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The representation of Thatcher's Theatre in Caryl Churchill's "Top Girls" : A social feminist study

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Abstract

Carly Churchill has a rare position within British contemporary's post-war dramatists. She is perhaps the most innovative and elusive writer of her age, an ardent advocate of women's equality and rights. The socialist feminist ideology of Churchill is indeed unquestionably the best of the postmodern society. Churchill lives under Thatcher's leadership, and she is among the leader who, not just in her nation but across the western world, transforms the cultural and social landscape of the state. This pivotal event appears as a backdrop for Caryl Churchill to challenge how a competent lady in the patriarchal system has risen on the social ladder and what she does for women and the society in her era. This study aims at knowing how Thatcher's theatre has depicted in Caryl Churchill's Top Girls . The work tries to set the effect of Thatcher on women and society in the period of her role as a prime minister of Britain and how her legacy makes citizens be successful in their jobs, but hates everyone around them, including their friends, coworkers, and even their families. The study hypothesizes that Churchill was affected by Thatcherism in her era and this influenced her style of writings. The paper starts with an Introduction of the Top girls play and Thatcher's regime , then follows the methodology of the study and the discussion comes afterwards and it ends

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with a conclusion that points out the results of discussion.
Keywords: Top Girls , Margaret Thatcher , British feminist Drama , Caryl Churchill , Patriarchal society .

تمثيل مسرح تاتشر في "توب جيرلز" لكارييل تشرشل: دراسة نسوية اجتماعية

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المخلص: تتمتع كارييل تشرشل بمكانة نادرة بين كتاب الدراما البريطانيين المعاصرين في فترة ما بعد الحرب. ربما تكون الكاتبة الأكثر إبداعاً والمروحة في عصرها ، وهي مدافعة متحمسة عن مساواة المرأة وحقوقها. إن أيديولوجية تشرشل النسوية الاشتراكية هي بلا شك أفضل ما في مجتمع ما بعد الحداثة. تعيش تشرشل تحت قيادة تاتشر ، وهي من بين القادة الذين ، ليس فقط في أمتها ولكن في جميع أنحاء العالم الغربي ، يغير المشهد الثقافي والاجتماعي للدولة. يظهر هذا الحدث المحوري كخلفية لكارييل تشرشل لتحدي كيف ارتقت سيدة مؤهلة في النظام الأبوي على السلم الاجتماعي وما تفعله للمرأة والمجتمع في عصرها. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة كيف يصور مسرح تاتشر في "أفضل الفتيات" لكارييل تشرشل. يحاول العمل تحديد تأثير تاتشر على المرأة والمجتمع في فترة دورها كرئيسة وزراء لبريطانيا وكيف أن إرثها يجعل المواطنين ناجحين في وظائفهم ، لكنه يكره كل من حولهم ، بما في ذلك أصدقائهم وزملائهم في العمل ، و حتى عائلاتهم. تفترض الدراسة أن تشرشل تأثر بالتأثيرية في عصرها وأثر ذلك على أسلوب كتاباتها.

الكلمات الدالة: توب جيرلز ، مارجريت تاتشر ، دراما نسوية بريطانية ، كارييل تشرشل ،

المجتمع البطريركي.

1.Introduction

The play 'Top girls' publishes after the election of Margaret Thatcher, as the First Lady prime minister. As she highlights the individual success and hierarchy of society with the conventional role of women. Thatcher gains numerous liberties won over a decade by the women's rights movement. She starts to enjoy the right of the ballot, and the chance of quality schooling, access to work and personal freedom of either her partner or her father. All of these have a great role to gain such a position in society. As a result, many women have soon gained new ideals of rivalry and roughness due to the rapid climate changes of British society and government, which in turn cause them to compete against each other and to view other women as rivals and may create a danger to their positions. In top girls, Churchill seems to emphasize that perhaps the absence of unity and sisterhood with other females, the focus on individual talents and success without taking others into account. As society has the main responsibility to create such nurture inside human being to seek only on his/ her talent. Besides, top girls' characters can be seen as lonely figures that do not appear to make bonds or indeed any personal connections by the emphasis on individual accomplishments. A woman with the ability is needing by the Thatcher age to excel and therefore has the potential to be noticing in an appropriate area. furthermore, there have been a few choices for them; even if a woman wishes to accomplish a feminist goal, she must sacrifice her sisterly unity. Marlene with other influential top girls are heavily motivating by the agenda of Margaret Thatcher that emphasizes the individual ability and business viciousness if wanting to be productive. The oppressive policies of Margaret Thatcher against the progress of the feminist movement compels women to make critical selections between the conventional position at the core of domestic life and popular acceptance links to the development of brutality and dedication that is requiring . Therefore, the characters in the top girls can be seen as casualties of the Thatcherism era. (1)In top girls, several concepts regarding both Thatcher as an individual and Thatcherism as a strategy of the woman that needs to dismiss her womanhood or her femaleness to excel has mirrored.(2) Top girls creates as a specific response against political issues at that time. Churchill senses the need to create top girls because there is a change from socialist toward bourgeois thinking. Furthermore, top girls becomes a drama in which all actors are women. She aims to introduce her critique of political ideologies by explaining that women have not only become very competitive in seeking prosperity, however, they are ready to do anything for their success.(3) Thatcher has blamed for being an anti-feminist template and her agenda supposes just some few affluent girls and many others are returning to domestic life. As the work for Thatcher becomes more important than her family and she is ready to do anything for her success . (4)

2.Methodology

This paper follows the social feminist approach by applying Betty Friedan's theory that applies it in her book ' *Feminine Mystique* ' that has published in 1963s " *Problem that has no name* ". The work focuses on social feminist theory to solve the problem statement and to condemn the greedy of Thatcher and her ravenous plan " Thatcherism". Social feminism is a phenomenon of women who support females empowerment and special housing. It had been used since the 19th and 20th centuries to classify representatives of the women's right movement that has involved with social issues which threatened wives and kids. Social feminists seeks to incorporate the movement for women's emancipation. (5) As In a patriarchal society, women must be

obedient, reliant, subservient according to traditional norms and social standards, and they should stay under patriarchal domination by staying at home to raise children without the freedom to study, work, or even to be successful and independent person. Therefore, Betty Friedan aims to crack such a notion by saying that women should not sacrifice their lives to be a mother and wives, they must view themselves as citizens and individuals to confirm their identities. (6) She claims that women must be trained to be independent by working rather than being in the domestic sphere. Friedan assists those women and helps them to pursue their own goals and live a 'meaningful life' as the only solution to break the phrase "*problem which has no name*", such dilemma staunches from a desire for anything other than becoming a housewife. She claims that society can no longer neglect the sound of women saying: "*I want something more than my husband, my children and my home*". (7) Friedan continues to explain that women should be supported to develop and explore their identity by pushing women at all costs to gain success in society.

3. Discussion

Top girls addresses and challenges the standards that society imposes on women during Thatcher's Era. The statue of woman has changed by Thatcherite policies. As the ideologies pushes women back to their homes and the private realm, recognizes as an epidemic of retaliation. (8) As the play contains three acts. In the first act of the play, Marlene Welcomes a group of fictitious, historical and fantasy people to dinner. She selects the women's community as she finds in them a kind of herself, especially their pursuit of accomplishment throughout whatever forms have been accessible to them, among many others. In the language of the dominant group, their manifestations of accomplishment are articulating and they have been forced to separate themselves from the domestic realm. They may not have any additional options, because according to Ardener that they all are residing in patriarchal communities. (9) It shows that the society does not give the women the same opportunity as men in the public realm throughout the history. Many protagonists are believing that by removing the conception of maternal and family tasks, they may excel in the working environment. As they believe that "*children and a career In man's world are mutually exclusive*". (10)

Carly Churchill deliberately picks these women to be visitors of Marlene and she does not arbitrarily select them, as every one of them represent a certain part of contemporary women. Since they embody modern women, they are processing to tell their experiences about how they have struggled to gain what they are really in by using multiple tactics. They confront the society in which they are living and the feuding systems and changing the world of gender stereotypes. They challenge the conventional image of female. As the society where the characters of the story are residing, that seems to be an oppressive society shapes by masculine ideologies that their philosophies are inflicting over females. Therefore, they are deeming as things and who have no self-identity and trade between men. In Joan's case, as a women have been treated as citizens of the second class in the ninth century. Joan realizes that the traditional patriarchal structure, which embodies by Church, and refuses her entitlement for education during that period. Therefore, Joan plans to camouflage herself as a guy as well as insert the church to gain her education right, which facilitates her to hold the top stance throughout the system. As she can become a bishop and then a papacy. (11) Joan effectively breaks that structure through being a pope, as she says:

"Joan: I dressed as a boy when I left home, I was only twelve. Also women weren't allowed in the library. We wanted to study in Athens" (12) (Naismith & Worrall 190)

This shows the injustice of the society that women cannot have the right of education as a males . As the patriarchal structure is militating against Joan's gender at that time and provides her with the authority to dominate the gender of men. However , she states that God will not speak with her because she is a woman , and starts to express her pessimistic view against her gender :

"Joan: I had thought that pope would know everything. I thought God would speak to me directly. But of course, he knew I was a woman".(Naismith & Worrall 118)

As the statement clarifies the disappointment of Joan against her gender as the woman that even God will not speak with her because she is a girl. Everything has been against the essence of female. She starts to believe that the structure of nature is fighting against her becoming a pope as being a woman in such a role is not normal for women. After she becomes pregnant from one of her chamberlains, Joan's prosperity has been impeded. She identifies herself as a male from the age of twelve and resides in a patriarchal environment. Thus , she has a low understanding as a woman regarding her ability and her sexuality. She determines to deny the pregnancy as she does not believe that she can conceive a child and assumes that because of her lavish life as a pope, she is going to get fat. Therefore, the effect of such blindness becomes lethal for her. As she expresses the condition to Marlene:

"Joan: A pope with a child was about as bad as possible. As women, children and lunatics can't be pope.

Marlene: so what did they do? They were not best pleased.

Joan: They took me by the feet and dragged me out of town and stoned me to death".(Naismith & Worrall 120,122)

The conversation between Marlene and Joan is the clear evidence about the unfairness of the society that just allows men to have a leadership position and deprives women from any ruling careers. Isabella bird becomes the second visitor to the promotion that Marlene describes her as a Victorian traveller. She is the girl of a vicar who has been doing domestic chores for half of her life. Until her father is indeed a life, she is trapping in domestic activities because she confines in Victorian society: “ *cult of true womanhood, a woman's place is at home, either as a daughter or sister, wife, or mother and does domestic duty such as cooking, nursing the sick*".(13) Thus, the society restricts the women's abilities by confining them in the house . But Isabella discovers herself ready to pursue her dream to explore the universe when her father has died. That is possible to see the death of her father as the death of patriarchal domination which ties her to the domestic life so far .As she says “ *I always felt dull when I was stationary./ that's why I could never stay anywhere .*” (Naismith & Worrall 125)Isabella has been independent of any male dominance that controlling a woman what can or should not have to do. Thus, she has the opportunities and liberty to pursue her wish. Despite her severe physical disabilities, Isabella seems to be vibrant as well as a famous traveller that explores the far parts of the universe. As she reveals her dream as an amazing factor that will help her to see the beauty of world :

"Isabella: I longed to go home, / but home to what? Houses are so perfectly dismal I feel in love with the sea. There were rats in the cabin and ants in the food but suddenly it was like a new world. I woke up every morning happy, knowing there would be nothing to annoy me. No nervousness. No dressing. "(Naismith & Worrall 108)

This shows that Isabella considers the home to be ' a Dismal place " and can see her identity in sea adventures rather than to be in home and takes care of her sick sister. Isabella deserts her lonely sister Hennie and starts to travel the globe .This reveals how

the society makes people to be selfish by neglecting to give assistance to anyone even their families and do not give the freedom to play both realms at the same time, as a professional women and as a housewives .Furthermore , the role of Dull Gret, as a middle-age farmer with a stubborn nature and pugnacious style. She guides the women of her village on account of their injustice and their sorrow to battle the Spanish troops. The solution for all of the women's problems is suggesting by Gret in the play . As she prefers to take action rather than just speaking. She indicates that all women should be unite and fight against the devils who have robbed their freedoms and kids. The demons that Gret alludes them in hell, represents all facets of society that have already snatched the pleasure from women. However, she reveals that perhaps the battle will not be easy. She intimates that they should permit to nothing prevent them from striving for their freedoms. (14) Gret starts to express her condition how she defeats the devils in hell to women in end of dinner party that stands for men in general . As she says :

" A big devil sat on a roof with a big hole in his arse and he's scooping stuff out of it with a big ladle and it's falling down on us, and it's money, so a lot of the women stop and get some. But most of us is fighting the devils. I come out my front door that morning and shout till my neighbours come out and I said, 'Come on, we're going where the evil come from and pay the bastards out.' And they all come out just as they were / from baking or washing in their aprons".(Naismith & Worrall 140)

Gret becomes an icon of progressing of women's movement and should continue with their activities to kill the Devils in the society . However, The first act ends with the adventures of Isabella , Joan and Gret to gain freedom in the oppressive society , but with the expensive cost the same as Margaret Thatcher. But Najo and Griselda are portraying the shape of traditional women who were trapped in domestic life and have a terrible life under the demonization of patriarchy. Therefore , in the second act, the women's desire to escape from the domestic roles are progressing . The conversation between Win and Nell clarify such a conception . As the women are refusing the married life and they start to address it as a ' playing house ' . The appearance of modern woman who refuses domestic life and encourages individualism and independence from family is appearing in Nell's conversation with a win as they discuss :

"Nell: Derek asked me to marry him.

Win: He doesn't know when he's beaten.

Nell: I told him I am not going to play house, not even in as it.

I could go on working and not marry him."(Naismith & Worrall 167)

As they think that by refusing to surrender to the domestic life , they can reach their Goal in the professional life .This illustrates the outrage of patriarchal society against female's gender by preventing them to achieve the balance between the two realms at the same time. Both Nell and win are already acceding with Marlene's idea and Margaret Thatcher's philosophy. Even the idea develops through the meeting of Marlene with Jeanine. Marlene starts to advise Jeanine not to say in the meeting of job that she may be going to get married as this will minimize her prospects of catching a nice job. As she says:

"Jeanine: I'm saving to get married

Marlene: does that mean you don't want a long- term job,

Jeanine So you won't tell them you're getting married".(Naismith & Worrall172)

This shows that there will be no room in employment for girls who seems to want a married life or kids. Such a condition seems to be horrible , as women have to choice between two important realms in women's life. In act three of Top girls, the play's fundamental thoughts can be more distinctly described. As the figureheads of the act

are Marlene and Joyce: the capitalistic profession women are representing by Marlene and the working-class women are describing by Joyce that from whose back a prior creates her fortune. The final act of the play mainly occurs in the kitchen of Joyce, from the town in which she has previously lived with Marlene. As she attends to the place where Angie with Joyce are residing, as her previous visit is six years ago. However, during the dinner party, Marlene has said that she never has a kid and we observe that it is not correct. She has a daughter, just like the successful women who have appeared before her, she yields it up for fear that even if she maintains it, she will not be able to flee from domestic life. As the daughter has been Joyce's child, as well as the audience eventually confirms about Angie's concerns that Marlene can be her mother. (15) Marlene prefers a career over motherhood. As she defines her wish to be normal in such a society that give no opportunity to women : *"I left home, so what, I left home. People do leave home / it is normal"*. (Naismith & Worrall 220)The destructive impact of the aspirations for power has been described in Thatcher's Britain that represents by Marlene. She is able to success, however at the Top alone. She believes that having kids and a husband will prevent the success of women in the public realm. Thus, she states that we should not have any domestic responsibility if we are wishing to achieve popularity and gain more strength, as she informs her sister: *"I've had two abortions, are you interested? Shall I tell you about them? Well I won't, it's boring, it wasn't a problem. I don't like messy talk about blood / I don't want a baby. I don't want to talk about gynaecolog"*.(Naismith & Worrall 224,225)

Marlene's declaration regarding her true emotion about a child shows that she despises even get pregnant. However, Marlene's anger has not solely demonstrated against the child and the marriage, but she rebels against the injustice of such a system that places a female inside a painful process after marriage. As wives should take the burden of sexual intercourse through being pregnant, while men do not have to interact with this at all. Even during the Marlene's answer to her daughter 's question whether she can remember her during Angie's birthday illustrates such idea . Marlene does not wish to involve in a domestic live. As the reaction from Marlene no longer seems to be shocking , she replies her by only remembering the Cake of her birthday not Angie: *"Angie: you were here for my birthday when I was nine. I had a pink cake. Kit was only five then, she was four, she had not started school yet. She could read already when she went to school. Do you remember my birthday?/ you remember me? Marlene yes, I remember the cake"*.(Naismith & Worrall 212,213)

This illustrates the merciless of such a system that makes a mother having no emotion to her biological daughter. Marlene therefore should ignore her maternal feeling towards Angie to excel in the masculine profession world. Marlene becomes an example of Thatcher's community, even though she is a woman, one can hardly see any female characteristics in Marlene. Therefore, Churchill states that perhaps the wealth and prosperity of Marlene is not solely due to her determination, however clearly relies on the domestic work of Joyce. Marlene misuses the work of Joyce, and due to the extreme strain of Marlene, Joyce has not able to get her own family and infant. Joyce is trapping in a domestic world by her sister Marlene and therefore becomes angry about the neglect of appreciation of her efforts and sacrifices. As she tells Marlene *"listen when Angie was six months I did get pregnant and I lost it because I was so tired looking after your fucking baby / because she cried so much - yes I did tell "*. (Naismith & Worrall 224)Joyce loses everything including her opportunity to have a baby because of having the responsibility of taking care of Marlene's daughter . This shows the behavior of society against a working mother that gives them no chance

as Joyce because she has refusing to ignore her family . This illustrates the main concept that women can gain success in the public realm by either losing her femininity like Thatcher or ignoring their families like many characters in the play .Marlene defends her decision by leaving the domestic role because she cannot find herself under the domination of her father and her husband , and she says: " *I need more adventures. I think I'm going up up up*".(**Naismith & Worrall 228**) The idea of Marlene comes from the example of her father that treating her mother in a bad way , and she does not want to be like her mother under the submissive of male society . Such an idea makes Marlene to be selfish and seeks only on her purposes like Thatcher. However , the family does not have any value to Marlene, she strengths herself by distancing herself from the obligation of family to excel in her dream as a successful professional woman. In end of the play , the future of women in patriarchal society is expressing by Angie. As she meets Marlene, who is about to go sleep, as Angie comes downstairs looking for her mum. Marlene starts to wonder whether she has a terrible nightmare because Angie continues to replicate " *fighting* ". As it has several interpretations. Those are the terms that are articulating at the end of the play and shows how Angie is trapping in both hopelessness of her own " *frighting*" and the influence of Marlene's authority for being " *frighting*". The term also refers to the atmosphere of Marlene's road to prosperity, which characterizes by the viciousness as well as lack of unity displaying to many other citizens, including those nearest to her, and also the apprehension of girls such as Angie, that has little or no strength and optimism for future. (16)

4. Conclusion

It becomes clear from Top girls' protagonists who are able to success, but each one of them suffer from something precious that she has lost it to reach a top position . As Marlene has able to defy the stereotypes gender and gains a leader position , but she forces to abandon her real child and follow her professional success. She abuses her family members and goes beyond her usual feminine position as a mother and woman. The case has been similar with Joan , Isabella and Dull Gret who have refused the domestic life to gain position in patriarchal society . This reveals the expensive cost that they have paid it to reach a top . As they must leave their femininity or family relationship to success in such an oppressive system. Eventually , they end up sounding like Thatcher and Thatcherite notions who are ready to do anything to achieve their goals .Therefore , we can recognize how these top girls, that are converging to share their tales of journeys, vacations, and academic successes, but suffer from a feeling of anguish and personality portion as well as loneliness . Thus we can see the irony of the title and can instead be branded as " *bottom girls*", because they cannot balance between the two realms of professional and domestic life in the society. As the patriarchal society does not give women opportunity to play both spheres at the same time and they have to sacrifice with one of them to gain the other .

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