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**Cross-dressing in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979)
and *Top Girls* (1982)**

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all my precious and dear family

To my mother Fatiha

To my father Mohamed

To my sister Wissam

To my grandfather Dahmani Ammar

And not to forget, I would also love to dedicate this work to my godmother Martha Ghyselen and godfather Noel Pollet, who took care of me for almost my entire life.

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Abstract

During the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave of feminism took place in Britain. Back then, women did not just carry the fight for equality in marriage and work, but they also wanted to break free of the chains of gender stereotypes that the patriarchy drew about them. The second wave of feminism; also known as the 'Women's Liberation Movements', did not focus on giving rights to women only but also to sex minorities (e.g. homosexuals, transsexuals. etc.). Caryl Churchill is a prominent English contemporary playwright whose works often attack sexual prejudices and oppressions that took place in the 20th century because of patriarchy. Transvestism, or 'cross-dressing', was one of the dramatic strategies that Churchill frequently used to reflect her feminist ideology in her plays; where actors dress like the opposite gender. In her two notable plays *Cloud Nine* (1979) and *Top Girls* (1982), Churchill used cross-dressing to reflect her feminist criticism to the injustices that were taking place at that time in Britain. In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill attacks both Britain's mistreatment of women, homosexuals and black people. In *Top Girls*, Churchill criticizes Thatcherism and exposes how Thatcher's rise to power had not met the criteria British women were expecting from her. In this respect, this work tackles three issues: First, why was cross-dressing used in both plays? Second, how was cross-dressing used differently in each play? Third, what were the themes which reflect Churchill's feminist position in both plays?

Keywords: Caryl Churchill, feminism, cross-dressing, contemporary British drama, twentieth century, patriarchy.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

From among all the decades of the Post-War Era, the 1970s was the period where the British society endured a phase of societal upheaval. Characteristics of this change can be perceived in several aspects such as economic crisis, conservatism and race relations. First, the economic crisis was an issue that strongly stroke the United Kingdom at that time. By the spring of 1975, one million people in the working force were suffering from unemployment, which instigated workers' strikes in the country. Moreover, the country's conservative spirit was also shaken by this change. As the Second Feminist Wave was taking hold, a number of acts were passed to guarantee women's rights and equality; this included the introduction of the contraceptive pill (1961) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). At the same time, British homosexual community had also risen to call for recognition. By 1971, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) has been fighting for LGBT rights in the United Kingdom. Methods of the movement included campaigns and manifests, and a prominent example of these would be Gay Pride March that the GLF organized in 1972 in London. Race relations also got frustrated after this social change. This was due the locals' dissatisfaction with the vast waves of immigrants that came from West Indies and South Asia to Britain. Consequently, a feeling of "xenophobia" generated and radical groups with far-rightist ideologies rose (e.g. Neo-fascism.)

This change, however, did not concern the political and social stages only. Literature and drama in particular, were also affected by the change on the levels of form and content. During the mid-1970s, the British theater started to reject traditional norms of drama writing. After the emergence of the Alternative Theatre Movement in Britain at that time, the shift touched both conventional drama norms and the way dramatists tackled social issues like discrimination and stereotypes in the British society. At the level of language, the British theatre had also become more explicit in expressing its ideas and messages. Before, The

English Theatre had maintained a “morally conservative nature” since the passing of The Licensing Act by Lord Chamberlain in 1737, which censored theatre. Therefore, it was prohibited to engage with topics like religion, politics or sex. Eventually, the era of the 1970s came to be a decade where the British theatre introduced a new ‘avant-garde’ dimension. (Swingler, 2016). Caryl Churchill was a contemporary female dramatist who embraced an unconventional style in addressing issues related to politics and sex in the British society.

This work, however, is not going to describe all of these changes, but will rather tackle an issue related with the wave of sexual liberation that took place during the 1970s. Cross-dressing, in particular, was a feature of this new era. For many conservative societies, cross-dressing has been and is still viewed as an offensive behaviour that reflects someone’s perversion or defiance to the norms of society. Yet, this was not always the case, as cross-dressing was also a method of manifesting one’s sexual orientation on one hand, and of showing objection to the stricture of gender roles on the other hand. Nowadays, cross-dressing has become a part of the Western culture, is it carved the image of the fight against patriarchy and sexism.

One of the literary motifs that Churchill often uses in her dramatist works is called ‘cross-dressing’. This theatrical “device” consisted of having characters or actors, who dress in ways that do not correspond with their gender or social position. These characters were used as images that function to violate some established images and stereotypes that the British society still ‘falsely’ maintain. Churchill, in this respect, concentrates on exposing the segregation that is enacted against women in their houses, and the one enacted against other sexual and racial minorities in the British society.

Yet, many previous works conducted on Churchill’s use of this theatrical device have not provided deeper analysis. In other words, cross-dressing was being used just to describe

characters, whereas it was supposed to be developed further since it has an “allegorical” function. Many of these sources, in fact, just applied ‘cross-dressing’ as a sub-theme and therefore did not consider studying all the implications behind applying as it a theatrical motif. Churchill, supposedly, challenged the mainstream by distorting unjust depictions sexual and racial identities. Eventually, Churchill’s dramatist style was influenced by the changes that contemporary theatre underwent on one hand, and by the social and political turmoil that took place in Britain on the other hand.

Therefore, this research paper aims to provide an extended review on the significance of the use of cross-dressing by Churchill in her two famous plays *Cloud Nine* (1979) and *Top Girls* (1982). In *Cloud Nine*, Clive who is one of the main characters combines both attitudes of sexual and racial oppressions and this is obvious in his mistreatment of his wife and the African natives. *Top Girls*, another major work of Churchill that focuses on chronologically depicting the hardships and obstacles women endured to receive the social recognition for which they fought.

To explore this issue, three questions are raised. First, what were Churchill’s objectives of use of the ‘cross-dressing’ in both *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*?. Second, how did Churchill use ‘cross-dressing’ differently in each play? Finally, how did the ‘Women’s Liberation Movement’ had an influence on Churchill’s theatrical vision and ideas?

The work is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, a definition for ‘cross-dressing’ will be set for cross-dressing as social phenomenon on one hand, and as a literary motif on the other hand. Besides, it is important to study the historical background of the phenomenon and how mythological, historical and religious texts tackled it. This same chapter will also show some examples and figures of cross-dressing from literature. Of course, the chapter will include a distinction between “cross-dressing” as a social

phenomenon and “transvestism” as a psychological disorder. The second chapter is set to analyze both *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*. First, it describes the social climate that Britain was living during the 1970s. Then, it will highlight Churchill’s ideas and position in both plays by explaining how the social events and movements of that period came to influence her ideas. Therefore, this chapter will analyze both plays at the levels of form and content, and how Churchill designed her characters and events to reflect what was taking place in the Britain at that time. Finally, the third chapter will draw a description on how “cross-dressing” was used in each play. For the case of *Cloud Nine*, Churchill used “cross-dressing” as a motif to display of cross-dressed characters was implicitly a denouncement of Britain’s colonial policy and the racist mentality that characterized it. In *Top Girls*, however, cross-dressing is implied as a theme to reflect Churchill’s feminist ideology.

Chapter One:

Cross-Dressing between the Past and the Present

Introduction

Despite the fact that cross-dressing marked a strong activity in the modern time in a strong way, there are many historical descriptions which describe this practice and how it was since ancient societies. First, cross-dressing will be defined in general. The chapter will also include examples of cross-dressing in history, art and culture. First, cross-dressing will be explained as a social phenomenon that took place in many historical periods, which were in most of the time related to religious reasons. Besides, the chapter will highlight the difference between cross-dressing and transvestism. The former refers to a behaviour that people opt either for sexual reasons to demand for social changes or equality, whereas the latter stands for a psychological condition where patients tend to dress like the opposite sex to satisfy their sexual fetish. Second, there will be a focus on defining cross-dressing as a literary motif on one hand, and as a theatrical strategy on the other hand. Third, the chapter will describe the social changes and conditions that urged certain societies to adopt this practice. At the same time, the section will also explain how these societies embraced the cross-dressing culture as a theme for their festivals.

1.1. Definition

Cross-dressing or tranvestism can be defined as a behaviour that consists of wearing clothing and accessories that belong to the opposite sex, i.e., men dressing up like women and vice versa. In former times, cross-dressed people were subjects to punishment and mostly to death penalties because it was considered a sin. Even nowadays, transvestism still carries pejorative implications and is often related to transsexuality or sexual perversion. Yet, this kind of behaviour can carry other motives such as “disguise, comfort or self-

expression”. Usually, the term ‘cross-dressing’ tends to be confused with transvestism and sometimes with transgenderism.

1.2. Transvestism vs. Cross-dressing

The Anglo-Saxon term “cross-dressing” emerged to replace the term “transvestism” which originated from the Latin "transvestite", a term used when referring to a mental condition known as transvestic fetishism. In fact, many debates arose about when the term was firstly introduced. The Oxford English Dictionary mentioned that Edward Carpenter’s definition of the term as the earliest citation. Cross-dressing, as Carpenter defined it, is a “general indication of, and a cognate phenomenon to, homosexuality.” (p.80, 1911)

Yet, it was in 1910 that the term was coined in a book entitled *Die Transvestiten* (The Transvestites) by the German psychologist Magnus Hirschfeld. In his book, Hirschfeld used the term to refer to a psychological condition in which people tend to cross-dress to “derive sexual pleasure.” Hirschfeld also rejected mistaken association of cross-dressing with homosexuality by emphasising that transvestite behaviour can be conducted by both males and females who are “asexual, bisexual, heterosexual, or homosexual.” Unlike cross-dressing, transvestism is more of a mental disorder in which a patient desired to sexually please himself by dressing like someone from the opposite sex. During the 1920s, ‘transvestism’ became considered as outdated and derogatory and was eventually replaced by the term ‘cross-dressing’.

In addition, it is important to make a distinction between transvestism and transsexualism. In transvestism, the individual is comfortable with her/his gender identity and performs the roles that characterizes her/his gender. A transsexual however, feels suffocated by his sexual

position and tends to manifest this feeling by cross-dressing before undergoing a sex reassignment surgery.

1.3. Cross-Dressing in Classical Narratives

1.3.1. History

Even though the influence of cross-dressing culture was strong in the modern period, history shows that cross-dressing was practised even in ancient societies. Therefore, many instances of cross-dressing can be found in mythology, history and art. What changed was only the terms that refer to it.

Since the beginning of civilizations, the way people dressed was bound by social factors. In other words, each sex had its specific clothes, colours and accessories that people from that gender were supposed to put on. Therefore, any society held a set of established norms that people had to display in their way of dressing. Dressing codes were not just gender-based but were also characteristics of an individual's social status and background. Yet, these dressing norms were subject to acts of violation. These acts were carried due to an attention of exposing social injustice, or to rebel against images and definitions that were believed to be unjust or segregational.

During ages, the scale of social power was balancing in favour for men and not women. Men thought they could occupy high positions in society whereas women were doomed to submission. Women also conducted similar behaviours as a means of uprising against the patriarchal oppression taking place in their societies. Along history, societies were governed by a patriarchal mentality that located women in a position that was inferior to that of men. Therefore, women were deprived of entry to economical, religious, intellectual and political spheres that were controlled by males.

Many religions dictate that higher positions in religious institutions are supposed to be maintained by men, whereas women are not allowed to occupy these posts because their place was at home to serve their spouses and bare children. Besides, women were also believed to be “intellectually” incapable of carrying such tasks. However, several stories tell about some women who rebelled against this dogma. Most of these can be found in Christian folk stories. For these women, to cross-dress was a necessary option to be able to serve God. Since they held the belief that they were creatures of God just like men, women thought about serving Him. Yet, the mentality during which they lived did not grant them this right. Therefore, these women decided to dress up and pass as males to gain acceptance in the religious institution.

There were Christian folk stories that told about some monks who were in fact disguised women. Saint Marina the Monk was a Coptic nun whose father entered her to a monastery where she acquired the monks’ habits, including their way of dressing. She was once accused of committing adultery with a woman and impregnating her. Marina’s identity and her innocence were not revealed until after her death when other monks unrobed her corpse to wash it. Saint Marina’s act of baring the charges was praised as an icon ‘of humble forbearance.’ (“History of cross-dressing”) One of the stories that tackles this is *La Vie de Sainte Euphrosine* (c. 1200). The tale narrates the story of Saint Euphrosyne of Alexandria, a young woman who chose to join the monastery life in order to escape the annoyance of the suitors who wanted to marry her because of her wealth. Therefore, she dressed as a monk and went under the name of ‘Smaragdus’. However, another problem occurred when the other monks began to sexually desire the young ‘monk’, who saw it fit to look ‘himself’ in a cell to protect ‘himself’. Euphrosyne’s gender identity was not revealed until she died. (McCallum and Tuhkanen 100) Another figure who became famous for cross-dressing is Pope Joan. The legend says that Pope Joan was a woman who dressed as a man because she

was ambitious about studying theology. The legend carries on as Joan becomes pope and occupies the papal chair for three years, until her identity is eventually discovered and she is stoned for heresy. Modern historians perceive the legend of Pope Joan as a symbol of anti-papal satire that was prominent during the thirteenth century. In modern drama, Pope Joan was interpreted as a character in Carol Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982).

This phenomenon was strongly apparent during wartimes. For example, some women were cross-dressing to enrol in military services because they believed that women also had the right to fight for their country. Other women, on the other hand, had no option but to dress like men just to protect themselves from being sexually molested by foreign soldiers. A famous example of this would be that of Joan of Arc, a French peasant girl who claimed that God Himself requested her to lead the French army to fight against the English attempts of colonizing France. Therefore, she had to wear an armour as male soldiers did. Eventually, her cross-dressing was one of the causes she was sentenced to death and burnt on a stake. In nineteenth century England, many women wore male uniforms to earn the same wages male workers had. In 1818, a woman named Helen Oliver took her brother's suit and got a job as a plasterer. Another example is that of Miranda Barry, a woman who cross-dressed to enrol in the University of Edinburgh to study for a degree in medicine.

According to Altenburger (2005), women's dressing as men was urged by their need to manifest for "social status, power, and freedom" (p. 171). The women who cross-dressed, in Altenburger's belief, had positive intentions unlike those of cross-dressed men. Especially that the latter were believed to be wearing female dresses to get closer to women in order to satisfy their sexual desires. Another reason was that cross-dressed men lost their social status because similar attitude made the society look at them in a negative way. These men, in other words, were seen by others as 'emasculated' men who do not behave according to their

gender and who, from a religious perspective, violated God's creation by dressing like the opposite sex.

1.3.2. Mythology

Examples of cross-dressing are numerous in ancient mythological narrations. In some myths, describing figures that tend to cross dress can be considered like a plot twist, like in the Greek mythology. Sometimes, cross-dressing is associated with some deities that are double-gendered. Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and fertility, was depicted in many archaic artefacts as a male who possesses feminine physical features. This was visible in the rituals that Dionysus's worshippers dedicated for him. One of the festivals they were holding was called *Oschophoria*, a series of feasts where Dionysus's worshippers celebrated the grape harvest season in Athens. During the events, young boys and wealthy men dressed as women. The young boys were to carry branches of grapes and lead a ritual march from the temple of Dionysus to the sanctuary of Athena. A similar example of cross-dressing in Ancient Greece was also manifested during the *Hybristica*; a feast that used to be held in the city of Argos by the worshipers of Aphroditus, and whose followers had to perform transvestite rituals. According to Philostratus the Elder, the adherents of this cult had to perform rituals in which men wear women's robes and females had to wear men's clothing and put false beards. Women also carried this ritual by violently insulting their spouses, a deed that was supposed to be a tribute to the resistance of Argian women against the Spartan invasion. The narrations of the *Travels of Heracles* mentioned another case. As a penalty for killing Iphitus, Heracles was given to Omphale, the queen of Lydia, as a slave. During his servitude, Heracles was forced to dress as a maiden and even do women's work. Inversion of sexual roles was the major theme of the myth.

Tales of cross-dressing deities can also be found in the Nordic mythology. According to the Edda¹, the Nordic gods Thor and Loki were the first to cross-dress not just among the gods, but also in the history of humanity. The story starts after Thor discovers that Thrymr the Giant stole Thor's hammer *Mjölhnir* to use it as a change for the goddess Freyja to be his wife, both Thor and Loki went to Freyja but she refused and therefore both gods decided to do things by themselves. Therefore, Thor decided to dress as bride whereas Loki dressed as the handmaid and went to the wedding. As a wedding rite, the giants place the hammer in Thor's lap who was dressing as 'Freyja' before Thor unveiled himself and slaughtered all the giants.

1.4. Cross-dressing as a Cultural Phenomenon

1.4.1. Society

Cross-dressing was not observed in the Western World only, but was also taking place in the Oriental world as well. In fact, many anthropologists were interested in this issue, and coined a term called "supernumerary gender"; referring to individuals who embrace the opposite gender's way of dressing and behaviour ("Cross-Dressing.")

The presence of cross-dressed people is usually found in entertainment circles, more precisely in belly dancing circles. In Islam, it is strictly prohibited that a woman dresses or behaves in a manner that is considered sexually appealing, i.e. a Muslim woman cannot wear revealing clothes or move her body in a way that provokes men sexually, especially that a woman's body is considered to be a '*awrah*'². Entertainers, therefore, saw that they could hire males (especially young boys) and train them to become belly dancers. Al-Farāhīdī's

¹ A set of poems written in Old Nordic language. The poems contain some folk tales about the Viking gods and heroes in Scandinavia.

² (Arabic: عورة) In Islam, The intimate parts of the human body that have to be covered by clothing

dictionary *Kitab al-'Ayn* mentioned the word *khawal* to describe boys that used to dress as female dancers in Egypt. The employment of these boys as dancers was still going until the period between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, more particularly in special occasions like weddings or when receiving tourists. Naturally, these tourists were shocked for seeing such attitude. In most of the times, the tourists witnessed cases where people from the audience started to molest the young dancers sexually.

The Ottoman equivalent of Egyptian *khawal* was *köçek*. Deriving from the Persian *kuchak*, which means 'little', the term referred to boys who were dressed as female belly dancers. These boys were being brought from various Ottoman provinces when they were five or six years old and taught how to dance. These *köçekler* were employed to dance in the Ottoman palace, public inns and private occasions held by wealthy men. Their job was to dance in an erotic way and sometimes engage in gentle wrestling in order to sexually provoke the audience. In addition, these boys were paid for to provide sexual services. Sometimes, *köçekler* were fortunate enough to possess high positions in the Ottoman palace.

Another case of employing young males in this kind of sexual entertainment can be found in Afghanistan. The term *Bacha bāzī* is the reference to young male dancers. Most of the time, Afghani military leaders and warlords abduct these boys and have them trained to work for these lords' entertainment. Radhika Coomaraswamy³ (2009) made a statement in which she condemned this practice as an act of sexual exploitation of children. Even procedures and penalties were urged to eliminate this behaviour. Girl-to-boy cross-dressing also exists in Afghanistan. Similar to *Bacha bāzī*, *Bacha posh* consists of making girls dress as boys. According to Shah (2012), a big number of Afghani families tend to dress their girls as boys during wartimes in order to protect them or to teach them how to fight. During her interview

³ A Sri Lankan politician who occupies the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in the United Nation

with the New York Times, Professor Nancy Dupree⁴ states that there was a photograph from the 1900s, which shows a group of women dressing as men. Their job is to guard the royal harem during the reign of King Habibullah Khan. Other families, who do not have sons to carry the family's wealth, tend to dress their daughters as boys because they believe that a Bacha posh is more likely to give birth to a boy (Nordberg, 2010).

In Albania, a certain category of women undergo an oath of 'vow of chastity' and cross dress so that they can live among the patriarchal society in their country. These women are called *burrnesha* or sworn virgin in Albanian. To do so, a woman has to take an oath in front of twelve chieftains of her village. After taking the oath, the woman can do whatever men can do; consume spirits, smoke, possess a firearm and even join men's grouping and talk to them.

1.4.2. "Doing-Drag"

A very famous example of cross-dressing is 'drag queens'. A drag queen, or female impersonator, is a male artist who is supposed to embrace a feminine behaviour: dressing as a woman and putting makeup extensively. Even though the drag phenomenon is usually associated with homosexuality and transgenderism, this does not prevent people from other sexual identities from involving themselves in 'doing drag'.

The early use of drag performance was noted in Shakespearean tragedies (Baker, 1994). During the mid-nineteenth century, drag queens became popular performers in US nightclubs, which they considered as places they could be themselves. Cross-dressing balls were organized, where couples from the same sex could arrange meetings, and sometimes these dancing parties were held to attract tourists. After the rise of the LGBT Movement in

⁴ A US historian

the United States during the second half of the twentieth century, drag queens became present in Pride Manifestos to fight against harassment and hate crimes that targeted them, like the Stonewall riots on June 28, 1969.

To some extent, drag dressing differs from cross-dressing. Carmen (2009) argued that both cross-dressers and drag queens share a history of oppression. Yet, a cross-dresser carries his attitude in a secretive way since he is aware of the society's disappreciation of his attitude. A drag queen, on the other hand, cross-dresses just to perform his job as performer and has no problem with doing so publically, and this is obvious in LGBT marches when drag queens participate to defend the rights of the marginalized sexual minorities.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler addresses cross-dressing and states:

“ Part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the [drag] performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender....In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity.”

(qtd. in Duignan 2019)

Here, Butler explains how ‘doing drag’ represents a break from images that were stereotypically associated with gender, such as social status and dressing codes. In Butler’s belief, drag queen performances are meant to expose these stereotypical images and how they are constructed to discriminate sexual subcategories that do not abide by the heterosexual or male chauvinist mainstream.

1.4.3. Cross-dressing as a Theme in Festivals

As it was previously mentioned, cross-dressing was not a phenomenon that emerged in modern times as there is evidence that this phenomenon was celebrated during festivals held by some societies that still maintain a primitive lifestyle.

In Ghana, for example, a festival called Apoo is celebrated yearly during the period from April to May in cities like Nkoranza, Techiman and Wenchi. The holding of the festival is supposed to be an opportunity to allow people to express their opinions and views freely. As a festival ceremony, Ghanaian men dress like women and women dress like men (Duodu, 2009). Ivory Coast is another African country that holds similar schemes in celebrations. In the last week of October, the Nzema population in the city of Grand-Bassam holds an event called Abissa. The event signifies the promotion of joy and forgiveness. During the festival, citizens from both men and women dress like their opposite sexes.

Another example is that of the *Kottankulangara* festival in India. Every year in the village of Chavara, the males are supposed to wear saari, carry lamps and female dancing customs decorated with flowers before going to the Kottankulangara Devi Temple. This ritual is meant to be a tribute to the Hindu goddess Bhagavati and to receive her blessings (Devanshu, 2008). In Japan, a festival is called *Ofudamaki* is held once a year. The origins of the festival can be traced back to 1688, when mothers donated their clothes to Shinto dancers so that the gods protect them from the cholera epidemic that was spreading at that year. To honour this memory, many males march to the local temple while wearing women's kimonos and butting traditional make-up. (Egli, 2016)

1.5. Cross-dressing in Arts

1.5.1. Literature

The use of cross-dressing was noted in literary texts, but its emergence as a literary ‘motif’ was strongly observed in modern literature and art, and its meaning mostly contained an allusion to the character’s nonconformity with her/his sexual identity rather than his gender (Craft-Fairchild, 1998). In literary texts, the motif of cross-dressing is an allusion to women who dress like men to reach a particular high social status that is only accessible by the males. According to Craft-Fairchild, female characters who cross-dress were often granted a heroic depiction since they were brave and righteous enough to defy the patriarchy. These women wanted to possess the same state of freedom through which they could travel, occupy professional positions that were restricted to men and to live romantic adventures just like the males had. According to Craft-Fairchild, this break from the codes of dressing resulted from a feeling of discontent with the depiction of females as ‘angels of the house’

Heldris of Cornwall’s *Le Roman de Silence* (c.1300) was a French romance which narrates the story of a girl who was brought up by her parents as a boy so that their fortune would be kept in the family. The name ‘Silence’ was chosen by the author for its ‘gender-neutral’ nature to describe the character’s gender blurred identity as well as her permanent silence, which was not broken until the end.

In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), another example of cross-dressing appears. In the nineteenth chapter, Jane Eyre decides to see a gypsy fortune-teller about whom she heard from Mr. Mason. When Jane goes to see her, the old woman tells her that she predicted Miss Ingram’s will to marry Mr. Rochester just to take all over his estate. After the woman starts reading Jane’s fortune, the latter realized that it was Mr. Rochester dressing as an old woman in attempt to trick her into confessing her love for him. As a minor plot element, ‘cross-

dressing is a reference class inequality. When dressing as a ‘fortune-teller’, Mr. Rochester becomes no more superior to Jane Eyre. Besides, this class inferiority is also manifested in the point that he was not granted entry to the Thornfield Manor because of his clothing⁵.

There is another example in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In the tenth chapter, Huck convinces Jim to help him disguise as a girl in order to collect information. Therefore, he puts a girl’s dress that he and Jim had found in the boathouse, and starts practising girlish impressions to make his disguise successful. He names himself ‘Sarah Williams’ and goes to carry his enquiries. (p. 66). In another chapter, another example of cross-dressing appears when Pap’s corpse was found with both men and women’s clothes with the dead body. These examples reflect Twain’s dissatisfaction with the sexist perceptions the American society was making about women at that time.

As for the use of male-to-female cross-dressing, the allusion is to satirize and undermine male characters’ masculinity by picturing them as feminine and mostly antagonist unlike the female character who cross-dressed for a righteous cause. An example raised by Jones (2016) was that of *Little Red Riding Hood*, where the little protagonist saves her grandmother from the wolf. Here, the hungry wolf symbolizes the male who wears women’s clothes to satisfy his sexual hunger (pp. 242). The wolf’s appetite to eat the protagonist is an allegory to men’s lust for women, which the wolf attempts to fulfil by dressing like the grandmother to eat the granddaughter.

⁵ For a detailed study, please refer to <https://gradesfixer.com/free-essay-examples/the-woman-at-the-door-the-gypsy-scene-in-jane-eyre/>.

1.5.2. Theatre

Cross-dressing was applied as well on theatrical stage. There are several reasons why such strategy was applied on stage. For example, some societies were governed by certain social and religious norms that do not allow women to occupy professions where they might 'interact' with men. In other words, traditional societies considered women's acting as a sin in the sense that a woman cannot reveal herself in front of men that she does not know. Artistic performances; including theatre, were restricted to males only. Therefore, men had to cross-dress in order to play female characters. Another reason was the traditional belief of women's mental incapability of performing and handling intellectual fields, like sciences, economy and arts.

In earlier ages, playwrights tended to use cross-dressed characters as a plot element to add some suspense and twist. A prominent instance of depicting female-to-male cross-dressing can be taken from William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1605), where the protagonist Portia dresses as a lawyer's apprentice and takes the name Balthazar to defend Antonio against Shylock, the Jewish merchant. Portia, among all the attendants of the trial, was able to save Antonio's life despite her poor knowledge of law; this might be in fact a reference to women's capability of surpassing men in their own domains.

However, using young boys to portray female characters provoked hostility in England at that time, especially by Puritans who saw it as a violation of biblical instructions on dressing. First, these Puritans believed that cross-dressing young boys would lead to their emasculation if they get attached to feminine gestures. Second, they argued that dressing boys as women is done to get the public's sexual appeal, in the sense that this could provoke the audience's paedophile desires. (Mullaney, 2005)

During the seventeenth century, cross-dress acting began to emerge in Japanese Kabuki theatre⁶. The term describing the male-to-female actors was *Onnagata* (women-role in Japanese). These actors were trained to play roles female and adolescent characters. They used to be employed in parties held by patrons and matrons, sometimes as performers or as prostitutes. The recruitment of male-to-female actors began after 1629, after former actresses were not allowed to perform because of the sexual molesting that was done to them by their patrons. Bringing male performers had also not solved the problem, as they became victims of their patrons' perversity as well. (Leupp, p. 90-90, 1997)

In the seventeenth-century European, cross-dressing on stage became known as *Travesti*, a French term referring to the interpretation of a role by an actor from the opposite sex was in an opera, drama or ballet. In England, for example, females were not supposed to perform on stage because it would be taboo for a conservative society. It was only until 1660 that women were allowed to work as actresses on stage; not to perform roles of female characters, but also those of the opposite sex. Feminist playwrights usually use cross-dressing as a 'theatrical strategy'. Their attention was to have a 'theatrical revolt against pre-established images that society had about women and other sexual minor groups.

Aston (1999) explains what these playwrights expect from using this strategy:

“Cross-dressing, cross-gendering techniques represent a theatrically exciting way of demonstrating and de-automatising our perception of ‘naturalised’ gender sign-systems (...) [c]rossing the gender divide may expose the way in which gender is organised as an arbitrary, artificial sign-system, which, like all such systems, it is possible to disturb and to deconstruct.” (Aston, p.74)

⁶ Is a classical form of Japanese theatre.

Aston, therefore, argues that the reason why many feminist playwrights use cross dressing is because the tension to observe the audience's perceptions about gender, how do these gender and sexuality images , and what would be the public's perception when seeing these pre-established get distorted and violated.

Conclusion

As a summary, cross-dressing was a phenomenon that emerged through various periods of history. Although many terms were coined to describe it, they were all referring to the same point. Concepts of cross-dressing had differed between being a social phenomenon, a psychological condition and an artistic element. Besides, cross-dressing was imported as a theme; the same idea was celebrated in various cultures, but the ritualistic significances differed.

Reactions to cross-dressing were mostly of rejection and hostility. However, history has demonstrated that conducting this practice was not always a result of sexual perversion, as many women used to cross-dressing in order to expose and resist he social marginalization to which they were subjected. Therefore, cross-dressing behaviours are related to the mentality and the social background of the individual who does it.

Chapter Two:

Cross-dressing in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979)
and *Top Girls* (1982)

Introduction

The 1970s in Britain was a controversial period. It witnessed a series of manifests that expressed the workers' disappointment with the government's irresponsibility. Demands of change that targeted the political bodies were not the only one, as the era brought a new liberal spirit, where the country's conservatism was being labelled as a cultural dead end. Sexual and ethnic minorities were working on making their voices heard. Theatre, in fact, was used to examine these social issues. As a new type of theatre emerged, known as the 'alternative theatre', new voices and approaches were introduced into the British theatre, rejecting the conventional theatrical models. Carol Churchill, a feminist Post-Colonial playwright, was able to establish her name among the notable dramatists of her time. Churchill did not focus on tackling issues related to women only, but also questioned Britain's position in political and racial issues.

2.1.The UK of the 1970s and the 1980s

2.1.1. Economic Situation

In the early years of the 1970s', Britain underwent an economic crisis that turned everything upside down. Under the term of Edward Heath (1970-74), the country suffered because of the increase of unemployment and crime. Eventually, a number of workers' strikes were provoked to protest against the government's irresponsibility. Some of these strikes include the seven-week- strike held by miners on 09 January 1972. The economic situation aggravated more after one million workers were suffering from unemployment. Therefore, other strikes were instigated such as the dockers' strike on the 28 of July 1972, which urged the government to declare a state of emergency one week after. This was followed by a strike held by workers from railway stations and civil services on 27 February

1973, leading to Heath's loss in the 1974 general elections. James Callaghan, who succeeded Heath in 1978, suggested to trade unions to reduce their pay rises to solve the problem of inflation, but his attempt resulted the Winter of Discontent where a number of workers' strikes rose. Callaghan's position in the issue was criticized and this made his Labour government lose the 1979 elections to Margaret Thatcher, who became Britain's first female Prime Minister. (Sandbrook, 2012)

2.2.2. Feminist and Gay Movements

Women had received a considerable number of advantages during the era. First, the 1970s in Britain saw the upcoming of new inventions that facilitated many daily tasks like the microwave. Such household tools granted women sufficient time to do activities where they can stay a little bit away from doing daily duties like cooking and doing dishes. Therefore, these women had the time to go to the movies, go to hairdressing salons, and wear mini-skirt. Some of these women were determined to enrol in the world of business. These factors made many British women shift from the mentality of the conventional and refined person to become a libertine woman who recognizes no images the patriarchal society imposed on her, especially those of picturing the woman as 'angels of the house' or 'the caregiver of the house' (Garces-Bovett, 2015). As the second wave of feminism was taking place, many movements emerged to carry the struggle against sex inequality, including Women's Liberation Movement. The movement, also known as Women's Lib, held their first national conference from February 27th to March 1st 1970, where the movement claimed that the fight should be for political presentation and the right to occupy independent jobs for women. Eventually, a number of acts were passed to secure women's welfare at work; including Equal Pay Act of 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975. The Women's

Liberation Movement also argued that women are free to do whatever they want with their bodies if they work as prostitutes or topless models. Other social reforms and events that granted British women access to male-occupied posts included, the allowance for women to occupy the post of ministers in the Methodist Church in 22 June 1970; the right for women to enrol as undergraduates at the University of Cambridge in October 1970, and the first time the English women's football team played its official match versus the Scottish team on 18 November 1972. In 1975, Jackie Tabick was appointed as rabbi, making her the first female to occupy the position in Britain. The LGBT movement also marked its presence during the era and emerged to fight for the right of homosexuals. In July 1st, 1972, members LGBT community members and under the organization of the Gay Liberation Federation, participated in the first Gay Pride march that took place in London. Despite that the Gay Liberation Front was fought for the rights of gay people, they also shared the feminists' aim of alleviating the oppression that the British patriarchy was enacting. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1973 was issued to prohibit same-sex marriages, and remained in action until 2013.

2.1.2. Race Relationships

After the collapse of the British Empire, the city of London turned into a cosmopolitan city. During the 1970s, the country witnessed the arrival of vast waves of immigrants from former colonies of the British Empire like Asia, the Indies and the Caribbean. The government saw that these immigrants were necessary to supply the working force in the United Kingdom. The locals, however, were not satisfied with the newcomers. For the latter, it was believed that the immigrants' coming did nothing but to increase the problem of unemployment, plus some other issues including housing shortages and hygiene issues. This

resulted many bloody quarrels between locals and the immigrants where the immigrants' residences were burned and many of them injured. One of these notorious riots was that of Notting Hill on August 9th, 1970 where black men got into a bloody clash with the police in Notting Hill, London. The next years witnessed more racial tensions, especially with the rise of far right movements such as Neo-Fascism. Enoch Powell, a British politician, was a figure of this xenophobic spirit of the era, and was known for delivering his 'Rivers of Blood' speech on February 27th 1974, in which he warned the audience from the risk of the immigrants' vast waves coming to the kingdom. To eliminate these racial tensions, the Parliament passed The Race Relations Act of 1976, which condemned all acts of racial segregation (Rodrigues 2015). However, it is important to say that the coming of these immigrants gave birth to a multi-ethnic composure that contributed in creating new artistic movements and genres in literature, cinema and music. Some examples of this would be the Windrush Generation writers and the Black Theatre.

2.2. British Theatre during the 1970s

During the 1970s', playwrights began to reject all traditional characteristics that the British theatre used to have in previous eras. Before, attending theatre was related to middle-class people only, and most of the plays' themes were related to the middle-class category only. After the waves of immigration coming from Eastern Europe and some of Britain's former colonies to the country, the British theatres acquired new artists and actors who applied their cultural views on the British stage. This was another point that required the rejection of the traditional theatre especially that the latter used to exclude foreigners from participation. The third change was the inclusion of theatrical performances in educational activities. This idea suggested that children would be able to interact with what happen in

their society by interpreting it in school plays. Another major factor that influenced the British theatre was that of permissiveness and sexual liberation. After the rise of the Labour Party to power during the 1960s, the conservative spirit that used to govern the British society was fading, and a new era of permissiveness, manifests and sexual liberation began to appear.

This theatrical reform did not change the type of audiences only, but it also affected the language and themes dealt with in theatre. Since the first half of the eighteenth century, the British theatre was stricted by censorship. The Licensing Act of 1737 issued by Sir Robert Walpole prohibited plays that satirized the royal family or tackled themes related to religion and sex. In addition, all plays had to be examined by the Lord Chamberlain before they were performed on stage. The censorship put on theatre was not lifted until 1968 (Swingler, 2016). When it comes to form, plays' scripts in this new theatre consisted mostly of improvisation, a theatrical technique that was difficult to master since actors had to instantly come up with scripts that can impress the audience. In this era, the Experimental or Alternative Theatre appeared, or as it was commonly known as 'Fridge'. The changes that these new-born theatres were not only about bringing new techniques and figures to the British theatre, but also generated new concerns to produce works that depict what was happening at that time from social and political events. The funds that the Arts Council was providing also helped these theatres to leave a permanent mark on today's British theatre. The Experimental Theatre was also open for artists from different backgrounds black, feminists, socialists and gay artists. After the lifting of theatre's censorship, dramatists became free to produce plays where they applied satire and historical metaphor when commenting on the political and social situations of their time. Example of these dramatist works include David Edgar's *Destiny* (1976), which made an attack on Britain's new white-supremacist spirit. John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil* (1981) was a play that brings up

the historical events that contributed to the increase of Scottish nationalism; starting from the Highland Clearances to the arrival of immigrants to Scotland (Billington, 2006). Yet, these new changes occurring at the level of theatre were not well perceived in Britain. Consequently, artists belonging to these groups were often obliged to perform their works abroad, since the sensitive subjects they brought up in their works were usually faced by rejection.

2.3.Caryl Churchill: A Biography

Caryl Lesley Churchill was born in London on September 3rd, 1938 to a middle-class family. Her parents moved to Montreal, Canada in 1945 where she attended Trafalgar School. During her childhood, Churchill had the habit of attending plays, and this generated her love of creating characters, as well as to write short stories and poems. Both Caryl's parents raised their daughter to lead a life where she could balance between motherhood and career. In some of her interviews, Churchill mentions how her parents had a great influence on her works. Her father, Robert Churchill, was working as a political caricaturist. Jan Churchill, Caryl's mother, worked in secretary, modelling and acting after quitting school at 14 (Tycker, 2008).

In 1956, she returned to her home country to carry her studies on English at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and received a BA degree in English Language and Literature in 1960. Her first one-act work *Downstairs* (1958), which was published as a student production, received the National Student Drama Festival. During that time, Churchill started to explore innovative techniques to tackle and satirize social issues and injustices. Churchill also tended to mediate her plays through television channels or radio stations. Her two plays *Having a Wonderful Time* (1960), *Easy Death* and *You've No Need to Be*

Frightened (1961) were staged as student productions. In the same year, Churchill got married to David Hunter, a barrister with whom she bore three boys. Establishing a balance between carrying her playwriting job and taking care of her children was not easy. However, she saw it necessary to give priority to her children while giving some effort to writing in her free time. Churchill saw the 1960s as a 'frustrated' period, during which she suffered because of various abortions. Churchill also felt like she was her role as housewife was "quite conventional and middle class and boring" (qtd, in Tycer 2008). This uncomfortable situation was another reason that led her to have interest tackling the struggles of women in the domestic sphere. This frustration, however, did not prevent her from carrying her writing. Therefore, she produced three one-act plays that were broadcasted on the BBC Third Programme: *The Ants* (1962), *Lovesick* (1967) and *Identical Twins* (1968).

In the 1970s, Churchill got the chance to work with a number theatre groups who shared her innovative vision in theatre. Most of these groups were influenced by the Alternative Theatre movement that was taking place at that time in Britain. This was a valuable opportunity for Churchill that allowed her demonstrate her interest in political and gender issues through her theatrical works. In 1976, Churchill was introduced to the Monstrous Regiment, a group of feminist playwrights who denounced oppressions against these 'unorthodox' women who refused to abide to conventional images that society draw about gender roles. With the collaboration of the group, Churchill wrote *Vinegar Tom* (1976), where a group of women were burnt after being accused of practicing witchcraft. The play victimized these women, whose only guilt was that that opposed the Christian creed, which dictates that women were inferior to men. (Snodgrass, 2006). In the same year, Churchill began her long-termed collaboration with the director Max Stafford-Clark. One of the features of this collaboration was the way Churchill used actors to interpret multiple characters; a notable example of this was Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*

(1976). Yet, it was *Cloud Nine* (1979) that extended Churchill's reputation to go beyond Britain. The play tackles both sexual and racial oppression and how they affect gender and sexuality. A year later, Churchill wrote her one-act play *Three More Sleepless Nights*. For the first time, the notion of overlapping dialogue¹ was used. Another application technique can be touched in following plays by Churchill, especially in *Top Girls* (1982). In *Top Girls*, Churchill both criticizes Thatcherism and tackles how society perceives the success of female individuals.

Caryl Churchill was a playwright who succeeded in marking her name among those dramatists of her time; an achievement that not many female playwrights could accomplish. In addition, Churchill's fame also extended due to her way of connecting between traditional theatre forms, and therefore succeeding in bridging the gap between the previous and future generations of playwrights. Not to mention her innovative style that she developed after working with various theatrical groups like socialist, feminist and experimental theatres, which showed to which extent her plays were entangled with the issues the British society were having at that time. Churchill was also able to prove ability of canonizing her works by depicting female protagonists instead of males. Yet, Churchill's theatrical mastery resits in how her works allow the audience to make multiple readings and thoughts.

2.4. *Cloud Nine* (1979)

2.4.1. Overview

Cloud Nine was a play written in 1979, and was the first play to carry Churchill's reputation to a transcontinental stage. The play has a reflection on how sexual and racial identities in Britain were oppressed by the society during the 1970s, and how this oppression

¹ It is when many actors talk at the same time. This technique is applied in both theatre and cinema.

came to face an end, which was marked by the rise of social movements calling for social equality and justice such as the second wave of feminism. Churchill also abided by some characteristics of the experimental theatre that was spreading at that time. Before writing the play, Churchill also made sure to choose actors who come from different backgrounds: men and women, homosexuals and heterosexuals, adolescents and adults. Etc. Churchill also interviewed those who auditioned for the play, and ask them about their opinions towards topics related to sexual politics. This was intended to make each actor more attached and integrated with his role. The play is also famous for the application of the motif of cross-dressing, through which Churchill aimed to challenge and expose the images that the British patriarchal societies imposed on sexual and racial minorities, leading these groups to struggle with their identities. The word *Cloud Nine* is an expression that refers to ‘an emotional state of absolute happiness and contentment’. This state, in the play, is the dream that most of the characters desire to achieve (Course Hero 01).

2.4.2. Themes

- **Domestic Colonialism**

According to Godiwala (2003), *Cloud Nine* tackles the issue of domestic colonialism, which Churchill had already expressed in her play *Owners* (1972). The term ‘domestic colonialism’ was used to reveal that the sexual and racial oppression exposed in the play were taking place within the domestic sphere or, in other words, the ‘nuclear family’ (p. 40). In Act 1, Churchill mocks Britain’s conservatism, which is interpreted in the play by Clive, the colonial administrator who incarnates all types of oppression: patriarchal, sexual and racial, and this what Clive feels proud of when he referred to himself as “[the] father to the natives here,/ And father to [his] family [...]” (1.1.14-15). The patriarchal oppression targets

Clive's son Edward, who is assaulted by his father whenever he gets spotted playing with his sister's doll. For the sexual abuse, Clive enacts it against his wife Betty by seeing her as someone from the 'weaker' sex, and he also does it against Mrs. Saunders as he uses her to satisfy his sexual hunger. Clive's racial stratification targets Joshua, whom Clive keeps scolding. Churchill's sympathy toward Betty is obvious. Among all characters, Betty receives most of the harm from Clive's patriarchal personality. He demeaned her feelings for Harry, despite that he is also unfaithful, beside referring to her and women as 'weaker sex'. Yet, Churchill also criticizes Betty for two reasons. First, Betty states that she wants to be what 'men want', which makes her someone who accepts an archetypical image that the British male society impose on women to keep them inferior. Second, Churchill demonstrates how Betty resembles Clive in his way of mistreating their son, Edward. In Scene 3, Betty warns Edward about playing with his sister's doll and tells him to be like his father. Here, Betty is supporting an idea that a patriarchal institution; who is Clive, wants to impose on someone who does not belong to the mainstream who in this case is their homosexual son Edward.

- **Women's Status**

During the Victorian period, women were supposed to abide by what was called the Victorian Values. Then, women were considered as 'angels of the house', entailing that their role was to serve their husbands and take care of their children. Therefore, the play demonstrates an attack on patriarchy and calls for granting women the same status that men have. In the play, Clive is the incarnation of the patriarchy and the one in control of the family. Through Act 1, Maud was always in agreement with Clive's mistreatment to his family. Here, Maud's position is to substitute Clive in his patriarchal role. For instance,

Maud keeps reprimanding her grandson Edward for playing with his sister's doll, makes her exercise the same patriarchal authority that Clive has on Edward. She also keeps instructing her daughter to be obedient to her husband. When Act 2 comes however, Both Clive and Maud are absent. This absence signifies that Betty now is no more chained by the norms and conventions of the Victorian period. Betty starts gradually to free herself from these ties in the second act when she separates from Clive. Betty also starts to acclimate with the fact that her son is homosexual. Another female character to benefit from this relief is Victoria, who proved that she could achieve her independence by pursuing her professional life despite her husband's underestimation and disapproval. Act 2, therefore, marks the beginning of women's independence from the traditional norms about gender roles. This took place in 1979, which coincides with the rise of both gay and women liberation movements. Mrs Saunders, however, is the only female character in Act 1 who does not go by the norms. She has no problem with being frank about her sexual desires, beside discussing matters related to politics, and not to forget her holding of a gun to protect herself, which a conventional Victorian woman is not supposed to. Mrs. Saunders independence is also apparent in her rejection to Clive's sexual proposals to her. Betty envies Mrs. Saunders for her status of independence, whereas Maud considers her as a threat to the patriarchal system. Churchill's thoughts of sexuality do not involve women only, but also people who were marginalized because of their sexual orientation, i.e., homosexuals. An example for this in the play would be of Edward, who became freer to show his homosexuality in ways that he was not able to in the first act.

- **Power**

The play also dives into the power relationships among races and genders. Both acts signify the rise and the fall of this power. In Act 1, the authority is at the hands of the white males. Clive, the colonial administrator, is a symbol of both white supremacy and patriarchy. He assigns himself and Harry to make decisions in the veranda, excluding the females from participating in the process of decision-making. Clive also excludes his son Edward since he considered him as someone who is not manly enough. Clive also exercises his authority on the native, and particularly Joshua, his black servant. At the final scene, the moment when this power began to decline is when Joshua pointed his gun at Clive, and this is an image of rebelling against the power. In Act 2, oppression began to demolish gradually and power scale was in favour of women instead of men. Victoria, for instance, decides to look for a career to support herself ignoring what her husband thinks about her inability of leading her own life. After she moves to live with Lin and Edward, her husband is obliged to coordinate with her when taking care of their children. Betty, on the other hand, started to establish her control over her life, and leaving her husband Clive was the first step to do so. Despite that Betty could not get used to her new freedom, she keeps going forward to retrieve her liberty. At the end of the act, Betty starts walking through blustering images of Clive and Maud to kiss her young self, a scene which symbolizes Betty's independence from the chains of the past and of course, freedom from her husband.

- **Gender Roles**

The Victorian society showed a strong attachment to gender roles, and women were forbidden from involving themselves in fields and matters governed by males. In Act 1, Clive discusses the feud with the native tribes with Harry only, without consulting his wife

Betty. When Clive reconciles Harry after confronting him Betty's affair with him, he refers to women as a 'weaker sex', representing women's marginalization by the chauvinist spirit of the Victorian society. Besides, Clive also grants himself the right to have an adulterous relationship with Mrs. Saunders, while telling his wife to stay faithful to him. In Act 2, these gender roles and constraints start to loosen and almost fade. Unlike in Act 1, Edward becomes free to show his feminine side in his relation with Gerry and while taking care of the kids with Lin and Victoria. Victoria goes on a search for a career, a thing that men used to be the only people who do it. Lin takes the roles of a mother and a father. She also makes sure that the gender roles do not put too much weight on her daughter Cathy, especially when she tells her to play with toy guns with the boys from the neighbourhood. Churchill is not calling for the omission of gender roles, but simply emphasises on the fact that gender roles do not harm as long as they do not impose things that do not fit some people's personalities or orientations.

- **The Fragmentation of Identity**

The play also discusses the struggle of characters with their identity. One example, Harry cannot show his homosexuality in public, and he even thinks of his natural feelings as "disease more dangerous than diphtheria". Harry also attempts to kiss Clive, who represses him and tells him to get married, and Harry therefore marries a lesbian woman to hide his sexual identity. Edward, on the other hand, cannot prevent himself from showing his feminine nature. Yet, his feelings get into question by his lover Gerry, who reveals his annoyance with Edward being the 'wife' in their relationship. This, however, does not stop Edward from accepting his nature. Another character struggling with his identity is Joshua. In Act 1, Joshua's self-esteem seems to be numb to the extent that he felt nothing when his

black co-workers were flogged or when his parents were killed by the British troops. Because of Clive's oppression, Joshua no longer has respect for himself as 'human being', since he accepted the position that these so-called masters gave to him. That is why he keeps referring to his own people as 'bad people', and this was revealed when he said that "[his] skin is black" while "[his] soul is white [...]" (1.1.24-25). Joshua, therefore, was deprived from his humanity and his identity. Joshua's self-esteem seems in the play to be numb to the extent that he felt no sorrow when his kins were flogged or when his parents were killed by the British troops. (Rebellato, p. 157)

- **Self-acceptance**

The plays describes how three characters: Betty, Victoria and Edward had to put the society's norms about sexuality aside to reach the state of self-acceptance. In Act 1, Victoria was played by a dummy, which symbolizes her lack of autonomy. In Act 2, Victoria becomes a mature woman who knows how to balance between her professional and private life. Most of times, women are obliged to take care of their children and leave their jobs, but Victoria made a choice of her own. This choice wan not made only because Victoria wanted to have a job of her own, but also because she wanted to be distant from a husband who does not support her choices at all. Victoria, eventually, had determined what she thought it would bring her happiness, and she was going after it. Among all characters, Betty was the one who underwent a major change in the entire play. In Act 1, she is an archetypical wife who is unsatisfied with her life. Betty envies Mrs. Saunders, and always fantasizes about having an adventurous live with Harry. In Act 2, Betty's separating from Clive is nothing but a first step toward her freedom, as she is still not ready yet to embrace her freedom. At the end of the act, Betty get reprimanded by Clive for helping Gerry to get up, but she ignores him and

embraces the actor who played her role in Act 1. This, symbolically, signifies Betty's acceptance of herself. Edward, unlike other characters, does not seem to be struggling when he conducts his feminine behaviour in front of the others. In Act 2, Edward comes to a moment when he starts questioning his identity. After Gerry expresses his dissatisfaction with Edward being the homemaker, Edward starts to realize that he is attracted to women and that he is a lesbian, after having an intimate moment with Victoria.

2.5. *Top Girls* (1982)

2.5.1. Overview

Top Girls (1982) is listed among Churchill's successful works beside *Cloud Nine* and *Fen*. Like *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls* got Churchill the Obie Award. In this play, Churchill insists how women despite their social and historical backgrounds are united by one fight against the oppression of Men. Second, Churchill exposes Thatcherian policy, which was seen by many women as an achievement for them. Churchill also explores how motherhood is viewed within society in general, and by women in particular. The play reflects Churchill's feminist views on the relationship between motherhood and work. (Tyser, p. 13). The title, *Top Girls*, is the name of the agency where Marlene works. The title is also an allusion to every woman who managed to establish a successful career for herself in a world controlled by men.

2.5.2. Themes

- **The Stories of Women**

The play grants a description about how women fight to achieve a recognizable status in a male chauvinist society. In Act 1, the female figures' stories reveal that submissiveness is

deeply injected in their minds that they cannot think of having a life outside their chains. The diner gathers Marlene with four female figures from history, and she displays a specific reaction to each one of them. The dinner that Marlene had with the historical female figures symbolizes the common cause that women from various backgrounds were supporting. The diner in the act was also a satirical imitation of Plato's *Symposium* (c. 850 BC), where he described a contest where four various Greek historical figures debate each other: the general Alcibiades, the playwright Aristophanes, and Socrates. (Snodgrass, 110)

The first of the figures to appear was the famous British traveller Isabella Bird. Isabella tells how she had to travel to cure her spine tumour when she was young. Isabella also saw the travel as good opportunity to stay far away from her home, where she was obliged to please her clergyman father. The female guest to come after is Pope Joan, the figure who dressed up as a man to be able to study theology, before being elected as pope, without letting other know that she is a woman. Pope Joan got pregnant after an affair with her chamberlain, and her pregnancy was revealed during her papacy procession. This led to her stoning for heresy. The third figure is Lady Nijo, the concubine of the Japanese emperor Go-Fukakusa. When she was fourteen, her father delivered her to the emperor to become his concubine. Living in the court, Nijo's life was full of unfortunate encounters: she was victim to physical abuse and she got banished from the Imperial Court and had nowhere to go. Eventually, Lady Nijo becomes a Buddhist nun. Lady Nijo also reveals how her life's circumstances deprived her from her will to question the injustice she was encountering. Another character from the Medieval age was Patient Griselda, a character from The Clerk's Tale In Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387). The tale narrates the story of Griselda, a peasant girl who get marries to a Marquis. Her husband tests her obedience, by taking her children away from her and throwing her out after marrying another woman. At the end, her husband comes back and informs her that she succeeded his test of obedience. The other

figures were shocked from Griselda's tale, and their shock grew bigger after hearing Griselda justifying the oppressive acts of her husband. The fifth female guest was Dull Gret, the main figure around which Pieter Bruegel the Elder drew his masterpiece *Dulle Griet* (c. 1563). Dull Gret's interference in the guests' discussion is almost absent, as she was busy devouring the food when the others were not seeing. Dull Gret starts telling her story like it was described in Bruegel's painting: Dull Gret was wearing an apron and an armour, and led the women of her village to fight the demons in hell.

- **The Oppression of Women**

In Act 2, Marlene receives Mrs. Kidd, who is the wife of a male employee that Marlene passed over by having her promotion. Mrs. Kidd attempts to convince Marlene to forfeit her promotion for Howard Kidd. Mrs. Kidd also adds that as Howard's wife she is supposed to make him her priority. After Marlene rejects her request, Mrs. Kidd argues that Marlene cannot hold such position since this would be considered by the society as "not natural" (p.60; act 2). Mrs. Kidd, therefore, is an example of a 'brainwashed' woman whose mentality has been structured to entail a position on her that is inferior to that of men. Churchill, therefore, reveals how women's life under patriarchy can be 'mind-numbing'. Marlene seems to show resistance to this issue, but she realizes later that having a job in a patriarchal society does not necessarily mean freedom from this society's boundaries (Tanner 2008). Marlene also figures out that she is no different from the women that attended her diner party. Despite that the circumstances in which she lived were different from those of the women, she somehow is vulnerable to the patriarchal rule of her period. Act 3 reveals some shreds from Joyce and Marlene's history, as she and Joyce recall how they used to suffer because of their father's mistreatment of their mother.

- **The ‘Thatcherian Individual’**

In Act 1, Marlene is manifested as a character who does not seem to sympathise with the other women’s suffering, and who is interested in elevating her own professional status. Her ruthlessness is already showed in her abandoning her baby and moving to work until becoming a managing director at the Top Girls agency. Here, Marlene is an allegory to Thatcherism, a spirit which favours the individual over the collective, and where Margaret Thatcher, a woman, tended to abide by the rules of the patriarchy rather than shedding light on the issues of her fellow women. Marlene’s journey to success is the centre of the play’s events. She had to sacrifice empathy, softness and any other ‘feminine’ features that present an obstacle between her and her financial success. This made her lose everything that makes her a woman or more specifically, a human. Marlene’s lack of emotion is also seen in her cold way of receiving Angie at office. In the third act, Marlene visits her sister Joyce. The two sisters get involved in an intense argument, and Marlene tries to justify her abandon of her baby, who is in fact Angie. Marlene adds that her decision was satisfactory to both parts: she leaves all of her feminine feelings behind her to join the business world, and her sister Joyce could raise the baby and forget about the abortions she suffered from. Joyce completely disagrees with Marlene’s view about success, arguing that Marlene rejecting the same people who helped her succeed does not make of her a successful woman. Churchill, here, is launching an attack on Thatcherism, which is presented in the play by the character of Marlene. Churchill believes that the Thatcherian policy of encouraging individualism has brought nothing good for Britain. This policy, in Churchill’s view, made people seek their own success even if it was at the expense of other people’s benefit. Therefore, what individuals believed to be success was nothing but an epic failure.

- **Motherhood**

The play also explores how women view motherhood. Marlene, for instance, sees motherhood as an obstacle that is not favoured by women who seek success controlled by men, and this justifies Marlene's act of leaving her baby to be raised Joyce. In Act 2, Angie, who is raised by Joyce, tells Kit that she believes that her aunt Marlene is her mother, and says that she wants to "kill [her] mother", Joyce (p. 31 ; act 2, scene 2). Joyce goes to see Marlene in London, and when she arrives at the agency, Marlene receives her with a cold welcome. In this scene, Angie is led by her daughter 'intuition' to meet her real mother, but the latter does not seem to appreciate the action since she believes that having motherly feelings is a burden on women who seek success. Marlene remembers that she left her baby to be raised by Joyce, but she somehow blames Joyce for imprisoning herself at home to serve her husband. In Act 3, both Marlene and Joyce start to fight over Angie. Marlene believes that motherhood would make her dream of achieving success impossible and make her have the same miserable life her mother had. Joyce speaks about how raising Angie helped her forget the pain of having an abortion, but Marlene considers the pain and abortion to be unnecessary, and brags about having two abortions. Joyce sees her sister's lust for success as disgusting. Obviously, Churchill completely objects with some women who view motherhood as an obstacle between them and success, and how motherhood became mistreated by society. In fact, Churchill reflects a part of her own life on this especially that she succeeded at managing to make a balance between her domestic and professional life. Besides, Churchill puts the blame on Thatcherism. In her belief, Thatcherism spreads the idea of the individual, and women who believed in this policy became more interested in elevating their own status at the expense of their position as mothers.

Conclusion:

The era of the 1970s was an unbalanced era that many British people consider controversial. During this era, the kingdom had faced several social encounters such as the economical crisis, the LGBT and the feminist movements and the tense racial relation between the Britons and the immigrants. These events, in the world of literature, were perceived as a material that British artists and playwrights could write about. Among these artists, Caryl Churchill was a female playwrights who succeeded in making a place for herself among the playwrights of her era, and was able as well to be among the minority of female playwrights who could establish their names as prominent figures in the British theatre. In most of her plays, Churchill sheds light on the sexual, racial and political issues and tends to satirize the injustice enacted in Britain. In *Cloud Nine*, her first famous play, Churchill exposes how the British society had been oppressing some marginalized groups such as women, homosexual and black people, as these two were categorized as inferior to the male British patriarch. *Top Girls*, another successful work by Churchill, reveals the playwright's disdain with Thatcherism. Churchill, in this play, shows how modern British women thought that they had it all, but realized at the end that their success was empty or rather, was nothing but an epic failure.

Chapter Three:

Cross-dressing in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979)
and *Top Girls* (1982)

Introduction

Cloud Nine and *Top Girls* were two masterpieces that made Churchill's reputation exceed Britain to reach the United States, and were the two works that made her win the Obie Award¹. Despite that, each of the plays' time coincided with different series of social events, but both of them carried Churchill's disdain with the patriarchal mentality that was still existing in Britain and because of which women specifically were still being marginalized. *Cloud Nine* was written in 1979, during a period that witnessed the rise of two movements: the Women Liberation Front and the Gay Liberation Movement. The period also lived a spirit of racism that targeted the incoming waves of immigrants. *Top Girls*, written in 1982, was considered as a farce in which Churchill attacks Thatcherism and describes the difficulties and sacrifices that women had made to make a recognisable social status for themselves. Both plays are classified as farces, since Churchill employed satirical images to denounce some social institutions and conducts related to patriarchy.

3.1. Cross-Dressing: An Overview

A general definition of cross-dressing is the act of wearing clothes or accessories that are associated with the opposite gender. Sears (2015) argues that cross-dressing is practiced due to various reasons, and that these reasons are defined by the contexts and periods in which they occurred (p. 21). For some men, cross-dressing was a psychological condition, but for others was an entertaining job. In the case of women, it was due their need to improve their situation, whereas other women grew up dressing like males in order not to avoid sexual harassment or to protect their families' fortunes since there were no men in these families.

¹ Also called the Off-Broadway Award, is an award granted to playwrights and theatre groups in New York.

However, this chapter is supposed to narrow the view of cross-dressing and to explain how Churchill it in her two plays differently. Therefore, my work is premised on the assumption that Churchill used cross-dressing as a motif in *Cloud Nine* (which makes it a travesty technique in this case), and as a sub-theme in *Top Girls*. In both of her works, Churchill's use of cross-dressing

3.2. Cross-dressing as a Motif in *Cloud Nine*

During the 1950s, the experimental theatre began to enter the United Kingdom. Also called the avant-garde theatre, the experimental theatre gathers all works in which innovative and experimental ideas and techniques are applied. Influenced by Bertolt Brecht's theatre, the experimental theatre is called as such because the plays are often based on experiments rather than on texts. Starting from the 1970s, the development of experimental theatre in Britain coincided with the rise of political and feminist theatrical groups whose works were influenced by the societal upheaval that Britain was living at that time (London, 263). In 1976, Churchill began to meet with playwrights who belonged to the experimental theatre, and this had a considerable influence on her feminist and political works, including her first successful work *Cloud Nine* (1979).

Before proceeding to stage *Cloud Nine*, Churchill interviewed those who auditioned and asked them about some topics related to sexuality and gender. Churchill required that the actors had to be homosexual, heterosexual, single and married individuals. Therefore, the choice of actors had to be based not on their fitness to the roles assigned to them, but was rather based on the set of interviews in which those actors expressed their ideas during the interviews. The actors also had to play a game. The game consisted of cards; each card represents a degree of power according to the number it carries, and cards with red colour

represented the males, whereas the black coloured cards represented the females. The cards were randomly distributed on players, and each player had to improvise a scene according to the gender and the power degree assigned to her/him. This game, in fact, was used as an experience how individuals would act in relation to roles that are imposed by exterior factors like society, and how could these roles grant or prevent these individuals from their ability to exercise power. In addition, the other aim of the game was to distort the gender roles and definitions that society imposes on people. (Keyssar 93-94)

3.2.1. Discussion

This tendency to distort gender roles was present in the assignment of the character roles to the actors. This was applied by the use of the stage device of ‘cross-dressing’. The aim of using ‘cross-dressing’ as a theatrical motif in the play was to shake gender roles and violate them. Under patriarchy, the British society believed in binary categorization, i.e., the division of people into men and women. This system was backed up by the Church, which emphasized that God created men and women to complete each other, and that any relationship that does not abide by this principle were forbidden. This put the pressure on people who belonged to different sexual orientations like gay, lesbian and bisexual people. These people had to keep their sexual identities hidden due to the harsh judgement the British patriarchy would have.

The first character to be played by an actor from the opposite sex is Betty. In Act 1, Betty is played by a male actor. It is possible to focus on two probabilities due to which Churchill opted for this action. Angel-Perez (2013) argues that Betty’s portrayal by a male is because she ‘want[s] to be what men want [her] to be’ (Act 1, Scene 1). Representing the persona of Betty by a man is to reflect Betty’s satisfaction with possessing all the features that men

attributed to women during the Victorian period. The male represents the archetypical image in power, and a man playing Betty was to show that Betty was an archetypical Victorian spouse. The second probability could be that Churchill wanted the males from the play's audience to put themselves in the position of Betty or, in other words, to empathize with her. Apparently, Churchill may also want to imply that women's issues are supposed to be discussed with men, who can provide comprehension and support to women against gender injustice. In the second act, a woman plays Betty. This was meant to mark the moment when Betty's freedom from the constraints of tradition began and of course, when she finally started to restore her worth as a woman.

Edward is played by a woman in Act 1 and by a man in Act 2, and this choice was done to fit the role. Edward was the only character in the play who, despite the reprimands, kept his 'feminine' self. Whereas characters like Betty or Harry were hiding their feelings, Edward was not ready to reject his nature; he was playing with his sister's doll every time, and he was overtly expressing his feelings to Harry. Having a woman playing the role of a homosexual person could also illustrate the commonality between feminism and the LGBT movement. Feminists, in Churchill's view, had not fought for women only, but had also to involve themselves in the struggles that different categories of their society were engaged in, including gay people.

Representing the four-year-old Cathy by a man in the play could symbolize the rebellion of gender images and roles that the British society used to adhere to. In Act 2, Lin encourages her daughter Cathy to play with toy guns in the neighbourhood, as she says to her, "Don't hit him, Cathy, kill him. Point the gun, [...] That's the way" (Act 2, Scene 1). Lin justifies this act by saying that she used not to have this privilege when she was young. Lin, in other words, does not want her daughter to be stuck to the gender roles that her elder generation used to believe in.

In the first act, Victoria is played by a doll. In the act, Edward is often seen playing with the doll, which is also his sister. This attraction will develop in the second act, when Edward has an intimate moment with his sister and identifies himself as lesbian. Unlike Edward, it is obvious that Victoria is not interested in playing with the doll, and this is a connotation of Victoria's rejection of gender images, i.e., associating dolls with girls. This image gets clearer in Act 2; as Victoria seeks to build her own career and life rather than being stuck in the housewife's typical life.

The cross-dressing device was not used only to attack gender stereotypes, but also to eliminate racial stratifying images as well. In the play, Clive's servant Joshua is played by white man. Since the play held a criticism to Britain's colonial policy as well, Churchill assigned a white man to play the roles of a black servant to call the audience to empathise with Joshua. Joshua's respect for himself was shattered, and his feelings of worth were suppressed or even dead. Because of Clive's patriarchy, Joshua was neither able to pursue his love relationship with Harry, nor object all the injustice that he was receiving from his superiors. At the beginning of Act 1, Clive starts introducing the other characters and when coming to Joshua's turn he says: 'my boy's a jewel. Really has the knack. / You'd hardly notice that the fellow's black.' (Churchill, 04; act 1), and Joshua says, 'my skin is black but oh my soul is white. / I hate my tribe. My master is my light. / I only live for him. As you can see, / what white men want is what I want to be' (04).

The use of this motif was to fit Churchill's objective, which was to expose the way patriarchy in Britain attempted to impose gender roles on individuals, and to persecute all those who do not abide by this classification. Churchill did not oppose gender roles, but rather wanted to show that some people are suffocating because their society puts them in a category that does not fit them.

3.3. Cross-dressing as a Minor Theme in *Top Girls*

In theatre, the cross-dressing device functions by 'invit[ing] men to play the role of women and women to play the role of the opposite sex in order to dismantle the notions of gender' (Ravari and Naidu 159 2011). In other words, using cross-dressed actors in a play is to reveal how gender roles can be manipulated or distorted. Frequently, theatrical cross-dressing can also be referred to as 'drag' or 'travesty'.

Unlike the case of *Cloud Nine*, cross-dressing appeared as a theme in *Top Girls*. Similar to *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls* also recalls the oppressive attitudes that the British patriarchy committed against women. In previous periods of history, women were not supposed to work and were even not allowed to vote. This did not prevent some of them from attempting to break these stereotypes, but they were instantly misjudged by their society. Some of these women, however, were able to integrate in some of the fields ruled by males by cross-dressing.

3.3.1. Discussion

In *Top Girls* (1982), Churchill sets the first act of the play to grant the audience a glimpse about the struggle that women used to have at their time under the patriarchal system. In the dinner's scene, Marlene wants to celebrate her promotion and invites some female figures that marked their names in history. One of these women was Pope Joan, the woman who passed for a man, became pope, and got stoned to death after her cover was exposed.

From this basis, Badreddine (2016) comments on Churchill's use of cross-dressing:

As far as Churchill is concerned, the playwright employs cross-dressing as a 'gestic' reference to the illogic state of social divisions between men and women. She seeks to challenge and subvert these unsound differences. In *Top Girls*, the act of cross-

dressing is put into relief through the character of Joan who lives a 'manly' life. (p.

7)

Like the other guests, Pope Joan starts telling her story about how she was able to become pope. When she was twelve, Joan started to dress up like a boy so that she could study at the library of Athens since women at her time were not allowed. When she became a grown-up 'man', she travelled to Rome. After spending some time there teaching Greek, Joan marked her presence thanks to her brilliance and was promoted cardinal. After the death of Pope Leo VIII², Joan succeeded him to become pope. During the scene, Joan details how she fell in love with her chamberlain and had an affair with him while still pretending to be a 'male'. Eventually, Joan got pregnant but she thought it was just a case of obesity. On Rogation days, Joan was riding a horse and accompanied by cardinals to have a procession ceremony before she starts to feel pain in her body. She got off her horse and ran to a place between St Clement's and the Colosseum, and a huge wave of masses were running after her. When she reached the spot, Joan's baby fell down from her womb. The scene left cardinals and masses in a state of shock. Joan was dragged by her feet out of the town and stoned her to death.

Unlike in *Cloud Nine*, cross-dressing only appears as a minor theme in the play, but its use does not deviate from Churchill's discussion of women's struggle against patriarchy. Along the act, Joan sounds to be mastering the topics that she discussed at the dinner table. Unlike the women at her time, Joan manifests a rich knowledge about theories of famous male philosophers and theologians like Saint Augustine or John the Scot. Since she was dressing like a man, Joan sounded like a man when she was talking, and this shows how cross-dressing for many years made her forget her nature. Pope Joan's cross-dressing was an inevitable option for her, since women like her were deprived of the rights of studying.

² Was the pope of the Roman Catholic Church from 847 to 855 A.D.

This, therefore, shows how patriarchy oppressed women to an extent that women had to hide their gender so that they can make a living for themselves.

For the majority of the audience, Joan's pregnancy was seen as a disappointment in that Joan was not supposed to be pope because she is a woman who was easily seduced by her chamberlain. Yet, this twist of events can reveal something about how churchmen are in fact 'unholy' men. As a pope, Joan got involved in an affair with a chamberlain, who fell in love with the male 'Joan'. If someone can refer back to the history of papacy, he will definitely retrieve some stories about how many popes -who were males-, were involved in series of shameful deeds: corruption, adultery, assassination and even sodomy (Lewis 09). Churchill here is trying to imply that Joan's pregnancy and love affairs were not because of her gender, but simply because the position she occupied was itself corrupt. For Churchill, If Joan as a pope got stoned because she got pregnant, people would also have to consider criticizing those popes who dress in clothes of saints but are in fact sinners and debauchees. Joan's position as pope makes think that she "would know everything", and that this post would allow her even to impose her own truth because "whatever the Pope says, that's true." (p. 11-12; act 1). Her knowledge also makes her realize that the pope was nothing but an ordinary man and not someone chosen by God, especially that he never spoke to her when she was a pope. Yet, Joan believes God's displeasure with her is because she tricked the authority of the church by dressing as a man and occupying a position that men only are fit to have. Joan proceeds by saying that God was sending some signs of his wrath like the earthquakes, blood rains and the herds of grasshoppers that attacked France (p.13; act 1). This perception that Joan makes shows how her society shaped her mentality and made her believe that her being a part of the religious institution is something irrelevant, and that institutions like the Church are supposed to be run by men only. Joan, in other words, has

absorbed the ideology of her time, which made believe that they were inferior to men. (Djundjung and Yong, 166-167, 2002)

3.4. Cross-dressing in *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*: A Contrast

In *Cloud Nine*, cross-dressing is used as a theatrical motif. In the play, cross-dressing can also be referred to as a 'travesty'. Churchill's intention behind using this motif is to show that gender roles can be flexible and even violated. In Act 1, most of the main characters are interpreted by people who belong to the opposed sex, and this is to show how fragmented these characters were because of their inability to express their sexual orientations and desires freely under the patriarchy, which is personified by Clive. A male actor plays Betty, Edward is played by a woman, Victoria is a doll in the first act and Joshua is played by a white man. In Act 2, each character is played by an actress or actor from the same gender. The second act, in other words, represents the moment when characters started to reconnect with their selves. The patriarchal oppression that was present in the previous act has less effect in the second act. At first, each of Betty, Victoria and Edward still had not arranged to gather their fragmented identities, but they succeeded at doing it at last.

In *Top Girls*, cross-dressing is displayed as a sub-theme. In Act 1, Pope Joan narrates how she had to dress as a boy so that she can pursue her dream of joining the library of Athens to study. Thanks to her intelligence, Joan was pontificated as Pope. She gets involved in several affairs with her chamberlain, and her pregnancy was the reason why she got stoned. Pope Joan's action showed how women at her time were forced to absorb what the males told them to follow so that they could survive in a society that men kept for themselves. At her time, women were considered "second-class citizens", so Joan thought that putting on male clothes will grant her access to that power that women like her could not attain. As

she succeeded at reaching higher positions like papacy, Joan reversed the roles and became the controller of the same institution that discriminated her (Djundjung and Yong 165). Like Pope Joan, the narrations of the other guests show that society classify people according to their biological composure, and this what originates the cultural stereotypisation of women as physically and intellectually inferior to men. Besides, gender roles also seem to be imposed by culture (Badreddine 222). Pope Joan's words confirm this point, as she says that a woman can have the intellectual status of a man only if she abide by the conventions set by men. Joan does not behave like a woman at all; her way of talking is masculine, and she even did not know that she was pregnant, because spending many years acting like a man made her forget what she really is.

3.5. Caryl Churchill's Use of Cross-Dressing

Churchill's use of cross-dressing also appeared in another successful play she wrote, *Vinegar Tom* (1976). This play narrated how a group of women were accused of witchcraft and burnt because they did not want to affiliate in the beliefs and norms of their society. Two characters, Kramer and Springer, are male witch hunters who were played by females. According to Ravari and Naidu (160), Churchill did this to highlight two ideas. The first is two show that some characters are undergoing a state of identity crisis, and this case is similar to that of Edward from *Cloud Nine* or Pope Joan from *Top Girls*. For the second idea, Churchill wanted to reveal that 'victimized women are condemned by those of their own sex'. A similar example would be Mrs. Kidd from *Top Girls*, who blames Marlene for taking her husband's post and tells her that she is 'not natural' because she occupied a post that was meant for men only (Churchill 54, act 2). Another scene of cross-dressing in *Vinegar Tom* appears in the Scene 20 where a group of cross-dressed performers disgrace 'misogyny in song and dance and tops and tails' (Aston 08). The scene, therefore,

depicts the victimized female characters as martyrs, because their rejection of norms made them victims to the persecution of the patriarchy.

3.6. Cross-dressing between the Past and the Present

Cross-dressing is and was not a phenomenon that appeared in the modern days. In fact, this practise has existed since ancient times and the factors that circulated it varied from one historical era to another. The reasons behind cross-dressing also differed between males and females. When male-to-female cross-dressing was the symptom of a psychological condition due to which men dressed like women to feed their sexual fetish, a woman's cross-dressing was meant to rebel against the unjust gender stereotypes to which women were victims (Altenburger 181-182). At that period, cross-dressing was still being perceived as a taboo behaviour, and those who do it were criticized by their society. For those males who cross-dressed, they were seen as pervert or emasculated men. Women, on the other hand, had to cross-dress in order to acquire some privileges that were limited to men only; like business, travel or education. Despite that these women were trying to have some rights that belonged to them, their patriarchal societies kept oppressing them on the basis that women were supposed to serve at the domestic sphere only. Another reason why cross-dressers were rejected by their societies was because their behaviour caused a kind of disequilibrium in the way society categorizes gender roles³.

With the coming of the twentieth century, however, the perception of cross-dressing in western societies began to change. After the LGBT community started to gain consideration, many gay and lesbian people wanted to celebrate their new freedom by cross-dressing to symbolize their freedom from the obligations of their gender roles. Unlike before, cross-

³ for more information, see: <https://allthatsinteresting.com/crossdressing-history>

dressing became a cultural aspect, and an example of this would be that of drag queens. Beside being an artistic form, some people consider the drag queen culture, for instance, as a method of expressing their own sexuality and celebrating their liberation from the norms that society has about gender. Hence, today, cross-dressing is being less treated as a taboo issue and its practice is being witnessed in many aspects of Western culture such as cinema, fashion, theatre and even festivals.

Conclusion:

Both *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* are theatrical farces that reflect Churchill's attempt to attack, satirize and expose patriarchal and societal abuse of women. In *Cloud Nine*, Clive is an allusion to the sexual and racial abuse in the British society and his oppression caused the other characters to lose connection with their identities. Churchill also expresses her disappointment with Thatcherism in *Top Girls*, after Thatcher's rise to power was proven to be nothing but a rejection of collectivism for the favour of individualism, and a loss for women who gained nothing after Thatcher became Prime Minister. In both plays, Churchill used cross-dressing to discuss sexuality and gender roles. In *Cloud Nine*, characters are cross-dressed because they have not come yet to know who they really were, and they succeed to do so in Act 2, where patriarchy started to lose its impact with the rise of the second wave of feminism and the gay movement. In *Top Girls*, Pope Joan, the only character who cross-dressed, is a sample of women who were victims to the religious institution that was controlled by the patriarchy and which marginalized women. By using cross-dressing, Churchill proved to her audience that gender roles are flexible and vulnerable to change, and that gender roles can sometimes be a tool of oppression.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis has explored how Churchill's feminist views were reflected on both *Cloud Nine* (1978) and *Top Girls* (1982), which were two plays that shared one purpose that was to carry an attack on patriarchy and explore how women were able to overcome this hardship after the emergence of the second wave of feminism.

With the rise of second wave of feminism during the 1970s, and with the rise of Women's Liberation movement, women's social status began to improve and the impact of patriarchy began to fade gradually. The emergence of Gay Liberation Movement also coincided with feminism at that time, and the two movements actually shared one common fight against the British patriarchal mentality. After the rise of Margaret Thatcher as the first female Prime Minister in 1984, British feminists thought that this was a remarkable achievement to women in the country, yet the policies Thatcher introduced were in favour for the patriarchal system, and women consequently lost their faith in her.

In both plays, Churchill expressed her position toward these social events, and how she perceived them from a feminist perspective. In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill highlighted some examples of oppression that Britain practised against women, homosexuals and even black people. Because of this segregation, the members of these social categories had to start searching for their fragmented identities and unlock their freedom from the chains of stereotypes. In *Top Girls*, Churchill explores how women paved their ways to success and how their male societies tried to suppress them. Besides, Churchill also denounced Thatcherism, and how Thatcher's rise to power did not meet the expectations British women set on her. As a socialist, Churchill also aligned Thatcherism with Capitalism, since Thatcher was among those who called for individualism, an ideology where individuals tend to elevate at the expense of the collective.

Moreover, another common point of the two plays was the use of cross-dressing. In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill applied what is called ‘travesty’, and the characters’ cross-dressing was to show that they were not yet aligned with their sexual identities, but they eventually came to achieve their freedom. In *Top Girls*, Pope Joan tells how she had to cross-dress to engage in a world where serving God was concerned only with males. Pope Joan’s cross-dressing also reflects how she subconsciously absorbed a male way of thinking and behaving.

In the English theatre, William Shakespeare is famous for using of cross-dressing in his plays. Example of this would include Viola from *Twelfth Night* (1602), Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* (1605), and Rosalind from *As You Like it* (1623). In English literature, the theme of cross-dressing appears frequently to criticize gender inequity or to make a call to recognize the importance of women’s position in society. In *The Song of the Lioness*¹, Alanna of Trebond, the protagonist, dressed like a boy to replace her twin brother Thom and train to become a knight. Even though Alanna faced rejection because of her gender, she eventually succeeded to become the King’s champion. The same case of a female character passing as male is also present in Patricia Duncker’s *James Miranda Barry* (1999), a novel in which the protagonist after whom the play is named started dressing as a boy when she was ten years old to study medicine in Edinburgh, and remained as such for fifty years. In this case, however, the character’s cross-dressing was imposed on her by her parents, because they saw it as a way to teach their daughter “mannerism”. Yet, the character chooses to remain a ‘boy’ rather than spending the rest of her life as a woman. This was done by Duncker to refer to the 1990s, where cross-dressing became no more a “taboo issue.”²

¹ a series of novels published during the 1980s by the American novelist Tamora Pierce.

² For more information, please refer to <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/cross-dressing-in-fiction-english-literature-essay.php>.

Appendix

The Summary of Cloud Nine:

In Act 1 takes the audience to a British colony in Africa in 1879. Clive, who is a colonial administrator, is supposed to handle the feuds between the native tribes. Clive gets worried because of the possible danger. He later receives his friend Harry Bagley, who is attracted to Clive's wife Betty; and Mrs. Caroline Saunders, a widow neighbour who seeks shelter in the family's veranda. Clive attempts to use Mrs. Saunders sexually, even though she does not feel attracted to him. Betty envies Mrs. Saunders' celibacy and feels attracted to Harry, and constantly tells him that they should run away. Harry keeps telling her that he prefers that she stay with her husband so that he can think about her when he is having an expedition. This was just an excuse Harry has to carry his sexual interactions with the black servant Joshua and Edward, Clive's nine-year-old son. Betty has the attraction of another person: Ellen, Clive's governess. The tension in the veranda gets worse, and so does the issue with the natives. Joshua informs his Master Clive about Betty's relation with Harry, about which Clive confronts Betty and refuses to talk to her after that. Clive confronts Harry but reassures him that what a 'weaker sex' does will never ruin their friendship. Harry mistakes Clive's words for something else and kisses him. Clive feels disgusted, and tells Harry to get married to repent for his sin. At first, Harry proposes to Mrs. Saunders, but she prefers to remain single. He proposes then to Ellen and she accepted, since she expected that she would not remain much longer with the family. Joshua tells Clive of Ellen's attraction to Betty. This makes Clive disgusted and he tells Joshua to 'get out of his sight'. Mrs. Saunders tells everybody that she is willing to sell her property to go back to England. Clive compliments and kisses her in front of Betty, who attacks Mrs. Saunders out of jealousy. Both Clive and Harry break the fight, and Clive blames Mrs. Saunders for not respecting his hospitality and tells her to leave at once. Clive forgives his wife, proposes a toast to Harry and Ellen, and assures the guests that the problems are over. Joshua comes in

holding a gun and aims it at Clive. Even he sees what is going on, Edward just covers his ears and does nothing to warn the other. The stage blacks out, and Act 1 is finished.

The Act 2 make a shift to London in 1979, but seems like the characters became 25 years older. Victoria is at the park studying and watching her children at the park with her friend Lin, who was gathering her courage to ask Victoria for a date. Edward, who is working as gardener in the park, walks with Betty, who says that she is separating from Clive. Lin asks Victoria to pass the night with her, but Victoria says that her husband may not allow her to do so. The next scene takes place at spring. Victoria feels uncomfortable since she does not know how to fill her time. Martin, Betty's husband, suggests that there is a job offer in Manchester she can take. Lin learns from Victoria about that and tells her that her husband was supposed to go with her and 'be a good wife'. Edward and Gerry separate from each other, because the latter had enough with having the role of the 'wife'. Edward goes to seek comfort from his sister, and they both are involved in an incestuous moment. Edward then says that he could be a 'lesbian'. When summer was about to pass, Edward quits his job and moves to live with Victoria and Lin. The three of them coordinate with Martin of their children. Betty works as a receptionist at a doctor's office. Lin and Victoria tend to take Betty with them and live in a new house; an idea that Victoria was uncomfortable with. The act is concluded by Betty's emotional monologue, where she reveals how much her divorce had taught her about herself. At the end, Betty kisses the actor who played her role in the first act.

The Summary of Top Girls

The scene opening Act 1 where Marlene celebrates her promotion in a restaurant in London. In this dinner, Marlene sits with five female historical figures: Pope Joan, Lady Nijo, Patient Griselda, Dull Gret and Isabella Bird. The discussion tackles issues related to women, and each

character narrates her story, and how she was oppressed by the males of her society. Marlene comebacks to Top Girls, an employment agency in which Marlene became the managing director. In the agency, Marlene interviews Jeannie, a woman who want to transfer to a new company that offers a better salary. Jeannie carries on and says that she is preparing her wedding. Marlene tells her not to share her private matters; otherwise, other co-workers will make sure that she does not perform well at work.

Act 2 goes to Joyce' backyard, where her daughter Angie and Kit are playing. Angie keeps brawling her friend Kit and talks about her desire to 'kill her mother'. Joyce, Marlene's sister, calls the girls to come and have a snack, but they do not answer. The girls talk about sex, and Angie tells Kit that she thinks that her aunt Marlene is her mother, and is willing to go to see her in London. The second scene takes the audience back to Top Girls' agency. Marlene receives congratulations from her co-workers Win and Nell. After, Win interviews Louise, a woman who wants to make a transfer because her old company did not pay attention to her despite working there for years. Angie meets Marlene, who seemed surprised and somehow annoyed by her niece's coming. Marlene welcomes Angie to stay the night with her. /Marlene receives Mrs. Kidd, who came to tell that her husband Howard, Marlene's colleague, is annoyed with Marlene's new post. Mrs. Kidd says that it is impossible that her husband should be inferior to her and that Marlene has to resign from her position to him. Marlene refuses Mrs. Kidd's demand, the latter keeps persisting, and Marlene tells her to 'piss off'. Nell interviews Shona, who is presenting herself as a twenty-nine years old woman who have a four-year' experience as a saleswoman. Nell gets impressed by her resume, and requires some information about Shona' private life. Shona stars making things up saying that her company pays her stays at hotels, and had already gave her a Porsche to drive. Nell discovers that Shona was lying, and Shona admits that she is only twenty-one and that she is unexperienced. /Angie sits and has a conversation with Win. The latter tells Angie about her private life, and as she keeps telling it,

Angie falls asleep. Win learns from Nell that Howard Kidd had a heart attack, and tells Marlene about the news. Win also tells Marlene that Angie wants to work at the company, but Marlene that Angie does not have the sufficient requirements to do it.

Act 3 takes place at Joyce's kitchen. Marlene visits Joyce, who was surprised by her sister's arrival, and it turns that Joyce has invited her aunt without letting Joyce know. The two sisters sit at the dining table after Angie goes to sleep, and start drinking whiskey. The scene reveals some information about the sisters' past. First, it turns out that Angie is Marlene's daughter. Because of being childless, Joyce accepted to raise Angie with her husband Frank. The discussion shifts into politics: Marlene states her position as Pro-Thatcherite, and Joyce says she supports the Socialist Left Wing. They change the subject and talk about their troubled marriages and the issues their working-class parents had. Marlene argues that she does not believe in classism, and that every individual can socially elevate as long as he possesses the potential, and she insists that she is not obliged to help those "stupid, lazy, and frightened" people to find jobs. Joyce says that Angie belongs to this category, and expects her not to succeed in case she happened to live in a country ran by Thatcherian conservatives. The two sisters keep arguing, and Joyce leaves Marlene to go to bed. Marlene is in the living room wrapping herself with a sheet and keeps sipping whiskey. Angie comes is looking for her mother. Angie tells Marlene that she is '[f]rightened'. Marlene asks Angie if she had a nightmare and comforts he, and Angie replies: 'Frightened', before the play ends.

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