

Chapter Three

Cloud Nine

Among the four plays of Caryl Churchill chosen for detailed analyses in this dissertation, (plays written between 1970-2000) *Cloud Nine* happens to be the second play which highlights the limits of power and freedom of women in fulfilling their individual aspirations. One of Churchill's challenging plays, *Cloud Nine* (CN), marks a radical change in her career as a woman playwright. The play was written after a workshop with Joint Stock Theatre Group in 1978. On 14 February 1979, CN was first staged by Joint Stock Theatre Group at Dartington College of Arts and finally in the Royal Court Theatre, London. It was the first play of Churchill to cross the Atlantic, where it was first performed in New York in 1981. This play won the Obie Award in 1982. CN identifies the basic ideologies of repression like gender discrimination, politics of sexuality, colonialism and racism. "Churchill's play CN examines the way in which human beings, and in particular women, children and homosexuals, have been constituted as subjects and objects of knowledge through the relatively modern discourse of sexuality" (Thomas 170). Apart from raising the issue of sexual oppression, Churchill interrogates the normative structure of imperialism that authenticates its power by constructing the colony as the other. Churchill here seems to have absorbed the postcolonial perspective by which the play highlights the erosion and dislocation of man's selfhood under various circumstances--"by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model" (Ashcroft 9). The loss of identity and repression of the individual are the major dramatic issues in the First Act of the play. However, the Second Act introduces the audience to a startling world of liberty where individuals search for new identities. In dealing with such complex issues of contemporary

society, Churchill adopts certain theatrical devices which appear to be surprising, playful, comic and subversive. These devices operate as sign-systems that open up new areas of exploration. New meanings arise from the interplay of such signifying systems and codes leading to the process of effective communication between the audience and the performers on the stage.

With the intention of providing a space for deprived women in the realm of theatre, Churchill goes against the conventional theatrical hierarchy of author, director and actor. While experimenting with theatre, Churchill is impressed by the 'Collective Theatre' or 'Theatre Workshop' that can give voice to silenced women from all spheres of life. While staging *CN* with Joint Stock Theatre Group, a workshop was organized which continued for three weeks. The idea that emerged from the workshop, may be summed up as "the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression"(Churchill, *Plays:one*, 245). All the actors involved in the play have the right to discuss issues of their own experiences. In the introduction to *CN* Churchill says:

The workshop for *Cloud Nine* was about sexual politics. This meant that the starting point for research was to talk about ourselves and share our very different attitudes and experiences. We also explored stereotypes and roles reversals in games and improvisations, read books and talked to other people. Though the play's situations and characters were not developed in the workshop, it draws deeply on this material, and I wouldn't have written the same play without it (*Plays: One* 245).

This kind of research work is anti-hierarchical, since it provides all the people involved in the making of the play with a potential sphere to give vent to their repressed desires. The title of the play, *Cloud Nine*, derives from a slang for extreme excitement or orgasm, which has been suggested by the caretaker of the place where rehearsals were in process during the workshop. The caretaker, a working-class woman, who was a victim of sexual politics, wanted to take part

in the exciting workshop to share her experiences of repression and moments of wild ecstasy. The dualities of working and thinking collectively and the discovery of the common, yet unexplored experiences are highly original and creative. Interestingly enough, through such theatrical strategy Churchill provides enough scope even to the peripheral working-class women to speak about their traumatic experiences and psychological repressions. While focusing on the oppression of working-class women, Churchill effectively links sexual oppression with class exploitation.

Light Shinning in Buckinghamshire was Churchill's first collaborative venture with Joint Stock Company. The second collaborative work, *CN*, was rather a different experience for all the members of the workshop. As Michelene Wandor says in *Time Out* (1979):

The workshops begin. They consist of an open and varied set of explorations. The company invite people in to talk to the group The individual roles of writer, director, and performer are deliberately blurred to maximize participation; everyone is free to suggest and initiate areas of work, books to read, asides to discuss. The workshops have two interrelated functions: to establish a good working relationship between members of the company, and to provide the mass of 'raw material which Caryl will draw on to write the play (*Fitzsimmons* 14).

CN did not require much analysis of history and its relation to contemporary lives of men and women; detailed analysis was required for *Light Shinning in Buckinghamshire*. *CN* is the result of the originally lived experiences of women and the exploration of their hidden desires. The actor Antony Sher explains the activity of the workshop:

Throughout the workshop we each took turns to tell our own life stories and to answer questions on our sexual experiences and lifestyles. It was nervewracking to contemplate (and far more revealing than stripping naked would have been) and so it is to the credit of the group that these sessions became the most exhilarating of all. Through them the real making of sexual politics was becoming clear. Each of us was secure in our separate territory male, female, gay, straight, married, single, or whatever; brainwashed by different upbringings and prejudices. However liberal we each previously thought ourselves, we were now face to face with 'the others' and so many preconceptions were proving to be wrong. (139-40).

The actors in the workshop speak in their own rhythm and fluidity free from the imposed stage roles they were made to perform. Everyone gathered new experiences that enabled them to re-evaluate the kind of liberty they have achieved within the socio-cultural domain. Churchill provides women the public sphere of theatre not only to reveal their unfulfilled desires of selfhood, but also to re-examine their codes of conduct in relation to the socio-cultural values at the present time.

II

In *CN* Churchill interweaves the themes of imperial dominance of the Victorian England and patriarchal control that suppress female desires and sexualities. The startling setting of the play serves as a powerful theatre semiotics that dismantles the conventional theatrical modes, thereby inviting the audience to examine their sexual and moral codes. The play is about the revival of human relationships and a revaluation of human identities. The First Act of the play is set in Africa, a British colony, during the Victorian period. The audience is introduced to the

staunch patriarch Clive, a white colonizer, and his family. Betty, Clive's devoted wife caters to his needs and thus shapes herself in terms of her husband's desire. She willingly acknowledges the superiority of her husband and represses her desires to satisfy his male ego. They have two children, Edward and Victoria. Clive, the man of the house desires to bring Edward up in his own image, while Victoria, like her mother, is a mere doll, regulated and nurtured by social conventions. Maud, Betty's mother, helps in perpetuating Clive's patriarchal control over the family. She teaches her daughter the lessons of being a perfect housewife, an angel of the house. Ellen, the governess, is a victim of sexual repression and feels attracted towards Betty. Harry Bagley, an explorer visits Clive's house. Mrs. Saunders, an independent widow, comes to Clive for her own safety. One of the most interesting characters is the dedicated black African slave of Clive, Joshua, who finally shoots his master at the end of the Act. Act Two relocates the characters to London of 1979, a phase when the socio-cultural scenario has changed completely. In juxtaposing these two Acts of two different historical periods, Churchill is trying to distance the audience from the stage show. As Antony Sher says, the First Act "bore no direct resemblance to the workshop which had never dealt specifically with Victorian sexual politics. Caryl had obviously been inspired and nourished by the workshop, but had then taken a bold imaginative leap and used a different period and society to highlight the things of sexual prejudices and role-playing" (*Fitzsimmons* 47). Churchill further complicates the situation in the second Act which takes place some one hundred years after the events of the First Act. The time span, interestingly, for the characters like Betty, Edward, Victoria and others is only twenty-five years. As Act Two unfolds, the search for one's identity becomes the major issue. This Act dramatizes the struggle against assumed or forced roles that the actor/character had to perform in

the previous Act. The device of time-shift technique calls for intellectual participation of the audience.

In the Introduction to the play, *CN*, Churchill mentions her thematic preoccupation:

When I came to write the play, I returned to an idea that had been touched on briefly in the workshop-- the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression, which Genet calls 'the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorised repression' (245).

Just as the 'Orient' becomes the 'other' in the European ideological set-up, the 'woman' is also the 'other' created by the phallogentric social framework to facilitate power politics and hegemonic control. Edward Said asserts: "the main thing for the European visitor was a European representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate" (1). Said further explains Orientalism "as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient" (3). Clive in this play serves as an agent for the functioning of Orientalism. Edward Said's assertion can be well related to Churchill's proposition:

We explored Genet's idea that colonial oppression and sexual oppression are similar. And we explored the femininity of the colonized person. We looked at England's relation to Ireland and how it is like a male/female relationship. The traditional view of the Irish is that they're charming, irresponsible, close to nature, all the things that people tend to think about women. (Churchill, *Vogue* ; 126).

Gender discrimination, like colonial oppression reconstitutes the female/colonized according to the dominant ideologies to enable proper execution of power politics. Sexual oppression and the hegemonic control of the heterosexual white-skinned Clive are the major issues in the First Act. Betty in Act One is the submissive wife who plays 'sex roles' in the family through the code of

conduct, gesture and attitude as prescribed by her husband. Patriarchy establishes its power through the family. Undoubtedly, Clive perpetuates imperialistic attitudes through his family in Africa. Clive's confident assertion reveals that his family willingly accepts the normative roles that he has framed for it:

I am a father to the natives here,

And father to my family so dear.

My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be

And everything she is she owes to me.

My boy's jewel. Really has the knack

You'd hardly notice that the fellow's black (*CN* 1.1).

Clive is not just the biological father in the family, but, as Marc Silverstein suggests, is the "symbolic father"¹ (11) who implements the subjection of his family members to his own laws grounded on the injunction that their bodies and desires be invisible. Moreover, Betty, while accepting patriarchal subservience, clearly declares in the opening scene of the play:

I live for Clive

The whole aim of my life

Is to be what he looks for in a wife.

I am a man's creation as you see,

And what men want is what I want to be (1.1).

Here Betty represents the 'man-made woman' who fails to establish herself as an individual. On the other hand, Clive who frames rules for others commits liaison with Mrs. Saunders, the independent widow, who comes to Clive for protection from the natives. In spite of being a liberated woman, she cannot escape the exploitation of her body by her protector. Ironically enough, when Betty's attraction for Harry Bagley is revealed, she is corrected by Clive. Clive castigates women as treacherous, lustful and inconsistent. The following conversation will reveal the operation of sexual politics and willing acceptance of gender roles by women.

BETTY: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Forgive me. It's not Harry's fault, it is all mine. Harry is noble. He has rejected me. It is my wickedness, I get bored, I get restless, I imagine things. There is something so wicked in me, Clive.

CLIVE: I have never thought of you of having the weakness of your sex, only the good qualities.

BETTY: I am bad, bad, bad –

CLIVE: You are thoughtless, Betty, that's all. Women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more dangerous than men. The family protects us from that, you protect me from that. You are not that sort of woman. You are not unfaithful to me, Betty. I can't believe you are. It would hurt me so much to cast you off. That would be my duty (1.3).

What is relevant is the fact that women themselves help in the functioning of patriarchal ideologies, which in turn torture and repress their own desires. Again, we see Maud, who facilitates the operation of sexual politics. She reminds Mrs. Saunders: “The men will do it in the proper way, whatever it is. We have our own part to play” (1.3). The entire family upholds the patriarchal ideologies. Sir Henry Maine, the nineteenth century historian links patriarchy to family in *In Ancient Law* (1981) and *The Early History of Institutions* (1985). He says:

“The eldest male parent is absolutely the supreme in his household. His dominion extends to life and death and is as unqualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves.” In the archaic patriarchal family “the group consists of animate and inanimate property, of wife, children, slaves, land and goods, all held together by subjection to the despotic authority of the eldest male” (qtd. in Millett 34).

Churchill in *CN* portrays the despotic authority of Clive, the eldest male of the family. Thus family leads to the socialization of patriarchal policies in relation to individual’s attitude, gender roles and status. It is Betty, the submissive housewife, who makes Ellen adopt sex roles. The conversation between the two women on the latter’s wedding day is noteworthy:

ELLEN: Betty, what happens with a man? I don’t know what to do.

BETTY: You just keep still.

ELLEN: And what does he do?

BETTY: Harry will know what to do.

ELLEN: And is it enjoyable?

BETTY: Ellen, you’re not getting married to enjoy yourself (1.5)

This dialogue underlines the idea that female sexuality is also repressed and restructured for the pleasure of male partners.

Edward, Clive's effeminate son, has to bear the burden of masculinity. He loves to play with the dolls of his sister, but such desires are repressed by the family. Clive exercises his repressive strategies to make Edward strong enough to play the role of the father when he attains adulthood. In the same way, Betty nurtures Victoria as a perfect doll, submissive, timid and subservient to the patriarchal codes of conduct. Such a 'principle of legitimacy' that propagates the superiority of the masculine, thereby condemning the feminine as inferior, establishes the rule that the status of both the mother and the child primarily depends upon the desires of male power (here it is Clive). Kate Millett explains the functioning of patriarchy: "Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the power of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property" (33). The norms of civilization as framed by the 'great white fathers' are forced upon the powerless, specially, women and the marginalized section of the society. Act One thematically and structurally holds up the Victorian codes of conduct that glorify the power of the Empire, patriarchy and heterosexuality, only to critique such conventional norms -- the norms which subjugate women and deprive them of their individuality. Clive's role is to enslave female sexuality, the African 'blackness', and also homosexuality, within the boundary of one Empire, thereby making the blacks, women and gay-lesbians obedient subjects within the territory. His assumed role of the 'symbolic father' of cultural hegemony paves the way for counter-threat and aggression by those subjects who so long endured such subjugation. In contrast, Act II takes place in London 1979, when Feminist, Gay and Lesbian movements challenged the oppressive

social structure. The focus on liberal sexualities reveals that rigid heterosexuality is no longer the norm. It calls for liberty and struggle for one's individuality. Mark Fortier refers to Silverstein and says: "Churchill, it has been noted, 'remains committed to the search for new representational forms, new strategies for encoding the body, new ways to organize the sex / gender relations we live in', while taking cognizance of the cultural conditions under which the new must come into being" (120). The play does not provide any strong solution to any sexual politics but encourages new alternatives that can offer women better opportunities in their lives.

As already mentioned before, woman is created by the heavy thuds of patriarchy; in the same way, the 'black' is also the creation of the white man. In this play Clive, entrusted with the 'White Man's Burden' tames his black slave Joshua as well as Betty and his children. Churchill's idea conforms to what Said says in *Orientalism* (2001):

I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage -- and even produce -- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period (3).

Joshua is managed and produced as the 'orient' by the superior culture of Clive. Even all the members of the family are disciplined by Clive, their master. Being a devoted servant Joshua has apparently adopted the culture of his oppressive master willingly. Like Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Joshua is nurtured by the master's language and culture. Caliban, nurtured by Prospero, learns his language, but is forced to work for him. He is tortured by his master who

desires to tame him for his own needs. But Caliban distorts the codes of civilized language. He uses it as a protest against his tyrant ruler, Prospero. In the same way Joshua learns the codes of civilization from his master. In turn the native becomes a threat to his own land. Such 'interiorised repression' becomes more prominent when Joshua informs Clive about native stable boys who visit their own people at night. Frantz Fanon explains the position of the black man in the superior culture of the white man:

The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him (110).

Joshua seems to fit in what Fanon visualizes here – the image of the willingly submissive black man who is not only forgetful of his own culture, but also blindly imitative of the new culture. So, Joshua, the devoted slave cannot betray his master for the sake of his country. In the opening scene he boldly asserts:

My skin is black but oh my soul is white

I hate my tribe. My master is my light.

I only live for him. As you can see,

What white men want is what I want to be (1.1).

He even participates in the choric song that celebrates the imperial rule:

Then gather round for England,

Rally to the flag.

From North and South and East and west

Come one and all for England! (1.1).

Like Betty, Joshua too has sold his soul (which he claims to be white) to his white master to gain his complete trust and confidence. The situation takes a sharp turn at the end of Act One when Joshua, the assumed slave-protector of Clive's house picks up the gun and targets his master. Ironically enough, Edward, who is supposed to follow the footsteps of his father observes it and puts his hands over his ears. Such a gesture of the son is a sign that Clive can no longer hold his position as the father figure. Things are about to fall apart. Whether Clive is finally killed or not remains a mystery. But the gesture of the slave connotes that powerful authority in turn creates its own opposing forces. The mask of absolute power that Clive retains throughout Act One is abruptly torn away by his own slave. The dominance exerted by Clive over his family must crumble in course of time, as individuals struggle for asserting their own identity. Power is not absolute; it suggests possibilities of socio-cultural changes. The characters are too much burdened with the identity that has been imposed upon them. What remains encoded in this Act One is the oppressive functioning of such roles that clash with their desires of being independent.

Act Two begins with a different rhythm where the central character Clive gains only a marginal status. John Glore in the programme note on the production of the play at Arena Stage comments:

[In Act Two], suddenly, the rules of Act One don't apply anymore; in fact the embodiment of those rules, the father, has all but disappeared from the stage. People aren't wearing ill-suited masks any longer, but they haven't quite figured out what to do with what they are

finding underneath those rejected masks. The characters in Act Two are adults in a world for which their childhoods never prepared them; a world whose fluidity and seeming disorder are both exhilarating and disorienting (qtd. in Fitzsimmons 45).

Churchill's dramatic technique defamiliarizes the conventional realistic modes of performance. Act Two, having an unnatural time gap of almost one hundred years from Act One, shows the same characters having new identities. Unrealistically for the characters it is only a gap of twenty-five years. In order to show the changed phases of the society and the individual's relation to such changes, Churchill places the same characters in two different historical settings. The disrupted chronological order at one level reveals the changes in the social order with the passage of time. The Victorian setting in Act One shows the conservative notions about marriage and sexuality based on the operation of sexual politics in that society. In contrast, Act Two shows the grown-up characters and their struggle to break through stereotype roles and to modify their lives in some new way. Stylistically, such chronological discrepancy alienates the audience from the stage performance, so that they can critically analyse the implicit inferences. Moreover, the chronological discrepancy jolts the audience so as to prevent him from experiencing any emotional attachment to the performing characters. In Act Two, the characters are no more under the clutches of the omnipotent father figure Clive. The scene takes place in London that has come out of its colonialist role, so the hegemonic control of the Empire no longer counts. The new identities acquired by the family members liberated from Clive's control imply a phase of sexual liberty. The submissive wife Betty has left her husband, trying to begin a new life with a different mode of sexual orientation. Her two children, Victoria and Edward, having the names of the King and the Queen of England, have also achieved a new order of life. Edward, working as a gardener, adopts a feminine role in his relationship with Gerry, a man who is not much

interested in developing a permanent sexual relation with his partner. Victoria, married to Martin, does not lead a happy life of fulfillment. Finally Victoria leaves her husband and decides to work at Manchester. The audience is introduced to a new character, Lin, a divorced working-class woman, who has a daughter named Cathy and a brother serving in the army in Northern Ireland. Being a lesbian, Lin is attracted to Victoria. In this Act Gerry and Lin, the homosexuals originating from working-class background, bring about the changes in the lives of Edward and Victoria, the children of Clive. The characters with their new sexual orientations focus on the upcoming alternatives of human relationships in the contemporary society. The play gains a special significance at the end of the Act when Betty of Act One comes and embraces Betty of Act Two. Such a dramatic strategy reveals that in spite of such liberating ideas, the predicament of women has remained unchanged. What is inspiring is the fact that new ways of life have to be evolved. The *Washington Times*² declares: "Miss Churchill's point seems to be that what sexual liberation, so called, has not been without sad losses, it has yet resulted in new freedoms worth having. The trouble with this, from the playgoer's standpoint, is that the first act was, compared to the second one, *much more fun*" (Fitzsimmons 45). Though homosexuality is not a solution to sex roles, it threatens the norm of compulsory heterosexuality.

While emphasizing the ambivalence and potential plurality of sexual identities, Foucault in his *The History of Sexuality* (1978) explores such constructions of sexuality in history. Foucault saw history as "episodes in a series of subjugations or successive interpretations of a system of rules" (qtd. in Thomas 161). The two Acts of the play represent two different periods. Each period reveals a specific 'episteme'³ in which knowledge is produced by following certain rules and procedures that operate unconsciously in the interests of social control. Act One with its coherent structure naturalizes the Victorian codes that maintain social control. The

chronological discrepancy and structural incoherence which operate as sign-systems exemplify the theme of operation of power through the ideologies of gender and sexuality. Thus what is normal or 'truth' is actually constructed and determined by power structures. The knowledge produced in an episteme is disseminated through certain disciplines that silence subversive voices. In Act One, power and knowledge are circulated through the family. On the contrary Act Two is fragmented. It shows that while we can interpret the archive of an earlier era, our own remains inaccessible because we are unconscious of the rules that govern us. Churchill's chronological game playing suggests that power relations have changed since the Victorian times. As Foucault views, Power is not a general scheme of domination-repression; the productive features are to be taken into consideration. The individual is both an effect of power and the element of its articulation. The play also shows the "polymorphous techniques of power" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 11). Power penetrates everywhere creating not only blockage, refusal and invalidation; but also incitement and intensification. Power in turn creates its own resistance, the possibility of a 'reverse discourse.'

Act one shows how power is channelized through the modes of confession, while Act two underscores the possibility of 'reverse discourse.' The words of the subjugated characters become a series of confessions that interweave to form the network of power relations in the Victorian society. In the act of confessing the characters constitute themselves as sexual beings producing truth about them that support power structures. It is Clive who judges the confessions and acts as an agent of normalization. Betty confesses her attraction for Harry and is construed by Clive as 'the dark female lust.' Harry's homosexual urge is silenced by Clive as 'a disease more dangerous than diphtheria.' Edward's budding effeminacy is dismissed as temporary aberration. Clive's use of words like 'sin', 'redemption' is also suggestive of the confessional

mode. We do not perceive confession as the effect of power. Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence. "The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 61). Agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks, but in the one who listens. As each confesses in mechanized, ordered language, their desires are suppressed and truth is constituted according to cultural norms. Their language, conforming patriarchal conventions shows the dominance of the 'symbolic' order. Language, a powerful theatre semiotics, reveals their subservience to social roles. Clive represses the homosexual desires in both Harry Bagley and Ellen. It has to be corrected and cured. The remedy is marriage and heterosexuality -- that is, the acceptance of the codes of Victorian society. Thus agitations are silenced. Their deviations are soon corrected by the master of truth, Clive. Therefore. Betty, Edward, Joshua, Harry -- all accept their social roles. Sexual identities lie in the period's obsession with discipline and normalization in which subjects are incited to produce truths about them. Foucault asserts:

Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule (*Sexuality* 3).

This Act shows the silencing of deviant voices in the interests of social control. On the contrary, the fluid, open, fragmented Act two demonstrates that while individuals in the twentieth century may be celebrating or interrogating their sexual identities, the network of power relations in which they are caught remains finally unchallenged. *CN* re-evaluates homosocial relations in the past and reveals that all forms of sexuality, heterosexuality or homosexuality, gain prominence only in particular situations. In the Victorian set-up, when heterosexuality was the convention Clive tries to cling on to such assumed norms. In the background of contemporary history in Act

Two, Churchill is showing the ‘queering’ of sexual identities. It “queries orthodoxies and promotes or provokes such uncertainties, moving beyond lesbian and gay sexualities to include a range of other sexualities that disrupt such fixed or settled categorization altogether” (Selden 265). Queer theory points out that sexuality is varied and open based on the liberty of pleasure principle that goes beyond rigid social norms. This sense of openness can be explained as follows:

The term Queer is manifold; it seeks to encompass that which has been excluded, ridiculed, oppressed. Life caught in the margins. Sex yes, and sexuality, but also gender, race, class, and that which refuses easy taxonomy and suffers the fate of difference. A philosophy never fixed or realized, but a politics of shared struggle, and a striving for community (Fortier 123).

The range of other sexualities rejects the dominant, legitimate sexual identities – thereby suggesting the necessity of new identities. In this context it is worth mentioning what Foucault says:

[the form of power] did not set boundaries for sexuality; it extended the various forms of sexuality, pursuing them according to lines of indefinite penetration. It did not exclude sexuality, but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals. It did not seek to avoid it; it attracted its varieties by means of spirals in which pleasure and power reinforced each other (*Sexuality* 50).

Act Two suggests that power does not prohibit or eliminate nonconjugal, monogamous sexualities; rather they are incited and multiplied. It is true that the characters do not reach the realm of absolute self-fulfillment or find their true selves, but, what is revitalizing is their struggle. They find pleasure in their new sexual orientations. It suggests that the relation of

power-knowledge-pleasure sustains the discourse on human sexuality. "Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 48). Thus Churchill focuses on the necessity of new identities that in turn can challenge prevalent orthodoxies. The 'shared struggle' gains much significance in the Second Act of the play. This struggle aims at crossing the boundaries of authenticity to achieve plurality of meanings and significances. The second Act, vibrating with the idea of varied sexual identities and postmodern openness to such practices, appears as a sharp contrast to the rigid, historically constructed heterosexism in the Victorian society of Act One. In this context what Jane Thomas asserts is relevant:

As in *Softcops*, *Cloud Nine* contains no comfortable resolutions to the questions it raises. It functions as a dramatization of the way in which we must continually interrogate the particular sexual identities we assume in an attempt to alter the power-relations which militate against us. It also exposes as a fallacy the notion of liberation from power through the articulation of our repressed sexual 'truths'. The characters of *Cloud Nine* do not escape the operation of power; they merely succeed in changing the strategic situations they are in. (179).

In foregrounding the changes in the lives of men and women, Churchill neither gives a simplified version of the complex issues, nor does she give easy solutions to such problems. Her purpose is to make men and women aware of their activities; they should critically analyse the situations in which they are involved. Being influenced by Michel Foucault, Churchill shows the methods of social control in general. Churchill, after writing the draft of *Softcops* in 1978 before *CN*, says:

I'd been thinking about how you can control people without the necessity of violent means once you have a whole lot of systems to fit people into. This was of course at the time of the Labour government when it was appropriate to see the government as a 'softcop' (the image being the 'hardcop' who beats you up and the 'softcop' who gives you cups of tea). While I was thinking about all this I read . . . Michel Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish* (Fitzsimmons 73).

Like *Softcops*, *CN* depicts the working of various agencies whose domination works through social consent.

Though *CN* has an aura of independence and disruption of power-structures in the society, Churchill highlights the bold progression of the present society toward decadence. The final picture of London is black and dark, replete with uncertainties. Edward, being able to assert his identity as a homosexual, tries to build a relationship with Gerry. Surprisingly enough, he identifies himself as a 'lesbian', an identity that will enable him to feel himself alike with Lin and Victoria. His attitude disrupts the notion of any fixed sexual identity. Even in his relation with Gerry, Edward assumes the traditional role of a woman. Gerry condemns such role-playing by saying: "I'm not the husband so you can't be the wife" (2.2). Again the relationship between Lin and Victoria is grounded on domination and subjugation. Lin, the working-class woman experiences the same ways of subjugation as Victoria experienced in her relation with her husband Martin. Thus, women oppressed by laws of patriarchy in turn oppress other deprived women when they are in a privileged position. Power operates not only through patriarchal conventions but also in the adoption of those same conventions by women. Lin, therefore, reveals that marginalized women are not free from oppression even at the present time. Sexual politics is still at work. Though the lesbians, gay and working-class women have overruled

power relations and feel that they are independent, in fact, are caught in the same network of power politics. Only the oppressors have changed their names and methods of torture.

The theme of colonial oppression is given a new turn through the character of Bill (ghost), a working-class soldier. Bill is the distorted image of Clive. He represents the colonizer in Northern Ireland. Clive's liaison with Mrs. Saunders acquires a note of crude subversion in Bill's remark when questioned about the reason for his appearance. He says; "No I've come for a fuck. That was the worst thing in / the fucking-army. Never fucking let out. Can't fucking talk to / Irish girls. Fucking bored out of my fucking head. That or shit / scared. For five minutes I'd be glad I wasn't bored, then I was fucking scared" (2.3). These distorted slangy words of Bill are a sign of the fear and insecurity associated with sexuality. It provides the glimpse of the fearful, frightening present where we dream to assert our liberty. In spite of being an English soldier, a colonizer, he is doubly marginalized -- sexually and also as belonging to a repressed class. The play is not a celebration of sexual liberty, but one that rather questions the kind of liberty that women have achieved at the present time. The play's insistence on new ways of living develops the idea that adopted conventions should be challenged. However, Churchill makes us cautious that these ways of change can revert to oppression and power politics if not evaluated critically. People irrespective of class, race and gender have to be aware of one's real position and then devise new ways of life.

To deal with ambiguous and complex issues, Churchill makes use of anti-hierarchical stage devices to bring out the hidden meanings. Apart from chronological disordering or time-shift technique as discussed before, the structure of the play is also interwoven with the critical issues that it shows. The First Act has a synchronized structure following a simple plot line; it focuses on the potent white colonizer, Clive, and his tactics to maintain his supreme position in

his family. On a broader spatial realm, Clive upholds the regime of the Empire in Africa, a colony. But the Second Act has an incoherent structure, with incoherent and fragmented dialogue. The scenes are disjointed and the entire Act takes place in a park. The setting in the park, an open space, reveals that the traditional bonds of family based on power politics do not exist in the fragmented postmodern world. As Churchill says:

The first act, like the society it shows, is male dominated and family structured. In the Second Act, more energy comes from the women and the gays. The uncertainties and the changes of society, and a more feminine and less authoritarian feeling, are reflected in the looser structure of the act. Betty, Edward and Victoria all change from the rigid positions they had been left in by the first act, partly because of their encounters with Gerry and Lin" (246).

The organized structure of Act One conforms to the authentic and conventional norms of dramatization. So, Act One is rigid, coherent and orderly. Surprisingly, in Act Two, Gerry and Lin, the marginalized homosexuals, modify the members of Clive's family. They help Edward and Victoria in their search for new ways of life. Such a technique hints at the fact that the centre no longer holds the margin; rather it is a relation of interdependence where both are on equal status. All the ideologies of patriarchy and imperial power are crushed in the fluid, incoherent, and subversive second Act. As theatre itself is a male domain, Churchill has discarded all the norms of conventional Aristotelian drama. In this play, plot is not simply the arrangements of the events in a sequence, rather a device for interruption and subversion. Churchill does not follow the linear progression of plot based on some plausible truths about human life. The relation between Probability and Necessity is totally negated in order to transport the audience to an unreal world. Like the Russian Formalists, Churchill considers the plot as a theatre semiotics that

can produce the effect of defamiliarization. Susan Carlson in *New Theatre Quarterly* explains Churchill's theatre strategy as follows:

In this parody of the typical comic happy ending, Churchill reiterates her act-long critique of social and comic tradition. Clive's celebration of the marriage -- the speech with which the act ends -- is, after the exposure of the act, no longer just farcical but dangerous. . . .

In exposing the empire in this Wildean fashion, she also makes tangible the danger of our consenting to the traditional stereotypes and patterns of comedy. On our road to the predictable comic ending, where are we left, when types exist only in perverted forms and when emotions find expression only clandestinely? (313).

The plot should prevent the audience from accepting the familiar sights as the universal truths. On the contrary, the plot should 'lay bare' the theatrical devices showing the artifice in the presentation of 'reality' on the stage before the audience. She favours loose structured Acts, disjointed, broken but rhythmic language, to create a theatre space for women. The fragmented Acts, short scenes, use of disruptive devices like songs, half-slangy words – reveal her postmodernist approach to theatre.

III

In order to show the operation of power in the society, Churchill makes use of the comic and subversive strategy of cross-casting . Cross-dressing in *CN* is deeply related to gender identity, role-playing and racial identity. "The ideological pleasure of cross-dressing in *CN* is that it allows a spectator the possibility of seeing beyond 'institutionalized gender roles and identity' by crossing vestimentary signs of masculinity and femininity with the 'wrong body'.

(Aston 32). In Act One the characters are cross-cast to clearly indicate the roles that they play. On the contrary, in Act Two, apart from Cathy, the characters are played by actors of the same sex. This shows that in course of time they have matured enough to search for their own selves. In the Renaissance theatre transvestism was a strategy to make women invisible from the stage performance. This device of transvestism in the theatre when deeply analyzed, keeps up the image of women on stage as a product of masculine imagination. Being a powerful theatre semiotics, this technique of cross-dressing unmasks the operation of sexual politics both on the stage and in the society. It can also be argued that “the cross-casting identifies strain between an expressive, experimental self, on the one hand, and the conditioning of social role and dominant ideology, on the other” (Reinelt 89). Such a technique provides women with a potential public sphere within which female psychology can be centered through the assertion of their individuality.

In *CN*, Clive disciplines his wife Betty in terms of his own desires. But what is surprising for the audience is to see that a man plays the role of the homely, submissive housewife, Betty, in Act One. This stage device is a code for the process of appropriation of gender roles. As a result of male domination women have constituted themselves in relation to male desires. Patriarchal discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, namely, ‘docile bodies’. “A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, *Discipline* 136). The visible male body behind the stylized costume explodes any conservative reading of the character in performance. Betty’s femininity is rewritten on a male body and her devotion to Clive appears to be peculiar. As Judith Butler argues, gender identity is performative, a construction of repeated, stylized gestures. Thus gender, sex and sexuality are not discrete categories, but rather historical constructions that are enacted by a series of actions and social

roles. Gender is “an identity instituted through *a stylized repetition of acts*” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 270). The female body is the product of symbolic language that defines, modulates and transforms it. Butler in *Bodies and Matter* speaks of the construction of body. She sees the body “not a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter” (9). The cross-cast body in Act one literalizes the masculine construction of the female body as a sex object. Through cross-casting, Churchill subverts such gender codes, showing the process how these codes are reified, made uniform and absorbed into the dominant discourse. In the same way this technique disrupts the symbolic codes that construct the body. The expectations of the audience are frustrated as the characters that are cross-cast denaturalize the stereotype roles that women play. Therefore, instead of deriving pleasure from female sexuality on stage, the audience is made to examine the ways in which women in society have been constituted according to patriarchal ideologies. Churchill is here deromanticizing and deconstructing the traditional images of women that have been handed down through history and culture. Betty says: “I thought if Clive wasn’t looking at me there wasn’t a person there” (2.4). Betty remains confined within the boundaries of power and knowledge as framed by Clive. As a result, Betty does not possess the body of the woman; she situates herself within the paradigm of gender roles and becomes a man-made woman. In the same way, Ellen’s lesbianism is apparently masked by cross-gendering Betty. When Ellen makes love to Betty and kisses her, the audience sees love-making between a man and woman. Through this technique heterosexuality is only made visible in the Victorian social scenario; it gains new significance as it foregrounds the invisibility of homosexuality. To women playwrights like Churchill, the female body is no longer evil rather the site of unconscious drives and repressed desires. The body should reveal its desires with

exuberance. So, in Act Two, Betty is played by a woman, as she struggles to establish her identity by detaching herself from patriarchal control. Betty, who has once lived only to be what her husband wished her to be, has broken all sorts of bonds with him. She has matured enough so as to desire to be herself. But she admits that she is frightened and feels secure in the company of men. But, what is striking is her assertion of her sexual urges that have been repressed by Clive so long. She describes the pleasure associated with it:

BETTY: [...] It felt very sweet, it was a feeling from a very long ago, it was very soft, just barely touching, and I felt myself gathering to gather more and more and I felt angry with Clive and angry with my mother and I went on and on defying them, and there was this vast feeling growing in me and all round me and they couldn't stop me and no one could stop me and I was there and coming and coming. Afterwards I thought I'd betrayed Clive. My mother would kill me. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them. And I cried because I didn't want to be. But I don't cry about it any more. Sometimes I do it three times in one night and it really is great fun (2.4).

Giving vent to her repressed sexual desire Betty has indeed reached 'cloud nine'; she finds pleasure in her new way of sexual orientation.

In the same way, the role of Edward, an effeminate boy, is played by a woman in Act One. What is funny and shocking is the fact that the audience will see a woman on stage even though Clive tries hard to make Edward bear the codes of masculinity. Such a subversive strategy deconstructs the ideological framework of patriarchy. The spectacle of a woman desiring to play with her sister's doll testifies to the gender roles of women. But in Act Two Edward is played by a male actor. During this time gap in this Act, he has asserted his identity as a homosexual. The cross-gendering in one Act and the reversal in the other signify the

discrepancy between the acquired roles and one's struggle for individuality. It is suggestive of the fact that new ways of selfhood will emanate in spite of forceful cultural constraints. Another remarkable stage device is that the role of Victoria, the doll in the house, is played by a dummy in Act One. She mechanically learns the role of a daughter as conferred upon her by her father. But Victoria of Act Two gains prominence as an individual who frees herself from the shackles of a dominating, hypocritical husband. She realizes that she is more brilliant and intelligent than her husband, and finds a job for herself. This evolution from a passive doll to an independent woman is suggested through the casting of the play. Churchill's emphasis on the functioning of gender roles is made more prominent by making Cathy, Lin's five-year-old naughty daughter in Act Two, played by an adult man. Cathy, in spite of being a girl child, shatters the codes of femininity, though slight glimpses of gender roles can be traced in her character. Such cross-gendering is not only comic, but also subversive. As Elaine Aston points out "the offside body which disrupts the symbolic in *Vinegar Tom* is a key focus in the sexual politics of *Cloud Nine* which takes the body as a critical site of gender representation" (31). The characters cross-gendered, conform to their fixed roles verbally, but their 'bodies' on stage are signs that disrupt such naturalization of social norms.

Cross-racial casting is a theatre semiotics that creates a strange effect upon the audience. The role of Joshua, the black slave of Clive, is played by a white actor. Like Betty, Joshua has acquired the culture of his white master. He learns the new language of his white-skinned father, thereby giving up all claims to his native identity. Churchill mirrors Foucault's conception of the body as a central component in the operation of power relations. Body is the target of knowledge and exercise of power. In the play "the body is shown to be located in a political field, invested with power relations which render it docile and productive, and thus politically and economically

useful” (Smart 75). The characters in Act One are turned into docile and productive bodies through disciplinary control. Power relations “invest the body, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault, *Discipline* 25). Through this technique, Churchill unfixes gender and racial identities, as their visible ‘offside bodies’ subvert and distort sexual and racial politics. “By mismatching the performers with their stage roles Churchill underscores the artificiality and conventionality of the characters’ sex roles” (Fitzsimmons 41). Such toying with roles is intended to evoke images which equate sexual repression with economic and racial repression, and male dominance with political imperialism. By such technique of cross-casting, Churchill draws our attention to the conventional mode that erases the individuality of the characters. Moreover, such a technique reveals the fictionality associated with the character showing it as a multiplicity of contrasting and contesting selves. The fictional characters acquire a living presence on stage thereby revealing the dichotomy between the fictional world of the character / role and the real existence of the actor.

Inspired by Brechtian dramatic strategies, Churchill effectively makes use of doubling and tripling of roles. As in *Top Girls*, Churchill makes one character play double roles in the two Acts of the play. This technique of double or multiple casting defamiliarizes the performance by making it appear strange to the audience. Though Churchill is of the view that many alternatives of doubling can be applied to the play, I would like to analyse the doublings as produced in the first performance of the play at Dartington College of Arts.

In Act One, the actor playing the role of Betty, plays the role of Edward in the Second Act. Such doubling signifies that the effeminate Edward, whose desires are repressed by the dominant father gradually develops into a self-sufficient gay capable of asserting his identity. Edward, in Act One is played by a woman to make the operation of sexual politics explicit. It is

also a reversal of the conventional norm of transvestism. Here, it is not the man who plays the role of a woman, rather a woman who plays the role of a man, thereby challenging patriarchal conventions of stagecraft. In this Act, Edward with the reversed gendering in role-playing, reveals his hatred for his father, asserting that he does not want to be like his father. This attitude implies a psychic yearning to be attached to the mother's womb and not to be exposed to a father's dominance. This unconscious bond is put under threat and negated by the authoritative father. On the part of the actor also there are contrasting changes in the roles that he/she plays. The submissive timid role of a good housewife which he played has matured to an independent homosexual who slightly clings on to feminine gender roles. It also signifies that Edward and Betty perform similar roles ordained for them. Both of them submit before the Law of the Father by suppressing their desires. The actor playing the role of Clive in Act One plays the role of the mischievous child Cathy in Act Two. This double casting signifies the rejection of patriarchal conventions in the contemporary world. This staunch patriarch in the First Act is transformed to the girl-child in the second. What Clive conforms, Cathy deconstructs it in the second Act. Again, the woman playing the role of Maud, the lady who sustains patriarchy in Clive's family in Act One is transformed to the independent Victoria, who leaves her husband to assert her individuality in Act Two. The actor playing the role of the black slave in Act One plays the role of the liberal Gerry in Act Two. Both Joshua and Gerry are representatives of the marginalized sections of the society -- the colonized and the working-class homosexual. But Gerry is free and loves to be alone. He corrects Edward by encouraging him to develop his own identity instead of his playing feminine roles. The roles of Harry Bagley in Act One and the hypocritical Martin in Act Two are played by the same actors. Harry's repressed homosexual urges overlap with the hidden patriarchal temperament of Martin. The gay Harry, whom Clive wants to correct through

the institution of marriage, is changed to a progressive husband, who finds it difficult to give up his patriarchal control over his wife. There is also a tripling of roles. One woman plays the role of three characters -- Mrs. Saunders, Ellen (Act One) and Lin (Act Two). All these characters are repressed or exploited by patriarchy and also offer a threat to the patriarchal conventions. Mrs. Saunders, though exploited by Clive sexually, enjoys herself in this relationship. She is independent and her sexuality is powerful enough to capture Clive and unmask him. She makes Clive break the code of conduct by involving him in an illicit relation. It is Clive who takes refuge under her skirt to mask his real desires. Clive finds her 'mysterious' and 'treacherous'. The 'skirt' the garment for women is the sign of Victorian morality that upholds gender roles. Ironically enough, it is in this symbol of imposed femininity that Clive takes shelter to retain his propriety of appearance. On the other hand, Ellen's homosexual attraction for Betty is repressed as it goes beyond the conventional norms of heterosexuality in Act One. But Lin in Act Two boldly asserts that she is a lesbian and hates men. All these three characters reveal the operation of sexual politics. But the doublings as discussed above, differed in the later production of the play.

The theatrical technique of multiple-casting gains special significance when the audience penetrates deeper into the stage performance and decode the meanings of these critical strategies. Churchill's aim is to make the characters aware of the dangers of assuming conventional roles and the need to stand apart from those roles; she seems less convinced about having them function as potential prototypes. Irving Wardle in a review of *CN*, in *The Times* (1980) rightly concludes: "...beyond the laughs, the real dramatic interest lies in the double approach to character as a fluid thing. The triumph of the play ... is that this point is inscribed in the casting" (Fitzsimmons 43). The double approach to a character as a fluid object opens up a space where

not only double but multiple options are available. The challenge is to the intellect of the audience who must come forward to understand the prismatic subtext. Churchill is fascinated by the power of theatre images to open things up. Setting the image of the actor against the image of the role undoubtedly creates a greater impact on the audience. Churchill also makes use of other elements like songs and distorted overlapping dialogues. These strategies subvert the convention of illusion-making, thereby unfixing the boundaries of the real and the unreal. Violating the traditional norms of illusion and reality, the play introduces the audience to a realm of ‘unreal reality’. The performance on stage provides a space for the perpetual deferment of conclusive meaning.

As in *Vinegar Tom*, in *CN* also Churchill makes use of songs as a powerful element that can communicate new meanings to the audience. These songs distance the audience from the stage performance by breaking the illusion of the reality. The songs also interrupt the lucid flow of dialogue in the play. Use of songs in comedies is an age-old convention. Beginning from the songs of the chorus in Greek tragedy to the songs in Shakespearean comedies we can say that the songs add to the rhythm and harmony of the play. Undoubtedly in Churchill’s play the songs acquire multiple layers of significance. The play *CN* opens with a song that glorifies the imperial dominance of England, exemplifying the notion of ‘White Man’s Burden’. The words “From bush and jungle muster all who call old England ‘home’” (1.1), reveal that western civilization has been endowed with the duty to tame and civilize the wild uncivilized Africa. Ironically enough, Joshua, the African native too joins the song. The song ends with the lines; “From North and South and East and West / Come one and all for England” (1.1). Thus, the play begins with the glorification of the Empire only to show the operation of hegemonic colonial rule in the British colonies. As the play progresses the audience realizes that the song is not a mere

glorification but acts as a subversive device to puncture the ideology of colonial hegemony in the western mind. This song is again echoed after Clive introduces Victoria, Ellen and Maud, the three women who are the victims of oppression and yet, conform to patriarchal laws. This section of the song mentions the name of Queen Victoria and her imperial sovereignty over Africa and Canada. The words 'chains of brotherhood' signify that colonial subservience is a forced brotherhood structured on the relation between the ruler and the ruled. The second song is sung by Joshua at the end of Act One Scene Two. This is a Christmas carol the governess Ellen taught the black slave Joshua. Ellen, a subject of sexual oppression, teaches the master's language and religious codes to the black native. Thus, Ellen a working-class lesbian, who is repressed by the ideology of heterosexuality, helps in subjugating the native and accepting white cultural ethos. It is significant to note that through the song a connection is established between sexual and colonial oppression. The words like "deep midwinter", "frosty wind", "moan", "show" and "stone" have the connotation of repression, passivity and suffering. This song too ends with the theme that the colonized should devote himself to the white master. It teaches Joshua to discard his black skin and bear the burden of the white mask forever. The third song at the end of Scene Three is sung in a different strain. This song is sung just after Edward shows some flickers of being upright. He commands Joshua to obey his mother. This is also a protest of the effeminate son against the insult done to his mother by the black servant. The slave at once obeys the manly voice of his future master. But when Betty wants to embrace him for his act, he recoils. The song 'A Boy's Best Friend' is sung by all members of the family. This song focuses on the unconscious bonding between the mother and the son. The unconscious drives of the son relate him to the body-of-the-mother. Lacan, while speaking about phallocentrism and human unconscious, observes that a child develops his identity by entering the 'symbolic' order of

language and by repressing his affinity with the mother's body. Edward's action of recoiling from mother's embrace and saying "Don't touch me" (1.3) signifies the adoption of the Symbolic order. The third song reverberates with the lines "This lesson we will learn / A boy's best friend is his mother" (1.3). This song subversively hints at the role of the mother that a woman has to play in the society. But, it also draws attention to the fact that the mother is always subdued by the strong voice of patriarchy. The song teaches the son to look after the mother and love her when she is old. As a subtext, the theme of loyalty to the mother reinforces the loyalty to the Queen, the Empire. Thus, the songs in the First Act directly or indirectly deal with those agents that frame the ideologies of the Empire, family and religion. The words of the songs are simple monosyllabic words, rhythmic in pattern but complex and varied in connotations.

Act Two, as a contrast to Act One propagates the notion of individual freedom and sexual liberty. In the same way the songs of Act Two more firmly negate the glorification of such power structures in the society. The major song of Act Two is directly related to the title 'Cloud Nine' that celebrates sexual liberty. The song begins with the line "It'll be fine when you reach Cloud Nine" (2.3). 'Cloud Nine' is the state of 'jouissance', a state of total fulfilment and satisfaction. But there is also a call for keeping watch over such a state of sexual liberty – "Better watch out when you reach Cloud Nine" (2.3). The words like "night", "dark", "mist" associate sexual liberty to uncertainty and danger. In this song there are references to the varied sexualities which the independent characters enjoy. This song subverts the theme of sexual and colonial oppression as portrayed in Act One; it celebrates the pleasure associated with sexual liberty. Other than the title song, in Act Two there are songs or rhythmic poems uttered by Cathy. As already mentioned before, the actor playing the role of Clive plays the role of Cathy, a five-year-old girl. The songs that glorify the patriarchal and colonial power of the oppressor Clive in Act One, are distorted

and deconstructed when the same actor breaks the codes of conservatism. The actor who upholds Victorian codes of values through the role of Clive, in Act Two sings scatological songs playfully. All the rhymes and songs of Cathy are replete with vulgar slangy words; it shatters the codes of Victorian morality based on power politics. The songs have sexual overtones, casually celebrating varied sexualities at the present times. Ironically enough, the songs have the undertone of barrenness and unfulfilment. The last song of Cathy at the beginning of Act Two Scene Four deals with marriage and family comprising two children. All other relations do not exist in such a nuclear family. The parents are not given any place in the family of the children. The song ends with the capitalized word “SEXY” and celebration of sexualities and individual freedom.

Churchill has created a new language of the theatre. This language is fluid, open and erotic like women themselves. Churchill makes use of simple verbal language to focus on the complex issues of the society. In Act One the language is more organized than Act Two. But the language of the second Act is distorted, incoherent and subversive like the structure itself. Undoubtedly in Act One Clive is the most prominent and dominant voice. Other characters with equal prominence reveal their repressed desires. Though their words conform to the Victorian codes of morality, the subtext reveals their stories of torture and oppression. The marginalized voices very often drown the authoritarian voice of Clive forming a polyphonic pattern. In conformity with Bakhtinian proposition, this polyphony or plurality of consciousness that undermines a single dominant voice distorts the ideology of power politics in the society. Language, here is not limited to linguistic features, but acquires the dimension of a fluid space where multiple, fragmented voices coalesce and converge. While speaking about Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin says:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his work is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world, combined but are not merged in the unity of event (6).

Polyphony of voices is also one of the major characteristics of *CN*. Like *Top Girls*, *Hotel*, and *The Chair*, in *CN* also there is a plurality of voices free from any sort of authorial control. Throughout Act One, all the repressed voices when free from authorial control temporarily, reveal their hidden desires. Much of stereotyping of roles is perpetuated by the victimized themselves. Their voices form a polyphony revealing stories of oppression and subjugation in different contexts. In scene two, when Betty comes to Harry for some comfort he reminds her of the 'gender roles' she has to play.

BETTY: Can't we ever be alone?

HARRY: You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife.

BETTY: I think I shall go and hide again (1.2)

Betty desiring to escape from the clutches of patriarchy, dreams of running away with Harry. She confesses to Ellen about her repressed desires.

BETTY: I love Harry Bagley. I want to go away with him. There I've said it,
it's true.

ELLEN: How do you know you love him?

BETTY: I kissed him (1.2)

Just like Betty, Edward and Ellen too suppress their desires. Edward expresses his desire to escape from the dominating father. It is Betty who educates Edward to repress his desires and follow his father as the epitome of perfection. The following conversation will reveal it:

BETTY: You must never let the boys at school know you like dolls. Never,
never. No one will talk to you, you won't be on the cricket team, you
won't grow up to be a man like your papa.

EDWARD: I don't want to be like papa, I hate papa.

MAUD: Edward! Edward!

BETTY: You're a horrid wicked boy and papa will beat you. Of course, you
don't hate him, you love him. Now give Victoria her doll at once. (1.3).

From the above conversation it is quite explicit that Betty, Harry and also Edward desire to escape and assert their independence. But they themselves submit before assumed masculinity and gender roles. In the same way, Ellen, Harry and Joshua hide their desires, and fail to assert their true selves. Their voices form a polyphonic pattern echoing their repressions and willing acceptance of patriarchal laws. Moreover, Churchill's Workshop Theatre negates the dominance of the author in a stage performance. Such a collaborative enterprise, as already discussed in the first section of the chapter, creates a polyphonic pattern where multiple repressed voices give vent to their innermost desires.

The language of Act Two appears to be more fluid and disruptive. The overlapping, incoherent and fragmented slangy words express the pleasures of individuality and sexual liberty. The broken language shows the contradictions in modern lives. Though the changes are welcomed and the struggles for selfhood glorified, what lurks behind is the inner vacuity and the loneliness that cannot be wiped out. It is quite difficult to come out of gender roles, however free and independent one may feel. The conversation between Gerry and Edward (who asserts his homosexual identity), reveals such a dilemma:

GERRY: Stop it

EDWARD: Stop what?

GERRY: Just be yourself.

EDWARD: I don't know what you mean. Everyone's always tried to stop
me being feminine and now you are too.

GERRY: You are putting it on.

EDWARD: I like doing the cooking. I like being fucked. You do like me this
really.

GERRY: I'm bored, Eddy (2.3)

Gerry's words 'Just be yourself' ring hollow as we come to the end of the play. The words are shocking and startling as they unsettle the air of freedom that envelops the Second Act.

In addition to the short, brisk dialogues, the second Act has long monologues of Betty. The silenced Betty and her actions jubilantly express her own pleasures of sexuality in self-eroticism. Betty's words emanate from her unconscious. Her words, explaining her very own state of 'cloud nine' is an uncontrolled gust of desires. The words of Betty show the interplay of semiotic drives in the symbolic order of language. Luce Irigaray's view on feminine language can be related to Betty's semiotic language:

If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized. Asleep again, unsatisfied, we shall fall back upon the words of men-- who; for their part, have 'known' for a long time. But not our body. Seduced, attracted, fascinated, ecstatic with our becoming, we shall remain paralyzed. Deprived of our movements. Rigid, whereas we are made for endless change. Without leaps or falls, and without repetition (188).

Betty's utterance is associated with the female body. She expresses her ecstatic moment through her body, a domain free from patriarchal control. Adopting a female way of writing, Churchill makes Betty speak in her own rhythm. Through her words, Betty makes the resonances of her body audible to the audience. Other than Betty, Gerry, the homosexual describes his own casual sexual experience in a bus. The casual tones and simple words, often distorted and disruptive, are a sharp contrast to the docile attitude of Joshua. When the audience sees that the actor playing the role of Joshua in Act One plays the role of Gerry in Act Two, he gets puzzled. Ironically, Gerry's overt declaration of his sexuality is a contrast to Joshua's servility; it re-connects colonial oppression with sexual oppression / liberty in Act Two.

Churchill has used some non-verbal stage devices that function as powerful signifiers in the play. The different settings of the scenes have much significance. What is remarkable is that the 'verandah' of Clive's house in Act One, where the action unfolds, is a confined space in which the subjugated characters are imprisoned by Clive's domination. The verandah is located within Clive's house in Africa. It suggests that the characters too are allowed the limited space to live their lives. Even in one's native land Joshua, the native is imprisoned within this space. On the contrary Act One Scene Two, takes place in an open space away from Clive's house. In this scene what is relevant is Clive's liaison with Mrs. Saunders, the independent woman. Such an activity on the part of Clive is in turn a negation of those moral codes which he upholds in his family. The 'open space' is a sign of the removal of social restraints that obstruct the ways of fulfillment of desires. Clive himself has to escape from the limited space of the 'verandah' to the open space to fulfill his own desires. But in Act Two the area of confinement extends to the open park. The open park where the independent characters meet each other talking about their freedom signifies that they have crossed the boundaries of Victorian morality. The enlarged space symbolizes greater freedom. Act Two, pulsating with the ideas of liberty germinates properly within this enlarged space.

Another significant non-verbal gesture is the murder of Clive by Joshua. Clive while upholding the white Victorian principles is finally shot by his devoted slave Joshua, when Edward remains a silent observer. The act of shooting Clive is an imaginary murder as it never happens and the audience does not hear the sound of shooting. The stage direction is surprisingly arresting:

While he is speaking Joshua raises his gun to shoot Clive. Only Edward sees. He does nothing to warn the others. He puts his hand over his ears. BLACK (1.5).

The gun which is a means of protection from the natives in Africa, is finally directed towards the white master. The two peripheral and oppressed characters, Joshua and Edward, are involved in the imaginary murdering of the father figure. This is suggestive of the fact that Act Two is about to provide a glimpse of a world free from the clutches of patriarchy. Edward's constructed masculinity cannot instigate him to take any action during the act of shooting Clive. On the part of Edward it comes as a relief; he is released from bearing the burden of the Name-of-the-Father. The final word 'Black' makes the ending of Act One ambiguous. The audience cannot be sure of the real death of Clive and is baffled in the midst of the dark stage. The word 'black' is suggestive of the human unconscious, the reservoir of human desires. Joshua who says "My mother and father were bad people" (1.4) is finally urged by his unconscious desire to shoot the oppressor. It suggests that both Joshua and Edward desire to free themselves from Clive and regain their identities.

The appearance of Clive at the end of Act Two is a powerful gesture that adds significance to the performance. At the end of Second Act Clive expresses his sense of shock and surprise after seeing the changed Betty. This new Betty is unknown to Clive as she does not keep up to his expectations. Moreover, the colony Africa has also changed. It is now free from the shackles of the imperial rule and has also become a communist country. Power structures have changed; Clive is no longer successful in sustaining his position before his wife Betty. Clive remarks: "I used to be proud to be British" (2.4). This remark is suggestive of the fact that all power and pride associated with the imperial rule and patriarchy have been shattered. The change is all that matters. Finally, Clive refers to the verandah and the stars. These two spatial references point to the process of change. Clive too has to endure seeing his limited space being transformed to the vast expanse of the unlimited star-studded sky. The 'verandah', a sign of

patriarchal and imperial confinement, represents the state of Clive; he now has to look up to the unlimited space to have a glimpse of those repressed family members who now assert their identities and make up their own lives in their own ways. More remarkable is the concluding stage direction which is almost an assault on the expectation of the audience: “[Clive goes. Betty from Act One comes. Betty and Betty embrace]” (2.4). The gesture of embrace of the two Bettys and the departure of Clive all alone, semiotically negate the ideologies upon which patriarchy rests. Betty, an independent woman can exist without the support of any masculine power. Elaine Aston remarks:

In the closing image of *Cloud Nine* Clive, stuck in the patriarchal past from Act One, enters to condemn the ‘new’ Betty, but his presence is displaced as he exits and Betty In embraces herself from Act One. The final image of the split self uniting offers women the possibility of a subjectivity beyond the objectification of the gaze (37).

It is through self-eroticism that Betty can overcome dominant ideologies and assert her own selfhood. In addition to it, the spectacle of Betty in Act One embracing Betty of Act Two is also suggestive of the fact that in the existing system it is difficult to free one from social restraints. Though she enjoys sexual fulfillment, she admits that she is frightened and feels safe in the custody of men. She tells Lin that “It’s strange not having a man in the house. You don’t know who to do things for” (2.2). The stage presentation becomes more ambiguous to the audience as Betty in Act One is played by a man. The same actor plays the role of Edward in Act Two, while Betty is played by a woman. Therefore, the image of Betty, the domestic housewife, overlaps the image of Edward who affirms his homosexuality. At one level the audience sees the mother and the son embracing each other; it suggests the son’s return to the desires of his ‘Imaginary phase’ - a space where he can express his desires and reconnect himself with the feminine body of the

mother. What remains prominent on the stage is the triumph of individuality and alternative ways of life free from overpowering influences.

What I feel after analyzing the play of Churchill is that the theme of post colonial dilemma and the hidden dangers associated with it requires a much more critical analysis in the final Act. The character of Bill (ghost) does not get much prominence, though his short appearance is of great significance. Moreover, the cross-casting or casting of this character is not properly mentioned in the first performance. He is the only character who shows signs of decadence after the colonial regime in London. The hazards and problems of the white colonizer in his own Empire are not analyzed in the play. As Churchill has presented sexual oppression and sexual liberty and the trauma associated with it, in the same way, the postcolonial trauma and the loss of the Empire require a vivid presentation.

IV

To encourage audience response, Caryl Churchill in her play *CN* blurs the distinction between the real and the unreal by her innovative theatrical techniques. The best manifestation of the relationship between the real and the unreal is the device of cross-casting and multiple role-playing by characters. By these strategies the identity of the character becomes much more complex and baffling to the audience. Analyzing the technical devices of the play from such perspective, it can be said that the characters gain the momentum of metatheatrical characters as they continually remind the audience about the fantasy associated with the performance. The dramatic characters having full self-consciousness cannot prevent their participation in their own dramatization. The metatheatrical characters venture to go beyond the stereotype role-playing, upholding the pretence of reality while laying bare his fictive existence. The character becomes a

powerful component of the semiotics of theatre that connotes plural perspectives to the play. Churchill always makes the audience conscious about the two notions that ‘the world is a stage’ and that the people are just actors. Such metatheatrical devices alienate the audience from the stage performance. In Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the characters in the play tell the stage manager that they are in search of an author. When they are given a chance to enact on stage they do not show the need of an author. “Released on the stage they commence to live—at the risk of life itself. Their belief is that ‘the play is the thing’, whatever its outcome for them” (Abel 167). But in Pirandello the characters often become stage types that fail to touch the audience deeply and truly. On the contrary, the metatheatrical characters in *CN* instigate the audience to judge critically the characters in the dramatic situation. Churchill challenges the notion of fixed identity as presented through the hero in traditional drama. But in real life identity is in constant flux, and consists of a progression of changing attitudes. Thus the concept of fixed identity in real life can never be achieved. What Churchill targets to show is the loss of identity of modern man and his split into multiple selves. The artificiality of the performance becomes relevant when one actor plays many roles; it negates the notion of fixed identity. By distancing the actors from the roles they are playing, Churchill shows that the characters are not abstractions but they are the actors, living, pulsating human beings at the present time. The actor, distanced from the stage roles, masks his internal self while unmasking the roles that he plays. The individual is presented as a sign that shows the overlapping and intersection of contradictory multiple identities. Jean Genet in his *Our Lady of the flowers* speaks of the contrast between the actor and the character:

If I were to have a play put on in which women had roles, I would insist that these roles be performed by adolescent boys, and I would so inform the audience by means of a

placard which would remain nailed to the right or left of the set throughout the performance. (qtd in Schlueter 13).

Churchill also seems to be inspired by Genet's use of devices of cross-casting. Though cross-casting is not a new stage practice, it constitutes a complex signifying process in Churchill's play, providing scope for new interpretations.

Churchill's *CN* evokes laughter while appealing to the intellect of the audience. The technical devices are subversive while suggesting the necessity for effective changes in human lives at the present times. The play opens up unlimited field of possibilities, but it is up to the individual to choose the way to live one's life. The play baffles and confuses the rational order of human perception by transporting them to a world beyond the boundaries of rationality and reality.

Notes

1. The expression 'symbolic father' exemplifies Clive's role as a patriarch and a colonialist. He maintains decorum within his family as well as in the colony. He is the supreme law who upholds Victorian codes of conduct through discipline and control by silencing opposing voices. Marc Silverstein speaks of Clive's appearance as the 'symbolic father' in the essay " 'Make Us the Women we Can't Be.' *Cloud Nine* and the Female Imaginary." (included in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 8.2 (1994): 7-22).

2. *The Washington Times* in the Editorial, "Silver Lining", on 1 May, 1984 makes the declaration.

3. In *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Michel Foucault defines 'episteme'. "By *episteme*, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which, in each of these discursive formations, the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formulization are situated and operate" (191).

Works Cited

Abel, Lionel. *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form*. New York: Holmes and Meier Pub, 2003. Print.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed. 1989. London: Routledge-Taylor, 2002. Print.

Aston, Elaine. *Caryl Churchill*. 2nd ed. United Kingdom: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2001. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Ed. Emerson. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

---. "Performing Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990. Print.

Carlson, Susan. "Comic Collisions: Convention, Rage, and Order." *New Theatre Quarterly* 3:12 (Nov 1987) : 303-16. Print.

Caryl, Churchill. *Plays One*. 1985. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

---. "Sex, Politics, and Other Play Things." *Vogue*. By John Simon. Aug 1983. 126-130. Print.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967. Print.

Fitzsimmons, Linda. Comp. *File on Churchill*. London: Methuen Drama, 1989. Print.

Fortier, Mark. *Theory / Theatre: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Allen Lane, 1977. Print.

---. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972. Print.

---. *The History of Sexuality. Vol 1: An Introduction*. 1976. Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Allen Lane, 1978. Print.

Irigaray, Luce. "When Our Lips Speak Together"(1977). *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*. Ed. Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin. New York: Routledge-Taylor, 2003. Print.

Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. 1970. New York: University of Illinois Press, 2000. Print.

Reinelt, Janelle. "Caryl Churchill: Socialist Feminism and Brechtian Dramaturgy." *After Brecht: British Epic Theater*. U.S.A.: University of Michigan Press, 1996. Print.

Said, Edward E. *Orientalism*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India (P)Ltd, 2001. Print.

Schlueter, June. *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama*. New York: Columbia U. P. 1979. Print.

Selden, Raman, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. 5th ed. New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2007. Print.

Sher, Antony. *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*. Ed. Rob Ritchie. London: Methuen, 1987. 138-142. Print.

Silverstein, Marc. " 'Make Us the Women we Can't Be.' *Cloud Nine* and the Female Imaginary." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. 8. 2 (1994): 7-22. Print.

Smart, Barry. *Michel Foucault*. 1985. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Thomas, Jane. "The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Essays in Refusal." *The Death of the Playwright? : Modern British Drama and Literary Theory*. Ed. Adrian Page. 1992. London: Macmillan Press, 1994. Print.