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RATTLING THE “IRON LADY”

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT:.....	3
CHAPTER 1:.....	4
1.1 THATCHER	4
1.2 BROKEN PROMISES.....	11
1.3 THATCHER AND THEATRE	12
CHAPTER 2:.....	15
SARAH DANIELS.....	15
CHAPTER 3:.....	23
CARYL CHURCHILL.....	23
CHAPTER 4:.....	33
CONCLUSION	33
BIBLIOGRAPHY:.....	36

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Abstract:

*“The feminists hate me, don’t they? And I don’t blame them.
For I hate feminism. It is poison”.*

Margaret Thatcher.

This thesis will discuss how the neoliberal discourse and policies of the first and only British female Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher affected women and examine the innovative techniques applied by two feminist dramatists Sarah Daniels and Caryl Churchill in explicating the consequences of her leadership; principally the effect upon women and the family. It will review Daniels’ political position and discuss Thatcherism with reference to her plays, *Ripen Our Darkness* (1981), *The Devils Gateway* (1983) and *Neptune* (1984). It will then consider the political position of Caryl Churchill and review her socialist feminist views on Thatcherism through a critique of her plays *Cloud Nine* (1979) and *Top Girls* (1982). Furthermore this thesis will elucidate how these ladies utilized the theatre to place women centre stage and as a tool to ‘rattle’ this ‘Iron Lady’s’ agenda. Finally, it will concur that anarchic feminist theatre ‘extends feminism’s conscious challenge of familiar and unexamined patterns...[it approaches] the play from a standpoint of what it is as well as what it is about’ (Kritzer, 1991, p. 12). Daniels and Churchill work to challenge the patriarchal and neoliberal structures that Thatcherism facilitated and endorsed. Their feminist dramaturgy is a critique of the established gender and cultural norms of women’s ‘place’ in society. They use the function of the family to explicate the sociopolitical landscape under Thatcher’s reign.

Chapter 1:

1.1 Thatcher

The Soviets labelled Margaret Thatcher the ‘Iron Lady’, a namesake that continues to be attributed to her as a fitting representation of her inflexible autocratic style of tenureship. She dominated the political landscape for more than a decade and the legacy of her refusal to challenge patriarchy and her rejection of any solidarity or social collectivism will be discussed through an analysis of her policies and their impact on the family and women’s identity. It will explore the dramaturgy of feminist playwrights Sarah Daniels and Caryl Churchill and their explication of the social and cultural oppression of women during her terms of leadership. Feminist dramatists endeavored to rattle the audience and women in particular, to move towards a solution for the inequalities of gender and class evident under Thatcher and her neoliberalist agenda. It will consider the feminist response to her broken promises and their attempts to rattle the ‘Iron Lady’ through innovative theatrical content and practice. Daniels and Churchill’s plays fundamentally broke away from established norms of technique and substance; their work was essentially ‘a radical kind of *contemporary* change that exposes new structures of feeling’ (Williams, 1961, pp. 64-65). By employing a unique feminist discourse, they reject historical views and myths that serve to reinforce male domination and female subjugation.

Winning three successive general elections Thatcher served as the British Prime Minister for more than eleven years (1979-90). Although as an individual she personally crashed the ancient iron gates of patriarchal politics, the ‘Iron Lady’ did not challenge the structure or oppression of patriarchy itself. She was famously quoted by *The New Statesman*’s editor Paul Johnson as saying, “The feminists hate me, don’t they? And I don’t blame them. For I hate feminism. It is poison” (Elgot, 2013). Thatcher did nothing to improve

life for the ‘ordinary’ women in the years of her tenure, the bourgeois feminism that she embodied was ‘not adequate to the task of improving the lives of a majority of women’ (Gems, 2003, p. 21). Her own rise to power conveyed that only women with educational and financial privilege could break the glass ceiling; therefore materialistic and cultural norms of capitalist society were further enforced, not challenged. Feminists carried banners proclaiming, “We want women’s rights – not a right-wing woman”! As feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti observes ‘the recognition of a bond of commonality among women...is the foundation stone that allows for the feminist position or standpoint to be articulated’ (Cameron, 2009, p. 143). Thatcher refuted any structure of sisterhood on either a personal or political level; her policies rejected all bonds of commonality.

Thatcher’s own ‘top girl’ status did little to further the social cultural or economic interests of women under her leadership. In her role as Prime Minister she had the power to implement policies that would give equal opportunities to women; however she deliberately embarked on a neoliberal agenda that enforced the traditional role of the nuclear family to support its structure. Her policies actively discouraged women without privilege from following her example, and in doing so patriarchal hegemony was maintained, therefore many working class women were further undermined by their lack of independence. Her politics also rejected the sexual liberation of women: policy firmly placed women in a traditional family formation and single mothers and those cohabiting were excluded from favorable tax benefits afforded to married couples. The class hierarchy and negation of women’s independence that Thatcher’s agenda proffered is evident in this speech delivered by Keith Joseph, her spokesman on Home Affairs...

Our human stock is threatened...many of these girls are unmarried, many are deserted or divorced or soon will be. Some are of low intelligence, most of low educational attainment...yet these mothers, the under twenties in many cases, single parents from

classes 4 and 5, are now producing a third of all births. A high proportion of these births are a tragedy for the mother, the child and for us. (Joseph, 1974).

For feminists the ‘tragedy’ was that the first women to preside over Britain would endorse such a negation of her gender. ‘The most consistent family policies [of Thatcher] were those which fit market and public expenditure...putting responsibility on families, and reasserting fathers as breadwinners’ (Pascall, 1997, p. 295). This government also brought about financial penalties in national insurance payments if both husband and wife worked. As Heywood observes “Most socialist feminists agree that the confinement of women to a domestic sphere of housework and motherhood serves the economic interests of capitalism” (Heywood, 2012, p. 241).

The ‘Iron Lady’ battled her way to the top of a male-dominated political system, she represented the idea that as an individualist women can shatter the ‘glass ceiling’, however many thought she pulled the ladder up behind her and closed the hatch! Wendy Webster, a professor of modern cultural history at the University of Huddersfield, said that Thatcher regarded herself as a one-off who owed nothing to feminism. “She didn't see her career as having grown out of any kind of movements...She saw herself as a unique individual who had made it through her own talent and her own determination” (Webster). She was often referred to as ‘the best *man* in the cabinet’ an indication of her tough and controlling behaviour. Personally and politically she did nothing to challenge the established system that the feminist movement opposed. Baroness Trumpington, a fellow conservative in the House of Lords, said that Margaret Thatcher “treated women like rather unnecessary second-class citizens”, she failed to promote any women to her cabinet apart from Baroness Young. Throughout her eleven year tenure she refuted any identification with the women’s movement and gave no personal oratorical platform to issues such as domestic violence, abuse or rape. Thatcher’s neoliberal social policies did in fact act as a constraint on that

freedom of choice as only women with the means to pay for private childcare had the opportunity to climb the career ladder. She criticized working mothers for raising a ‘crèche generation’, as under her rule ‘women were simultaneously encouraged to participate in the economy and reviled for it’ (Griffin, 2000, p. 195). Lovenduski and Randall argue that “although the family was awarded a prime position in the Thatcherite liturgy...it was unclear what women’s place within it should be” (Randall, 1993, p. 38). Governments, as with all institutions reproduce and reflect social systems as Krook and MacKay assert ‘Institutions are the rules that structure political and social life’ (Mackay, 2011, p. 3). Thatcher endorsed the status quo of patriarchy and capitalism and refused to challenge women’s oppression under these systems. Caryl Churchill’s work in particular revealed ‘the dangers of feminism without socialism’ (Gems, 2003, p. 20).

Authoritarianism is one of these dangers that Churchill refers to: it ‘is belief in or the practice of government ‘from above’, in which authority is exercised over a population with or without its consent’ (Heywood, 2012, p. 79). Thatcher’s brand of conservatism practiced this, and under her agenda women’s liberation was neither endorsed nor supported. Rejecting any individual or personal determination of morals, she repeatedly ‘proclaimed her support for Victorian values’ (Heywood, 2012, p. 92)

Freedom will destroy itself if it is not exercised within some sort of moral framework, some body of shared beliefs, some spiritual heritage transmitted through the Church, the family, and the school.

— Margaret Thatcher

This view is the antithesis of feminist thinking. ‘Marxist feminists especially noted...signs of a good female nature were in fact attributes assigned women in capitalist culture to make them better domestic laborers, better angels in the house’ (Ryan, 2004, p. 765). Thatcher endorsed a repressive ideology that placed women firmly in the home. Child benefit was cut as part of her war against the welfare state, social programs were slashed that supported

women's role as stay at home mothers. More women did enter the workplace during the Thatcher years, not as 'Top Girls' but through financial hardship in the aftermath of policy decisions that saw unemployment reach an unprecedented high as traditional industry and the unions collapsed under privatization. Moreover, the cost of education and healthcare rose, affecting all but the privileged few.

Thatcher did not challenge this division, the interests of the free market and capitalism outweighed everything; her policies and belief in bourgeois feminism created new forms of political and cultural oppression for women. These policies caused greater divisions in the class system and further financial burdens left women without means of escape. Thatcher's radicalism also encompassed a critical approach towards the welfare state. 'Welfarism, in her view, had spawned a dependency culture' (Evans, 1997, p. 65). As Education Secretary, she cut free school milk for children over the age of seven, which earned her the nickname "Margaret Thatcher, Milk Snatcher." Therefore socioeconomic and cultural forces embodied by Thatcherism propagated more power and oppression over marginalized groups. 'The overwhelming picture is of a government attempting to retain the Beveridge family in structure, roles and responsibilities' (Pascall, 1997, p. 295). The Beveridge report had identified 'five giants' that prevented people enjoying their existence; lack of money, lack of education and skills, lack of employment, poor housing and ill health. However forty years on Thatcher's policies only address these issues for the privileged few.

In order to achieve and maintain power, she appeared to assimilate traditional male behaviour. However the plays discussed ask the question, what is the point of emancipation if women have to accept male gendered behavior and deny their own femininity in order to succeed? Aston confirms "women taking on a male role to be a 'Top Girl' can hardly be

equated with feminism in any positive sense at all” (Gems, 2003, p. 21). Her behaviour confirmed that qualities associated with masculinity are given more status and hierarchical position than female traits, and in doing so she denied the power of her own gender. Hélène Cixous argues that [these traits] are embedded, and reproduced directly and subliminally. Phallogocentric thinking was therefore endorsed not rejected by these powerful business women that emulated Thatcher, however feminists sought to deconstruct these modes of hierarchy. As columnist Michele Hanson said, “from great heights [Thatcher] looked down and thought not how can I raise up other women? But only how can I poop on the poorer ones?” (Hanson, 2012). Personally or politically she had no interest in social equality or female solidarity and did nothing to change the cultural misogyny of British politics, in fact she became a part of it. Under her leadership there was no political challenge to the socially constructed view of gender and male authority. The accumulation of wealth and power, not the liberation of women from oppression was the agenda: this further disempowered the most vulnerable in society. As Churchill has continued to argue throughout her career, feminism and socialism are natural bedfellows in a way that feminism and conservatism can never be. ‘Margaret Thatcher’s story is a remarkable tale of individual achievement, but whilst she may have bludgeoned her own way through the glass ceiling, she implemented no policies to help other women follow in her footsteps’ (Roberts, 2013).

Thatcher recognized the power of collectivism and tenaciously worked to break the solidarity of the British trade unions; she viewed sisterhood in the same light. This government implemented strategies to transfer services from the local authorities into the hands of the private sector; this put a further financial strain on working class families. ‘Thatcher considered public-sector employment a necessary evil and was determined to reduce its burden on the state’ (Evans, 1997, p. 53). These policies were socially divisive; by

privatizing everyday utilities the running of a household became more expensive. Tom Robinson, a political activist and singer said “she helped accelerate the global shift of power away from accountable governments into the hands of transnational corporations and their lobbyists: she championed the supremacy of financial values over human ones” and endorsed policies that pushed women further into the domestic sphere to facilitate her neoliberal agenda. The ‘Iron Lady’ had no interest in challenging any form of gender inequality; powerful women did gain wealth and status...but as honorary men! This negation of female identity is addressed in the feminist dramaturgy discussed in this thesis, as are the hegemonic power relations between men and women.

During this era British popular culture became enmeshed in materialistic gain. Harry Enfield’s comic parody ‘*Loadsamoney*’ offered a coarse stereotype of ostentatious champagne Charlie’s who judged everything in terms of immediate financial gain. Women’s fashion also became representative of power and money; big shoulder pads and power suits symbolically represented women as rich controlling bitches. Contemporary television dramas like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* parodied the neoliberal ‘Top Girl’ image. However, the theatre was one forum for debate on this unforgiving world of neoliberal affluence and feminist playwrights used it to explicate the individual within a social and political context. Sarah Daniels play *The Devils Gateway* is set around the women’s peace camp at Greenham Common; it highlights a political agenda where everything and everybody is viewed merely as a commodity. Popular culture was heavily marketing a dominant image of confident aggressive female groups. The *Spice Girls* promoted ‘girl power’ a ‘contradictory mix of feminism and anti-feminism discourses that supported an image of aggressive ‘sisterhood’ and feminine glamour through a creed of selfish individualism designed to get what you want out of life’ (Aston, 2003, p. 6). The ‘Iron lady’ was dubbed the original ‘spice girl’.

1.2 Broken promises

Many promises of the Conservative electoral manifestos during her reign were broken, often with detrimental consequences for families. In 1979 they pledged to support family life by helping people to become home-owners and promised to raise the standards of children's education and welfare services for the sick, the disabled and old aged pensioners. However, in 1980 a paper proposed the opposite; it included the promotion of private health insurance, fees for doctors and dentist visits and increased prescription charges. The manifesto had also promised 'Extending parents' rights and responsibilities', including their right of choice and to raise standards by giving them greater influence over education. Less well-off parents were promised they could claim part or all of the fees at certain schools from a special government fund. Unfortunately for many families in 1981 Thatcher's government cut education grants and this 'right of choice' came down to what school fees you could afford, or if your house was in a 'good school' catchment area; the divide between private and public education widened. Social policies continued to divide the population along class and gender lines. Their manifesto had also assured increases in retirement pensions; a promise made just before the election, however in the 1980 Social Security Act 'The link between state pension increases and average earnings was broken. If the link with earnings had not been broken, a basic state pension for a single pensioner would worth about £30 a week more' (BBC News, 2002). Furthermore, public services were undermined by the steep rise of the private sector; tax structures deterred lone mothers and child benefit [a particular support for women] was frozen. They also reneged on the promise of generous support to Britain's cultural and artistic life. The reality of broken promises exacted a polarization of inequality throughout Britain; 'The poll tax and other divisive social policies have left

Scotland's communities suffering the brutal legacy of Margaret Thatcher to this day', said Tommy Sheridan [Scottish Socialist Party]. In addition, deregulated markets, high unemployment and less state housing contributed to difficulties within many working class families. On becoming Prime Minister she promised to unite the nation, however, her neoliberal agenda served to further divide the nation both geographically and along class and gender lines.

1.3 Thatcher and Theatre

'The explosion of explicitly feminist theatre-making...was an artistic response to the lived experience of [women's] social and cultural exclusion' (Gems, 2003, p. 9). As Frederick Engels suggested women's oppression arose hand in hand with the rise of a class society. Throughout Thatcher's reign she encouraged the vehicle of patriarchy to perpetrate its oppression and enforce unequal gender positions upon the majority of women. Feminist theatre politicizes the inequalities of gender and class inherent under patriarchal and capitalist systems, by rattling us into critical assessment of the politics and cultural norms serving our society. Sarah Daniels and Caryl Churchill's work is a strong critique of her neo liberalist ideology, her legacy and in particular its effect on women. Thatcher's personal achievement and vision embodied a complete contradiction of female freedom as Churchill herself stated, 'Playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions'. Daniels work reflects contemporary society, Churchill's re-evaluates it.

Feminist dramatists sought to dismantle the veiled structures that have situated women in the position called 'woman's place'. Sarah Daniels and Caryl Churchill rattled the 'Iron Lady's' negation of women's liberation; by dramatizing domestic issues on the

theatrical stage, they reveal the workings of society on the political stage. They ‘recognised that art has the power to subvert established ideas of society and culture’ (Hollywood, 2014). Feminist drama also highlighted the gap between personal happiness and the social expectations of responsibility and subordination that capitalist and patriarchal structures enforce. Furthermore it posed the question: are women denying themselves the ability to occupy their own gender in order to succeed in this society? Daniels spells out these societal issues, Churchill goes further; she reaches out for a solution to them. They used the theatre as a platform to deliberate on the dangers of right wing feminism. When discussing her work *Top Girls* she said “This play is expressive of the next wave of feminism, a feminism that focuses not on the individual women’s struggle for autonomy, but on the need for a radical transformation of society” (Randall P. R., 1989, p. 117). The revolutionary dramaturgy of Daniels and Churchill concurs with Michel Foucault’s view that ‘we are disciplined by society to conform’. The divisiveness of Thatcher’s legacy was seeping into every crevice of society as the gulf between those ‘Top Girls’ with power and influence and those without access to it grew. As Aston recalls “It was precisely the damaging consequences of this kind of ‘rightwing’ feminism that so concerned Caryl Churchill in *Top Girls*” (Aston, 2003, p. 6).

Feminist drama wanted to show that hegemonic gender assumptions need to be overhauled if the structure of patriarchal society is to change. As Cixous asserts, “Men and women are caught up in a web of age-old cultural determinations that are almost unanalyzable in their complexity” (Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, 2004, p. 350). Daniels and Churchill explicate that the unequal power relations between men and women are often facilitated by a rigid family structure determined by patriarchal mores, and that any solution to this would involve a change in the structure of society itself. Aston stated that “Theatre has the political power to stage the world that is and invite us to see the other worlds that might

be” (Aston, 2003, p. 16). Moreover their theatre staged recognition of the bond of sisterhood and commonality among woman as an effective political instrument. Feminist theorist Braidotti concurs “the recognition of a bond of commonality among women...is the foundation stone that allows for the feminist position or standpoint to be articulated” (Cameron, 2009, p. 144). Feminism refutes any assumption that women are a homogenous group of similar class, race, or culture. Churchill commented in an interview Thatcher “may be a woman but she isn’t a sister, she may be a sister but she isn’t a comrade” (Koeing, 1987, p. 77). Churchill’s play *Top Girls* perfectly demonstrates this when Marlene tells her sister Joyce...

“I know a managing director who’s got two children, she breast feeds in the boardroom, she pays hundreds of pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because she’s an extremely high powered lady earning a great deal of money” (Churchill, 1982, p. 50).

Her play *Top Girls* uncovered the true price of success for women who embrace the tropes of capitalism and competition. The limitations of choice are obvious and Thatcher’s materially divided Britain is revealed. ‘This is the very reason that feminist theatre is so vital to the goals of the feminist movement. It allows the audience to identify with the dramatic action through the shock of emotional and personal recognition and ‘social change, can therefore, be implemented’ (Bemis, 1987, p. 1).

Feminist theory, sisterhood and gender politics are major themes on the feminist stage. Churchill’s work demands recognition of the needs of that great majority of women and men in societies who, like Angie and Howard, have no chance of rising to the top. Ultimately, she implies “the need for a redistribution of economic and political power rather than a simple accommodation of the individualistic aspirations of a few women” (Kritzer, 1991, p. 150). She criticized bourgeois feminism for advancing only the lives of a privileged few and “felt impelled to a socialist correction of this mistaken emphasis on bourgeois

individualism and personal achievement” (Reinelt, 1986, p. 180). The innovative dramaturgy of Daniels and Churchill explicates the social, sexual and cultural inequalities that are forced upon women. They criticize ‘the damaging consequences for women [in] an unequal world, which prioritizes the masculine sphere of material, cultural and sexual production over women’s lives, creativity and maternal reproduction’ (Gems, 2003, p. 171). Feminist drama asks the audience to consider if it is possible to further the equality and interests of women, if like Thatcher it is the pursuit of self-interest that is prioritized? The theatre is a vehicle to instigate debate and encourage social change, as Daniels confirms “A play can certainly challenge assumptions and encourage audiences to examine the way they think or feel about certain issues and indeed other people” (Goodman, 1996, pp. 101-2). Daniels and Churchill’s theatre reveals patriarchal society as a vehicle that perpetuates the oppression of women and that its enforcement often takes the form of violence. Feminist theatre ‘represented a suitable platform for the exploration of theoretical concerns as well as being a platform upon which the voices of women were heard’ (Morrissy, 1994, p. 8). As Adorno observed, the main function of art is to shake us up.

Chapter 2:

Sarah Daniels

Sarah Daniels plays ‘present largely contemporary portraits of life in Britain from a feminist perspective’ (Bartleet, 2010, p. 145). She is described as ‘a well-established figure on the contemporary English stage, one of the feminist ‘canonicals’...[her] drama frequently examines what critics have viewed as radical-feminist politics of male domination’ (Aston, 2003, p. 39). Daniels dramaturgy addresses the view that women are often oppressed by material conditions, in her opinion ‘a feminist play is something that isn’t just about women,

but challenges something to do with patriarchal society, or that actually pushes it one step further and challenges the status quo' (Bakker, 1996). Labelled a radical lesbian feminist by Carole Woddis's review (Woddis, 1998) Daniels notoriety grew and although often humorous, her work challenges many hegemonic structures that subjugate women to conform. She offers the option of an alternative life and existence for women through the strength of communal bonds and sisterhood. Furthermore she discusses an alternative to the heteronormative nuclear family designated by capitalist patriarchal structures. As Bartleet asserts, "Daniels writing creates a theatrical space for a lesbian experience without subordinating them to heterosexual voyeurism" (Bartleet, 2010, p. 150). Her work reveals the societal criticism of lesbian mothers and their domestic relationships; furthermore she addresses the psychological manipulation often enforced by a society that deems women 'mad' if they do not conform to its established model of life. Daniels uses naturalism to depict social landscapes as 'naturalism typically studies people at the intersection point of psychological and political forces' (Hollywood, 2013). Her techniques and style of dramaturgy emphasize the political nature of personal relationships and of women's role within familial structures. This view the 'person is political' was strongly endorsed by the women's liberation movement. "This motif offered women a means of exploring their individual position within the context of collective ideas and debate" (Morrissy, 1994, p. 28).

Institutional rules are heralded as oppressive in many of her plays; the Anglican Church in *Ripen our Darkness*, the school in *Neptide* and marriage in *The Devils Gateway*. Daniels dramatizes possible strategies for women to escape these confinements and assert some personal power and independence. Themes discussing female solidarity, whether familial or political are recurrent throughout her work. As Bakker observes, *The Devils Gateway* "dramatizes the coming together of women on all fronts-domestic, political and

spiritual...as well as the difficulties inherent in this process” (Bakker, 1996, p. 23). Daniels agenda was to explore women’s private lives and transcend issues of oppression into the political sphere. Familial bonds and communities of sisterhood are used to highlight the strength and comfort women gain from each other’s company.

Consciousness raising was Daniels overall intention; she revealed the inequality within domestic situations as a microcosm of society as a whole. Morrissy concurs that the motif the personal is political “offered women a means of exploring their individual position within the context of collective ideas and debate” (Morrissy, 1994, p. 28). In her play *Neaptide* Daniels explores the politics of the people in terms of sexual identity. She challenges homophobic structures that permeate society; *Neaptide* discusses the difficulty of lesbians living with prejudice and concealment. This is evident when Joyce is admonished by society as a mother because she is a lesbian; she says to Claire “...It’s usually only drunk and insane mothers who are considered unfit for parental control” (Daniels, *Neaptide*, 1986, p. 248). In this play Daniels critiques the functionalist view of the family; proposing a move beyond existing ideologies towards a democratization of gender. Adrienne Rich emphasizes “that homosexuality is not a deviation from a supposedly natural sexual matrix, she calls for a theory of gender which moves away from binary opposition between man and woman” (Norris, 2001, p. 203). Daniels dramatizes this point in part one scene six when Diane informs the Headmistress that she is a lesbian, and is told to...

“...keep quiet. Do you hear me?”

Diane responds “If I don’t say it, who will? We are nowhere in history books, sex education leaves us out, the media makes us into gross caricatures, when society does recognise us, it’s only to oppress and...” (Daniels, *Neaptide*, 1986, p. 269).

Daniels anarchic narratives constantly reflect her personal radical feminist beliefs. In *Ripen Our Darkness* and *The Devils Gateway* lesbian relationships are presented as a more equal and respectful partnership than the orthodox model. Betty and Enid are both trapped in either

emotional or physically abusive marriages and Daniels contrasts their oppressive situations with the equality of Linda and Fiona's democratic lesbian relationship. She also extrapolates this view to the public sphere: as the women on Greenham Common take action against male domination and the bomb in a force of communal sisterhood. The nuclear model implemented by patriarchal societal constructs is shown to negate women's individuality and facilitate unequal power relations. In *The Devils Gateway* Linda and Fiona's characters reveal shared domestic chores as the norm. A dramatization of partnership and equality in homosexual relations is evident at the end of scene 2. Fiona is ironing her dress for an interview but has to leave and Linda takes over the ironing. Daniels contrasts their domestic equity with the traditional marriage of Betty and Jim as act 3 begins with Linda's mother Betty doing the ironing for everyone in the household, while her husband sits and watches T.V complaining about the mess of the house. Daniels rejects any belief that women are less significant than men, or that they have to endure any oppression in private or public.

In the opening page of her play *The Devils Gateway* Jim and Betty's unequal relationship is also established; Jim talks about his wife as though she doesn't exist.

Jim "I know, but you know what she's like, faffing about"
Betty "Who's she? Thank you very much"

Daniels examines the relationship between gender and status; neither Jim nor Betty work outside the home, but Betty is expected to do all the domestic chores. His autocratic persona is evident in scene one, as is Betty's compliant explanation. Jim is sitting; Betty is making the tea and washing up.

Jim "You hovered in here today, Bet?"
Betty "You know full well that I do the hovering on Wednesdays and Fridays"
Jim "Even so it's looking a bit grubby"

Daniels reveals the lack of democratization in the traditional institution of marriage.

In *The Devils Gateway* Daniels uses the site of feminist sisterhood ‘Greenham common’ as the backdrop for Betty, Enid, Ivy and Carole’s domestic self-realization. This play addresses the politics of Britain under the presidency of Thatcher and how her policies and agendas affected women’s lives. Daniels theatricalizes that the confinement of women to the domestic sphere of housework and motherhood serves the economic interest of capitalism. She challenges this idea of ‘public man, private woman’ and focuses on communities of women whose daily reality is the antithesis of ‘top girls’ like Thatcher. Daniels spells out that the path for self-realization and liberalization is to negate male domination and neo liberalist ideology; and to work towards women’s community and unification. The characters of Betty, Enid and Carole are used to reveal this shift from relationships that are sacrificial to relationships of personal satisfaction. Betty tells her daughter Carole “It’s about time Darrel learnt to look after his own son for a whole day, don’t you think”? Furthermore, Enid leaves her violent bullying husband to live with her sister after she “landed the chip pan over bully boy Bob’s bonce”. As Bakker asserts, “the personal is political feminist epithet is never more apparent than in this play” (Bakker, 1996, p. 22). Daniels theatricalizes the link with women’s familial solidarity (mothers, daughters and friends) with the political solidarity at Greenham common. Betty’s consciousness is raised and she also encourages her friend and daughter to reject the male domination they endure for the sisterhood at the women’s peace camp. Daniels uses the theatre as a forum to uncover strategies that will enable women to have the power of self-realization and to break the bonds of patriarchal domination in their personal and public worlds. Bakker observes that, “*Gateway* emerges as a logical extension of *Ripen*; Daniels carries many of *Ripens* issues and objectives into the realm of political action” (Bakker, 1996, p. 23). Her work consistently challenges the status quo whereby women’s inequality is accepted as the ‘norm’. Thatcher

expected women to take on male attributes in order to achieve equality; however feminists hoped as a woman she would take political measures to rattle the structure that maintains it.

Daniels emphasizes that politics are embedded in domestic relationships. In *The Devils Gateway* Carole's marriage to Darrel has rendered her compliant; devoid of independent thought. The societal status of marriage and material goods has left her sacrificing herself to Darrel's stifling authority. She repeatedly says "Darrel says" and expounds his views as her own. Even when he physically abuses her, she defends him... "I've got a beautiful home and little boy and a lovely husband" (Daniels, *The Devil's Gateway*, p. 117). Carole tells her mother, "marriages are made in heaven", Betty disagrees, saying "marriages are made uneven". The consumerist capitalism of Thatcher's ideology is evident as Carol boasts of her 'gold plated dolphin toilet roll holders'; buying into this capitalist ideology she believes that the acquisition of commodity goods will give her social status and make her happy. Daniels technique of situating inequality in a domestic and familial environment to elucidate the political landscape is often done with black humour. This continues in her 1986 play *Ripen Our Darkness* as Roger and David are shown to preach their antiquated moral rectitude both at home and in Church. Bakker observes "*Ripen* dramatizes the oppression the average woman suffers on a daily basis facilitated by societal acceptance of patriarchal institutions". Daniels work criticizes these institutions; she dramatizes the principle that patriarchal society has systematically constructed women as insubordinate to men. The plays action hinges on the raising of one female character's consciousness. Mary is rebuked for not having the dinner ready on time or getting to church on time. *Ripen* follows Mary's journey of self-realization as she fights against this oppression and the polarization of women to positions of economic dependency. Her consciousness is

raised to the discrimination and hierarchical power structures at play within her own marriage...

“I’ve wasted my life in bitter compromise. I’ve bitten my lip and said nothing when inside I’ve been screaming...and said whatever you think dear” (Daniels, *Ripen Our Darkness*, 1986, p. 61).

Sarah Daniels also raises issues of domestic violence, and tackles these omnipresent issues with black comedy and farce, parodying and ridiculing the men in her plays as comedic caricatures. In *Ripen* five relationship dynamics are explored, four of these are traditional heterosexual relationships; one is lesbian. The power and control elements are clearly evident in their binary roles. David is autocratic self-righteous and dominant, while Mary his wife is subjected to domestic drudgery by her husband. Daniels feminist dramaturgy explores this societal acceptance of gender inequality. Although David tries to convince himself and all around him that Mary must be sick because she won’t conform to his authority, Daniels reveals that it is him not ‘mad hysterical females patients’ that have serious issues. In *The Devils Gateway* Jim refers to women as ‘daft bats’ shouting at Betty “...you silly born bitch. How stupid can you get” (Daniels, *Ripen Our Darkness*, 1986, p. 82). This view is extended into the political sphere as society historically referred to women as ‘mad’ if they refused to conform. She includes male Doctors in this critique; Enid reminds Betty when her daughter was sick that even ‘the bloody doctor thought I was neurotic’ (Daniels, *The Devil's Gateway*, p. 97).

In *Ripen* she ridicules the master/slave dynamic so often at play in traditional marriage; lampooning the male characters in this play. ‘Daniels intention behind inflating these characters to such extremes seems to be not only a matter of poking vicious fun...but more importantly, to deflate their power and self-importance’ (Bakker, 1996, p. 15). The farcical humour continues as the women in *Ripen* parody their male counterparts. Daphne

says, after symbolically castrating David by pulling the knobs off her dead friend Mary's cooker...

"I'm not mad. For Christ's sake. I'm Angry. Don't worry. I'll sabotage tonight's salad - rinse the lettuce in Dettol" (Daniels, 1986, p. 70).

Marriage is revealed by Daniels realistic dramaturgy as an institution that generates and propagates an unfair dynamic between men and women; this is highlighted by an obvious comparison in the more equal relationship of the homosexual couple Anna and Julie. She utilizes the theatre to challenge these established institutions, and exposes that the only women with any power are those who reject the constraints of marriage. Anna is cast as tenacity itself in her challenging of the education system, by refuting sexist literature in her classroom. Her partner Julie ridicules men with scathing humour on page 40 reciting that birth control for men should be 'a hand grenade held firmly between the knees', in addition *The Devils Gateway's* Jim is rendered a ridiculous character as he doesn't realize that a female PM is running 'his' world, when he says "men, who let's face it, run the world without fussing about hairdos" (Daniels, *The Devil's Gateway*, p. 81). Women's solidarity is discussed when Ivy talks about the war...

"Women became strong. We had to be. We ran the country...we invested our dreams in our daughters, only to see them evaporate...Having kids is important, but having a washing machine, television and car became more important...bloody silly values for a country that was supposed to be embarking on freedom" (Daniels, *The Devil's Gateway*, pp. 139-40).

Daniels reminds us that these are Thatcher's personal and political values. Throughout *Ripen*, *Neptide* and *Gateway* dramatic realism spells out the avenues available to women if they embrace solidarity as a powerful tool for their gender. Farcical and extremely humorous at times, Daniels emphasises that a domestic and political subversion of patriarchal control can ultimately lead to change. This is evident when Betty and Enid decide to defy their traditional domestic roles by taking on accepted male social behaviours'; they play cards, smoke, drink...have fun! Enid tells Betty...

“Get it out [the wine]. Leave all the chores. Let’s ‘ave a game of cards turn this place into a real den of Equity” (Daniels, *The Devil's Gateway*, p. 109).

The pun on the word *inequity* is satirical and ironic and Daniels uses this to drive her message of gender inequality home to the audience.

Thatcher had the opportunity to reassess this inequality; by implementing policy changes she could have enabled women of all situations some legal, if not immediate cultural change; in fact she caused further division by affirming the established structures of class and gender. A reversion to these established constraints is apparent when Mary is ‘sent’ to the retreat by her autocratic husband as a punishment, however contradictorily she finds that this time alone allowed her space to think and review her life; in fact this encouraged Mary to defy her bullying husband David. Her suicide was the ultimate rejection of these controlling institutions that privately and publicly dominated her life. She chose to take her own life; an intolerable sin in the eyes of the Church as death was the only avenue of liberalization open to this woman. Mary’s darkly humorous and bitterly ironic suicide note was her last act of powerful subterfuge “Dear David, your dinner and my head are in the oven”. Daniels radical theatre “suggests that women must call upon friendship, guidance, and nurturing from other women” (Bakker, 1996, p. 20) and focus on sisterhood to obtain some power. This view was stridently opposed by the political policies and agenda of Thatcher’s government.

Chapter 3:

Caryl Churchill

The renowned and prolific feminist dramatist Caryl Churchill’s work and personal beliefs are inextricably bound; a socialist feminist she has tenaciously stayed true to those

views. Socialism and feminism are not 'synonymous' in Churchill's view, but as she explained in an interview... "I feel strongly about both and wouldn't be interested in a form of one that didn't include the other" (Aston, 2003, p. 18). The dramatic texts of Churchill recognized the failing of the conservative government for women and aimed "to do more than simply remedy women's oppression by shifting the locus of power from men to women...[she understood a need to] break down the prevailing construction of gender at a microcosmic level, before the oppressive structures of state at a macrocosmic level can be removed" (Morrissy, 1994, p. 14). Churchill began her career in radio and has been writing feminist dramas since the 1970's; her first play *Owners* was staged at The Royal Court Theatre in 1972. Her interrogation of life under capitalist and patriarchal forces continues through her experimental form and innovative process of direction and production. Stephen Daldry, the artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre (1992-1998) observes that Caryl Churchill "always manages to have her pulse on the moral, social and political issues that are current in society [she is] a formal adventurer in terms of her theatrical language" (Daldry, 2007). Certain venues, particularly The Royal Court Theatre encouraged a new inclusive form of collaboration between producer, director, writer and actor. Furthermore as Hammond observed the *Joint Stock Company* was 'one of the most overtly political and left-leaning of the alternative theatre companies formed in the 1970's' (Hammond, 2007, p. 3). Churchill was also involved with *The Monstrous Regiment* theatre which was one of the evolving fringe companies that put women and their experiences centre stage, it was a forum for women to challenge established societal and cultural norms.

Any feminist drama is by nature political; as Reinelt affirms "Political theatre requires the ability to isolate and manifest certain ideas and relationships that make ideology visible...For feminists, Brechtian techniques offer a way to examine the material conditions of gender behavior (how they are internalized, opposed, and changed)" (Reinelt, 1986, p.

154). Brechtian feminist dramaturgy was often implemented by Churchill to define the causes of female oppression and aimed to provide critique and possible solutions for it. In the opening scene of *Top Girls* Churchill historicizes women's place in society. A miscellany of women from different times and cultures are brought together at a dinner party for Marlene's promotion. Churchill dramatizes the historical stories of real and fantasy figures that reveal accounts of women's treatment in diverse cultural and societal modes and invites her audience to engage and recognize these forces and their effect. She uses the scene of two dinner parties to reveal how gender and class inequalities that were evident in the past are still relevant in 1970's Britain. Churchill endeavoured to rattle the audience and women in particular to move towards a solution for these inequalities and ignite a move for social change. Her formal experimentation of language, device and structure is inextricably bound up with the political and her approach is deliberately incongruous. She employs a montage of dramaturgy and disjointed interrupted narrations, providing a theatre committed to revealing the conditions of a society that dictates what and how we think. As Artaud said there is a "rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representations" (Artaud, 1958, p. 7). Churchill reveals this rupture through her innovative discourse and techniques.

Caryl Churchill's play *Serious Money* (1987) was a cutting satire on this greed is good society. The main protagonist in this play Scilla Todd relishes the buzz of gambling for high stakes. Salt observes the character of Scilla is a 'tough corporate cookie who intends to keep her end up in a man's world' (Salt, p. 30). Thatcher did nothing to challenge or refute these stereotypes, and therefore further embedded a societal and cultural view of women's inferiority if they were not tough corporate cookies! Furthermore in *Serious Money* Churchill highlight's Thatcher's elitist view that the privileged few take all the profit while the rest take

all the risks and consequences. Perhaps it is time that we challenged the orthodoxy of our belief system as capitalist society often works in favour of those with wealth and power. Her play *Top Girls* sums up the 1980's ethos of ambition, ego and greed. The setting is a dinner party in a London restaurant thrown by Marlene to celebrate her recent promotion at an employment agency. Marlene is the embodiment of bourgeois feminism; a wealthy career woman breaking the glass ceiling, while Joyce her sister works as a cleaner and raises Marlene's daughter Angie. This play reveals the historical power structures of patriarchy and capitalism that enforce inequality upon women and addresses societal and cultural modes that incite an 'internalized sense of guilt about breaking the sacred definitions of gender when asserting themselves as independent' (Norris, 2001, p. 198). Feminism and feminist drama strove to valorize women's equality and independence, this play illustrates that 'if women fail each other or their children the consequences can be fatal' (Aston, 2003, p. 170).

Churchill's *avant-garde* nonlinear techniques explicate the conflicted sisterhood of women. This conversation of two sisters reveals this division...

Joyce "...you'd be ashamed of me if I came to your office...I'm ashamed of you, think of nothing but yourself"

Marlene "...I hate the working class...it doesn't exist anymore, it means lazy and stupid"

Joyce "...I hate the cows I work for" (Churchill, 1982, p. 53).

As Aston asserts, *Top Girls* was a "state-of-the-nation debate about the Thatcher legacy [and] of a materially divided, 'us and them' Britain" (Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage*, 2003, p. 23). Churchill sets the political argument of class in the domestic space of the kitchen, a space historically attributed to women. Her conceptual analysis of Thatcher's Britain explicates that the institution of family itself can act as a constraint on women's power. The two sister's lifestyles reflect this. Marlene rejects any familial responsibility and is economically independent. Joyce, her sister has no economic power and takes all the

responsibility for their parents and her adopted daughter. Churchill's postmodern techniques include, as Badun-Radunovic asserts "intertextual inclusion of archival material...[whereby] historical events are presented as fragmented, compressed, and disjunctive units; and the compulsive repetition of events in the performative present" (Badun-Radunovic, 2008, p. 448). Marlene's dinner guests are famous women from history and myth, including 'Pope Joan, the Victorian traveller Isabella Bird, the 13th-century Japanese courtesan turned Buddhist nun Lady Nijo, Dull Gret from Brueghel's painting depicting a woman in armour running through hell and routing devils, and Patient Griselda, whose story is told in The Canterbury Tales' (Gardner, 2002). Furthermore she utilized a new form of theatre production, employing improvisational workshops and collaboration with both actors and director; her meticulous dedication to content and her personal socialist feminist beliefs are evident as she examines women's role in society in *Top Girls*. Churchill incorporates 'intellectual meticulous historical sociological research' (Hollywood, 2013) in her work.

The opening scene reveals a retroactive interpretation of women's experiences throughout history; particularly their personal experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. All the women were obliged to abandon their children. Griselda talks of doing her duty by obeying her husband's demands to take her child away;

Joan interrupts "he killed his children/to see if you loved him enough?"

Griselda "...I always knew I would do what he said" (Churchill, 1982, p. 15).

Dull Gret represents the revolutionary aspect of women and Griselda is representational of the martyred submissive. They are however fictional characters from a painting and prose; here Churchill implements Brecht's alienation technique. She combines nonlinear scenes of place and time with overlapping speech to disrupt the audience and force the Brechtian concept of 'complex seeing'; revealing that oppressive structures have historically existed

over place and time. The play has an all-female cast, sixteen characters in total; however Churchill employed only seven women and had them play multiple roles. This technique refutes the traditional dramatization of character as they are incomplete in their diverse roles. Churchill only introduced two 'real' characters to scene one, Marlene and the silent waitress; a 'Top Girl' of Thatcher's reign and her opposite that 'never made it'; a working class woman rendered powerless, without a voice in this capitalist society where power is measured by economic success. This is evident on page 16...

The waitress enters...

Marlene "oh god I can't bear it. I want some coffee. Six coffees; six brandies. Double brandies. Straightaway"

...the waitress exists.

Churchill dramatizes Marlene's male gendered behaviour, as historically drinking brandy after dinner was seen as a predominantly male centered ritual. Furthermore Marlene's demanding tone and lack of inclusion or manners towards the waitress exposes a lack of female sisterhood; taking the view that the position of waitress is beneath her. Churchill's dramaturgy reveals when women take on male gendered traits in order to succeed, this serves to endorse the very historical divisions that feminist are fighting against. In addition the character of Lady Nijo is utilized to explicate that culture becomes embedded in the very fibre of a person. She is sold as a concubine and loses her babies, however in the midst of her harrowing story Nijo constantly elaborates on what she wears as clothes are a cultural stamp of social hierarchy.

"The empress had always been my enemy Marlene, she said I had no right to wear three-layered gowns...(but) I had been publically granted permission to wear thin silk" (Churchill, 1982, p. 8).

When Marlene raises a glass to toast "We've come a long way" Churchill invites us to consider have we really? Without a change to the structure of society, women in power are replicating male domination upon their own gender. The bourgeois feminism embodied by

Thatcher was ‘not adequate to the task of improving the lives of a majority of women’ (Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage*, 2003, p. 21). The closing lines of the play reveal the consequences of Marlene’s success; she denies her daughter and herself the role of a mother.

Angie calls, “Mum”?

Marlene [replies] “no she’s gone to bed. Its aunty Marlene”

Angie replies “frightening...frightening.”

It is indeed frightening that money and power are of such importance to Marlene that she denies her own parenthood. Churchill encourages her audience to ask are these ‘Top Girls’ any solution to inequality? Her innovative postmodern dramaturgy moves beyond explanatory theatre, she reaches out for a solution. Although Thatcher was the first female Prime Minister of Britain, her success did not benefit her own sex. Churchill’s feminist dramas are embedded with her socialist feminist ideology; which takes the view that women need to find a new structure as the capitalist system is historically built around the psyche of men. As Curran says “In the context of capitalism, even family relations come to be understood not in human terms, but as either an obstacle or a vehicle for the goal of making money” (Curran, *Brecht's Criticisms of Aristotle's Aesthetics of Tragedy*, 2001, p. 173).

Churchill’s play *Cloud Nine* (1979) is an examination of the relationship between gender, racism and status. She dramatizes the impact of imperialist politics and sexual politics by staging the play in two dimensions; one in British colonial Africa and one in 1970’s Britain. Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* introduces cross dressing, crossed gendered characters to further explicate the Brechtian alienation technique ‘thereby undoing mimesis and drawing attention of the audience to its own role in socio-political processes [furthermore Churchill enacts] a pointed critique of cultural, gender, and social stereotypes’ (Bahun-Radunovic, 2008, p. 448). As Morrissy asserts the content of *Cloud Nine* “reflects the transition from a

clear socialist feminism to the incorporation of power relations...Churchill structured act one within the spatial and temporal landscape of Victorian colonial Africa. As a result she put moral and social issues on display” (Morrissy, 1994, p. 64). This technique of deconstruction and disintegration of language and form encouraged the audience to critically assess the historical impact of women’s inferior position within society. Utilizing the historicizing effect as discussed in *Top Girls*; she dramatizes the same issues from the perspective of the past and the present. Feminist theatre has revolutionary potential and as political theatre it ‘foregrounds performance as an ideological process’ (Morrissy, 1994, p. 8). Churchill reveals this process by showing us women performing in two different contexts. The formulations of her Marxist socialist views are evident in the process of transference she adopts between her work, the production team, the cast and her audience. Hierarchical structures of importance are replaced with a working ethos of cooperation and collaboration. Lacan suggests that ‘conscious discourse veils unconscious meaning’ and Thatcher often used subliminal political oratory to undermine any move toward solidarity; when questioned about the high levels of unemployment in the North East she further negated the unions facing unemployment through her privatization policies as ‘Moaning Minnie’s’ (Thatcher, 1985). Thatcher also employed colonial rhetoric during the Falklands War. “The spirit of the South Atlantic was the spirit of Britain at her best. It has been said that we surprised the world, that British patriotism was rediscovered in those spring days” (Margaret Thatcher 08/10/1982). Churchill employs this type of jingoistic language as a technique to convey the attitudes of colonial Britain in *Cloud Nine* “We are not in this country to enjoy ourselves”.

She directs the characters of *Cloud Nine* in a farcical comedy by adopting the technique of fast paced entry and exits from the stage, incorporating a jumpy and non-linear approach to reveal comedic theatre in action. *Cloud Nine* opens as a critique and parody of

British upper class society in colonial Africa. Churchill's play reveals the inflexible British attitude to class hierarchy and sex. When the main protagonist Clive, a high ranking military officer discovers his son holding a doll, he sternly admonishes him for displaying such feminine behavior. The socialization process of patriarchal society and the hegemonic divisions along gender lines is dramatically addressed: Churchill refutes the stamp 'biology is destiny'. By Act two 'social status has been replaced by sexual status' (Morrissy, 1994, p. 65) *Cloud Nine* discusses that unequal power relations need to be reconstructed across class and gender lines. Furthermore, Churchill demonstrates that sexual and material stratifications need to be deconstructed if women are to achieve liberation and equality. Socialist feminists took the view of Deleuze and Guattari that the world would be better rejecting vertical hierarchal power structures and take a rhizomatal view for an equality of class and gender (Guattari, 2004, p. 378). The play presents the audience with a view of both historical and contemporary attitudes to morality and gender. Churchill ridicules these British colonial attitudes and the impact of this ideology on society. This is evident through Betty, whose character is played by a male actor ...

"I live for Clive" (Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, 1985, p. 251)

"...Clive is my society" (Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, 1985, p. 258).

This play 'was developed out of a theatrical workshop on sexual politics, it is a broadly based attack on a number of interrelated hegemonic forces of oppression: sexism, heterosexism, racism, colonialism and classism' (Fortier, 2002, p. 117). This thought provoking satirical comedy rattles the audience into questioning Victorian attitudes to gender and sex; Victoria asks at the end of act 1 "does it count as adultery if it's with a woman?" In this play 'The theme is sex-sex of all manners and variety and the perennial hypocrisy towards it' (Jenkins, 1979, p. 25). Throughout, universally imposed gender and racial stereotypes are subverted by Churchill's techniques of cross casting the actors own ethnicity

and gender. By introducing a concept of multiplicity and hybridity in her characters, she suggests less identity and more affinity could encourage gender equality. In the first act she ridicules British colonial racism; the play opens with ex-pats singing a patriotic British song. Further on in act 1 Clive, the epitome of hierarchical male superiority and his cohorts flog ‘the natives’ while the women remain indoors. Churchill satirizes the ideology of ‘public man, private woman’. Their ex-pat existence is limited both physically and ideologically; each is constrained by the rigours of a ranked society. The renowned dramatist Ibsen said in his notes for *A Doll’s House* that “A woman cannot be herself in contemporary society; it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view”. Churchill employs the same actors in the second act, using the device of cross characterization, she utilizes humour and cross gender to dramatize their attempts to break free from societal and cultural limitations. In the second scene the action moves to contemporary London, revealing that in modern society the feminist movement has worked to afford women and homosexuals more of a ‘voice’.

In addition, Churchill uses farcical satire to convey the quest for identity; revealing identity to be principally forged by gender and societal socialization. Churchill’s socialist feminist ideology is evident as her dramaturgy critiques the family as an economic structure enduring male dominance and the individualism of capitalist politics. Sexual repression and sexual politics are reviewed and her theatrical portrayal of evolving sexual liberation in *Cloud Nine* also invites her audience to critically assess the failure of political programmes in addressing these issues. Churchill reveals the power that dramaturgy has to subvert established rules of gender and shatter conventional societal constructs. As Felski states “visions of women are contaminated by male-defined notions of the truth of femininity...woman is always a metaphor, dense with sedimented meanings” (Felski, 2010,

p. 38). Feminist dramaturgy sought to shake up these socially constructed and accepted 'truths' of gender. Before coming to power Margaret Thatcher was one of only a handful of Conservatives to vote for the decriminalization of homosexuality, however as Prime Minister she lent her support to one of the nastiest anti-gay measures of modern times: the infamous Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which forbade schools from teaching the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship. 'This was despite the open secret (among Westminster insiders, at least) that several prominent members of her government were themselves gay, albeit in reinforced-steel closets. It remains one of the darkest spots on her legacy' (Doran, 2013). "What [Thatcher] did was inflict huge damage on a community that desperately needed support, and smashed down any possibility of supporting confused children or educating them about how to not catch HIV" (Todd, 2013). This hypocrisy is challenged in Daniels *Neptune* when Diane tells the school hierarchy that she is a lesbian, Diane responds to their obvious negation...

"But Miss Grimble, I know that hypocrisy is a value you don't encourage. Surely you didn't expect me to lie?" (Daniels, *Neptune*, 1986).

Churchill's feminist dramas invite us to look for explanations to this situation and to rattle our political leaders into finding a solution. She encourages us not to ignore these issues of inequality, gender and class and confirms that art engages us in the political landscape.

Hammond asserts that Caryl Churchill "attempted to use or explain history and to locate the individual within a social, political thus often historical context" (Hammond, 2007, p. 2).

Chapter 4:

Conclusion

In conclusion feminist theater emerged as a direct result of the feminist movement and playwrights like Churchill and Daniels utilized *avant-garde* techniques on stage to

politicize the inequalities of gender and class inherent under a patriarchal and capitalist system. They sought to explicate the hegemonic, domestic and societal oppression of women and encourage their audience to look beyond existing ideologies. Both utilized their writing talents and the forum of the theatre as a vehicle to critique and discuss solutions for this subversion of women. As Aston says, Churchill theatricalized “a socialist and feminist critique of the injustices and inequalities produced by late twentieth century capitalism and patriarchy” (Aston, 2003, p. 18). In addition, Daniels staged realism to challenge any acceptance of male violence, control or authority over women. However the key strategy of the women’s movement was consciousness raising, as Ernst and Goodison profess “we believed that direct struggle against oppression in the home and outside, together with solidarity with other women, would lead to rapid change” (Goodison, 1981, p. 3). Daniels and Churchill politicized these issues, the same issues that Thatcher’s social policies negated. They discussed the gap between personal happiness and the enforced cultural roles favoured by Thatcher to facilitate her neoliberal agenda; an ideology that encouraged ‘profit before people’ and that served to further the fragmentation and division of women.

Kate Millet’s book *Sexual Politics* (1971) takes issue with the ways in which representations of gender and sexuality reflect contemporary stereotypes of women’s inferiority (Norris, 2001, p. 198). Margaret Thatcher consciously divorced herself from these representations, and stated that it was not through any women’s movement but the necessary component of capitalist ideology; self-serving individualism that she achieved ‘top girl’ status. The renowned French feminist H  l  ne Cixous proclaimed that, “the hierarchized opposites that underpin the symbolic systems through which culture and society are organized are in the interests of the masculine” (Cixous, 1987). As the first woman to hold governmental power in Britain Thatcher had the opportunity to reassess and readdress this inequality whereby society perpetrates women as insubordinate to men. However, she did

not; in fact she caused further division in class and gender structure. Sarah Daniels and Caryl Churchill's feminist discourse both represented and reevaluated the cause and effect of her personal and political agenda. The plays discussed were effective political instruments to exact an understanding and need for social and cultural change; particularly from a women's perspective. As Hennigan concurs "The socialization process makes a male...blind to the discrimination he perpetuates, and one cannot help to solve a problem if they are a factor contributing to it" (Hennigan, 1984, p. 86).

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