

THE IMAGE OF THATCHERISM IN TOP GIRLS BY CARYL CHURCHILL

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
Caryl Churchill's <i>Top Girls</i> (1982) reveals how women have achieved a point of strength and independence in their battle to face men's oppression throughout history. Churchill has replicated recent transitions in the 1980s and 1990s in works that depict these movements' central concerns and contradictions as they change. Similarly, her theater is a result of many problems and shifts in hegemonic modes of production during this time. This paper traces the achievements of the major character of <i>Top Girls</i> , Marlene, in her way of life and her handling of the struggles of other women around her. Because of this strength, Marlene is compared to the British Prime Minister, Thatcher. Therefore, this paper will shed light on the term of Thatcherism and its application to the play with a reference to the continuing injustice of women through different aspects of culture and the new face of feminism, the Iron Woman.	Empowerment of women, Thatcherism, Feminism, Patriarchy, Top Girls

INTRODUCTION

In a patriarchal society, males have all political and economic control, and women are supposed to bow to the demands of those men and their culture. Caryl Churchill, a British postmodern playwright, which her goal is to reveal theatrically the empowerment of women throughout her plays. She “intends to highlights the role of women which has been long forgotten throughout history and to demonstrate women that has been hidden from view”. (Ravar, 2011:26). In her plays, Churchill, reflects contemporary women's desires for equality and success in all aspects of life. She embodies the ambitions of modern women who do not want to be limited to conventional roles and want the problem to be examined in the light of a larger social and political framework. Churchill felt that a male-dominated way of life was depressing for women because it was incompatible with the modern world's aim of producing a feeling of sensibility and that the way we treat women in all aspects of social life must be tailored to their needs. She emphasizes the importance of modern women fighting for issues that directly affect their lives by emphasizing that the essential transformation in social life can only

be realized if everyone plays their role. While Churchill stresses the significance of meeting women's wishes in order to build a more livable world, she also advocates for the development of a society in which all members are engaged in meaningful struggles for the common good. She also says that women must have a steady social life for this effort to be worth it.

Many critics concentrated on the first scene of the play when Marlene finally advances to the position of manager in a large firm. To commemorate her achievement, she hosts a dinner for five ladies from all classes of society. At the end of a celebration of women's success, realizing what they sacrificed to achieve their ambitions puts us in a bittersweet sense. The dramatist portrayed women from different cultures as an "innovative" method with its simultaneous dialogue.

Marlene, a modern woman born in the twentieth century, is the same as her historical forebears, who had to give up everything to survive in a patriarchal society. However, her sacrifices and losses are only for the sake of being the best female at her job, with no concern for sisterhood or motherhood. Marlene reflects the kind of woman who is willing to take action to achieve her own goals in everything. As for her friends, she overlooked herself. Marlene has to manipulate other women to stay on top and be a good professional woman (Ravar, 2011:31).

Britain has developed new habitats as a result of Thatcherism's focus on the significance of the individual. People were worried about themselves and strove to acquire as much money as possible, which contributed to the rise of classism in society, but at the same time, these conditions led to a significant decline in the number of employment opportunities (Vasile, 2010: 243).

The decade of the 1980s in the United Kingdom was marked by rapid change, resulting in a much more competitive labor market. Consequently, the concept of the "Superwoman" or "Iron Woman" has evolved, which celebrates women's achievements in all spheres of life, both public and private. Thatcher's fame as a capitalist superwoman politician is directly attributable to the misuse of the word. Certainly, one can see this in Marlene (Vasile, 2010:250).

Margret Thatcher is known as "The Iron Lady" because of her impact on British policy's economic and political policies and her willingness to replace the communist dream of labor with an active dedication to free market, private industry, and home ownership (Howard, 2009: 37). Thatcher was England's first female prime minister, and she is frequently referred to as a man because she did not exhibit any feminist traits during her tenure; rather, her rule was superior to male prime ministers. To address Marlene from the Thatcherism angle, Churchill cautioned that there was retaliation involved in seeking performance on predominantly male terms. Both Marlene's and Thatcher's performances can be reported mainly as particular cases that did not adequately lead to altering the normal woman's life (Komporalý, 2006: 56).

British culture underwent an enormous transition during Thatcherism, which is widely regarded as one of the most important political and economic upheavals in recent history. This trend criterion effectively reflects the societal shift toward a more progressive norm. Because of this, the meaning and function of feminism in modern society have been profoundly reshaped as a direct result of Thatcherism which can be defined as "the political and economic policies advocated by the former British Conservative Prime Minister Margret Thatcher" (Oxford Dictionary, 2013:431). The term is meant to imply the significance of political and economic processes in the creation of any specified scenario of life in the UK. The radical right-wing economic policies and open resistance to the notion of welfare capitalism implemented by Thatcher's administration have been linked to significant negative social outcomes (Marwick: 1982, 353).

The British economy was in shambles when Thatcher gained power, due mainly to increased unemployment, monetary constraints, and a lack of available opportunities. She devised a strategy to deal with the crisis that emphasized social economic strategies designed to minimize governmental participation. It entails encouraging the privatization of significant nationalized industrial, educational, and healthcare systems; reducing union power through new regulations; encouraging individual initiative and small businesses; and lowering taxes, lowering public spending, and encouraging a competitive free market (Vasile, 2010: 243).

According to Aston, Churchill is "arguably the most successful and best known socialist feminist playwright to have emerged from the second wave feminism" (2000: 174). Since gaining public recognition in the mid-1970s, Churchill has encouraged and advocated some of the most important feminist thoughts. Coinciding with the emergence of second wave feminism and Britain, she rose to prominence. In recent plays, Churchill has reflected historical transformations of the 1980s and 1990s in plays that depict these movements' central concerns and contradictions. As they moved and evolved, her theatrical work reflects a number of problems and shifts that were occurring in the dominant modes of production at the time (Ibid). Churchill illustrates:

For years and years I thought of myself as a writer before I thought of my sound as a woman, but recently I've found that I'd say I was a feminist writer as opposed two other people saying money wars I was. I've found that as I go out more into the world and get into situations which involved one man what I feel is quiet strongly a feminist position and that inevitably comes into what I write (Aston and Reinelt, 2000: 174).

Ginger Strand emphasizes Churchill's involvement and identifies it as "an important feminist voice" (1999:499). Churchill strives so diligently to maintain the feminist spirit and its influence in the majority of her plays, which depict both obstacles and chances. In addition, she attempts to provide a road map for feminism within the context of the enormous changes in the economic and political strategies of society especially under Thatcherism.

I. Top Girls

In the first scene, Churchill applied this concept, which exhibits stories of some women from history, painting, literature, and at least one real woman. Such women are invited to celebrate Marlene's elevation as executive manager at Top Girls Company by her, the only true woman at the party. Marlene states that "[w]e've all came a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements" (*TG*: 25). The image of women from six different cultural and geographical backgrounds is presented.

Despite their incredible achievements, these ladies had to put in a lot of effort to get to where they are now. According to this reasoning, a class-based culture would benefit just a few capitalists while bourgeois feminism continues to oppress the majority of proletariat women. Because *Top Girls* elaborates on the problems of individuals aspiring to success, especially lower-class women, it reveals that capitalism feminism is not wholly effective in resolving feminist concerns (Ravar, 2011:29). To put it another way, Marlene represents the way Thatcher handled both men and women. As a result, Margaret Thatcher's administration is perceived as more restrictive than her male predecessors'. Despite her promises, Margaret Thatcher's political career in the United Kingdom revealed a woman who was more powerful and ruthless than any of the previous male prime ministers. Despite the fact that she was the first female Prime Minister in the Kingdom. (Patterson, 2003 155). Churchill herself

gave inspiration and background of this play when she had just returned from a student performance of Vinegar Tom in the United States when she met several American women who stated that everything was fine; "Margret Thatcher had just been elected Prime Minister...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*" (Truss, 1984: 8).

A basic study of Churchill's remarks reveals a spark that demonstrates how Thatcherism came to govern a major western state like Britain. Churchill depicted Marlene, one of the leading Top Girls, as a modern Iron Lady, representing Thatcher's political views (Aston and Reinelt, 2000: 180). At this point, Marlene may confidently say she has "made it" Despite her accomplishment, Churchill criticizes Marlene's procedures and the price she has had to pay for them when asked, "What kind of accomplishment is that?" Churchill responds by describing Marlene's success as intensely competitive and ultimately destructive. This is in contrast to merely recognizing women's accomplishments. While at first glance, the play appears to be a feminist production; its direction will change with time (Betsko and Koenig, 1987:82).

It has been Churchill's goal to dispel the idea that men are inherently superior to women, and how this has had a negative influence on women's rights and equality. The new pattern that emerged in Britain during the Thatcherism period also serves as a reflection:

All of the women remain blind to the relationship between their misery and their choice to obey or imitate masculine figures. Churchill subsequently explains this problem through realistic representation of an institution which is part of the contemporary world of work. The employment agency scene, which follows the fantastic presentation of the dinner party, shows how Marlene uses her power to intimidate and narrow further an already limited range of options for the women who come seeking employment (Kritzer,1991: 141).

In her interactions with her female clients, Marlene not only adheres to the masculine norm of success, but she also becomes an oppressor. Her acceptance of patriarchal and commercial attitudes toward female employees has been demonstrated through conversations with clients. Marlene and her staff at the employment agency demonstrate "the ethic of competition" in their everyday encounters (Ibid).

Isabella, on the other hand, is acquiring some gender position under the influence of a male figure, which has no difference from Betty's in *Nine Clouds*. Churchill depicts Victorianism in *Top Girls* in order to compare the personalities of Marlene, who symbolizes the woman who looks forward to equalizing the man especially her rivalry with Mr. Kidd to retain the role of Top Girls Company's head boss for revolutionary feminism to earn women's rights in the patriarchal culture., and Isabella, who represents the Victorian mindset, which does not generate a trustworthy character. Isabella is the only person at the dinner party who has children. Churchill invites Isabella to the celebration party because she wants to illustrate how motherhood has been viewed as a burden throughout history. Churchill brings Isabella to the scene to demonstrate to Marlene and the audience that success is measured by more than just money or corporate power. Churchill did it to emphasize the difference between Marlene, who represents the woman who seeks equality with men no matter what, and Isabella, who "internalizes the values imposed upon her by her father to such an extent that she is not aware that she is in a situation of self-denial" (Firat, 2005: 21). This has been noticed from the first scene when she says: "I tried to do what my father wanted... I tried to be a clergyman's daughter "(TG: 2). The Victorian method of dealing with women can be shown obviously in ideologies and directions of patriarchy which "considers women to be men's property, inferior, ignorant, and incompetent, its value system

claims that women cannot take their own decisions and need to be led by a male figure" (Firat, 2005: 21).

The waitress, who stands with the women in this gathering, is a strong contrast. She is the only character who is seen as not as qualified as the others. She represents the vast majority of ordinary women who struggle silently against poverty and injustice, going through the entire event without saying anything in patriarchal and capitalist societies. Working women's challenges are depicted as a tool for these "Top Girls" to acquire fame and money. The unexceptional ladies reappear in subsequent acts as well. The waitress emphasizes the tremendous contrast between individual achievement and societal reform. Churchill brought these women together to describe the moment as one of the most transitional in history. Marlene does believe in their ability and celebrates their achievements; "We've all come a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements [emphasis added]" (TG: 67)

Capitalism as a patriarchal system prevents sisterhood from being formed among women by also causing them to assume the male identity to survive and succeed, as "one of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another... creating a lively antagonism... between career woman and housewife" (Millett, 2000: 38). Accordingly, in *Top Girls*, the contemporary female characters, including Marlene, Nell, Win, Louise, Jeanine, Shona, and even Angie, are led to beat out their peers, male and female, within the capitalist system.

II. Conclusion

Marlene's behavior is considered remarkable since she represents an individualistic form of feminism. She embodied the image of the Iron woman in both her behavior and her comments. By depicting historical women, Churchill exposes how women have been objectified, exploited, and subjected to humiliation in patriarchal cultures throughout history. Churchill contends, however, that women cannot retrieve their future if they sacrifice their motherhood and sisterhood, as well as their past and origins, for the sake of having a good profession or being the "top girl." In her writings, Churchill attempted to represent the subject to both British women and women all around the world. Marlene's success is the model for radical feminism, which insists that women reclaim the role of men as leaders of society. Fighting male dominance makes Marlene the perfect character for the new image, the new face of feminism, that is; the iron woman.

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