggerated stereotypes of their given roles. Clive, empire-builder and

rigidly authoritarian husband and father, keeps his wife subjected while he lusts after a lady of independent means, and it becomes evident as the act proceeds that it is only he who is content in his role. All the other characters are playing roles that have been imposed upon them. Churchill overturns traditional structures, so that patterns of behaviour wholly acceptable in terms of ingrained social standards begin to seem ridiculous: Betty, Clive's 'dutiful' wife, becomes infatuated with heroic explorer Harry Bagley, who is actually a closet homosexual; Harry deliberates over his loyalty to Clive and his love for Betty, then has sex with the black servant and Clive's son; Ellen reveals that her devotion to Betty is based on sexual attraction rather than obligation; Mrs. Saunders has sex with Clive because she enjoys 'the sensation' (p. 263), but he undermines her claims of independence by satisfying himself only. The act closes with a wedding, but the bride and groom are a homosexual and a lesbian. Churchill thus unsettles habitual perceptions, and in doing so she transfers the audience into a liminal space where alternative social codes and structures can be imagined.

The element of farce that runs through the first act is based on the disconnectedness between what is actually happening and what Clive chooses to believe is happening. The absurdity of his society becomes manifest through this farce, and many of Churchill's points arise through the clash between the rigid social code and the comparatively outrageous behaviour and desires of the characters. Her use of the cross-casting technique to 'unfix' stereotypical behaviour/representation is carried further by the farcical dialogue and action throughout the play. Churchill amuses the audience while eliciting crucial questions. She raises laughter by presenting situations regarded as highly improbable in decorous society, such as by portraying 'respectable' characters in undignified positions: Clive, the imposer of decorum, disappears under Mrs. Saunder's skirt while voices are heard singing *The First Noël*, and then emerges from under her skirt to resume his role: 'I'm all sticky...Tidy yourself up. There's a hair in my mouth' (p. 264). This farcical vigour animates the first act, rendering it highly entertaining. Churchill's comical questioning also elicits a sense of the 'painfulness' of the situation, notably at the end of the act where oppressive society threatens to prevail. Churchill states in her introduction to the play (1985) that 'Rehearsing the play for the first time, we were taken by how funny the first act was and then by the painfulness of the relationships – which then became more funny than when they had seemed purely farcical.' The 'painfulness' is contained in the fact that the characters are expected to comply with the demands of imposed roles.

Betty is perceived by Clive as the stereotypical Victorian woman, fragile and helpless. She is 'delicate and sensitive' (p. 253) and belongs to the gentle world of 'poetry' and 'the piano' (p. 253). Hysteria and fainting fits, depression and boredom were common 'ailments' for such

Victorian women: 'So today has been all right? No fainting? No hysteria?' (p. 254). In *The Female Malady* (1987), Elaine Showalter describes how, for centuries, hysteria has been perceived as the quintessential female malady. Showalter refers to a study of hysteria by Dr Robert Brudenell Carter, who observed that women were more liable to hysteria than men because 'the woman is more often under the necessity of endeavouring to conceal her feelings' (1987: 132). She points out that:

'...What Carter does *not* go on to suggest is that sexual feelings were not the only ones women endeavoured to conceal...But longings for independence and for mastery were socially unacceptable at every phase of the female life-cycle. Even when doctors observed these longings in their female patients, and noted the women's powerless position in their families, they did not make the obvious connections' (1987: 132).

Describing how hysterical women were disliked as they '...were led to violate the expectations of the female domestic role' (1987: 133), Showalter states that, 'When the hysterical woman became sick, she no longer played the role of the self-sacrificing daughter or wife...she demanded service and attention from others' (1987: 133). Physicians were concerned that hysterical women were 'enjoying their freedom from domestic and conjugal duties, as well as their power over the family and the doctor himself' (1987: 133). If institutionalized for such behaviour, women were forced to adhere to their constructed roles, as 'The ladylike values of silence, decorum, taste, service, piety, and gratitude...were made an integral part of the program of moral management of women in Victorian asylums' (1987: 79).

The character of Betty illustrates the alienation between actual women and the sign 'Woman'. Women become fixed in the position of object of the male gaze: they appear in order to be looked upon. Male culture has made women's bodies into objects of male desire, converting them into sites of beauty and sexuality for men to gaze upon. . Women have learned to view their bodies in this way, and have thus been prevented from identifying with their own appearance. The sign 'Woman' is constructed by and for the male gaze. Thus the concept of the male gaze contests that representations of women are perceived as they are seen by men – namely the male subject in capitalist patriarchy. The result of this representation of 'Woman' as 'Other' in the male gaze is that 'Woman' also becomes 'Other' to herself. She is invested with the qualities which the male gazer constructs as 'Other' to himself. Betty is everything that men want her to be. In this sense she is constituted as 'Other', and her desire is not symbolized in the patriarchal order. She requests Harry to 'Please like me...Please want me' (p. 261): Betty can only perceive herself as a man's object, and resists her sexual desire. The cross-gender casting highlights Betty's gender as a fiction of the male gaze: there is no real woman beneath the costume, make-up and body

language. Studying the 'Woman as sign' and the 'Woman as object' are deconstructive strategies that 'aid in exposing the patriarchal encodings in the dominant system of representation' (Case, 1988: 121).

The rigidity of the roles the characters occupy influences their language and expression, notably resulting in an inability for those with little power to express sexual desire. Jacques Lacan claimed that subjectivity is constructed through the linguistic sign-system of language, and in the Lacanian system the entry into language constitutes an entry into an external order which constructs identity. The entry into language is thus regarded as an entry into an order which represents the Law of the Father, classed as the Symbolic order. All subjects, as members of a communicating social order, are required to participate in the imposed Symbolic order, which privileges the patriarch. Although Edward communicates his desire to Harry, he lacks the vocabulary of sex: 'You know what we did when you were here before. I want to do it again. I think about it all the time. I try to do it to myself but it's not as good. Don't you want to anymore?' (p. 270). This contrasts with Harry's language: Harry, 'manly' and powerful as a white explorer, asks Joshua, 'Shall we go in a barn and fuck? It's not an order.' (p. 262). Betty, even less powerful than her son, can only express her desire indirectly, as a function of male desire for her.

Clive views his role in the Empire in heroic and Calvinistic terms: 'We are not in this country to enjoy ourselves' (p. 253). He conflates the idea of loyalty to himself with the idea of loyalty to the Empire, and sexual non-conformity thus implies covert resistance to authority. Clive informs Betty that if she were unfaithful to him it would be his duty to expel her from the family. He attributes the fall of Empires to homosexuality, and urges Harry to get married for the sake of England. Edward explicitly links his effeminate behaviour to rejection of his father, and ostensibly betrays 'the Empire' by failing to alert his father to the fact that he is about to be shot by his native servant. Further, Ellen is told, 'Women have their duty as soldiers have' (p. 281).

Although Clive's authoritarian control is never totally effective in purging the characters of 'deviant' desire, it enforces its standards on their public behaviour. Collusive agents within the household extend Clive's control. Joshua tries hard to please his white master, and gathers information for him. He confirms a belief in the connection between women and Africa in the myth about a mother goddess he tells Edward, and rejects Africa in the hatred of women shown both in his treatment of Betty and his stabbing of the doll. The tension between Betty and Joshua serves Clive by preventing any internal coalition against his power. Edward is monitored constantly by mother, grandmother and governess. Maud has always existed in the position of a

subject, and wants other subjects to continue as such. She depended on her husband in the past, and is now dependent on her daughter's husband for her own material prosperity: 'Your father always knew what to do...Since your father died, I know what it is to be unprotected...' (p. 274). Maud 'attempts to define an ego for [Betty]' (Hamilton, 1995: 108.) She is the voice from the past that continually intervenes in the present, extending historically oppressive attitudes into Betty's world. She repeats for Victoria, 'Clap hands, daddy comes, with his pocket full of plums' (p. 274), inculcating her with the idea of the patriarch as her provider. She tells Betty acidly, 'Young women are never happy...Then when they're older they look back and see that comparatively speaking they were ecstatic' (p. 258). This remark is indicative of how a woman's physical deterioration further marginalizes her in society. Maud has accepted her place in patriarchal society, to the extent that she has become its servant. Through Maud, Churchill demonstrates how the past continually controls and informs the present, and illustrates the phenomenon of women participating in and supporting activities that result in the oppression of other women, or even of themselves.

Betty, Ellen and Maud all play their part in promoting Edward's 'masculine' position, and Victoria's muted place, in the dominant order. They all downplay, or condemn, any actions that may be contrary to Clive's concept of his children's gender roles. When Edward is seen holding Victoria's doll, Ellen tells Clive, 'He's minding it for Vicky. He's not playing with it' (p. 257) and Betty echoes Ellen's words. Clive, not entirely convinced by this but willing to overlook any possibility of unconventional behaviour, concludes that, 'Yes, it's manly of you Edward, to take care of your little sister. We'll say no more about it' (p. 257). Later in the act, when Edward is again caught playing with the doll, Betty impatiently reprimands him: 'Edward, I've told you before, dolls are for girls' (p. 274). She acts in accordance with her husband's codes of behaviour by warning him not to mention his actions to anybody, as 'No-one will talk to you...you won't grow up to be a man like your papa' (p. 275). Maud, in turn, responds to Edward's protestations that Victoria does not even play with the doll by stating, 'Victoria will learn to play with her' (p. 275): Victoria will be taught to follow the path of conventional women.

The compliance of women in the patriarchal system is further demonstrated in *Cloud Nine* in the power exercised by women over servants and children. Betty slaps Edward when she finds him playing with the doll, and Maud slaps the doll as an example to Victoria. Authority in patriarchal society is unquestionable, and any rebellion, be it from children or natives, meets with the aggression of the enforcer. After slapping Edward, Betty urges Ellen to deal with the situation: 'Edward's got the doll again. Now, Ellen, will you please do your job' (p. 275). In this incident, Churchill reveals how 'hierarchy' is entrenched in Clive's society: Betty continually asserts her

power over Ellen, with prompting by Maud. Maud upholds the concept of parental authority by stating that, 'When I was a child we honoured our parents' (p. 275). Clive's commanding position in the hierarchy is evident in the instance where Betty orders Joshua to take her mother back to the house when she is stung by an insect. Joshua's immediate reaction is to question Betty's authority in relation to that of her husband: 'Sir told me I have to keep an eye' (p. 268). Clive holds the ultimate authority. When Betty appeals to Edward to censure Joshua's impertinence, it becomes clear that the social hierarchy gives precedence to gender, even in master-servant relationships. The precedence of gender is again evident when Betty and Ellen play a game of catch at the picnic. They play amid 'murmurs of surprise and congratulations from the men whenever they catch the ball' (p. 265), but Betty obeys Edward when he tells her 'Mama, don't play. You know you can't catch a ball' (p. 265). She sits down saying, 'He's perfectly right. I can't catch either' (p. 265). Edward goes on to add, 'Ellen, don't you play either' (p. 265), and he gives Victoria to her to mind. The power hierarchy is straightforwardly displayed when Ellen orders Edward, 'Go inside, Edward. I shall tell your mother', and Betty then threatens, 'Go inside, Edward at once. I shall tell your father' (p. 285).

The extent to which Betty has been affected by the patriarchal system is revealed when she refuses to acknowledge Ellen's sexual advances. When Ellen kisses Betty and tells her 'You're so pretty...I love you...I worship you...' (p. 271), Betty replies, 'Oh Ellen, you are my only friend'. Lesbianism is inconceivable to Betty, who is part of a system that does not recognize any phenomena that would limit men's access to women. In response to further declarations of love by Ellen, Betty tells her 'You don't feel what you think you do. It's the loneliness here and the climate is very confusing. Come and have breakfast, Ellen dear, and I'll forget all about it' (p. 281). She encourages Ellen to deny her lesbianism, in the same way that Clive later encourages Harry to deny his homosexuality.

Clive refers to women and to the African continent in similar terms. Just as he determinedly struggles to subdue the 'dark female lust', so he is determined to subdue the continent. He tells Mrs. Saunders, 'You are dark like this continent...' (p. 263), and he tells Betty, 'This whole continent is my enemy. I am pitching my whole mind and will and reason and spirit against it to tame it...' (p. 277): Colonialism and patriarchy become two parts of one whole for Clive. They are, for him, almost indistinguishable, and he strives to subjugate both women and the natives. For Churchill, it is the perception of family that links the oppression of 'dangerous' natives with the oppression of 'dangerous' women at home: functioning both as a social institution and a social image, 'it is primarily the family that transmits on a local level the principles of order that govern society at large' (Brater, 1989: 35.) In the African setting, racism enters the equation:

Clive illogically states, 'You don't do it with the natives, Harry? My God, what a betrayal of the Queen' (p. 283). Africans have not yet been 'tamed' by imperialist ideology – they are 'savages' (p. 260), and Clive wants to bring them all to be like Joshua, who has internalized oppression. Joshua assists Clive in 'taming' his people by beating the stable boys on his (Clive's) instruction. While the forceful subjugation of one group is taking place outside, another oppressed group, the women, remains indoors with the blinds pulled: the power of the men over the women is, to an extent, covert, and the women collude in the very system that oppresses them.

Clive's lecture to Betty when he suspects her of kissing Harry Bagley testifies to his moral double standards, and the confused values that pass for order and discipline. Clive categorizes women as 'irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful', and emphasizes their biological difference by claiming 'they smell different from us' (p. 282). Elizabeth Grosz explains:

'Given the coupling of mind with maleness and the body with femaleness...Woman (upper case and in the singular) remains philosophy's eternal enigma, its mysterious and inscrutable object – this may be a product of the rather mysterious and highly restrained and contained status of the body in general, and of women's bodies in particular...' (1994: 4/5).

In the wake of lustful sexual encounters with Mrs. Saunders, he moralizes to Betty on resisting 'this dark female lust' (p. 277). He patronizingly warns Betty that 'women can be treacherous and evil' (p. 277), with his earlier words to Mrs. Saunders still resonant: 'You terrify me...mysterious. Treacherous...Oh don't shut me out, Caroline, let me in' (p. 263). The very qualities that Clive disapproves of in his wife excite him in his lover. Betty is expected to feel guilty and immoral over her innocent flirtations, in the face of her husband's unrestrained sexual activity. She interprets her discontentment with her life as wickedness: 'I get bored, I get restless, I imagine things. There is something so wicked in me, Clive' (p. 277). According to Clum, Clive's lecture to Betty 'also demonstrates his dysfunctional and destructive trinity of homosociality, sexism, and homophobia' (Randall, 1988: 96): 'If Harry Bagley was not my friend I would shoot him. If I shot you every British man and woman would applaud me' (p. 277). His words imply to Betty that the constraints on her life as a woman are upheld by society in general, and also highlight his 'manly' readiness to resort to violence to keep his wife in check. The parallel between sexual oppression and colonialism is alluded to by Clive specifying that every *British* man and woman would applaud him. Male friendship, or 'homosociality', is accorded high status in Clive's world. His threats of resorting to extreme violence affirm his belief in himself as having the ultimate authority, by virtue of his place in the patriarchal realm.

Clive defines sexual standards and sexuality in the manner which best serves his own sexual desires. He is the initiator. Sexual pleasure is derived from women and natives, regarded by Clive as the subjects. He has sex with Mrs. Saunders at the Christmas picnic, while voices off-stage invoke the values of family and Empire in the singing of a Christmas carol. Disappearing under her skirt, he violates the Victorian standard of keeping the female body and female desire hidden. Clive repeatedly refers to Mrs. Saunders' 'amazing spirit', but despite his fascination with her 'independence', he assumes a position of power in his relations with her by engaging only in self-satisfying sex, and ignoring her pleas for sexual gratification. The sexual act, for Clive, centres on his climax and ejaculation:

Clive: I came.

Mrs. Saunders: I didn't.

Clive: I'm all sticky.

Mrs. Saunders: What about me? Wait.

Clive: All right, are you? Come on. We musn't be found.

Mrs. Saunders: Don't go now.

Clive: Caroline, you are so voracious. Do let go. Tidy yourself up. There's a hair in my mouth (p. 264).

Grosz has analysed the ejaculation shot or 'come' in pornography as a masculine fantasy of female pleasure:

'Pornography, at least in part, offers itself to the (male) spectator as a form of knowledge and conceptual/perceptual mastery of the enigmas of female sexuality but is in fact his own projection of sexual pleasure. The come shot is thus no longer an unmediated representation and demonstration of his pleasure (as one would expect): it becomes an index of his prowess to generate her pleasure. His sexual specificity is not the object of the gaze but remains a mirror or rather a displacement of her pleasure (or at least his fantasy of her pleasure)' (1994: 199).

Churchill's 'ejaculation shot' creates a *Gestus* which registers the broader social context in which female pleasure is displaced by the male fantasy of female sexuality and desire. This is developed further when Clive mistakes Mrs Saunders's unsatisfied sexual pleasure for a 'voracious' sexual appetite.

In the final scene of the first act, Clive decisively confirms his and Mrs. Saunders' respective places in the patriarchal hierarchy by categorically relegating her to the ranks of an outcast. He hypocritically reaffirms his 'commitment' to the family unit, and his position as head of the unit, by a vehement display of loyalty to his wife. Permanently intrigued by Mrs. Saunders' 'amazing spirit', he kisses her on hearing she is to leave for England. When Betty launches herself at Mrs. Saunders in response to this, Clive is flattered by her jealousy and rallies to her defence: 'Mrs. Saunders...How dare you touch my wife?...Were you jealous my dove? My own dear wife!' (p.

287). In the manner suggestive of a king addressing his subjects, he tells Betty and Mrs. Saunders 'I don't deserve this' (p. 287). His diction and behaviour epitomize the 'treachery' he warned Betty of: he clearly cannot be trusted. Clive dismisses Mrs. Saunders as a woman with 'shocking behaviour' (p. 287). With their sexual encounters at an end, he no longer has use for her and concludes that there is 'no place for her anywhere' (p. 287). This contrasts with his earlier willingness to give sanctuary to Mrs. Saunders when she arrives in a state of shock after fleeing from native insurgency. He previously felt reassured about the ultimate dependence of women on the protection of men, but when Mrs. Saunders' 'amazing spirit' threatens to disrupt his world, it must be crushed.

Throughout the first act, Edward grapples with the conflict between his desire to perform the role that Clive has formulated for him, and his homosexuality. In Edward's case, both sexual orientation and gender identification run against social acceptability: he has sexual relations with Harry Bagley, is no good at sport and is more interested in his sister's doll and his mother's necklace than in activities considered appropriate for men by his society. Edward is 'within the nineteenth-century concept of the sexual invert as one with the soul of a woman imprisoned in the body of a man'. (Randall, 1988: 101.) Edward's desire to fulfil the 'manly' role that Clive sanctions becomes confused with fulfilment of a 'manly' role in relation to Harry, with whom he is infatuated. Accentuating bravery and heroism, traditionally masculine qualities, he tells Harry, 'I don't mind being awake because I make up adventures...A crocodile comes at me...and it's biting your leg right off and I take my knife and stab it...And I drag you onto the river bank...and we lie there in each other's arms' (p.269). Edward's dreams indicates his wish to be finally alone with Harry, and his wish for sexual relations with Harry.

It is evident that Edward has learnt the ways of the role prepared for him in terms of the exertion of his power as the white master over the native servant. When dealing with Joshua's insolence towards Betty, he tells him, 'Don't speak to my mother like that again...You fetch her sewing at once, do you hear me? You move when I speak to you, boy' (p. 278). Betty responds by telling him, 'Edward, you were wonderful' (p. 278), and moves to embrace him, but Edward moves away replying, 'Don't touch me' (p. 278). He is loathe to be touched by his mother as he has acted in accordance with her expectations of his behaviour, rather than naturally, and he shows himself to be resentful of this. The song proclaiming that 'a boy's best friend is his mother' (p. 279) follows this incident, claiming that 'there is one whose smile will ever on us beam...cherish her with care...when gone you will never get another' (p. 279). While the song suggests a relationship between mother and son that is more on an equal basis as compared with that of the all-powerful father with his son, it simultaneously closes the scene involving Betty and Edward

on an ironic note. Edward is nauseated by the flagellation of rebellious native servants, which he is made to watch, but decides that 'They got what they deserved' (p. 274). When Betty finds her necklace missing, which Edward had taken to give to Harry as a love token, Edward immediately tries to blame Joshua. When he finally presents the necklace and claims that he was guarding it for his mother, Clive again displays his tendency not to acknowledge behaviour that contradicts his ideals in his statement, 'Well done, Edward, that was very manly of you. See Betty? Edward was protecting his Mama's jewels from the rebels' (p. 287).

Edward retracts his defiance of his father when caught playing with the doll, paying lip-service to his father's model of society: 'I know it's very bad of me. And I said I didn't want to be like you and I said I hated you...please beat me and forgive me' (p. 276). Clive replies 'Well there's a brave boy to own up', and adds, 'You should always respect and love me Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and loved my own father, because he was my father. Through our father we love our Queen and our God...It is something men understand' (p. 276). Clive's words invoke the power of patriarchy, and demonstrate how he uses patriarchal rationale as the springboard to colonialist thought and to the sexist interpretation of religion. They again highlight the confused values that underlie the 'order'. He chooses to override Edward's actions with the 'bravery' of his (Edward's) confession – he would rather search for any signs of conventionally defined 'masculinity', than dwell on Edward's 'unconventional' behaviour. Edward in turn responds with fitting ambiguity: 'I don't like women. I don't like dolls. I love you, papa, and I love you, Uncle Harry' (p. 276). Clive's lecture to Edward on loving and respecting his father is inconsistent with his words earlier in the act: 'A boy has no business having feelings' (p. 266). Clearly, the love and respect that Clive speaks of does not involve genuine emotion, but a calculated commitment to a specific rationale. At the end of the act, Edward is the only person who observes Joshua raising his gun to shoot Clive, but he does not warn his father: Edward's feelings have, indeed, been razed.

Despite his unorthodox sexuality, Harry shares Clive's ideals, or accepts his judgements, to a large extent: 'For Christmas and England and games and women singing...The Empire is one big happy family' (p. 266). His perception of women is just as confining as Clive's: 'You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife' (p. 268). Harry likes to think of Betty as the guarantor of the Empire, at home while he is off exploring. Thinking of her as 'safety and light and peace and home' (p. 261) gives him his 'direction' (p. 268). He lives a free life, but, like Clive, limits women to domesticity and espouses the idea of male authority. He states, 'When I think of you I always think of you with Edward in your lap' (p. 261), and 'I need to go up rivers and know you are sitting here thinking of me' (p. 268). Betty is only able to live a free life vicariously through

men: when Harry tells her, 'You have been thought of where no white woman has ever been thought of before' (p. 261), Betty comments that it is 'one way of having adventures'. Cousin (1989: 41) maintains that Harry, like Clive, 'seems to want to own the universe'. He tells Betty, '...you are a star in my sky' (p. 268). He prefers her, however, to remain as untouchable as a star: 'I need you to be Clive's wife...' (p. 268). He does not like 'dangerous women' (p. 261). As a homosexual informed by Clive's gender codes, his sexuality becomes somewhat confusing. Immediately after attempting to embrace Betty he encounters Joshua, and asks him, 'Shall we go in a barn and fuck?' (p. 262). Harry's sexuality is hidden in marginal spaces such as the barn.

The fact that Harry only engages in homosexual sex with minors and inferiors suggests the prevalence of a hierarchy in patriarchal culture, and also suggests his inadequacy. Harry, to a greater extent than Edward, struggles against his homosexual attraction and ostensibly supports heterosexuality. But both men secretly succumb to their true desires. When Harry calls their relationship 'wrong', Edward says, 'But we'll do it anyway won't we?' (p. 270). Harry's reply is 'Yes, of course'. His shame at his 'deviant' sexual preferences is evident when Edward threatens to reveal their relationship to his father: 'Edward, no, not a word, never, not to your mother, nobody, please' (p. 280). This scene immediately precedes the scene where Ellen professes her love for Betty.

Clive's discovery of Betty's romantic attachment to Harry Bagley unsettles him to an extent, but he swiftly restores his idea of Betty as he would like her to be: 'you are not that sort of woman. You are not unfaithful to me, Betty' (p. 277). His words force Betty back into the narrow existence to which she has become accustomed. He continues in his pursuit of Mrs Saunders, and in his desire to do his duty to the Queen by making all the natives as much like Joshua as possible. Clive, however, perseveres in this direction in the midst of actions which blatantly contradict his ideals: Betty declares her love to Harry, Ellen professes love to Betty, Harry turns his attentions to Edward and Joshua, and the natives are in revolt. The repeated references to the native unrest outside Clive's compound highlights the futility of his attempts to maintain order. In this act, where the tension between sexual order and chaos is blatant, this is an effective metaphor for the chaos underlying the imposed patriarchal order.

Despite the threat of disruption to Clive's self-imposed organisation of society, he remains blinkered. His words to Betty underline this: 'I don't want to know about it' (p. 277). He never discovers what has happened between Harry and Edward, or Harry and Joshua. When Joshua, who spies on the others on his behalf, informs him that Ellen 'talks of love' (p. 285) to Betty, he refuses to even consider such an idea. When Clive confides that 'friendship between men is...the

noblest form of relationship,' and asserts that 'Women are irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful, and they smell different from us', Harry embraces Clive, under the mistaken impression that he would welcome such advances. At this point Clive, finally, has to acknowledge Harry's homosexuality, and is momentarily speechless for the only time in the play. He disdainfully tells Harry, 'The most revolting perversion...this sin can destroy an empire...it's unthinkable...' (p. 283). The ideals of family and Empire are inviolable and inseparable. The empire that Harry's homosexuality threatens is, in fact, the sexual, political and domestic empire that Clive upholds.

Harry's response to Clive's revulsion is that 'It is not a sin, it is a disease...I am like a man born crippled...' (p. 283). Clum (Randall, 1988: 96/97) asserts that this response reflects 'the conceptual change which took place when nineteenth-century sexologists coined the term *homosexuality*, and thereby moved same-sex activity from religious and moral spheres to the medical sphere'. He maintains that this shift in context 'did little to make that newly discovered entity, *homosexual behaviour*, socially respectable', providing for Harry 'only a new set of self-deprecating similes', self-pity and excuses. Clive reinforces this idea of medically-based weakness by adding that 'It is a disease more dangerous than diphtheria. Effeminacy is contagious' (p. 283). For Clive, subversion of the traditionally masculine sexual role poses a serious threat to power relations in a society that privileges his sex: for him, homosexuality obliterates 'manhood', thereby resulting in a lowering of social status. Clive's solution is to urge Harry to suppress these feelings and to conform to his designated role by getting married. Masking Harry's homosexuality through marriage would, moreover, preserve the sanctity of their friendship: 'Friendship between men is a fine thing. It is the noblest form of relationship' (p. 282). Paradoxically, Clive is ultimately relieved at Harry's homosexuality, because he is again able to think of Betty in the terms he chooses: 'What a relief that you and Betty were not after all...' (p. 283).

The institution of marriage is referred to repeatedly in the first act. Betty remarks to Ellen, 'You're quite pretty, you shouldn't despair of getting a husband...women have their duty...you must be a mother if you can' (p. 281): motherhood and performing conjugal duties are what, in her view, constitute a marriage. The whole aim of Betty's life is 'to be what he [Clive] looks for in a wife' (p. 251). When Betty frets about Clive's blister, it becomes clear that she pays homage to the Victorian notion that wives should provide their husbands with a comfortable place to escape from the harsh world outside of the home: 'My poor dear foot...Oh but it's sore' (p. 253/3). The principles of the marriage have been laid down by Clive: 'My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be, and everything she is owes to me' (p. 251). In Betty's view, the act of marriage

would suppress, or at best conceal, Ellen's lesbianism, and it would seal her place in patriarchal society in having formally subscribed to its institutions.

Clive regards male friendship as 'not something that could be spoiled by the weaker sex' (p. 282), as the noblest of relationships, and sums up his view of the marital relationship by contending that 'There is the necessity of reproduction. The family is all important. And there is the pleasure' (p. 282). Marriage, for him, is merely the means for perpetuating patriarchy and ensuring the perpetual availability of physical pleasure. It is a kind of sublimation of needs and desires. In the same breath, Clive speaks of his adulterous relationship: 'I suddenly got out of Mrs. Saunders' bed and came out here on the verandah...' It is evident that Clive merely pays lip service to the institution. Committing adultery is of no consequence for him, while the possibility of his wife's adultery unsettles him. Harry's attitude to marriage becomes unequivocal when he resignedly states, 'I suppose getting married wouldn't be any worse than killing myself' (p. 283). When Clive advises Harry to marry Mrs. Saunders, he links marriage to patriotic duty: 'Ask her now, Harry. Think of England'. Patriarchy's chief institution, the family, is a microcosm of the state. Sexual politics and colonialism are in this setting inextricably intertwined: the institution of marriage has become a microcosmic indication of the exploitation that takes place on a grander scale, on sexual, racial and economic grounds.

Mrs. Saunders' retort to Harry's marriage proposal is, 'Why?...I choose to be alone, Mr Bagley. If I can look after myself, I'm sure you can...There is only one thing about marriage that I like' (p. 283/4). Harry immediately thereafter proposes to Ellen, and his blatant lack of sincerity in this proposal highlights the general hypocrisy, and the absurdity of the situation. He asks, 'Ellen. I don't suppose you would marry me?', and Ellen replies, 'What if I said yes?' (p. 285). He looks for a wife in order to meet the demands of society, and, by accepting, Ellen allows herself to be exploited by Harry - while consciously denying her true inclination. Her awareness of her real desires, reflected in her earlier comment, 'I don't want children. I don't like children' (p. 281), gives way to acceptance of a refuge from a world intolerant of sexual 'deviancy'. While Betty assists Ellen with wedding preparations, Ellen asks her, 'what happens with a man' (p. 286), and Betty's reply is that 'You just keep still'. When asked, 'Is it enjoyable?', Betty points out to her 'you're not getting married to enjoy yourself' (p.286). This sharply comic exchange of words mirrors the words spoken by Clive to Harry regarding the 'pleasure': sexual pleasure is the husband's prerogative as the head of the family, while a wife should be pleased to satisfy her husband and to rear his children. Ellen and Harry marry, with Ellen's tears an expression of her powerlessness in the face of overwhelming exploitative forces. Harry's identity has been shattered, and this is reflected in his disjointed speech. When he is called on to make a speech, he

can only string together wedding clichés. The tragedy is twofold: both Ellen and Harry have denied their sexual orientations to maintain the semblance of heterosexuality, and Ellen has been further exploited as a woman who is to finally sign over control of her existence to a man, in a setting of archaic views on marriage. Amid Clive's cries of 'Cut the cake, cut the cake' (p. 288), Harry symbolically steps on the doll, that is, Victoria, under the table. Churchill's use of a doll creates a *Gestus* which critically examines gendered relations, as it is through the institution of patriarchal marriage that women are crushed.

This climactic marriage scene fuses the related issues of colonialism, gender oppression and sexual oppression in its final moment. The element of farce that runs through the first act is at a low ebb in the wedding scene, where 'genuine tragedy does threaten to engulf the comedy, as the walls of propriety close in to solidify the new union of Harry and Ellen.' (Kritzer, 1991: 121). Clive, resolvedly unseeing, refers to the pair as the 'happy couple' (p. 288). In his speech he takes the hypocrisy even further by referring to Harry in traditionally 'masculine' terms, 'So brave, and strong...' (p. 288), and Ellen in traditionally 'feminine' terms, 'Ellen, from neath her veil so shyly peeking' (p. 288). His use of the word 'supple' (p. 288), a word more often used to describe women, when referring to Harry is, however, an unintentional indicator that Harry is not all that Clive would have him be. Clive reminds Harry of his (Harry's) physical domination over his wife by urging him to 'Put your arm round her, Harry, have a kiss' (p. 288). The marriage between Harry and Ellen signals for Clive the victory of heterosexuality over homosexuality. The marriage ceremony is a ritual conventionally used in dramatic comedy to mark the restoration of family values, but Churchill uses it to expose the oppressive nature of Clive's society, and in so doing intensifies the pitch of her questioning. In their context, Clive's words to the wedded couple, 'Long may you live in peace and joy and bliss' (p. 288), are acutely ironic and unsettling. He states in his speech that 'Dangers are past. Our enemies are killed...All murmuring of discontent is stilled' (p. 288), ostensibly referring to the native uprising, but his words are significantly ambiguous. The hollowness of his words and the weightlessness of his world are summarized in Joshua's raising of his gun to shoot Clive, while Edward looks on without warning his father. The colonial oppression frames the sexual oppression, and this is literally extinguished as this final tableau is blacked out.

Cloud Nine's two acts are dissimilar in their structures, with Churchill contrasting both dramatic styles and time periods. While the first act is farcical, tightly structured and has boldly painted characters, the action of the second act is less concise, and meanders to the conclusion that relates the two halves of the play. The element of comedy wanes in the second act, as the moral prejudices are no longer set safely in the distant past, but come uncomfortably close to the

audience. In contrast with the swift pace of the first act, frequent pauses and meandering conversation slows the pace of the second, allowing the audience more time to consider the complex issues of choice raised by the action. The first act, like the society it displays, is male dominated and rigid in its structure. In the second act, the women and the homosexuals are given more textual freedom. The Victorian moral code pervades the language, music, use of space, and the action of the first act. Accents, with the exception of that of Joshua, are upper-class, and as a result the dialogue sounds fairly uniform. This is broken in the second act, with working-class cant adding to the variation. The Brechtian influence in the first act gives way to greater subjectivity in the second, where there is no longer a psychological distance between the actors and the audience: in the second act the audience is encouraged to question its perception of imposed roles, and to draw conclusions from this. The uncertainties and changes of society, in the context of greater freedom, are reflected in the looser structure of the second act.

The seven actors change roles for the second act, and are therefore in a similar position to the characters they portray, who also find themselves taking on new roles. Doubling of roles is a significant element of *Cloud Nine's* conception. Members of a single company are given different roles for the first and second acts, and therefore perform the entire play. Churchill notes that the doubling can be arranged in any way that suits any particular production¹⁰. The characters have moved closer to a state of self-awareness, and Churchill confirms this by casting actors of the right sex for these characters. Betty is now played by a woman, as she gradually gains a greater sense of herself as 'woman'. The one exception is the only child character, four-year-old¹¹ Cathy, who is played by a man. The actor who played Clive in the first act doubles as Cathy in the second act. Churchill elaborates:

'Cathy is played by a man, partly as a simple reversal of Edward being played by a woman, partly because the size and presence of a man on stage seem appropriate to the emotional force of young children, and partly, as with Edward, to show more clearly the issues involved in learning what is considered correct behaviour for a girl' (1985: 246).

Joshua is absent from the second act, partly owing to the fact that the second act was written before the first, and the white actor who played Joshua plays the role of Gerry¹². The role of Victoria is played by the actor who played Maud. Churchill stresses that the role of the soldier

¹⁰ In many productions the Betty of the first act plays Gerry in the second act, and the Clive of the first act plays Edward.

¹¹ In the Nick Hern edition (1989), the list of characters describes Cathy as 'Lin's daughter aged 4 and 5', while at the opening of the second act she is described as 'Lin's daughter, aged 4'. In the *Plays: One* version (Methuen, 1985), she is described as 'Lin's daughter age 5' in the list of characters, and is introduced in the second act as 'Lin's daughter, age 4'.

should be played by the actor who plays Cathy, and Cathy's aggressive behaviour and affinity for 'war toys' seems to pull this doubling together. She has also indicated her preference for the actor who played Betty in the first act to play Edward in the second. . The actress who played the part of Ellen and Mrs. Saunders in the first act now plays the part of Lin, a divorced lesbian mother. This actress has therefore moved beyond the role of a lesbian caring for the children of others, about to be locked into a heterosexual relationship, to one where lesbianism is no longer suppressed.

The second act is a new world in terms of time and location, and also in terms of sexual liberation. It is set in a London park in 1979 as this is where Churchill (1985: 246) 'wanted the play to end up, in the changing sexuality of our own time.' Although the time period was 'our own time' for Churchill when she wrote the play, and for the audience watching the play in 1979, or in the early 1980's, the setting is now more than twenty years in the past. Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics*, urges a sexual revolution as she claims that no monogamous marriage would survive free sexual activity and the foundations of the patriarchal family would thus crumble. This 'sexual revolution' which seems to have found its way into the second act cannot be viewed through the identical lens of past audiences, as the escalating AIDS crisis is now a factor in any consideration of free sexual activity.

In the first act, any resistance to that which Clive's society represents is camouflaged, while in the second it is blatant: the characters are choosing to reject society's perception of them. Patriarchal marriage is no longer upheld as the ideal for relationships, and heterosexuality is no longer compulsory. The characters have acknowledged the existence of a plurality of desires and of potential ways of life and relationships. Social and sex roles have become more a matter of individual choice than of social imposition. There are sexualities, rather than one sexuality. Homosexuality is now unconcealed, and the sexual liberation manifests itself in the casualness about varieties of sexual behaviour. The characters are, however, struggling with gender roles and identities in that they are bewildered by the many options open to them, and there are still prejudices and preconceptions that need to be further explored. The play thus begins to narrow its focus to gender construction in the absence of the patriarch. This new order 'seems as sadly disordered as the one it succeeds, and the family no less a locus of unresolved tensions between public roles and private lives' (Brater, 1989: 35). Instead of having too few choices available to them, the characters have too many, and with the new freedom comes confusion.

¹² Churchill notes that Gerry's age, cited as thirty-two in the text, can be altered to fit the actor.

The patriarchal family has been dissolved, but imperialism still haunts this new world. 'The bitter end of colonialism' (Churchill, 1985: 246) is apparent in the person of Lin's soldier brother, who dies in Northern Ireland. Bill is Joshua's counterpart in this act, in that the identities of both men are stifled by imperialist activity, and Bill's ghost symbolizes the destructiveness of such activity. In terms of the allusions to the struggles in Northern Ireland, Churchill has revealed that she and the participants in the workshop viewed England's relation to Ireland as that of a male to a female, in that Ireland is traditionally thought of as being charming and irresponsible, as many people view women.

While most of the action of the first act takes place on Clive's verandah, the setting of the park in the second act is less confining. The free space of a park is able to accommodate a variety of character types and activities, and here the audience finds the characters exploring, like children. Although only one of the characters is a child, the other characters are engaged in a process of discovery which in a sense returns them temporarily to the status of children. The setting of a public space also emphasizes the degree to which sexuality and sexual choices have been brought into the open, although Edward's fear of revealing his homosexuality does serve as a reminder that, in spite of this, some Victorian attitudes do persist. The action takes place through the changing seasons of the year¹³, suggesting that change does not come about instantly. The last scene of the play, when Betty comes into an awareness of herself, is set in late summer, and this can possibly be perceived as the progression to her 'flowering'. The first scene is set in the park's indoor children's playcentre on a winter's afternoon, and the subsequent three scenes are set outdoors.

In the first act, the family is Clive's property, and his perceptions structure the act. Although he makes a brief appearance towards the end of the second act, he is absent from its action, and this absence is tantamount to an absence of roles and parameters consistent with oppressive ideology. Betty, who is middle-aged, announces that she is leaving Clive. Edward and Victoria have grown up: Victoria is married to Martin and has a small son, Tommy, who never appears onstage, and Edward is having an affair with Gerry. The characters are finally free from the gaze of the patriarch. Nonetheless, 'If men are finding it hard to keep control in the first act, they are finding it hard to let go in the second' (Churchill, 1985: 246). Victoria has been offered a job in Manchester, and is uncertain as to whether or not she should accept it. Martin views Victoria's dilemma from his own standpoint, while professing to be sympathetic to her difficulty in making a decision. Despite his claims of sympathy for feminism, he tries to dominate Victoria. Gerry claims Edward is behaving just like a wife, and feels confined. Edward, still mindful of the

condemnation attached to homosexuality in Clive's society, is reluctant to make public his homosexuality for fear of losing his job as a gardener in the park. Lin¹⁴ is uninhibited in terms of her lesbianism, but still frightens her daughter with the traditional bogeyman when she is naughty, just as her mother frightened her: 'Cathy, for fuck's sake stop throwing stones at the ducks. The man's going to get you' (p. 303). When Victoria draws attention to this inconsistency, saying, 'What man? Do you need a man to frighten your child with' (p. 303), Lin tells her, 'I've changed who I sleep with. I can't change everything' (p. 303). Lin's words reflect Churchill's acknowledgment that change is a slow process. The characters are in a 'middle state' of sorts, not entirely emancipated from the traditional thought-patterns and behaviour codes of the past.

While Clive's words 'we are not in this country to enjoy ourselves' echo through the first act, the pursuit of pleasure predominates in the second act, suggesting that the characters are in the process of freeing themselves from Clive's value system. The characters experiment with different roles and possibilities, and the shattering of long-held sexual taboos tests the limits of the new freedom. In the first scene, Lin tells Victoria that she is a lesbian and initiates a relationship with her. Victoria replies to Lin's proposition for sex, 'I don't know what Martin would say. Does it count as adultery with a woman?' (p. 296): the society of the first act does not even recognize, much less tolerate, the existence of alternative behaviour codes, and the characters of the second act consequently struggle to locate such unconventional behaviour in any value-system. Lin's remark, 'You'd enjoy it', highlights how moral codes have now yielded to personal pleasure. Edward decides that he too is a 'lesbian' and moves in with Victoria and Lin. This three-way relationship, which is simultaneously homosexual, heterosexual and incestuous, shatters the patriarchal order.

Both Gerry and Betty explicitly relate details regarding their sexual behaviour: when Gerry speaks of homosexual sex with a stranger in a train compartment and Betty speaks of masturbation, they release themselves from the restrictions placed on language and expression by the show of propriety in the first act. The unrestrained language that replaces Clive's practiced phraseology expresses previously unspoken thoughts and desires. This becomes jarring when its indelicacy and vulgarity extends into the speech of four-year-old Cathy, while Edward's use of language is humorous but expressive: 'I think I'm a lesbian'. While the style of language in the first act is consistent with that of upright Victorian society, all linguistic parameters have been erased in the second. The expression is distinctly colloquial, although Betty's language does not

¹³ The first scene is set in winter, the second in spring, the third in summer and the fourth in late summer.

¹⁴ Lin, her name a contraction of 'Ellen', 'liberates' the position of Ellen from the first act in that she lives openly as a lesbian.

seem to have changed since her Victorian days, serving as a reminder that aspects of the past have been carried into the present. The women and homosexual characters are now able to communicate their sexual desires directly, and in fact express themselves more freely than the male heterosexual. Lin asks Victoria straightforwardly, 'Will you have sex with me?' while Martin is only able to communicate his desire by using his female partner as a reference point, and prefers not to talk during sex: 'What is it about sex, when we talk while it's happening I get to feel it's like a driving lesson' (p. 300). Gerry and Betty, in their monologues, vividly convey the different ways in which they find sexual excitement and pleasure.

The gender definitions in this contemporary society are most clearly observed through the approaches to child rearing. While in the first act Edward is played by a woman and Victoria by a dummy, in the second act Cathy is played by a man, and it is Victoria's son, Tommy, who has no visible role. In this act it is the men who are assigned the task of rearing children, while child rearing in Clive's world is the domain of the women, with some input from the men in prodding their sons to manliness. This shift reflects that progress has, indeed, been made in terms of dismantling traditional gender definitions. Although women still have the responsibility for their children at the beginning of the act, observed as Lin and Victoria sit in the park watching their children play, by the end of the act Martin and Edward replace Victoria and Lin as the caretakers of Tommy and Cathy. Edward is content in his role as housekeeper for the women and their children, but Martin, who is still in a transitional state, does find it difficult to adapt to the role of the truly 'liberated male'. His response to his son's bed wetting reveals that, despite his good intentions, he is confused in terms of what his role represents: 'Of course I don't get fucking angry, Eddy...I don't like to say he is my son but he is my son. I'm surprised I'm not wetting the bed myself' (p. 313). Although his shame regarding his son's behaviour is reminiscent of Clive's attempts to 'masculinize' Edward, Martin tries to move beyond this by examining his own inadequacies.

Issues of appropriate behaviour seem now more closely connected to psychology and violence than to gender. The question of gender should not, however, be overlooked in any analysis of social behaviour. When Lin tells Victoria that she hates men, Victoria comments, 'You have to look at it in a historical perspective in terms of learnt behaviour since the industrial revolution' (p. 292), pointing to the ongoing pressure of historical behaviour patterns in the context of socialization. Lin was, however, the victim of an abusive husband, and the issues of violence and gender therefore come together in her case. Speaking of her ex-husband, she states, 'I'm grateful he didn't hit me harder than he did' (p. 291), and 'He let me keep Cathy and I'm grateful for

that...I'm a lesbian' (p. 291). The repetition of the word 'grateful' indicates that there is still a degree of acceptance of men as the wielders of power, in this case of physical power, and of the notion that heterosexuals should be accorded greater status than homosexuals. Clearly, even Lin herself has not consciously perceived the deep psychological effect her ex-husband's aggression has had on her, and her words simultaneously reflect that aspects of the Victorian world prevail. The 'progress' has come in Lin's ability to express the feelings that derive from her state of oppression, albeit an emotional rather than intellectual exercise: 'I just hate the bastards' (p. 292). Victoria tells her, 'you've no analysis' (p. 303). Although she presumably married for reasons of social acceptability - it is unclear whether she has always been aware of her lesbianism or whether it came to the fore in her abusive marriage - she has embraced the new freedom by abandoning this role.

Victoria and Lin both have children who are inclined towards aggressive behaviour, and they speculate over whether aggression is innate, exhibiting somewhat limited views of aggression. Victoria tells Lin, 'I'm afraid I do let Tommy play with guns and just hope he'll get it out of his system and not end up in the army' (p. 291), while Victoria states 'I'll give her [Cathy] a rifle for Christmas and blast Tommy's pretty head off for a start' (p. 292). Cathy and Tommy both play with guns. Cathy's playmates are members of a gang of boys, the Dead Hand, and her favourite toys are war toys. Instead of playing children's games, they are constantly fighting, and a grim sense of the extent to which violence characterizes their world is conveyed when Lin suggests that Cathy 'paint a car crash and blood everywhere' (p. 289). Unlike the protected women of Cive's society, who remain indoors while the natives are being flogged, no-one is shielded from the brutality of the modern world. Cathy, the child of a violent marriage, is encouraged by Lin in her aggressiveness: 'Don't hit him, Cathy, Kill him. Point the gun...that's the way' (p. 291). Lin and Cathy's aggressive speech and behaviour incite one to uncomfortable laughter. Their behaviour, when viewed in terms of traditional expectations of women, comes across as incongruous and therefore ludicrous. Churchill uses comedy to raise the awareness of the audience to the issue of violence, encompassing that of the violent oppression of women, and to the boundaries that define, or confine, women's behaviour. Cathy is seen as the act opens chanting a scatological rhyme and brandishing a toy gun, and periodically bursts into the action onstage 'firing' her gun. The violence of this society, that pervades the social fabric in several different forms, vibrates through the action each time Cathy does so. Although violence did exist in the world of the first act, there the chief perpetrators were the patriarchs, while in the second act it has permeated all levels of society. The question now becomes more one of where such aggressive inclinations originate, or originated. Liberation does not appear to have reached the

domain of 'masculine', traditionally aggressive, activities. The violence further serves to suggest the revolutionary potential of the Kristevan Semiotic to disrupt the Symbolic.

Cathy, the aggressive daughter of a lesbian mother, represents the confusion of the new world. This is symbolized powerfully when Cathy walks onstage wearing a pink dress, carrying a rifle. The lack of definition and absence of parameters that have become distinctive features of this world are encapsulated in the exchange of words when Lin tells Cathy it is time to go home and to go to bed:

Cathy: I'm not going to bed now.

Lin: Not now but early.

Cathy: How early?

Lin: Not late.

Cathy: How not late?

Lin: Early.

Cathy: How early?

Lin: Not late (p. 306).

Although Cathy loves war toys, she also loves pretty dresses: she refuses to wear jeans to school because her friends tease her about being a boy, but she wonders whether she will inherit her soldier uncle's gun. Despite her outwardly 'masculine' behaviour, when Betty tells Cathy she is pretty, she is delighted and exclaims, 'Look mum I'm pretty, I'm pretty, I'm pretty' (p. 294). Further, she wants her ears pierced and admires Betty's hat and beads. When Lin disrupts her 'feminine' interaction with Betty, she tells her, 'I hate you, Mum, you smell' (p. 295). These words are reminiscent of Clive's remark that 'Women...smell different from us' (p. 282), and suggest that gender issues are still at the root of much of the conflict that prevails. Peggy Phelan contends that 'At once an attempt to stabilize 'difference' and an attempt to repress the 'sexual' itself, cultural representation seeks both to conceal and reveal a real that will 'prove' that sexual difference is a real difference' (Phelan, 1993: 4). Clive stresses the biological difference between men and women to justify his gender expectations, and Cathy expresses the belief that her mother's gender equates with a biological difference: gender expectations continue to limit and confuse the characters. Lin's difficulties in raising a child who does not seem to comprehend gender in a traditional way also recall Betty and Clive's similar difficulties with Edward. She complains that 'I give Cathy guns...I dress her in jeans, she wants to wear dresses...I can't work it out, I don't want to' (p. 303). Although other issues, notably that of violence, have ostensibly become more problematic than issues of sexual liberation, the basic gender/biology distinction continues to seep through into contemporary ideology. Cathy's responses to her mother's suggestions in the first scene are marked by indecisiveness, and this sets the tone for much of the

exploration and questioning that takes place in the second act, where freedom has ushered in confusion.

Cathy's childishly vulgar song that opens the second act, 'Yum yum bubblegum. Stick it up your mother's bum...' (p. 289) contrasts with the song from the first act, 'A Boy's Best Friend', that says of a mother, 'Then cherish her with care...A boy's best friend is his mother' (p. 279). Churchill points to the confusion over the biological and sociological meanings of the word mother. While the song in the first act directly follows the scene where Betty has caused Edward to act out of harmony with his desires, and is therefore somewhat ironic, Cathy's song flagrantly denounces a mother's role. Victoria asks, 'Does everybody hate their mothers?' (p. 296), and Cathy tells her mother to 'fuck off' (p. 304) when she is told it is time to go home. This resentment is based on an awareness of the part the mother plays in perpetuating the existence of patriarchy. Conversely, Betty is able to talk to Lin because Lin has no expectations of her in terms of a set role: she is not Lin's mother. Lin advises Victoria not to 'think of her as your mother, think of her as Betty' (p. 317), and Victoria replies, 'But she thinks of herself as my mother' (p. 317). This is an indication of generation differences of perception and value. When Betty transcends her restrictive, and restricting, role, there is hope for fruitful relationships with her children.

Victoria is a married middle-class professional, and Lin is a divorced working-class lesbian. They begin a relationship despite perspectives that are often conflicting. In their modern world it appears that relationships have moved beyond the question of the gender of the partners, and they try to avoid the difficulties of 'traditional' relationships. Power dynamics do exist between them, but their relationship is more successful than that between Martin and Victoria. They recognize the need for respect of individuality, and in her series of questions to Lin, Victoria tries to locate an alternative to the demands Martin places on her. Victoria has to struggle to find ways to manage her life independently in that she has to consider a job offer that involves separation from her child and sexual partners. In questioning Lin, she attempts to define a relationship free from the patriarchal patterns of domination and objectification. They discuss the meaning of a love relationship: Lin maintains she would still love Victoria if she (Victoria) went to Manchester, or if she went on a climbing expedition in the Andes (p. 302). She would still love her if her 'teeth fell out' (p. 302) and if she 'loved ten other people' (p. 302). She gives very different values equal weight, but makes the point that, ideally, their love would not be limited by conventional assumptions and values. Victoria claims that she feels 'apologetic for not being quite so subordinate as I was. I am more intelligent than him [Martin]. I am brilliant' (p. 303). Nonetheless, when Lin tells her to leave Martin, her response is, 'Don't be silly' (p. 303): At this

point Victoria prefers to explore from the safety of her marriage, but 'progresses' later in the act when she moves in with Lin. Lin has already moved beyond the safety of traditional relationships, and seeks the pleasure of sexual freedom: 'I'm not asking because I need to live with someone. I'd enjoy it, that's all, we'd both enjoy it' (p. 303).

Martin, the 'new man', attempts to view Victoria's relationship with Lin open-mindedly, commenting that 'You're the one who's experimenting with bisexuality, and I don't stop you' (p. 301). The deeply ingrained attitudes carried over from the past do, however, become evident when he adds, 'I think women have something to give each other. You seem to need the mutual support' (p. 301). Martin 'helps with the washing up and everything' (p. 291), and is ostensibly liberated. But, like Clive, he attempts to define women to suit his own needs. He is writing a novel 'about women from the women's point of view' (p. 302), but this is merely another means of locking women in male-based definitions: the sign for 'Woman' is derived from the male perspective.

Martin's idea of himself as the postmodern male in his refusal to be 'the sort of man who makes women cry' (p. 299) indicates that his very understanding of women's liberation is fractured. For him, the ideal liberation was in the sixties: 'If all we're talking about is having a lot of sex there's no problem. I was all for the sixties when liberation just meant fucking' (p. 310). While Clive failed to satisfy Mrs. Saunders sexually, Martin is obsessed with his own sexual performance, and expects his sexual beneficence to be appreciated: this is only another form of selfishness. He intimates that Victoria's sexual unresponsiveness upsets him: 'My one aim is to give you rolling orgasms like I do other women. So why the hell don't you have them?' (p. 300/301). He tries to dominate her in insidious ways, such as by implying that her indecisiveness over the job in Manchester negatively affects his image of himself: 'You don't seem to realise how insulting it is to me that you can't get yourself together' (p. 301). His manipulations become obvious when he talks of selling the house, which would result in Tommy's insecurity, and comments that 'I could just take that room in Barbara's house...You think that means I want to fuck Barbara...And even if I did, what's a fuck between friends?' (p. 299). He in effect tries to blackmail Victoria into acting in accordance with his will by threatening adultery, but cushions his threat with 'sensitive' words, which further reflect his real confusion as to his role: 'Whatever you want to do, I'll be delighted. If you could just let me know what it is I'm to be delighted about' (p. 299). He pressurizes Victoria for personal and sexual perfection. Martin's progress comes in his acceptance of Victoria's decision to live apart from him, and in his role as caretaker, together with Edward and Lin, of Tommy and Cathy.

In this act Edward is blatantly homosexual, despite his wishes to conceal this for fear of prejudices relating to his job. In his relationship with Gerry, the issues of gender, sexual orientation and relationship come together: their relationship is not only based on desire, but on the pattern of heterosexual marriage. Edward would like Gerry to treat him like an old-fashioned wife, but Gerry finds Edward's approach to their relationship confining. When Gerry complains that 'You're getting like a wife' (p. 306), Edward replies, 'I don't mind that' (p. 306). Edward in turn complains that 'Everyone's always tried to stop me being feminine and now you are too...I like doing the cooking. I like being fucked' (p. 306). When Gerry speaks of ending the relationship, Edward plays the injured, guilt-provoking wife with precision: 'I wouldn't want to keep a man who wants his freedom...I'll always be here, Gerry, if you want to come back...I don't think I could love deeply more than once. But I don't think I can face life on my own...' (p. 307). Churchill suggests that there are individuals who choose stereotypical roles for themselves, and that, as a man, Edward might prefer this 'feminine' role. Nonetheless, he must be aware that he has taken on the identity of Clive's ideal woman in his portrayal of helplessness, and must move beyond the role of an artificial woman before he can find personal happiness. He must free himself from the gender definitions that force him to be the conventional wife to his lover. As the relationship deteriorates, Edward abandons the concept of homosexuality as it relates to the partnership of two men, and embraces the concept of homosexuality as it relates to lesbianism: 'I'm sick of men...I think I'm a lesbian' (p. 307). He chooses a *maison-à-trois* lifestyle with Lin and Victoria, dispensing with the concept of being one of a couple.

Churchill reminds the audience that the past attitudes and practices are not securely locked in history, but are carried into the present. Despite the fact that the Edwards of the two acts are played by different actors, indicating that there has been some change, Churchill highlights that there are still areas of commonality, and that the change has not been all-embracing: as the Edward of the first act gives Harry the gift of the necklace, so the Edward of this act gives Gerry the gift of a painting. She connects the two time periods by bringing Harry from the first act onstage as Gerry's pick-up in the second. When Gerry and Edward encounter one another after their break-up, the Edward who appears is the Edward from the first act. This encounter immediately follows the appearance of the ghost, and Edward, too, seems to be haunted by his past self. Further, their exchange of words mirrors the exchange between Harry and Edward in the first act. In the first act, Edward and Harry relate as follows:

Edward: Harry, I love you.
 Harry: Yes I know. I love you too.
 Edward: You know what we did when you were here before. I want to do it again.
 I think about it all the time...Don't you want to any more? (p. 270).

Harry: I do, but it's a sin and a crime and it's also wrong.
Edward: But we'll do it anyway won't we?
Harry: Yes of course (p. 270).

In the second act, the dialogue between Edward and Gerry is almost identical to the above:

Edward: Gerry, I love you.
Gerry: Yes, I know. I love you, too.
Edward: You know what we did? I want to do it again. I think about it all the time. Don't you want to any more?
Gerry: Yes, of course (p. 311).

Churchill reflects that there has been sexual liberation in that Gerry does not, as Harry does, assert that homosexuality is 'a sin and a crime'. Gerry states, 'I come here sometimes at night and pick somebody up...There's never any trouble finding someone. I can have sex any time' (p. 311). Change has not yet, however, reached the deep-rooted concepts of identity. Edward, despite his sexual freedom, is still in the process of freeing himself from the rhetoric of Clive's world. When Edward appears again later, he is played by the actor for the second act, and there has been advancement since his position at the beginning of the act in that he has left his job as gardener, and is no longer concerned to conceal his true sexuality. In the *maison-à-trois* environment he pursues traditionally female activities, such as cooking and childcare, but does so as himself, rather than as an artificial woman. In accepting his feminine side outside of Clive's conventions he is able to engage in these 'feminine' activities without obscuring his identity. When Gerry finally asks, 'Whose wife are you now then?', Edward replies, 'Nobody's. I don't think like that any more...' (p. 315). His words carry the promise that he has, indeed, begun to free himself from the constricting definitions carried over from his father's world. He can now build a new relationship that is not an imitation of patriarchal marriage.

Gerry determinedly struggles against any imposed identity and values his autonomy: 'I quite like living alone' (p. 311). Talking of his two-year relationship with Edward, he points out, 'You have to get away sometimes or you lose sight of yourself' (p. 297). He is confident about his sexuality, and divulges that he enjoys having sex with strangers. He consciously avoids being forced into any roles, and is not prepared to remain in a relationship characterized by role-playing: he prefers anonymous sex, unconnected to any relationship. Graphically relating a sexual encounter in a train compartment, he states, 'I felt wonderful. Then he started talking. It's better if nothing is said....' (p. 297). Gerry's ideal sexual encounter is with 'somebody really great who never said a word, just smiled' (p. 298). This sexual act in a public place contrasts with Harry's sexual activity, which was hidden in marginal places such as the barn. Referring to his anonymous sexual partner, he relates that, 'He said I hope you don't think I do this all the time. I said I hope

you will from now on' (p. 297). Gerry openly advocates free sexual activity, to the extent that he tells Edward, 'I saw someone who looked like you but it wasn't. I had sex with him anyway' (p. 315). His recognition and acceptance of other sexualities is evident in his words to Betty, 'Not everyone's gay' (p. 320). Gerry is able to contemplate a relationship with Edward when Edward no longer clings to a wifely role, when they are able to meet on a plane unfettered by ideological and other constraints. On such a plane, he is able to move closer to a new, more committed, relationship with Edward, to the point where he is able to tell Betty, 'I'm very involved with him' (p. 319).

The relationships of Martin and Victoria, Victoria and Lin, and Edward and Gerry all reflect the difficulty in creating relationships when there is no pattern to follow - no well-defined sex roles or prescribed sexual orientation. In contrast to the inhibiting influence of societal condemnation in the first act, the activity of the second is set against a social background where neutral acceptance predominates, and this creates its own problems for the individual. The gender of the partners becomes less significant than the problem of creating relationships in accordance with the needs of the individuals involved. The characters try to redefine themselves in new relationships, and find that this is no easy task. Churchill proposes that all human relationships, if genuine, have their validity.

In the third scene, Victoria, Lin and Edward drunkenly attempt to conjure up a mythical fertility goddess. Sue-Ellen Case describes how many radical feminists perform in goddess rituals and the rituals of witches, explaining that 'their rituals compound women's intimate relationship with nature (particularly the bond between women's biology and nature) with such social issues as rape' (Case, 1988: 69). She maintains that 'The rituals commonly celebrate women's biological cycles, intuition, receptivity, fertility, bonding and nurturing', and that 'They cast the experiences and qualities of women in a spiritual arena rather than in the context of socio-political history' (1988: 69). Although as a socialist feminist Churchill firmly locates oppression in an historical context, the ritual she uses in the play draws on the radical feminist goddess rituals related to 'biological cycles' and 'fertility': Lin and Victoria call, 'Goddess of breasts...Goddess of cunts....Goddess of fat bellies and babies. And blood blood blood' (p. 309). This call 'invokes the absent 'offside' female body, which they need to remake desire and identity beyond the conventional ordering of sexuality' (Aston, 1997: 36).

Victoria chants, 'Goddess of many names...give us back what we were, give us the history we haven't had, make us the women we can't be' (p. 308). Victoria is unable to locate a history that is specifically female. Victoria begins to lecture Lin and Edward on matriarchy stating, 'And the

women had the children and nobody knew it was done by fucking so they didn't know about fathers and nobody cared who the father was...' (p. 309). Lin responds by saying, 'Don't turn it into a lecture, Vicky, it's meant to be an orgy' (p. 309), but Victoria asserts 'It never hurts to understand the theoretical background...' (p. 309). Churchill is infinitely aware of the connection between theory and practice.

The futile attempt to invoke the goddess implies that cultural representation of female power remains marginal. The mirthful appeal to this goddess only attracts the attention of Martin, and leads to the summoning up of the ghost of the British soldier, who testifies to England's continuing, if reduced, capacity to dominate and oppress. The ghost of Lin's soldier brother, killed in Northern Ireland, interrupts the invocation with his diatribe, and dislocates the jocular, but realistic, proceedings with his unsettling and ambiguous presence. He seems to disrupt the Brechtian style of the play. Bill's ghost represents the last vestiges of imperialism which haunt modern Britain, while reminding the audience of the limits of representation. According to Freud, the appearance of a ghost relates to the repressed impulses that are inadmissible to our consciousness: ghosts are repressed impulses moving into consciousness. They are both the sign and effect of the repressed. The ghost comes into consciousness as the spectre of a past which the characters believe themselves to be beyond. It is perceived as the fleeting appearance of a deceased being.

Bill's explicit outpouring of barely coherent anger is described by Clum as 'a parody of working-class macho rhetoric' (Randall, 1988: 105), and is a raw example of the basic constructions of masculinity that maintain colonialism and other forms of oppression. It is also an outpouring of anger and frustration. His words 'I got so I fucking wanted to kill someone and I got fucking killed myself and I want a fuck' (p. 311) force the point that aggression and sexual repression are connected. Sexual liberation therefore becomes political freedom. In Bill's case, political imperialism also equates with economic repression. He is either bored or terrified in the army – 'Fucking bored out of my fucking head. That or shit scared' (p. 310/311) – and is, in a sense, as repressed as the victims of his country's imperialism. Bill speaks in personal terms without direct reference to any political dimension. When Lin asks, 'Have you come back to tell us something?', Bill replies, 'No I've come for a fuck' (P. 310). He does, indeed, bring a message. The present is not separate from the past, and the past is capable of affecting the present. The characters in the play need to overcome oppressive forces from the past in order to progress in any real sense.

At the end of the scene, the 'Cloud Nine' song (p. 312) joyfully celebrates freedom and diversity. Its overlapping voices defy fixed definitions, and reflect the many individual voices that make up

society. There is a joyous affirmation of freedom and acceptance of formerly unorthodox behaviour through reference to smoking 'dope on the playground swings', 'women in love', a bride of sixty-five and a groom of seventeen who 'fucked in the back of the black limousine' and 'the wife's lover's children and my lover's wife'. The final line, 'Upside down when you reach Cloud Nine' suggests the state of happiness to be found through the discovery of new social behaviour and/or sexual possibilities.

Betty, the most repressed character from the first act, is the character who ultimately makes the most progress. She announces that she is leaving Clive and making a life for herself, yet of all the characters she retains the strongest ties to the past. She carries the same necklace from the first act to the second, symbolizing how she brings part of this world with her. She also makes direct reference to the Victorian days in Africa by declaring, 'I had help with my children...that was in Africa of course so there wasn't the servant problem' (p. 293). Betty echoes the repressive sentiments of the first act, in a manner reminiscent of Maud's constant reinforcement of ideas from the past: she tells Cathy, 'Well you'll grow up to know that you have to suffer a little bit for beauty' (p. 294). Change is most difficult for her, and she at first seems unable to move beyond her patterns of dependency. As an older character who has become accustomed to her conventional role, she feels afraid to be alone: this is the mark of a society where the women draw their strength from their male partners. Her helplessness, cultivated as a trait of true femininity, has to be overcome: 'I'll never be able to manage. If I can't even walk down the street by myself...' (p. 298). For her the park seems 'so large the grass seems to tilt' (p. 302). She has been conditioned to think of women as being of no value, and this is unequivocally reflected in her words: 'I've never been so short of men's company that I've had to bother with women...They don't have such interesting conversations as men...I can't say I do like women very much, no' (p. 301/302). Consequently she struggles to believe in her own self-worth: 'There's nothing says you have to like yourself' (p. 302). It is 'strange not having a man in the house' (p. 301), and not having anyone 'to do things for' (p. 301) – without having the demands of patriarchy to meet, she almost feels that she no longer exists. Although Betty's independence frightens her initially, she grows to appreciate it, and finally manages to reject Clive's perception of her, that is, his male gaze, and come to a loving acceptance of herself. As she re-negotiates relationships with her family, she also explores her sexuality.

Betty's self-empowerment begins when she starts to earn money. She exhibits a child-like delight in her new-found independence: 'Betty's been at work this week, Cathy...And the money, I feel like a child with the money, Clive always paid everything but I do understand it perfectly well' (p. 313). Together with the economic independence, earning her own money has roused in Betty a

sense of her own self-worth. She tells Cathy after they have counted her money: 'Look what a lot of money, Cathy, and I sit behind a desk of my own and I answer the telephone and keep the doctor's appointment book and it really is great fun' (p. 314). Although she is again operating as the subordinate to a man, she has become financially self-supportive and has therefore begun to empower herself. She is able to treat Martin and Cathy to ice-creams, and derives pleasure from telling Martin, 'No, the ice-cream was my treat, Martin' (p. 316). The hope that this financial independence will be aspired to by the next generation comes through her words to Cathy, 'Look Cathy let me show you my money' (p. 313). When Cathy is questioned about the assault on her by the gang of boys, the Dead Hand, she states twice, 'Took my money' (p. 317/8), which suggests that she has already begun to see herself as an economic entity. Edward's response to Gerry's question, 'Your mum got you into a dark suit?' is, 'No, of course not. I'm on the dole. I am working, though, I do housework' (p. 315). The particular gender role he has espoused carries with it economic implications.

It is with Betty's growing economic independence that she begins to find sexual and personal freedom, and she describes her experience of masturbation, for the first time since childhood, in her monologue (p. 316). Having been discouraged from masturbating by her mother when she was a child, she narrates the rediscovery of her body and her ability to give herself sexual pleasure. In *Feminism and Theatre*, Sue-Ellen Case reflects on Jacques Lacan's claim that 'culture intrudes upon libidinal pleasure from the moment the infant begins to identify bodily zones' (1988: 119): 'In other words, in infancy the body feels pleasure anywhere and everywhere – it is the culture which imposes limited erotic zones'. She states:

'Once attuned to cultural laws, the child then perceives that there is something like a self, a discrete unit of identity (Lacan's 'mirror stage'). He trades his earlier, undefined realm of self-satisfaction for the desire to be a self. The self is actually a cultural ideal, alienating him from his libidinal pleasure. The organisation of selfhood then drives him into the symbolic order of the culture. Thus, the subject's participation in the world of symbols is always marked by an alienation from the satisfaction of libidinal desires and the resulting state of unfulfilled desire' (1988: 119/120).

Betty's effacement of herself, as the subject of the male gaze, had been so extreme that 'I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there': as the 'Other', Betty has to re-discover her physical self. In this monologue, she reflects that, 'I used to think Clive was the one who liked sex. But then I found I missed it'. She recounts how when she touched herself she was afraid that her 'hand might go through space' (p. 316). She discovers that 'there is somebody there' (p. 316), finding her own body and her own pleasures, unmediated by a male presence. She exposes the role of traditional views and of patriarchy itself in causing her to deny her sexuality by asserting

that 'I felt angry with Clive and angry with my mother and I went on and on defying them...Afterwards I thought I'd betrayed Clive. My mother would kill me. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them.' Her acknowledgement and acceptance of this separateness, and her discovery of her sexuality, is evident when she concludes, 'Sometimes I do it three times in one night and it really is great fun' (p. 316).

The placement of Betty's monologue in the second act varies in the different versions of *Cloud Nine*. For the first American production, directed by Tommy Tune in New York, Churchill agreed to allow the monologue to be moved to the end of the play, immediately preceding the final embrace between Betty and her old self¹⁵. In her introduction to the 1984 Methuen edition, Churchill notes that this change provides the play with 'more of an emotional climax'. She further notes that it emphasizes 'Betty as an individual', rather than the 'development of a group of people'. In the 1985 Methuen and 1989 Nick Hern editions, Churchill expresses her preference for the play not to end with Betty's self-discovery, but with her moving beyond that to a first attempt to make a new relationship with someone else. Thus, in the play as first performed, Betty functions as a voice of change rather than as the voice of change, while in the New York production a climax is reached through Betty's development.

Betty's personal 'healing' allows her to recognize the unconventional sexual choices of her children, and, accordingly, she accepts the endless sexual possibilities in a free society. She openly asks Gerry, 'So what I'm being told now is that Edward is 'gay' is that right?' (p. 319/20). Whereas earlier she comments that, 'I think I've known for quite a while but I'm not sure. I don't usually think about it, so I don't know if I know about it or not' (p. 317), she comes to suggest buying a house in which the entire family could live together. Betty begins to display an ability to assert her own needs in terms of relationships, and tries to initiate a new relationship, albeit mistakenly with a homosexual, Gerry. The fact that Gerry is a member of the working class indicates that Churchill has not omitted the pervasive presence of capitalism from her considerations. Betty tells Gerry, 'But if there isn't a right way to do things, you have to invent one' (p. 319), which is a significant statement in view of the rigid codes implicit in the first act. She has perceived the need to overcome the arbitrarily imposed Symbolic order, and create one's own individual codes of behaviour. Her acceptance of herself as well as her children is encapsulated in her statement, 'Well people always say it's the mother's fault but I don't intend to start blaming myself. He seems perfectly happy' (p. 320). Betty is learning to like her own gender, and has begun to affirm freedom of choice. Her dramatic growth offers a statement of

¹⁵ This version of the script is found in the French's acting edition.

hope as it proves the capacity for change. She has reached a new awareness of herself, and is able to assimilate her former self into the self she has become.

As Betty becomes liberated from the world of the first act, haunting figures from this act appear and admonish her. Maud enters to warn her about being 'unprotected' (p. 316), but Betty has learnt to protect herself: 'But mother, I have a job. I earn money' (p. 316). Ellen appears to repeat her question from the first act, 'Betty, what happens with a man?' (p. 316), and tells her, 'Don't forget me, Betty'. These visitors from her past are determined to bring history into the contemporary world. At the end of the play the spectre of Clive appears to voice disapproval of Betty's independence and connect her rebellion against Victorian sexual mores to a communist take-over of Africa. Clive has the last word, reminding the audience of how far-reaching and enduring his socio-political structures are. His words have, however, lost their power. He now seems more wishful than dictatorial: 'You are not that sort of woman...I can't believe you are' (p. 320). Clive's presence is displaced as he exits and Betty embraces herself from the first act.

The moment of Betty's loving embrace with the ghost of her past self is the true climax of *Cloud Nine*, even though the 'Cloud Nine' song is a high point of the play. This embrace signifies the union of Betty's two identities. Aston posits that in the Lacanian model the position of the female subject is one of double alienation, and quotes Sue-Ellen Case to further explain this:

'If I might expand Lacan's metaphor in order to include the possibility of the female subject, 'she' also sees in that mirror that she is a woman. At that moment she further fractures, split once as the male-identified subject and his subjectivity and split once more as the woman who observes her own subject position as both male-identified and female' (Aston, 1995: 37).

Aston theorizes that 'the female subject 'cannot appear as a single, whole, continuous subject as the male can because she senses that his story is not her story'' (1995: 37). The double image of Betty's embrace makes a final statement of hope for the future, while effecting a reciprocal relationship between past and present. It 'breaks apart the unitary patriarchal construction of woman and creates an empowering moment of theatrical doubleness for women audience members' (Kritzer, 1991: 127). Further, 'The final image of the split self uniting offers women the possibility of a subjectivity beyond the objectification of the gaze' (Aston, 1997: 37).

By the close of the play, all the members of Clive's family have managed to overcome the strictures that patriarchal definitions had placed on them. Patterns of societal power, nonetheless, prove to be even more resistant to change than sexual patterns. 'Fucking and economics' came into play in the first act in that the constraints imposed on the characters were attached to values

based on ownership: the concept of the family as the property of the patriarch was at the root of issues of gender definition and sexual orientation. Despite the freedom gained through the deposition of the patriarch, the characters cannot easily overcome the capitalist workings of the social system: Lin has gained the freedom to express lesbian desire, but is still limited to a job as clerk in a clothing store. Churchill indicates that the potential for empowerment and change, through sexual pleasure previously denied by societal constraints, does not operate in isolation from economics.

The play challenges the traditional belief in the continuity and unity of individuals in isolation from environmental or historical circumstances, by presenting individuals in two different historical contexts and examining the ways in which they influence and are influenced by these societies. The second act, by juxtaposing strong contemporary and past images, focuses on changes in the structure of power and authority as they affect sex and relationships. Freedom gives rise to uncertainty, and Lin appears to be the only character who is able to make decisions without constant questioning. The other characters seem perplexed by the wide range of possibilities open to them. Changing the pre-existing power relations proves neither easy nor predictable, and Churchill unexpectedly brings together Betty's identities 'to ally the defiant energy of the first act with the greater possibilities of the second' (Kritzer, 1991: 122). This conclusion of the play has, however, elicited varying opinions from critics: some regard the embrace as indicative of further possibilities for change in the future, while others view it as halting any further exploration of feminist issues.

Churchill's dramatization of sexual politics in *Cloud Nine* demonstrates the way in which the personal is political and the political affects the personal, bringing together people's internal states of being and the external political structures which affect them. The play's deepest theme is power: that of colonizer over colony, husband over wife, parent over child. All the characters make changes in their personal lives in the context of these power relations, but they all acknowledge the difficulty of doing so: the options which individuals understand occur as a response to, and hence within, the dominant ideology. Although all the characters in this act do change a little for the better, Churchill indicates that she is aware of the painfulness that change involves. Through the intertwining strands of entrapment and escape, Churchill suggests that there is hope for a society on 'Cloud Nine'. 'Cloud Nine' is some time in the future, when gender relationships are not governed by an imposed power structure, when homosexual identities are not marginalized by heterosexuality, when race is not cause for oppression, and when women have moved beyond the objectification of the gaze.

CHAPTER THREE

TOP GIRLS

Top Girls, staged at the Royal Court Theatre in August 1982, is often cited as one of Churchill's most accomplished plays. In it Churchill calls for collective action in class and female solidarity, levelling criticism against women who advance themselves according to the tenets of patriarchal capitalism. The play stood out against women's playwriting in Britain at the time, which focused only on the question of how individual women could succeed within a society that was seen as 'post-feminist'. Churchill had achieved transatlantic and commercial success with *Cloud Nine*, and *Top Girls*, similarly, was acclaimed in Britain and America. Joseph Papp's production of the play at New York's Newman theatre won the Obie award for 1983, establishing Churchill as a major voice in playwriting.

In *Top Girls* liberal feminism fails dismally and the precepts of Churchill's own preferred political methodology, socialist feminism, prevail. In liberal feminism there is an acceptance of male values as human values. Liberal feminism also emphasizes individual freedom over the common good, and embraces humanism, which is not gender-specific, over feminism which is gender-specific. Male values deny motherhood and homemaking as valuable work, and women must therefore appropriate male values and characteristics in order to be 'successful' – a male-defined term. Individual freedom is possible for middle-class and upper-class white women, who have the economic freedom to leave their children at home with the working-class women they (generally) underpay. In such a system, everyone minds his or her own interests. Thus, women fail to identify their similar needs and aspirations. The roots of liberal feminism are embedded in eighteenth-century enlightenment thought: in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft rebukes the fact that women are kept in a state where their education is restricted and where they are forced to be dependent on their husbands. She espouses the idea of a woman free from a life centred on husband and home, and advocates work outside the home. Betty Friedan's germinal work of the liberal feminist movement of the twentieth century, *The Feminine Mystique* (1974) also encourages women to work outside of the home and to participate in the public forum. She claims that the 'feminine mystique', the idea that women are satisfied with the exclusive roles of wife and mother, is a myth that has left middle-class women's lives empty. Twenty-five years after writing *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan revised her stance in *The Second*

Stage. Here she calls for changes in public values, leadership styles and institutional structures, asserting that women have changed the way that they work, but men have not.

Unlike liberal feminists, Marxist feminists believe that class, not gender, accounts for women's oppression - that women's oppression is a product of the political, social and economic structures associated with capitalism. In terms of Marxist feminism, capitalism is viewed primarily as a system of exploitative power relations. The difference between what the employer pays the worker and the value of that which the worker actually creates is the profit that the employer derives. This surplus value is the key to the exploitative nature of capitalism. For Marxist feminists, the concepts of false consciousness and alienation are extremely important. Marxist feminists examine the relationship of capitalism to the family structure. They emphasize the trivialization of women's work in the home, as well as the low wages and menial nature of women's work outside the home. Churchill has acknowledged that as a middle-class woman, she too has benefited from a system that oppresses others. Her understanding of the issues regarding the lower classes has, however, become more defined through the years.

The elements of class and feminism merge in *Top Girls*, as it examines women in the 1980's at work. Women are portrayed as full participants in the economic system, but at a cost. It examines the 'top girls', women who succeed in a 'man's world' by accepting capitalistic structures and functioning within them, exploring the negative consequences of a system that copies the worst traits of male hierarchy by establishing a female hierarchy. The women in the play have internalized patriarchy, and reproduce the antagonistic exclusivity which feminism deplores as a characteristic of patriarchy. The achievements of the 'top girls' are valueless, as their 'successes' involve the adoption of traits that are destructive. Marlene, like Marion in *Owners*¹⁶, demonstrates that the capitalist impulse is not determined by the biological difference between male and female, but illustrates how women may also take on the values of the masculine. Women like Marlene are driven by the desire to own and control. Members of the dispossessed group, represented by Joyce and Angie, are the victims of the owning classes. Marlene is an individual character as well as a stock figure representative of an era. While *Vinegar Tom* coincided with the interest generated by the Woman's Movement, *Top Girls* was staged at a time when women needed to examine more closely the complexities of feminism in the light of the politics of bonding and sisterhood of the seventies. The play is set in a very specific decade and political context, that of Thatcherism, and feminism in Britain in the eighties

¹⁶ *Owners* was written by Caryl Churchill in 1972, and performed in the same year.

The British tabloid press at the time often represented Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as the ultimate symbol of the capitalist superwoman. Thatcher had been elected to office in 1979, and ostensibly represented a model top girl, a woman who signified what women could achieve in a man's world. The press underscored her image as a self-made career woman, the daughter of a grocer and mother of two who rose through the ranks to a position where she wielded power over men and women alike. Vera Lustig, in her article *Top Girls?*, states, 'We now have a female Prime Minister who displays a quite dazzling insouciance about the needs and aspirations of her less fortunate, less thrusting sisters' (1990: 12). Thatcher, like Marlene, was successful in a competitive, capitalist sense, and for socialist feminists, was therefore not legitimately 'feminist'. Churchill uses Marlene as Thatcher's equivalent in the play, the symbol of the 1980's career woman, or 'superwoman', but, indeed, the play is not about Marlene's success but rather about her failures. She fails because in her singular ascent to the top of the corporate ladder, 'female community' is lost. Marlene embraces patriarchal capitalism and in so doing she abandons her less 'fortunate' sisters. The effects of 'superwoman' status on individual women, their families and society more generally, come to light in the play. The oppression suffered by women is systemic: the patriarchal power systems ensure the subjugation of women, their lack of control over their lives and their children's lives.

Churchill probes both inter- and intra-sexual oppression, demonstrating that right-wing feminism is not an option as women who imitate their male corporate counterparts neglect the common good. She questions narrative structures surrounding women and their history and asks audiences to envision what a 'new' woman might be. Churchill avoids an excessively prescriptive approach in that she does not offer a model for this 'new woman': the woman capable of making meaningful changes in her life and in her society is absent from the play.

Although *Top Girls* was staged in 1982, directed by Max Stafford-Clark, ideas for the play began in the late 1970's. As early as 1977 Churchill was making notes on Dull Gret, one of the women from the opening dinner scene, and she had also been considering staging a play in which women from the past have coffee with a woman in the present:

'*Top Girls* was a play whose ideas came together over a period of time and in quite separate parts. I think some years before I wrote it, I had an idea for a play where a whole lot of people from the past, a whole lot of dead women, came and had cups of coffee with someone who was alive now. That idea was just floating around as something quite separate, by itself. Then I started thinking about a play possibly to do with women at work and went and talked to quite a lot of people doing different jobs and one of the places I visited was an employment agency, which later became the focus of the play' (Goodman, 1996: 234).

In an interview with Lynne Truss in *Plays & Players*, Churchill commented:

‘It was also that Thatcher had just become Prime Minister; and also I had been to America for a student production of *Vinegar Tom* and had been talking to women there who were saying things were going very well: they were getting far more women executives, women vice-presidents and so on. And that was such a different attitude from anything I’d ever met here, where feminism tends to be much more connected with socialism and not so much to do with women succeeding on the sort of capitalist ladder. All of those ideas fed into *Top Girls*’ (1984: 8).

Top Girls represents an all-female community, played by an all-female cast. Plays with all-female casts were not uncommon in ‘alternative’ feminist theatre in the seventies and early eighties. It was company policy for some theatre groups, such as the Women’s Theatre Group (which, like Monstrous Regiment, was established in the seventies), to perform plays with roles for women only. But in a mainstream context it was not common for plays with women-only casts to achieve any measure of success. *Top Girls*, however, successfully found its way to mainstream audiences, despite the fact that it takes issue with mainstream bourgeois feminism. This audience appeal can be attributed to Churchill’s theatrically inventive expression of her socialist-feminist standpoint.

The play is characterized by a non-traditional use of language and structure. It ebbs and flows from one time frame to another, dialogue overlaps, there is no linear plot, and there is no dramatic resolution. The audience only learns all the facts of the play in the final scene. Commenting on the structuring of the play, Churchill explains:

‘I remember before I wrote *Top Girls* thinking about women barristers – and how they were in a minority and had to imitate men to succeed – and I was thinking of them as different from me. And then I thought, ‘wait a minute, my whole concept of what plays might be is from plays written by men...’ And I remember long before that thinking of the ‘maleness’ of the traditional structure of plays, with conflict and building in a certain way to a climax. But it’s not something I think about very often’ (Goodman, 1996: 232).

Many critics argue that there is a 'female' way of speaking, reading and writing, which is influenced by innate gender characteristics, as well as by culture and learned gender roles. In summary, that men and women differ in their use of language and of writing prose fiction. This perception has been developed by several theorists, such as Helene Cixous, who, in *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), theorizes that men and women differ in the way they write. She claims that women write with their bodies, imbuing their writing with a rhythm that is suggestive of female sexual pleasure. Churchill's statement reflects her awareness of the fact that she writes plays in a tradition that has been defined and structured by male writers, and that the act, or art, of writing, is gender-influenced.

Top Girls opens with a celebration dinner at a restaurant for the play's 'top girl' protagonist, Marlene, who has just been promoted to managing director of the employment agency she works for. She celebrates in the company of women from history, but these characters do not reappear later in the play. The 'real' story of Marlene's life develops in the second act, at the Top Girls employment agency, where the audience observes her interacting with her work colleagues, with women seeking employment and later with her sister, Joyce, and niece, Angie - whom we eventually discover is her own daughter. Angie's wish to conform to Marlene's society is visually represented in her wearing a dress bought for her by Marlene which is in fact too small for her (p. 98). The dress signifies Angie's desire to model herself on the well-dressed career woman, but Marlene dismisses her own daughter's career aspirations as a 'packer in Tesco more like' (p. 120). Angie does not have the necessary tools or traits to succeed in 'a man's world'. The complicated and compromising situation of the 'superwoman' is highlighted when the audience learns that Marlene gave her daughter up to be raised by her sister in order to succeed in her career. 'Rather than depict Marlene as a 'bad mother' or a 'flawed character', Churchill seems to suggest that Marlene is a character at odds with a world which expects too much of women and offers too little support' (Goodman, 1996: 235). In such a world all women, both those who oppress and those who are oppressed, suffer loss. Marlene is as alienated as she is alienating. Her 'achievements' can only be viewed positively when viewed through a patriarchal lens.

The play has been presented as either two acts (as it was in the original production) played with one interval, or as a three-act drama, played with two intervals. Churchill has indicated her own preference for the three-act version, which she claims makes the 'structure clearer: Act One, the dinner; Act Two, Angie's story; Act Three, the year before', but she concludes 'Do whichever you prefer'. (Churchill, 1990: 54). The three-act structure seems to underline Angie's story as the focus of the second act, rather than Marlene's 'achievements' in the workplace. In the first act, several women, both historical and fictional characters, tell their stories. These stories echo and

resonate through the second act. What the audience assumes at first to be a celebration of the remarkable achievements of women becomes a critique of these achievements. In the third act the audience is faced with a nightmare of the future, should the 'top girl' approach persist.

The highly amusing opening dinner party scene establishes a world where women's experiences and stories are given full attention, and in the midst of its hilarity it unleashes most of the play's principal themes, such as the call for collective action, the historical nature of women's oppression, motherhood, the urge to travel, and class issues. The oppression of these women is rooted in patriarchy and in a variety of economic systems: patriarchy has a long history and its manifestations vary from one economic system to another, but it is the oppression of women under patriarchal capitalism that forms the focus of the rest of the play. Marlene, the modern woman, celebrates her promotion with five women from different times and cultures: the travellers, Isabella Bird and Lady Nijo; Dull Gret, a figure in a Brueghel painting; Patient Griselda, the obedient wife from Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* in *The Canterbury Tales*; and Joan, the female 'heresy' held by some to have been Pope between 854 and 856. The dinner guests enter the stage individually and without formal introduction, until later in the play. They interact realistically even though they are aware of the impossibility of this meeting. When Griselda arrives in the middle of the scene, Marlene reflects on this gathering of women with the same interest she has in dessert:

'Now who do you know? This is Joan who was Pope in the ninth century, and Isabella Bird, the Victorian traveller, and Lady Nijo from Japan, Emperor's concubine and Buddhist nun, thirteenth century, nearer your own time, and Gret who was painted by Brueghel. Griselda's in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer because of her extraordinary marriage. I'd like profiteroles because they're disgusting' (Churchill, 1990: 74).

Marlene's nonchalant manner about the collection of women at her celebration prevents the audience from dwelling on the impossibilities of the scene, but it is simultaneously prevented from losing itself in the scene. Marlene arranges the dinner, makes decisions about what they should drink, imperiously gives the waitress commands and often ties conversational threads together. Nonetheless, her presence in this scene, although active, is not compelling. The women of history and fiction dominate the conversation. Churchill's use of these historical characters, both fictional and non-fictional, imbues the scene with a sense of authenticity as well as uncertainty, and places Marlene in an historical context. Further, the audience is unable to locate itself solidly in any specific historical period. Thus the scene defies any logical historical, chronological or spatial representation as Churchill creatively disregards the dramatic conventions which traditionally govern time, place and character.

The area of commonality in Marlene's dinner party guests is their activity: they are travellers, mothers who have lost children, and adventurers. Marlene's points to this in her words: 'I don't think religious beliefs are something we have in common. Activity yes' (p. 60). Churchill has indicated in various interviews that the dinner guests were not chosen in any linear way, and that her choice of women was, in fact, fairly arbitrary. Each character serves a purpose, but the purpose becomes defined as the play develops. Churchill notes how the women she selected had all made significant changes in their lives, had travelled and had also encountered difficulties combining children with their various activities.

Lady Nijo (1271 – 1306)¹⁷ was a Japanese Emperor's courtesan who later became a Buddhist nun, and is known to have travelled across Japan on foot, but her story is embroidered by Churchill. She became the concubine of a retired Emperor in Kyoto at the age of 14, and participated in the elaborate ceremonial and social life of the imperial family. All court events followed complicated rules of decorum: poetry was the chief form of communication and the arrangement of the different layers of a court lady's costume was an art that served to indicate what the occasion was, and to reflect the wearer's status.

Pope Joan's existence in history is less certain. Although not historical fact, it is believed by some that Pope Joan disguised herself as a 'boy' to gain an education. She subsequently fell in love with a young monk at the monastery, and absconded with this monk to travel and study. Churchill would have the audience believe that this monk died and that Joan, as John the Englishman, went on to Rome where she entered the Church, becoming a Cardinal. The story relates that when Leo IV died, she became Pope John VIII, but her identity was revealed when she gave birth during a procession. The shocked crowd stoned her to death and dragged her body through the street.

Dull Gret, the subject from the Pieter Brueghel painting *Dulle Griet* or *Mad Meg* (c. 1562), is pictured wearing an apron and armour, symbolizing her dual roles as woman and warrior, leading a crowd of women through hell and fighting devils. She strides boldly forward, carrying the long sword of the giants of mythology, wearing a helmet and breastplate.

¹⁷ *The Confessions of Lady Nijo*, translated from the Japanese by Karen Brazell, recounts the story of Lady Nijo's life.

Isabella Bird¹⁸, nineteenth-century Scottish traveller, is known as a woman of stubborn eccentricity. Born in Yorkshire, England, in 1831, the daughter of a clergyman, Isabella suffered poor health for an extended period as a young woman. In 1854, on the advice of her doctor, Isabella travelled to the Americas, and she found in travelling the cure for her malady. She travelled extensively, and wrote about her adventures in the books *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* and *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*.

Patient Griselda is known as a character in the literary texts of Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer, and Churchill depicts her as the model of the self-sacrificing woman, denying herself both food and the right to express her own emotions. Although Chaucer's story of the long-suffering wife has become the most well known, he was not the first to write this story: the first known recorded Griselda story is found in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* in 1353. After Boccaccio, Petrarch translated the story into Latin. Griselda has been upheld as the role model for wifely obedience and subservience. She is the embodiment of the promise to 'love, honour, and obey'.

The women's stories intertwine as their speeches overlap, creating a disconnected collage of historical experience, but it is significant that their 'texts' are parallel rather than interactive. Through the use of overlapping dialogue Churchill draws attention to the interrupted communication and understanding between women, while paradoxically unifying them by blurring their personal narratives in the framework of their womanhood. Churchill also uses this technique, with which she had experimented in her short play *Three More Sleepless Nights* (1979), to render the conversations realistic. Churchill conveys the fragmentation in the play's written format by noting interruptions with a /, and a disrupted but continued discussion with a *:

Joan: Damnation only means ignorance of the truth. I was always attracted by
 the teachings of John the Scot, though he was inclined to confuse / God
 and the world.
Isabella: Grief always overwhelmed me at the time.
Marlene: What I fancy is a rare steak. Gret?
Isabella: I am of course a member of the / Church of England. *
Gret: Potatoes.
Marlene: *I haven't been to church for years. / I like Christmas carols.
Isabella: Good works matter more than church attendance.
Marlene: Make that two steaks and a lot of potatoes. Rare. But I don't do good
 works either.
Joan: Canelloni, please, / and a salad.
Isabella: Well, I tried, but oh dear. Hennie did good works.
Nijo: The first half of my life was all sin and the second / all repentance. *

¹⁸ *A Curious Life for a Lady*, from which Churchill took most of Isabella's words, was written by Pat Barr about Isabella Bird.

Marlene: Oh what about the starters?
Gret: Soup.
Joan: *And which did you like best? (Churchill, 1990: 58/9)

While overlapping dialogue functions at one level as a form of 'realistic' speech and as a signifier of the differences between the women, it is skilfully executed in order that the main ideas of each line are heard above the others. The points of interruption and overlap are carefully planned, so that the overall effect is one of a lively celebration and story-telling. Churchill's explanation for her choice of a dinner table for the setting clarifies why the technique of overlapping dialogue seemed most appropriate:

'I suppose I set them around a dinner table because it's a place where you can celebrate and I wanted it to be a festive scene where they were celebrating what they'd done as well as talking about the hard times. It was to be at a level of amusing anecdotes, sharing something, entertaining each other' (Goodman, 1995: 238).

The women all relate their experiences, and compare their individual responses to similar situations. They share their experiences of being daughters, wives, mistresses and mothers. They tell their stories to and at each other, with the audience receiving the totality of their experiences, rather than concentrating on any one experience. As each woman speaks, the others listen to only part of her speech. They simultaneously think about their own stories and interrupt when a line from one story becomes a cue to tell another. As a realistic device, overlapping dialogue is effective as it prevents audience involvement in the personal narrative and highlights the multiplicity of female experience. Occasionally the audience has to absorb what it can from two simultaneous conversations. The interruptions are not necessarily negative or competitive from the audience's standpoint, but create a rich texture of historical experience. The audience must draw its own conclusions, because the women do not listen to or fully understand one another's dilemmas.

The guests all share common experiences as women, but the individual contexts differ, and they are bound by their time periods. Nijo considers herself to have 'belonged' to the Emperor while Isabella would never have considered herself as belonging to Dr Bishop; Griselda's story is met with incomprehension by the rest of the women; and later Nijo sympathizes with Griselda about losing her daughter, but assumes that the removal was due to the child's sex, as would have been the case in her own culture. The ways in which the women's oppression is enacted are different in each case. The characters interrupt and talk across each other to show that they are locked in different discourses. Characters start speeches before previous speeches are concluded, at times because they break off into smaller groups for conversations, and at other times because they

want to pursue their own histories. The women are caught up in their own individual narratives – except in the instance where they pay attention to Gret. The inability to listen to and to share experiences with other women is indicative of the intrasexual oppression Churchill warns against.

Isabella and Nijo are the first guests to arrive at the restaurant, and they launch into stories about the rigid religious and patriarchal structures within which they had to live. Their stories, particularly that of Nijo, are infused with a deep sense of suffering. Nijo leads the audience through her sorrowful tale of rape, prostitution and abandonment, and tells how she had to give up her four children because an Emperor's concubine is not permitted to keep her children. The moment of her greatest triumph was an organized rebellion where she and another of the Emperor's concubines beat the Emperor with a stick as an act of revenge for his allowing his attendants to beat the women across the loins so that they would have sons and not daughters. Isabella's desire to move beyond the oppressive structures is evident in her remark that she 'longed to go home, / but home to what? Houses are so perfectly dismal' (p. 61). It becomes clear, however, that both women have absorbed these cultures to the point that they suffer guilt for their own independent actions. They represent fragmented feminine subjects. Isabella states:

'Whenever I came back to England I felt I had so much to atone for...I did no good in my life. I spent years in self-gratification. So I hurled myself into committees, I nursed the people of Tobermory in the epidemic of influenza, I lectured the Young Women's Christian Association on Thrift...I wore myself out with good causes' (p. 72).

The tension between their internalization of patriarchy and their desire to move beyond it is unequivocal. Isabella declares that she 'always travelled as a lady' and 'repudiated strongly any suggestion in the press' that she was 'other than feminine' (p. 62), but states later that she 'cannot and will not live the life of a lady' (p. 80). She 'swore to obey dear John, of course, but it didn't seem to arise' (p. 75) and 'tried very hard to cope with the ordinary drudgery of life' (p. 65) when married. Anecdotes about Isabella's travels are interwoven with details about her various illnesses. This seems to indicate that she has married her adventurous spirit to the conventional image of the fragile and delicate Victorian woman: 'Such adventures...But even though my spine was agony I managed very well' (p. 67). When she asserts that she was 'more suited to manual work' she describes this 'manual' work as 'cooking, washing, mending, riding horses' (p. 58) – conventional women's activities. Her final journey, at the age of seventy, is to visit the Berber sheikhs and she becomes the first European woman to have seen the Emperor of Morocco. She regards this meeting with the arch-patriarchs as having been a privilege: 'What lengths to go to for a last chance of joy' (p. 83).

When Isabella speaks of her sister, Hennie, she relates how she invited her to join her, and that ‘...Hennie wrote back, the dear, that yes, she would come to Hawaii if I wished, but I said she had far better stay where she was. Hennie was suited to life in Tobermory’ (p. 55). She later adds, ‘I did miss its face, my own pet’ (p. 56). Isabella’s words on Hennie’s death, ‘How could I go on my travels without that sweet soul waiting at home for my letters?’ (p. 65), are reminiscent of those of Harry to Ellen in *Cloud Nine*, suggesting that Isabella has adopted the male ‘privilege’ of being the adventurer. Harry explores the world while a woman faithfully waits for him in the home, hanging on to his every tale and thereby giving him a sense of power, and Isabella re-enacts this. Isabella’s attitude towards her sister is patronizing, as is the attitude of ‘successful’ career women to those women who remain in the home. Marlene’s words later echo this attitude toward a life spent in the home: ‘Of course I couldn’t get out of here fast enough. What was I going to do? Marry a dairyman who’d come home pissed? / Don’t you fucking this fucking that fucking bitch...’ (p. 133). Isabella and Marlene literally leave their blood sisters behind to follow their own pursuits. Isabella doubles with Joyce, Marlene’s sister who has been left behind by Marlene to raise Angie as her own daughter, and the play alludes here to the lack of sisterhood.

Like Marlene and Joyce, Isabella and Hennie were separated by geography. Isabella would leave for months at a time on her exotic foreign travels, returning to Henni in Tobermory. Isabella was nonetheless devoted to her sister and corresponded with her about her travels, in contrast to Marlene, whose obsession with her career means that she barely sees her sister or her daughter. In the final act it is established that Marlene has not visited Joyce and Angie for years. Unlike Hennie, all that Joyce and Angie receive while Marlene is away in America is the clichéd ‘wish-you-were-here’ postcard which Angie treasures.

Nijo spent half of her life in repentance, blaming herself for having tempted men, such as the priest Ariake: ‘The first half of my life was sin and the second / all repentance.*’ (p. 59). She is convinced that his love for her has condemned him to hell: ‘I wasn’t a nun, I was still at court, but he was a priest, and when he came to me he dedicated his whole life to hell’ (p. 64). She also agonizes over having disturbed her father during his prayers before he died: ‘My father was saying his prayers and he dozed off in the sun. So I touched his knee to rouse him. ‘I wonder what will happen’, he said, and then he was dead before he finished the sentence. / If he’d died saying his prayers he would have gone straight to heaven’ (p. 58). She blames herself for the uncertainty of the men’s hereafter.

The dominant role of patriarchy in the lives of Isabella and Nijo is reinforced through their constant references to their fathers: it was the ardent desire of both women to please their fathers.

Isabella states that she ‘tried to be a clergyman’s daughter. Needlework, music, charitable schemes...’(p. 57), and Nijo admits, ‘I tried to do what my father wanted’ (p. 57). She maintains that he ‘was a very religious man. Just before he died he said to me, ‘Serve His Majesty, be respectful, if you lose his favour enter holy orders’’(p. 57). Nijo’s comment further suggests that men are prone to using religion as a tool for oppressing women, although her Buddhist faith and remark that she had ‘never heard of Christianity’ (p. 60) indicates that it is not solely the Christian faith that is guilty of such practices. When Griselda describes how she came to marry the Marquis, Nijo immediately assumes ‘your father told you to serve the Prince’ (p. 75). The powerful presence of the patriarchs is again highlighted in the women’s comments on the deaths of their fathers: Isabella claims that ‘...my father was the mainspring of my life and when he died I was so grieved’ (p. 58), and Nijo states, ‘When father died I had only his Majesty’ (p. 61).

While Isabella and Nijo are fragmented women, Pope Joan and Griselda are male creations. Joan literally effaced herself in order to achieve success by pretending to be a male, while Griselda became a totally passive feminine subject. Joan ‘wanted to study in Athens’ but ‘women weren’t allowed in the library’ (p. 62). She repeatedly emphasizes her detachment from womanhood: ‘I didn’t live a woman’s life. I don’t understand it’ (p. 78). When she left home she ‘dressed as a boy’ (p. 62), and then ‘forgot I was pretending’ (p. 63). She says, ‘I decided to stay a man. I was used to it. And I wanted to devote my life to learning...’ (p. 65). She did not realize she was pregnant because she ‘wasn’t used to having a woman’s body’ (p. 70). She does not understand Griselda’s plight as a woman because she does not perceive herself as a woman. Griselda, meanwhile, perceives herself as a female object, a commodity to be exchanged or dispensed with as the patriarch pleases. In spite of the suffering Walter caused her by taking away her child, she readily comes to his defence: ‘Marlene, you’re always so critical of him...he was very kind’ (p. 76). She confirms her acceptance of the belief that ‘a wife must obey her husband’ (p. 75), and tries to justify his actions: ‘Walter found it hard to believe I loved him. He couldn’t believe I would always obey him. He had to prove it’ (p. 76). Her self-effacing attitude is encapsulated in her comment on her husband’s new bride (who is in fact the daughter she believes to be dead, and is part of another of Walter’s tests): ‘The girl was sixteen and far more beautiful than me. I could see why he loved her’ (p. 78). The idea of the husband as the provider and of the insignificance of the wife is underlined by Griselda when she tells of how she was sent home to her father, wearing only a slip so that the Walter ‘wouldn’t be shamed’ (p. 78): ‘I came with nothing / so I went with nothing’ (p. 78). Her story is ‘like a fairy-story, except it starts with marrying the prince’ (p. 74) as he reinstates her as his wife and returns her children, now grown, to her. Her story ends ‘happily ever after’, but she is ever at the mercy of the Marquis. When Marlene offers Griselda

food, she exclaims, 'I never eat pudding' (p. 74). She has learnt to deprive herself, in this instance on the physical plane, for the benefit of men.

The last story to be told at Marlene's dinner party is that of Dull Gret. Dull Gret's male creator, Brueghel, is usually interpreted as both poking fun at shrewish, aggressive women, and castigating the sin of covetousness, of which Gret is the personification. On the canvas, Gret has spiky red hair and stands tall and thin – which serve as comic indicators in medieval Flemish painting. Churchill re-visions her. Until she tells her story, Gret presents herself as a comic character. She makes short, grunting, and monosyllabic comments, hoards food and wine and steals utensils and serving dishes. The fact that she has ten children seems to mark her status as peasant class. In the 1991 televised production of the play, Gret eats voraciously with her hands and stuffs food into her satchel. But Gret's broken speech is nonetheless powerful. For Churchill, Dull Gret was a peasant without any form of power until her decision to take action.

Dull Gret is central to Churchill's plea for collective action. Throughout the dinner party she speaks only seventeen times, saying in her first fifteen times of speaking only thirty-two words. Towards the end of the scene she is attributed a speech of some 316 words. Up until her one long speech, she had been following the other women's conversations intently, but had either reiterated what they had said, or interjected with words like 'sad'. The sudden launch into her story commands attention to her words. Churchill gives Gret's story importance by showing that the other characters recognize it as being significant. Marlene tells Joan to 'Shut up, pet' (p. 82), and Isabella says, 'Listen, she's been to hell' (p. 82).

The first edition of *Top Girls* was published in 1982, and in the second, post-production version, Churchill makes several subtle but important changes to the text to ensure that Gret's message reaches the audience. As originally written, the speech had no interruptions. The interruptions that Churchill writes in for the later edition are, however, not of the same order as those in the rest of the scene. Here, rather than deflecting attention from the original speaker, Gret, they draw attention to her. Gret describes her descent into hell, remembering the day when she had suffered enough at the hands of her oppressors:

'There's places on fire like when the soldiers came. There's a big devil sat on a roof with a big hole in his arse and he's scooping stuff out of it with a big ladle and it's falling down on us, and it's money, so a lot of the women stop and get some. But most of us is fighting the devils. There's lots of little devils, our size, and we get them down all right and give them a beating...Well we'd had worse, you see, we'd had the Spanish. We all had family killed. My big son die on a wheel. Birds eat him. My baby, a soldier run her through with a sword. I'd had enough, I was mad, I hate

the bastards. I come out my front door that morning and shout till my neighbours come out and I said, 'Come on, we're going where the evil come from and pay the bastard out.'... You just keep running on and fighting / you didn't stop for nothing. Oh we give them devils such a beating' (p. 82).

Her story, recounted in forceful language, is of women fighting against 'the bastards' in hell. The 'bastards' are class and gender oppression, here in the form of soldiery. Grett makes a plea for collective female resistance to this oppression. Some of the women stop to pick up the money the devil scooped out of his 'arse' with a 'big ladle', as Marlene, Nell, Win do in the second act, but most of them fight together. Nijo interrupts, but her interruptions are expressions of enthusiasm at the thought of women fighting together: 'All the ladies come' (p. 82), and 'Take that, take that' (p. 82) when Gret says 'You just keep running on and fighting' (p. 82). Gret's use of both past and present tense carries her message through history, and gives her message the status of an imperative. Churchill replaces Gret's generalized 'Men on wheels. Babies on swords' with the more specific, 'My big son die on a wheel. Birds eat him. My baby, a soldier run through her with a sword' (p. 82). Gret is given a personal motivation for her political action.

The final noteworthy textual alteration is in the final set of stage directions for the scene. In the earlier text it is written 'Nijo is crying'. This is amended to read 'Nijo is laughing and crying' (p. 83), to indicate that intertwined with the hardships and suffering are the sentiments of joy and hope for eventual triumph. Although all of the women around the dinner table are moved by this account of action taken against their oppressors, they do not draw any conclusions from it. The scene thus ends as it began, with a mingling of sorrow and triumph over the history of women. The closing words are, in fact, a final bow to the male world, as Isabella describes her visit to the Berber sheikhs and Emperor of Morocco as 'a last chance of joy' (p. 83). For Churchill, women's history will never change until Gret's call is heeded.

The women's dialogue records both patriarchal oppression and the desire to move beyond the conventional gender divide: Nijo turned from courtesan to nun, Joan acted against the patriarchal order by becoming Pope, and Isabella left the confines of domestic life for travel. However, in serious respects the achievements of all the speaking characters in the first scene, with the exception of Gret, are individualistic and made without actively challenging the systems of oppression. Griselda, who reaches the limits of wifely self-abasement, ultimately wins her children and husband through her absolute compliance with the system. Nijo travels alone as a nun, but only after she has lost favour with the Emperor. Joan becomes Pope, but in so doing she rejects her own sex. Isabella travels widely at the expense of her sister but only begins her travels once her father is dead, and refrains from travelling for the six years of her marriage. Joan is

proud of her scholarly accomplishments and truly enjoyed being Pope, but at the same time she calls herself a 'heresy' for daring to become Pope: 'I had thought the Pope would know everything. I thought God would speak to me directly. But of course he knew I was a woman' (p. 68). Further, Nijo reveals her desire to please the Emperor and her love of fine clothing: 'I can't say I enjoyed my rough life. What I enjoyed most was being the Emperor's favourite / wearing thin silk' (p. 58). Griselda's narrative about becoming the wife of a Marquis after having been a peasant girl signifies the objectification of women in the heterosexual, male gaze. As observed by Elin Diamond in *Making a Spectacle* (1989), the actual costumes worn by these 'top girls' in the dinner scene are suggestive of the complicated historical texts that cover their bodies. Rejection of the masculine is, thus, constantly at odds with the physical and verbal indications of patriarchal oppression. Nijo's constant references to dress in the first act are also indicative of her narrow perception of sexual identities. Her understanding of the masculine and the feminine is informed by confining images, the external pointers. References to male and female clothing form the basis of the account of her rape by the Emperor: 'He sent me an eight-layered gown and I sent it back...My thin gowns were badly ripped...he'd a green robe with a scarlet lining and very heavily embroidered trousers...' (p. 57). She cannot avoid using these stock indicators of masculinity and femininity. In her world, human bodies are also signed according to their respective places in the power order: 'The Empress had always been my enemy, Marlene, she said I had no right to wear three-layered gowns. / But I was the adopted daughter of my grandfather the Prime Minister. I had been publicly granted permission to wear thin silk' (p. 66). She asks:

'Don't you like getting dressed? I adored my clothes. / When I was chosen to give sake to His Majesty's brother, the Emperor Kameyana, on his formal visit, I wore raw silk pleated trousers and a seven-layered gown in shades of red, and two outer garments, / yellow lined with green and a light green jacket. Lady Betto had a five-layered gown in shades of green and purple' (p. 62).

Isabella's references to clothing add another dimension to the problem by suggesting the domesticity of sewing: 'I sat in Tobermory among Hennie's flowers and sewed a complete outfit in Jaeger flannel' (p. 66).

The end of Griselda's story, and the alcohol they have consumed throughout the scene, affects all the women deeply, and their reactions suggest that they begin to achieve some perspective on their histories. Griselda's passivity and loving acceptance in the face of brutality seems to awaken each of them to some of the anger they have about their own situations. In the drunken climax of the dinner scene there is a verbal and physical representation of an attempt to reject patriarchal oppression Joan says, 'I can't forgive anything' (p. 79). Isabella says, 'How can people live on

this dim pale island and wear our hideous clothes? I cannot and will not live the life of a lady' (p. 80). Nijo realizes 'Nobody gave me back my children' (p. 79), and tells a story about how the women got even with the Emperor for allowing attendants to beat them at a ritual ceremony by attacking the Emperor themselves. Even Griselda ventures to say, 'I do think - I do wonder - it would have been nicer if Walter hadn't had to' (p. 81). Gret calls on women to leave their 'baking or washing' to fight the 'devils' in hell, to go 'where the evil come from and pay the bastards out' (p. 82) while Joan speaks some Latin and is sick in the corner. But the women do not evaluate the experiences themselves, or the structures responsible for their suffering, in any coherent or integral way. Their treatment of the waitress, who is invisible as a subject but highly visible as an object, is suggestive of their individualism. She is ordered about by everyone imperiously and is barely acknowledged. These historical 'successful' women are no more to be emulated than Marlene is, and the 'top girls' of the title is as ironic a description of them as it is of Marlene. They have sacrificed part of their female identity to images compliant with a male-dominated world, and it is, ironically, to these images that Marlene toasts.

Motherhood is a central concern in *Top Girls*. Gret has ten children, Nijo claims to have given birth to four, Griselda to two, Joan to one, and Marlene has a daughter although she does not admit to this. Pope Joan lost her child through the agency of men, as when she gave birth to her child during a religious procession she was condemned as the Antichrist and stoned to death. The revelation of her true biological sex results in her, and her baby's, deaths, yet had she revealed her sex prior to this, she would never have been Pope. Lady Nijo was not able to keep her children and remain as a courtesan at court. She tells of her second child, who was taken away by her lover: 'He cut the cord with a short sword, wrapped the baby in white and took it away. It was only a girl, but I was sorry to lose it' (p. 70). When Griselda tells Lady Nijo that the baby her husband took away from her 'was a girl' (p. 76), Lady Nijo comments, 'Even so it's hard when they take it away' (p. 76). Isabella remarks that when she was in China, 'Some people tried to sell girl babies to Europeans for cameras or stew!' (p. 69). The women's various comments powerfully expose the low 'worth' of women – the selling of 'girl babies' neatly encapsulates the relation between economics and gender. Nijo's lover, Ariake, died before her fourth child was born, and Nijo 'didn't want to see anyone' (p. 72): 'It was a boy again, my third son. But oddly enough I felt nothing for him' (p. 72). Nijo is unable to find her identity as a mother without the buttresses of patriarchy. Her own identity is shattered and her child, a part of herself, is foreign to her. Griselda's second child, the male heir, was sent away to be killed because, according to Walter, the child was a peasant's child and would have been rejected by the people. Griselda's reference to her child as a peasant's grandson brings together both patriarchy and class awareness, indicating the importance placed on the male hierarchy. Griselda was led to believe

that her daughter would be killed by her husband, and describes the moment when she was parted from the child: 'I asked him to give her back so I could kiss her. And I asked him to bury her where no animals could dig her up. / It...was Walter's child to do what he liked with' (p. 77). When the women ask how she could allow her husband to kill her children, Griselda simply replies, 'It was easy because I always knew I would do what he said' (p. 77). Griselda and Nijo passively accept the patriarchal authority over the futures of their children, even though Lady Nijo cries and says, 'Nobody gave me back my children' (p. 79) when she hears that Griselda's children were eventually returned to her. Gret does not accept this and claims agency: '...I'd had enough, I was mad, I hate the bastards...' (p. 82). Like Nijo, Marlene gave up her child without mothering it, but, unlike Nijo, she feels little sense of loss. Both Nijo and Marlene see their daughters later in life, but Marlene sees a daughter who has been left practically hopeless in the absence of motherly love and education, while Nijo's daughter was trained to be like her. Joyce, like Griselda, lost her baby at an early age and also has a daughter (Marlene's daughter) to replace the one she lost. Churchill spans centuries and makes these analogies to remind the audience that there have not been any far-reaching changes for women, and that the women who 'succeed' are the women who appropriate upper-class male values. The economic situation has created two choices for women: the relative poverty of child-rearing, or the emotional alienation of capitalistic pursuits. The ambiguous mother/daughter relationships illustrate the uncertain status of women in a male-dominated society.

Class considerations weave through all the women's stories, culminating in the 'modern reality' of the second and third acts. In *A Curious Life for a Lady*, Isabella's empathy with the working class is stressed in her great pride in having been mistaken for a hired girl on one of her travels (Barr, 1970: 65). Joan rises from a life of poverty as a woman to one of luxury as a man: '...the life of a Pope is quite luxurious...' (p. 70). Gret, who is of indisputable peasant status, does not gain wealth as she fights against the patriarchal system. Griselda shows a strange class-conscious pride in her existence as the ultimate obedient wife: 'I'd rather obey the Marquis than a boy from the village' (p. 75). She speaks of her 'white silk dress and jewels for my hair' (p. 76), and regards her story as a fairy-tale, despite the inhumane treatment by her husband. When Walter tells Griselda that the people refuse to allow royal status either to her or to her children, she does not question this. Nijo expresses her preference for her life of luxury with the Emperor, when she could wear 'thin silk' (p. 58), over her 'rough life' (p. 58). Both Griselda and Nijo are willing to sacrifice part of themselves for the material comforts offered by men, and this self-interested compliance with the system of oppression, be it conscious or sub-conscious, resounds throughout the rest of the play in the person of Marlene. The combined class and gender oppression that Gret urges women to rally against is underscored in the second act through Joyce's words, 'She's

(Angie) not going to get a job when jobs are hard to get. I'd be sorry for anyone in charge of her. She'd better get married...' (p. 97).

Marlene's place in the class system is specific, as is her place in the capitalist system: she is managing director of an employment agency. Joan remarks to Marlene, 'you find work for people' (p. 67), but Marlene only has interest in finding work for a select few, the 'top people' in society. Her disregard for those in inferior positions on the class / economic scale is demonstrated in the first scene by the peremptory manner she adopts in dealing with the waitress who serves her and her guests. The waitress is not a top girl, and, in Marlene's view, needs no consideration. In contrast, she makes attempts to bond with her distinguished dinner guests. Marlene identifies with and participates in the class system, espousing the ethos of individualism. Her celebration of her new position is a celebration of her progression to a higher rank in the hierarchy. This is, for her, 'worth a party' (p. 67).

Marlene toasts herself and her guests, announcing, 'We've all come a long way. To our courage, and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements' (p. 67). Activity (albeit, in truth, misdirected) and 'achievement' impress Marlene. It becomes clear that there is a lack of understanding on Marlene's part as to the overall dynamics of oppression, as she equates individual female action with empowerment. She ostensibly allies herself to an anti-oppressionist position, asking Nijo, 'Are you saying he raped you?' (p. 57), and declaring, 'Walter's a monster' (p. 79). The hollowness of these words becomes evident as the circumstances of her life unfold, particularly as it comes to light that she has abandoned her child for selfish reasons. Marlene's incomplete, or incorrect, perception of women's oppression becomes increasingly clear as the scene proceeds. When Joan tells the group how she had a baby in the street during a papal procession because she 'wasn't used to having a woman's body' (p. 70), Marlene does not perceive this as the inevitable separation of Joan's female body from her male role, but suggests that Joan was acting subconsciously: 'Did you want them to find out?' (p. 70). Joan's account of how the baby's birth resulted in both her and the baby's death sobers the women momentarily, and Marlene wonders, 'Oh God, why are we all so miserable?' (p. 72). Griselda's story about her marriage to Walter disturbs Marlene to the point that she has to leave the stage, but it is Griselda's passivity that disturbs Marlene most. Although Marlene admires Griselda for progressing from a peasant girl to the wife of a Marquis, she urges her to be angry instead of upset, as anger initiates action. When Griselda tells how her daughter was taken from her, Marlene seems horrified, 'But you let him take her? You didn't struggle?' (p. 76). It is not the fact that Walter took Griselda's babies away that agitates Marlene, but Griselda's attitude. In terms of Marlene's understanding it is not unthinkable to dispose of children when they become

obstructions on the path to success. She makes no comment about the fate of Nijo's children, and later in the play we learn that she has chosen her career over her daughter, Angie.

Marlene's toast to herself and the other women around the table as a community of winners does not have much effect on them. Nijo laughs and cries at the end of the scene, reflecting the conflicting feelings they all have about their lives. The contradictions inherent in these women's lives prevent them from establishing a collective historical identity, and the scene powerfully conveys the sentiment that women's oppression must be viewed as historically determined. . Clearly, the future for women rests on a shared understanding of the past. The women's stories seem to echo each other, and this echoing function suggests that similar stories are told over and over again with little change. Griselda's story has been awarded importance in patriarchal western literature by being labelled a 'classic'. It has been told by men three times. Isabella Bird and Lady Nijo told their own stories, and were not awarded such 'status'. Pope Joan's story is generally denied by historians, and Dull Gret's story is classified as satire, as a result of her unusual cultural practices.

After the dinner scene the action proceeds to a series of short scenes in the employment agency, where women seeking jobs and promotion are interviewed by Marlene and her 'top girl' colleagues. The narrative of Angie, Marlene's daughter purported to be her niece, cuts across these scenes. Churchill pursues Marlene's attitude about winners and losers. She (Marlene) becomes an oppressor in this scene, and is distanced from the women around her. Marlene appears to support only those women who can defy structures and triumph, or who can operate within these structures to their own advantage. According to Geraldine Cousin, 'Marlene's values are the prevailing ones of her society which constructs a hierarchy culminating in the top people. The only change from the past is that a small number of women can now scramble to the top of the ladder, alongside, and sometimes ahead of, men' (Cousin, 1989: 97). Churchill carries the audience from the historical context of the oppression and triumphs of women to the everyday workings of a modern office, where oppression occurs on a smaller scale. The only lesson that Marlene seems to have learned from history is that it is better to oppress than to be oppressed. On stage Marlene becomes the only character who is portrayed by one actor throughout the play, which intensifies the focus on her character. She is 'a living image of a power structure that negates her female identity' (Despenich, 1990: 178).

Marlene's interview with Jeanine shows her acceptance and enforcement of patriarchal attitudes to women employees. She is unwavering in terms of her categories and will not listen to Jeanine's

desires for advancement and fulfillment as she regards Jeanine as limited. She repeatedly patronizes her. When Jeanine tells her 'I'm a secretary' (p. 84), Marlene asks, 'secretary or typist?' (p. 84), further diminishing the status of Jeanine's category of women. She also tells her, 'Now Jeanine I want you to get one of these jobs, all right?' (p. 87). Her commission is much more important to her than a satisfactory placement for Jeanine. Marlene marginalizes Jeanine's wishes, while condescendingly telling her, 'If I send you that means I'm putting myself on the line for you' (p. 87). She suspects Jeanine of not wanting a long-term job due to marriage plans. Jeanine tells her 'I'm saving to get married', and Marlene immediately asks, 'Does that mean you don't want a long-term job, Jeanine?' (p. 85). Marlene decides that Jeanine does not have what it takes to perform the job she would like (executive secretary): 'You haven't got the speeds anyway' (p. 86). This contradicts her earlier comment, before finding out that Jeanine is engaged, that 'Speeds, not brilliant, not too bad' (p. 84). She advises Jeanine not to mention her impending marriage because prospective employers will not want to take on a young woman who may leave to have a child:

Marlene: So you won't tell them you're getting married?

Jeanine: Had I better not?

Marlene: It would probably help (p. 85).

Jeanine and Marlene constantly talk over and interrupt one another. Marlene's interruptions are rude and competitive, compared to the chorus of voices in the first scene. These competitive interruptions carry further Churchill's point that women do not listen to or hear one another in any meaningful way, particularly in the competitive climate fostered by capitalism. When Jeanine expresses an interest in working for an advertising company, Marlene asserts that she is inadequate:

Jeanine: I thought advertising.

Marlene: People often do think advertising. I have got a few vacancies but I think they're looking for something glossier.

Jeanine: You mean how I dress? / I can dress different. I

Marlene: I mean experience.

Jeanine: dress like this on purpose for where I am now.

Marlene: I have a marketing department here of a knitwear manufacturer. / Marketing is near enough advertising. Secretary

Jeanine: Knitwear?

Marlene: to the marketing manager, he's thirty-five, married, I've sent him a girl before and she was happy, left to have a baby, you won't want to mention marriage there. He's very fair I think, good at his job, you won't have to nurse him along. Hundred and ten, so that's better than you're doing now (p. 85/86).

Apart from undermining Jeanine, Marlene's words also reveal patriarchal capitalism's hold on her thought processes: marital status, money, the 'inconvenience' of pregnancy, and the role of the 'lower' echelons of women as nurturers (or 'nursemaids') are foremost in her mind in her evaluation of Jeanine and the employment market.

The scene that immediately follows Marlene's interview with Jeanine is set in Joyce's back yard, where Angie, Marlene's biological daughter, and Kit, her younger friend are sitting huddled in a shelter. This 'back yard' setting is suggestive of a working-class, urban environment. Angie is slow and peculiar, and not likely to act in accordance with the 'top girl' philosophy. She is sixteen, but behaves like a child and is often treated as one by Joyce: 'Want a choccy biccycy, Angie?' (p. 91). Unlike the voices of the middle-class women that dominate the linguistic space, 'dull' Angie, like Gret in the first act, is relatively silent. Significantly, in the original Royal Court production the roles of Angie and Gret were doubled by one actress. Angie and Gret are inarticulate but somehow 'visionary' characters. Linguistically, Angie fails to assert authority over Kit, and struggles to hold her own in the verbal power-play between them:

Angie: You know the kitten?
Kit: Which one?
Angie: There only is one. The dead one.
Kit: What about it?
Angie: I heard it last night.
Kit: Where?
Angie: Out here. In the dark. What if I left you here in the dark all night?
Kit: You couldn't. I'd go home.
Angie: You couldn't.
Kit: I'd / go home.
Angie: No you couldn't, not if I said.
Kit: I could (p. 89).

Like the interviewees at the agency, Angie is no match for her brighter friend, who imagines a future for herself as a nuclear physicist.

The glimpse the audience is offered of Angie's life with Joyce is decidedly stark. Angie and Joyce are both resentful of one another. Angie hates her 'mother' (in the person of Joyce), and in turn Joyce shows little affection for Angie. She calls her a 'fucking rotten little cunt' (p. 91) and tells her 'you can stay here and die' (p. 91). Ironically, Joyce's description of Angie mirrors her own life:

'She's not going to get a job when jobs are hard to get. I'd be sorry for anyone in charge of her. She'd better get married. I don't know who'd have her, mind. She's one of those girls might never leave home' (p. 97).

Angie is not a top girl, but she has desperately been trying to tell a story about herself that would reshape her life. She cites Joyce as her oppressor, as the one who limits her freedom and renders her powerless: 'If I don't get away from her, I am going to die' (p. 90). She asserts, 'I'm going to kill my mother' (p. 90). When Angie accuses Kit of being too afraid of blood to watch her kill Joyce, Kit shows Angie her menstrual blood on her finger. Angie licks it to show she is not afraid of blood, adding, 'You'll have to do that when I get mine' (p. 90).

Angie does not murder her mother, but she longs for a change in her situation. She admires Marlene's image and wants to imitate Marlene by leaving home and proving that Joyce's way of life is inferior to Marlene's. The language and images that Churchill invokes in this scene are all extreme. At the end of the scene Angie returns to the stage in a dress that is too small for her. The audience later discovers that the dress was given to her by Marlene, and it thus signposts the direction of Angie's aspirations.

Angie picks up a brick as Joyce scolds her: 'You're not going to the pictures till you've done your room...Have you done your room? You're not getting out of it, you know' (p. 98). Picking up the brick with its implied threat is an empty sign for Kit:

Angie: I put on this dress to kill my mother.
Kit: I suppose you thought you'd do it with a brick.
Angie: You can kill people with a brick.
Kit: Well, you didn't, so (p. 88-89).

For Angie, the act of putting on the dress and picking up the brick were gestures that opened an area of possibility. To Kit, Angie's gestural sign is an empty fantasy. For the audience, however, Angie's gesture is shocking: to the audience, she is uncouth. Angie incessantly bullies Kit in the attempt to subject her: 'Say you're a liar...Say you eat shit' (p. 93). She is at once pathetic, repulsive and needy, and the audience sees in her person the consequence of Marlene's success. Significantly, Marlene is not even present during the scene, but her assessment of Angie can be anticipated: she's not going to make it.

Marlene's co-interviewers, Nell and Win, refer to themselves as 'tough birds' (p. 102), and display the same ideals and approaches as Marlene. Like the men they wish to replace, Nell and Win talk about their potentials and job prospects:

Nell: I wouldn't mind a change of air myself.
Win: Serious?

Nell: I've never been a staying put lady. Pastures new.
Win: So who's the pirate?
Nell: There's nothing definite (p. 100).

It pleases them that Marlene was promoted ahead of a man: 'Our Marlene's got far more balls than Howard...' (p. 100). They are also envious, stating that 'there's not a lot of room upward' (p. 100) as Marlene's 'filled it up' (p. 100). When Marlene asks them, referring to this promotion, 'Do you feel bad about it?' (p. 104), Nell replies, 'I don't like coming second' (p. 104), but Win adds, 'We'd rather it was you than Howard...' (p. 104). This overt disregard for men is also evident in a conversation between Marlene and Joyce in the final act:

Joyce: And men?
Marlene: Oh there's always men.
Joyce: No one special?
Marlene: There's fellas who like to be seen with a high-flying lady. Shows they've got something really good in their pants. But they can't take the day to day. They're waiting for me to turn into the little woman. Or maybe I'm just horrible of course.
Joyce: Who needs them?
Marlene: Who needs them? Well I do. But I need adventures more. So on on into the sunset...I think I'm going up up up (p. 137).

Win, Nell and Marlene see themselves as being in competition with men, and in this respect they support one another, but in the context of the capitalistic structure they support, they are also in competition with one another. This tension between them as women and as 'top girls' fills their lives with contradictions as image and identity are discordant. Like Marlene, Nell and Win are living an image. But if Marlene, Nell and Win have 'balls' (p. 100), they cannot fully realize themselves as women as well. Win tells Angie about her life later in the scene, relating her extensive travels, drinking problems, failed relationships and nervous breakdown, but speaks as though it were someone else's life:

'Oh yes, all that, and a science degree funnily enough...You don't have to be qualified as much as you might think. Men are awful bullshitters, they like to make out jobs are harder than they are. Any job I ever did I started doing it better than the rest...So I'd get unpopular and I'd have a drink to cheer myself up. I lived with a fella and supported him for four years, he couldn't get work. After that I went to California...Then I went to Mexico...I came home, went bonkers for a bit, thought I was five different people, got over that all right, the psychiatrist said I was perfectly sane and highly intelligent. Got married in a moment of weakness and he's inside now...' (p. 119)

She does not blame the image she has embraced for any of her problems. Her only solution to the pressure she feels is to embrace more resolutely the power relationship with her clients that her job provides her with.

The 'top girls' have lost touch with who they are, and the 'unsuccessful' women try to be like them, not realizing the price they have to pay to succeed in the way that these women have. The barrier between the two types of women is represented on the stage by the desks that separate the top girls from their clients. Win interviews Louise, who tries to 'pass as a man at work' (p. 106), and is appropriately doubled as Pope Joan¹⁹. Louise wants to leave her company after 20 years in middle management as she feels the company does not appreciate her. She has a valid grievance, but she is unable to express it effectively because she has tried to divorce herself from her sex: 'I don't care greatly for working with women, I think I pass as a man at work...there is a kind of woman who is thirty now who grew up in a different climate. They are not so careful. They take themselves for granted. I have had to justify my existence every minute, and I have done so, I have proved – well' (p. 106). Louise has dissociated herself from her sex in order to succeed in the corporate environment. She would like Win to understand her as a woman, but since she has spent years 'passing as a man', and Win has tried to imitate men by acting aggressively, they cannot succeed at that kind of relationship. Louise acknowledges and respects the power relationship inherent in the interview situation. She will probably end up accepting the job at the cosmetics company that Win offers her, a job that is 'easier for a woman' (p. 106).

Win asks Louise her age, and Louise tries to be vague, stating, 'I'm in my early forties' (p. 105). Louise asks her, 'Exactly?' (p. 105), and she replies, 'Forty-six' (p. 105). Win reminds Louise that her age is a 'handicap': 'It's not necessarily a handicap, well it is of course we have to face that, but it's not necessarily a disabling handicap, experience does count for something' (p. 105). This theme, of age and the associated waning of female desirability in the male gaze, can also be identified in Isabella's constant references to her age in the first act. She repeatedly makes mention of her age when recounting her adventures, for example, she describes how when she 'sat in Tobermory among Hennie's flowers...I was fifty-six years old' (p. 66), and is clearly aware of the benefits of youth for women: 'Well I always travelled as a lady and I repudiated strongly any suggestion in the press that I was other than feminine...There was no great danger to a woman of my age and appearance' (p. 62/63). She frankly states, 'When I was forty I thought

¹⁹ The actress playing Louise doubled in the role of Pope Joan in both the British and American original productions.

my life was over' (p. 61). Churchill demonstrates how, throughout history, the male gaze has operated to marginalize older women for what it has viewed as diminished physical appeal.

The women facing the 'top girls' in the interviews are advised to suppress parts of their true stories. The agency's advice that the interviewees suppress their narratives recalls the suppression of the earlier 'historical' narratives. Their stories would limit their chances of employment by the higher ranking operators in the patriarchal order. Win tells Louise that she must not talk too much in an interview, to avoid mentioning her training of many men who have moved up the corporate ranks while she has remained in the same position: 'You shouldn't talk too much at an interview' (p. 107). Ironically, Louise replies, 'I don't. I don't normally talk about myself...I only talk to you because it seems to me this is different, it's your job to understand me, surely. You asked the questions' (p. 107). Churchill heightens the irony through Win's words, 'I think I understand you sufficiently' (p. 107). Win in reality understands nothing about Louise, and is not interested in her story. She is too preoccupied with her own story:

Win: Do you drink?

Louise: Certainly not. I'm not a teetotaler, I think that's very suspect, it's seen as being an alcoholic if you're teetotal. What do you mean? I don't drink.
Why?

Win: I drink (p. 107).

Later in the scene, Nell conducts an interview with Shona, a young girl who wants to find a good job. She has no real experience, but initially manages to mislead Nell about her previous jobs. During this initial part of the interview, when Nell perceives Shona as a potential top girl, she treats her with some regard: 'Video systems appeal? That's a high-flying situation' (p. 116). Nell displays interest when Shona, speaks about a possible career in computer sales, and tells her of the difficulties that beset women in that field:

'And what about closing....Because that's what an employer is going to have doubts about with a lady as I needn't tell you, whether she's got the guts to push through to a closing situation. They think we're too nice. They think we listen to the buyer's doubts. They think we consider his needs and his feelings' (p. 115).

Shona presents herself in the 'tough girl' manner she believes will be pleasing to Nell, telling her, 'I never consider people's feelings' (p. 115). When Nell tells her, 'I was selling for six years, I can sell anything...I'm jolly as they come but I'm not very nice' (p. 115), Shona echoes, 'I'm not very nice' (p. 115). As the interview proceeds, Nell realizes that she has misjudged Shona. Shona's lack of experience as a top girl becomes evident when she manufactures a story about life on the road:

'I have a Porsche...I'm selling electric things. Like dishwashers, washing machines...I sell a lot of fridges...People want to buy fridges in the summer because of the heat melting the butter and you get fed up standing the milk in a basin of cold water...And I stay in hotels at night when I'm away from home. On my expense account...I go down to the bar, have a gin and tonic...Then I go into the dining room and have dinner. I usually have fillet steak and mushrooms, I like mushrooms...I like having a salad on the side. Green salad. I don't like tomatoes' (p. 117).

Nell immediately responds, 'Not a word of this is true, is it?' (p. 117). Shona has not yet sacrificed her identity to the image, even though she thinks she has. She has simply admired the trappings of that image.

Angie's arrival at the office takes place in between the two interviews. The scene of Angie's meeting with Marlene places the encounter between mother and daughter on the level of business. Angie does not seem to want anything, and Marlene finds this kind of passivity disconcerting. She repeatedly asks Angie if she feels all right when Angie offers no explanation for her presence. Marlene has to draw information out of her because the usual power dynamics implicit in an interview do not work in this encounter: 'Sit down. Do you feel all right?...So where's Joyce...Did you come up on a school trip then?...Did you come up with a friend?...' (p. 108). Marlene can only relate to others within the framework of a power structure, but Angie cannot see the barriers:

Marlene: How did you get past the receptionist? The girl on the desk, didn't she try to stop you?

Angie: What desk? (p. 107)

They are interrupted by Rosemary Kidd, the wife of the only male staff member in the Top Girls agency. Howard Kidd, who is unseen, has been passed over for promotion in favour of Marlene. Mrs. Kidd is desperate for Marlene to become 'unavailable after all for some reason' (p. 113) as her husband would be the 'natural second choice' (p. 113). Marlene assumes control of the situation, finally telling Mrs. Kidd to 'piss off' (p. 113). It is a case of the housewife confronting the career woman, and 'we are offered the fleeting, but striking, image of a limiting stereotype of the past confronting a limiting prototype of the future' (Brater, 1989: 43). Angie is 'mesmerized by this prototype' (Despenich, 1990: 184) and seats herself at Win's desk to taste this 'power'. She admires Marlene's power: 'I knew you'd be in charge of everything' (p. 110), and tells her, 'I think you were wonderful...You told her to piss off' (p. 113). She later expresses a desire to work at Top Girls, but while discussing this with Win, Win lapses into a monologue about her own life - and Angie falls asleep. Marlene's assessment of her 'niece' is unflattering:

Marlene: Is she asleep?
Win: She wants to work here.
Marlene: Packer in Tesco²⁰ more like.
Win: She's a nice kid. Isn't she?
Marlene: She's a bit thick. She's a bit funny.
Win: She thinks you're wonderful.
Marlene: She's not going to make it (p. 120).

Marlene's pessimistic pronouncement does not have its full impact until the end of the play, when the audience learns that Marlene is, indeed, Angie's mother. Marlene's dismissal of her own daughter as someone who is 'not going to make it' becomes shocking once their relationship is confirmed. Angie's silenced, sleeping presence at the close of this act as Marlene verbalizes her destiny prefigures her waking-nightmare state at the close of the play when, in Marlene's presence, she delivers the final, one-word line, 'Frightening' (p. 141).

The final act stages a confrontation between Marlene and her working-class sister Joyce, a confrontation which derives from both class and gender issues. The act is set in Joyce's kitchen a year earlier, introducing a further time shift, when Marlene visited Joyce and Angie on what Angie calls 'the best day of my whole life' (p. 110). The visit has been arranged by Angie without Joyce's knowledge. Marlene has kind words and presents for Angie, but already perceives her as someone who will never be a top girl. The relationship between Marlene and Joyce is complicated by the fact that Marlene has not visited for six years. Marlene has rejected her closest community, her sister and her daughter, to pursue her career. This loss of contact becomes evident, and Marlene is not even aware that her sister's husband, Angie's 'father', moved out three years previously. She tells Joyce, 'I don't know what you're like, do I' (p. 123), and, referring to Angie, she says, 'How do I know / what she's like?' (p. 123), while Joyce maintains, 'You could be married with twins for all I know...' (p. 128). Marlene and Joyce quarrel their way to the end of the play, as Angie leaves the stage. Their arguments elicit information about the working-class origins that Marlene has erased from her history, and information about a seventeen-year-old Marlene who gave her baby daughter to her sister in her flight from her working-class roots.

It comes to light that the source of Joyce's contradictory feelings about Angie is due to her losing her own child while looking after her (Angie), but Marlene does not even remember that Joyce told her this. She immediately refers to her own abortions:

²⁰ Tesco is a British supermarket chain.

Joyce: Listen when Angie was six months I did get pregnant and I lost it because I was so tired looking after your fucking baby / because she cried so much – yes I did tell

Marlene: You never told me.

Joyce: you - / and the doctor said if I'd sat down all day with

Marlene: Well I forgot.

Joyce: my feet up I'd've kept it / and that's the only chance I ever had because after that –

Marlene: I've had two abortions, are you interested? Shall I tell you about them? Well I won't, it's boring, it wasn't a problem. I don't like messy talk about blood / and what a bad

Joyce: If I hadn't had your baby. The doctor said.

Marlene: time we all had. I don't want a baby. I don't want to talk about gynaecology (p. 135).

Marlene has used Joyce as a wife model in order to succeed in the labour market. Kritzer comments:

'Marlene's rise to the top has been founded upon Joyce's willingness to take upon herself, without compensation, the 'messy', female-identified tasks that Marlene does not even want to talk about. Marlene's labour in the public market-place, like that of a traditional husband, depends on Joyce's labour in the home for its profitability' (1991: 147).

Churchill's socialist-feminist critique of bourgeois-feminist values is highlighted here, as Joyce, the working-class mother-figure is represented as economically, socially and culturally deprived in comparison to Marlene. Marlene has prospered through her 'heartless', selfish life, while Joyce has suffered as a result of her acceptance of a life mothering her sister's child.

In Pat Barr's study of Isabella Bird (1970), it is noted that Hennie, like Joyce, satisfied a maternal need by looking after and educating a young girl from their village. But Joyce does not wish Marlene to perceive her as having been eager to care for Angie: she would like Marlene to understand that she left Angie in a situation that was not ideal. Marlene's choice was one which benefited her alone.

In the first act, the travel discourses of Isabella and Nijo illustrate how geographic mobility relates to independence. Similarly, while Marlene has enjoyed working in America and now has the challenge of managing the agency in London, Joyce remains trapped in their hometown, with its limited employment opportunities for women. Women seeking jobs through the employment agency also equate travel with career opportunities: Jeanine would 'like to travel' (p. 86) and Shona dreams about an expensive car and high-powered selling up and down the M1: 'I have a Porsche. I go up the M1 a lot. Burn up the M1 a lot...Staffordshire, Yorkshire, I do a lot in

Yorkshire' (p. 117). Angie's trip to London to see her 'aunt' is also her travel adventure, her hope for change. She states, 'I want to go to America. Will you take me?...People who go keep going all the time...They go on Concorde and Laker and get jet lag...I want to be American' (p. 129). Travel seems to be perceived by the women as a key to freedom, as an escape from their unhappy lives. Joyce, however, realistically states, 'I'm right here where I was. And will be a few years yet I shouldn't wonder' (p. 123). Without fundamental change, there will be no real independence.

In *Literature and Gender*, Lizbeth Goodman maintains that 'Joyce comes closest to being a 'feminist character' in her dedication to the 'feminist cause' of working together with other women' (1996: 240). For example, she visits her mother every week: 'I go and see her every week...Somebody has to' (p. 132/133). Goodman adds that Joyce does, however, show 'signs of strain – there is a crumbling of her faith in 'sisterhood' as she remains trapped in a working-class culture and in her role as an adoptive mother, so is unable to connect with many other women or make much of a career for herself' (1996: 240). To portray Joyce simply as a victim would ignore her emotional battering of Angie, her acceptance of her father's physical battering of her mother and Marlene's assertion that Joyce 'could have left':

Marlene: You could have left (p. 130)
Joyce: Who says I wanted to leave?
Marlene: Stop getting at me then, you're really boring.
Joyce: How could I have left?
Marlene: Did you want to?
Joyce: I said how, / how could I?
Marlene: If you'd wanted to you'd have done it (p. 130).

Marlene determinedly 'left' the life Joyce has found herself unable to leave: 'Of course I couldn't get out of here fast enough. What was I going to do? Marry a dairyman who'd come home pissed? / Don't you fucking this fucking that fucking bitch...fucking telling me what to fucking do fucking' (p. 133). She is represented in a restaurant, at work and in Joyce's house, but never in her own home, indicating that she has indeed escaped the confining (through the liberal feminist lens) space of domestic life.

Marlene's acute class awareness and inability to divorce the concepts of career and children for the benefit of the latter is underlined in her statement, 'I could have taken her [Angie] with me...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' (p. 134). When Angie states, 'She hasn't been here since I was nine...' (p. 125), Marlene remarks, 'Is it that long? Doesn't time

fly?' (p. 125). She is devoid of any feelings for her daughter. Marlene relegates Angie to the ranks of traditionally unimportant women – this lack of importance owing to the 'nurturing' nature of their work and the poor remuneration associated with such work - asking her, 'Do you want to work with children, Angie? / Be a teacher or a nursery nurse?' (p. 126). Joyce tells Marlene that Angie has 'been in the remedial class the last two years' (p. 131), but Marlene does not acknowledge this statement, as it probably confirms for Marlene her notion that Angie is 'not going to make it'. Angie nonetheless regards Marlene's visit as 'better than Christmas' (p. 126). A sense of the tragedy of the situation can be detected in Angie's hopeful wish for some acknowledgement by her mother: 'You were here for my birthday when I was nine...You remember my birthday? / You remember me?' (p. 128).

Marlene tells Joyce that she is too critical of Angie, and that 'she'll be all right' (p. 140). Joyce, however, contends, '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' (p. 140). She proceeds to accuse Marlene of being 'one of them' (p. 140). 'Them' in the dialogue refers to Marlene and to the conservative Thatcher government in Britain at the time. Marlene speaks of Thatcher with admiration, claiming, 'She's a tough lady, Maggie. I'd give her a job...First woman prime minister. Terrifico. Aces. Right on...' (p. 138). Joyce replies, 'What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms Hitler. Got a lot done. Hitlerina...' (p. 138). Joyce's observation that nothing has changed transports the audience back to the dinner party scene. The abusers have simply changed their appearance.

The sisters claim to love each other, but they cannot suppress the real source of conflict between them: Marlene's participation in a structure that oppresses Joyce. Marlene cries when Joyce tells her that it would be of no consequence if she did not come back for another six years. When she stops crying she comments, 'I knew I'd cry if I wasn't careful' (p. 136). Crying, traditionally associated with emotional and hysterical women, is too 'feminine' for Marlene. Marlene starts to boast about her future and the future of England with Margaret Thatcher in power, and negates her sister's identity in order to reassure herself about her own choice: 'Bosses still walking on the workers' faces? Still Dadda's little parrot? Haven't you learned to think for yourself? I believe in the individual. Look at me' (p. 138). Although Marlene tells Joyce, 'I don't believe in class. Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes' (p. 140), it is evident that she despises the working class: 'I hate the working class / which is what you're going...to go on about now, it doesn't exist any more, it means lazy and stupid. / I don't like the way they talk. I don't ...like beer guts and football vomit and saucy tits / and brothers and sisters...' (p. 139). The unquestionable impact of 'class' on their lives and on their relationship is further highlighted

through Joyce's interjections. Joyce, who has 'four different cleaning jobs' (p. 136), states, 'I spit when I see a Rolls Royce, scratch it with my ring / Mercedes it was...I hate the cows I work for / and their dirty dishes with blanquette of fucking veau' (p. 139/140), and adds, '...the eighties is going to be stupendous all right because we'll get you lot off our backs' (p. 140). Marlene tries to end the discussion with Joyce once her values are questioned: 'I didn't really mean all that...But we're friends anyway' (p. 141). She tries to make amends, but Joyce says, 'No, pet. Sorry' (p. 141).

The scene closes with Angie's awakening from a nightmare. She utters the final word of the play: 'frightening'. Max Stafford-Clark, the director of the Royal Court performance, claims that Angie has not overheard the conversation between Marlene and Joyce, but has woken from a nightmare. Churchill (1990: 250) explains that while she did not intend for Angie to overhear, it is equally possible that she does. It is left to the audience to interpret what 'frightening' refers to: Marlene's politics, the sisters' shared history, the unbridgeable rift between the two sisters, or the only future that Angie is allowed to dream for herself. Angie's future seems even more frightening when we consider that the last statement of the play in chronological time is that Angie is 'not going to make it'. Marlene behaved as she did throughout the play after this encounter with her sister and daughter. Marlene's matter-of-fact statement about Angie's lack of prospects is frightening, since Marlene represents the future.

The theme of class difference manifests itself in various ways in the play, such as in the positioning of the waitress as the character who serves but does not speak, and in the division of roles and experience of Marlene and Joyce. In her own family, Marlene has practised capitalist exploitation by allowing her economically disadvantaged sister to care for her child: Joyce uses her financial resources and labour to raise Marlene's child, and Marlene actually profits from this as it gives her the opportunity to pursue her own career. It is also expressed in the scene where Marlene instructs Jeanine on how to dress for success. Here Marlene is the middle-class woman looking down on the working-class woman by implying that her appearance and values are unacceptable. When Angie sprays on the fancy perfume that Marlene gives Joyce as a gift in the final scene, she states, 'Now we all smell the same'²¹(p. 122). These words carry the hope for sisterhood, but the audience is aware that this is veneer, and that confining class differences need to be overturned before women can truly 'smell the same'.

²¹ These words are reminiscent of Clive's words in *Cloud Nine*: 'Women are irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful, and they smell different from us' (p. 282).

In 1991 *Top Girls* was revived for BBC television (and included on an Open University/BBC video in 1995) and the stage ²². By 1991 times had changed, and what had been in 1982 a provocative play about women's current status was suddenly reviewed as a play about the conflicts facing women in the modern era more generally. The Thatcherite aspect of Marlene's character, and all its negative associations, was highlighted in 1991 in view of the altered political and social climate in which the play was performed.

For the 1991 production, Max Stafford-Clark undertook dialect work ²³, and the actors also studied magazines of the period, establishing that the career woman trend was stronger then. In the 1980's there was a greater pressure on women to 'make it', which involved an aggressive approach. At present there seems to have been a shift towards environmental issues and children, even though women are expected to combine children with a career. Deborah Findlay²⁴, the actress who played Isabella Bird, Joyce and Mrs Kidd in both productions, stated in an interview for *Plays and Players* that the play's language has dated a little: 'Marlene and her colleagues use a terse, insinuating exec-speak, all 'smart bird', 'pushy lady' and 'pretty fella'. That 'up-and-at-em' brazen, ambitious language is gone now...' (1991: 15). Marlene promises, 'Not a word about the slimy unions will cross my lips' (p. 138), but this line is now dated as that the trade unions were defeated during the 1984/85 Miners' Strike. Joyce's roots are in solid Labour trade unionism, but the Labour party has become more middle-of-the-road. The influx of disenchanted town-dwellers into rural areas would provide Joyce with more cleaning jobs, but Angie would find that both work and Social Security have dwindled.

Churchill initially considered elucidating the play's message by playing out the possibilities of Angie's life. She thought Angie might reject Marlene's values and then eventually join a feminist collective. But she finally decided not to include a feminist role-model, keeping the play as a development of ideas about the progress of women like Marlene. This decision resulted in a provocative and theatrically innovative play. The play's open-endedness has resulted in some misinterpretations of Churchill's focus, but she is nonetheless committed to maintaining the complexity of the play's focus.

Churchill's disruption of narrative sequence is contrary to the audience's expectations of sequence. If one was to follow a chronological ordering of Angie's story, Angie's nightmare

²² The 1991 stage version was recorded for television before it was performed on stage.

²³ Joan Washington, the dialect coach, pointed out that there are only four notes in the dialect of Suffolk, where Joyce grew up and lives.

²⁴ Deborah Findlay also played three roles in the production which visited New York in 1982, and won an Obie award.

would be before Marlene's comment about Angie – she's not going to make it. One would perceive the exchanges between Kit and Angie during the brick episode as having led to Marlene's verdict about Angie. The events would be interpreted as givens, but Churchill has not allowed the action to be perceived in this way. Churchill establishes an effective dramatic irony by moving backward and inward through the play's structure into Marlene's life. The audience must evaluate the meaning of Marlene in each context in which she appears, and then re-evaluate her when Churchill moves the focus backwards in her life. It then has to be decided if Marlene is really successful in a meaningful way. By distancing the audience from chronological development, Churchill uses stage time to create an active dynamic between the audience and the play's message. The tension between the chronological sequencing and Churchill's sequencing is a violation of the audience's expectations, and can be identified with Brecht's 'Verfremdung': violating 'givens' to smash through the barriers set up by reason. Brechtian techniques are used to create innovative theatrical contexts in which to examine Marlene's shortcomings.

The doubling of actors' roles is another device used in the play that earmarks it as innovative theatre. According to Churchill, the practice of doubling actors' parts was in fact a device initially used to reduce production costs. Deborah Findlay insists that there is no significance behind the doubling of characters: 'I've looked for it, but it really isn't there. It's just to do with convenience, and who's suitable for which roles' (Aston, 1997: 38). Nonetheless, whether intentionally or not, apart from ensuring that accomplished actors fill even the minor roles, this doubling of roles attributes sign value to the actors' bodies. When one actor plays the part of two different characters in a production, the audience begins to make associations between the characters that might not have otherwise been made. For example, when the same actress who played Dull Gret later appears onstage as Angie, the audience begins to make connections – the comic Dull Gret with the alternately shocking and pitiful Angie. Dull Gret's speech, like Angie's, is rough talk. Her tale of having marched into hell seems as ludicrous as Angie's fantasy of making objects move by means of her cerebral command. The question of which character is speaking becomes unimportant, as the audience listens to and watches bodies speaking from the stage. Thus the discourse itself becomes the focus. Attention is drawn to Marlene's identification with dominant, masculine values in that the 'unfixing' strategies used in the doubling of other characters do not apply to her character: In Marlene's case, the actor and the role are constant. While the doubling and overlapping techniques suggest fragmentation, 'Marlene's stable positioning functions as an oppressive 'block' to the desires and aspirations of the other characters' (Aston, 1997: 41).

Some critics have misinterpreted the play as a celebration of liberal feminism. Though to most producers, directors and audiences Churchill's play was perceived as thoughtfully and critically feminist, it has not been so for all. Walter Adler's production in West Germany, for example, presented the women of the first act as miserable, competitive and quarrelsome, the women in the employment agency as neurotic, and the waitress as a bunny girl of sorts. In Greece, male members of the audience interpreted the play as a statement on why women should not go out to work themselves. These different interpretations lend weight to the argument that it is extremely difficult to disrupt discursive structures that have operated in various cultures for centuries. Audiences interpret drama in accordance with their own belief/value systems.

The last line of the play, Angie's plaintive 'frightening' (p. 141), suggests that the future for women will indeed be frightening if women such as Marlene continue on their individual capitalist paths. Marlene's abnegation of her responsibility towards Angie can be seen a metaphor for her abnegation of any moral responsibility towards her society. To achieve Marlene's level of success, women have to 'unsex' themselves, appropriating male values of power and callous self-interest. This kind of success is oppression in disguise, and Churchill warns against a society where a 'Hitlerina' (p. 138) will be considered a successful woman. Feminism must combine with humanism, combating poverty and oppression.

The absence of male actors in the play stresses the point that women can oppress one other by retaining male values and roles during men's absence. The failure of liberal feminism is in this insistence on appropriating male values, and Churchill's pointed critique of capitalism suggests that socialist feminism, with its emphasis on women's work and women's community, is the appropriate system to follow. The women trapped in traditional roles face a bleak future, and the future remains as bleak for those women in the 1990's as it was in the Thatcherite years of the 1980's - which were prodigious ones for one class, but not for another.

Churchill pleads with women to listen to one another. Even in the contemporary scenes without overlaps in dialogue, the characters manage not to hear or communicate with one another. Angie falls asleep when Win speaks about her life. Joyce answers Marlene's questions to Angie for her. Win admonishes Louise for talking too much at an interview even though it is she who is talking. Nell advises Shona not to 'listen to the buyer's doubts...[or] consider his needs or feelings' (p. 115). Until women seek to hear and understand one another in order to establish a collective identity, fragmentation will lead to oppression. Joyce, Angie, Louise and Shona are oppressed both intrasexually by the middle-class career women, and intersexually by men. They are tied to

their milieu and class both geographically and socially, and Churchill develops this point in her next play, *Fen*.

CHAPTER FOUR

FEN

In addressing both the struggles against patriarchy and against capitalism, *Fen*, like Churchill's plays discussed in previous chapters, must be seen as a socialist-feminist text. *Fen*, like the play immediately preceding it, *Top Girls*, makes a plea for the dismantling of present systems and structures specifically through collective action in class and female solidarity. While the exploitation that is a feature of life on the fens theoretically affects both men and women, it is the relations that define the existence of the women within the patriarchal sexual hierarchy, as mothers and domestic labourers, that marks their oppression. The difficulties for women to make the required changes are presented in relief against gender and economic oppression. Motherhood forms an integral part of the social system, and is dealt with as a central issue in both *Fen* and *Top Girls*, examined purposefully by Churchill as a construct of patriarchy and capitalism. In both these plays, therefore, Churchill shows women as systematically oppressed by capitalism and patriarchy, and her vision is for women to recognize a shared past and present of oppression, and a continuing need for a shared resistance to patriarchal capitalism.

Fen, written and produced after a workshop with Joint Stock in 1983 and the winner of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for outstanding plays by women, focuses on the lives of working-class women, specifically women agricultural labourers. The director, Les Waters, and Churchill had read Mary Chamberlain's *Fenwomen: Portrait of Women in an English Village* (1975) and had decided to concentrate primarily on the women of the fens. The play, like *Vinegar Tom*, particularizes the effect of political structures on people through an episodic dramatic narrative that details aspects of the characters' lives. The work (potato picking, onion grading and stone picking) informs the dialogue, and the play also shows domestic work, such as ironing, mending, cooking and baby-minding. The audience is thus presented with a hard image of women's work: low-paid or unpaid. The play's provisional title, *Strong Girls Always Hoeing* (taken from an 1842 agricultural report advising employers that strong girls who are always hoeing can do the work better than men and they cost less), revealed Churchill's fundamental concern with the economic basis of women's lives, echoing her commitment to both socialism and feminism. The words of the report are echoed in the play: 'Better workers than men. I've seen women working in my fields with icicles on their faces. I admire that' (p. 171).

As a Joint Stock production, *Fen* features the distancing techniques built into the very structure of the company. With six actors playing 22 characters, identification with any of the characters is avoided. The combination of particular circumstances with an all-encompassing situation is appropriate to the manner in which Churchill and Joint Stock collaboratively researched the play, spending two weeks in the fens collecting material. The company lived in a cottage in Upwell, in the heart of the fens, and unlike other workshops, the actors did not go their separate ways at the end of the day so there was an added intensity to the work. The play thus developed through a direct encounter with the people and the land, and Churchill attempted to write both *from* and *for* the experience in the fens. She has described the play as almost a documentary:

‘We went off to stay in a village and everyone would go out each day and talk to people and make notes or remember. The actors in the group would report back by becoming the people they met and saying the things the person had said; you could ask more questions and the actor would start to improvise and develop the character. Those of us who weren’t actors simply described what had happened. So I was left with a lot of notes and quotes and things different people had said. But never a whole speech, just lines here and there. And I didn’t make any characters who were based on a single person...practically every line is something that somebody actually said to us, but it’s a composite of many different people’ (Betsko and Koenig, 1987: 80).

Five quotations from fenland villagers are used as epigraphs to the play-text.

The scenes in *Fen* offer a series of images that associate land with oppressed women workers, cutting images of a bare line of fields and the bodies of women bent to the ground in toil. Annie Smart (the designer for the original production, whose brilliant contribution to the effect of the production is acknowledged in Churchill’s introduction to *Plays: Two*) created a single set consisting of a surface of furrowed earth bounded on three sides by rough board walls that was at once a field and a domestic interior. This ‘field in a room’ suggests how the women were bounded by domestic responsibilities and low-paid agricultural work. Churchill emphasizes the implications of the set in the closing scene as Shirley irons the fields, suggesting women’s constant labour, domestic and agricultural. She presents the notion that in this flat, limited world there is little possibility to follow one’s desires.

At the beginning of the play (the play begins as the audience comes in), a ‘boy’ from the last century, *barefoot and in rags...alone in a field, in a fog, scaring crows* until it gets dark (p. 147), brings a ghostly presence of a repressed history to the fore. His spectral presence, developed by the use of fog as a scenographic device, marks a history that has been displaced from mainstream history, and literally disappears into darkness. His voice is barely heard: *As the day goes on his*

voice gets weaker till he is hoarse and shouting in a whisper (p. 147). It is the history read through the filter of capitalism that persists, and the opening scene features a Japanese businessman, Mr Takai (played by a woman), presenting a history of the fens. The fens are now owned by multinational corporations, and Mr Takai perceives this ownership as the logical progression of history, beginning in 1630 when ‘rich lords planned to drain fen, change swamp into grazing land, far thinking men, brave investors’ (p. 147). He regards the fen people as having had ‘no vision’ as they ‘wanted to keep fishes and eels to live on’ (p. 147), and attempts to portray them as less than human. He comments that, ‘Not true people had webbed feet but did walk on stilts. Wild people, fen tigers’ (p. 147). For Mr Takai, it was right to put these ‘creatures’ in the service of progress. Their resistance to the plans of the ‘rich lords’ is recorded: ‘Refuse work on drainage, smash dykes, broke sluices. Many problems’ (p. 147). But the capitalists ultimately triumphed: ‘We now among many illustrious landowners, Esso, Gallagher, Imperial Tobacco, Equitable Life, all love this excellent earth’ (p. 147). Mr Takai refers to the landscape as ‘beautiful’, but later states ‘it is too foggy to take pictures’ (p. 147). For him and other capitalists the beauty lies in the land being ‘a very good investment’ (p. 147). He does not elaborate on what became of the ‘fen tigers’. Ann Wilson, in her essay *Hauntings: Ghosts and the Limits of Realism in Cloud Nine and Fen*, comments that ‘He relishes the beauty of the landscape which seems curiously devoid of people, as if he simply doesn’t notice them. The way in which Mr Takai sees involves a particular blindness (or repression) so that what he sees is compatible with an economic articulation of patriarchy, capitalism’ (1997: 162). It would seem that progress in this context is in the interests of the wealthy, and that their economic prosperity is dependent upon the oppression of the labourers. Thus, Mr Takai’s view of life on the fens is ‘clearly at odds with the experience of the boy from the nineteenth century (toiling in isolation and abject poverty) and the depiction of the contemporary Fen people whose lives seem not terribly dissimilar from those of forebears’ (Wilson, 1997: 162).

Elin Diamond, in her essay *(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill’s Theatre* (1989: 270), calls Mr Takai’s speech, with its praise of the multinationals, ‘a bitter homage to Thatcherite economic policies’. The Thatcher government had been returned to power in 1983, on the heels on the Falklands war²⁵ of 1982, and Margaret Thatcher’s popularity was extensive. Diamond refers to Mr Takai’s monologue as an ‘unembarrassed reference to technocracy’ (1989: 270), and suggests that the image of the labouring women in the scene immediately following his speech amounts to a juxtaposition of ‘multinational financing and a cash crop of potatoes’. This becomes a social

²⁵ With the Falklands war still uppermost in the mind of the nation, Churchill makes reference to a military jet flying over the women working in the field, commenting that *Only Nell looks up, angry* (p. 171).

gest for the double alienation of women: they are oppressed on the level of their economic status as well as in their status as women.

The characters in the play, while severely oppressed by life on the fens and often conscious of the oppression, cannot take the final step and imagine another life. This inability to imagine is a consequence of the community's powerful methods of regulation, including self-regulation. Ann Wilson asserts that:

'The community's regulation registers on three distinct levels: a failure to imagine life other than the one being lived; the regulation of dissident voices and the repression of historical consciousness. The consequence of this regulation is violence which pervades the community and frequently erupts as self-abuse' (1997: 163).

Val and her lover, Frank, are 'unable to imagine life other than the one being lived'. Elin Diamond (1989: 270), comments that 'early in the play *Fen* brings stasis and defeat to the very edge of representational truth'. Frank, alone on stage, verbalizes an imagined confrontation with Mr Tewson, the owner of the farm. Frank verbally anticipates the ways in which Mr Tewson will respond to his (Frank's) request for higher wages by constructing Mr Tewson's argument as one linking the family with labour relations:

'...But Mr Tewson I can't live on the money. You'd get half as much again in a factory, Frank. I wouldn't blame you. But I remember when your dad worked for my dad and your brother played about the yard. Your poor old brother, eh Frank? It was great we got him into that home when your mum died. We're like family. We'd both put up with a lot to go on living this good old life here' (p. 151).

Frank ends his monologue with the words, 'I hate you, you old bugger' and hits himself across the face, imagining he is hitting Mr Tewson. Although Frank dreams of escape, Mr Tewson controls him with a misplaced family loyalty. Diamond highlights Frank's slap as an important development in Churchill's work:

'This self-hitting, this self-discipline, marks a change in Churchill's writing. Now the body enters decisively, the body that can be hurt...his body has become an explicit site of his character's struggle and suffering. The historical and political pain of life in the fens is concentrated into that slap, Frank punishing himself for even considering confronting the boss' (1989: 270).

Val is on the brink of leaving the community and approaches Frank to suggest that they, together with her daughters, move to London to start a new life (p. 151/2). But Frank sees no job prospects outside farming: 'What am I supposed to do in London?' (p. 151). He now asserts that Mr

Tewson is 'not a bad old boy' and that he 'was good to my brother' (p. 152). Frank highlights the economic limitations in asking, 'How much money you got', and Val replies, 'Fifty-six pounds. I'll get a job...' (p. 151). Val cannot live without her two children or without Frank, and does not allow herself the option of living with all three: referring to her husband, she states, 'He'll never let me. He'll have them off me' (p. 152). Her husband remains a powerful off-stage influence, and Churchill hereby ensures that the conflict is focused on Val's own desires, rather than on a 'custody battle'. Val decides to leave her children with their father and moves to Frank's home. The social and emotional consequences that arise from this decision give the play a sense of continuity, and provide a central instance of attempted change and its failure. The limitations of economic and familial structures are too overwhelming for Frank and Val, and they are unable to take any course of action other than one of self-destruction.

The sense of women caught in a cycle that is difficult to break is brought across through intergenerational connections in the play, such as the depiction of a birthday party for ninety-year-old Ivy, May's mother. Ivy's meandering memories reveal how when mothers in the cycle do nothing to 'break' it, they imprison their daughters in the same way that they have been imprisoned. Diamond (1989: 270) states that '...in near-monosyllabic exchanges between the generations of women in Val's family, birth and blood create an ongoing cycle of denial, guilt and rage'. Even in death Val is unable to escape the cycle, as she returns as a ghost: 'I could have gone but I wanted to stay with you and I found myself coming back in' (p. 187).

Scenes of the women labouring in the fields from dawn to dusk cut through the play, yet Nell is isolated in her objections to the exploitative conditions under which the women toil. She is the sole voice of resistance, and as such is viewed as a 'trouble maker': 'I'm nobody's right hand. And proud of it. I'm their left foot more like...' (p. 179). When Val walks off the potato-picking job with no real explanation to the gangmaster, Mrs Hassett, Nell demands to know what will become of Val's wages. The other labourers try to silence Nell, telling her 'Nell, do give over' and 'Come on, Nell, let's get on with it' (p. 150). Nell asks, 'Am I crazy? Am I crazy? Am I crazy?' Unlike Nell, the women are loathe to question the system for fear of the consequences, and view Nell with suspicion: 'Nell, you're just embarrassing' (p. 150). Nell's 'embarrassing' ways and her single status result in her categorization as a 'morphrodite' and a 'witch' (p. 155). This scene echoes Churchill's earlier play, *Vinegar Tom*, where she reveals her concern that women who did not occupy a conventional position in the system were labelled as witches and treated exceedingly harshly, usually to the point of death. Becky tells Shona and Deb that, 'She eats little children, so watch out' and Deb adds, 'She talks to herself. That's spells' (p. 155). An attempt is made to regulate Nell's 'different' status with violence: Becky takes the garden hoe

and pokes it at her, and Nell, like Hansel and Gretel's witch, retaliates by pushing Shona into a rabbit hutch, with Deb shouting to Becky, 'Kill her' (p. 156). In terms of the stage directions, Becky *screams and stabs at Nell, who ducks and gets her hat knocked off* (p. 157). Nell calls them 'nasty, nasty children' and says, 'You should be entirely different. Everything. Everything' (p. 157). Nell is frustrated by her conception of how things should be, and her inability to act on these convictions.

After taunting Nell, Val's daughters and Becky sing 'Girl's Song' (p. 157), which outlines the options the girls envisage for themselves when they grow up: nurse, teacher, cook, and housewife. The song, based on quotations from Mary Chamberlain's *Fenwomen*, expresses the futile hopes of all the women in the play. It ends with the following recitation:

I don't think much about what I want to be.
I don't mind housework.
I think I want to be a housewife until I think of another job.
When I grow up I'm going to be a nurse and if not a hairdresser.
I'm going to be a hairdresser when I grow up and if not a nurse (p. 157/8).

The girls limit their vision to one of occupations that are traditionally for women, and the interchanging ideas contained in the last two lines of the song indicate that they are trapped in these limited conceptions of their futures. The contradictions and ambivalence in this song convey the reality in which these women operate: they are likely to marry, have children and work in the fen.

The girls' song of 'hopes' is set against the reality of Shirley's life: Shirley is depicted as constantly working, moving from labour in the fields to domestic labour. She tells Val:

'You've got too much time on your hands. You start thinking. Can't think when you're working in the field can you? It's work work work, then you think, 'I wonder what the time is', and it's dinnertime. Then you work again and you think, 'I wonder if it's time to go home', and it is. Mind you, if I didn't need the money I wouldn't do any bugger out of a job' (p. 168).

The stage directions note that she *goes from one job to another, ironing, mending, preparing dinner, minding a baby* (p. 167). As Shirley works, her unemployed husband Geoffrey drinks soup and complains about the changing nature of the work available and the 'Declining morals all round' (p. 170). He grumbles that the boys 'don't want to work today': 'When we went to school we got beaten and when we got home we got beaten again. They don't want to work today' (p. 169). Geoffrey, with a working class pride, equates the level of violence with work standards,

revealing the severe regulations in the capitalist system. The powerlessness of the working class is further suggested by his blaming the Russians and the Common Market for his predicament. In such a perception, there is little possibility for action as the power systems appear to be at many removes. He insists that there were 'terrible times' in the past and asks Val, 'So why shouldn't you have / terrible times? Who are all these people / who come and live / here to have fun? I don't know anybody. Nobody does. Makes me wild. / My mother was glad she could / keep us alive, that's all...' (p. 170). Shirley and Geoffrey have been plunged into a world where survival is the only criterion, and they accept the bounds and sufferings of this world without any close questioning. This passive acceptance of their powerlessness is captured in Shirley's words to Val: 'You expect too much Val' (p. 169).

At the play's midpoint, Nell narrates a lengthy story to the women in the fields, offering them a fictional escape from their labours. The story is supposedly about her grandfather as a boy: 'He used to swear this really happened' (p. 164). This representation of the past is a male representation, and marks the absence of a female tradition in literature. It is a subtle reminder of how women have 'been buried by man-made history', and how there is a need for a 'recovery of their [women's] 'lost' female ancestors' (Aston, 1995: 15). The story chronicles a feigned death and a vengeful farmer who stabs an adulterous couple with a pitchfork as they lie naked together in bed, and then clubs them to death. The grandfather's terror, the old man rising from the coffin and the image of the couple 'sort of stitched together' (p. 166) are horrific, and the women 'don't reckon it's true' (p. 167). Shirley comments, 'Funny if it is true, eh Nell?' (p. 167), and Nell replies, 'I believe it all right. Why not? There's harder things to believe than that. Makes me laugh'. The women who believe the story is true, Shirley and Nell, find it funny: they have been repressed to such a degree that the horror of life elicits nothing more than a laugh. The story in their own 'real lives', that of Val and Frank, correlates with the absurd and brutal tale that Nell recounts, with Frank murdering Val with an axe and stuffing her body in a wardrobe. Violence appears to have gripped the world of the fens, as the desperate characters use abuse and self-abuse as an outlet for their frustrations.

Rage and frustration are clearly symptomatic of life on the fens, and have persisted through generations of women, and labouring men such as Frank, manifesting in senseless acts of violence. Shirley relates how 'My grandmother told me her grandmother said when times were bad they'd mutilate the cattle. Go out in the night and cut a sheep's throat or hamstring a horse or stab a cow with a fork...She stabbed a lamb. She slashed a foal. 'What for?' I said. They felt quieter after that...' (p. 189). The futility of these acts becomes tragic in view of the concomitant inability or reluctance to act purposefully against the system of oppression. Frank's enactment of

his hitting Mr Tewson; Deb and Becky poking Nell with a garden hoe; Nell pushing Shona into a rabbit hutch; Frank overdosing on pills; Frank killing Val with an axe; Angela forcing Becky to drink boiling water and pulling her hair: abundant images of angry 'victims' pervade the play. There is a simultaneous regulation of differences which might disrupt the community, and a venting of anger at the severe oppression that characterizes life on the fens. The victims victimize others, although in the cases of Val and Frank the 'violence' is self-inflicted, and a sense of power is achieved in these acts. Here Churchill alerts the audience to the torment of the system for those in 'powerless' positions, and to the unnatural suppression of human desires, both conscious and unconscious, in such a system. In the play, those confined by rigid structures do not strike out at the confining structures, but instead their behaviour turns in on itself, and the characters end up hurting themselves and those they love just to 'make something happen' (p. 189). Val's words to Frank when she asks him to stab her to death, 'I've been feeling happy all day because I decided' (p. 186), encapsulate the sense of power over their own lives that Val and the other characters, consciously or sub-consciously, are striving for.

Angela's physical and emotional abuse of her stepdaughter, Becky, is a dramatic form of the victimization that occurs in the fen community. The relationship between Angela and Becky appears to be an exaggerated version of the relationship between Joyce and Angie in *Top Girls*. Angela forces Becky to drink scalding water, and treats her with cruelty and contempt, telling her that her father does not really love her. She threatens to kill Becky if she makes Angela's treatment of her known. Becky harbours romanticized ideas of her biological mother in the face of Angela's abuse and writes a poem in which she (Becky) longs for her mother who she calls 'sweet and dear' (p. 182). Angela scorns Becky's cherished ideas of how her natural mother would have treated her, and tells her, 'Wouldn't want to be the mother of a filthy little cow like you. Pity you didn't die with her. Your dad wishes you'd died with her...' (p. 153). Becky struggles through her poetry to understand romantic relationships, but Angela ridicules these efforts: 'Now this is dirty...That doesn't even rhyme, you filthy child...What puts filth like that into your head? What if I showed your dad?' Angela's callous treatment of Becky is an indicator of her own struggle to locate herself. For Angela, taking action is victimizing those in lesser positions of power in order to aggrieve her own pain: 'Becky, do you feel it? I don't...I have to make something happen. I can hurt you, can't I?' You feel it, don't you. Let me burn you. I have to hurt you worse. I think I can feel something. It's my own pain. I must be here if it hurts' (p. 189). By inflicting pain on Becky, Angela is able to 'feel something' and is able to achieve a degree of self-awareness as 'I must be here if it hurts'. Jeanie Forte, in her essay *Focus on the Body: Pain, Praxis, and Pleasure in Feminist Performance* (1992: 251) claims, 'I searched for those circumstances in which the body is undeniable, when the body's material presence is a

condition of the circumstance. Interestingly, one is that of pain...the body must be acknowledged...' She maintains that 'One crucial aspect of contemporary feminism is the expression of pain, the pain of a female body in patriarchal culture...Using Scarry's model, the pain women experience because they are female in patriarchal culture would seem to resemble torture; that is, the bodies do not 'consent' to their being used...' (1992: 252).

Angela's words to Becky, 'You shouldn't let me treat you like this' (p. 153), and, 'Becky, why do you like me? I don't want you to like me' (p. 184) reveal her own self-loathing and hint at her (Angela's) underlying wish for women to act against their oppressors. This is further underlined in the incident where Becky complies with her Angela's demand for an apology. Pulling Becky's hair, Angela comments disdainfully, 'No stamina...What you made of, girl' (p. 154). Angela also tells Frank, 'You've got no spirit Frank. Nobody has round here. Flat and dull like the landscape. I am too...' (p. 180). When Frank announces, 'I'm thinking of killing myself', Angela replies, 'God, so am I, all the time. We'll never do it...' (p. 181). Although Frank proves Angela wrong, as in the following scene she reveals that Frank 'took some pills' (p. 184), her frustration at the lack of agency by the people of the fens, including her own, is evident. She disparages Frank's suicide attempt by means of a poem, commenting that, 'Too bad he got saved by his silly wife. Not his wife. / Now he's got to go on being alive / Like all the rest of us here who survive...He won't go to heaven and he's already in hell...' (p. 184). She adds after the poem, 'Those pills must have made him feel sick / And wish he'd never followed his prick'. In Angela's disparagement of Frank's attempt to end his life it becomes clear that she will, indeed, 'never do it'. Her final jeer that he must have wished 'he'd never following his prick' re-aligns her with commonly-held attitudes regarding socially acceptable, and unacceptable, behaviour.

In *Fen* the dominant tradition is that of the family, as the characters refer constantly to their families and their ancestors. In terms of the family structure, the primary role of the women is in caring for their children, or in May's and Shirley's situations, their grandchildren. Apart from the economic dimension of their lives, their lives are determined by their roles as mothers, daughters or grandmothers, and they are expected to fill those roles without hesitation. They are seen as unnatural or 'bad' if they do not: Angela says of Val's behaviour, 'She's...acting funny. Leave her own kiddies...' (p. 164), and Alice comments, 'I know she's wicked but she's still my friend' (p. 164). Responsibility to one's children is seen as a woman's greatest virtue: May tells Val, 'I'll stand by you. I stand by my children. I'd never have left you, Val' (p. 160), and 'I'd go through fire. What's stronger than that?' (p. 160).

Both Val and Angela are seen in the context of a conventional idea of mothering and motherhood, but neither of these women fulfils their roles in the conventional way. Angela, who states, 'If I had my own kiddies I wouldn't leave them' (p. 164), subscribes to the myth that mothers are naturally bonded with their biological children and physically and mentally abuses her stepdaughter. The assumption is that 'real' mothers, with the bond of physical motherhood, provide all the love and care craved by their children. In accordance with this myth, Becky's poem to her dead mother refers to her as 'sweet and dear' (p. 183), and claims that 'If you could see what's done to me / You'd come and get me out of here'. Yet Val, who has her own children, does not meet the notions of perfection in her mothering as she 'abandons' them. This issue of natural caring becomes the focus, and reveals how women are compelled to behave in certain ways if they are to be socially integrated. The women are held up to some commonly held standard of motherhood: the notion of motherhood is constructed rather than natural, and the restrictions on Val's life result in her perceiving her own behaviour as 'unnatural' – observed in her guilt and her oscillation between Frank and her children.

The idea of family also becomes a repressive image through Mr Tewson, with his paternalistic capitalism: 'we're like family' (p. 151). Family loyalty also keeps the farm from becoming unionized. Mr Tewson tells Miss Cade, 'You want to watch the Transport and General Workers. The old agricultural union was no trouble' (p. 162). Mr Tewson's family has owned the farm for four generations, and he sells out to the City so that his 'grandson will farm his grandfather's acres' (p. 162). Out of this deal he ensures that he will have 'capital to reinvest. Land and machinery' (p. 162). Thus family inheritance is part of the system of oppression. Ironically, the representative from the City is a young woman, indicating that if women are not united across the classes, they too will sell one another out. Even Mr Tewson comments, 'I've read about you, Miss Cade. Moguls...And tycoons. And barons' (p. 161).

After Mr Tewson meets with Miss Cade, a nameless female ghost who has witnessed 150 years of working women's suffering appears to reproach him. Mr Tewson states, 'My father saw you. I didn't believe him' (p. 163): the capitalists have always refused to hear the voice of the labouring woman. Ann Wilson explains that 'ghosts are the return of voices displaced from history because the recognition of these experiences would disrupt the claim of history as progress' (p. 165). The anger of the ghost is palpable: 'We are starving, we will not stand this no longer...You bloody farmers could not live if it was not for the poor, tis them that keep you bloody rascals alive, but there will be a slaughter made amongst you very soon...You bloody rogue...' (p. 163). When Mr Tewson tells the ghost that although he is selling the farm, 'everything will go on the same', the ghost replies, 'That's why I'm angry' (p. 163). The oppression will continue. But the past will

continue to haunt those complicit in the oppressive system that has destroyed the lives of the Fen women: 'Get home then. I live in your house. I watch television with you. I stand beside your chair and watch the killings. I watch the food and I watch what makes people laugh. My baby died starving' (p. 163).

The appearance of ghosts in *Fen* is thematically similar to the appearance of the ghost in *Cloud Nine* because in both plays ghosts represent the return of voices displaced from history. The ghosts mark the return of histories, both social and personal, which have been displaced from the history of the community. They serve as a reminder that that which is repressed interacts with that which is consciously known, and appear as history which has been repressed from consciousness 'because the recognition of these experiences would disrupt the claim of history as progress' (Wilson, 1997: 165). Churchill's ghosts further shatter the conventions of realism, thereby questioning the manner in which realism is bound to patriarchal ideology.

Churchill's notion of the potentially oppressive nature of religious doctrine is introduced when Val turns in desperation to the church, and attends a Baptist revival meeting with Alice. The church promises community, and the women hug one another and refer to one another as sisters. Margaret, a member of the congregation, addresses the women but tells them, 'I don't know where to begin because I've been unhappy as long as I can remember. My mother and father were unhappy too. I think my grandparents were unhappy...' (p. 174). She speaks of her father's physical abuse of her mother, the death of her daughter, and her own alcohol abuse before she found the church. Referring to her impending baptism, she states, 'I want to give myself over completely to God so there's nothing else of me left, and then the pain will be gone and I'll be saved' (p. 175). Margaret seeks a spiritual death to efface her history of pain and embrace a future that is, for her, brimming with hope. Her new embrace parallels Val's attempt at departing from her unhappy world, and May's words seem pertinent here: 'What you after? Happiness? Got it have you? Bluebird of happiness?' (p. 159). The tone of May's 'question' suggests futility in the attempts of these women, and that happiness will continue to elude them.

Alice tells Val, 'We're all rubbish but Jesus still loves us so it's all right' (p. 176), conveying the sense of guilt that plagues the women for their less than perfect lives. Her words also register a desperate need for acknowledgement and forgiveness. While the women in the congregation regard themselves as a 'sisterhood', their ideology is confining as the key doctrine of 'accepting one's lot' is incongruent with the collective action required to dismantle the oppressive social and economic structures. Their conviction that 'This is not a perfect world and we can't be perfect in it' (p. 174) undermines any possibility for change. Churchill's position is one calling for

collective consciousness on all levels, most importantly on the levels of gender and economics, and she registers her position with regard to escapist religious community through Val's words, 'I'd rather take valium' (p. 176).

Val is unable to 'write her body' in the sense of representing its desires and creating 'a powerful alternative discourse' to 're-create the world' (Jones, 1986: 366). In the final scene of the play she literally marks her body with a pen to pinpoint the place where Frank should stab her. By this act, Val displays the body as an inscriptive surface, where 'The body is...the privileged object of power's operations ...' (Grosz, 1994:149). She announces to Frank that he will have to kill her, and imagines a lover's end to her life: 'Just say you love me and put the knife in and hold me till it's over' (p. 186). The audience has no reason to believe that this scene will have a different ending from the previous conversations they have had about dying, yet Frank unexpectedly kills her with an axe. Moments before complying with her wish to be killed, Frank suggests to Val that they, 'have a fire and some tea' (p. 187). These words are strongly reminiscent of the Japanese businessman's words in the opening scene, 'Now I find a teashop, warm fire, old countryman to tell tales' (p. 148). Mr Takai perceives the people of the fen as quaint, with quaint tales to tell, but the suggestion is that the stories of the fen are not fireside tales, but accounts of poverty, violence and lives that are lost, literally and figuratively.

After Frank has put Val's body in a wardrobe, and is sitting on the floor with his back against the wardrobe door, Val *comes in through the door on the other side of the stage*. In Diamond's evaluation:

'Val re-emerges not as a prophetic ghost or a misty mystified body but as a consciousness that instantiates a new theatre space...She ventriloquizes the stories of other dead, but more importantly *by her bodily presence* makes a space for her fellow labourers to explore and change their suffering...' (1989: 271).

Characters appear, and are offered a liminal space to express their repression. Here there is finally recognition of Becky's tormented childhood: 'There's someone crying in her sleep. It's Becky...She's running downstairs away from Angela...Angela's after her...' (p. 188). Becky speaks: 'I want to wake up. Angela beats me. She shuts me in the dark. She put a cigarette on my arm. She's here.' (p. 189). Although Becky's words to Angela, 'You can't, I won't, I'm not playing. You're not here' (p. 189) would seem to indicate that Becky has resolved to make changes, she does not appear in the 'reality' of the play, but in a dream. She may 'want to wake up', but the audience cannot be certain that this will be the outcome.

Nell *crosses on stilts*, visually echoing the seventeenth-century fen-dwellers who used stilts to cross the fens. She states, 'I was walking out on the fen. The sun spoke to me. It said, 'Turn back, turn back'. I said, 'I won't turn back for you or anyone' (p. 189). The sun's earthly cycle is a constant process of turning back, but Nell believes she can change her condition and fight against regression. Diamond describes how 'The death-space permits a representation of the unrepresentable, what Cixous has called the 'unheard songs' of the libidinal (and revolutionary) female body. Yet there is no effective triumph in these songs, rather a grim awareness of the conditions that prevent their singing' (1989: 272). For example, she claims that 'Nell's political self-consciousness has no projection outside this death-space' (1989: 272).

The boy who scared crows at the beginning of the play appears at the end and calls, 'Jarvis, Jarvis, come and make my coffin' (p. 190). These words are identical to those heard earlier in the play in Ivy's tale: 'Old fellow lived next to us, he was a hundred. He'd come out on the bank and shout to the undertaker lived on the other side, 'Jarvis, Jarvis, come and make my coffin...'' (p. 178). This single utterance by the boy conveys a sharp sense of how the lives of the fen workers have not changed for over a hundred years. Further, Churchill writes in the play's production note that 'I like the idea that the boy was that old man' (p. 145). Though the suggestion is bleak in the context of the characters of the play, it is surely assumed that the audience has the capacity for instituting change in the present.

Various critics have named 'May's song' at the close of the play as *Fen's* moment of hope, but this is not, in fact, May's song. In the final line of the play, Val states, 'My mother wanted to be a singer. That's why she'd never sing' (p. 190). This is followed by the stage direction, *May is there. She sings*. Yet the production note points out that 'May sings, ie she stands as if singing and we hear what she would have liked to sing' (p. 145). Thus this is not May singing, it is only a 'lip-sync'. It is a song that May would sing if she could, but both the words for the song and the voice that sings it come from someone else.

While in *Cloud Nine* the tone of the second act is recognizably optimistic, offering a perspective that patriarchy's most powerful means of regulation, sexuality and gender, might be transformed, the perspective of *Fen* seems less optimistic. Resignation to the idea that 'Nothing's perfect is it...' (p. 169) is the unfortunate stance of the majority of the characters in the play. Emotional and/or political inertia threaten any hope of change. Any emancipatory options are made to seem practically impossible. Patriarchal ideology dominates all aspects of the characters' lives and brings them closer to a sense of self-loathing than any real resolution to institute change. As in *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill employs Brechtian devices, such as episodic play structure, to keep the

community and its socio-economic-sexual systems at the centre of the play. She 'dramatizes the dialectical relationship between history and consciousness' (Reinelt, 1996: 45). While history in *Fen* becomes reunited with the present, it does not seem powerful enough to affect the future: Val's ghost meets other ghosts who continue to wander the fen world. The Brechtian notion of 'the criticism of the received past from the standpoint of a concrete present' (Reinelt, 1996: 46) does not filter to the level of the thought processes of the characters, which does not augur well for their future. As a socialist feminist, Churchill does not assume 'that the experiences of women are induced by gender oppression from men or that liberation can be brought about by virtue of women's unique gender strengths, that patriarchy is everywhere and always the same and that all women are 'sisters'', but rather she, 'underscores the role of class and history in creating the oppression of women' (Case, 1988: 82). The women in *Fen* try to achieve community through societal institutions, such as the family, the work-place and the church, but never fully succeed. They fall short of a collective consciousness, the solidarity as a class necessary to bring about change. For Churchill, the appropriate collective action cannot occur in the world as it exists, where there is 'violent repression' and 'where the bodies and others like them are disciplined into silence' (Diamond, 1989: 273).

CHAPTER FIVE

SERIOUS MONEY

In *Serious Money*, Churchill turns from consideration of labour to an examination of capital. Called a 'city comedy of High-Tech greed' (Cousin, 1989: 101), the play is a socialist critique of extreme capitalist greed. Everything and everyone represents an opportunity for profit. In this play, the 'frightening' implications of Marlene's brand of 'feminism' in *Top Girls*, ruthless individualism, are vividly exemplified. Like *Top Girls*, *Serious Money* exposes the failure of liberal feminism. In both plays Churchill criticizes the selfish acquisitiveness of British society, where women participate in the economic system with men, but at a price. The characters, like the characters in *Top Girls*, are consumed with material gain. They place business before all human consideration. Human feelings are subordinated to a passion for acquisition. Although Churchill returns frequently in her work to the theme of the heartless nature of capitalism, the 'top people' in these two plays constitute a powerful indictment on the way in which capitalism operates. Churchill perceives the economic system as a paradigm for all power structures, and she extends her critique of 'Big Bang' economics to include gender as well as class. She explores the social dynamics of a world in which a limited vision of success is shared equally by both sexes. While *Top Girls* focuses on the appropriation by women of traditional male attitudes and methods of success, *Serious Money* focuses on the devastating effect of such an appropriation: a heartless society devoid of any urges other than that of money-making. In this morally bankrupt society there is total subordination to the most important source of power in the new financial world, money.

The play grew out of a two-week workshop organized by Max Stafford-Clark at the Royal Court Theatre in September 1986, and was rehearsed as a play in February 1987. It opened at the Royal Court in March 1987, and was a resounding success. Apart from Stafford-Clark and Churchill, the workshop group consisted of eight actors and the musical director, Colin Sell. The most important aspect of the workshop was to elucidate the complexities of high finance, and to this end the group spent time at the various markets gathering information and forming impressions. They watched trading from viewing galleries and interviewed a broad spectrum of individuals, such as traders, brokers, an American lawyer, and a fraud squad member. They were reportedly amazed at the 'theatricality' of trading. Churchill spent the larger part of that autumn researching the business in the City – the financial district of London, and London's equivalent of Wall

Street, housed within the walls of old London. She made cuttings from *The Financial Times*, and sought to understand the more technical aspect of finance, while simultaneously endeavouring to develop a means of structuring her thoughts. Her research was complicated by the breaking financial news in Britain and the United States at that time: the Ivan Boesky scandal was making headlines in the United States, and the 'Big Bang', which constituted a revolution in trading, had taken place in Britain. A succession of take-overs was underway, and various arrests were being made in conjunction with insider dealing, providing Churchill with a wide scope for her subject matter. The play, overall, presents the view Churchill gained of the City as amoral and greedy in the extreme. The world of the play is at once glamorous and dangerous, and captures the challenge and excitement of the stock market while simultaneously exposing greed, materialism and corruption as the qualities that assure the success of those operating in it. Cousin (1989: 103) comments how 'The conjunction of the dextrously varied rhythms, the stunning energy which the play generates in performance, and the deliberately two-dimensional characters creates a world which is dazzling, speedy and terrifyingly shallow'. It won for Churchill, among other distinctions, an Obie award, the Olivier Award for best new play and her second Susan Smith Blackburn Award.

Churchill uses post-'Big Bang' London (specifically the City) as the chief locus of *Serious Money*. The effects of the 'Big Bang', a term that describes the surge in stock acquisition and trading following the 1986 deregulation of the London stock market, form the basis of the action of the play, informing Churchill's characterization. She bases the action on the financial dealings in the London Exchange Market and, by connection and inference, the International Exchange Market, after the 'Big Bang' irrevocably changed the pattern of finance in the City. Previously the preserve of England's upper classes, it opened its doors to modern technology and to anyone prepared to spend time and money on financial speculation. The 'Big Bang' signalled unlimited opportunity for *anyone* prepared to work hard. Laura L. Doan, in her essay *Sexy Greedy is the Late Eighties: Power Systems in Amis's Money and Churchill's Serious Money*, expands:

'Under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, the Tory government of the 1980's has encouraged the rapid Americanization of the British economy by calling for a new attitude toward free enterprise and consumerism, and by inculcating an ethos of hard work. In order to urge Britain to become more economically competitive, the new Conservative ideology – decidedly at odds with the old establishment comprised of leisured public school-educated English gentlemen – advances the premise that work and money should no longer be considered 'dirty words' (Doan, 1990: 69).

Churchill communicates, through her selection of characters, how in the new world of financial trading there is space for those members of society who were previously marginalized: women,

foreigners and former members of the lower classes. The new domain even has space for members of the Third World. Austin E. Quigley, in his essay *Stereotype and Prototype: Character in the Plays of Caryl Churchill* (Brater, 1989: 48), points out, 'A play that begins by linking twentieth-century England to seventeenth-century England continues by extending its scope in space just as it initially extended its boundaries in time'. He adds that, 'This social, temporal, and geographical inclusiveness is not, however, matched by a similar breadth of moral vision' (Brater, 1989: 48). Although both men and women are able to operate in the new City, and every nationality and social background is acceptable, it becomes evident that in the fast-moving world of financial speculation, individual freedom has degenerated into gross social irresponsibility.

Churchill deliberately subtitles *Serious Money* 'a city comedy', a genre associated with the Jacobean theatre. The city comedy was the only prominent genre of Jacobean drama to survive the Restoration. She thus associates the play with the moral satires on greed and miserliness common in the early seventeenth century.

Klaus Peter Muller comments on the significance of the association with the City Comedy:

'The audience's decision to see *Serious Money* either as comedy or satire may explain their different reactions towards the play. Seen as a satire, the play must provide...moral norms...and...morality is obviously an important aspect for the difference between comedy and satire in contemporary definitions...The 'moral line' in *Serious Money* is not so easily detected, however, if it is not seen in connection with the genre, the City Comedy, and its history' (1990: 348).

The play opens with a scene from a city comedy whose target was urban avarice, and where the buying and selling of fraudulent stocks is symptomatic of post-English civil war social relations: Thomas Shadwell's *The Volunteers; or, The Stock Jobbers* (written in 1692). Dressed in elegant late seventeenth-century attire, the actors present a brief scene which establishes the human propensity toward selfishness and greed. The primary concern of all societies of stockjobbers is highlighted: 'the main end verily is to turn the penny in the way of stock jobbing, that's all' (p. 196). It is not the utility value of a thing that is of importance, but only its trade value. Interest in building a better mousetrap, finding an authentic flea killer, or discovering a successful device to promote flying is subordinated to an overriding interest in buying shares in these projects before prices rise, and selling them again before prices fall. This short historical vignette is the prelude to Churchill's unflattering exposure on the unbecoming attitudes and practices of the City's financial high-flyers. In the post-'Big Bang' market anyone with the ability to buy cheaply and sell at a profit can secure a place in stockjobbing. Yet the prevailing ethos, that of making money

unscrupulously, remains unaltered. Shadwell's graceful language contrasts with the vulgarities of the modern scene to follow, yet prepares the audience for Churchill's use of verse: she proceeds to use her own Shadwellian rhymed couplets throughout the play. The past is consciously linked with the present at the end of this scene when one of Shadwell's characters directs the audience into the contemporary world: 'Look ye Brethren, hye ye into the city and learn what ye can' (p. 197).

The scene that immediately follows the Shadwellian scene presents major changes in technology: the audience is faced with *three different dealing rooms simultaneously. All have screens and phones*. Eight people in these rooms carry on business all at once, shouting out figures and bids, with screens and phones in use, and with business operating on an international basis. The primary objective, however, remains unchanged from the previous scene: to make a profit. Again, the product that a company makes is not important in itself. The commodity that matters is money, and money is the main commodity traded on the floor of LIFFE (the London International Financial Futures Exchange). But the money-making game has lost all meaningful connection to life: the face of this hectic world of brokers, jobbers, oiks, arbitrageurs, white knights and corporate raiders is now barely human. The characters of the play have all dedicated their lives to making money, and compete to exploit one another through the economic structure of society.

In this first 'contemporary' scene, the audience is immediately absorbed by the energetic presentation of the business world, without necessarily understanding its involved workings. In fact, many of the convolutions and complications in the action of the play are almost incomprehensible to those not versed in the business of high finance, because of Churchill's close attention to detail and authenticity. The audience must, in places, rely on explanations as to the activities taking place by one of the characters to follow the action. Consequently, Churchill creates a dramatic situation where the audience ultimately tends to remember the performance of the play without recalling the specific details of plot. The performance, which engages the audience in the frenetic pace and energetic excitement of insider trading and financial dealing, initially makes it difficult for it (the audience) to form a clear perspective as to what, precisely, is taking place. It must, however, gradually realize that it is this furious frenzy of avaricious activity that keeps the characters from ever gaining any meaningful perspective on their own behaviour. While the involved plot and absence of scene breaks render it practically impossible for the analyst to move through the play systematically without becoming entangled in laboured explanations of the plot, meticulous attention to such details does not enhance, for the most part, the analysis of the play for its broader purposes.

Churchill's structured and complicated plot captures the spirit of her determined investigation into City dealings. In short, the plot involves the attempted takeover of Albion Products by Corman Enterprise, spearheaded by an American banker, Zac Zackerman. Albion, which is the ancient Greek and Roman name for Britain, symbolizes the state of the British financial world before Thatcherism: 'obviously deficient / In management. Old-fashioned and paternal' (p. 225). Jake Todd is also involved in this take-over deal, but his chief source of income is the selling of inside information, primarily to Marylou Baines, an American arbitrageur. He is the only public schoolboy who can keep up with the unscrupulousness of a Thatcherised working class. Jake brings the Peruvian businesswoman, Jacinta Condor, and the importer from Ghana, Nigel Agibala, in on the deal to buy Albion shares on behalf of Corman Enterprise. Through a tip-off from Frosby, who is bitter at having been sidelined after the 'Big Bang', the Department of Trade and Industry decides to investigate Jake. Before it can proceed with the investigation, Jake is found dead. Many people in the City would have been concerned about the Department's imminent investigation as Jake was in a position to expose those involved in the intricate web of financial corruption. The question to be asked is whether Jake committed suicide out of desperation, or whether he was murdered.

The take-over attempt can be regarded as the play's main plot, with the sub-plot being the murder mystery. This is presented largely in the form of flashbacks, which are woven into the play through the narrative function of Zac Zackerman, a pivotal figure in the deal. Ultimately the take-over bid is halted, and Churchill abandons the murder mystery by the close of the play: the mysteries of Jake Todd's death and money are never solved. It becomes evident, however, that it is neither of these things that matters. Doan (1990: 71) states that 'Churchill gambles on the expectation that the audience will come away, not with the pleasure of knowing 'who done it', but with a discomfiting challenge to rethink more serious issues'. Zac articulates in his final dialogue that 'What really matters is the massive sums of money being passed / round the world', 'there's a whole lot of greed', and 'the Conservatives romped home with a landslide victory for / five more glorious years' (p. 306). The continuance of the exploitative economic system, capitalistic in the extreme under the Tories, and, in tandem with the economic system, the politics of sexuality are 'what really matters'.

A significant change that is presented early in the play is not only the change from the seventeenth century to the play's present, but one that has arisen within two living generations, between parents and their adult children. The first generation, in the play, is that of the traditional stockbrokers or bankers who attended public schools and universities and exerted considerable influence in the country. The younger generation wishes to seize this power and, importantly, the

money connected with it. Durkfeld, Scilla, Jake, Zac, Jacinta Condor and Billy Corman represent the new group of players in the British financial world. The nature of this change is encapsulated when Grimes, a school dropout who 'speaks with the obscenity-laced argot of a Cockney street trader' (Kritzer, 1991: 162), claims:

'We're only doing just the same
All you bastards always done.
New faces in your old square mile,
Making money with a smile,
Just as clever, just as vile' (p. 283).

He continues, 'All your lives you've been in clover, / Fucking everybody over, / You just don't like to see us at it' (p. 283). Greville Todd blames the new operators in the City, many of them former members of the lower classes, for the demise of his son: 'Because of yobs like him my Jake was led astray' (p. 283). And Frosby laments, 'My lovely city's sadly changed. / Sic transit gloria. Glory passes! / Any wonder I'm deranged, / Surrounded by the criminal classes' (p. 282). Grimes tells him, 'You've all been coining it for years. / All you fuckwits in the City. / It just don't look quite so pretty, / all the cunning little jobs, / When you see them done by yobs' (p. 283). The language of the younger men and women in the City shares the hierarchical and masculine/feminine references with that of the older clan in the financial world. Like the older group of traders and financial dealers, they envision the structure of their world as a hierarchy with an up and down movement, but they talk of enjoying life on the 'floor'. The members of this new breed 'didn't go to university and learn to think twice' (p. 205) and have 'no intention of working after...[the age of] thirty' (p. 205). Labelled as 'aggressive' at school (p. 207), and expelled for being 'hooligan[s]', this generation is prepared to 'fight dirty' (p. 206) and 'love it down with the oiks' as 'it's more exciting' (p. 206). Durkfeld asserts that he doesn't want the Picassos or the large office size, and claims 'I'm good at my job' (p. 209) because 'I stay on the floor with the guys' (p. 209). Scilla asserts, 'I'd rather be working on the floor' (p. 206) and that, 'I found O levels weren't much use, the best qualified people are street traders' (p. 244). These differences in the generations are shown in connection with changes in the banking and trading professions. The successful banker Merrison, who sees man as 'a gambling animal' (p. 208) is told to 'walk' (p. 210) by the trader, Durkfeld: Durkfeld tells Merrison, 'Jack. I hate you... You're too important to smell your own fart' (p. 209). Durkfeld's personal characteristics are those of all traders who earn more money than the bankers, but are still held lower in public esteem: 'I run the best trading floor in New York City, / And traders make two dollars profit for this company / for every dollar made by you bankers. / And you treat us like a load of shit' (p. 209). Zac maintains that 'The financial world won't be the same again... It's like Darwin says, survival of the fit...' (p. 210). The changes in British and world politics after the loss of the Empire, and the

change in the financial world after the Big Bang in the City of London in October 1986 are all mentioned in Zac's monologue on contemporary life:

'The British Empire was a cartel.
England could buy whatever it wanted cheap
And make a profit on what it made to sell.
The empire's gone but the City of London keeps
On running like a cartoon cat off a cliff – bang.
That's your Big Bang.
End of the City cartel.
Swell' (p. 210/211).

The greed of the new breed of bankers and traders, where the credo is 'Do others before they can do you' (p. 305'), is unsurpassable. Scilla's statement, 'on the floor of LIFFE the commodity is money' (p.244), alerts the audience to the connection between this acronym and the characters' lives and view of the world. Boesky's tribute to greed as the basis for the health and wealth of nations summarizes the beliefs of the characters in the play. Jake declares that 'Greed's been good to me. Fear's a bitch...I can always hit the straight and narrow tomorrow'. (p. 257). He would 'like to own a big cube of sea, right down to / the bottom, all the fish, weeds, the lot. / There'd be takers for that' (p. 231). Unrealistic as this is, Zac replies, 'Sure, it's a great notion' (p. 231). When Jake continues, 'Or air. Space. A square metre going straight up into infinity' (p. 232), Zac adds, 'And a section of God at the top' (p. 232). Their greed knows no limits. Zac himself states, 'Naturally there's a whole lot of greed and / That's no problem because money buys freedom' (p. 306). There is a culture of excess, where vast sums of money can, ironically, never satiate the greed: 'You can't get rid of your money in Crete. / Hire every speedboat, drink till you pass out, eat / Till you puke and you're still loaded with drachs' (p. 302). The twenty characters of the play steal, cheat, lie and vigorously crush anyone who stands in their way of making more money. Corman warns Marylou, 'You cheated me. / I hate you. I'll fucking annihilate you' (p. 239) and Zac's philosophy is, 'Deny. Deny. Deny. / (Let them see what they can prove)' (p. 217). In this cutthroat environment, loyalty, much less community, does not exist: Durkfeld fires the man who promoted him, Jacinta does not hesitate to sell against Corman's interest when the price is right, Jake speculates with money advanced to Nigel by Corman for the purpose of buying Albion stock, and Marylou sells her Albion stock to Corman's competitor to dissociate herself from Jake's death. Those who indulge in 'serious' money-making can think of nothing else, and the 'Futures Song' proclaims that '...LIFFE is the life for me and I'll burn out when I'm dead' (p. 253). But the demands of a life motivated by greed are too rigorous for those no longer in their energetic youth: Zac believes that, 'Guy over forty's got any sense he takes his golden handshake and goes' (p. 210), and Scilla says, 'They'll have us on the scrap heap at thirty-five' (p. 205). There is a world where 'a Porsche in the garage and champagne in the glass' (p.

205) are the indicators of success and happiness, but Michael Billington, in a review of *Serious Money* (The Guardian, March 30, 1987: 13), points out that ‘the rancid joke at the heart of the play is that, for a whole new generation of dealers and traders, making money breed has become life itself’.

While explicit questioning of the values presented in *Serious Money* does not occupy the space of the play, Churchill uses, primarily, the Brechtian concepts of historicization and alienation to induce the audience to challenge these values. Alienation, the presentation of familiar situations in such a way as to make them appear strange, thereby inciting deeper examination, takes on various forms in *Serious Money*. Kritzer claims:

‘Observing an imitation of the ordinarily hidden action within this world [the world of high finance] and beginning to understand the reality on which it is based empowers the audience member to analyse its function within the capitalist system and its relation to him or her personally. Such genial characterizations as those of Zac and Jacinta deflect anger from the easy target of an individual villain to the more important one of the economic structure and its supporting ideology’ (1991: 169).

Breaks in the dominant style of presentation provide brief conceptual spaces, liminal spaces, where such questioning can take place, and the theatrical device of multiple roles, a device used in previous plays, signals the possibility of transformation. Nineteen characters are doubled by seven actors, and Zac, who occupies an important narrative function, is the only actor whose role is not doubled. Zac is the chief proponent of American capitalism in the play, and as such the actor in this role does not occupy any other. The actors playing more than one role in the play are generally representative of universal models of corruption. In the original production, one actor played five such roles: Durkfield the trader; Greville Todd, the stockbroker; Duckett, chairman of Albion; Sloat, the midwestern manufacturer; and Gleason, the Cabinet minister. Similarly, one actress played two types of hypocritical, amoral women committed to self-advancement: the Southern arbitrageur, Marylou Baines, and the British stockbroker, Mrs. Etherington. Frosby is portrayed by the same actor who plays Jake, cutting through any possibility of realism. The doubling technique maintains the portrayal onstage as an incitement to critical thinking rather than superficial entertainment, and possibly suggests that there is potential for altering one’s relation to the capitalist system.

Historicization of the situation presented in *Serious Money* results from the news events that influenced the writing of the play. The writing of the play co-incided roughly with the outbreak of stock market scandals, and there is a thread of topicality that weaves throughout: the topicality

undoubtedly assisted in rendering the play as one of Churchill's most commercially successful. The Big Bang is the back-drop for the conflict between old and new styles of making money, and privatization, one of the boasts of the Thatcher government, is mentioned when Etherington comments, 'But the British public's financial education / Is going in leaps and bounds with privatisation' (p. 229). Both the Guinness and Boesky scandals are mentioned, as well as issues that were topical at the time (some of which continue to be topical), such as Aids, cocaine, the CIA, MI5, and the Contras. Further, Corman receives a request from the cabinet minister to meet him during a performance of 'Lear at the National' (p. 294), an actual production of which was running concurrently with the first production of *Serious Money*. Of considerable significance, the Conservative victory referred to at the close of the play parallels the outcome of the general election that was in progress as the play went into production. This strong strain of topicality connected the play with the contemporary world of the time, that of the 1980's, and while for an audience in the new millenium this feature of topicality is largely lost, the larger principles of the play are able to carry it. The entertainment value is, perhaps, diminished, and would perhaps consequently result in the play attracting a more select audience.

The play has an episodic structure in that it moves backwards and forwards in time, and moves as easily across continents and time zones, and in so doing it presents an overview of global finance – with a sense of Britain as no longer being the powerful centre of an empire, but as part of an expanding world. The Shadwellian scene and the flashbacks shatter any possibility of realism, but in a sense, *Serious Money* has a traditional linear time frame: apart from flashbacks and the initial scenes establishing the nature of the financial world, the main action takes place over twenty-four hours, from the morning when Jake Todd is found dead to the early hours of the following morning when Scilla, his sister, arrives in New York. In this respect it differs from plays such as *Top Girls* and *Vinegar Tom*, which overtly register a refusal of linear structures. These two plays, however, focused on 'women' with more specificity than *Serious Money*. In *Serious Money*, Churchill's commentary on oppression relates more generally to all the victims of the capitalist system, to 'society at large'. The driving pace of the play, with episodes continually overlapping as the action accelerates, captures the frenzied pace of trading and the frantic grasping for more that characterizes the traders.

A key element of *Serious Money* is the discussion of money in terms of rapacious sexuality – 'sexy greedy'. Starr tells Corman that 'sexy greedy is the late eighties' (p. 287), and shortly thereafter Scilla tells Corman that Jake was 'so fucking rich' (p. 288), which is a direct expression of 'sexy greedy'. Zac highlights this trend in the play:

‘...the traders are coming down the fast lane.
They don’t even know it themselves, they’re into fucking or
getting a Porsche, getting a Porsche *and* a Mercedes Benz.
But you can’t drive two cars at once’ (p. 210).

He adds that, ‘...the new guys are hungrier and hornier...Now, here in England, it’s just beginning to hit’ (p. 210), and ‘England’s been fucking the world with interest but now it’s a / different scene’ (p. 211). The language of the play is replete with implicit and explicit sexual references. Kimball King, in her essay *Serious Money: A Market Correction?* (Randall, 1988: 154), claims that ‘*Serious Money* proves that the foul language of the marketplace contains a pervasive subtext of brutal sexual innuendo...When sex is described in exploitative terms so that it becomes pure carnality, devoid of any affection, copulation is a mere transaction’. In her view, when there is a manipulative treatment of sexual partners as objects, sex becomes something you ‘do’ to someone else. This sexual language proliferates in the ‘business’ of the play, with jokes and expressions conveying a ‘no-holds-barred’ attitude on the part of the characters. Both men and women in the play use the expression, ‘you’re trading like a cunt’, and a trader jokes, ‘Why is a clitoris like a filofax? / Every cunt’s got one’ (p. 302). The language of sex is blurred with the language of business: when the Albion deal is in the offing, Corman states, ‘Put your family life and your sex life on hold. / A deal like this, at the start you gently woo it. / There comes a time when you get in there and screw it’ (p. 236). The ‘Futures Song’ begins with the line, ‘Out you cunt, out in oh fuck it’, and ends with the assertion, ‘You can never hide if your spread’s too wide, you’ll just fuck yourself instead’ (p. 253). Backups sing, ‘Out! Buy buy buy! Leave it! / No! Yes! Cunt! / 4! 5! Sell! / Quick! Prick! Yes! No! Cunt!’ (p. 253). Thus, Churchill conveys how the seduction of making money is just as alluring as sex - in fact, the interest in money is so intense that, despite the hard-hitting language, sex does not feature. The pairing of sex and greed also powerfully connects economics and gender.

Churchill’s use of verse in the play emphasizes the lack of introspection on the part of the characters, and signifies the limiting aspects of external structures: free expression of real feelings is suppressed by the verse structures. Like Shadwell’s play, *Serious Money* is rendered in verse replete with assonance, rhyme and the jargon of high finance. Poetic cadence and rhyme is somewhat unexpected in the stock exchange setting, yet the use of verse does not lessen the authenticity of the scenes. The verse also has farcical qualities, with some of the couplets being juvenile and scatological, thus broadening the satire of the play. Churchill claims that the use of verse arose from the fact that her first concern with the play was for it to be theatrical, as she felt while writing the play that it was beginning to resemble a research paper. Verse gives the play its theatrical edge, and the parodic use of verse certainly enhances the comedic aspect of the play:

the blending of the verse rhythms, predominantly in pentameter couplets and tetrameter quatrains, adds humour, and ‘...it does have the effect of driving the play incredibly fast which seems very right for it’ (Fitzsimmons, 1989: 84). The rhymed verse results in lines that are sometimes complicated being spoken without missing a beat, and this reinforces the driving pace of the action. The form of the play is the key to its energy: in places it is sheer doggerel, while at other times it neatly encapsulates a point.

The verse is effective in capturing the speed and energy of the city world, and also in maintaining the characters as two-dimensional. This two-dimensionality is maintained as completing a rhyme takes precedence over perspective. When Scilla comments, ‘And daddy needs a banker’ (p. 206), Grimes’ only reply can be one that ends with a word rhyming with ‘banker’, and he states, ‘Won’t survive without one, poor old wanker’ (p. 206). The expression of real feeling is contained by rhyme and dominated by rhyme structure. For example, when Greville Todd discusses the death of his son with Scilla, his attempt to make his thoughts rhyme, which is indicated by his near rhymes, suppresses the emotion he claims to feel:

‘Poor boy. Who would have thought? I’d rather he’d been a failure.
He used to want to emigrate and sheepfarm in Australia.
He always would rush in. He had no sense of balance.
He could have done anything, you know, he had so many talents.
Musician. Politician. No obstacles in his way.
If he’d done something else, he’d be alive today’ (p. 221).

Although the play is filled with the slang and jargon of the City, this loose language is contained in the verse. Churchill even manages to distinguish certain characters with verse style. Cousin describes this:

‘Each of the major characters has his or her own individual speech rhythms, and these chase each other in and out, sometimes blending, sometimes scoring a satirical point, through a deliberate break in the metrical and rhyme scheme. The loosely sprung, lengthy verse lines which characterize Zac’s speech merge with Jacinta Condor’s snappy, jazzy rhythms, or the forceful driving language of Corman, the corporate raider. When Jacinta Condor offers...to help Duckett, the chairman of Albion, to foil Corman’s take-over bid, she picks up the rollicking rhythms of Duckett, and Biddulph, his white knight’ (1989: 101).

Almost all of the play’s forty-eight scenes use the rhymed dialogue, but the trading scenes are not rhymed, and the sudden break with the predominating form seems to magnify the harshly discordant financial world. The only other scene that is not rhymed is where, in a flashback, Jake tells Scilla that he is under investigation by the Department of Trade and Industry. The other momentary breaks in form – such as when Duckett panics in the face of the take-over attempt –

highlight that there is another reality beyond the world created by the characters of the play. While the use of rhymed verse directs the characters, suggesting that they are slaves to a different system, the sudden breaks in form indicate that the system can be disrupted, and this signals hope.

In *Serious Money* the rhetoric of economics deliberately replaces the language of personal concerns. In terms of this rhetoric, money-making takes precedence, and all vestiges of love, loyalty, friendship and family values must be ruthlessly eliminated as obstacles in the path of profit. In the world of those concerned with serious money, 'Happy takeover day' (p. 240) replaces 'Happy birthday', and a death is hardly reason enough to be late for work. Zac states, 'I went with Scilla to identify her brother Jake's body which was / kind of a mess. / Then we stopped for coffee, which was making me late for work, / but it was a special occasion, I guess' (p. 218). Using Scilla's character, in particular, Churchill skilfully blurs personal and business language. When Scilla tells Zac that she is 'going to find out who killed Jake' (p. 220), he replies, 'Take a sedative, have a sleep, and then see how you feel' (p. 220). Scilla's retort is, 'Nobody sleeps in the middle of a deal' (p. 220). Scilla's investigation into Jake's death becomes a heartless hunt for serious money. Once Scilla discovers that her brother was 'making serious money' (p. 243), her interest in murder suspects is purely for her own possible financial gain: referring to Jacinta and Nigel, she states, 'Would either of them be likely to kill / Jake? Or more important still / Could they tell me about his bank account? / Which bank is it in? / And what's the total amount?' (p. 284). Her motive is more than clear: 'And if it's in a numbered Swiss account, Zac, how do I get at it?' (p. 284). Grimes complains, 'Fucking nuisance if he's died without a / Will' (p. 278), and when Scilla replies, 'Daddy and I are next of kin' (p.278), he asks, 'Will you marry me?' (p. 278). Social contracts, or institutions, such as marriage, become financial transactions. Indifference to anything other than the opportunity to earn more money (and, therefore, acquire more power) is bluntly conveyed when Corman, after Scilla accuses him of murdering Jake, replies, 'After the deal, after the deal I'll confess / To murdering anyone just let me get on with the deal' (p. 241). Scilla impatiently tells her father twice, 'Pull yourself together, daddy' (p. 221/222) when he begins to show signs of human feeling, saying, 'I wish he was still a baby and giving daddy a kiss' (p. 222). Every life event, be it death or marriage, is calculated in financial terms.

The difficulties facing those who conducted business in the City before the 'Big Bang' are brought to the fore in the character of Frosby, the middle-aged jobber who is facing compulsory redundancy. It is this discarded jobber who decides to inform the Department of Trade and Industry about insider dealing involving Jake Todd, the son of his old school friend Greville, thereby exacting revenge. Frosby's 'redundancy' is evident early in the play as, when attending a

hunt, he is the only person on foot: he has 'been asked to retire early' (p. 215) and is no longer 'in the game'. In this hunt scene, where the imagery presented reveals the competitiveness and aggressiveness of predatory people, he is left alone onstage when the horn blows for the start of the hunt and everyone rushes off. He begins a monologue about what the stock exchange used to be like, embarking on an embittered account of the passing of the 'old boys' power structure into the hands of 'yankees' and 'barrow boys'. Anger occasionally breaks through his sentimentality, and he confesses that 'Revenge would give me some relief' (p. 215). Frosby is struggling to come to terms with the new situation and speaks of how the changes in the financial world have had far-reaching consequences, especially in terms of his 'friendships'. He recalls how 'The stock exchange was a village street. / You strolled about and met your friends. / Now we never seem to meet. / I don't get asked much at weekends' (p. 215). He laments how the human face of the stock exchange has been eroded. Formerly, traders 'really had a sense of humour. / And everybody played the game' (p. 215), but 'Since Big Bang the floor is bare, / They deal in offices on screens. / But if the chap's not really there / You can't be certain what he means' (p. 215). Whereas in the past the traders knew one another by name and could rely on fair play, business has lost its 'human' dimension and the traders are never quite sure whether they are in touch with reality or not. A trader is now 'no better than a thief' (p. 215). Frosby's final, non-metrical line in this scene, 'I'm very frightened' (p. 216), jolts the audience into an awareness of impending disaster, and disturbingly echoes Angie's words at the end of *Top Girls*. His revenge earns him nothing, and he confesses, 'I thought the sun would never set. / I thought I'd be extremely rich. / You can't be certain what you'll get. / I've heard young say Life's a bitch' (p. 301). His betrayal of an old family friend reveals the hollowness of the friendliness he recalls during his monologue, and one assumes he ends his own life as it is pointed out that he has a gun: he states, 'I betrayed my oldest friend. / It didn't give me too much fun. / My way of life is at an end. / At least I have a friendly gun...(p. 301). The futility of Frosby's revenge and the pitiless workings of the world of business are powerfully encapsulated in the words, 'Frosby was forgotten' (p. 307). And the deals and schemes of the traders and bankers would continue at least for 'five more glorious years'.

The women characters in the play do not serve merely as objects for male sexual gratification, but have the same privileged access to money. It is in this collusion in the oppression of less economically advantaged women that the anti-Thatcher theme that features in *Top Girls* is perpetuated in *Serious Money*. Scilla Todd, Jacinta Condor, Mrs Etherington and Marylou Baines are all 'dangerous' women who betray, from the socialist feminist standpoint, true feminist ideals. Scilla, whose name suggests the dangerous, sucking whirlpool on Odysseus' journey, is indeed a 'monster': the Scylla of mythology captured her victims by means of her twelve limbs, while Scilla Todd reaches out in all directions grasping at money and power. The absence of any trace

of human values in Scilla is 'frightening', as is her description of herself: '...You'll find me quite a dangerous enemy. / I'm greedy and completely amoral. / I've the cunning and connections of the middle class / And I'm tough as a yob' (p. 305).

Although the audience can sympathize with Scilla for being less significant in her father's life than her brother (she states, 'You never liked me, Daddy. Jake was always your favourite' (p. 223)), her willingness to use the same system to attain her material goals is unforgivable. She has internalized male values, which is evident when she accuses her father of 'trading like a cunt' (p. 283). Any sense of loyalty, including family loyalty, has been eroded on the path to greater wealth, and she even threatens her father: 'If I find out you were in on it, you're not getting my protection' (p. 223), and, 'If you're holding out on me daddy you'll be sorry' (p. 282). She berates him, saying, 'I've always been ashamed of you. Your drink and your pomposity' (p. 224), and he replies, 'Scilla, the oiks you work with have made you a monstrosity' (p. 224). Although Greville correctly perceives that Scilla is seriously lacking as a human being, he himself is entrenched in the patriarchal system in which she coldly operates, and erroneously concludes that she has been negatively influenced by the 'oiks'. His limited view is evident when he states, 'I protected you, Scilla. / It's bad enough to see a woman get work / Without her being part of an old boy network' (p. 281). Scilla's characteristically monstrous retort to her father is, 'Fuck off. I want my share' (p. 281). Her moral lassitude is abundantly clear when she asks, 'What does it matter if Jake was a baddy' (p. 221). At the end of the play, Scilla uses the information she has gathered during her investigations to blackmail Marylou, the arbitrageur who bought inside information from Jake, thereby securing herself a position with the company. She tells Marylou, 'I had been wondering if you killed Jake, but now I hardly care / It's not going to bring him alive again, and the main thing's to get / my share...' (p. 304). Like Marlene in *Top Girls*, Scilla has rejected community and family considerations for self-aggrandizement.

Equally guilty are Marylou Baines, Jacinta Condor and Mrs Etherington. The description of Marylou by Greville is reminiscent of Thatcher. She 'Was originally a poor girl from the plains. / She set out to make whatever she wanted hers / And now she's one of America's top arbitrageurs / (second only to Boesky)' (p. 222). Marylou approvingly quotes Boesky, 'Greed is all right. Greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still / feel good about yourself' (p. 234), and maintains that Boesky 'overstepped some regulations, sure, / but the guy's no criminal' (p. 233). She hypocritically refers to arbitrage as 'a service to the community' (p. 232). She summarizes her life: 'I work twenty-four hours a day and take pills for stomach acidity - / So companies can be taken over easy, / Which means discharging superfluous workers, discontinuing / unprofitable lines, the kind of stuff that makes your lazy / inefficient management queasy' (p. 232). Jacinta

Condor, a ruthless profiteer and zestful swindler, is a Peruvian national who directly exploits the economically disadvantaged citizens of her country. Jacinta, a mining heiress who is in London to convert her family's ill-gained wealth into eurobonds, is obsessed with increasing her power in the money markets. To this end, and with no compunction, she closes copper mines because they are no longer profitable: '...the government will not let us mining companies exchange enough dollars at the better rate, they insist we help the country in this crisis, I do not want to help, I want to be rich, I close my mines and sell my copper on the London Metal Exchange...' (p. 254). Her philosophy on aid for the poor in her country is summed up in her words, 'Why bother to send aid so many miles, put it straight into my eurobonds' (p. 255). Mrs Etherington, a stockbroker, is Churchill's example of a hypocritical woman who merely pays lip-service to integrity. In the incident highlighting this, Mrs Etherington tells Corman that her 'reputation for integrity' (p. 236) compels her 'to suggest you should take care' (p. 236) as there is 'No point succeeding if that same success / Destroys you and your company forever' (p. 236). She warns, 'Remember Guinness' (p. 236). Corman, whose philosophy is '...get the stock. And I don't care how you do it' (p. 236), responds to her 'concerned' warning by telling her, 'You can piss off, I'll get another broker. / The last thing I need in my pack is some tight-arsed joker. / (I thought you were good at this)' (p. 237), and Mrs Etherington immediately replies, 'My duty has been done in speaking out. / And now I'll help in every way I can. / My reputation for integrity / Will reassure our colleagues of their safety / In making any purchase we advise' (p. 237). This incident encapsulates how Mrs Etherington, under the veil of integrity, is as greedy and grasping as her 'sisters' in the play. Greed is the driving force behind all of these women, and Churchill does not leave the audience with any hope for change in these characters: at the close of the play we learn that Scilla has been named by *Business Week* as 'Wall Street's rising star' (p. 306), Mrs Etherington 'runs the City's new disciplinary panel' (p. 307), and Marylou 'ran for president in 1996' (p. 307). Jacinta marries Zac, but the fact that they spend their honeymoon in Shanghai because there is 'Good business to be done in China now' (p. 306) signals that her priority remains unchanged.

Despite the fact that Churchill's female characters are as vile and corruptible as her male characters, having appropriated the male gaze, overt sexism is rampant in the play. A line of the 'Futures Song' reads, 'I fucked that runner she's a right little stunner so I pulled her off / the floor' (p. 253), and Scilla confesses to having been '...terrified when I started because there aren't many girls and / they line up to watch you walk' (p. 244): the women in trading/dealing have not moved beyond the constraints of a phallogocentric world into neutral territory, and their bodies remain objects of male desire. The women's bodies continue to be converted into sites of sexuality for men to gaze upon and exploit. Further, women are publicly humiliated in a crudely sexual manner, such as the woman who is told, 'She's looking for her cunt' (p. 251). Scilla

describes the male traders as 'a very chauvinist bunch' (p. 245), and says, 'They left me out because I'm a girl and it's terribly unfair' (p. 304). Greville confirms the continuance of a 'traditional' male view, that of female 'hysteria', in his comment to Scilla, 'Darling, you always did have a vivid imagination / (like poor Mummy)' (p. 224). The women assist in perpetuating the economic system and concomitantly, albeit unwittingly, perpetuate this sexism. For example, eager to speak to Corman, Scilla announces, 'kissogram for Mr Corman' (p. 239) to attract his attention, and Jacinta acts the helpless woman when flirting with Zac, as when Zac asks, '(So are the miners bothering you?)', she responds, 'You come and protect me?' (p. 259). Both the male and female characters employ feminine references to disparage: for example, Grimes reports his boss calling him a 'cunt' (p. 204) when the boss assumed that he (Grimes) was pressuring for a larger percentage of the profits on a trade, and Scilla insultingly refers to her father's trading as 'cunt'-like (p. 283). 'Cunt', a word entirely gender-specific in its origin and implication, and used to debase women, becomes gender-neutral to Scilla as she has lost all concept of women's role, if any, in the system. Sexism is overlooked by the women in the play because the power structures of traditional sexual relationships and the business world are the same, hierarchical and exploitative. Just as men adopt derogatory terminology in their language to / about women, women such as Scilla similarly deride those inferior to them in the sphere of business.

The men in the play are nonetheless mistaken if they underestimate the women by treating them as fragile and helpless: these women are hardbitten by greed and play the money game according to the male-instituted rules. This 'role reversal' is seen in in one instance where Marylou, described as 'second only to Boesky' (p. 222), gains the upper hand over Corman when he mistakenly assumes that he has won her loyalty by sending her flowers – a token which in the traditional gender world would have 'softened her up' for the deal. In another instance, Biddulph, the female white knight, sets out to rescue Albion's corporate chairman, described as a 'sweet English maiden, all shining and bright' (p. 235): Biddulph must save Albion from Corman, who is the 'villain intent upon rape' (p. 235). She states, 'And the knight has a fight and the maiden escapes / And when I'm in charge I'll put everything right. / (We can talk about closing Scunthorpe late)' (p. 235). By casting Biddulph in a traditionally male role, that of the rescuer, and by characterizing Duckett as a fair maiden, Churchill disrupts gender roles. Doan (1990: 76) comments that, 'In fact, Corman's inattentiveness to such powerfully assertive women like Biddulph could leave him a damsel in distress'. She explains how Churchill shatters the chivalric code:

'Churchill begins her destruction of the chivalric code – a paradigm of female helplessness and male self-sacrifice – with the subversive appropriation of the

language of chivalry, and completes it by investing Biddulph, not with a noble and generous intent, but with aggressive masculine self-interest' (1990: 76).

A man is cast as Marylou's personal assistant, setting up a situation where Churchill can display how women who have risen through the ranks in an individualistic way are ultimately as exploitative and abusive as their male counterparts. TK constantly tries to ingratiate himself with Marylou, telling her, 'I really admire your style, Miss Baines' (p. 232), and later, '(Ms Baines, I admire your guts)' (p. 233). His comment is in parentheses as his lower position on the corporate ladder means his voice is unimportant to Marylou. Marylou finally unceremoniously dismisses him, saying, 'Sure, TK, you said you wanted out, / Scilla wants in. So don't let's hang about' (p. 305). The emergence of this tough new breed of women and the exchange of gender roles does not herald a victory, but is seen to be equally contemptible.

Serious Money exposes the unconcerned attitude of rabid money-makers to the underprivileged areas of the world, and simultaneously exemplifies how there are wealthy businessmen-and-women from these Third World countries who unscrupulously accumulate and augment their own wealth at the expense of their poorer brethren. Although the masses in these countries may be on the brink of starvation, capitalists such as Zac regard the economic successes of the minority as reason enough to dismiss any notion of economic plight: 'Pictures of starving babies are misleading and patronising. / Because there's plenty of rich people in those countries, it's just the / masses that's poor, and Jacinta Condor flew into London and / was quite enterprising' (p. 255). In Zac's amoral world of business, the unscrupulous means Jacinta has used to build up her fortune is irrelevant. The wealthy nationals of the poorer countries, Jacinta and Nigel, prefer to dissociate themselves from their motherlands: Jacinta likes to do business in England, where 'governments don't fall overnight and children don't sell themselves in the street and my money is safe' (p. 254), and Nigel, educated at Eton, confirms that 'one's mostly based over here' (p. 260), and 'One's based in London so one's operation / Is on the right side of exploitation' (261). Jacinta's knowledge of cocaine, copper prices and the LME far exceeds her interest in the mines she owns in her home country, and her lesson in the economics of Third World aid is that the rich get eurobonds and the poor country gets debt. She quickly disposes of her holdings in Peruvian mines, abandoning the workers, when the price of copper plummets, but retains her investment in cocaine, and ships this to Marylou in New York. Even if she has to agree to contribute an additional ten percent towards the support of the Contras in order to persuade the C.I.A. to continue to help the cocaine to pass through the barriers, she will still make a considerable profit. Her callous attitude to her starving countrymen is contained in her words to Jake, 'My country is beautiful, Jake, white mountains, jungle greenery. / My people will starve to death among the scenery. / (Let them rot. I'm sick of it.)' (p. 261). Nigel summarizes in his upper class Eton accent

his assertion that financial success can be achieved at the expense of the people in the Third World: calling to mind the colonialism in *Cloud Nine*, he states, 'One thing one learned from one's colonial masters, / One makes money from other people's disasters' (p. 261). When Zac comments that 'The IMF is not a charity. / It has to insist on absolute austerity' (p. 260), Nigel wholeheartedly agrees, saying that Third World countries must 'accept restricted diets' (p. 261) and that 'paying the western banks is the priority' (p. 261). Jake comments on the controversial effort to aid starving Africans in 1986, claiming, 'Bob Geldof was a silly cunt. / He did his charity back to front. / They should have had the concerts in Zaire / And shipped the money to banks over here' (p. 261). Zac believes that 'The so-called third world doesn't want our charity or Aid. / All they need is the chance to sit down in front of some green screens and trade' (p. 255). The poor and the powerless never appear in the play. Although mines and factories are closed and workers dismissed or made redundant, this does not occur onstage. But Churchill nonetheless succeeds in forcing into the spotlight the ongoing global oppression of economically disadvantaged groups, and highlights the depravity of this oppression through the flippant references to gross human suffering. Women such as those in *Fen* partly comprise the silent masses in *Serious Money*.

The elitist attitude of those privileged enough to choose an abode anywhere in the world is evident when Zac declares that, '...as a place to live, England's swell' (p. 211), compared with Tokyo, New York and Hong Kong: 'Tokyo treats me like a slave, New York tries to kill me, Hong Kong / I have to turn a blind eye to the suffering and I feel wrong' (p. 211). He maintains that in London he can 'go to the theatre, I don't get mugged, I have classy friends, / and I go to see them in the country at the weekends' (p. 211). The concept of happily maintaining an insulated existence away from the realities of poverty should become a cause for concern for the audience. The difference between the American capitalistic impulse and the British 'dream' arises in a conversation between Zac and Jake: Zac asks Jake, 'Why do the British always want land?' (p. 230), and Jake replies, 'You're not upper class without it, you're too American to understand' (p. 230). Zac's response is, 'You don't make money out of land, you make money out of / money'. (p. 231), and Jake explains, 'It's a dream. Woods. Springtime. Owning the spring...' (p. 231). While the American dream is fixed squarely on dollar notes, the British capitalists still yearn for the life originally defined by the landed aristocracy. Buying land, for them, would somehow equate with buying their way into the upper class - connecting the fast, flashy world of their new money to the sedate world of the landed gentry of the past.

While the characters frequently use language filled with sexual innuendo, sexual liaisons do not feature in this play for none of the characters has the time. Scilla states that the male traders are

'all too knackered / by the end of the day' (p. 245), and Kathy, a trader, adds, 'It's true, they're all frustrated / because they never have time to do / it' (p. 245). Doan maintains:

'In the City, it's strictly business before pleasure. What happens below the belt in *Serious Money* has little to do with sex. In fact, both women and men suspend their interest in sex in order to concentrate on the all-important act of making money. Men are slightly disadvantaged in that they find sexual abstinence more frustrating, but both sexes willingly abandon sexual interests until an important deal is pushed through. 'Sexy greedy' may be the catchphrase of the late eighties...but it is a state of mind rather than of body' (1990: 77).

The City, which bows to the Thatcherite precept of hard work, demands a postponement of outside interests: Corman tells his take-over team, 'Nobody's going out any more to lunch. / (You can cancel dinner too.) / From today, we're going for the gold. / Put your family life and your sex life on hold' (p. 236). At various points throughout, the characters make attempts at 'romantic' liaisons, but fail. Jacinta Condor and Zac match schedules as they try to find a time to meet privately, but their schedules are too full of business meetings. Jacinta tells Zac, 'I can't do bad business just because I feel romantic' (p. 300). The two would-be lovers react ecstatically to one another's corporate triumphs: Zac tells her, 'The way you do business, Jacinta, drives me completely frantic' (p. 300), and she confides that, 'I love the way you are so obsessed when you're thinking about your / bids' (p. 300). She says, 'I love the way you never stop work, I hate a man who's lazy', and he completes her rhyme, 'The way you unloaded your copper mines drove me completely / crazy' (p. 300). Jacinta's words, 'Zac, you're so charming, I'm almost as fond / Of you as I am of a eurobond' (p. 300) encapsulate how money presides over their 'relationship'. When they finally overcome several scheduling difficulties to meet at Jacinta's hotel suite, after she has had dinner with eurobond dealers and he has been busy planning a take-over attempt, Zac admits that he is too exhausted for sex: 'Did you ever play with a hoop when you were a child and when it / stops turning it falls down flat? / I feel kind of like that' (p. 300). Jacinta, equally exhausted, only wants to 'go to sleep' (p. 300). At the close of the play, Jacinta reports that 'Jacinta marries Zac next week and they honeymoon in Shanghai. / (Good business to be done in China now)' (p. 306). Again, profit dictates. The audience can only wonder how the couple will manage to schedule marital duties into their overloaded diaries.

The ability and tendency of capitalists to calculatedly misrepresent themselves and/or their businesses to society in order to benefit materially from these false corporate or personal images is brought into the play's scope in the scenes where Biddulph, a 'white knight' (a publicist), and Dolcie Starr, a public relations consultant, advise Duckett and Corman respectively on their public images. Duckett hires Biddulph to present Albion as a model for others interested in the

welfare of the community, although he has never had an interest in the social good. Biddulph advises Duckett to project an image where 'You do so much good, you give so much enjoyment...' (p. 274). Referring to art, she tells him, 'You don't give a fart, / I know it, they know it, you just mustn't show it...' (p. 274). Equally ludicrous is Starr's suggestion that Corman assume the Donald Trump façade: 'bad' and 'glamorous' (p. 285). Starr claims that 'Everyone loves a villain if he's handled right. / bad has connotations of amorous' (p. 285). Corman plays the rich man who is a friend of the arts. Consistent with Churchill's socialism, corporate charitable contributions are depicted as invariably being the gimmicks of public relations experts employed by the wealthy. Duckett sponsors the provincial orchestras but Corman sponsors the National Theatre: 'He sponsors provincial / orchestras. You need the National / Theatre for power, opera for decadence, / String quartets bearing your name for sensitivity and elegance, / and a fringe show with bad language for a thrill. / That should take care of the spiritual. / Now the physical. It's a pity you haven't a yacht' (p. 286). Starr also recommends 'a sex scandal', suggesting that, 'We provide a young girl who'll say you did it eight times a night' (p. 286). The ludicrousness of Starr's scheme is glaring when she adds that, 'Your wife is standing by you, so that's all right', as Corman is not married. Corman informs her that, 'I'm not married' (p. 286), but this is written in parentheses as whether or not it is true is of minor importance. Starr merely responds, 'If necessary we provide the wife' (p. 286): in this practiced art of deception, the truth is irrelevant and the aim is to be as convincing as possible. When Corman shows hesitation, Starr impatiently tells him, 'There's ugly greedy and sexy greedy, you dope. / At the moment you're ugly which is no hope. / If you stay ugly, God knows what your fate is. / But sexy greedy *is* the late eighties' (p. 287). The play thus exposes the manipulations of the rampant capitalists, exploiting what they merely view as 'the market' through such determined and contrived means as carefully orchestrated public relations campaigns.

In the exchange between Corman and Starr, Churchill makes further reference to the Aids issue – having made direct reference to it in a previous dialogue between Jake and Scilla, and a monologue by Zac. Corman comments, 'I thought sexy was out' (p. 287), and Starr responds, 'The more you don't do it, the more it's fun to read about' (p. 287). Starr's rationalization is that the Aids-wary public would welcome the opportunity to take vicarious pleasures in Corman's exploits. In the earlier discussion between Jake and Scilla, Scilla relates how 'At work they ask for tea in an Aids cup, they mean / a disposable...' (p. 218), revealing how the topicality of Aids at the time of the play revolved more around the misconceptions of its infectiousness. In his monologue, Zac maintains that, 'Aids is making advertisers perplexed / Because it's no longer too good to have your product associated with sex' (p. 255). Churchill determinedly avoids an interpretation of Aids as a judgment of God against homosexuals, which was a commonly held

view in the eighties, but rather her references to the disease suggest that she perceives it as possibly starting a new trend toward general sexual abstinence. As a play written in the eighties, she does not introduce the slant of 'protected sex', a slant that proliferates in the present to a larger degree than the 'abstinence' approach. The mention of Aids is appropriate to the moral chaos that courses through the play: it is an out-of-control disease in an out-of-control world.

The Conservative government is viewed, through the perspective of the play, in the same deceptive and manipulative light as capitalists such as Duckett and Corman, with Churchill exposing its concern with public image and its double standards. Congruently, Thatcher and women like her are placed in a critical light. At the end of the play, the government intervenes in the take-over attempt of Albion, and manages to stop it. Another take-over immediately prior to the election would make the City and the government 'look greedy' (p. 298) at a time when they need to 'be seen to care about the needy' (p. 298). Neither the DTI nor any of the politicians wish to risk any scandal, and Cabinet Minister Gleason tells Corman, 'Mr Corman, I'll be brutally frank. / A scandal would not be welcomed by the Bank / Nor will it be tolerated by the Tories. / Whenever you businessmen do something shitty / Some of it gets wiped off on the City, / And the government's smelly from the nasty stories' (p. 298). When Corman asks, 'Why pick on me? Everyone's the same. / I'm just good at playing a rough game', Gleason replies, 'Exactly, and the game must be protected. / You can go on playing after we're elected. / Five more glorious years free enterprise, / And your services to industry will be recognised' (p. 299). The takeover bid concludes with Corman begrudgingly agreeing to stand down from Albion in return for an assurance that the Department of Trade and Industry will terminate its investigations, and he will receive a knighthood: 'Cunt. Right. Good. / At least a Knighthood' (p. 299). But neither Corman nor any of the other City operators is deterred: as is clear by the one-liners at the end of the play, the characters will continue relentlessly in the business of business. The Conservatives 'romped home with a landslide victory for five more glorious years' (p. 306).

Trading is the predominant action of *Serious Money*. It emerges in between the plot developments and flashbacks, and, through these complex trading scenes, Churchill brings the City world to life. Here the cacophonies of trading convey the frenzied scramble for money, with the noise metaphorically drowning out anything that is not 'business'. The three dealing scenes in the play employ a technique of overlapping dialogue, which Churchill also used in previous plays. The overlapping dialogue effectively conveys the chaotic nature of the exchanges taking place. At the end of the first act, four companies on the LIFFE floor, each with its own telephones and trading pit, trade simultaneously. There is frantic gesturing, and the shouting of bids and obscenities gets louder and louder, building into the 'Futures Song'. This song ends the first half of the play and

intensifies the pace with its rant, 'Money-making money-making money-making money-making / Money-making money-making money-making caper / Do the fucking business do the fucking business do the fucking / business / And bang it down on paper' (p. 253).

The play ends with the biting song by Ian Drury, 'Five More Glorious Years', which predicts furious money-making under the continued leadership of Margaret Thatcher and her Conservatives, and conveys the confidence that money and greed conquer all. Presented in an ostensibly 'cheerful' mood, satirical in the extreme, the song raucously raises the spectre of a continuing Thatcher government:

'Five more glorious years, five more glorious years
we're crossing forbidden frontiers, we're sniding beneath our veneer
pissed and promiscuous, the money's ridiculous
send her victorious for five fucking morious
five more glorious years' (p. 308).

Kritzer avers, 'At the end, they all sing a song of praise to Thatcher, but they have actually been marching to her tune all throughout the play' (1991:164). This is a grim note on which to conclude the play, particularly since a set of rhyming one-liners on the futures of the characters indicates that they will continue as before. Their focus remains on materialism. A further cautionary note here lies in the final statement on Corman: He is 'chairman of the board of the National Theatre' (p. 307). In addition, the characters that claim agency in the play, Scilla, Marylou, Jacinta and Nigel, all join in singing this cynical song, suggesting that they are, indeed, subsumed. Despite instances of personal autonomy, such as when Scilla's claims agency and flies to New York at the end of the play to work with Marylou for 'extremely' serious money, it is evident that these 'top people' are enslaved by the system, just as the 'top girls' are enslaved.

Serious Money, like *Top Girls*, explores the achievements that are valued by contemporary capitalist society, and again exposes these achievements as valueless. Boundaries in the society of the play are established more by the legal and investigative powers of the Department of Trade and Industry than by any tradition of moral authority or community concern. In a world where the game of life is like 'a cross between roulette and space invaders' (p. 244), the only ethical issue is whether 'you can be greedy and still feel good about yourself'. The traders and dealers who appear to exercise power prove to be, in the final analysis, just another commodity for exchange. The fact that diverse groups (men, women, blacks, Jews and Latin Americans) are all players in the money game is not an indication of freedom: they are enslaved by the politics of business, and collude in their own oppression as they oppress others. Despite the community of song at the close of the play, it is clear that there is no sense of community among the characters. The

commonality of the characters lies in their single-minded determination to make money, while ignoring the cost. The play is thoroughly entertaining, but it is only once the final curtain has fallen that the audience is likely to realize the gravity of what it has seen. By means of the entertainment value of the play, it is clear that the pursuit of money can be appealing, but the audience must reflect on the selfish individualism of such a life and the emptiness of its 'rewards'. The ideological configurations in the play resemble those of Churchill's earlier plays, and Churchill's message resounds for those who allow it to penetrate their resistance: a life embracing the community and the integrity of honest work for fair wages would advance society, while those struggling against the effects of patriarchal capitalism face marauding individualists in their own quarters. Churchill's feminism could be said to be distinctively socialist in this play. She warns that without a redistribution of the power created by 'serious money', ambitious women 'on the floor of life' will become as oppressive as their male counterparts.

CONCLUSION

In her dissection of traditional relations of power, not only between the sexes but also among different social groups, Churchill uses the multi-dimensionality of theatre to explore both the surface of social structures and the mental territory beneath that surface. Thus, in her work uncompromising social commentaries fuse with theatrical inventiveness to present a convincing critique. Challenges to form, or the 'unfixing' of boundaries, are now widely recognized strategies of feminist theatre which explore the liminal in the interest of challenging the sign of Woman. But Churchill's skilful manipulation of sign-systems through her use of time-shifting, overlapping dialogue, doubling and cross-casting have secured her place as a major British (and feminist) contemporary dramatist. Aston wrote in 1997, 'The need for Churchill's socialist-feminist critique of class and gender issues is arguable...all the more critical in the current backlash climate of the 1990's when even the acceptable face of bourgeois feminism is under threat' (1997: 44/45). Churchill explores women's oppression by grappling with issues such as the male gaze, the objectification of women, the masquerade of femininity, and women as objects of exchange within a masculine economy. In so doing, she locates her concerns in the area of 'materialism and gender'.

Churchill's plays reveal how signs create reality rather than reflect it: in capitalist patriarchy the term 'male' refers to the male subject, and 'Woman' is constituted as 'Other'. Churchill uses the Brechtian-based distancing methods to induce a critical examination of gendered relations, and these (methods) impact on her drama most effectively in its visual presentation. She calls into question the traditional sign 'Woman' – which is constructed by and for the male gaze – by constructing the female body as a site / sight of 'looking-at-being-looked-at-ness' in performance. This is achieved by the particular usage of vestimentary signs of gender-encoded costume in relation to the body. In feminist theatre, cross-gendered costume display requires the hiding of the female body, in order that it might be removed from its objectified position in the male gaze.

Cross-gender casting, Churchill's most widely reviewed dramatic device, destabilises fixed sexual identities determined by dominant heterosexual ideology. Tampering with the vestimentary codes of gendered costume deconstructs the alliance between sign systems and the patriarchal order. Churchill assigns vestimentary signs of masculinity and femininity with the 'wrong' bodies, thereby using the stage itself to question the notion of the actors' bodies and how they are represented. The extent to which convention connects the actors to the characters is revealed, indicating the uncertainty of conventional meanings. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*:

Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990:137), claims that ‘...drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity’. She points out that ‘Both claims to truth [appearance and reality] contradict one another and so displace the entire enactment of gender significations from the discourse of truth and falsity’ (1990: 137). Further, drag ‘reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency’ (1990: 137). Butler affirms that if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. She states:

‘Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of ‘men’ will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that ‘women’ will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution...there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one’. (1990: 6)

It is highlighted how the performance of drag does not only play upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed, but also brings the audience into the presence of ‘three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality’ (1990: 137) – namely, anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. Butler asserts, ‘If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance’ (1990: 137). Cautioning that parodic drag on its own is not subversive, she contends that it must contain elements that will ‘compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality’, ‘compel a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the masculine and the feminine’ and ‘enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire’ (1990: 139).

The question of the assignment of ‘sex’ (in reality, ‘gender’) was explored in Virginia Woolf’s biting parody, *Orlando*, where ‘Sexes change and sexuality changes with...unbounded and joyous momentum...’ (1992: introduction). The mark of gender ‘appears to ‘qualify’ bodies as

human bodies' (Butler, 1990: 111), but it appears to be a matter of 'tricks and cover-ups, of looking like what you are not, or what you may not be after all' (Woolf, 1992: introduction). The matter of presenting oneself as a socially recognizable identity is exposed as a series of ruses and masquerades. Woolf writes:

'...she [Orlando] found it convenient at this time to change frequently from one set of clothes to another. Thus she often occurs in contemporary memoirs as 'Lord' So-and-so...She had, it seems, no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive; nor can there be any doubt that she reaped a twofold harvest by this device; the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied. For the probity of breeches she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally' (1992: 211).

In an exploration of the constructedness of vestimentary codes, Woolf describes Orlando as follows:

'So then one may sketch her spending her morning in a China robe of ambiguous gender among her books; then receiving a client or two...in the same garment; then she would take a turn in the garden and clip the nut trees – for which knee-breeches were convenient; then she would change into a flowered taffeta which best suited a drive to Richmond and a proposal of marriage from some great nobleman; and so back again to town, where she would don a snuff-coloured gown like a lawyer's and visit the courts to hear how her cases were doing...and so, finally, when night came, she would more often than not become a nobleman from head to toe and walk the streets in search of adventure' (1992: 211/212).

Here gender becomes 'a project which has cultural survival as its end' (Butler, 1990: 139), and can therefore be termed a 'strategy' – this suggests 'the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs' (Butler, 1990: 139).

Catherine Nash, in her journal article *Reclaiming Vision: Looking at Landscape and the Body*, comments that 'forms of visual representation may support patriarchal power relations' (1996:167). Churchill, however, uses cross-gender casting to dramatize the patriarchal colonisation of female experience. This 'colonisation of the female experience' is brought into view, literally, by enabling the audience to view the man behind the image (The casting of a white actor to play the role of a black servant operates on the same principle). While simultaneously functioning as an alienation device, and provoking questions as to an 'original' gender, cross-gender casting serves as an emphatic refusal of socially-enforced gender roles.

The collapsing and shifting of temporalities in *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*, and *Fen* registers Churchill's non-compliance with linearity. In the sphere of women's theatre, feminist criticism

has linked the concept of linear time to those dramatic forms which are alienating to the female subject, such as realist drama. The well-constructed, or 'well-made', forms are expressive of the male experience in that the subject of this type of narrative is male and its discourse is phallogentric. Realist drama depends upon the interactive speaker-listener interchanges in which acts of speaking drive action on through exposition, progression and climactic closure. The focus is on the domestic domain and the family unit as a means of highlighting the male as sexual subject and the female as the sexual 'Other'. The female is enclosed within this male narrative, is most often defined in relation to the male subject (for example, in the capacity of wife, mother or daughter), and is unable to assume a subject position. Here women are used as objects of exchange in the heterosexual, male economy, as elucidated by Luce Irigaray, in *This Sex Which Is Not One*:

'...woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity...Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce. Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men, including the competition for the possession of mother earth' (1985: 31/32).

Churchill records how she remembered 'thinking of the 'maleness' of the traditional structure of plays, with conflict and building in a certain way to a climax' (Fitzsimmons, 1989: 90). The linearity of speaking time, ordered by units of dramatic time and action, represses the articulation of women's experience, and is aligned to male experience. Thus, in her non-linear framework, Churchill addresses the marginality of the female experience.

In *Top Girls* and *Serious Money* in particular, Churchill explicates a socialist-feminist position by pointing directly at the failure of liberal feminism. Women are portrayed as full participants in the economic opportunities afforded to men, but the concomitant disadvantages, to themselves and other women, are evident. The lack of a sense of community among women, highlighted by Churchill's portrayal of women such as Marlene, forms a critical element of Churchill's drama. Her drama re-iterates how meaningful change is impossible while women continue to oppress one another, and while economic structures perpetuate patriarchy.

The definitive role that class plays in social organization means that there are notable differences between upper-class and working-class women: there is little or no notion of a 'sisterhood', and the women in the privileged class in fact oppress and/or exploit those in the working class. But women's experiences cannot be understood outside of their specific historical context. Thus, rather than suggesting that liberation can be achieved through women's particular gender

strengths and the 'sisterhood', class and history are allocated a very specific place in their oppression. It is as a result of the specific economic conditions of women – in which they are exploited by virtue of their gender – that the oppression of women, for socialist feminists, is always within the class analysis.

For all socialist feminists, the concepts of false consciousness and alienation are of great significance. False consciousness is a system of lies that deludes exploited people into thinking that they are not really exploited, while alienation is their feeling of meaninglessness and worthlessness - or the illusion that their lives are otherwise. Alienation is by definition a fragmenting experience, where a sense of unity among women through their ongoing, shared experience in and against the material world becomes impossible. 'Fragmentation' is evident in all the plays examined, which identifies a need for consideration of the extent of the submission and/or subscription of a given group to the practices and ideologies of the oppressive order in any analysis of power dynamics. Altered consciousness, aligned to socio-political re-structuring, is necessary for both the oppressors and the oppressed, in a society where too much emphasis has been placed on individualism.

Semiotics²⁶, when applied to the theatre, explores how theatre communicates, or produces, a meaning, and the signifier is the elements in the theatrical production which compose its meaning. As a result, the gender of the audience members is significant in determining what the feminist play might mean, as the signified is the meaning derived from the signifier by the audience. This has a bearing on Churchill's plays as there have been instances of 'misinterpretation' of her concerns, by male critics in particular. *Top Girls*, for example, has been hailed by some critics as a tribute to the achievements of women such as Marlene, and, similarly, some have failed to observe or understand Churchill's criticisms in *Serious Money*. As a sign-system, feminist theatre can surpass conventionality in its rearrangement of signs, but the class and gender bias of the audience may in some instances prove to be impervious to any 'new reading' of these signs. This is not an indicator of ineffectiveness on the part of Churchill's critique, but rather of the obduracy of the prevailing ideologies.

In final consideration of Churchill's work, it must be averred that it effectively and comprehensively questions women's oppression. Churchill herself wrote that 'Playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions' (Thurman, 1982: 54), and her plays are truly interrogative in that they reflect 'an 'unfixing' of the subject, a destabilizing of meaning, and ...[an

²⁶ The study of signs and symbols.

acknowledgement of]... the painful suturing of the Imaginary²⁷ and the Symbolic²⁸, (Aston, 1995: 36). Although she does not delineate a clear-cut model for a new dispensation in her drama, she reveals the hidden realities of an unequal world. Aston comments that in Churchill's drama, 'What emerges is a Churchillian landscape which is characteristically 'frightening', greedy, corrupt, violent and damaged, and is populated with oppressed groups – particularly of women – marked by powerlessness, division and dispossession' (Aston, 1997: 1). In her essay *Toward an Understanding of L'Ecriture feminine*, Ann Rosalind Jones posits that only through an analysis of the power relationships between men and women, and practices based on that analysis, will it become possible to end oppression. Further, only then will it emerge what men and women are or can be. She states, 'We need to know how women have come to be who they are through history, which is the history of their oppression by men and male-designed institutions' (Jones, 1986: 369). Through theatre which '...is not just a question of politics, but a politics of style' (Aston, 1997: 80), Churchill addresses this. She looks to a time when, despite representations of 'Woman' as an eternal category, an imaginary formation, 'Woman' is no longer a political and economic category. Her disruption of the boundaries of illusion and reality is an invitation to her audiences to share in the possibility of an altered world.

²⁷ In the Lacanian system, the entry into language constitutes the entry into an external order which forms the child's identity. In psycho-sexual terms it is also the moment when the child's pre-Oedipal connection with the mother is broken. The pre-Oedipal phase is termed the Imaginary.

²⁸ In the Lacanian system, the entry into language is the entry into an order which represents the Law of the Father – and the loss of the mother – and is classed as the Symbolic Order. The arbitrarily imposed Symbolic Order privileges the male at the expense of the female.

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SUMMARY

Caryl Churchill, the most widely performed female dramatist in contemporary British theatre, is a playwright preoccupied with the dissection of the traditional relations of power. She challenges social and dramatic conventions through her innovative exploration of the male gaze, the objectification of women, the performativity of gender, and women as objects of exchange within a masculine economy. In so doing, Churchill locates her concerns in the area of 'materialism and gender'.

Churchill explicates a socialist-feminist position by pointing directly at the failure of liberal feminism. The lack of a sense of community among women, highlighted by Churchill's portrayal of women such as Marlene in 'Top Girls', forms a critical aspect of Churchill's work. Her drama reiterates how meaningful change is impossible while women continue to oppress one another, and while economic structures perpetuate patriarchy. Altered consciousness, aligned to socio-political re-structuring, is necessary for both the oppressors and the oppressed, in a society where too much emphasis has been placed on individualism.

The outspoken hope for a transgression of the conventional processes of identification and other omnipresent, oppressive socio-political phenomena, is a strong aspect of Churchill's work. Her plays reveal how signs create reality rather than reflect it, and she uses Brechtian-based distancing methods to induce a critical examination of gendered relations. Time-shifting, overlapping dialogue, doubling and cross-casting are used by Churchill to manipulate the sign-systems of the dominant order. Cross-gender casting, Churchill's most widely reviewed dramatic device, is employed to destabilise fixed sexual identities determined by dominant heterosexual ideology. She calls into question the traditional sign 'Woman' – which is constructed by and for the male gaze - and addresses the marginality of the female experience in a non-linear framework.

Although dealing with serious issues, Churchill's plays are often executed in a style that is at once amusing and thought-provoking to exclude the possibility of didacticism. With her skilful use of language and innovative techniques as her highly effective instruments, Churchill accomplishes her broader purpose with originality. In its originality and complexity, her drama is in itself a 'new possibility' for different forms.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	p.
2. CHAPTER ONE: <i>VINEGAR TOM</i>	p.
3. CHAPTER TWO: <i>CLOUD NINE</i>	p.
4. CHAPTER THREE: <i>TOP GIRLS</i>	p.
5. CHAPTER FOUR: <i>FEN</i>	p.
6. CHAPTER FIVE: <i>SERIOUS MONEY</i>	p.
7. CONCLUSION.....	p.
8. WORKS CITED.....	p.